



FAR-OFF THINGS

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TREATING OF THE HISTORY, ABORIGINIES,  
MYTHS, AND JUNGLE MYSTERIES OF CEYLON

BY

R. L. SPITTEL

AUTHOR OF "WILD CEYLON"

WITH SIXTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

~~Swami Grantha...  
CEYLON...  
...  
... 1933~~

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TO  
MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER  
MY HELPFUL CRITICS

*Will no one tell me what she sings?—  
Perhaps her plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago.*

*W. Wordsworth*

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HAIL LANKA !

Let others belaud the ways of the West,  
Or homeland or township, wherever it be,  
However mighty, however blest—  
Lanka, my Island, you are all to me !

When homeward I sail from travels afar,  
And your mountains arise like wraiths from the sea,  
By rose of the dawn or beam of the star—  
Oh, Island mine, you are heaven to me !

And from the Peak and the table-land  
That brave the vast dome so gallant and free,  
From the tree-girt shore and the glittering sand,  
You, emerald Island, call to me !

The strains of eld on your breezes blown,  
Steal out of your solitudes eerily :  
The tales that are shrined in legend and stone,  
Are the songs you, old Island, sing to me !

But oh, for the trails that the wild men tread,  
The hills that are home to the hiving bee,  
For the tuneful bill and the branching head—  
Oh, Island, wild Island, you are home to me !

## INVADERS AND SETTLERS OF CEYLON

### I. THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE SINHALESE KINGDOM

CEYLON'S oldest name was Lanka, and Lanka it still is to the Sinhalese. "Gray and green and glorious Lanka was like garden of the sky," says the Ramayana of the Indian poet Valmiki—and that is the earliest mention of Ceylon in books.

What Lanka means, we do not exactly know; some suggest 'resplendent,' and others the 'abode of demons.'

After the arrival of the Aryan settlers from Northern India, it came to be known as Sinhala-dwipa—the island of the Sinhalese; subsequently this was changed to Selediba and then to Serendib by the Arabs; still later the Portuguese, Dutch, and English altered it to Ceilao, Zeilan, and Ceylon respectively. To the ancient Greeks it was known as Taprobane, a modification of Tam-bapanni (copper coloured), an ancient district on the north-west coast best known to sea-faring traders.

The first people to arrive in the Island came over from India in pre-Palaeolithic times over a then existing isthmus. From those Australoid nomads, the Vedda aborigines are almost certainly derived.

That Ceylon was repeatedly invaded from India in prehistoric times there can be no doubt; ancient legends and songs make repeated references to such incursions.

The recorded history of the Island dates from the landing of *Prince Vijaya* and his band of seven hundred warriors from Northern India in B.C. 543 (about the date of Buddha's birth).

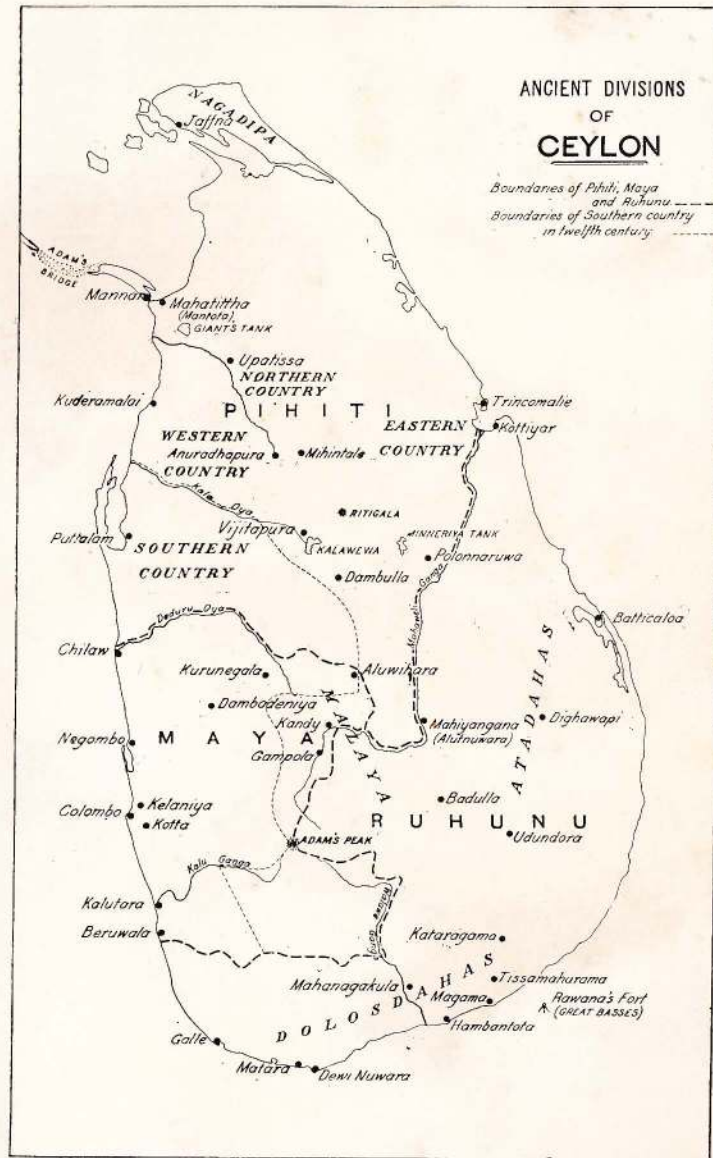
They found the Island occupied by two races (originally hill tribes of Southern India) known as the Nagas who lived in Nagadipa in the north-western districts, and the Yakkhas who occupied the central parts with a capital named Lankapura. These people, being less powerful and civilised than the invaders, were easily subdued by them.

The new settlers were soon to become a powerful nation known as the Sinhalese. At a time when the greater part of Europe was still inhabited by barbarians, they attained a high state of civilisation. They built great and magnificent cities; and by a system of irrigation that is a marvel to-day, they trapped into vast artificial lakes the heavy rainfall of the central mountains, and distributed it to the dry flat lands, making them yield abundant crops.

The great stimulus to the rapid advancement of the early Sinhalese seems to have been the fervent espousal by kings and subjects alike of a new religion (Buddhism) with its lofty tenets. How rapid that development was we shall note with wonder as we proceed to touch in the high lights of Ceylon's early history.

Vijaya landed near Puttalam,\* conquered the Yakkhas, and established his capital at Tammana Nuwara a few miles inland. His followers divided themselves up under chieftains and settled in Anuradhapura, Upatissa, and Vijitapura. Once his supremacy was assured, Vijaya cast his Yakkha wife and children aside, and married a South Indian princess, the daughter of the Pandyan

\* A southern port has been suggested as a possible alternative.



king. Many of his followers too, according to their different castes, married the Tamil women who accompanied the princess.

For thirty-eight years (B.C. 543-505) Vijaya reigned at Tammana Nuwara. He had no sons to succeed him. So Upatissa, the leading Sinhalese chief, ruled at Upatissa Nuwara a few years, until *Panduvasu-deva*, son of the king of Sinhapura in Northern India, Vijaya's home country, came over and assumed rule. He married an Indian princess, a relative of Gautama Buddha. Six of her brothers accompanied her to Ceylon and settled in various parts of the Island; one of them, Anuradha, built the first great tank on record.

Ceylon was then divided into three great provinces.—(1) Pihiti or Raja Rata, north of the Mahaweli Ganga and Deduru Oya, in which the great cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa were afterwards to stand; (2) Maya Rata between the Deduru Oya and the Kalu Ganga; and (3) Ruhuna Rata south of the Mahaweli and Kalu Ganga—the future haven of refuge for Sinhalese princes when pressed by the Tamils.

*Abahaya*, the eldest son of *Panduvasu*, was the next king; and then his brother *Tissa*, whom *Pandukabhaya* his nephew dethroned with the aid of the Yakkhas. *Pandukabhaya* removed the capital to Anuradhapura, and there it remained for over a thousand years. In his reign two great tanks, *Jaya-veva* and *Abhaya-veva*, were built.

*Mutasiva*, *Pandukabhaya*'s son and successor, planned the famous pleasure garden of Anuradhapura, the *Mahamega*. Anuradhapura was now a rising city, and the Sinhalese an established power.

Then in B.C. 307 there came to the throne *Devanampiya Tissa* (*Tissa* beloved of the gods), in whose reign Ceylon, hitherto of the Brahman

faith, was converted into Buddhism. How this came about we shall now see.

In the sixth century B.C., the Aryans, divided into various tribes, inhabited the Ganges Valley of Northern India. To one of these tribes, the Sakyas, dwelling a hundred miles north-east of Benares, was born Gautama or Siddartha, son of the chief of the clan—afterwards the founder of Buddhism.

Strongly influenced by Greek thought is Buddhism (and later, Christianity and Islam), for the influence of Greece in its day was world wide. During the century when Thales of Greece was "liberating thought from the bondage of religious ritual, and applying to the fundamental problems of existence the free unfettered activity of the human intellect," Gautama in India and Confucius (following La-otze) in China were doing the same in their own way (Elliot Smith).

In his twenty-ninth year, Gautama, troubled by the sufferings around him, renounced the world and took to religious meditation. For six years he wandered until he came to the city of Gaya in Bihar. Sitting there meditating under a bo-tree, it was revealed to him that pain was due to insatiate desire, and if desire could be annulled pain would cease to exist; to this end should the mind of man be disciplined. For forty-five years he taught his doctrines, and converted a great part of Northern India before he died in B.C. 447.\* To-day nearly one-third of the population of the world follows him.

Two hundred miles east of Benares was Magadha

\* Buddha is said to have made three legendary visits to Ceylon. The first was to Bintenne, where the Mahiyangana Dagaba now stands; the second, in the fifth year of his Buddhahood, to Nagadipa in the north west, where he settled a dispute concerning a gem-set throne between two Naga kings; and the third, three years later, to Kelaniya to preach Buddhism to the Naga King, when he is said to have visited

whose king and people became converts to the new religion. Early in the third century B.C. the Greeks, under Alexander, invaded India. They supported the Magadhan State and thus helped it to become a great empire which under the Buddhist monarch Asoka (the Sorrowless) dominated the greater part of India.

The Sinhalese of Ceylon were of the Magadhan race. That the two peoples kept in touch with each other is certain, for we read that Devanampiya Tissa (B.C. 306-267) was a friend of the Emperor Asoka, though the two had never met. Tissa despatched ambassadors to Asoka with costly presents, and Asoka, while returning the compliment, exhorted Tissa to embrace Buddhism.

Soon afterwards, in B.C. 307, Asoka sent his son, *Prince Mahinda*, ascetic and greatest of Buddhist teachers, with a few monks to Ceylon.

Mahinda met Tissa out hunting on the rock of Mihintale, eight miles east of Anuradhapura. There he converted the king and his courtiers. On the spot of that conversion stands to this day the Ambastala Dagaba (unlike others built of stone) that enshrines the ashes of Mahinda who lived and died there. The sacred rock of Mihintale bristles with ancient ruins—perhaps the most interesting of them all is the hewn slab, "Mahinda's bed" set on the verge of a dizzy precipice overlooking a wonderful vista of low-lying forest, where the apostle was wont to retire for meditation.

Having converted Tissa, Mahinda returned

Anuradhapura and left his foot print on Adam's Peak, still annually worshipped by devout pilgrims.

*Wesak*, the day of the full moon in May, is of great importance to Buddhists, because it is held to be the anniversary not only of the birthday of the Buddha, but also of his Enlightenment and of his death, or the Nirvana. It is the day in which the Buddhist year begins, and according to Ceylon tradition the day in which Vijaya landed.

*Poson* commemorates the anniversary of the introduction of Buddhism into Ceylon.

with him to Anuradhapura, where he won over the queen and her attendants. Soon Buddhism replaced Brahmanism and became the religion of the Sinhalese nation.

Tissa, in emulation of Bimbisara of Magadha, dedicated the royal pleasure garden, the Mahamega, twenty miles square, to sacred use; within its spacious limits were afterwards to arise the mighty dagabas and monasteries, the ruins of which tell the tale of Anuradhapura's greatness to this day.

Tissa himself built many viharas (monasteries); one of them, consisting of thirty-two cells, was cut out of the living rock at Mihintale. He also erected at Anuradhapura, in B.C. 307, the Thuparama Dagaba, the first of its kind. In it later were placed the right collar bone and alms-bowl of the Buddha, obtained by sending a nephew of Mahinda to the Emperor Asoka, and to "Sakka the chief of the Devas."

*Sanghamitta*, the sister of Mahinda, leaving her father Asoka to finish his days in lone old age, followed her brother to Ceylon that she might complete the conversion of the queen and her attendants. She brought with her a branch of the *sacred bo-tree* under which Buddha attained enlightenment. From that branch is said to have grown the tree that even now flourishes at Anuradhapura after a period of over two thousand years.

The kings that followed Tissa were so imbued with the new religion, that in their anxiety to gain posthumous merit by building dagabas, viharas, and tanks, they neglected the defences of their country, and encouraged the people to settle down to the peaceful pursuits of agriculture and architecture. Petty Sinhalese chieftaincies, independent of the king, arose in the south and

west. But worse than that, two sons of a Malabar horse trader brought over a Tamil army from India, killed the Sinhalese king and usurped the throne for twenty-two years. Thus they showed the Tamils how easy it was to get possession of the Island. So began a relentless feud, which was to rage through future centuries and lead eventually to the undoing of the Sinhalese kingdom. The Tamil usurpers were eventually slain by the Sinhalese prince *Asela*, who reigned ten years.

Then came *Elara*, the Chola prince. Landing with his army at the mouth of the Mahaweli Ganga, he marched to Anuradhapura, overthrew *Asela*, and ruled over Lanka for forty-four years. *Elara* was a just ruler, and though a Hindu, was tolerant of Buddhism. He fortified his kingdom with thirty-two forts, and made Mantota, north of Mannar, a port of landing for Tamils, which they used frequently in after years.

During his reign the Sinhalese chiefs of Maya and Ruhuna governed their provinces, but paid him tribute.

Now, the chief of Ruhuna, Kavan Tissa, was of the Vijayan dynasty; he was the grandson of Yathala Tissa (whose capital was at Kelaniya), son of Mahanaga, younger brother of Devanampiya Tissa. Mahanaga had long earlier established himself in Ruhuna making Magama, east of Hambantota, his capital. Kavan Tissa's wife was Vihara Devi, the pious princess of Kelaniya, who had landed at Kirinde after being cast adrift on the sea, in expiation of her father Yathala Tissa's sacrilege—the murder of the high priest of Kelaniya.

Kavan Tissa had two sons by Vihare Devi—Gemunu and Tissa—both scrupulously fostered in the Buddhist faith. The youth Gemunu

chafed for war against the Tamil usurper, and ignoring his pious and peaceful father's express injunctions, sent him a female trinket in expression of his disdain, and then fled to the hills of Kotmalie where he married a lovely maiden not of royal caste. After this act of disobedience he was known as *Dutu Gemunu* or Gemunu the Disobedient.

Gemunu, on his father's death, began a war with the Tamils. One by one he overthrew the outlying fastnesses of the Tamil chieftains. Crossing the Mahaveli he attacked the great stronghold of Vijitapura near Kalaveva, with its lofty battlements and threefold lines of trenches. After a four months siege he captured it.

He next fortified himself round Anuradhapura and won battle after battle. At length the aged warrior king, Elara himself, rallied his forces and led the attack. Gemunu sought out his rival in the field and challenged him to single combat. They fought with spears, mounted on charging elephants—and Elara fell.

Then was enacted a deed of chivalry that has come down the ages. Duttu Gemunu had the body of his foe cremated where he died, built there a tomb, and decreed it royal honours. Whoever passed that way, were he even the king of Lanka, would silence music and pass on foot—a custom that long outlived Duttu Gemunu's day.

Having overcome the Tamils, Duttu Gemunu (B.C. 101-77)—the contemporary of Caracalla and Diocletian—devoted himself to religion and good government, and rose to be one of the greatest of Lanka's kings.

Warrior though he was, his pious upbringing had shaped his mind. When he envisaged his wars and the immense sacrifice of life they entailed, he knew no peace, and sought the

consolation of religion.

He built monuments that to this day are witnesses to his greatness and piety—chief among them a monastery that could compare with palaces, and a dagaba that rivalled the very hills.

The *Brazen Palace* (Lowa Maha Paya), as the monastery was called, was a nine-storied structure standing on one thousand six hundred granite monoliths, and roofed with sheets of brass. Each floor had a hundred apartments embellished with silver, gems and gold. In the midst of the building was a gilded hall on golden pillars studded with pearls, and in the centre of the hall a throne of ivory overshadowed by a white umbrella canopy, emblem of Sinhalese royalty. This magnificent structure was in subsequent years repeatedly looted and demolished by Tamils, and rebuilt again by some Sinhalese monarch strong enough to recapture the throne. Its final destruction was due as much to schism in the ranks of the Buddhist priesthood as to the iconoclasm of the Tamils. All that remains of it to-day is a group of huddled monoliths.

A more enduring achievement was the *Ruanveli Dagaba*—a solid pile of bricks and mortar, 270 feet high and 1,000 feet in circumference. It was built not by forced but paid labour, in consideration of the heavy taxes entailed by the Tamil wars. Its foundations of stone, iron, and copper reaching down 100 feet, have supported their mighty burden to this day. Buried in the heart of the dagaba was the relic-chamber, replete with gem-studded images of gold and silver and much wealth besides. These were deposited with all the pomp and pageantry that a royal procession composed of caparisoned elephants, panoplied warriors, saffron-robed priests, musicians, singers, dancers, and surging, shouting devotees could impart.



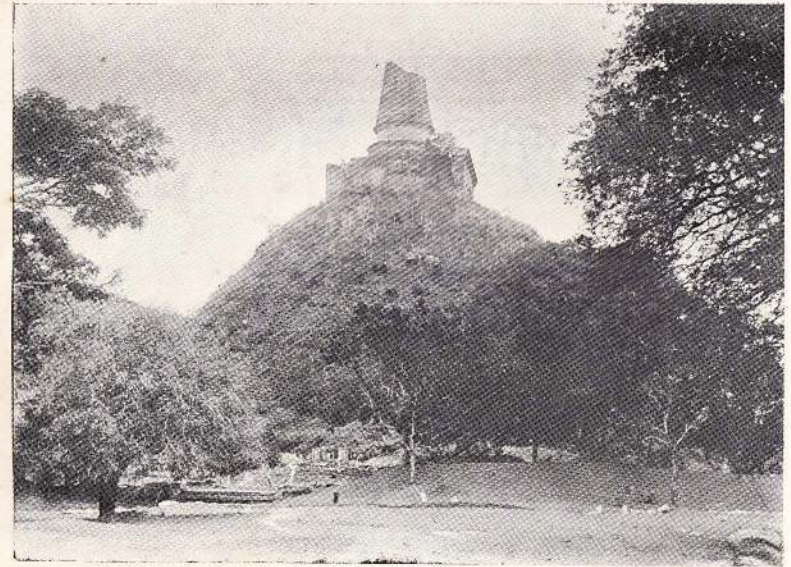
The reign of a single king was not sufficient for the accomplishment of a structure of such immense proportions, and death crept on Duttu Gemunu as the dagaba was nearing completion—the spire and plastering still remained to be done. In order that the dying king might see what the structure would look like when finished, it was draped with white cloths and surmounted by a temporary bamboo spire. The king was then taken to a spot whence he might behold his two mightiest works, the Ruanveli Dagaba and the Brazen Palace. Recumbent on a marble couch, his favourite priest (once a great warrior) before him, he gazed on these, reminded his bhikkus that he had been as a “slave to the priesthood,” dedicated the completion of the dagaba to his younger brother Tissa, and “dropped into silence.”

Duttu Gemunu left a son Sali who renounced the throne of his father for the love of a woman of lower caste, Asoka-mala the flower maiden. And Duttu Gemunu's brother, *Sadha Tissa*, became king.

Thirty years after the death of Duttu Gemunu *Vatta Gamani* or *Valagam Ba*, the fourth of Sadha Tissa's sons to become a king, ascended the throne. He had reigned but five months when the second great Tamil invasion occurred. Seven chiefs, under Pulahatta, deposed Vatta Gamani and carried away his queen Somadevi.

For fifteen years the king wandered in concealment in the hilly forests south of Anuradhapura. During that time, five of the Tamil chiefs, each successively killing his predecessor, occupied the throne. Vatta Gamani slew the fifth, and regained his kingdom.

Vatta Gamani, like his predecessors, was an ardent Buddhist. At Dambulla, where he had



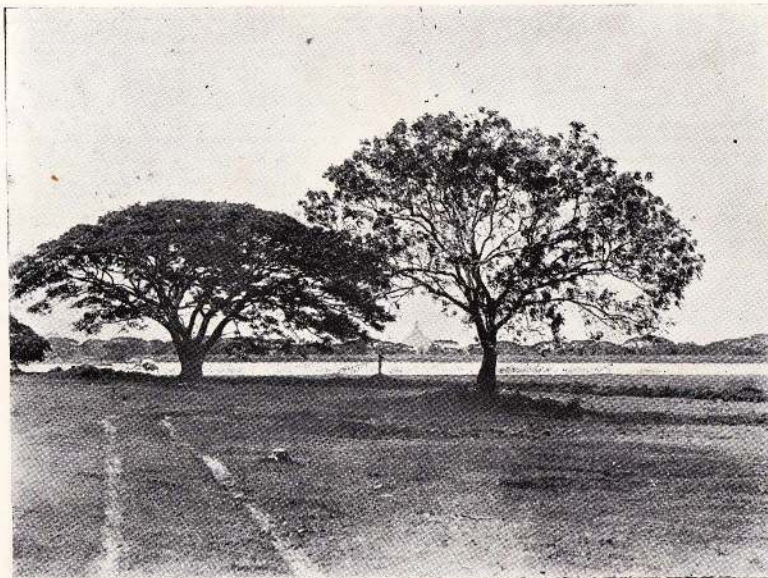
Jetavanarama Dagaba—Anuradhapura.



Tsuparama Dagaba—Anuradhapura.



Sculptured guard-stone, moonstone and monoliths at entrance to temple.



Abhayagiri Dagaba faintly seen across Basawak Kulam tank.

once found refuge from his enemies, he built the famous vihara. The Lankarama Dagaba at Anuradhapura was also his. Fired with zeal to surpass even the works of Duttu Gemunu, he built on the spot where a Jain ascetic had mocked him in his flight from Anuradhapura, the Abhayagiri Dagaba (B.C. 87) (now known as Jetavanarama), the greatest monument of its kind in the world—360 feet in diameter, and 405 feet high, *i.e.* 50 feet higher than St. Paul's. The new monastery was responsible for the first split in the priesthood—the Abhayagiri fraternity teaching doctrines opposed to those of the Maha Vihara.

In this reign Buddha's doctrines (*Tripitaka*), hitherto perpetuated by word of mouth, were committed to writing by an assembly of priests at Aluvihare, near Matala. (About this time, in B.C. 55, Julius Caesar was invading Britain).

Among the immediate successors of Vatta Gamani was the infamous queen *Anula*. Having poisoned one by one, two husbands and four paramours through whom she had governed the kingdom, she ruled alone, until she was slain by *Makalan* or *Kutakana Tissa*. This king surrounded Anuradhapura with a rampart sixteen feet high, and thirty-five miles in circumference.

His grandson founded Ridi Vihara in the Kurunegala district. In the first century A.D. *Ila Naga* built the Naga Maha Vihara at Tissamaharama.

*Mahadeliya Mana* was a king obsessed with such devotion, that he dedicated himself, his horse and elephants to the priesthood—an act of folly that even the priests reproved, and only released him from on the payment of heavy fines!

In A.D. 110, the Cholians plundered the country and carried away thousands of Sinhalese to India.

Soon afterwards *Gaja Bahu* avenged the outrage by crossing over, laying waste the land of the Cholas, and bringing the captives back. An annual *perahara* at Anuradhapura subsequently celebrated the triumph.

The reign of *Voharika Tissa* (A.D. 215—237) saw the religious dissension between the Maha and Abhayagiri Viharas rage high. The latter taught the strange "northern" doctrines of Kashmir, Tibet, and China, learnt from the Indian Vaituliya, as opposed to the dogmas of the "southern" Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma, and Siam.

Bali offerings and devil dancing received impetus in the reign of *Siri Sangabo I*, when a great plague devastated the land. His pious memory is perpetuated at Attanagala, near Veyangoda, where he sought sanctuary when his people rose against him, owing to the lawlessness brought about by his leniency to criminals and murderers whom he privately released after conviction.

*Jettha Tissa* "the Cruel," on the day he ascended the throne, impaled round the funeral pyre of his father, Gothakabhaya, sixty ministers guilty of treason. He built many tanks, also the Mulgiri-gala Vihara in the Hambantota district, and restored Mutiyangana Vihara at Badulla, attributed originally to Devanampiya Tissa.

And now we arrive at the reign of *Maha Sen* (A.D. 275—300) in which the schism among the Buddhist priesthood, destined to mar their harmony for fourteen centuries, was worse than ever it was before. Alas! Buddhism had again assimilated the very extravagances against which Gautama had revolted; the mystics and the ritualists would not leave the rational thinkers alone.

The king, at first a seceder from the orthodox

brotherhood of the Maha Vihara, persecuted it for refusing to adopt the new doctrines of the Dharmaruchi fraternity at Abhayagiri. He forbade the bestowal of alms to the Maha Vihara priests, and thus forced them to abandon their historic abode and settle in Ruhuna. Their vihara, like many another monastery including the Brazen Palace, was pulled to the ground.

Such sacrilege could not but give offence to the people, and the king's chief ministers banded themselves against him. Maha Sen relented, recanted his heresy, and rebuilt what he had destroyed.

To Maha Sen's credit stands the third of the great dagabas—the Jetavanarama (now erroneously called Abhayagiri), 321 feet high; it was begun before his recantation, and was incomplete at his death. A *thupa* (temple) he built for a Yakkha chief, is evidence that up to that time these early inhabitants were a factor in the land.

It is for his tanks, however, that Maha Sen is most famed. Of these he built no less than sixteen, of which Minneriya (20 miles in circumference) the largest, was formed by the erection of a dam across the Kara Ganga, and fed by a channel that tapped the Amban Ganga.

And so, this king who at first molested priests and despoiled temples, afterwards proved a benison to his people, who, forgetful of the evils he wrought, erected a temple to his honour at Minneriya, and worshipped him as a god.

With Maha Sen's death the Mahawansa proper or Great Dynasty (a Pali chronicle) closes—due perhaps to the loss of monastic archives involved in the destruction of the Maha Vihara. The kings who followed come under the Sulavansa or Lesser Dynasty, for no other reason perhaps than the interruption of the tale—but some

think because they were of more mixed descent, and the prosperity of Lanka was on the wane.

Maha Sen's death synchronises with the inception of a specially brilliant era in Indian history.\* Six hundred years after Asoka, there ruled in India a dynasty of kings known as the Guptas, whose capital was at Ayodhya (Oudh). They were paramount throughout India from A.D. 320 until A.D. 467, when the "white Huns," from central Asia overthrew them. "Later Guptas," however, ruled in Magadha till the middle of the seventh century. The "*Gupta Period*" corresponded in Ceylon from the reign of Siri Sangabo to that of Agrabodhi II.

It was a time of brilliant achievements in war, literature and arts, that influenced Ceylon and other eastern countries. Kalidasa, the world-famed Sanskrit poet, lived in the first half of the fifth century. The Laws of Manu, descriptive of the customs of the Brahmans of Northern India, were compiled. The Mahabarata and Ramayana were crystallized into their present forms.

Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Brahmans, became the popular language, and this led to the slow and sure decay of Buddhism in India. Northern India, that in the days of Asoka had glittered with the yellow robes of Buddhist monks, became again the home of Brahmanism.

The intellectual awakening of the Gupta Period was due to the prevalence of peace which gave men leisure to cultivate the arts and literature. Frequent communication with Rome and China (as evidenced in the coinage, arts and writings of the time) provided an impetus to the movement. Ceylon, that had already pro-

\*This description of the Gupta Period, like much else of this historical survey, is taken from Mr. L. E. Blazé's admirable summary of the subject in his "History of Ceylon."

gressed far on its own despite harassing wars, being in close touch with India, was influenced by those countries. Traces of Gupta architecture are seen in many Ceylon temples; examples of Gupta sculpture are found at Isurumuniya, and of painting in the Sigiriya frescoes.

And now we must return to what corresponded in Ceylon to the beginning of the Gupta Period. Maha Sen was succeeded by his son *Siri Meghavana* (Kit Siri Mevan), to whom it was left to complete the Jetavanarama Dagaba and the restoration of the Brazen Palace begun by his father.

Two priests this king had sent to Buddha-Gaya in India, brought back word that they had no place there in which to stay, and that Buddhism was fast disappearing from Northern India owing to the Gupta kings being Hindus. So with the permission of Samudra-gupta, Siri Meghavana had a large vihara built there for pilgrims.

Siri Meghavana's reign is chiefly famous for the arrival of the *Tooth Relic* of Buddha in Ceylon (about A.D. 313). It was brought from Kalinga, to prevent it falling into the hands of a hostile king, concealed in the hair of the king of Kalinga's daughter, she and her husband travelling disguised as ascetics. For its reception the Dalada Maligawa (Palace of the Tooth) was built within the outer walls of the Thuparama. The annual Perahara Ceremony (still perpetuated at Kandy) dates from this time, when on festival days the tooth was carried through the streets of Anuradhapura on the back of a white elephant.

In after years the Malabars frequently destroyed the various Temples of the Tooth, but as often the precious relic was removed to safety and preserved. In the fourteenth century it was taken by the Tamils to India and lay there until

Parakrama Bahu III went over and ransomed it. Eventually, in 1560, it is said to have been captured by the Portuguese with the treasure of Vidiye Bandara and burnt by the viceroy at Goa, in spite a heavy ransom offered for it by the king of Pegu; but Buddhists aver that the relic still worshipped at Kandy is the original tooth of Buddha.

The reign of *Jetha Tissa II* (brother of Siri Meghavanna) was noted for the development of the fine arts and Sinhalese and Pali literature. The king himself was a skilled painter and sculptor.

*Buddhadasa* (Slave of the Buddha), brother of the last king, was a physician and surgeon of conspicuous ability. He wrote a Sanskrit work on medicine, the *Sarartha-sangraha*.

Buddhadasa's reign was one of peace, prosperity, and benevolence. He established hospitals throughout the kingdom, one to every ten villages, and appointed to them physicians who received as payment one-twentieth part of the produce of cultivated fields. He built roadside hostels, and stocked them with food for the lame and blind, founded schools of art, and added the beautiful bright-hued "Peacock Monastery" to the Maha Vihara. He encouraged learning, and had translated the *Suttas* or sermons of the Buddha from Pali to Sinhalese.

In his reign there came to Ceylon, about A.D. 412, the Chinese traveller Fa Hien, who in his writings has preserved for us the splendour and greatness of Anuradhapura where he lived for two years transcribing sacred Buddhist books.

Seventy years later, in the reign of *Mahanama* (Buddhadasa's second son, and the last of the Lambakanna dynasty), the famous commentator *Buddhaghosa* (Voice of the Buddha), born near the bo-tree at Buddha-Gaya, came to Ceylon

from Magadha. He stayed here three years before returning to India, chiefly at Anuradhapura and Aluvihara, where he rewrote in Pali the Sinhalese commentaries on the Buddhist scriptures, and composed the *Visuddhimagga*, a philosophical treatise summarising the doctrines of the *Tripitaka*. His teachings had a profound influence on later Buddhists.

In Mahanama's reign an embassy was sent to China. Previous embassies from Ceylon kings to foreign courts were: one to Rome in the first century A.D., and another to Rome and China in the fourth century.

The death of Mahanama was followed by a stormy period of which the Tamils were not slow to avail themselves.

Mahanama's son (born of a Tamil mother) was killed on the day of his accession by his step-sister whose notorious husband ("Plunderer of Crops") ruled for a year. He was put to death by Tamil invaders, six of whose chiefs successively dominated the Island for twenty-seven years, destroying as usual all Sinhalese institutions; while the Sinhalese chiefs found refuge in Ruhuna.

From among these chiefs *Dhatusera* arose, and expelling the Tamils, won back for the Sinhalese the sovereignty of the Island. He restored the buildings and statues the Tamils had demolished, and built new tanks, the greatest of which was Kalawewa. Buddhism now came into its own again.

In his reign was composed the *Mahawansa* (A.D. 459-477), a chronicle older than any extant in India, by the great historian and priest Mahanama, uncle of the king. Though completed 500 years after Christ, it must not be considered to be merely the fancies of a monk of that period, but rather a chronicle compiled from records of

the second and third century B.C. by men contemporary with Pandukabhaya, and preserved by the monks of the Maha Vihara.

It is a history, composed in metrical Pali, of the kings from Vijaya to Maha Sena—the Great Dynasty. It was resumed in the same style in the reign of Parakrama Bahu the Great (about A.D. 1226), and carried down by later scholars at various times to the end of the eighteenth century—this part comprising the Lesser Dynasty.

Taken as a whole the Mahawansa is a work of varying merit. Consistently it glorifies Buddhism and kingship. Fanciful, mystical, or sublime in parts, it is crude in others; but the facts are there, though often disguised in a cloak of extravagant fiction.

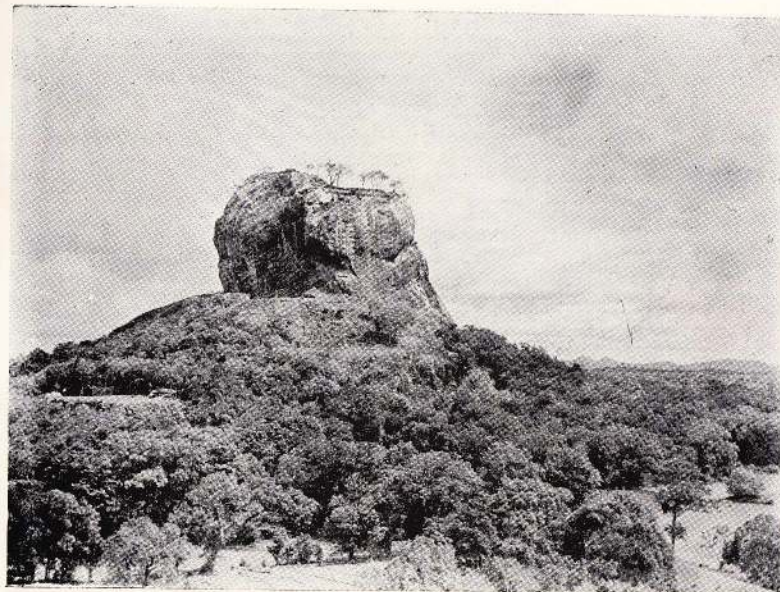
It is to the Mahawansa that we owe what knowledge we have of Lanka's history\*—to it and the evidence of our ruined cities.

Empires dissolve and peoples disappear :  
 Song passes not away.  
 Captains and conquerors leave a little dust  
 And kings a dubious legend of their reign ;  
 The swords of Caesar, they are less than rust ;  
 The poet doth remain.†

Dhatusena had two sons *Mogallana* and *Kasyapa*—the latter by a woman of inferior rank. Kasyapa dethroned his father and put him in a dungeon; and subsequently, failing to secure his treasures, walled him up alive. Mogallana to escape assassination fled to India. Kasyapa, fearful of his brother's vengeance, forsook Anuradhapura, and with his treasures betook himself to Sigiriya, an impregnable rock rising abruptly 400 feet out

\* Other historical works of later date written in Sinhalese are :—the *Rajavaliya*, *Rajaratnakara*, *Pujavaliya*, *Thupavansa*, and *Dhatuwansaya*.

† Sir William Watson.



Sigiriya.



Buddhas on the platform of a Dagaba at Polonnaruwa.



Frescoes on the rock of Sigiriya.

of the forest. He fortified the crag and built a splendid palace on its summit. For eighteen years he reigned there in luxury and splendour, but under perpetual fear of Mogallana's vengeance. At the end of that time Mogallana arrived with an army, and Kasyapa, sure of victory, descended from his stronghold, mounted on an elephant and gave him combat. Kasyapa was defeated and committed suicide on the battlefield.

*Mogallana* reigned in Anuradhapura for eighteen years (A.D. 495-515). He secured himself against invasion by placing guards along the coast. Sigiriya he converted into a vihara and bestowed it on the monk Mahanama, the author of the *Mahawansa*.

*Kumara Dasa*, Mogallana's son, after a reign of nine years, immolated himself on the funeral pyre of his *fidus Achates* the poet Kalidasa (not the Indian bard).

The state of Ceylon in the first five centuries of the present era, says Codrington, must not be judged by the innumerable irrigation works which were almost certainly not all functioning at the same time. The majority of tanks were small, and many were abandoned and replaced by others as the soil was exhausted. The north, south, and south-east of the Island were the most thickly inhabited parts. Vast tracts continued in forest. The total population was probably no larger than it is now. Anuradhapura was the only city of consequence; it had a quarter assigned to foreign merchants who held much of the trade.

Egyptian traders subject to Rome, frequently visited the Island. Small Roman copper coins of the fourth century, formed the bulk of local currency and are found plentifully, not only at

every little port, but even at Sigiriya. Mantota was the chief sea port; about A.D. 500 it was under an independent prince, as Colombo was in the fourteenth century.

Ever since the parricide Kasyapa abandoned Anuradhapura, its power steadily declined.

Henceforward Tamil influence began to grow stronger. Invasions from India became increasingly frequent. The sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries were characterised by murder, revolution and internecine war. The sixth and seventh centuries saw the murder of a dozen kings. Bloodshed and anarchy stalked the land. Viharas and dagabas were ruthlessly plundered, and cultivation was strangled.

Rivalries within the royal house helped the Tamils, who, already firmly established in the north of Ceylon, rapidly spread their borders southwards, and fortified themselves round Anuradhapura. In A.D. 1001 they looted and demolished the city. A few years of Tamil dominion and the once resplendent capital was a waste—for the Tamils destroyed never to restore.

Having abandoned Anuradhapura to the Tamils, the Sinhalese, at first temporarily under *Agrabhodi VII* (781-787), and then permanently under *Sena I* (846), removed the seat of their government to Polonnaruwa, 50 miles south-east of Anuradhapura, where it remained for the next 150 years.

The new capital grew with amazing rapidity. Palaces, temples, gardens, and tanks sprang forth, and almost eclipsed the older city in splendour.

But the tranquillity was not to last long. The Tamils were now a power in the land; they held high positions in government, were influential and wealthy, and had their own *devalas*

(temples). Tamil mercenaries were in the pay of rival kings. And in the veins of monarchs and people alike, we may take it, Tamil blood was strong.

In the new capital, *Sena II* (nephew of Sena I) "won back the lost honour of the Sinhalese," restored the prosperity of the Island, and secured for himself and his immediate successors immunity from Tamil attacks. Espousing the cause of a Pandyan prince, he even sent a force to Madura, sacked the city, killed its king, set up the prince in his stead, recovered treasures taken from the Island, and brought back great plunder.

But civil strife, and fierce dissensions among Sinhalese chiefs, attracted further Tamil invasions, and many a king had to abandon his capital to Tamil iconoclasm, and seek refuge in Ruhuna.

*Mahinda V* and his queen were even taken captive by a Chola king, and spent their days in exile in India, while a viceroy of the Indian monarch ruled at Polonnaruwa. Mahinda's infant son, however, was carried away to Ruhuna, and thus the ancient Sinhalese royal line was preserved.

So, buffeted by the winds of war, the fortunes of Polonnaruwa waxed and waned; while from Sinhalese strongholds in Ruhuna, armies, nursed for years by some brave prince or chieftain, time and again put their fortunes to the test against the Tamils, sometimes to be victorious, more often to be defeated.

One such prince was *Vijaya Bahu I* (1056-1111), who after a prolonged struggle, and aided by Burmese gold, succeeded in expelling the Tamils not only from Polonnaruwa but also Anuradhapura. Buddhism after long years of Tamil dominance had now reached its lowest ebb; there were "not ten good priests in the Island." The



king brought over Buddhist monks from Burma, and so gave the impetus to a great revival of Buddhism; but it is significant that Hindu devalas were respected, and Tamil soldiers were maintained in the pay of the king.

Vijaya Bahu's death was followed by a period of disaster, until his grandson, *Parakrama Bahu the Great*, arose to be a power in Lanka.

Nurtured in Ruhuna, redolent of Sinhalese tradition, as a youth he had smarted under the wrongs of his people and nursed dreams of conquest stirred by ancient tales of chivalry. He knew the weakness of his country and the causes of its decay. He was a scholar and a soldier, and had the prudence and cunning of a great leader. He sent out his spies disguised as snake-charmers, pedlars, and pilgrims among the village people, and moved among them himself, testing their feelings. He built up an army composed of well drilled regiments of Sinhalese, Tamils and Veddas and warred against his uncle the weak king Gaja Bahu. After a long and fierce struggle he captured Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura and took Gaja Bahu prisoner; but retiring to his chieftaincy in Ruhuna, he allowed that monarch to reign until his death in 1153.

Then Parakrama became king of Lanka, and his people "filled the whole heaven with shouts of victory."

During his reign of 33 years (1153-1186) Polonnaruwa rose to the zenith of its greatness, and Anuradhapura's former prosperity was restored. Buddhism, shattered by heresies, was purified, and a friendlier spirit established among Buddhist monks. At the same time Brahmanism was tolerated. Arms, arts laws and language flourished. Taxes were collected without oppression. Temples, such as Jetawanarama



"Buddhas whose sublime calm reminded man that pain was due to insatiate desire."

and Thuparama, and a Palace for the Tooth, were built, and more than a thousand tanks, one of them called the 'Sea of Parakrama,' also a seven-storied palace of splendour arose in the city, which was surrounded with a rampart.

The might of Parakrama made itself felt outside Ceylon. Angered by the insults offered to his subjects by a Burmese king, he sent an expeditionary force to Burma under a Tamil general, who slew the king and entered the capital in triumph. He espoused the cause of a Pandyan against a Chola king, and sent his armies to India, where they won battle after battle, laid waste the country, entered Madura, expelled its ruler, and set up another in his place as vassal of the king of Ceylon. Tamil prisoners were brought back and set to repair the Ruanweli Dagaba that the Cholians had damaged.

With the death of Parakrama Bahu in 1186 the Sinhalese power began to decline permanently. In twenty-nine years there were fifteen kings whose chief concern seemed to have been to prey on each other.

In 1215 the Tamils, under *Magha* of Kalinga, more merciless than any previous invader, landed with 20,000 men. They "ransacked the kingdom even as a wild fire doth a forest." They killed man and beast, broke images, destroyed temples and books, made dwelling places of viharas, and tortured the rich for their wealth. They took Parakrama Pandu captive, plucked out his eyes, and robbed him of his treasures. They stalked about the land hither and thither crying out boastfully, "Lo! we are the giants of Kerala." "Alas, alas," says the historian, "even so do those Tamil giants of Mara destroy the kingdom and religion of the land."

Magha reigned twenty-one years; though, scattered among the mountains, were Sinhalese strongholds his armies could not subdue.

Henceforth the Sinhalese power rapidly declined. Short reigns, riven by violence, sundered the kingdom into rival chieftaincies. There were feuds within and pressure without, and no man strong enough to hold the people together.

The Tamils destroyed the irrigation works of the Sinhalese, and laid the lands they conquered desolate. What war began, malaria completed. The invaders pressed on, and forced the Sinhalese to retire further and further southwards where they established a series of capitals at a number of places—Yapahu, Dambadeniya, Kurunegala, Gampola, Kandy, and finally Colombo.

And then the prows of Europe faced the East.

Meanwhile the tropical jungle crept over the ancient cities and fertile lands, and enveloped within itself the remains of a civilisation that flourished over two thousand years ago. While, tumbled amidst that wilderness, were granite Buddhas whose sublime calm reminded man that pain was due to insatiate desire. Round the colossal dagabas, and over monolith and moonstone the jungle grew, covering them with carpet of softest grass and canopy of leaf, to hide as it were, from future eyes the story of man's past sorrows.

Long centuries ahead, the hands of another race of men were gently to tear away the verdurous shroud, and lay bare, like broken sacraments, the shattered symbols of bygone calamities.

## SIGIRI

The parricide Kasyapa 'took himself to the Sihagiri rock that was hard for men to climb,' fortified it, built a palace on it, and lived there 'in fear of the world to come and of Mogallana,' his avenging brother. Eventually, in the eighteenth year of Kasyapa's reign, (497 A.D.), Moggallana arrived with his army. Kasyapa descended from his security, saying, 'I will catch him and eat him.' He mounted an elephant and led his troops to battle, but was defeated; in despair he 'cut his throat with a knife and returned the knife to its sheath.' With his death the secular glory of Sigiri departed.

By Sigiri's rock the night-jar sings—

Afar, aloof, alone—

Of old unholy happenings

Around the storied stone.

He flits the darkling woods along,

That phantom winds bestirred :

His song is still the same old song

The rock for aeons heard.

The sylvan loneliness around

And drear unlovely tears

Are gathered in that sombre sound,

That coronach of years.

And human might and splendour gone,

In ghostly grim array,

Steal, silent as the dews of dawn,

To mourn the vanished day

When Sigiri on its base and crest,

Bore wondrous works of man,

And, clinging to its scarped breast

The ambushed galleries ran.

That kingdom's now a solitude :  
 But still stands there alone,  
 As in the ancient days it stood,  
 This proud cold mass of stone.

Time does not mar its dauntless brow,  
 Nor burning sun nor storm  
 This grandeur that we gaze on now,  
 This mute immobile form.

And crowning all the prospect fair,  
 Hoar forests stretching wide,  
 It guards a thing of beauty there,  
 The lotus lake, its bride.

Lo ! mirrored on her scented breast  
 The swarthy giant sleeps,  
 And while she ripples him to rest,  
 A kingdom's memory keeps.

The yearning moon, in state supreme,  
 Bathes it with dallying light,  
 And pales the yearning planet's gleam  
 Upon its silvered might.

What time ancestral souls are free  
 And jungle creatures roam,  
 The night-jar hymns sepulchrally  
 This vanished royal home,

By Sigiri's crag you'll hear him cry—  
 Afar, aloof, alone—  
 It echoes in the listening sky  
 And in thy heart, O stone !

#### PARAKRAMA AT POLONNARUWA

“ This bold and valiant prince, who regarded glory as the  
 greatest wealth, and fame as the most solid substance. . . ”

*Mahawansa.*

From the bowl of Wisdom filled to the brim  
 Deep he drank, and he heaved his breast  
 And braced his thews from heel to crest :  
 For Glory and Fame were the dream of him.

Of the Race of the Moon was this warrior born :  
 Heart of a lion, soul of a man :  
 Hope of his people, god of his clan :  
 Who seek a leader, here's your man—  
 Draw your swords and follow on.

Flown the gladness, gone the tears ;  
 But these, the stones of the town he planned,  
 Alone have withstood the hungering hand  
 Of forest that strove six hundred years.

The laws he gave, and the might he beamed,  
 Have gone to their doom like a crumbling hive ;  
 But, long as the day these stones survive,  
 The Glory is his and the Fame he dreamed.

## 2. WHEN WEST MET EAST

THE early days of Western colonisation form some of the most enthralling pages of history, and savour more of fairy tale than fact.

To Portugal, that little strip of land that braves the vast ocean, is due the everlasting honour of first having tempted, in the frail craft of the day, uncharted seas. The first great navigators and colonisers were the Portuguese. Their names shine with incomparable lustre in that galaxy of explorers which the 15th century produced.

*Henry of Portugal* (1394-1460), surnamed *The Navigator*, was the inspiring spirit of pioneer marine adventure; it was he who set the movement in full swing. Under him Portugal, victorious against Castile and the Moors of Morocco, began to take prominence among European nations. His explorations, limited at first, gradually developed into a search of the Western ocean and a seaway along the unknown coast of Africa; then to a search of the rich Negro lands beyond the Sahara, to the half-fabled realms of Prester John, that mythical mediaeval Christian monarch of Asia—and so ultimately to the Indies.

Up to this time the Canarian Archipelago was known to French and Spanish mariners. Henry's seamen explored these islands, and pushed farther into the Atlantic, keeping in view, perhaps, the possibility of a western route to Asia, such as Columbus attempted in 1492 only to find America across his path.

In 1441, *Gonsalvez*, one of Henry's captains, brought the first slaves and gold dust from the Guinea coasts to Portugal. Cape Blanco was reached. These successes popularised sea enterprise, and merchants and mariners came forward. Soon there was a great burst of exploring activity along the coast of Africa; the slave-trade began in earnest; the Cape Verde Islands were discovered; much new information was gathered of the trade routes of North-West Africa and of the native races.

The Portuguese caravels in the days of Henry the Navigator were the best craft afloat. His court was the centre of geographical study and the fountain-head of practical exploration. The glory of Prince Henry does not rest merely on the achievements of his life-time, but on the after events his genius and perseverance inspired. To him humanity is indebted for the maritime exploration within one century (1420-1522) of more than half the globe, especially the great sea routes from Europe to Asia by the east and west. His life was only sufficient for the accomplishment of a small part of his task, and though his share is forgotten in the exploits of such great sailors as Diogo Cam, Bartholomew Diaz and Vasco da Gama, it is to his prescience that the fame of Portugal must be attributed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Discoveries followed fast on each other. Bartholomew Diaz (1481-1500), Columbus (1451-1506), Francesco de Almeida (1450-1510), Vasco da Gama (1460-1524), and Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) were contemporaries.

Henry's seamen discovered the Azores and the African coast, whence came reports of a great monarch east of Benin. John II. of Portugal tried to reach this potentate by sea and land.

He sent *Bartholomew Diaz* with two vessel westward. After many months Diaz came back to report that he had been carried far to the east by fierce storms, past the southern end of Africa. When the sea calmed, Diaz stood east, but failing to discover land, turned north and struck the south coast of Africa. Reconnoitering along the seaboard he found the way round the Cape of Good Hope which he called the Cape of Storms in commemoration of his experiences.

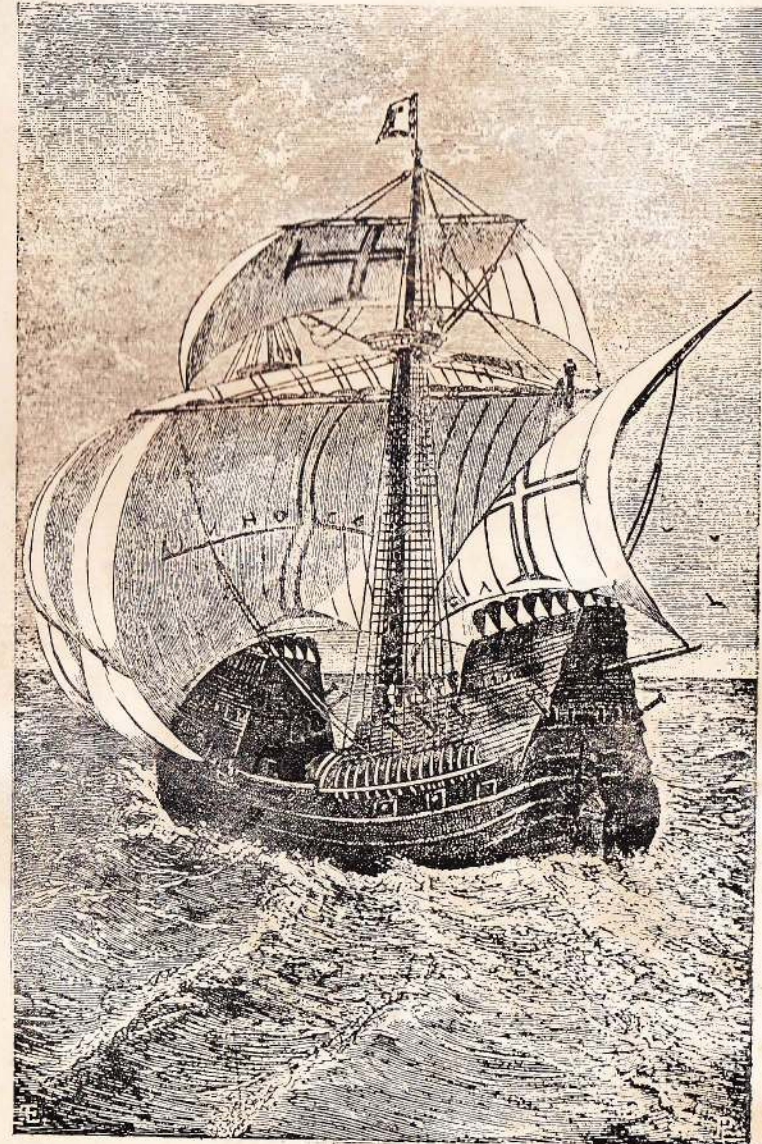
When the Indian expedition was being prepared for Vasco da Gama, Bartholomew Diaz superintended the construction and equipment of the ships. He participated, in 1500, with Cabral in the discovery of Brazil; thence he would have guided the fleet to India, had he not perished in a storm off his own *Cabo Tormentosa*.

*Vasco da Gama*, the discoverer of the sea route to India, was born in the year Prince Henry the Navigator died.

Nine years after the Cape had been discovered, Emmanuel, who succeeded John II, completed preparations for the great voyage to India by the Cape. Meanwhile Columbus had discovered America. It was to Vasco da Gama, the bold soldier who had been fighting in Castile, that the command of the expedition fell.

The flotilla consisted of four caravels. The flagship *S. Gabriel* was commanded by Vasco, its sister ship, the *S. Raphael*, by his brother Paulo, a smaller and swifter vessel, the *Berrio*, by Nicolau Coelho, and the fourth was a provision ship.

They were square-rigged, flat-bottomed craft, each bearing the effigy of its patron saint. The "castles" fore and aft were their main feature, from which the crew could hurl javelins, grenades, and powder-pots at boarding pirates and savages.



From Danver's *Portuguese in India*.  
A Portuguese caravel of the 15th century.

The men had no muskets, but were armed with cross-bows, swords, boarding-pikes, axes and spears. A few had steel armour, the rest breast-plates and jerkins.

Gama was a stern, thick-set, black-bearded grandee of thirty-seven, with that manly bearing which, when first seen by the king as he strode the courtyard, won him at once the command of the little armada.

In July, 1497, the four vessels sailed down the Tagus, after prayers and confession made by the crew in the Mariner's Chapel built by Prince Henry.

The Canaries were reached, and then Cape Verdes, which the explorers left on August 3rd on the most adventurous voyage attempted up to that time. They were now to sail for ninety-six days, and traverse 4,500 miles of ocean before sighting land, and this with no other nautical aids than the wooden astrolabe with which to find latitude, mariner's compasses, sounding leads, hour-glasses, and a rope trailing astern to indicate the ship's lee. They had no chronometer or log to estimate a day's run. They measured mileage by dead reckoning—"one way in a calm sea was to spit over the bow and to calculate the rate by timing its speed in passing this comparatively fixed point."

Contrary trade winds and violent storms buffeted them. When at length they spied sea-fowl, a whale, seals, and a weed peculiar to South Africa, they knew they were not lost.

On November 7th they cast anchor in a bay they named St. Helena. Here they found a Hottentot gathering honey, and soon they were trading amicably with his people who preferred bells and tin rings to gold and spices.

At Mossel Bay the Hottentots entertained

c

them with music and dancing, which the Portuguese reciprocated; red caps and bells were exchanged for ivory bracelets and a "fat and toothsome" ox.

Rounding the Cape they struck a terrific tempest which very nearly wrecked them. The rain flooded their vessels and heavy seas broke over them; the lightning played in a sky so dark that the men could scarcely see each other. The pumps were worked incessantly. The sailors lashed themselves to the masts; some died of exhaustion. Gama worked as hard as any, but held doggedly on his course, refusing to turn back despite the entreaties of his captains. The men prayed and cursed, and beseeched Gama in the names of God, the Devil, and their dear ones to do as the captains desired, but he cajoled, threatened and intimidated them with a "fury that outdid the storm."

With a lull in the tempest came a mutiny. Gama, on the pretext of a parley, got together his disgruntled masters and pilots on board the *S. Gabriel*, trapped them, and put them in irons. He then pitched their navigating instruments into the sea, saying God would guide them to India.

The Agulhas Current, that great ocean river, drifted them 200 miles off their course. Their fresh water ran low, and food had to be cooked in brine.

On Christmas Day they coasted along Natal (which they named accordingly), and anchored near the mouth of the Limpopo. Here friendly Bantus, adorned with copper circlets and armed with tin-hilted daggers in ivory sheaths, bartered with them.

In January, 1498, they arrived at Corrientes (the Cape of Currents) which, to their surprise, they found comparatively civilised. Thus far

south the Arab traders could come, but no farther, for their frail craft were incapable of weathering the storms set up by the clash of trade winds and warm and cold currents prevalent there. North of Corrientes, Persians and Arabs had founded prospering trading posts, which developed into cities where they bargained for gold and ivory. Towards these busy centres Gama was sailing.

At Kilimane, he saw men robed in silk and satin, who though friendly, were not impressed by his gifts; one man they met hailed from a far land, and had even seen such ships as the Portuguese came in. Here the sailors were afflicted with scurvy—the dread of old-time mariners—but they pushed on and reached Mozambique which was a flourishing town. Four Arab vessels stood in the harbour laden with gold, silver, precious stones and spices. Engaging two pilots, they reached Mombasa where they had their first taste of treachery; the plentiful oranges obtainable there cured the men of scurvy, though they did not realise what restored them to health.

Their last port of call on the East African coast, before Calicut, was Malindi, off which they captured a *sambuk* with rich cargo. Malindi was a rich city with fine houses and gardens and coconut groves, ruled by a rajah who befriended the Portuguese. Gama reciprocated his goodwill by freeing the Moors he had seized, and giving over to him their boat and cargo to dispose of. The rajah swore fealty to the king of Portugal, and allowed the explorers to make free of his city. Here they caulked their ships and provisioned them, and learnt to make coir rope in preparation for their trip to India.

Securing a pilot at Malindi, they boldly set



sail across the unchartered Arabian Sea. After twenty-three days, the mountains of Malabar loomed on the horizon. Gama had reached his goal; Portugal's proudest hour had come; the ocean route to the East was blazed. Henceforth the brooding East was to savour the interference of the West.

Gama anchored his ships off Calicut in May 1498, ten and a half months after leaving Lisbon.

Calicut was a great city. From it the Mopla merchants sent out their ships freighted with cinnamon from Ceylon, cloves from Malacca, and ginger and pepper from India. Weeks later these cargoes reached Jedda, and were transhipped to vessels bound for Suez, whence camels bore them in ten days to Cairo. Here they were put into river boats and conveyed to Rosetta, and a day later reached Alexandria to await the galleys of Genoa and Venice, whence they were distributed throughout Europe. Transferred as the cargoes were from port to port, with the intervention of many middle men, the tariffs and profits piled up, so that in England a pound of cloves fetched the equivalent of two cows. What wonder that the merchant princes of Calicut spat into gold cupidors, and Italy was one of the wealthiest countries of Europe!

Vasco, realising that his arrival would provoke jealousy among the Moorish traders, anchored in a cove fifteen miles north of Calicut. From there he had himself carried in a palanquin into the town, accompanied by thirteen picked men. Changing into princely regalia, he strode through the thronged streets followed by the ships' trumpeters, to make his historic visit to the ruler. He was escorted into a gorgeous audience chamber, where, on a green velvet divan under a canopy of brocaded gold, reclined the great

Hindu zamorin. On one side of him was a massive spittoon of solid gold, on the other a gold basin containing his betel chew. He was draped in finer calico than Europe could spin. On his arms were gem-studded armlets. Two necklaces of large lustrous pearls sagged down his bare chest to his lap. From a smaller necklace of gold hung a giant emerald surrounded by pearls and rubies. His hair, twisted in a knot, was gem-bedecked, and so were his ears.

The courtiers who surrounded him were Brahmans and polyandrous martial Nairs, naked except for a white girdle, and armed with shield and short sword.

The arrival of the Europeans was no surprise to the zamorin, for their reputation had preceded them. He enquired of Gama what he wanted. Gama, reading hostility in the surrounding faces, asked for a private hearing, and was accorded it. He produced a letter, purporting to be from his king, but possibly fabricated by Gama when he learnt of the magnificence of the zamorin's court.

Two days later Gama paid his second visit to the zamorin, taking with him gifts which he had been warned would be inadequate. This time he was kept waiting four hours, for the Moors had convinced the king's ministers that the Portuguese were fugitives or spies.

Gama displayed his best gifts—cloth, hats, coral, basins, sugar, oil, and honey—but the zamorin did not dissemble his scorn. He asked the Portuguese whether they expected to find stones or men; he said that the pettiest Arab traders could do better, and that the king of Portugal must be poor or mannerless to offer a potentate of his status such paltry gifts. Gama replied that the presents were from him and not from his king; those the king sent had been

lost in a storm; he had only brought samples as he had come to trade.

On leaving the zamorin, Gama found difficulty in getting back to his ships and grew angry. Treachery was in the air. After being kept several days he was rowed out to his ships and allowed to bring his goods ashore. The Moslems scorned these, refused to trade, and spat whenever they saw a Portuguese; but the zamorin showed his good faith, and arranged for the sale of the wares.

When Gama was ready to sail away, he sent Diogo Dias as emissary to the zamorin soliciting gifts for his king. Dias returned without gifts, but with a large bill for customs duty for landing his goods, and a warning that it must be met before the ships could sail. At the same time a guard was placed round the Portuguese warehouse, and some of the sailors were seized as hostages. Gama retaliated by capturing eighteen Hindus. The zamorin then ordered the release of the Portuguese, and sent Gama the famous letter, written with an iron style on a palm leaf, to the king of Portugal. It ran as follows:

“Vasco da Gama, a gentleman of your household, came to my country, whereat I was pleased. My country is rich in cinnamon, cloves, ginger, pepper and precious stones. That which I ask you in exchange is gold, silver, corals and scarlet cloth.”

There is little doubt that the Hindu ruler would have favoured the Portuguese from the first, had not the envious Mohammedan traders incited the Hindus against the newcomers.

These Mohammedans were Arabs (Moplahs of South India), to whom the Portuguese gave the name Moors because they were of the same religion as the true Moors of Morocco—the

inveterate enemies of Portugal and Spain.

When Venice heard of the zamorin's letter it was panicstricken, for it knew its prosperity was doomed. Henceforth the trade of Alexandria and Italy was to deviate to Cadiz, Lisbon, Antwerp and Bristol.

The sultan of Egypt, whose chief revenue was the tariffs he imposed, set about speedily to build a fleet to attack the Portuguese on future visits—to little avail as after-events showed.

Threatening vengeance against the scheming Arabs, Gama left Calicut on August 29th, 1498. He skirted the coast to Goa (to this day a Portuguese possession), and then put out across the Arabian Sea, in the teeth of the monsoon. It took him three months to reach Africa.

Finding Mogadishu hostile, he bombarded that city and sank the vessels in harbour. Proceeding south he fought eight Arab ships, and then reached Malindi, whose friendly rajah gave him a great welcome.

Towards the end of February he arrived at Zanzibar. Near Mozambique the *S. Raphael* was abandoned owing to want of men, as the store ship had previously been. The two vessels now left, doubled the Cape on March 20th. At the island of Terceira, Paulo da Gama died with Vasco at his side; while the *Berrio*, in charge of Nicolau Coelho, proceeded to Lisbon, to be followed later by Gama in the battered *S. Gabriel*. The voyage had taken two years; half the ships, and two-thirds of the crew were lost, but “Christians and spices” were found and the ocean-route to the Indies was discovered.

Vasco da Gama entered Lisbon in triumph. He brought news of the vast resources of India. He was made Dom by his grateful sovereign, and given a pension.

Less than a year later, *Pedro Alvarez Cabral* sailed to India with thirteen ships. Carried farther west than previous explorers, he touched Brazil, and, little dreaming that he had discovered a new continent, passed on to Calicut.

Cabral left forty Portuguese behind at a factory he established at Calicut. The natives incited by the Mohammedans, murdered every one of them.

Gama on hearing of this, begged his king to let him go and reek vengeance on the zamorin who had permitted this outrage, and previously treated him with such indignity. "I feel," said he "a strong desire to go and make great havoc of him."

And so Gama, with great bitterness in his heart and a contempt for infidels which the age inspired, started on his voyage of vengeance in 1502, with a strong armament of ten ships. Off Malabar he seized and set fire to an Arab dhow carrying pilgrims to Mecca. He killed or burned all on board except thirty children whom he made Christians.

At Calicut the zamorin tried to appease him, but Gama retorted that he could fashion a better ruler out of a palm tree. He sank the zamorin's ships, and severing the hands, ears and noses of traders and fishermen he captured in the harbour, sent them to the zamorin to make curry with. He then put his victims on a raft, tied their feet together, knocked out their teeth that they might not undo their bonds, and setting the barge on fire, sent it shorewards. Then he bombarded Calicut and treated the inhabitants with horrible savagery.

His work of destruction accomplished, he made favourable trading terms with Calicut, Cochin, and other coastal towns, built warehouses, left agents, and laid the foundations of a regular trade. He returned to Lisbon in September, 1503, in

richly laden ships, and retired one of the wealthiest and most honoured men in the kingdom.

The Portuguese conquests rapidly increased in the East, and were placed under viceroys.

The first viceroy, appointed in 1505 by the Portuguese in India, was *Dom Francisco de Almeida* who belonged to one of the most distinguished families in Portugal.

He urged the king to annex no new possessions but to protect the trading posts they already had, and to increase the navy. He destroyed the fleets of Egypt, and made the sea safe for Europeans.

His son *Lorenzo de Almeida* was probably the first Portuguese to visit Ceylon. In 1505 Francisco himself came over, and found the Island divided into seven kingdoms.

The first contact of the Portuguese with Ceylon was fortuitous. Dom Francisco de Almeida had a mandate from his king to reconnoitre the Island, so famous in Europe from very early times for its cinnamon, gems and elephants. The Moors, in order to evade the Portuguese, had latterly taken to sailing from the Red Sea to Malacca by the south of Ceylon, touching at the Maldive Islands *en route*. The viceroy sent his son Don Lourenco with a few ships to the Maldives, but the monsoon drove him to Colombo, where he found Arab ships plying a great trade.

Kotte, a few miles out of Colombo, was then the seat of the Sinhalese king, Dharma Parakrama Bahu IX. The following message was immediately taken to him of the arrival of the Portuguese: "There is in our harbour of Colombo a race of people fair of skin and comely withal. They don jackets of iron and hats of iron. They rest not a minute in one place. They walk here and there. They eat hunks of

stone and drink blood. They give two or three pieces of gold or silver for one fish or one lime. The report of their cannon is louder than thunder when it bursts upon the rock Yugandhara. Their cannon balls fly many a *gawwa* and shatter fortresses of granite" (*Rajavaliya*).

The Sinhalese king, having consulted his ministers, decided to conciliate rather than resist such dangerous foes, and consented to receive a friendly embassy from them. The Portuguese were led to Kotte by so devious a route that the journey of six miles occupied three days! But the explorers were not deceived.

After this, the Portuguese, though they often visited the Island in the course of their explorations farther east, did not decide to settle here till 1518. In that year *Lopo Soares de Albergaria* came with a fleet of eighteen ships, and set up a factory and a mud fort to protect it in Colombo, despite the hostility of both Sinhalese and Moors. The *padrao*, a rock carved with the arms of Portugal, may be seen to this day in the Gordon Gardens.

In 1520 the fort was rebuilt in stone, against strenuous opposition. Thus the Portuguese secured a foothold in the Island, and also a fearful reputation by their merciless deeds. Repeated attempts were made to expel them, but overwhelming numbers were no proof against the superior arms, experience, and valour of those hardened mariners.

Still, were it not for the curse of civil war, the besetting sin of the Sinhalese dynasties, the Portuguese would probably have fared ill. As it was, they championed the cause of the Kotte kings against the Kandyan, and made themselves indispensable. Nevertheless, during almost a century and a half of occupation, though they made repeated attempts to penetrate the interior,

they were as often repulsed, and had eventually to content themselves with fortified settlements in the coastal towns—Galle, Colombo, Negombo and Jaffna.

Wherever their influence extended, Roman Catholicism took root, for they tolerated no religion but their own. That religion to this day is a power in the land, and the Portuguese names given at the christening—Silva, Perera, Fernando, Dias, etc.—are the heritage of vast numbers of the low-country Sinhalese. A Portuguese patois still persists among their descendants, now represented by small mechanic communities, despite the determined efforts of the Dutch to eradicate it during their century and a half of rule.

De Almeida, who was superseded in India by *Albuquerque*, the 'Portuguese Mars,' was slain on his way back to Portugal by Hottentots. Albuquerque planted his country's flag at Goa, Malacca, Ormuz and Aden. He died and was buried in Goa. To his tomb, in after years, Mussalmans and Hindus resorted to invoke protection against the injustice of his followers, as he left no one fit to succeed him, and during the next ten years India was misruled by fortune hunters.

The fifth viceroy was so incompetent that Vasco da Gama was recalled from his retirement and sent to India, in April, 1524. King Manuel had died. Da Gama had married and settled down, and had been enjoying his fortunes for twenty-one years, when King John III appealed to him to go out to India and refashion its government.

Once on board, the white-bearded, irascible, fat, old sybarite was leader again. Arriving at Goa he set himself to rectify the abuses of

his predecessors. He arrested the Portuguese governor for irregularities, and severely punished all offenders. With light brigantines, specially built by a Genoese, he cleared the rivers and coasts of the swift Arab pirate craft that infested them.

Gama did not live to return to Portugal, where, like Albuquerque and many another pioneer, he might perhaps have been denounced by his enemies. He died at Cochin, on the Christmas Eve following his arrival, and was buried there. Some years later his remains were taken to Portugal, and now they rest at Belem, the port he reached on his return from his first voyage, in a beautiful tomb, beside Camoens, the one-eyed soldier poet, who in the epic of the *Lusiad* has immortalised the voyages of Gama.

It is fitting that we conclude this cursory sketch of Portuguese exploration with the exploits of *Ferdinand Magellan* (1480-1521), the first circumnavigator of the globe.

He had sailed with Francisco de Almeida to India, and was wounded in Cannanore. He explored the Spice Islands, Java, Malacca, etc., and was lamed for life in a battle in Morocco against the Moors. Discouraged by the court of Portugal, he renounced his nationality and sought service with Spain. His hope was to discover a strait at the extreme south of South America, and reach the Spice Islands that way. How he accomplished this forms perhaps the most enthralling story of a period when exploits of endurance and bravery were a matter of course. He was the first to see and name the Patagonians. He discovered the Straits of Magellan or Eleven Thousand Virgins, and got through them to the Pacific, which he found calm. He left his mark in the heaven's there, and "Magellan's clouds" still

fascinate mariners as they weather the tempests off Cape Horn, where the bleak winds blow in from the polar seas of the farthest south.

For ninety-eight days Magellan and his crew roamed the wastes of the Pacific with little water and no fresh food. At first they ate putrid biscuit, later ox-hide, saw-dust and rats. Scurvy ravaged them. They were about finished when they reached Londres and discovered the Philippines.

Here Magellan became friendly with a treacherous native sovereign, and was killed in a fight with the natives whom he wanted to Christianise. So died the man of whom it may well be said,

..... This soul has been  
Alone on a wide, wide sea.  
So lone it was, that God himself,  
Scarce seemed there to be.

Magellan, dying as he did in the Philippines, strictly speaking, failed to complete the circumnavigation of the globe, but he had accomplished its most perilous and unknown part. What remained, the way to Europe from the Philippines by the Indian Ocean and the Cape, was already known to the Portuguese and also to Magellan. Thirty-one men returned without their master in Magellan's ship, the *Vittoria*, the first vessel to make a tour of the earth. Magellan had achieved what Columbus planned.

Here we will leave the Portuguese explorers and their incomparable deeds. In frail craft, not very much bigger than the Maldivian dhows we see in our harbours to-day, they braved the perils of unknown seas. No nation did for navigation what they did. They trod the paths of desperate adventure that led to fabled lands. Among other lands to Lanka they came, and broke down for ever the aloofness that had been hers from the

beginning of time.

It was unfortunate for early colonisation that it synchronised with the days of religious fanaticism in Europe. To this must be attributed the deeds of hellish cruelty for which the Portuguese conquerors were responsible. In the fair name of a religion whose founder said He had come to bring peace and not the sword, they committed some of the most brutal acts in history, when they forced their faith with fire and sword on "heathens" whose traditions and religion really went a long way further back than their own.

Let us now rapidly review the events which followed on the heels of the Portuguese discoveries.

Trade was opened between East and West. The Portuguese had the monopoly at the start; but it inevitably followed that other sea-girt peoples would attempt to profit by the example of the Portuguese in search of merchandise; and this brought conflicts. By 1595 the nations were at grips on the great trade routes.

The *Dutch* at first were the chief conveyors of eastern produce from Lisbon to Northern Europe; then Portugal and Spain banded themselves together, and the Spanish king shut out the Dutch from the Portuguese trade. The Dutch tried to find a route to the East by the north of Europe and Asia, and failed. They then decided to use the well-known route by the Cape of Good Hope, and to fight their way to the Spice Islands of the Malay Archipelago.

The first expedition, commanded by *Cornelius Houtman*, sailed in April, 1595. It suffered many disasters, but the survivors returned with valuable cargo, and had made a treaty with the sultan of Bantam in Java. These results encouraged commercial adventure. On distant seas, the traders uncontrolled by their governments, fought among

themselves, as well as against the Portuguese and natives. Dutch competition with the Portuguese sent up prices in the eastern markets and lowered them at home.

According to the economic principles of the time, the States-General in 1602, combined the separate companies into one united *Dutch East India Company* empowered to govern in the remote seas, fight Spain and Portugal, and protect and control Dutch trade in the Indian Ocean. The charter was granted for twenty-one years, and conferred great powers on the company. It was allowed to import free of all customs dues, but had to pay three per cent. on all exports. It was authorised to maintain armed forces by sea and land, erect forts and colonise, make war or peace, arrange treaties and coin money. Its sphere of influence extended from the Straits of Magellan westward to the Cape of Good Hope.

The history of the Dutch East India Company, from its formation in 1602 to its dissolution in 1798, is one of war and diplomacy. From its headquarters at Batavia, in Java, it spread its operations far and wide. It had to deal tactfully with China and Japan; to engage in rivalry with the Portuguese and the English; to make secure its footing in the Malay Archipelago and Ceylon; to establish posts and factories at the Cape, in the Persian Gulf, on the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, and in Bengal. It had, in all, eight governments—in Banda, Ternate, Macassar, Malacca, Ceylon, Cape of Good Hope and Java. Its trade included the "grand trade" between Europe and the East, and the "Indies to Indies" or coasting trade between its colonial possessions and native ports. It expelled the Portuguese from Ceylon between 1638 and 1658, and from Malacca

in 1641. The flourishing age of the company was from 1605 till the end of the 18th century. At the height of its prosperity it possessed 150 trading ships, 40 ships of war, 10,000 soldiers, and paid a dividend of 40 per cent.

Its decadence was due to:—(1) Its enforcement of a rigid monopoly which provoked the retaliation of rivals, especially the French and the English, whom they drove away from the Spice Islands and Malay Archipelago between 1613 and 1632. (2) Its severe losses during the War of American Independence. (3) The increase of its political and military burdens which destroyed its profits. (4) The conquest of Holland by the French under Napoleon, leading to the fall of the government of the stadtholder, and the establishment of the Batavian Republic in 1798.

In the same year that the Dutch East India Company came into existence, the Dutch, under *Admiral Spilbergen*, landed on the east coast of Ceylon. They made their way to Kandy and sought the alliance of the Sinhalese king whom they eventually helped to expel the Portuguese. In 1638 and 1639 a Dutch expedition destroyed the Portuguese forts on the east coast. Galle was captured and fortified by them in 1640, Negombo in 1644, Colombo in 1656, and Jaffna, the last Portuguese stronghold in Ceylon, in 1658. They thus took twenty years to wrest the Island from the Portuguese.

Pursuing a more tolerant and conciliatory policy than the Portuguese, the Dutch improved the country under their supremacy, and opened trade with the interior.

The duration of the dominion of the Dutch in Ceylon, almost equalled that of Portugal—about one hundred and forty years. The main memorials to-day of their rule are the Roman-Dutch Law,

ramparts, a few churches, and canals. The Dutch language is not now spoken even by their descendants, the Burghers; but, here and there, may still be heard the echo of an old voice singing the fragments of an older song.

The *English East India Company* was founded to compete with the Dutch merchants and undermine their monopolies. In 1610 *Captain Hippon* planted the first English factories in the mainland of India, at Masulipatam and Pettapoli in the Bay of Bengal.

Soon friction arose between the English and Dutch Companies. In 1613 the Dutch suggested co-operation with the English, but this was declined, and the next few years witnessed frequent encounters between the armed traders of both nations. In 1619 a "Treaty of Defence" was ratified to prevent friction between the two rival companies. At its proclamation enmity was solemnly suspended for an hour, and the beflagged fleets with manned yards saluted each other—after which hostilities were resumed as before! In 1623 these disputes culminated in the "Massacre of Amboyna" when the Dutch governor is said to have tortured and executed the English residents for conspiring to seize the fort. The immediate result of this was that the English Company left the monopoly of far eastern trade to the Dutch, and confined their activities to India and neighbouring countries.

The necessity for good ships brought into being the famous "East Indian" vessels built at Deptford, which were soon to become pre-eminent among the merchant craft of the world. Throughout the seventeenth century they fought not only the armed trading ships of the Dutch, French, and Portuguese, but also Malay pirates. It took the English East India Company a century to

monopolise the Indian trade. It grew, in the reign of Charles II to a great chartered company empowered to acquire territory, coin money, make war and peace, form alliances, and exercise both civil and criminal jurisdiction.

In 1689, when the three presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay had just been established, the directors of the East India Company passed the following resolution for the guidance of the local governments of India.—“The increase of our revenue is the subject of our care as much as our trade; 'tis that must make us a nation in India; without that we are but a great number of interlopers fit only to trade where nobody of power thinks it their interest to prevent us; and upon this account it is that the wise Dutch in all their general advices that we have seen, write ten paragraphs concerning their government, their civil and military policy, warfare and the increase of their revenue, for one paragraph they write concerning trade.” In these simple words we see the foundation of the great British Empire in India—and the doom of Dutch rule in Ceylon.

Ceylon, occupying the strategic position it did, was coveted by England. Once they had broken the power of the French in India and secured firm footing there, they turned renewed attention to the Dutch, their greatest rivals in the trade of the East.

In 1762 the governor of Madras offered to help Kirti Sri against the Dutch, but nothing came of it. Twenty years later England and Holland were at war, and the British again approached the Kandyan king, Raja Singha, with a view to an alliance against the Dutch. However, hostilities against France and Spain kept the British occupied, and they left Ceylon alone till 1795 when *van Angelbeek* was governor of Ceylon.

Meanwhile, stirring events were occurring in

Europe. Napoleon's troops over-ran Holland, and its stadtholder, William, fled to England. A republican government was formed in alliance with France, though some of the Dutch were still for the stadtholder. With Holland thus divided came Britain's opportunity.

In August, 1795, a British force came to Trincomalee carrying a letter from the stadtholder (then in England) asking the Dutch in Ceylon to admit the British troops in order to prevent the Dutch possessions from falling into French hands. Van Angelbeek and his council, however, decided to obey the orders of the new republic and to resist the English. But by now the Dutch forces in Ceylon were depleted by the previous removal of several regiments of European troops during van de Graaf's rule, and the de Meuron regiment they employed went over to the British.

The Dutch could therefore offer but a poor resistance, and when Trincomalee fell in August, 1795, the game was up. Colombo, and with it Ceylon, was surrendered without any fighting in February, 1796.

From the present time, it is a long way back to the days when the Portuguese caravels were masters of the ocean. To-day it is the British ships that are found on every sea; and well may England's poet sing—

Come up, come in from Eastward, from the guard ports  
of the Morn!  
Beat up, beat in, from Southerly, O gypsies of the  
Horn!  
Swift shuttles of an Empire's loom that weave us, main  
to main,  
The Coastwise Lights of England give you welcome back  
again!



To-day Ceylon is well and justly governed by the British, who have now had it one hundred and thirty six years. Peace and prosperity prevail under a progressive and sympathetic administration, and at bottom there is contentment on the whole, despite the unrest natural to the awakening of a people subject to a race that has, apart from individual exceptions, maintained its aloofness.

The rich agricultural possibilities of the Island have been abundantly exploited. The central hills are clothed in tea. The lower lands have recently been planted in rubber, which, alas, after fashioning a sudden spate of opulent individuals, has now let them down tragically.

Coconut and paddy remain almost exclusively in the hands of the indigenous population. Though ancient tanks and channels have been restored, and great facilities given for rice cultivation, still it cannot be said that the government has given this indispensable product the concentrated attention it deserves; Ceylon still continues to depend largely on outside countries, such as India and Burma, for its staple food.\* Cinnamon that allured the conquistadors is now almost an effete commodity.

Excellent roads penetrate the Island, giving access to its remotest parts, but great tracts of forest still exist teeming with game.

\*Parakrama Bahu the Great, when he deemed that he had brought under cultivation sufficient land to meet his peoples' needs, sent out to the remotest parts of his kingdom a man with a bushel of paddy, to find what it would fetch.

The man returned and said that the highest offer he received was two cents for the entire bushel.

Then said the king, "Our crops are not yet adequate; build new tanks, open out more fields."

When this had been done, the king again sent out a man with a bushel of paddy for sale; and this time he brought back word that the people would not have it even for nothing. Then only was the king satisfied that the wants of his subjects were met!

The British, like the great colonising race they are, have, by a policy of liberal education, enlightened a large section of the people of the land, and imbued them with Western culture. As a natural result they are now discontented with alien rule, and clamour for self-government. Bowing to the inevitable with a wonderful patience, the British are gradually handing over the reins of government to their subject peoples, while their armaments still continue to protect the lands.

When such is the ultimate outcome of events, who will say that the Western races, however obtrusively they at first carried civilisation to the ends of the earth, have not fulfilled a mighty destiny?

British Swami Grantha...  
 GEORGE AT...  
 "HOSPITAL...  
 HOSPITAL...

## THE LEGEND OF VIJAYA

**K**LAINGA, a king of India, gave his daughter in marriage to the king of Vanga. The result of this union was a beautiful daughter named Suppadevi, who, the astrologers predicted at her birth, would mate with a lion and bear him children.

Suppadevi grew to be a lovely damsel, and was carefully guarded in a seven-galleried palace built for her by her father.

One night, impelled by passion, she escaped in disguise and joined a party of merchants bound for Magadha. When they came to a wilderness in the land of Lala, a lion attacked them and dispersed the caravan—but the princess approached the beast. He, overcome by her grace, wagged his tail and put back his ears. Then did the princess remember what the astrologers had foretold, and, freed from fear, she caressed the lion and aroused his passion. Placing her on his back, he took her to his den and lived with her.

The princess, in the course of time, gave birth to twins, a son and a daughter, whom she named respectively Sinhabahu and Sihasivati. They only resembled their sire in hands and feet.

When Sinhabahu was sixteen he asked his mother how it was that the three of them were so unlike their father. Then she told him of her shame.

“Why then do we not depart?” asked Sinhabahu.”

“Your father,” said she “blocks the mouth of this den with a stone.”

The next morning, when the lion was out in search of food, Sinhabahu rolled away the stone, and placing his mother and sister on each shoulder, carried them quickly away. Approaching a village, they covered their nakedness with leaves. There, seated under a banyan tree and supervising the cultivation of his lands, they found Prince Anuru, the standard-bearer of the king of Vanga, and a cousin of the princess.

“Who are you that come in this strange guise?” asked Anuru.

“We are dwellers of the wilderness,” the travellers replied.

He gave them food and clothing, and the princess told him of her birth and lineage. Thereupon Prince Anuru took Sihasivati to the city of Vanga and made her his wife.

When the lion returned to his cave and discovered his loss, he neither ate nor drank, but sought his loved ones far and wide, terrorising the villagers who fled to the king, saying, “A lion lays waste thy country, oh sovereign! we pray thee rid us of him.”

As no one could be found bold enough to face the beast, the king placed a thousand pieces of gold on the back of an elephant, and had it proclaimed that the money would be his who slew the lion. This was afterwards increased to two, and then to three thousand pieces.

Sinhabahu, who had previously been dissuaded by his mother from undertaking the enterprise, was now tempted to do so. Secretly he accepted the offer, and was presented to the king, who told him that if he killed the lion, he would bestow on him the ravaged country in addition to the reward.

Taking his bow and arrows, Sinhabahu set forth into the wilderness to slay his father.

He arrived at the mouth of the den and shouted, "Lion, come out."

The beast, hearing his son's voice, leapt out joyfully to meet him.

Then Sinhabahu discharged three successive arrows at his father, but they fell away harmlessly owing to the lion's good intentions.

When, however, the lion saw a fourth arrow being fitted to the string, he realised that his son intended slaying him, and resolved to tear him to pieces. This change of heart was his undoing, and the fourth arrow pierced him.

The fallen beast now called to his son, and laying his head on his lap, inquired lovingly after his wife and daughter, and died.

Sinhabahu severed the lion's head, and returned with it to the city of Vanga, seven days after the death of the king.

There being no heir to the throne, Prince Sinhabahu was declared king. He accepted sovereignty, only to bestow it on Anuru his step-father. Taking his sister Sihasivati with him, he departed to Lala, the land of his birth and made her his consort. By her he had sixteen twin children.

Vijaya was the eldest of these. At his birth the astrologers predicted that he would destroy the Yakkhas of Lanka and become its king.

Seven hundred boys were born in the land on the day of Vijaya's birth, and they all grew to be giants. Vijaya became a lawless prince and made these his companions. The harassed and enraged populace called on the king to execute his son.

But the king, having had the heads of Vijaya and his seven hundred associates half-shaved,

put the offenders on a vessel and sent them away to sea. Their wives he placed in a second vessel, and their children in a third, and cast them all adrift.

They landed in different countries—the children in Nagadipa, the wives in Malundadipa, and Vijaya and his companions in the port of Supparaka in Jambudipa. Vijaya, fearing a clash between his followers and the hostile natives, re-embarked and sailed towards Ruhunarata in the midst of the sea, where he espied the high rock Sumanta Kutaparvata, and decided it was a good land to settle in.

So he landed in the Tambapanni division of Lanka on the day that the avatar of former Buddhas reclined in the shade of two delightful sol trees to attain Nirvana. Having blessed the world, Buddha attained Nirvana, and seated on the throne amidst a great assembly of devatas, addressed Saka who stood near him, thus :

"One Vijaya, the son of Sinhabahu, king of the land of Lala, with seven hundred men has landed in Lanka. Protect thou this lord and his retinue and Lanka"—and Buddha gave Sakka water and thread with which to secure Vijaya and his band against dangers.

Sakka repaired to Lanka, and disguised as a devotee clad in a yellow robe, he waited at the foot of a tree. Vijaya and his party approached him and asked, "Pray holy man, what land is this?"

"The land of Lanka," he replied; then having blessed them by sprinkling water on them and tying threads round their arms, he vanished through the air.

Once before, when Buddha sent the Yakkhas of Ceylon to Yakgiridivayena, seven hundred of them fled to the wilderness of Laggola. A

Yakkini called Kuveni, possessed of three breasts, had been told by the god Iswara that whenever her middle breast withered she would secure a husband. And on the day when Vijaya and his giants landed in Lanka, Kuveni found that her middle breast had withered, and she was glad.

That day, while Vijaya and his followers rested under a Nuga tree, Kuveni assumed the form of a bitch of four colours, and coming to that spot, licked Vijaya's foot, wagged her tail with joy and then ran away.

When the bitch had gone, Vijaya thought to himself that there must be human beings nearby, and sent a giant in search. He reached a tank, where Kuveni, disguised as a devotee, sat at the foot of a tree spinning a thread. The man bathed and drank, and was getting edible roots and water to take back, when Kuveni arose, saying, "Stop! thou art my prey."

The man stood spell-bound unable to move. But owing to the charmed thread he wore, she was unable to devour him; nor would he give up the thread to the beseeching yakkini. Bellowing, she cast him into a subterranean vault. The other giants, sent out one by one, met with a similar fate.

The prince finding his followers did not return, bound the charmed thread round his neck, and taking his five weapons of war with him, went after them. He came to the tank where they were hid; and seeing that all the foot-prints led towards the water, but none away from it, he became sorrowful and afraid. Turning round, he saw a woman in the shade of a nuga tree spinning a thread of shining gold, and immediately suspected that she was the cause of the disappearance of his companions.

He went up to her, and seizing her by the hair

of her head, asked her what had become of his friends.

"From ministers what pleasures can you have?" was her cryptic reply. "Drink you and bathe, ere you depart."

"This Yakkini knows even my lineage," said Vijaya to himself; and leaping at her throat, he seized her by the hair, raised his sword and exclaimed, "Wretch, restore my men, or I will kill you."

The terrified Yakkini cried, "Lord spare my life and I will make thee king, and render thee the favours of my sex and all other service that you may desire; and I will restore to thee thy seven hundred giants. Take not away my life, but make me thy queen."

Thereupon the prince made her promise on oath that she would not do similar mischief again; and she swore saying, "May the breast in the middle of my chest decay, if I restore not to thee thy men." Then Vijaya promised to make her his queen, and said, "If I do not fulfil my promise to you, may the seed sewn in Lanka be unfruitful."

So she released his followers, and saying they must be famished, fed them abundantly on rice and other food got from the wrecked ships of mariners who had fallen a prey to her. She also partook of the residue of the meal the prince bestowed on her. Excited to the highest pitch of delight, she transformed herself into a girl of sixteen, and wore innumerable ornaments; lovely as Maranga herself, she approached him and fired him with passion.

Then she caused a bed, curtained as with a wall and fragrant with incense, to stand under a tree. There Vijaya passed the night surrounded by his seven hundred followers.

That very night, was celebrated in the city of Siravatha the marriage of the demon sovereign Kalasena with the demon princess Pusamitta. Vijaya, hearing music and song, inquired of Kuveni what it might mean.

She, desirous of securing the sovereignty of Lanka for her lord, replied, "I will render this Lanka habitable for men. There is a grand festival in an assembly of Yakkhas, which will continue increasingly for seven days."

"Then," said Vijaya, "it is impossible for us mortals to remain in such a country as this inhabited as it is by demons."

"Lord, such an assemblage will not occur again" replied Kuveni. "This very day thou shall extirpate the Yakkhas."

"Dear charmer, how can I destroy Yakkhas that are invisible?" asked Vijaya.

"Prince," said she "I shall place myself in the midst of them and shall shout. On that signal fall to with blows; by my supernatural power those blows shall strike the bodies of my people."

The prince acted as Kuveni bade, and destroyed the Yakkhas till their blood flowed like water. He killed Kalasena and assumed the demon's robes; his soldiers did likewise with the clothes of the other Yakkhas.

After some days they departed from the Yakkha capital, and eventually founded the city called Tambapanni at the spot where they had at first crawled out of their boats and seated themselves down. And Vijaya made Kuveni his queen.

Lanka came, in time, to be called Sinhala after Vijaya's father Sinhabahu who slew the lion (sinha), and earned for his descendants the name Sinhala or lion-slayers.

Thereafter the followers of Vijaya established themselves in various places all over Sinhala;

they founded Anuradha on the bank of the Kadamba, Upatissa to the north, Urawela and Vijita, each subsequently becoming a city.

And the time came when Vijaya's followers approached him with reverence and beseeched him to be crowned king; but Vijaya answered, "That can never be while I am mated with a demon." Then all the chiefs sent ambassadors with gems and presents to King Panduva of Southern Madura. They announced their mission, and addressed the king thus, "We come for a royal virgin for Vijaya, the son of Sinhabahu who has conquered Lanka."

The king consulted his ministers and decided to send Vijaya his own daughter, Pandava, and for Vijaya's retinue seven hundred daughters of such of his nobility as were willing to part with them.

He assembled the maidens robed in their finest apparel at his palace. Adorning his own daughter with every kind of gold ornament as befitted her sex and exalted rank, he bestowed on her as dowry elephants, horses, chariots and slaves. He despatched them all with eighteen officers of state and seventy-five menials who included grooms, mahouts and charioteers.

The Princess Pandava arrived in Lanka long after Kuveni had borne Vijaya two children, a son Jivahata, and a daughter Disala.

When the arrival of the royal maidens was announced to Vijaya, he decided that it would be impossible for the princess to share his home with the Yakkini, so he addressed himself thus to Kuveni:

"A daughter of royalty is a timid being. Leave therefore our children with me and depart hence."

"On thy account," cried Kuveni "I have

murdered my people, the Yakkhas, and I dread them now. I am an outcast on both sides. Whither then can I betake myself ? ”

“ Within my dominions,” answered Vijaya “ thou mayest go wheresoever thou pleasest. I will maintain thee with a thousand Bali offerings.”

Kuveni, with great lamentation, and assuming again her inhuman form, took her children and wandered to Lankapura the Yakkha city. Leaving her children outside the city, she entered it and met a Yakkha who recognised her. Then another Yakkha, more fierce and enraged, shouted, “ Have you again come to destroy the peace we enjoy ? ” and in his fury he killed her with a blow of his open hand.

Kuveni’s uncle, Kumara, proceeding out of the city, saw the children and asked them, “ Whose children are ye ? ”

“ Kuveni’s,” they replied.

“ Your mother is murdered,” said he, “ and you too will share her fate should you be seen ; begone quickly.”

They fled instantly, and took up their abode in the neighbourhood of Sumantakuta (Adam’s Peak)—and the elder grew up and married his sister, and by her had numerous sons and daughters. This is the origin of the Pulindas or Hillmen.

## VEDDAS

### A GENERAL SURVEY

SCATTERED in the wilderness of the Vanni, those arid forests of central Ceylon, there are to be found small groups of a destitute nomad people whose ethnic origins derive from the very dawn of human evolution, and whose life is still that of the primitive hunter.\*

True there are very few such left. How can it be otherwise when highways, jutting on every hand into the dwindling forests, have all but destroyed what meagre remnants of the Veddas survived in the impenetrable woodlands? There the wildest of them found sanctuary, as wave after wave of invasion and settlement swept over the land from earliest times.

Ceylon being but a small island, the loneliest spot in it is no more than ten or fifteen miles removed from some jungle village—a condition of things not adapted to the perpetuation of wild forest tribes. Jungles that echo to guns are but poor hunting grounds for bowmen. Propinquity to Sinhalese and Tamil habitations inevitably leads to miscegenation, that paramount factor in the obliteration of race. The Vedda woman who weds the Sinhalese chena-dweller and the Vedda man who takes to himself a Sinhalese or Tamil wife, sooner or later, are weaned from their wandering ways.

\* Vedda—Sanskrit *Vyādha*, one who pierces, a hunter.

It is then not to be wondered at that there are now no pure Veddas in Ceylon. Many jungle communities called Vedda are that only in name; in clothing, habits, and appearance they are Sinhalese or Tamil. Still, the assiduous searcher of the forests, even to-day may find scattered here and there, individuals true to Vedda type and tradition, living the life and practising the arts of their savage progenitors.

#### *Origin of the Veddas*

Old chronicles have little to tell us of this people; and that little tends to bewilder. To glean facts from the Ramayana, the Skanda Purana, or the early chapters of the Mahawansa is as hopeless a task as to do so from the epics of Homer or the Sagas of the Norsemen. But legend contains a core of fact and, sifted in the light of modern knowledge, may assist us to arrive at probable truth.

Virchow renounced the idea of using the myths of Gotama Buddha as a basis for ethnological contemplation; let us, however, launch into that fascinating realm of conjecture.

There were three legendary visits of the avatars of the Buddha to Ceylon. Of these the first was to Mahayangana. "Before the Buddha came," says the old Pali chronicle, "the Island was the abode of devils; but when his religion was preached and followed it became the abode of men."

Mahayangana was the chief city of the Yakkhas; and here the Buddha found them. "In the agreeable Mahanaga garden, in the assembling place of the Yakkhas he met them: and struck terror into them by rains, tempests, and darkness. The Yakkhas, overwhelmed with awe supplicated

the vanquisher to be released from their terror. He spread his carpet of skin and seated himself, and caused the carpet, refulgent with a fringe of flames, to extend itself on all sides, and spread to the limits of the Island. The scorched Yakkhas stood terrified around on the shores. The Saviour then caused the delightful isle of Giri to approach for them, and they transferred themselves thereto. Immediately the redeemer folded up his carpet, and the devas assembled, and the divine preacher propounded his doctrines to them."

Emerging out of these fog-bound myths into what must at least contain some germ of history, the Mahawansa proceeds to relate how in 543 B.C. Vijaya, a banished Aryan prince from Northern India, landed with a band of his daredevil followers in Ceylon, and soon afterwards married Kuveni, a native princess. With her help he overcame her people the Yakkhas, and established the Sinhalese kingdom. Kuveni bore Vijaya a son and a daughter; but once his supremacy was assured, Vijaya cast Kuveni and her children aside, and married a South Indian princess. The forlorn Kuveni returned to the city of the Yakkhas whom she had betrayed, and paid for her treachery with her life. Her children fled to the Adam's Peak wilderness, and there begot the Pulindas or hill-men, whom some consider the Veddas; though most writers think the Veddas to be the Yakkhas of the Mahawansa.

Such theories, however, fail to do justice to the vast antiquity of the Vedda race. It is almost certain that the wildest Veddas, far from making contact with the Vijayan invaders—or, for that matter, any other that preceded or

followed them—must have withdrawn deeper into the forests with each succeeding settlement.

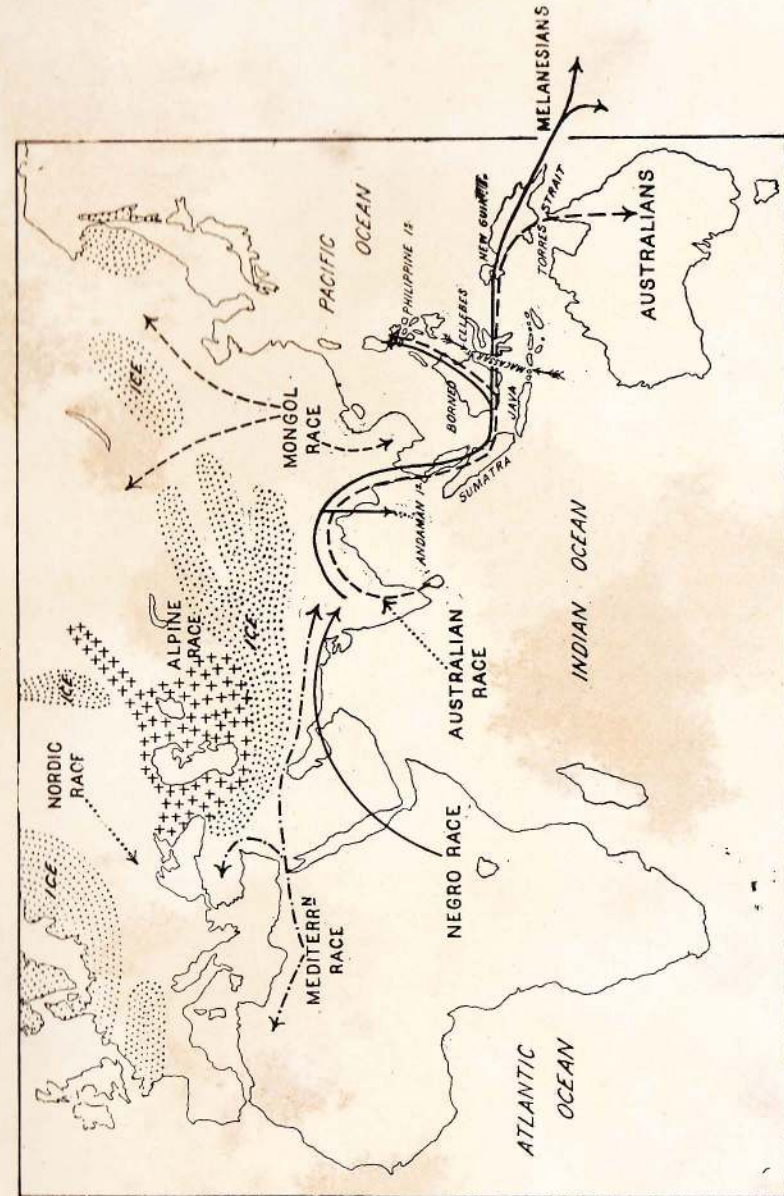
There is ample evidence to show that Southern India was populated by a highly civilised maritime race (the Nagas?) long before Vijaya's time; also that when Vijaya landed, Ceylon was the home of a civilised people (the Yakkhas of the Mahawansa had a city); metal was known, and communication with India must have been free, for the Sivaite Vijaya and his ministers had no difficulty in securing for themselves Hindu brides from India.

The Nagas were a maritime folk given to piracy. The Yakkhas were inland dwellers; originally a hill tribe, they brought with them to Ceylon their gods and customs, supplanted the Nagas, and occupied the central and eastern parts of the Island. Kattragam was their chief shrine, now regarded as one of the holiest both in India and Ceylon.

“Vijaya and his band,” says Seligmann, “were obviously only one of many parties of settlers who came from India in prehistoric times. Perhaps the record in the Mahawansa of the coming of Buddha to Mahayangana refers to one such immigrant party, and the legend of Rama may with even more probability be taken to refer to an invasion from the mainland.”

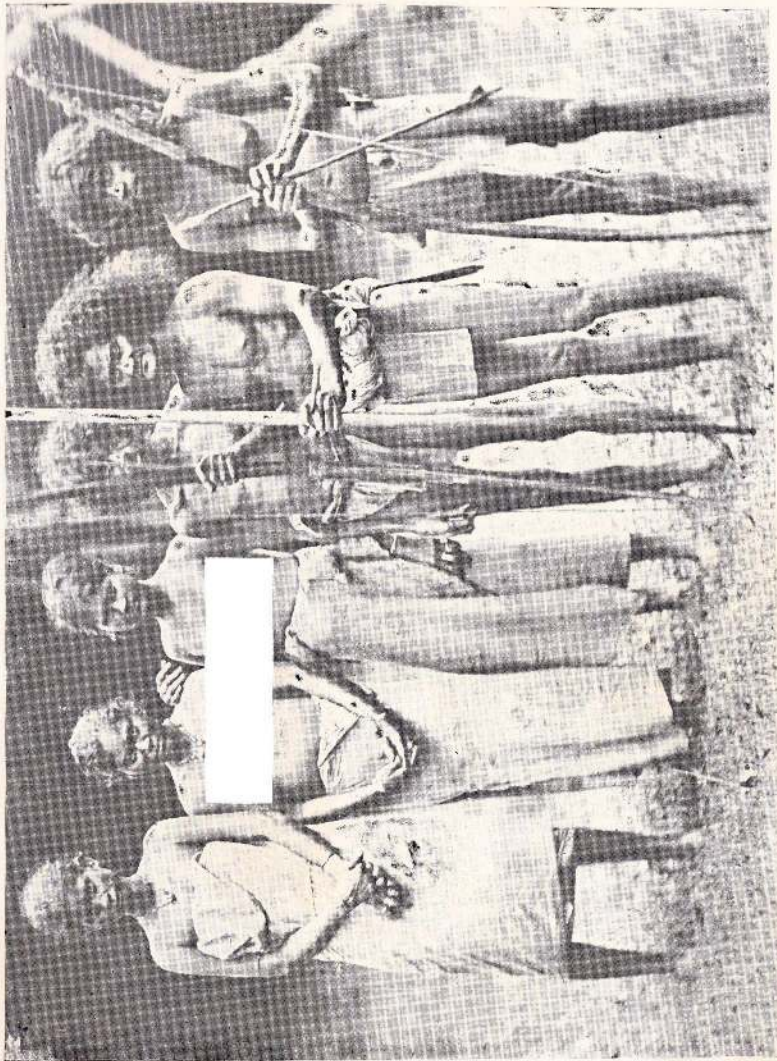
*Who then are the Veddas* if not the Yakkhas? For these, as we have seen, like the Nagas, were far too civilised to have title to such claim; and we will only mention the theory that the Veddas represent a decline from an organised Yakkha state, to reject it.

That the Veddas were the *true aborigines of Ceylon*—a pure-blooded race apart from the



Distribution of the 6 Races of Man during the Glacial Period showing their 'areas of characterisation.' The early movements of the Australian and Negro Races (as well as of the others) are indicated by arrows. The arrows between Borneo and the Celebes indicate the site of Wallace's Line, the break between the archaic continents of Asia and Australia (after G. Elliot Smith). (p. 66).





Group of Veddas.

mixed Sinhalese\*—is supported by the facts that they have distinct physical characters, and that their exogamous clans and cult of the dead bring them into line with the half savage jungle tribes of India. Scholars are agreed that they are an *aboriginal people of great antiquity, one of the primitive types of the human race.*

And now let us take a peep into human history with Professor Elliot Smith.—

Man, primitive ape-like man, came into the world, a million, perhaps several million years ago, somewhere between the Himalayas and Central Africa, round about the Caspian Sea. Compared with this the mere six thousand years of civilisation, that originated in Egypt when man the nomad settled down to be a tiller of the soil, is a thing of yesterday.

*Homo Sapiens*, being nomadic, gradually broke up into sparse scattered communities that by interbreeding developed distinctive racial characters.

They roamed, these naked houseless wanderers, in family groups like apes, happy children of nature, for thousands of years across the breadth of the old world. Geography and climate were then very different from what they are today. In the Glacial Period, a large tract of Southern Asia, including some of the hottest parts of the world, was always free from ice. Along this great tropical belt, primitive man went to the ends of the earth.

When the ice barriers that kept the small communities apart lifted at the close of the Glacial Period, the races of nomads mingled with each other. And thus about sixty centuries ago

\*Vijaya himself, the progenitor of Sinhalese, and his followers, on the evidence of the Mahawansa, took to themselves Dravidian wives—apart from their undoubted alliances with the Yakkhas.

“ areas of characterisation ” became manifest ; that is, certain distinct territories had come to be occupied by the six easily distinguishable races of man that constitute the peoples of the world today. These races are the Australian, Negro, Mongol, Alpine, Nordic and Mediterranean—the last three constituting the European races.

The Indians belong to the Mediterranean race, and are identical with those of Europe and Northern Africa (Egypt, etc.). The dark skin of the Indian, in contrast to the olive brown of the ordinary Mediterranean, is due to Australoid and Negroid admixture, but in the Indian, Mediterranean characteristics are predominant.

The pioneers of civilisation (whether this originated in Egypt, Babylon, or Syria) were the Mediterranean race. The Nordic race which, during the last thirty centuries, has developed and spread civilisation abroad, took no share in its creation.

All people of the earth, though seemingly so diverse from each other, are members of one and the same species. The colour of the Negro and Australian, so similar to that of the Anthropoid Apes, was the common heritage of all men to begin with. Later there came to be a progressive loss of pigmentation in some races, the development of colouring matter being hindered as though it were bleached.

The primitive races of today are the Australians and the Negroes. Their distribution in the world, and how this came about, is closely concerned with the problem of the origin of the Veddass.

The Negroes are found in Africa, new Guinea, and Melanasia ; the Australian race in Australia, South India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula, Eastern Sumatra, Borneo and the Phillipines. How did these races become so widely spread over the earth ?

From the jungle regions in Chota Nagpur, where they originated, the Australian race moved southwards and eastwards through the Malay Peninsula which was then continuous with Borneo and Java. The Celebes, New Guinea and neighbouring islands were joined to Australia. There was always a break between Borneo and the Celebes (Wallace's Line)—a gap between Asia and Australia, as shown by a difference of fauna on each side of the Macassar Strait. The early men must have crossed Wallace's Line in rafts or boats.

In their long journeys from India to Australia the pre-Dravidian Australoid people, like the Negroes, left small groups of their race along their line of march to blaze the trail of the ancient wanderers. Evidences of the migration of the Australian race are seen in the scattered Australoid peoples, namely, the jungle tribes of Southern India (the *Kadir* of the Anaimalai Hills, *Paniyan* of Malabar, the Wynad, and Nilgiris, *Irula* and *Kurumba* of the Nilgiris), the *Veddass* of Ceylon, *Sakai* of the Malay Peninsula and East Sumatra, *Toala* of the Celebes, and possibly some of the races of Borneo. The Irulas are said to be so black that charcoal leaves a white mark on them !

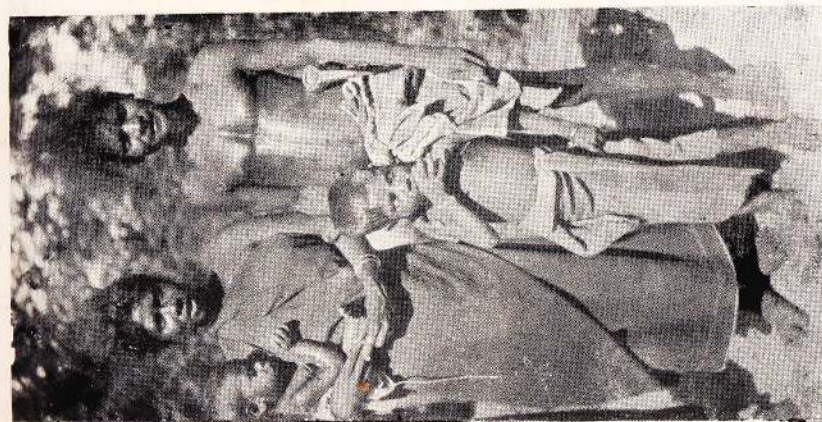
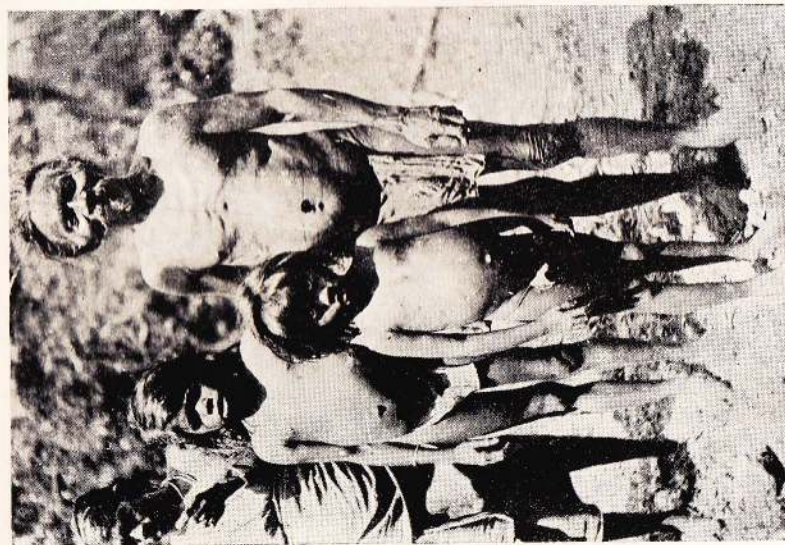
Similarly with the Negroes. Originating probably in Africa, they travelled far east to Papua and Melanasia along the southern littoral of Asia. There are thus two great groups of Negroes—the African and the Oceanic, the latter embracing New Guinea, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and Fiji ; this group intermingled with the Australian. In the intervening areas, between the two groups, the evidence of the easterly migration of the Negroes is seen in the pygmy Negritoes of the Andaman Islands, and in various parts of the Malay Archipelago as far as the

Phillipines and New Guinea. There are also signs of Negro admixture in Southern Persia and India, accounting for the very dark skins of the Dravidians. There may be a negroid strain in our Veddas; for, far from being hirsute like the Australians or the Sinhalese, they have, like the Negroes, little hair on their bodies and faces.

"It is probable," says F. D. Adams, "that early man came to Ceylon from India by means of a then existing land bridge. He had not at that time reached the Palæolithic stage of culture, but he attained this later on the Island. Still later came Neolithic men, but whether these were descendants of Palæolithic men whose weapons are found abundantly in the Pleistocene deposits of Ceylon, or whether they are another race, is unknown."

Craniometrical evidence by itself does not distinguish whether the Veddas were pre-Aryan Dravidians (themselves aborigines of the Deccan), or a race derived from the pre-Dravidian Negrito element of South India and Malaysia.

The ancestors of the Veddas at one time ranged from Australia to India, or perhaps even to Africa, when these lands were part of one vast south-eastern Lemurian continent. The successive upheavals of the Himalayas from the ocean bed at long intervals of time caused corresponding depressions in the existing land areas, and a severance of the connections between Australia, India and Africa. Palæolithic man was then cut off in the islands of the Eastern Archipelago, and never advanced beyond that period. They are to-day found in India and Ceylon, the Malay Archipelago, and the Polynesian Islands. The only way to account for such primitive savages—Australoid hunters like the Veddas, and Negrito dwarfs—in widely distributed regions



Vedda families of Gunner's Quoin.

of the world, especially the islands separated by oceanic wastes, is by the assumption of the subsidence of intervening land areas.

The jungle tribes of Travancore are said to be more Negrito-like than the Veddas. It may be that Ceylon also was at one time the home of a Negrito race, distinct from the Australoid Veddas. The legend of the Nittaewo lends colour to such a surmise. These, according to persistent tradition among the jungle folk of south-eastern Ceylon, were a race of savage, hairy, long-nailed dwarfs feared even by the Veddas. They are said to have lived on platforms on trees, and eaten crocodiles, tortoises, oysters and crabs. On seeing a human being they attacked him and tore out his flesh with their long nails. They greatly feared the buffalo and the dog. Long ago in the Leanama country, by the Kumbukkan Oya, where the last of them survived, the Veddas are said to have destroyed them by herding them into a rock cave, the mouth of which they piled with firewood and kept alight for three days. What manner of creatures these Nittaewo were it is impossible to conjecture—Negrito dwarfs perhaps, or beings more ape than man. The discovery of their bones alone can tell.

#### *Geological Evidence*

The existence of a stone age has been proved in Ceylon. In the old Vedda rock shelters of Kattragam and Uva, those assiduous Swiss cousins, the doctors Sarasin, discovered quartz and chert implements—hammer-stones, arrowheads, cores, worked flakes and scrapers—some showing bulbs of percussion but none polished, belonging undoubtedly to Neolithic times. They also found a few fragments of worked bone, and shells of the

large land-snail so holed as to allow of their sharp edges being used for cutting.

Quartz and chert implements have since been found near Maskeliya and Ratnapura in the Peak country, in the Uva highlands (Bandarawella), and round about Kandy.



Seligmann, investigating the Bendiyagalge caves, concludes them to have been inhabited 2000 years ago by the Sinhalese, who left evidence of occupation in the form of drip ledges, pottery, bones, a rusted catty (chopper), arecanut cutter, charcoal fragments, iron slag, and land shells. In the deepest strata were animal bones and pieces of worked quartz implements of the Neolithic age.

It is remarkable how little geological exploration has been done in Ceylon up to now. When this work is systematically undertaken it should prove a truly fascinating search that will throw light on many a strange problem.

#### Historical References

Coming now to historical times, we have repeated references to Veddas in early writings.

The earliest description of them is in *De Moribus Brachmanorum*, written about 400 A.D. probably by Palladius, where the account is recorded of a Theban traveller, who reached Ceylon in an Indian trading boat from Axume. Reconnoitering inland he suddenly came upon the *Besadae*—a shy

people, of low stature, with large heads and shaggy unshorn hair. "This people" he relates "is by far the smallest and the weakest, they live in rock caves, and know how to climb over the most intricately massed rocks, and thus gather pepper from the bushes." He was stopped by the chief of the *Besadae* and asked his business. Their loud voices, blood-shot eyes, and savage gnashing of teeth put great fear into him. They held him captive for a time and made him cook for them.

In the seventh century the Chinese traveller Hioueng Tshang speaks of the *Yakkhos* as having retired to the south-east part of the Island.

In the eleventh century the Arabic geographer Alberini described the "silent trade" with the savage *Ginn*.

Only one writer during the Portuguese occupation of Ceylon (1506-1608), Pedro Teixeira, writing in 1610, alludes to the Veddas, whom he calls *Pachas*.

Captain João Ribeiro (in Ceylon from 1640 to 1658) refers to them as *Bedas* in his book written in 1681, twenty years after the Dutch ejected the Portuguese from the Island.

In 1675 Rijklof van Goens the elder, at first Governor of Ceylon and later Governor-General of Batavia, gave a pretty full description of the Veddas, which is contained in Valentyn's work.

Here is an extract (supplied me by Mr. E. Reimers, Government Archivist) from a memoir of R. van Goens, the elder, to R. van Goens, the younger, dated 12th April 1675:

"Since, through the exertions, linguistic ability, and many other good qualities of the commandeur, the extension of the Batticaloa district has been advanced as far as Welasse, and thereby a large number of Veddas or Beddas, has been brought under the authority of the Honourable Company,

Your Excellency should pay a special measure of attention to this people, yea, as much as to any other matter in this Island, owing to the excellent opportunity which now presents itself of securing the valuable services and allegiance of this wild people. Excessive kindness would make them bold and presumptuous, and harsh treatment on the other hand would estrange them, and therefore I would strongly recommend to Your Excellency that on no consideration whatever should this people be overburdened in any way nor excused from the labour which (according to their customs) it is lawful for us to impose on them. His Honour de Graeuw, for example, has with wonderful tact been able to dispose them to felling and dragging the heavy timber in the forests and to do many other things; and since this people by nature are fairly savage and are brave fellows in the hunt and expert bowmen besides, we may accordingly look forward in due course to seeing their children turn out into good and brave lascarins, who, unlike the other castes, are not subject to whims and prejudices, and would do all that was lawfully imposed on them."

To Robert Knox, who wrote in 1681 after twenty years captivity in Ceylon, is due the credit of the first precise account of the Veddas—though he does not seem ever to have seen one. He divided them into the wild and the tame. The former called *Ramba-Veddahs* never showed themselves, but the latter traded with the people, and supplied the King's officers with ivory, honey, wax and venison in exchange for arrowheads and cloth.

They never cut their hair. Their clothing was scarcely enough to cover their buttocks. Their language was Sinhalese. They never tilled the

ground; but were expert archers and carried at the waist a little axe with which they cut honey out of hollow trees. They preserved flesh in honey poured into the cavity of a tree, the opening of which they stopped with clay. They lived by streams under trees, with boughs strewn around them by night to give warning of approaching beasts. They had their bounds in the woods, beyond which they were not permitted to shoot or gather honey or fruit. They captured an elephant by striking an axe into the sole of its foot while the animal slept, and so laming him.

They gave hunting dogs with their daughters, as portions. They were courteous, but if displeased went where they were better treated. They had a god peculiar to themselves. The tamer sort built temples, the wilder brought their sacrifice under trees and danced round it—both men and women.

The wilder sort acquired arrowheads by stealthily hanging a load of flesh at night in a blacksmith's shop with a leaf cut to the pattern they desired. The smith would fashion the arrowheads and substitute them for the flesh; if he failed to do this, they killed him at night. They were "so curious of their arrows" that no smith could please them; not even the king though he gave them of his best, for these they ground on a rock into another form.

One band of them waylaid *tavalams* carrying produce from the interior to the seaports. This brought them into conflict with the king who, having captured them with great difficulty through the treachery of some of their own people, first pardoned them; but on a repetition of the offence he hanged two of their leaders on trees outside the city.

The king once used the Veddas in an expedi-

tion against the Dutch, "and with their bows and arrows they did as good service as any; but afterwards they removed farther in the woods and would be seen no more, for fear of being prest again to serve the king."

There have been scores of writers on Veddas since Knox's time. Pre-eminent among them are the Sarasins (1893) who described most accurately their physical anthropology and arts and crafts, and Seligmann who made a careful study of their sociology and analysed their ceremonial dances and language (1911); to their scholarly treatises we owe most of our scientific knowledge regarding the Veddas. Virchow, without leaving Germany, summarised in 1881 what was known of the Veddas up to that time, and gave measurements of Vedda skulls available to him. While among other observers, with greater opportunities for investigation, who have contributed largely to our knowledge, are Bailey, Neville, and Parker.

#### *Influence of Veddas on Other Races*

It is likely, says Seligmann, that when Sinhalese history began, inhabitants of Ceylon, with enough Vedda blood in them to be called Veddas, had reached a far more advanced state than others; and that Vijaya and his settlers may have intermarried with these and produced the Sinhalese of the present day.

There is a tradition among the Sinhalese, but not among the Veddas themselves, that the Veddas were once a powerful and wealthy people, whose chiefs had hoards of gold and gems. Such a belief probably arose from the fact that the Veddas in certain parts of the Island were more numerous than the Sinhalese, and that Vedda chiefs, time and again, rose to positions of trust

and power under Sinhalese kings. But such chiefs could only have come from partially civilised semi-Veddas, and not from the wilder and purer representatives of their race.

It is held in Sabragamuwa, that at one time the Veddas there predominated over the Sinhalese, until the growth of the latter caused the former to withdraw towards Bintenne and Wellasse. In Sabaragamuwa and other parts, fields, villages, and families still retain Vedda names, such as, Weddecoombe, Weddegala, etc.

In the days of Bhuwaneka Bahu, Rajah of Kotte (about 1466 A.D.), there were Veddas in the north of Puttalam, and a Vedda chief, Bandara Mudiyanse, held high administrative office. Other Veddas, Karadiyan and Liyana, are recorded as holding influential appointments in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively.

The Kandyan and Up-country Sinhalese have absorbed much Vedda blood, and their customs have been influenced by the Veddas, who in turn have learned to speak an Aryan language. The Tamils owe nothing to the Veddas (Seligmann).

#### *Language*

The Veddas provide the remarkable phenomenon of a savage race speaking an Aryan dialect. No trace of the old Vedda language has survived. Whatever language they spoke, they lost it long ago and adopted a Sinhalese dialect in its place, while still retaining their ancient customs and mode of life.

The present day Veddas speak a quaint modern colloquial Sinhalese. On occasion, however, they affect a jargon which, though at first apparently different from Sinhalese, turns on closer scrutiny

to be kindred to it. This dialect the Veddas gradually evolved from the limited vocabulary of the jungle Sinhalese, adopting those words suitable to their wild life. It is of respectable antiquity, for it contains many non-Sinhalese, Aryan words derived from Hindi, Marathi, or Sanskrit, as well as an archaic element akin to old Sinhalese, now called Elu.

Many of the expressions in the Vedda dialect arose, (a) from the tendency, as in all hunting languages, (e.g. the *Kaelabasa* or jungle language of the Wanniyas of the North-Central Province) to avoid common names of animals; the bear for instance being called *hatera*, the enemy; and (b) from an intentional effort to mystify strangers by the use of circumlocutory speech; that is, they deliberately invented a secret language—thus the monitor lizard (*munda* or *talagoya*) is called by them *bimbada ganeka*—one whose belly touches the ground; and the pig (*dola* or *ura*) is called *hosedika*—long snout.

There are then three stages in the evolution of the Vedda dialect.—(a) The effacement of the original language by an archaic form of Sinhalese; (b) the formation from this of secret words; and (c) the substitution of modern colloquial Sinhalese for the majority of archaic forms (Seligmann).

#### *Physical Characteristics*

The Veddas are a dwarfish, sturdy, wavy-haired race, with long, narrow heads (dolicocephalic) and moderately broad noses (mesorrhine). The average height of the men is just over five feet, and of the women about four feet nine inches. Their colour is blackish-brown, neither as dark as the Tamils nor as light as the Sinhalese. They



A Vedda.

(Photograph by Skeen & Co.)





(Photograph by Skeen &amp; Co.

Veddas.

have little hair on their bodies, and on their faces merely a thin moustache and a sparse chin-tuft, in contrast to the hairy Sinhalese. Their brow ridges are well marked, eyes deeply set, mouth firm, and cheek bones prominent, giving them an aspect of energy. Their habitual expression is one of vacancy and that apathetic taciturnity that characterises the lowest types of man ; there is no mistaking, however, the furtive, wild-eyed look they flash on first contact with a stranger.

Their temper is easily roused. Ordinarily they are shy of strangers, harmless, and peaceable, but also proud and independent. Undisciplined progeny of nature, they say just what they think, and behave as they feel, unhampered by the restraints of civilisation. They lie when necessary to protect themselves, and use what we call vulgar language unblushingly, for they see no harm in these things. They have been said never to laugh—by those whom the charlatany of exhibition-Veddas has hoaxed !

The Veddas, like all other primitive races, are not the savage barbarians they are popularly thought to be, but happy children full of generous impulses—genial, peaceful, kind, and benevolent.

Natural man, says Professor Elliot Smith, is Nature's gentleman. He is peaceful (though ready to fight to protect life or avert danger), kind, and well-intentioned ; he has an innate love of truth, and impulse to sincerity and decent behaviour. Peace, not enmity, is the natural state of mankind. And yet politicians would have us believe that war is difficult to avert because the fighting instinct is inseparable from human nature. Aristotle said two thousand years ago that kindness shown to travellers is evidence of the goodwill of mankind. Human nature, not splitting hairs over what philosophers wrote, should be

the basis of ethics. Civilisation may give us refinement of manners and luxury, but it also breeds war, cruelty, disease, social inequality and injustice, vice, and trickery.

### *Social System*

This consists of a clan organisation with female descent. In former days the clans were territorially grouped, but now the few Veddas left merely live in family assemblies. The clan names, however, survive, and every Vedda worthy of the name will tell you the *waruge* or clan he belongs to. The clans have status: the *Morana* and *Unapana* clans, for instance, are superior to the *Namadewa*, *Uru*, and *Aembele*. It is an ironic commentary on the sameness of human nature wherever found, that social distinctions, the pride of the *élite*, prevail even among these destitute remnants of a primitive race.

As regards *marriage*, the daughter and son represent the mother's family, and no one must marry one of the same family even if the relationship was lost in antiquity. This division of the Veddas into exogamous clans is distinct from anything Sinhalese. A daughter must marry her father's sister's son, or her mother's brother's son, neither of whom would have the same clan name. The correct marriage for a man is his mother's brother's daughter. The children of two brothers or two sisters cannot marry each other, for they are not considered cousins (*hura* and *nenā*) but brother and sister; such marriage is incestuous, and in the old days was punishable by death.

The marriage ceremony is simple. The suitor goes to his future father-in-law with such gifts as iguanas, honey, dried flesh, or yams tied to his unstrung bow used as a carrying stick. The

father calls his daughter and gives her to her husband, immediately or a few days later. The bride ties round the bridegroom's waist a *neenda* bark string of her own twisting, and they become man and wife. This waist-string is left till it frays away, when his wife replaces it with another. The girl's father makes over to his son-in-law a tract of land—a hill with bees perhaps—and often some personal property, such as a bow and arrows, a hunting dog, an axe, or a catty. Thus simply is marriage consummated.

There is an intimate comradeship between father-in-law and son-in-law; they live and hunt together. But the son-in-law scrupulously avoids his mother-in-law; he evades her in the jungle, takes no food directly from her, and only speaks to her in the presence of others. An unmarried man looks particularly after his mother; a married man after her and his father-in-law.

The Veddas of a group, being closely inter-related, share game, honey, etc. among themselves. They usually avoid calling each other by name, but do so in terms of relationship, and are often at a loss for names when questioned. The aged are addressed respectfully as *siya* (father) or *mutta* (grandfather), and in the case of an old woman as *kiriamma* (grandmother).

Second marriages are frequent in a land where the toll of death is heavy. A man then usually marries a sister of his deceased wife, and a woman a brother of her dead husband.

Divorce is quite an informal affair. The woman is merely returned to her parents, later perhaps to be bestowed on another. Polyandry, fairly common even now among the Sinhalese of the Kandyan provinces, is said not to have been tolerated by the purer Veddas. As a rule their sexual morality is high: they are monogamous

and conjugally faithful. But human nature must be reckoned with: I have known two brothers who shared a single wife, and two sisters a common husband.

Women are segregated during their periods. Every household has provision for this in the form of a crazy shack built over a trestle surrounded by rank overgrowth, and perilously near the jungle edge.

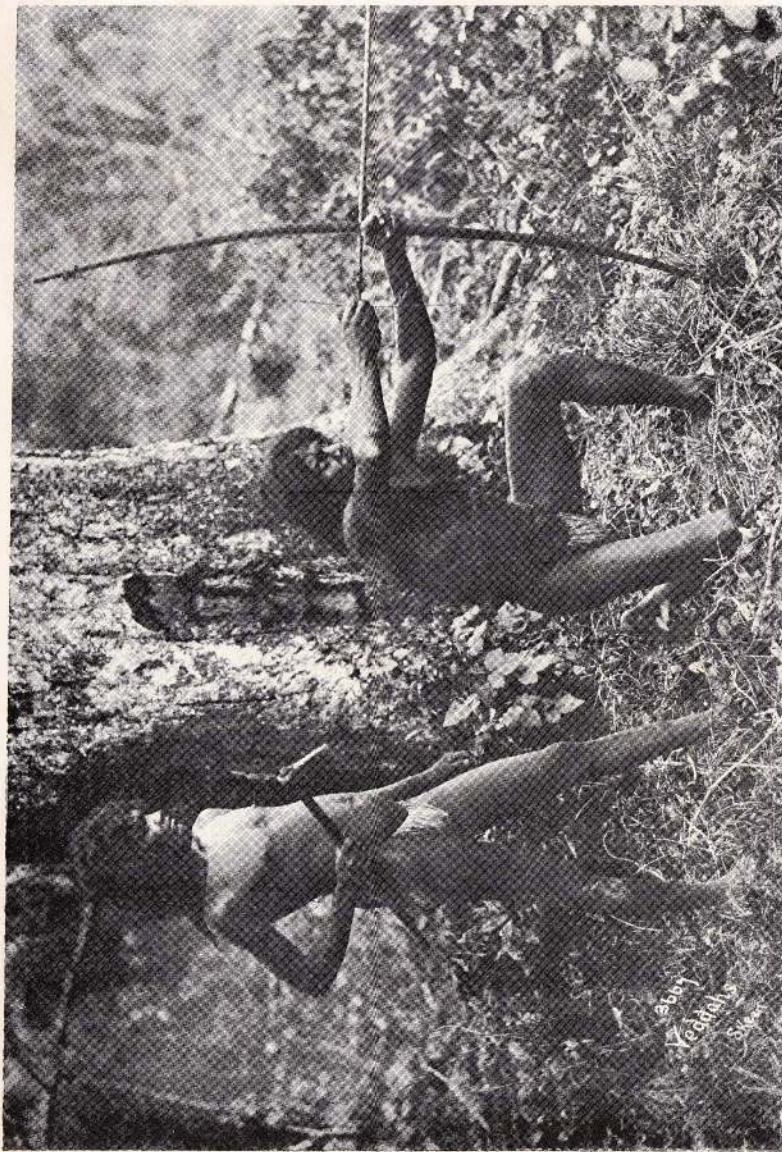
Child-birth takes place in a cave or hut, and sometimes out in the jungles, for the Veddas are nomads. The Embille and Kiribo *waruges* are said to owe their names to child-births under embille and kiribo trees, and the Uru waruge to an *accouchement* in a pig's wallow. I know a Vedda called Gama who owes his name to the fact that he was born on a journey (*gamana*).

The parturient woman leans with her back to a rock or tree, supported by a relative; the cord is cut with an arrow. She is fed on iguanas and their eggs for a few days, and in a day or two is up and about. The little one is called *tuta* or *tuti* (baby) for a few years.

#### *Property and Inheritance*

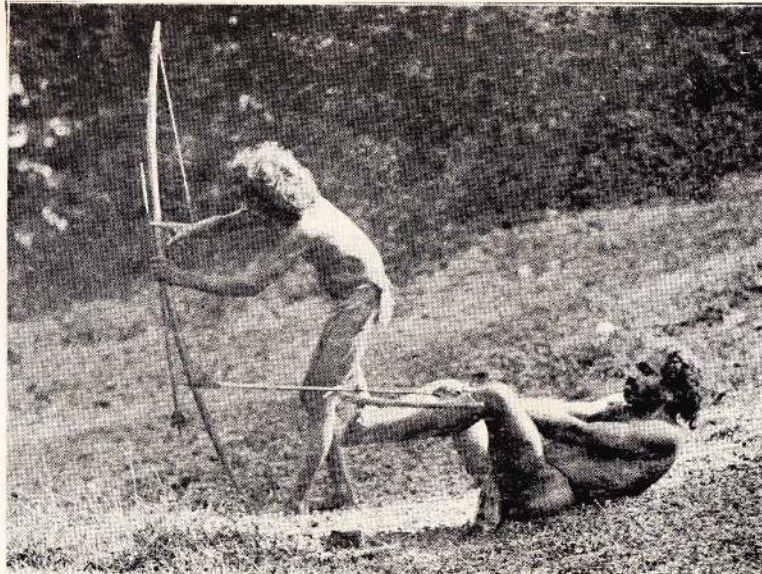
In former times each Vedda group had its own boundaries defined by such natural features as streams or rocks. Where these were lacking, prominent trees had their barks cut with the *dhuna-hena* or bow-mark—the representation of a man with a drawn bow, or a drawn bow only. These boundaries were well known to each group and were seldom transgressed, as trespassing brought relentless retaliation. Rock shelters were guarded with special care, Veddas, like other mortals, being jealous of their women.

In the old days the boundaries were sentinelled.



(Photograph by Skeen & Co.)

Veddas hunting.



(Photograph by Skeen &amp; Co.)

Vedda shooting with bow gripped by feet (p. 94).



Coast Veddas at Mankeni (p. 96).

In 1630 we read that the Portuguese, Don Juan da Costa, travelling in the service of Rajasingha through Vedda territories, was conducted by relays of Veddas from boundary to boundary.

The sign of land transfer was a stone, usually a quartz pebble, the 'seisin' of a man's hunting ground; a tooth might be added, perhaps a flint and steel, or lock of hair. When a man lay dying, his sons and sons-in-law would gather round him for the distribution of his possessions.

The present day Veddas have no knowledge of *message sticks*, and what we know of them comes from the Sinhalese. A knotted creeper sent to a person denoted a summons, the urgency of which was indicated by the number of knots. The lock of a dead person's hair twisted round a twig and enclosed in a leaf or cloth was sent as a symbol of death. Signs scratched on leaves or chips of wood were despatched to Veddas by Sinhalese chiefs in need of flesh or honey: a horizontal line denoted a carrying stick, two short vertical ones, venison, and a circle, a pot of honey.

#### *Religion and Ceremonial Dances*

One writer dismisses this subject with the summary statement that the Vedda religion is a kind of demon worship consisting of rude dances and shouts to scare away evil spirits. But there is more to it than that.

In the Vedda religion we have preserved for us through æons of time the very beginnings of superstitious faith, and of irrational fear of the unknown, when the awakening mind of man put forth religious tendrils tremulous with dread. In their religion we have the earliest conception of a God—the reincarnation after death of a

beloved or pre-eminent human being.

The Veddas have no legends or theories of the origin of man and the universe. But they have a vague belief in a host of nameless spirits that inhabit the natural features about them—the air, rocks, trees, glades and springs.

They have, besides, a more definite faith in the spirits of the dead or Nae Yaku, especially of the recent and more important dead, who live unseen around their homes, protecting them if propitiated and harming them if ignored. These spirits they appeal to for protection and for success in hunting.

Closely associated with the Nae Yaku are the spirits of a few, long dead heroes, mighty hunters, handed down by tradition. Pre-eminent among these are Kande Yaka and his younger brother Bilindi Yaka. They are benevolent and loved and help men to kill deer; they never send sickness. They are invoked at the beginning of the Nae Yaku ceremony, and are thought to bring the Nae Yaku with them, also at the *kirikoraha* ceremony for favour in the chase.

Panniki Yaka, a great Vedda chief who captured elephants for Sinhalese kings in the sixteenth century, is invoked in the *kolamaduwwa* ceremony (more Sinhalese than Vedda) to avert sickness and bring prosperity to men and cattle. Bamburu Yaka, a sinister spirit, who though he gives yams and helps men to slay pigs also sends sickness, is appealed to when illness prevails and when dogs are lost or killed by leopards.

Kande Yaka, Bilindi Yaka, and the Nae Yaku are the important Vedda gods.

When a man dies, his meagre possessions—weapons, betel-bag, etc.—are taken from him, and his body is covered with leaves and branches, and abandoned or buried in a shallow grave

some distance away from his hut. The place of death is thought to be haunted by the malefic phantom of the deceased, and is therefore avoided for years; a dying person may even be forsaken before death.

Each community has its *kapurale* or shaman (priest) who is capable of calling the *yaku* and presenting them with offerings. Before a ceremony the shaman must avoid eating pig and fowl, but may eat sambhur and monitor lizard.

Two forms of arrows are used in the Vedda ritual, (a) the ordinary hunting arrow, and (b) the long-bladed, short-handled ceremonial arrow or *aude*. The arrow is thought to exercise protective power; placed beside a babe, it guards it from wild creatures and harmful spirits, such as Maha Kiriamma who steals children; stuck into the bolted door of a vacated hut with a V-shaped sprig bestraddling it, it protects the owner's possessions from his superstitious fellows.

In their ceremonial songs and dances the Veddas have reached their highest form of artistic expression. These dances are, owing to foreign influence, too complicated and manifold to describe fully here, as they differ in detail with each community. They are to be found carefully recorded in all their bewildering complexity in the pages of Seligmann. We shall content ourselves with describing the more important of them in broad outline.

The *Nae Yaku Ceremony*, undertaken with the object of enabling the dead man to become a Nae Yaka, is performed a few days after death. In its simplest, and perhaps most impressive form as done by the real jungle Vedda,



the shaman dances round an offering of yams and water, or merely round an implanted arrow, chanting the invocation :

My departed one, my departed one, my God!  
Where art thou wandering?\*

As most frequently carried out to-day, the offerings for the Nae Yaku ceremony consist, as in so many other ceremonies, of cooked rice, coconut milk and betel leaves, placed on a rice pounder or a tripod. Round this, the shaman holding a ceremonial arrow dances, invoking the spirits including that of the dead man :

*Ayu bowa, Ayu bowa†!*  
Having called you we give you rice:  
Think no wrong of us, for we share the meal.  
You who have gone, come back,  
Take rice and honey and betel,  
Show us the sambhur and spotted deer,  
Allow our four-footed ones‡ to catch iguanas.  
We will place their meat on your altars.  
Grant us protection and sustenance.

The *Arrow Dance*, the simplest of the Vedda dances, is performed when a spell of ill-luck has attended hunting. The spirit invoked is the Itale (arrow) Yaka, probably identical with Kande Yaka. An arrow is thrust in the ground and the Veddas dance round it, forwards and backwards, with jerky half-turns of the body, to a song rhythm and the slapping of hands on the chest and abdomen. The dancers work themselves to a high pitch of excitement, shouting, and thumping themselves, and tossing their shaggy heads up and down with increasing vigour, until one after another falls exhausted to the ground, trembling,

\* *Ma miya, ma miya, ma deya,*  
*Topang koyihetti mittigan yandah.*  
† Salutation, Salutation.  
‡ Dogs.

gasping, howling. Then they all rise, and the dance is over.

The *Kirikoraha Ceremony* is observed to obtain game, and also after death to propitiate the spirit of the dead man. The appeal is to Kande Yaka and Bilindi Yaka and sometimes to Indigolla Yaka as well. The shaman, ceremonial arrow in hand, and with hair let down, dances round an offering of cooked rice (*adukku*), coconut, and betel leaves, chanting :



With arrow-heads shaped like *na*  
leaves and *bo* leaves,  
There goes, from spoor to spoor of  
sambhur,  
From plain to hill,  
My *Wanniya* (chief) of the hill crest, giver of rain,  
Lord of the nameless jungle.  
Lo, with his hands he seizes the horned sambhur,  
And delivers him to us, etc.

The chant is repeated over and over. The dancing, at first slow, gradually quickens. Soon the shaman, a shaggy haired, wild-eyed figure, is apparently oblivious of his surroundings. He works up to a climax of frenzy, and is now possessed by the spirit, Bilindi Yaka, he has called. He interrupts his hoarse intonings to split the coconut with an axe. Holding each half of it against his chest, and with head bent and body swaying, he utters the words of the spirit that possesses him: "You have called me; I have come. Why did you call me?"

While two Veddas prepare the coconut milk, he dances twirling the arrow blade between his fingers. His arms jerk up spasmodically—Bilindi Yaka has left him and Kande Yaka entered. And now, possessed by the spirit of that great hunter, he

tracks an imaginary sambhur pointing to the spoor with an arrow—thus showing the direction the future hunt should take. He crouches in a shooting posture; then returns to the offering, and putting his hands into the coconut milk, lets it drip between his fingers, saying, "Like this shall the sambhur bleed." He slits a betel leaf



to show that the quarry will be horned, immerses the leaf in the milk and lets it fall. Should it lie with the under surface upward the animal will take long to kill, if the other way, death will be speedy. He now holds a betel leaf over the heads of the male spectators, and touches

their chests with it, showing they are favoured. Another short spell of dancing and the shaman, shuddering and throwing his head about, falls back exhausted as the Yaka leaves him, into the hands of one who latterly has been watchful to support him. When he recovers all partake of the offering.

After the actual hunt, if a deer has been slain, parts of its head and breast are offered to Kande Yaka, and then eaten by the Veddas.

The *Bamburu Yaka Ceremony* is a pantomimic dance, undertaken with the object of obtaining pig and yams. It centres round the following story:—While a group of Veddas were digging for yams, their dogs strayed into the jungle and startled a boar which charged the Veddas. None of the men could kill the animal, but a woman picking up her husband's bow and arrow, and aided by him with his yam stick, slew the beast.

The woman's spirit became Dunne Yakini (Bow Spirit), and the man's Ule Yaka (Yamstick

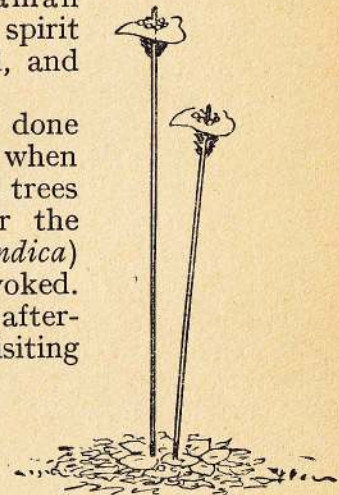
Spirit). Bamburu Yaka, returning to his cave carrying yams and iguanas, came across the hunt; hence his part in the ceremony, in which Dunne Yakini and Ule Yaka come as his attendants.

The properties for this dance are cooked yams, stones, bows, arrows, yam-sticks and carrying sticks, all spotted and striped with pigment made of lime, turmeric and charcoal; also a bundle of grass, leaves, and twigs suspended from a platform representing the boar.

The ceremony, like the rest, consists of invocation and dance, and culminates in possession by the spirits invoked, and a most realistic pantomime of a spirited boar hunt, in which the quarry is difficult to kill and lames the hunter before death. The possessed shaman delivers the message of the spirit where a boar might be found, and falls quivering in a trance.

The *Dola Yaka Ceremony* is done for protection and success when collecting bambara honey from trees and dangerous rock faces, for the sting of these large bees (*Apis Indica*) is terrible. Dola Yaka is invoked. The ceremony takes place in the afternoon when the bees are busy visiting flowers.

Two arrows are set in the ground; a betel leaf, trans-fixed on the top of each and resting on the feathers, supports a bead necklace. These leaves represent the bundle of foliage used in smoking out bees, and the necklaces the creeper down which the *kapunkaraya* climbs. Those partaking in the dance walk round the arrows singing the invocation beginning:



Goddess show me a beehive to-day ;  
I will cut it down and hide it and go.

When possessed, the dancers make pretence of listening intently with hands to ears and body bent forward. Suddenly they leap up and resume their dancing. Again they listen—and this time strike their chests for joy crying, “We hear many bees, there will be plenty of honey.” They dance round the arrows again, beating off imaginary bees from their bodies. Once more they listen—and picking up leafy twigs, as if they were alight shake them at the supposed comb and spring back to get away from the angry bees. They dance thus, till one by one they become exhausted, and the Dola Yaka departs from them.

The *Pata Yaku Ceremony* is performed to ensure safety during pregnancy and child-birth. Three Pata (bark) Yaku are invoked, and the dance takes place round three implanted stakes dressed with strips of bast. The dancers are usually the woman’s father, paternal uncle or husband. Like the others it is a possession dance.

The *Invocation of Rahu Yaku* is undertaken with a view to curing sickness and gaining success in the gathering of honey from trees—not rock-honey which is under the guardianship of Dola Yaka. Coconut milk, rice, betel leaves, a necklace, etc. are the necessaries for the ceremony.

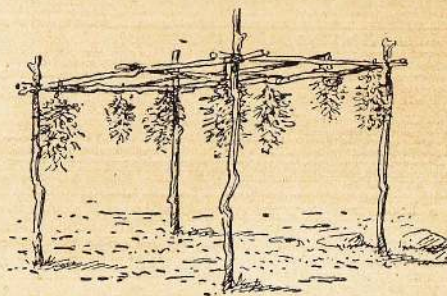
The Rahu Yaku originated as follows.—There were three Vedda brothers. The youngest quarrelled with his wife, left her in their cave, and went out hunting with his brothers. On their return they found a strange man with the woman. The intruder escaped before the angry husband could shoot him ; but the husband, having beaten his wife, built a fire, jumped into it, was burnt to death, and became Gini Ratur Bandar or Yaka. When his two brothers died they

too became Rahu Yaku.

The *Wangata Yaku*, invoked for help in hunting, arose from a family that died as the result of imprisonment in a rock cave, caused by the fall of a boulder which blocked its entrance.

The *Ruwala* and *Kolamaduwwa Ceremonies*, performed for curing cattle disease and epidemic human ailments, are not true Vedda rites.

Such are the basic ceremonies of the Vedda cult of the dead. It will be seen how inseparably the needs of hunting are combined with spirit reverence in every one of them.



Foreign creeds have gradually permeated the primitive Vedda cult, owing to the close association, from time immemorial, of the tamer Veddas with the Sinhalese and Tamils, and the presence in remote jungles of Buddhist and Hindu shrines ; to these, neighbouring Veddas repair at festival time attracted chiefly by the free meals (*dhanas*) they receive. The Veddas of Bintenne, for example, go to the Mahayangana dagaba, and the Veddas of Seerangamadu to the Mandur kovil.

Alien spirits of the Sinhalese and Tamils have thus been absorbed into the Vedda system of worship. Benevolent Vedda Yaku gradually give precedence to dangerous Sinhalese and Tamil demons, and to reverence for Buddha and the high Hindu gods, and also the Kattragam god, that grim diety of the jungles, outside the pale of all religions yet feared and worshiped by both



Buddhists and Hindus.

Seligmann (of whose views this section on religion is a summary) thus tabulates the strata of Vedda belief.—(1) Cult of the dead, including cult of spirits of recent ancestors and of long dead heroes. (2) Cult of foreign spirits naturalised and protective like Vedda Yaku. (3) Cult of foreign spirits retaining foreign nature—terrible and hostile.

(1) The *cult of the dead* we have already dealt with.

(2) Among the *naturalised Vedda Yaku* are the Rahu Yaku invoked in sickness, hunting, and honey-gathering—the purely Vedda patrons of which are Kande and Dola Yaka.

The *Bandar Cult* represents the remains of the primitive cult of the dead. It comprises an innumerable hierarchy of demons (dwellers in trees, hills, and river rocks) that go to swell the list of naturalised Vedda spirits. They include Indigollae Yaka, Peradeniya Bandar and Kalu Bandar exorcised in the Vedda-Sinhalese zone, and the female demons Maha Yakini with her attendants invoked with beads, bangles and *na* leaves, and Maha Kiriamma, formerly an old dame, now a malefic spirit addicted to kidnapping children. This demonology is acquired mainly from the Sinhalese who are past masters in the intricate art.

Kande Yaka, the Vedda lord of the dead, is superseded in some places, such as Kovil Vannami and Bandaraduwa, by Kandaswamy or Skanda, the Kattragam god of the Tamils, with Valiamma his Vedda spouse; and both the Hindu trident and Vedda *aude* are used in invocation.

In certain districts the Veddas have so confused an idea of their credo, that offerings to Buddhist priests are considered a necessary preliminary to a

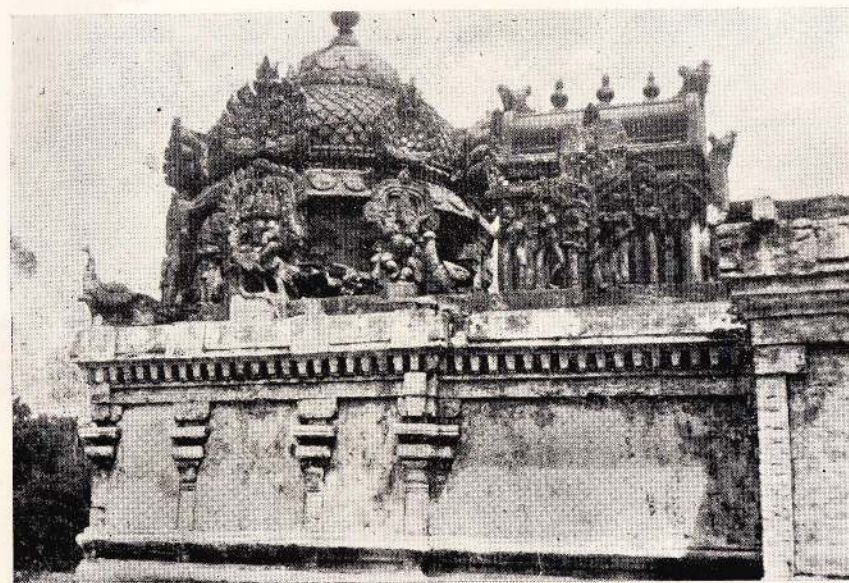


Veddas dancing.

(Sketch by J. L. K. van Dort)



Vedda child of Bingoda eating wild berries.



Hindu temple at Verugal on the frontiers of the Vedda country (p. 89).



Forest shrine of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god (p. 91).



Coast Vedda women at Panichchankeni (p. 96).

Nae Yaku ceremony, for fear the spirit of the dead might otherwise be angered. They further believe that the Nae Yaka must get the sanction of the Kattragam god before he can accept the proffered oblation.

(3) Lastly, we come to the third stage in which *the imported gods retain their foreign nature*, and the primitive Vedda belief is all but obliterated. This phase prevails near the towns among semi-civilised Veddas with more of Sinhalese or Tamil than Vedda blood in them. Here the Nae Yaku are vaguely remembered, but the great Vedda heroes have been supplanted by alien gods and demons such as Skanda, Ganesha Vihare Deyo, Pullagaman Deyo, Mangara Deyo and others. The Veddas of Yakkure have a shrine of rough stones against a tree on Yakkure *wewa* bund, sacred to Ganesha the elephant-headed Hindu god, who is also seen in many another shrine regarded as Vedda. Some village Veddas even build temples—crude huts—containing a *maessa* on which are placed the symbols of *deviyo* and *yaku*, and flowers, betel-leaves and arecanuts, before which the shaman dances, facing east.

Among these Veddas, Veddas only in name, there are no dances at a man's death, no invocation to the spirits of the dead, or for luck in hunting.

Religions, bereft of their ethical codes, resolve themselves, after all, solely into a reverence for the unknown, which will probably elude the mind of man "to the last syllable of recorded time." And who knows, but that the naked Vedda, dancing round his implanted arrow in some forest glade, seeking his meat from God, is as near to the soul of things as appalled priests before the gilded altars of old cathedrals,

philosophers entangled in the mazes of logic, or scientists groping after cosmic laws.

### Arts and Crafts

The arts and crafts of the wilder Veddas are exceedingly few and simple. They practice no magic, and what charms they have against wild animals have been learnt from the Sinhalese.

Musical instruments are unknown to them. Their oldest ceremonies, such as the arrow dance, are merely accompanied by the rhythmic slapping of the hands on the abdomen.

Their songs, consist of invocations and lullabies, which, though they are characterised by a feeling for tonality, represent the very beginnings of melody building (C. S. Myers).

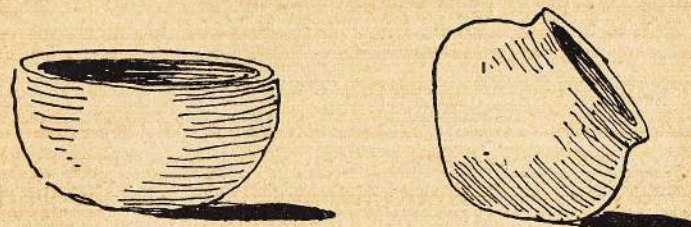


They do not paint or tattoo themselves, or wear any kind of ornament.\* Their art comprises crude drawings of human beings and animals, made on the rock surfaces of their caves, with a finger dipped in a mixture of ash (or powdered charcoal) and saliva held in the palm of the hand.

Their pottery consists of rough vessels fashioned of dark clay, first dried in the sun and then baked

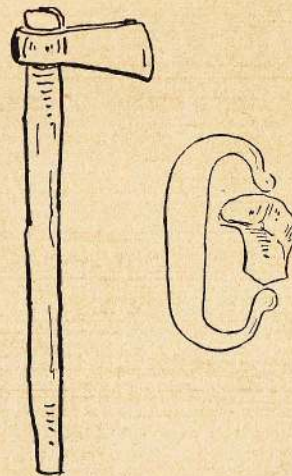
\* This is not true of the village Veddas whose women adorn themselves with bead necklaces and ear-rings; the latter are also worn by many of the men.

hard on a fire. They are thick, misshapen objects, devoid of ornament, and often lipless; some are conical-based and topple over when stood upright.



The bow and arrow and axe are the only real Vedda implements, but nowadays most Veddas possess arecanut cutters and iron strike-a-lights which have supplanted rubbing-sticks as sources of fire. The arrows and arecanut cutters are also used generally as cutting instruments—the arrows being employed as skinning knives, and the arecanut cutters for whittling arrow shafts.

The bows are made of the peeled and shaved saplings of *kobbe vel* (*Allophylus cobbe*); the bow-string of *aralu* bast (*Terminalia chebula*) coated over with *timbiri* resin (*Dyospyros embryopteris*), and the arrow shaft of the light *welan* wood (*Pterospermum suberifolium*). The iron arrow and axe heads are acquired by barter. The arrows are feathered with the plumes of peacocks, herons, owls and eagles.



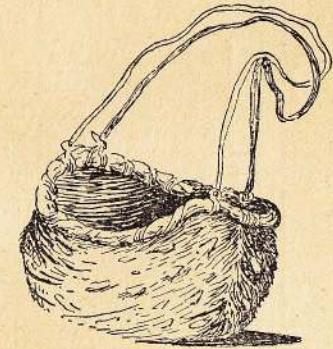
The present day Veddas are poor bowmen for the reason that they have no difficulty in getting the loan of guns from pedlar Moors whom they repay a hundred-fold in flesh before being given possession of the weapon. The bow is therefore not seriously used now, except occasionally for hunting monkeys and other small game. That the Veddas up till a few generations back were expert archers there can be no doubt; many tales are told of their skill. They are even reputed to have shot running animals and flying birds, lying on their backs and gripping the bow with their feet.



Traps and snares were probably never known to the Veddas, but they have learnt the use of the sprung noose, dead-fall (*habakka*) and trap-gun from the Sinhalese.

Honey gathering is an art in which the Veddah is supreme. As he roams the forests, his eyes and ears are ever on the alert for the sight or sound of a bee. Honey is his staple food, and he gulps it greedily, grubs, wax, and all. Formerly the Veddahs preserved chopped meat in honey, cached in a hollow tree or rock; nowadays they dry any excess of meat.

The honey of the stingless dammar or rosin bee (*kanava*) is available throughout the year, and with iguanas, forms the Veddahs' daily menu in times of jungle dearth. The honey of the *mee massa* (*Apis indica*) and *bambara* (*Apis dorsata*) is only to be got in June and July. The combs of the former, like those of the dammar bee, are cut out of hollow trees. *Bambara* combs are not so easily obtained; these great bees, though they build occasionally on the branches of trees, usually favour the underside of ledges on the sides of dangerous rocks, where colonies of them are to be found. The Veddahs get these in the dead of night by climbing down cane ladders secured to a stone or tree on the summit of the hill. The *kapunkaraya* or cutter, swinging over the precipice, sings lustily while he works to appease the spirit of the rock. First he smokes out the bees, then, spitting the combs on a long, four-pronged stake (*masleya*), he shakes them out piece by piece into a deer skin receptacle (*hangotuwa* or *maludema*) which, to gratify the demon of the rock, is called the *yakka katta* or devil's mouth. His perilous task completed, he ascends the ladder with his spoils.



#### *Present Day Veddahs*

At the time of the Dutch conquest, about two hundred years ago, the Veddahs were to be found all over the island, even in the Jaffna peninsula.

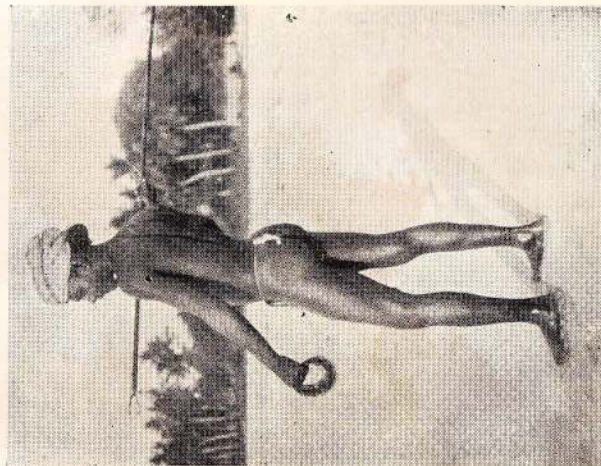
To-day they live in scattered groups in the

dense unhealthy jungles between the Mahaweli Ganga and the eastern littoral. This country is the traditional *Maha Veddi Ratta*, and is still so designated on some of our maps. In the vicinity of the isolated rocks that stud that wilderness—Danigala, Nilgala, Henebedde, Friar's Hood, Galmede, Baron's Cap—the Veddas are to be found; but not without considerable trouble where the best of them are concerned, for they are wanderers, ever in search of the food which those arid jungles so grudgingly yield.

The old classification of the Veddas into, (1) Jungle or Rock Veddas (*Kele* or *Gal Weddo*), (2) Village Veddas (*Gan Weddo*), and (3) Coast Veddas, yet holds.

The *Coast Veddas* are the most civilised, and live in close association with the Tamils with whom they are thoroughly intermixed. They are to be found just inland from the coast between Batticaloa and Trincomalie—at Kalkuda, Panichchankeni, Mankeni, Vakaraï, Velayadimadu, and Padichena. Some of them, as at Panichchankeni, ply the ferry-boats on the Batticaloa-Trincomalie road. Essentially these Veddas are fisherman of the lagoons that fret this coast; but they are singular in this, that—apart from the usual methods of fishing with rod, line and net—they use a harpoon (which they shoot from a bow or hurl like a javelin) with a detachable head secured to a long floatable pole and line; this

they employ for larger fish, such as *vela*, *sirrah*, *kadua* and *kale*, which enter the lagoons during the rainy months towards the end of the year. With a little luck one may see a Tamil Vedda (or



Coast Vedda of Kalkuda with harpoon and line.  
(p. 96).



Coast Vedda boy of Panichchankeni  
with catch of fish (p. 96).

*Verda* as he calls himself) engaged in the occupation, from the pier at Kalkuda.

The *Village Veddas* (*Gan Weddo*), like the Coast Veddas, live in close association with, and affect the customs and dress of the Sinhalese or Tamils near whom they live; they also are so intermixed by marriage as to be almost indistinguishable from their more civilised neighbours. They represent the final stage in the extinction of the Vedda by miscegenation. They cultivate chenas, live in mud and wattle huts, and keep cattle and fowls, depending for their food more on agriculture than hunting. The classical Veddas of Danigala and Bintenne (Bulugahadenne) are, we must regretfully admit, rapidly coming under the category of Village Veddas, though they still retain many words of the Vedda dialect, and are expert in the art of making bows and arrows.

Around Horabora Wewa, about Malgoda and Makulugala, are semi-Veddas whose main sustenance is the seed of the lotus with which the tank abounds. These Veddas are the descendants of the lotus eaters commemorated in the old Sinhalese song sung at the Kolamaduwa ceremony :

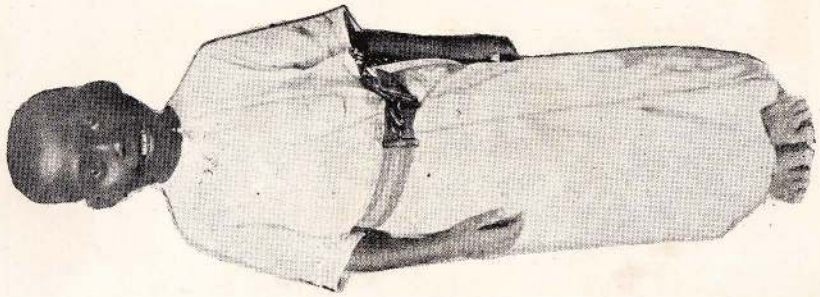
On that shore of Sorabora wewa the Veddas be ;  
On this shore of Sorabora wewa the Veddas be ;  
On both shores of Sorabora wewa the Veddas be ;  
Will they grant lotus pods to thee and me ?

At Sorabora wewa the lotus blossoms blow,  
To gather them pass women to and fro ;  
All blackened and whitened the rice they bestow,  
But, alas, where's the meat that with it should go ?

The *Rock or Jungle Veddas* (*Gal or Kala Weddo*) in the strictest sense of the epithet are now really extinct. To-day there is no Vedda that clothes himself in leaf or bark, hunts solely with bow and arrow, and lives exclusively in caves. There is,



Coast Vedda family at Mankeni, now being civilised (p. 103).



Kaira (p. 101).

however, evidence that about three generations back such *Attukola* (leaf) Veddas did exist, so remote from the Sinhalese, that the only raiment available to them were leaves or beaten bark which they wore as girdles tucked under waist strings.

There are a few Veddas, even now, who live the old life of the hunter, and in whom the old spirit survives. They are to be found, individually here and there, among the small family groups that band together in their recognised lands (Henebedde, Galmede, Meeangolla), but are not numerous enough to combine in a tribal life. These Veddas keep much to themselves, the best of them even living apart from their own people, and are so shy of strangers that they are very difficult to encounter.

They may make a pretence of cultivating chenas, but are hopelessly incompetent at it, their plots being more picturesque with rank growth than productive of food. Every now and then they forsake their crude and crumbling bark huts, and betake themselves with their families and dogs to the shelter of caves and trees, wandering from place to place, wherever food is available.

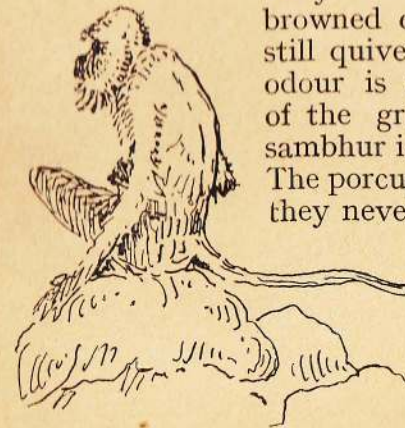
They are as foul and unkempt as it is possible to be, and their meagre loin rags barely cover their nakedness.

Gifted with an amazing sense of direction and memory for landmarks, they never lose their way in any jungle. They track spoor only visible to themselves, climb trees like monkeys, scale up to hidden caves they alone know where the edible nest swiftlet builds, and gather honey, swinging from canes over fearsome precipices. They may not be expert archers, but put the most ramshackle muzzle-loader with a single charge into their hands, and they will not return without a load

of meat, for they move like shadows and get within a few feet of their quarry.

No part of an animal they kill is wasted; there is no such thing as offal with them; the lungs and intestines are as good as any other portion.

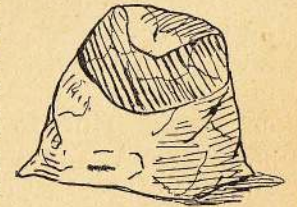
They eat their meat merely browned over embers while it still quivers, or so high that its odour is appalling. The flesh of the gray ape, iguana, and sambhur is what they like best. The porcupine, for some reason, they never eat, considering it a



*rodiya* (outcast) among beasts. They appease their hunger with incessant chews of *demata* and *davata* bark combined with lime

made from burnt snail shells (*wantako*), which they carry in pouches made of monkey skin or cloth impregnated with bee's wax.

Let us see where these Veddas, judged by their mode of life, come in relation to the most primitive races of the world extant today.



We will take as our standard prehistoric primitive men—the nomadic hunters or “food gatherers,” as opposed to the settled “food producers.” They lived only in rough shelters or caves, without permanent houses, went naked or only scantily clad, and kept no domestic animals, except perhaps the dog; they were ignorant of pottery and metal, and had no culture. They observed no social distinctions, nor did they

organise themselves into clans, but merely lived in family groups like the anthropoid apes.

The Australian aborigines are held to be the most primitive of existing peoples, the Negroes (Bushmen and Pygmies) coming next. Yet the Australians, though they answer in most particulars to the prehistoric standards, are not a pure type—different groups showing strong contrasts. Besides, strangely enough, they have a highly specialised social organisation that includes complicated marriage regulations and totemism, and some groups even mummify their dead.

Compared with this, the simplicity of the lives of our Veddas needs no stressing. We may safely claim for them that they, perhaps more effectively than any other race, have handed down to our time a mirror of the life of our ancient ancestors.

They love solitudes, and prefer a life of hardship to one of ease. The Revd. Mr. Gillings, in 1853, offered board and education at his Mission to an orphan Vedda lad, who refused it saying, "When I am hungry I chew the bark of trees and pluck roots. When I am cold I light a fire and warm myself. I want no books, nor learning, nor money. Only give me an axe and I am content." Thus from the mouth of that untutored savage came the great truth that "Life is greater than culture." Carlyle taught that the healthy life is the unconscious life, and that it is in man's dim, illogical instincts that truth often lies.

And now I have a confession to make. About fifteen years ago I brought away from the jungles a derelict orphan half-Vedda boy of five, whom I took to my house in Colombo. During the early days of his stay we missed a number of little things, such as penknives, pencils, ornaments, etc., that lay about the house. The acquisitive instinct was strong in him; whatever pleased his

fancy, he slyly took. We gradually cured him of the habit—and of many another, as we would a puppy.

He grew to be an intelligent and capable urchin. Much to my wife's concern he became the playmate of my daughter of similar age, who called him her "slave." He worked excellently under supervision; learnt to speak Sinhalese, Tamil, and English pretty fluently, and was a general favourite in the house.

On one occasion we left Colombo on a two weeks holiday. We returned to find Kaira, as he was named, a changed boy. He had made friends with the scallywags in the adjoining garden and developed vagrant tendencies. That was the beginning of his downfall. His one inclination thereafter was to scamp his work and to slink away whenever he was not observed, unable to resist his beckoning playmates with whom he was not only favourite but leader.

To correct him of the vicious habit I tried all manner of expedients, for I had a soft corner in my heart for the boy. Alternately I thrashed him, was kind to him, gave him a monthly salary, and permitted him liberal hours of recreation when he might associate with his friends. But no—stolen pleasures and revolt from discipline attracted him like a magnet.

He soon began keeping away from the house to escape my displeasure. I would have him brought back, spoken kindly to by my servants, or even threatened by the police—all to no purpose. Driven to exasperation, I let him go his way and made no effort to retrieve him. But in a few days he would be led in by some commiserating individual, seemingly repentant, starving, and in rags. For a short time he would be a model boy only to lapse again.

At the age of fourteen his precocity began to



manifest itself. He was now a squat, sturdy, little fellow. He walked with a swagger, wore his hair well oiled and brushed sleekly back, sported a dud wrist-watch, and, though no Adonis, was obviously careful of his looks and bold in courtship, for he addressed amorous epistles to a nearby Sinhalese damsel about his own age. His tastes being relatively expensive, he helped himself to money from the servants' pockets whenever he got the chance; but I will say this, he never robbed me.

Twice I packed him off to estates about a hundred miles from Colombo; in a few days he was back among his playmates; how he managed it without means, is more than I can say.

At length I refused to have anything more to do with him and turned him out of my house. We saw nothing of him for weeks. Then one night, a lady staying with us woke to find a small black hand thrust between the window bars, fumbling with trinkets on her dressing table. That earned him three years at the Magonna reformatory.

At the end of his term a policeman escorted him back to me. I refused to have him with thanks. To-day he is at large somewhere in Colombo. Would that I had never brought him away from his jungle home.

Attempts have repeatedly been made to civilise the Veddas. In 1844, 163 men, 48 women, and 85 children were baptised—but all went back to "their former habits and follies." Some years later, Government got a number of them together, "built houses and planted trees for them, gave them food, and encouraged them to abandon their old customs and interest themselves in agriculture." All to no avail.

What has been essayed before is being done

even now, as I write. If any one wishes to witness the experiment, let him visit Mankeni, north of Batticaloa. There he will find several Vedda families collected from the interior, provided with homes by the roadside. In the midst of the colony stands a school for the education of the wild-eyed brats who scuttle away at the approach of the stranger and cling trembling to their mothers.

So far all attempts by Government officials and missionaries to civilise the Veddas have failed. May a similar fate befall the present endeavour to hasten the extinction of a dying race. Better, is it not, to leave the Veddas in their green mansions where they wish to be, that their dust might mingle with that of their ancestors, while we refrain from harassing them with inhuman forest laws? Since go they must, let civilisation filter gradually into their wild fastnesses doing its work of destruction insidiously. Let it not be charged to us that we weaned them from the solitudes they loved, and forced on their unready minds our ideals and the doubtful benefits of our civilisation.

In how different a spirit did Virchow approach the problem:

"May the zeal of the observer," he wrote, "know no flagging, that before the utter extinction of this already much depleted race, the language and customs, the physical and mental constitution of the Veddas may be in all particulars firmly established."

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VEDDAS OF SEERANGAMADU AND  
BARON'S CAP

LEAVING my companions to amuse themselves shooting crocodiles round Rukam tank and punishing more whisky than was good for them, I proceeded alone on a Vedda quest; for I had yet to know the Veddahs inhabiting the country between Vellaveli and Unichchai tank (especially the Seerangamadu and Kovil Vannami folk) as well as those at Meeangolla beyond Baron's Cap.

There is a sequestered ferry in the Eastern Province, just off the main road, a serener spot than which it would be hard to find. Paddiruppu it is called. Its little market place is under the trees. Here the long lagoon of Batticaloa thins down to a narrow neck, and then, suddenly changing its mind as it were, spreads out serpiginously southwards again. Two *dhonies* are picturesquely at anchor by the shore, while the boatmen unload their cargo of coral. In the evening the steam-boat from Batticaloa fusses in with its handful of passengers. As it darkens a fisherman strips, and casting his net a few times in the dark shallows under the mangroves, secures fry for his dinner.

Having provisioned ourselves overnight, we were rowed across the lagoon the following morning to where a road petered out in the water, and a cart waited to convey us to the wilds beyond.

Passing Vellaveli, we came at noon to Bakiella,

where we stayed for lunch. Though avowedly a Sinhalese hamlet, we found the Tamil spoken here fluent, and the Sinhalese quaint; while the abundance of ornaments worn on toes, fingers, arms, and ears by the women gave them a distinctly Moorish appearance. A real mix up was here.

In the garden of the hut we occupied was a frail platform containing betel leaves and coconut flowers, before which a *maleliya* ceremony had been performed the previous night for illness. That the place reeked with malaria was evident.

We found in the hut a pointed stick (*dhikantha matha*) for spearing fish stunned by such poisons as *kukuruman gedde*, *thaluk kiri*, and *kalawel mul*. There was a small *aude* (ceremonial arrow) too—sure mark of Vedda associations.

A boy squatting on the ground ate his rice off a bronze, pedestalled salver; before him were a cat, a dog, and a parrot, to each of which, from time to time, he shared out impartially tit-bits from his meal.

An itinerant Sinhalese pedagogue, bloated with a hearty meal that like mine included a local hen, belched himself into contentment, and proceeded to take the folk of the place to task for affecting the language and dress of the Tamils. He gave them grandiloquent fragments of Ceylon history, and told them the Sinhalese had priority of claim to the Island, and were an infinitely superior race to the despicable Tamils—which, considering that there were many of the latter about, was hardly in good taste.

"Don't you believe all this nonsense," I interposed, unable to stand his chatter any longer. "Your customs and tastes are what your environment has made them, and there is nothing to be ashamed of in that. He tells you the Island

belongs to the Sinhalese because they were here before the Tamils. I tell you that long before the Sinhalese came, the Veddas were here. And if you go by his argument it is to them the land must belong. And you have Vedda blood in your veins, which he has not." That put a period to the schoolmaster's garrulity. And we went our ways.

From Bakiella it was a near walk to Pahur, where a few huts stood among coconuts, limes, jaks, and tamarinds. Pahur Ella was not far off. Crossing a grove of teak I came to a glade, and descended a grassy bank to a shallow streamlet. There, unwittingly I stumbled on a jungle idyll. A Vedda girl was bathing, and a boy filling his pot, while another lad was tentatively stabbing the mud of the stream bed with a stake in search of submerged tortoises, saying, each time he struck, "*Tak gapang theyanay. Tuk gapang theyanay*" (Let there be a *tak*, O Lord. Let there be a *tuk*, O Lord). Seated on a patch of sand by a clump of tall grass was a shaggy-haired dwarf as black as ebony, whom I had at first mistaken for a bear, but immediately recognised as my old Vedda friend Naga Karual or Kauwa. There was, however, no joy of greeting in his eye—merely a sad, wistful look.

"What Kauwa, don't you know me?" I asked.

"Yes, I know you," he said gravely without getting up.

"What ails you, Kauwa?" I enquired. "We are friends, aren't we? Don't you remember Divulana and the journeys we made together?"

"I remember that," said he, "but it is different now. I cannot walk, my spine is broken. I lay helpless for months; but now I can hobble a little with the help of this stick."

"How did it happen? Where are your two sons?"

"They are both dead."

"What, those strong young fellows I knew?"

"Yes, and I might be dead too for all the use I am," and sorrow clouded his wild face.

"How did you come to be like this?" I asked.

"I fell from a tree. Like a jak I fell; and where I fell there I lay. No more walking for me after that."

"How came you to fall, who climb so well?"

"I went up a tree with my gun after a monkey, steadied myself and fired; my foot slipped and I fell."

"And the monkey?"

"He escaped."

He staggered up on his stick and poised himself on paretic limbs.

"What's the use of me now?" he mumbled.

"I am no good to any one. Others have to find me food; and my two sons are gone. There is nothing left for me but to die." Perhaps he was right, for what use was man or beast in such a land without serviceable limbs.

By now the Vedda boy who had been prodding the stream bed, had secured a tortoise. He made a fire and on it he placed the live creature, breast uppermost. As the fire burnt it, the poor thing thrust out its head and waggled its legs. All the good that brought it was a merciful blow with a fire-brand on the head, accompanied by a gibe. When half baked, the tortoise was slit laterally and the shell was torn off. The flesh was cut up, roasted again, and eaten with relish by the Veddass.

I camped there for the night, but not before I reconnoitered the Vedda chena. Brushing through the rank growth, I came on a small clearing in which was a puny dead-fall (*habbaka*), such as a child might make.

"What's this?" I asked the boy who accompanied me.

"Kauwa's doing," said he with a patronizing smile.

"What does he catch?"

"Quails, for him to eat." The crippled Vedda was still to be reckoned with.

Not far away was a hut which I instantly recognised as Kauwa's. No one else would favour a crazy thing like that. It was the exact duplicate of his former shelter. But here was greater comfort; friendly hands had plastered the trestle with mud, covered it with a mat, and provided a little ladder up which the cripple might climb.

Moonlight flooded my camp. Innumerable frogs cheeped in the grasses and flopped about the sand, often landing on my bed curtain. A tall tree, festooned with mycania, stood out against the moon be-diamonded with fireflies that rivalled the stars.

The following morning I visited a larger chena at Pahur. Suthu Banda, the best Vedda there, had gone to the festival at Mandur, but I met his brother and a few others, all of whom were more Sinhalese than Vedda. Seated on a rice pounder in the chena, amidst plantains and manioc, I conversed with them, while a caged parrot chattered amiably, and a pet mongoose ran in and out amongst us.

The presence of a ridiculously young married couple turned our talk to child marriage. Their defence was simple and summary—"When the liking comes, what is to be done?"

Of charms against wild animals they had plenty. They scared away a herd of elephants with—"Rajakali, rajamatakali, kulumatakali, odu amma odu." A single elephant, being a graver proposi-

tion, called for a longer harangue.—“*Kulate atange girima-ange hathi-rajayanang. Ilake atang kiti-kuchi rajayanang. Anake sahatunge vadi eesthryanayang balete Buddhu bahu theva thanang.*”

The bear's feelings are not spared, for he is reminded that he is fashioned of the dirt that fell from Buddha's body, and the incantation ends with a contemptuous ejection of saliva.—“*Thahasath Buddhunge kunugodang uppana, neelathe neelathe neelwaliya, bada upang thoo the puthathe chee.*” The bear, when he hears this is said to flee howling as if shot.

The potency of all these spells lies, of course, in their terrifying resonance when boldly delivered, and not in any magic quality they possess. Very often, however, the charmer is mauled with the words still in his mouth.

Many of the Veddas of Pahur come from Galmede. Their chenas contain plantains and yams, but not kurrukhan, for the soil is too sandy. Amidst their crops were teak plants which they tended for a consideration from Government, and gave over after four years. At the entrance to the chena was the hut of a Moor, stocked with rice, betel, tobacco, and cloth, which he bartered for the produce of the chena on which he had a lien.

Traversing glady jungles, patchily fired, we came to a grove of teak sadly burnt out. Our cart creaked and bumped against the roots of the jungle path; lurched, boggled, and swayed, battering us against its sides; dipped sheer into dry aars, and slanted on escarpments threatening to overturn.

There was but one Vedda in Kachkadiya, a man named Neela, but he was out fishing at Puluganawa tank when I arrived; so I consoled myself with the rambling talk of my voluble guide:

Mahasona the demon, he told me, sometimes comes in the form of a sambhur, and Koliapa another demon, in that of a light at night. The *kalawatha oganas* (moans) plaintively like a human being. The loris (*unuhapuluwa*) is so gentle in its movements that it can climb the back of a roosting cock or peafowl without awakening it and bite off its neck. And should a twig snap as it ascends to the peacock's high perch, it carries it all the way down, deposits it on the ground, and steals up stealthily again.

Uthur, reputedly a Vedda village, had a population that was Tamil to all appearance. A most inhospitable lot they proved, taking no notice of me whatever. When I questioned them, I got casual grudging replies. Even their dogs kept yelping, “Get away! Get away!” A woman, reclining with her child on a verandah, would not open her eyes for all the din of the yelping curs.

The village bordered a wide stretch of paddy, and seemed pretty prosperous. The houses of these Tamil Veddas were plentifully stacked with grain and straw, and stood in groves of coconuts, oranges, and limes; but never a fruit did they offer me, tired as I obviously was that scorching afternoon. Wild pork was spread out to dry in practically every compound; and this explained the presence of the hunting dogs with which the hamlet teemed.

To my surprise, just beyond Uthur I found a motorable road. Then I knew the reason for the indifference of my welcome there—I had expected jungle standards in a civilised village!

I was now on my way to the Vedda settlement of Seerangamadu. An unbridged channel from Pulaganawa tank, that fed fields a mile and a half beyond, cleft the high road. Crossing the water

I camped on the farther bank at dusk, and felt secure from civilisation. But I was mistaken. For just as I had made myself comfortable, and settled down to a contemplative pipe, a forest ranger dwelling close by crossed the stream and squatted on the sand beside me without so much as "By your leave." I asked him about the Veddas of Seerangamadu. He ridiculed the idea of my finding them there on those festival days. It was not long, however, before I discovered that he knew even less about those Veddas, living in the very forests in his charge, than I did who had not yet met them. Alas, that those with the opportunities should always be lacking the interest.

If I was inquisitive about Veddas, that ranger was curious with regard to every item of my equipment, and did not dissemble it. Failing to choke him off with monosyllabic replies to his prying questions, I ignored him altogether and took up a book. That had the desired affect. He was a jarring note, and when he had gone the tenderness of the evening came to me like balm. The last of the wayfarers had passed. The swift stream lapped the bank musically. Jackals howled in the distance. The sky scintillated; and peace wrapped everything. It was difficult to imagine that I was on an open highway where the sun beat mercilessly down by day.

I awoke in the morning to find myself in the midst of a stream of pedestrians. The jungle was emptying its folk towards the scene of the Mandur festival. Questioning the wayfarers, I was glad to learn that, though most of the Seerangamadu Veddas had left, two or three families still remained behind. I was sorry, however, to learn that Madana, their patriarch, had been buried two days before. It is always thus, the best Veddas



A Vedda family group of Seerangamadu (p. 113).



"He staggered up on paretic limbs" (p. 108).

have either died or gone on a journey when you get to them.

I only found two Vedda families in the Seerangamadu chenas; but they were good ones—squalid, unkempt, and unsophisticated—though they lived close to a Sinhalese settlement.

They visited me in camp. When I focussed my camera on them they promptly attempted to clothe themselves in borrowed garments.

“Oh no, I want you as you are,” said I. Just then a Sinhalese youth escorting two damsels, all gaily tricked out for Mandur, paused to watch. His facetious comments on the scantily clothed group posing for their pictures caused a young Vedda to adjust abashedly his loin cloth.

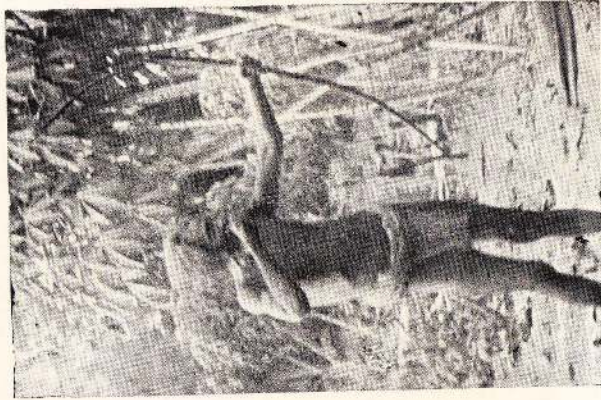
“Take that off too,” the youth advised; “the picture will then come out better.” The maidens giggled, and everyone laughed.

I spent the evening in the Vedda chena talking to Sellen Banda (a combination of Sinhalese and Tamil names) and his wife Karrupi. I learnt that not long ago the Veddads of Seerangamadu and Kovil Vannami—within a couple of miles of each other—were about fifty strong. Now only four small families remained. Madana, just dead, had been their chief. When he shot a monkey, the arrow would pierce it through and through, and the animal fall dead at his feet. But those left were unskilful with the bow and arrow, though they were fairly adept with the pellet bow, which they used chiefly to scare away parrots and doves from their maize and kurrukhan. Each family had four or five dogs for hunting sambhur and pig. They loved pork, and often ate it mixed with honey.

These poor Veddads had barely a rag to their bodies, in marked contrast to the prosperous looking Sinhalese and Tamils in the adjoining chenas. Their very destitution and fecklessness in a



A Vedda family of Meeangolla  
(p. 120).



Seerangamadu Vedda with pellet-bow  
(p. 113).

semi-civilised setting proclaimed them Vedda. In eternal debt to itinerant Moors who provided them with cloth, tobacco, etc., they could not call their produce their own. One had but to see the fair crops they grew and contrast them with their abjectness to realise the extent to which they were exploited.

There was one exception, however, to that fever-stricken, ulcerated, emaciated *menage*; and that was a little girl of two, plump, joyous, and squint-eyed. She was never quiet; now she would suck at her mother's skinny breasts, now munch a boiled manioc, anon she would be chasing an insect or peeping coquettishly at me round a corner. She was the only thing of spirit there.

The night at Seerangamadu was disturbed. Elephants broke the jungles on all sides of us; and incessant *hoos* from watch-huts punctuated the stillness of night.

And now I must tell of an interesting little chap I met. I had come to Seerangamadu with a Sinhalese letter of introduction to the headman, who happened to be away. No one there could read the note. Eventually they hit upon this brat of eight, the headman's son, as the only one likely to make anything of it.

He proved equal to the occasion. Seating himself on the ground with a consequential air, and cocking his head one way or another, he gave the letter what interpretation his wits suggested. This gave him status in camp and he hung about, a shrewdly observant spectator, chipping in with sage remarks whenever an opening offered. His ingenuous *savoir faire* was in marked contrast to the *gaucherie* of the others. We called him *gamarala*, for he advised like a sage, took the stuttering words out of his elders' mouths, and finished gracefully what they found difficulty in

expressing, with a naive quaintness and charm beyond belief in one so young. He was a real little man.

I asked him if he smoked. He answered that he loved cigarettes, though of course he had never smoked one before. When given one he puffed it like a connoisseur taking his cue from me, while the others chewed theirs to pieces.

I took him out shooting pigeons that evening, and let him talk of birds and beasts. "See that tree?" he said. "An *ulama* sometimes roosts there. Oh, he's a good one that. We saw him once against the moon on that branch. He dances when he cries, spreading out his wings like this, and hopping on the branch—*bukkun, bukkun, bukkun, kova-a-a. Cha*, if we see him now, we'll do a nice thing to him, won't we?"

But not meeting this arch enemy of his, and not having seen enough of shooting to his taste, he tried to induce me to kill even the rare little birds, in whose unusual melodies I showed interest.

"Shoot him," he would say. "Then you will better be able to see what sort of bird it is."

After dinner that night, he swaggered into camp with his cloth hitched up above his knee, and a gun on his shoulder.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Going after pig," said he.

"What, by yourself?"

"Why not?"—and he melted into the shadows.

As I was leaving Seerangamadu the next morning, the little hunter came along.

"I am going with you," he declared.

"Good," said I, and we took the path.

"Last night a fine thing happened" he said vivaciously. "I had hardly put aside my gun and lain down to sleep, when I heard a woman's cry for help. Hastily I went out and inquired what



the matter was. 'An elephant is in the chena,' said she. I seized my gun and rushed out."

"Did you?" I asked, "What did you intend doing?"

"Shooting him," said he, in a matter of fact way. Then more excitedly: "My mother! I had barely turned the bend of the path when there he was, as big as a house."

"What did you do?"

"What else but turn and run home as fast as I could? Then we all hooed, and he must have gone away."

"Didn't you go out to make sure he had?"

"Not I."

As we were passing his home, his mother who was pounding paddy, called out to know where he was going.

"With the gentleman to Addichikodal," he replied.

"And how do you propose coming back the seven miles?" she inquired.

"I'll come," said he airily.

"All right," the woman yelled, as the distance between us rapidly increased; "you are playing fine games, just because your father isn't here. You take the gun he never allows you to touch. You come and go when and where you like. You just wait till he returns and I tell him."

"You better go back," said I to the boy.

"She doesn't know what she is talking about," said he, without slackening his pace. "If my father were here would he not have gone with the gentleman?"

The crowing of a domestic cock now reached us from the jungle.

"Hear that?" said the boy. "He's our *gonga* that went wild. He doesn't come home now. The wild ones that used to comb the litter at the

edge of our garden called him away. Let's go and shoot him." We did not.

"Ah," he said, in gleeful anticipation, "I'll show you hundreds of fowls and pigeons and pigs today. We'll have fine shooting I tell you."

But at the end of our journey, all we had seen were hornbills, hawks, and minas; and when I asked the boy how it was he had not shown us what he promised, his answer came pat, "We started just a little too late." That was a dandy boy.

The Veddas of Addichikodal were, like all the others in these parts, intermixed with the Tamils beyond recognition.

We attained Unnichchai and the high road by way of Kachikody. And then I set out to visit the last little group of Veddas in the Island I had yet to see—those about Baron's Cap. I had been told they were the most primitive in the Eastern Province.

I had attempted to reach them previously through Omuna, and failed. Now I proposed to approach them from Chittandi, north of Batticoloa.

A broad lagoon cuts off Chittandi from the inland forests. This, and the fact that the scattered inhabitants are Sivaite Tamils, accounts for the exceptional tameness of wild life in these parts. Doves, wood-peckers, cormorants, and kingfishers keep their perches as you pass closely by; beside the water's edge the eel-like neck of the snake bird, often with a gleaming fish in its bill, bobs in and out of the brine. Even the jackals only just give you road way.

Six lugubrious miles in the burning heat brought us to Padukoda where, in the gloomy granary of a Tamil, we refreshed ourselves with young coconuts and oranges; but never a fowl or egg could we obtain.

Three miles beyond was Vethilpotumadu, also Tamil. Here I found a man who could speak Sinhalese. When that happens in a Tamil community in Vedda precincts, you may take it he is Vedda. And I was not mistaken. For Manikan Marian, as he was euphoniously named, had a powerful bow and arrows, could sing Vedda songs, and dance with bell-studded deerskin greaves buckled to his shins. He had left his home at Galela when a beardless boy, and lived among the Tamils ever since. He had not spoken Sinhalese for years, and when he heard me speak it, his heart went out to me.

He complained bitterly that he, a Vedda, was denied a chena. But I told him that it was a penalty correctly attached to his domestication with people quite capable of cultivating paddy.

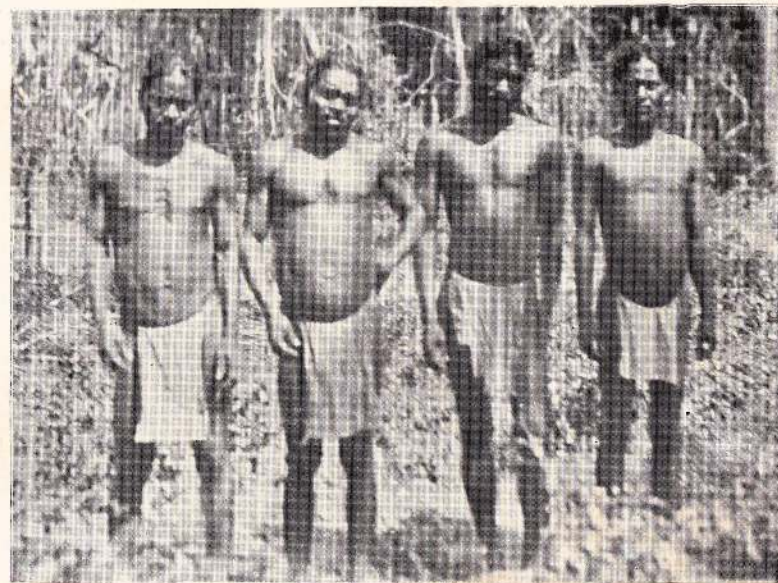
With Marian for guide and a few carriers, I left the following morning for Meeangola, twelve miles away. The path lay by that isolated hill, Baron's Cap. As we passed it, Marian showed me the tall straight tree which one must climb to attain an otherwise inaccessible ledge that led to the summit. He also described a cave there in which he had lived with his people, and a waterhole to which bears and leopards repaired in numbers in times of drought. In his young days a she-elephant and its cub took to visiting that water hole so frequently that she became a nuisance to the Veddas occupying the cave; so one night Marian's father shot an arrow into her sole, thus crippling her and causing her to die of starvation.

Traversing abandoned chenas we came at noon to the dry bed of a tributary of the Maduru Oya. It was pocked with holes dug for water by the Meeangola Veddas who lived about a mile away.

Their chena was about the most ramshackle I have ever seen. There was not an eatable



Baron's Cap (p. 118).



Veddas of Meeangola (p. 120).



“Waiting for death” (p. 119).

thing in it. The huts were all falling to pieces, and the people seemed destitute to the point of starvation.

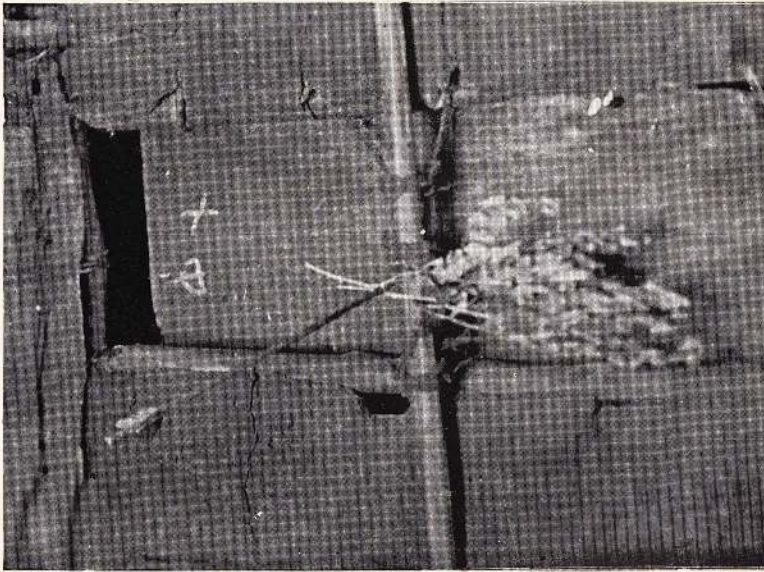
Their chief, Marian's cousin, was away; He had left a few days previously with his family for the Maduru Oya in search of food which the exhausted chena denied them.

“There you are,” exclaimed the domesticated Marian. “Did I not tell you? That's just like him—a real wild fellow who can never stay in one place. A pity he isn't here.”

However, there was his hut of bark and wattle. He had bolted the door and driven into it an arrow on which was placed a dry V-shaped sprig. Above this was chalked in wood-ash an arrow mark (*dhunu hena*) and a cross. Thus the Vedda protected his property in his absence. None of the Veddas would approach the hut; but I peered through its numerous crevices to find little enough there to tempt a thief—a bow, a few arrows, and some broken earthen vessels.

As for the other huts, they outdid each other in decrepitude. There was one that was remarkable even in this setting; it was the very slenderest of shelters, merely a few leaves on four slender sticks, standing by itself amidst rank growth. Sitting outside it, in a patch of sunshine for warmth, was the most sorrowful human creature I have ever seen—an emaciated blind old woman, alone in the world, dependent for existence on the grudging and meagre charity of a callous community with little enough for themselves. She was just waiting for death that came so tardily. Hearing us speak, she turned on us her great lustreless eyes, in wonder that anyone should commiserate her. I moved sadly away from that face that mirrored the woes of humanity.

Although the Veddas of Meeangola, taken as



Vedda chief's bolted door, with arrow and sprig to protect his belongings during his absence (p. 119).

a whole, were the most destitute and agriculturally hopeless a set as I have ever encountered, there were among them no less than about five men whose physique might have been a credit in any setting; and one short, bull-necked, deep-chested fellow was especially remarkable. These were the fittest that survived out of scores that perished. But the fact that such specimens were here, was eloquent testimony to the nutritive qualities of their crude food—manioc gruel, kurrukhan cakes, and flesh. They ate hardly any rice at all, and, as a rule, but one full meal a day.

They were very anxious I should meet their chief, and though the task of ferreting him out in the jungle seemed hopeless, the thick-set Vedda undertook the mission, provided I stayed over night, which I did.

I was about to turn into bed about twelve when he came. A stout blustering fellow he was, with a happy gift of talk, full of the sorrows of his people. And when I heard him, I understood the anxiety of his fellows that I should meet so eloquent an advocate of their cause.

"Look at me," said he, warming to his topic. "What sort of a life is this, when I have to leave my home and go into the jungle in search of food? If I did not do it we would starve. You saw our chena. What is there in it that one can eat? And now we have to wait a year before we are allowed to clear another piece of land! What are we to do in the meantime?"

"Why do you not get out of this, and go where conditions are better?" I asked.

"I would sooner die than do that," was his reply. "This is my home; why should I forsake it? I would rather starve here than die in plenty elsewhere. That is in the blood; we cannot go against it. If Government would only be less

niggardly in granting us land for chenas where forests are so abundant, life would be more tolerable. Why are we not allowed to get a living out of jungles where we and our ancestors have always been?"

And so I left them with promises to do what I could. Empty assurances I knew; but cheerful enough for them to hear.

My last night I spent at Vethilpotumadu—Marian's village. I was talking to him after dinner, and we spoke of many things. Then conversation languished, and we were each occupied with our own thoughts. His glances at me from time to time showed which way his reflections tended. Unable to restrain his curiosity any longer, he asked,

"What brings you into the jungle?"

"I come," I said, "because I like to get away from the unrest of towns into the quiet of the forest."

A pause.

"Do you come here on Government work as the others do?"

"I do not."

"You don't come for shooting. I can see that," he ruminated. "Do you get paid for travelling here?"

"No."

"Then why do you come? . . . Have you a wife?"

"Yes."

"Children?"

"One."

He knit his brows and thought awhile.

"Who looks after them and gives them food when you are away?"

"I have provided for that."

"You should not come into a wilderness like

this unless you have to," he admonished. "Life is uncertain. How do you know what is happening to those you love while you are here? How do they know what is happening to you? It is not good to forsake them. *We* don't leave our wives and children like that."

All this, mark you, oh superior denizens of the towns, from a despised Vedda!

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,  
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,  
The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

## KAIRA AND HUDI

### A VEDDA TALE

**W**ITHIN a forest cave, amidst the hills of Galmede in the arid heart of Ceylon, a wild man lay dying. Except for a frayed sambhur skin and a few fresh leaves which underlay him, the bare stone was his bed. His bow and arrows stood against the rock wall. Beside him smoked a slow fire, and over it was a light trestle for drying flesh; a few crude and broken earthen vessels lay about.



The cave was dark and closely beset by great forest trees and massive rambling lianas. In the

crevices of the rock lurked iguanas, lizards and snakes; a musty, acrid odour betrayed the roosts of bats in the more spacious recesses. A rocky streamlet babbled hard by. Such was the *Alu Galge* or Ash Cave, as the Veddas called it.

The man was old, perhaps some sixty-five years—which is reckoned a good age in these insalubrious lands. He was nude as an ape, except for a meagre covering of beaten bark that hung negligently about his loins attached to a bast waist-cord. Under the lax, wrinkled skin, the contours of shrunken muscle showed that in his day he had been a man of fine proportions inured to hardship; and his rugged face betokened, even in its frailty, a dignity of feature amazing in one so savage. He moved uneasily on his hard bed attempting to turn over, but fell back each time he did so with a feeble moan. At last, with a great and slow effort he succeeded. Opening his weary eyes, he looked uneasily out of the cave towards the jungle, and called huskily some unintelligible name. In a moment a girl was beside him—a squalid, unkempt, little creature, of seventeen, clad as meagrely as he, lustrous-eyed and wildly graceful.

“What is it, father?” she asked, bending over him solicitously. Receiving no answer she turned and stirred the fire. Then, reaching out for an earthen cup, she held the iguana broth it contained to the old man’s lips, tenderly supporting his head on her thigh. He sipped and seemed to revive.

“Has Kaira come?” he asked. The girl shook her head.

“He has been gone a long while,” he said labouredly. “If he does not come soon I shall not see him.”

“*Ana*, no father; he will come now,” she said

reassuringly, “and bring you the wanderoo brain you like so much, and the herbs from the far hill, and you will soon be well.”

The shadow of a smile passed over his face as he closed his glazing eyes. The girl stroked his head tenderly, and then sat at the mouth of the cave watching him.

Presently she rose, and going some way into the jungle, shouted a long “hoo,” and listened intently. She had done this a third time, when, from the far distance, came a response so faint that it might have eluded less anxious ears.

The girl ran back to her father.

“He is coming, father,” she said. “He will soon be here.”

“That is good,” mumbled the old man.

The better part of an hour must have elapsed before the youth, a lithe, sinewy fellow, arrived. Slung on one shoulder was a grey ape, on the other a small axe. At either end of his unstrung bow he carried a bunch of herbs and a bundle of honey enclosed in leaves. A pied dog that followed at his heels, nosed the sick man affectionately and lay with its tongue lolling out.

Casting a quick questioning glance at the girl, the youth put down his burden, and, kneeling by the old man, whispered solicitously, “father.”

“Son, have you come?” said the stricken one feebly. “It is good. I did not think to see you again.”

“I have brought the herbs, father—it was a long quest—and the honey and the ape, and Hudi is already preparing them for you.”

“Not I, but my spirit, shall taste what you have brought.”

“Don’t say that, father,” said the girl rushing to his side.

“Listen you two,” the old Vedda muttered;

"even now I die. You two are all that are left of our *waruge* (clan). Son, you take my bow and arrows. Leave me here in the cave of our fathers and begone with tomorrow's dawn. Seek the Unapane people beyond the Bandaradua hill. . . ." His voice sank to incoherence and ceased for good and all.

The girl fell to sobbing with her hands to her dishevelled head; the dog sniffed the still form and set up a mournful howl. Kaira sat outside the cave tearless, pensive, tired.

It was now darkening rapidly, as it does in the forests even when the sun is still well above the horizon. Kaira soon regained his composure, if indeed he might be said to have lost it at all, stripping though he was; the Vedda is of all things a fatalist.

He went into the forest and returned with sprigs and brambles with which he covered the dead man. Then, with the help of the girl, he picked up their few belongings, including the old man's weapons, and casting timorous looks behind, they were soon lost in the shadows of the jungle; for Veddas have a fear of their dead; when a man dies they believe that the *hetha* or spirit killed him and that the *hetha* of the deceased haunts the place of death for years. Thus lay abandoned the last Vedda of his clan to die on his ancestral land, soon to be the food of the jackal and the mongoose.

The Vedda youth and maid, followed by their dog, travelled fast till they came to a cave a mile away, where they startled a lairing sambhur with their shouts of "cho-ho-ho," without which no Vedda approaches a neglected rock shelter, for fear of encountering the sloth bears with which the enforested rocks abound.

The girl, with the forethought of her sex, had

brought a brand, and soon they cooked themselves a meal of roast ape. They spent the night in the cave.

With the first piping of birds at dawn Kaira woke Hudi.

"Let us go now," he said.

"Where are we to go," asked Hudi, blinking away the sleep that clung to her eyelids. "We have nowhere to go, only you and I are left."

"It is no use our staying here any longer; let us go beyond the mountains and seek another people, even as our father bade us."

And so, without more ado, they trusted themselves to the fortunes of the forest.

Now these two, 'brother' and 'sister' though they called each other, and 'father' the old man they had left dead, were in reality not brother and sister at all, but the children of two brothers. Yet, by Vedda law, such kinship was the same as that of brother and sister, and precluded wedlock under pain of death.

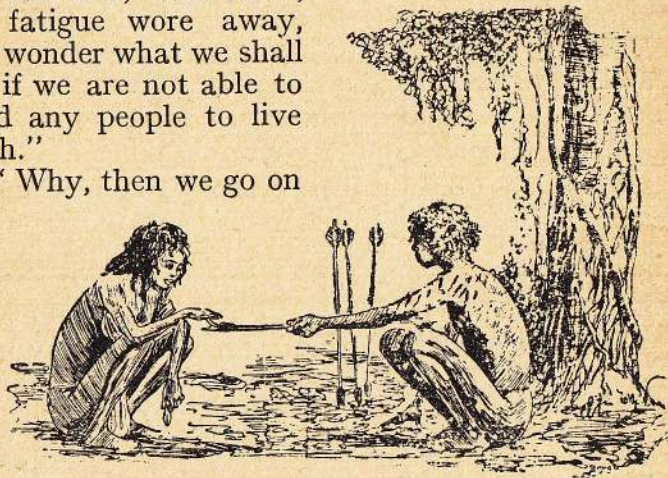
They travelled three days. Waking at dawn, they would walk till their legs ached, which would be near about mid-day, when they would sit to some meal they had come by. Skilled in the craft of the jungle, they had but little difficulty in obtaining food sufficient for their simple needs. They ate whatever they chanced on. Now it would be the acrid, pulpy berries of the *kong* tree which Kaira would climb; now they would squat by the root of some slender vine and dig with arrow-blade or stake for wild yams. Always they would be alert for the hum of a bee or rustle in the undergrowth, which might lead them to a cache of honey in the hollow of a tree, or to a crouching iguana or chevrotan which Kaira would kill with the help of his dog, quarter with the sharp edge of his arrow blade, and roast over a

fire made by the friction of dry sticks.

Late on the afternoon of the fourth day they halted in a small glade by a stream, near the Bandaradua rock. Kaira had laid his bow aside and stuck the heads of his arrows into the ground, as is the Vedda way. Unfastening a squirrel-skin pouch he carried at his waist, he withdrew from it some fragments of *bolvilla* bark and *davata* which he began to chew, giving a share to Hudi. Then, unfolding a small leaf containing lime made from the burnt shell of a land snail, he added some to his quid, and some he placed on the blade of an arrow he pulled out of the ground, and handed across to Hudi. She wiped the lime off the blade with her finger and ate it. And thus they sat together chewing in silence.

"Brother," said Hudi, as fatigue wore away, "I wonder what we shall do if we are not able to find any people to live with."

"Why, then we go on



until we find them," said Kaira.

"And if we do not find them even then?"

"We shall meet them right enough, never fear. Our tribe was not the only one in these jungles. I know we are close to folk even now, for today I saw a snapped twig."

"As for me, I do not care whether we come upon people or not," said the girl.

"Don't talk madness, Hudi."

She lay supine on the grass, graceful as a fawn, with her head pillowed on her palms. A pair of scimitar babblers, picking their food on adjoining trees, made the glade ring with their rippling notes. Their song became lower, richer, and more passionate, as the birds approached each other and met. Hudi, watching them, pointed them to Kaira saying, "Brother, do you see that?"

"See what?" he asked indifferently.

"Those birds,"

"I do: what then?"

"I am thinking how happy they are," she said.

"And are we not happy, sister?" he asked.

"Perhaps you are hungry or tired?"

"I am not that," she said with a sigh. "But I am not as happy as those birds."

She rolled closer to him, and lay prone; supporting her chin on one hand, she teased a grass flower with the other.

"Brother," she said after a while.

"Yes?"

"I know our people have laws regarding whom we should marry and whom not; but do you think it matters very much if we wed those of our choosing, whoever they be?"

"Of course it does. Our fathers were wise, and they knew best. Their spirits watch and guard us."

"If I loved a man I should follow him, whoever he might be."

"There'd be no harm in that—provided he was not a very close relation."

"Even then I would not mind."

"Don't talk such nonsense, girl; it is very wrong," chided Kaira, looking curiously at Hudi;



this was the first time she had discussed matters of the heart with him.

For a long while Hudi slyly contemplated her companion, as he sat gazing at the brook that rippled gently over the stones. Then rising, she went into the jungle. She came back a half hour later twisting a strip of shredded bark, and with a cluster of red ixora adorning her frowzy head. Kaira dozed on the bank. She walked softly up to him and touched his body lightly with the end of the twist; his muscles danced, and he scratched the place, taking it for a fly. She teased him thus until he discovered her, and then frolicked away giggling.

Kaira sat up and looked seriously at the girl. There was that in her eye he had not seen before. He could not understand her strange behaviour.

"Let us go now," said he impatiently, picking up his bow and arrows. "It is time we started."

"Not yet, Kaira," coaxed Hudi "Wait a while longer. I am tired. Let us not go farther today. The sun is low, and this is a pleasant place to rest."

"As you like," said he.

Suddenly the roar of a leopard broke the jungle stillness, followed immediately by the startled and angry *ah-he-hik* of a leader ape.

Hudi looked round timorously.

"Will he come here?" she asked.

"Don't be afraid of him," said Kaira. "Our fires will scare him away."

Hudi resumed her twisting.

"What is that you are doing?" asked Kaira.

"Don't you see? It is a *neenthe* waist-string I am making."

"Wait till you find a husband first," he taunted—for it is the custom for a Vedda girl to tie a string she has made round the waist of the man she weds.

"Yes, sister," continued Kaira; "that was why our father wished us to find another people—that you may have a husband."

"And you a wife, I suppose," she coyly rejoined.

Placing a knot at the end of the cord she had now completed, she held it up critically to her gaze. Then, going to Kaira, she said, "Stand up, will you. I wish to see if this string is long enough."

He did as he was bid. She passed the cord round his waist, and with trembling fingers had knotted it in a trice. She took a pace backwards; clasped her hands, looked ardently at him a moment, and then, losing all restraint, embraced him, saying, "Now you see who my husband is."

Kaira leapt aside with a frightened cry and thrust the girl violently from him, as the full meaning of her behaviour flashed on his tardy mind. Before he knew what he was doing, he had seized his bow, fitted an arrow to it, and shot the girl through the breast as she lay stunned and bruised by the violence of her fall. She doubled up with a groan, clutching the arrow.

"Kaira, why did you do this to me," she gasped, looking at him with frightened eyes. Her body stiffened, she shuddered a time or two, coughed up some frothy blood, and then lay still.

The dog looked up at Kaira, sniffed the girl, and whimpered. Green pigeons whistled plaintively on the tree-tops preparatory to roosting; a cuckoo kept up his incessant '*botua-kappan*' with which he had made the woods echo all day; Kaira stood as one in a trance contemplating his work.

The suddenness with which events had moved left him stupefied. At first he barely realised what he had done. Suddenly terror seized him, and he rushed from the scene, as if a fiend were

at his heels. For, to his simple mind, now that he was alone, the jungle was peopled with spirits, and he was afraid. His nerves were on edge; he started at the slightest sound or shadow.

His flight was purposeless and headlong. Soon darkness had overtaken him; and before he knew it, he found himself amidst a herd of elephants that were feeding scattered about the forest glooms, betraying themselves only now and then by the crack of a branch. He stumbled against a calf he had not seen. The creature raised a frightened squeal, and Kaira was only just able to clamber up a tree in time to save himself from the infuriated mother. There he stayed till morning.

The presence around him of elephants, tangible terrestrial things, gave him some sense of security. When the herd moved off, the stars had already begun to pale with the approaching dawn.

He descended the tree and continued his journey in a more chastened mood. Daylight restored his mental balance in a measure; but he was still somewhat bemused. Gradually reason replaced fear, as he moved with slow, disconsolate steps, trying to muster his wits. The more he thought of the previous evening's occurrences, the more mystified he became. How had it happened that Hudi, always so modest and companionable, had changed so suddenly into a passionate creature? this was a problem that harassed him sorely. Affectionate she had always been; perhaps more so than was usual between the males and females of a Vedda household; but that was because they had almost always been each other's sole play-mates. What had made her act so shamefully? Could some evil spirit have possessed her? Had some malefic *Yakkini* (she-demon) attempted to woo him in the form of his sister? Such things

had occurred in the forests, as he had heard from his elders. Did not demons come as phantom stags, and lead hunters astray to their undoing? Did they not appear in the form of bears with fearful, bloodied mouths agape, and tear out the eyes of his people? Did the Veddas not prohibit their women from adorning themselves with the scented wild jasmine, for fear of arousing the lust of demons?

Thus he arrived, by cool thought, at the idea at the back of his mind which inspired his impulsive act. It was the sudden subconscious suspicion of demoniac guile that had nerved his arm to strike so truly. And even now he was not sure that he had not acted rightly. But oh, it was so lonely without Hudi; and how she had looked at him when he struck her down!

Gradually he slackened his listless walk, and sat down wearily, still troubled by his imaginings. His dog, more practical than he, busied itself on the scent of a hare.

So absorbed was he with his reflections, that he failed to hear certain faint noises in the distance. Nor did he observe the cocked ears and alert eyes of a strange dog that peered at him for a moment and then disappeared.

In a little while the animal returned accompanied by a stealthy, crouching human figure, that stole noiselessly from trunk to trunk and came to a stop by an ebony tree a few paces behind him. The Vedda, for so the new-comer was, surveyed Kaira intently for a couple of minutes; and then, as if satisfied by his scrutiny, he drew his bow in deadly aim at the back of his unsuspecting victim.

At that moment, Kaira, as if prompted by the imminence of danger, swung round abruptly, not a second too soon; even as he did so the bow

twanged, and the arrow hissed by his ear and quivered in a projecting root near by.

Kaira leapt to his feet and took cover; but he had not the time to seize his weapons.

"Why do you want to kill me?" he called to his assailant who was already manoeuvring for another shot. "What harm have I done you?"

"You are not of our people. What business have you in our *pangua*\*? Did you not see the *dhuna-hena*† on the *bakinni* tree by the stream you crossed. I will have your liver,‡ you son of a dog!"

"Hear what I have to say first," replied Kaira, peering from the shelter of his tree.

"Words are no use to me," said his antagonist advancing; he knew he had the lad at his mercy.

"By the sun, I swear," pleaded Kaira, "I came here with no wicked intent. I am a Vedda of the Morana *waruge* from Galmede way. I have been travelling these four days to get here."

"Those are lies. What did you come for?"

"Our people are dead. My sister and I only were left; and we had nowhere to go. So, at our dying father's wish, we came seeking a people to live with."

"Hu, you came with your sister, did you? Then where is she now?"

Kaira was silent. But the other was quick to notice the shadow that crossed his brow. Besides, now that he had heard the artless lad, his curiosity was aroused.

"Come away from there and let us talk," he said, lowering his bow.

"Lay your weapons aside first," said the

\* Division of forest.

† Bow-mark cut on the bark of a tree to demarcate boundary.

‡ The Veddas used to carry in their betel pouches a dried fragment of the liver of an enemy they slew, and would chew it to heighten their anger.

cautious Kaira.

The other readily acquiesced, for he, a gnarled old warrior, saw that he had but a boy to deal with. Sitting on their haunches a few feet apart, and keenly watchful of each other, they held converse.

Kaira told the tale truly of the sad fate of his dwindling clan, that had fallen a prey to dysentery and fever and scarcity of food—a tale only too common in those fierce lands; and of the death of their father and the events that followed; but when he came to the point where he had last been with his sister, he broke off abruptly saying: "For the rest, well I am here."

"But where is your sister, man?" asked the stranger.

"What's the use of that?" said Kaira. "She is lost. Take me to your people or let me go elsewhere.... Only I don't know where to go," he added pensively.

"I shall take you to our clan right enough, do not fear. But why, having said so much, do you not tell me all? What is easier than for me to find your sister? On your own statement you parted from her but yesterday; and I have only to trace your foot-prints back."

Kaira looked sadly away.

"I mean you no harm, boy. Why hide this thing from me?" persuaded the other. "I have a son like you. My grandmother came from the land of your people. I can see some sorrow has befallen you. Your sister was slain by a beast perhaps, or died of fatigue?"

Kaira continued to remain silent. He did not care to share his sister's shame with a stranger.

"Take my word. On my father and mother I swear," said the older man, "that if you confide in me no one else shall know what has happened,

if you so wish it."

Kaira looked eagerly into the man's face, and read there that his confidence would not be misplaced. Moreover, he yearned to disburden his mind.

So, without more ado, he took up the story from where he had left it, and carried it through to the tragic end, omitting no detail.

The other listened intently, nodding his head at intervals; but no expression of commiseration or surprise escaped him. When the recital was done, he remained plunged in thought awhile. Then getting up, he said:

"Come boy, let us go and see this place where your sister lies."

"Of what use would that be?" objected the apprehensive Kaira. "It is all over now. Take me to your folk, for I have tasted no food since mid-day yesterday."

"That is easily remedied. I was digging *gonala* yams when my dog, Boriya, brought me to you. But afterwards we must go to where you left your sister. I am not without skill in jungle lore; I have known strange things happen in these forests. The ways of the *Yakkas* are past saying. Let us see if we can solve this mystery."

Having roasted and eaten some yams, they started off.

As they neared the scene of the tragedy they heard a soft crunching. Creeping up, they saw a leopard, that had been tearing the carcass, slink away snarling.

"Cha," was all the comment the old man made when he saw the mangled form of the girl with the broken arrow still buried in her breast. He glanced round the scene. Then calling to Kaira, who had kept aloof, he asked him to indicate the place where he had planted his arrows when they

first came to a halt. Bending down, he carefully scrutinised the spot; then picked up a severed stem and examined it closely, nodding his head wisely the while. He began to dig cautiously with an arrow blade. The deeper he went, the more careful he became, merely scratching and blowing the loose earth away. Now he skilfully worked round something lodged at the bottom of the shallow pit he had made, and in a little while he had out on his palm a small downy ovoid bulb. He showed it to Kaira, and indicated a small indent on its surface.

"What is this?" asked the bewildered boy. "Has it anything to do with what occurred?"

"Everything to do, if what I think proves right," said the other, placing the bulb carefully in his pouch. "*That mark was made by the point of the arrow on which you dabbed the lime your sister ate.* But more of that later. Come, give me a hand to bury the girl. It was no fault of hers, poor thing, that she behaved as she did."

They dug a shallow grave and interred what was left of Hudi, and heaped it over with thorns to keep the wild beasts away.

And now they tell of a rare herb in the jungles called *Thangai-kolai* or *Naga-marualla*—the "Sister-killer"—a most potent love charm. Its leaves are flecked with blood-red spots, that tell of the old-time tragedy.

## TRACKERS' TALES

GO into the jungle equipped with no language but your own, and you walk as one blind. Overcome the barrier of language, get into friendly converse with the simple folk, and they become the voices of the wilderness, interpreting for you its ways and its moods.

Five of us were seated in camp. My companion and I, in togs more cool than elegant, reclined on our chairs, lazily smoking our pipes; the Sinhalese trackers squatted around, chewing a pungent jungle leaf for lack of betel. The cook was busy with a fragment of deer, and the chauffeur, separated by miles from his car, kept him idly helpful company—for the reason, no doubt, that it was politic to keep well with the cook!

Tired out, we had reached camp after a long stalk that evening, shot a brace of green pigeons that greeted us with minstrelsy on arrival, and bathed in a covert pool where we startled a great kingfisher that winged away with a clamorous cackle. And now we were enjoying the great reward of the hunter—the evening rest in the far off place.

The shamas with which the woods were plentiful, having piped tirelessly all that April day, now sang sporadic notes. Two, from roosts apart, bespoke each other long, and then somnolently settled down for the night. The clarion call of the pitta spiked the silence. That halcyon of the pool we had routed, having regained his roost,

## TRACKERS' TALES

was spasmodically vocal. A few flies and mosquitoes buzzed about. Gekkoes "chicked" from the trees. A nesting owlet, that had been seated on its two white eggs all day, left its hole in the tree-trunk and, emitting a single note, fared forth. Daylight died, and the sky, still silvery in the west, dulled eastward into darkening grey. Hesperus that brings all things home shone wanly overhead. Nature was set for the drama of the sombre night.

This was the nightjar's hour. There he was, tuning his throttle with those first harsh notes, that soon would yield to a refrain as melodiously sad and resonant as the drip of water in a caverned dell. All night long you hear his *quck quck-kooroo*, now from this covert, now from that bare bough silhouetted against the moon. At dawn you hear him still, perhaps a trifle sadder and more tired.

We lay quiet a long while, drinking in the sounds and the silence, until evening had melted into night. Then we began to talk of jungle topics. A leopard's hungry challenge set us off.

"Are there many leopards here?" I opened.

"A great many," replied Ukkurala, a suave, gentle-voiced fellow of fifty, *vidane* (headman) of Nikewewa, by the lotus tank some miles away.

"Many years ago," he went on, "there were man-eating leopards along this path."

"When was that?"

"In the days when Indian Tamils bound for the estates, landed at Arippru, and taking this road to Anuradhapura, passed through Dambool and Matale to the tea country."

"How came the leopards to be man-eaters?"

"They got a taste for human flesh by feasting on the bodies of coolies who died on the way in hundreds, of cholera and small-pox. So dangerous did the leopards become, that, for a long time,

this road was abandoned as a cooly route."

"Are there no man-eaters now? Have any of you been attacked by a leopard recently?"

"The leopard does not attack unless you go after him when he is wounded, which is a fool-hardy thing to do. The other day I killed a leopard that had been prowling about our village seizing dogs."

"Did you shoot him over a carcase?"

"No, I got him with a trap-gun," Ukkurala was truthful enough to admit.

"I'll tell you something about the leopard," he resumed. "He begins life by catching iguanas, blood-suckers, and other small animals. As he grows, he stalks a hare, may be, or a young deer or small pig. In his vigorous maturity his prey is the deer and the sambhur; and a bold fellow may match his prowess against the fierce solitary boar (*thanium*); whilst two leopards may even try conclusions with a buffalo; the chances are then equal as to which will survive. As he gets older and his fleetness wanes, he goes down the scale of animals as once he came up; he keeps to the vicinity of villages, killing cattle, and, as age creeps on, even dogs and cats—the one I trapped the other day had not a single tooth in his head. The time comes at last, if he lives long enough, when he must inevitably starve, being too feeble to obtain the agile food that Nature has ordained for him—he cannot live on grass and leaves! Killer though he be, his end is sad, like that of all jungle creatures."

"Have any of you had adventures with wild beasts?" I asked.

"Nothing to speak of," said Ukkurala. "We jungle folk and the animals, from elephant to viper, are always meeting and avoiding each other. One day I was out at the water-holes with a gentleman.

He killed two bears, and wounded a third, which crawled into a thicket and lay there growling all night. At dawn we went after him. He no sooner saw us than he charged with fearful clamour. The gentleman's first shot was a clean miss. The bear was on us, his mouth most horribly agape, emitting devilish yells, when a second shot into his mouth rolled him over dead at our feet. The master was very pleased with me because I had not run away like the other trackers."

There was a pause, and he continued, "It is a dangerous thing to follow a wounded leopard, buffalo, or boar into close cover. They always attack. The leopard, of a colour with the scrub that shelters him, watches you come long before you see him. He roars, and, before you know whence the sound comes, is on you like a streak of lightning. The wounded boar and buffalo double on their tracks and await you on the blood trail, facing the way you must approach in search of them. The bear, whether wounded or not, attacks when he suddenly meets you. A female with cubs is especially dangerous."

"I know all that," said I; for had I not seen scores of jungle men bearing on their faces the horrible disfigurements of such encounters. I remembered a man disemboweled by a buffalo; one crushed to a pulp by an elephant; one ripped from ankle to groin by a boar; and one whose face was chewed and clawed to ribbons by a bear.

"A few months ago we captured two bear cubs," ventured the hitherto silent Andia, a slip of a fellow, the butt of our party's waggery. We named him *Kala meeche*, after a shama he had eaten earlier in the day, ridiculing it the while with the beautiful ditties it had made.

"How did you catch the cubs?" I asked, intrigued by the disparity between the man and

his exploit.

"Three of us were out in search of iguanas and honey, when a *waleheni* (she-bear) leapt at us out of a cave. We struck her with our *katties* and she returned to the cave. We then cut stakes, knocked them into the ground at the mouth of the cave, killed the mother, and took the cubs."

"As easy as that, was it? But how exactly was it done? Surely the she-bear had something to say."

"She tried to get at us right enough, but while two of us beat her in with a stick and an axe, the other fixed the stakes. Having barred the entrance, we dug a hole through the roof of the cave and prodded the howling beast with pointed poles till she died."

"What did you do with the cubs?"

"Sold them to a man at Anuradhapura, as we did two leopard cubs we once caught."

"Leopard cubs, eh? Tell us of that," said I, with growing respect for the little man.

"We saw the leopardess with her young in a hollow tree-trunk. She leapt away as we approached, and we took the cubs." Lucky chaps! Men have been killed for less.

"*Meecha* is no ordinary man," I bantered.

"He can do anything from eating a frail songster to taking the young of fierce animals from under their mothers' noses," twitted Ukkurala.

"He will eat anything, even a mud-tortoise," put in the demure, well-set Bandirala.

"*Cha*, him I will not eat," rejoined Andia.

"What animals would you eat?" I asked.

"Anything," said he, spiking with a thorn an *ul-massa* (large fly) that stung him, "except elephants, monkeys, tortoises, and crocodiles."

"You were the *hathaya*" (fellow), observed Bandirala, "who promised us a honey-comb today.

Where is it?"

"I shall get one tomorrow," replied the unabashed Andia.

"The snipe that is given today is better than the elephant that is promised for tomorrow," retorted Bandirala.

Nevertheless, the next day, the two of them disappeared into the jungle for an hour, and returned with combs of delicious honey.

"What is that great scar on your chest?" I asked Kapurala, the carter, a tall, sullen youth, who sat somewhat apart.

There was no reply, and Andia answered for him, "He stabbed himself."

"Why did he do it?"

"Because his father beat his mother. He got so ill that he nearly died. He lay three months in the Anuradhapura hospital with a festering wound."

"What made you do it?" I asked Kapurala.

He did not answer.

"Was it sorrow or anger?" I tried again.

"Sorrow," was the grudging reply—I felt a cad.

Talk languished, and wistful glances were cast towards the scene of the cook's activities, whence came savoury smells.

"If a young pig would only come this way," said Andia, smiting a stone with his axe-head, "*chis, chis*, I'd smash his skull like a wood-apple."

We smiled incredulously.

"I did it once," he averred reminiscently. "I was on my way to work in a chena, carrying an axe and mamoty, when I heard a rustling in the tall grass. Quietly I crept in, peeped, and saw a fat sow with a litter of young. Crawling stealthily I got close to where the low squeals and rustlings came from. Keeping my mamoty

handy, I lay low and imitated the sounds I heard—'chukus chukus'—and rustled the grass as the pigs did, and chortled and grunted like them. Soon two little heads peered through the grass, and I smashed them both like tender coconuts. We had fine fare that day, I tell you."

This speech was greeted with approving smiles and nods.

A low rumble of thunder now came from the distance.

"If we have a shower tonight, we shall have good sport tomorrow," said Ukkurala, the *vidane*.

"The deer will then stay out late in the glades."

"It doesn't look much like rain," I said.

"It must rain," he insisted in his easy drawl.

"How do you know?"

"Tomorrow it must rain," he repeated sagely.

"It is said in the book."

The thunder growled, but at greater distance.

"It will rain," mumbled the old man again—but a look at the clear starlit sky overhead made him add, "If not here, it must rain somewhere tomorrow; the book does not err."

No one quarrelled with that.

Dinner was now ready and we retired to our respective repasts, my friend and myself to grilled pigeon and venison, the trackers to rice and a curried iguana, which the resourceful Andia, peering into every likely ant-hill by the way, had caught unawares by the tail, and killed with a dexterous blow on the head from the handy little axe he always carried.

Soon we were all in bed, but before sleep came we heard the provocative Bandirala drowsily remark that there did not seem the remotest likelihood of rain that day, the next, or for many days to come.

"Don't throw away an old man's words," chided the respectful Andia—but what his actual thoughts were concerning the prospect of rain we could well guess.

The next morning, leaving all our trackers, except Bandirala behind, we made for the highways. A long walk brought us to a pool. Sitting on the grassy bank we proceeded to draw natural history out of our guide. Monosyllabic at first, he warmed to our interest. Cicadas were making the jungle hum. I called Bandirala's attention to them.

"That is the *rasaya*," he said. "They only cry during the three honey months. They cry for a hundred days and then burst. In August you can collect them by the bushel. They are only beginning now; we are hearing the young ones; that is why they stutter so. Later, when they mature, their cry will not be the feeble, jerky thing it now is, but a long sustained note that never wearies, so that the whole jungle rings with nought but their sorrow."

An iguana peered out of an ant-hole only to disappear on spying us.

"Are iguana eggs good eating?" I asked, remembering that Andia had extolled their qualities.

"Very good; we always welcome them," said Bandirala.

"How many eggs do they lay?"

"Thirty or forty, or only one or two. The younger they are the more they lay, the older, the fewer. Sometimes we find but four or five eggs in a hole."

"There was a European in these parts some time ago," Bandirala continued, "who was very fond of eggs. He was a big, tall man, and ate whatever eggs he got. He paid boys to bring



them to him. He'd give as much as fifty cents for the eggs of small birds such as *meechas* (shamas) *kondayas* (bulbuls) and *batichas* (tailor birds); and a rupee or even two for the eggs of bigger birds such as green pigeons and hornbills."

"Surely the gentleman did not eat the eggs," said I. "He must only have blown them out for collecting."

"He ate them right enough. Some few he collected, it is true, but most he broke into a wine-glass and swallowed, or drank out of the shell." I was afterwards able to confirm the truth of this.

"Now tell us of that delicious honey you brought us yesterday. Does all honey taste the same?"

"No, it depends on the flowers in season. What we had yesterday was not the best; the comb was immature and contained the pollen and grub cells which I ate, and the honey cells you gentlemen enjoyed so much. In another six weeks the combs will be all honey and nothing else."

"From what flowers is the best honey obtained?"

"*Walmala* honey is the best. *Mora*, *pannaka*, *kahapenala*, *katukaliya*, and *halmilla* honey are all good, and so is *habara* honey. Of these you may eat your fill; there is no *mathgathiya* (stupor) about them. But *kurudu*, *kathuru* and *withara* honeys are bitter like opium, and cause giddiness. *Kurudu* and *virindha* are in flower just now, and that is why the honey has an indifferent flavour."

"Do the bees of each hive gather pollen from but one variety of flower?"

"No, they glean indiscriminately from all flowers, and thus their honey has a medley of flavours, unless there happens to be but one flower in bloom."

And so he rambled on until we resumed our

journey.

Now, it often happens that however pleasant a holiday, a discordant note will somehow intrude itself sooner or later. We had ours at the end of the trip, when it came to reckoning with the carter. He was always something of an enigma, this tall young fellow who cooked the trackers' food; he spoke little and that surlily, as the person knew who shifted his outspanned cart even a yard; he had recoiled with fear from the blowing of a nesting owlet, taking it for a cobra; it was he who had attempted suicide over a parental quarrel. A taciturn bundle of impulses was this quiet lad.

"How much have I to give you?" I asked him when it came to settling accounts.

"Anything the gentleman pleases," said he graciously.

"We agreed to five rupees, didn't we?" said I, meaning to double it by way of *santosum*.

"It was ten rupees we agreed to," said he.

"How can that be when I never spoke to you about it. It was with the owner of the cart I settled the matter. Where is he?"

"He is not here. But had I known it was for five rupees that I was expected to do this job, it would have been better for me to have taken to my village the load of straw I had packed," was the impertinent reply.

To find a jungle villager talk in the manner of an insolent carter of a town was a surprise indeed. I told him roundly what I thought of him, and gave him not a cent more than the stipulated sum. Bandirala looked on in silent wonder, and respectfully received his ample wage.

"*Hu*, let us go," said the carter to Bandirala, with an air of haughty indifference that might have done credit to an under-tipped head-waiter!

## ELEPHANTS AND MEN

TO the dwellers on the Western shores of Ceylon, the Eastern coast road from Arugam to Kuchchaveli holds a strong fascination. We reach it, whether we go by Anuradhapura, Kantalai, Maha-Oya, or Muppene through forest roads, flanked by scattered homes, and tanks melodious with the cries of water-fowl; and so we attain a pleasant goal by pleasing paths.

Even as the car speeds, the discerning eye may glimpse spoor by pools, rootled ground, and broken branches, which tell us we are in the domain of the wild beasts. Monkeys and jungle fowl we shall certainly see, and, with a little luck, a scurrying pig, a startled deer, or perhaps a listless leopard. But, whether we encounter them or not, we may rest assured that wild eyes watch us all the way from the security of forest glooms.

From Pottuvil we journey north towards Batticoloa—on one side of us the lonely beach, on the other alluring misty hills arising out of the forest depths. The coast here is fretted by a series of lagoons, frequently spanned by causeways; and farther north, between Batticoloa and Trincomalee, is a succession of ferries which, even if something of a nuisance to the traveller, serve at least to preserve the desolation of these wild shores.

No motorable way transacts the wilderness to our left, but every score of miles or so, good roads jut inland, to end blindly in some old restored tank, such as Irakkamam or Ampari, destined soon to sustain large agricultural populations

to the detriment of the forest. Around these artificial lakes, hemmed in on every side by the jungle, wild life is plentiful; here elephants roam at large regardless of man.

Reaching Ampari, some thirty miles from the coast, we lodged in the irrigation bungalow kindly placed at our disposal. Kondawattawan, another tank, was within easy reach; and thither we went one afternoon, equipped with cameras, to photograph wild elephants. A small squad of coolies, supervised by a very juvenile overseer, was working at a dam. We asked the youth whether there were elephants about.

"Plenty," said he. "In a little while you will see them in the 'capes'"—by which he meant the glades biting into the forest border.

The elephants were there right enough, barely a stone's throw from where the men were working. Keeping to their windward we approached to within twenty-five yards of them, (for elephants, though gifted with wonderful scent, are amazingly short-sighted), and photographed them to our heart's content. In one 'cape' we found a single colossus browsing indolently on the tall grass; in another, a group of five, one with a damaged leg, supported, when it came to moving, by another that lent him a helpful hip.

Having completed our work, we turned to find a dozen men watching us from the edge of the tank. Three of them had stout deer-hide nooses; three others carried unlit torches, and one a muzzle-loader. Their leader asked us whether we intended shooting around the tank. We told him we did. "Then," said he, turning to his companions, "we might as well go back."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"We are Pannikyans\* who have come to noose

\* Moorish elephant catchers.

elephants," he explained. "If you gentlemen are going in that direction there is no use our doing so to-night, for your shots and scent will scare away the herd we have marked for our work."

"Do you think you can catch any animals to night?"

"We certainly can," said he.

We decided to leave the field to them.

Their leader was a stocky fellow, with a badly bruised and thickened finger which a young elephant had bitten at capture a few days previously. But this was no deterrent to the pursuit of his risky calling that night.

Indicating the single elephant we had been snap-shotting, we asked him how close he could approach it.

"Up to that tussock," he declared, pointing to one within fifteen yards of the animal.

We challenged him to do it, and also to walk up to the beast till it turned away.

Without a moment's hesitation, calmly chewing his quid, he stepped forward. He slowed his paces as he got close, and soon attained the tussock in full face of the elephant, away from all cover. He took another step. The animal became uneasy, cocked its ears, and groped with its trunk, scenting. The man stood rigid. Reassured, the beast began grazing again. The man moved a trifle nearer. Out spread the ears of jumbo, up went its trunk, its tail stiffened. The man petrified. We trembled for him and had our rifles up. The animal hesitated a few seconds, then slewed round, and quietly entered the forest. Such is the way of the Pannikyan with the elephant.

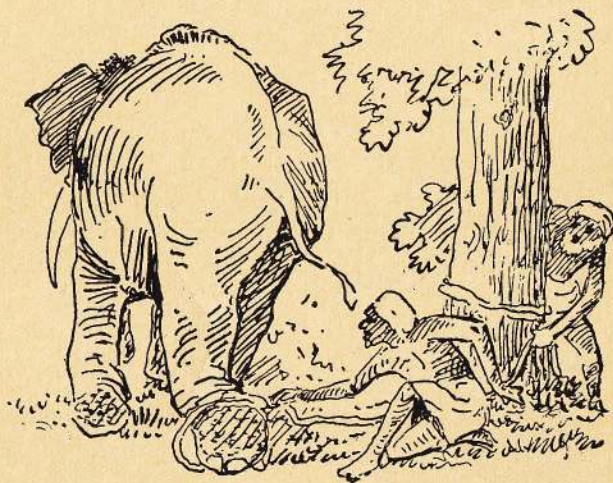
These folk are consummate masters of the art of noosing the wild elephant. It is to them anyone wanting an elephant goes. They only

seize young, and therefore subduable, animals between four and eight feet high. Those about six feet are most fancied; above eight they are difficult to break in; and below four are protected by Government. The tamed beasts are sold within a few weeks of capture, at the rate of a hundred rupees per cubit of height. An average animal will fetch about five hundred rupees; while a fully grown domesticated one may sell for as much as three thousand rupees; but with these the Pannikyan has no concern; his vocation is to seize, tame, and sell; he is no warder of docile beasts.

And this is how these Moors capture the wild elephant.—Providing themselves with the necessary licenses, they go into the forest, follow up a herd, and camp in its neighbourhood. Equipped, as we have seen them, with deer-hide nooses, torches, and an old gun or two, they approach the feeding animals at dusk (sometimes during the day) and watch their movements. The noosers, usually two or three, are in the van. Stealthily they creep up-wind; dodging from tree to tree, they reach the thick of the herd, where the young animals are, protected by their mothers. Selecting his quarry the nooser creeps up to within reach of its hind legs, and awaits his chance.

Cool must he be, noiseless as the loris, and patient as the leopard, if he would succeed. The crack of a twig, a shifting breeze, and the game is up. Sooner or later comes his opportunity; he may even make it by tickling or slapping the youngster. When a hind leg is momentarily uplifted the noose is dexterously slipped and tightened, and the other end swiftly secured to some tree; or if it has a sambhur horn attached, the rope is left free.

Now the action is swift. No sooner has the noose been slipped than a signal is given. The whole body of Pannikyans raise a sudden shout and discharge their guns in the air. The startled herd stampede, crashing and trumpeting. A sudden jerk pulls the captive short: an impetuous tug: a testy, frightened squeal. With ears cocked, tail astrain, and the devil in her eye, the mother, ahead with her first strides, turns to the rescue. "Toreador now guard thee!" Torches flare and shoutings re-double, but like an avalanche comes



the mother's charge. From under her very trunk the human shadows flit and escape by circling round some tree, but never closing up against it lest man and tree be clasped in a deadly embrace. While some are pursued, the others press in and flourish their torches and shout their charms in her very face. There is pandemonium in the gloom. Now terrified she retreats, now incensed and agonised by mother love, she rushes to the aid of her squealing offspring, charging

wheresoever she sees or scents a human form. Thank the Powers an elephant's eyes are what they are, or what chance would these frail hunters have? But calm courage and agility are the match of colossal fury and power, and man is lord of the brute.

Sometimes the noosed animal breaks free before the men can secure it. Often the mother does not forsake her young until badly wounded or even killed—but 'tell it not in Gath,' for there is no legal warranty for it.

The tumult dies. Fires are lit. Henceforth the captive is lost for ever to the forest and the herd, and is under the tutelage of man.

Another method of capture, best seen on the banks of the Walawe Ganga during the dry months of July and August, when the elephant herds keep to the vicinity of the great rivers, is as follows.—The Pannikyans, armed with nooses to the ends of which sambhur horns are attached, lie in concealment where the game trails lead to the river. They size up the animals as they go down to drink and bathe. The herd, having finished its ablutions, re-enters the forest: then the noosers close in, each behind the beast he has marked, while the others fire off their guns, raise a clamour, and stampede the herd. When the hind foot of an elephant is uplifted in running, the noose is deftly slipped and pulled taut, and the rope let go. The dangling sambhur horn soon catches a root and makes anchorage.

Yet another, if less dramatic way, is by setting a noose on a trail. The place must then be very carefully chosen—one, for instance, where a tree trunk has fallen across a narrow track. An animal using this path must of necessity place its fore-foot at a definite spot when negotiating the

barrier. Here a hole six inches deep is dug, and of a circumference slightly bigger than the foot of the beast it is desired to entrap. Over the mouth of the hole is arranged a light framework of twigs; on this is placed a running loop of twisted hide about the thickness of a man's wrist—interwoven with charms to give it potency! The loop is carefully camouflaged with sand and leaves, and so is the eight foot length of rope leading to a stout tree to which it is secured—for the elephant is a suspicious beast, and avoids like the plague anything of man's making. To a point on the rope, about a foot or two from the noose, the end of a bent sapling is so attached as to jerk up when the noose is disturbed. Should a large animal tread on the snare, nothing happens, for its sole over-spreads the hole; but a small foot placed there sinks within the noose causing the sapling to spring and draw the loop taut, thus trapping the animal.

The securing of the quarry once noosed is no tame business either, for the animals, especially the larger ones, put up a fierce fight. As the men close round their prisoner, it makes vicious lunges at them, only to receive unmerciful blows with clubs. After a hard struggle the two fore-feet are fastened as well as the hind ones, and soon the animal is immovably tethered to surrounding trees. A circle of fires is then lit, as much to intimidate the captive as to warn away interfering members of the herd.

After some hours rest, the animal is led away to camp by three men who drag at a rope round its neck, while two behind have hold of a restraining rope on one of its hind legs.

The Pannikyans treat their captives well—that is, as well as is compatible with the taming of so

strong and recalcitrant a beast as an elephant.

The morning following the day on which we had encountered the Pannikyans at Kondawattawan, we visited their camp half a mile from ours. There we found two elephants. The bigger, about eight feet high, had been caught two weeks previously; the other, but five feet, only the previous night. The noosers had made good their assurance to us that they would succeed. We had heard at dawn the clamour that accompanied the youngster's home-coming; the herd responsive to its protestations, having harassed the men all the way.

To judge by the demeanour of these folk, you would have thought that they had done nothing more extraordinary than secure a stray cow off a field. And yet, many a Pannikyan has come by a terrible death; for an elephant's methods are merciless towards those they hate, or fear—it is said that if Pannikyans are on one side of a river the elephants keep to the other! I knew a Pannikyan, who as a youth of eighteen, sustained ten fractures—in legs, thighs, pelvis, arms, shoulder, ribs, etc.—from the hold and throw of an elephant. That he survived was a miracle. He would never approach an elephant after that, and when he saw anyone do it, even at safe distance, he trembled like a leaf.

The younger animal in the Pannikyan's camp, caught only the previous night, was tethered by its hind leg and neck to two trees. A bell dangled from its neck. Rasa was its name! A light vertical awning of plaited coconut leaves protected it from the morning sun. Already it seemed reconciled to its lot. It made no attempt to escape; but swaying back and forth, as far as its ropes permitted, fed from an abundant litter of fresh grass provided it (a cart-load is a young

elephant's daily allowance), every now and then throwing trunkfuls of dust over its body. Still a stranger to the ankus, its roguish little eyes were ever on the watch for anyone unwary enough to approach it, when it would make a sudden thrust with its trunk and kick with a fore-foot. But a Moorish lad, keeping just out of the animal's reach, would grasp the end of its trunk and hold it prisoner—the first step in the training of an elephant.

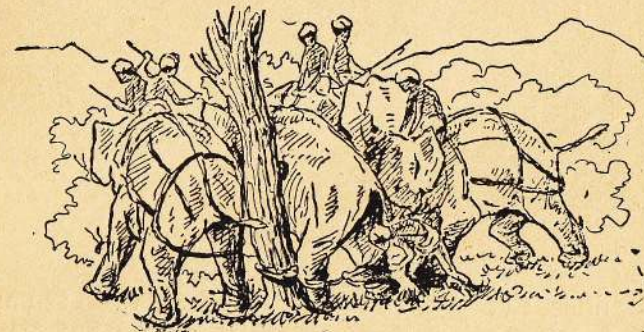
Not so truculent was the older animal, now two weeks under the charge of man. Letchimie she was called, and a bell adorned her too. That she had put up more of a fight than her fellow captive was evident from the pendulous tumour that underhung her abdomen, the deep circular scars on the hind legs where the ropes had bitten deep, and the great bruises and ulcers on her withers and flanks besmeared with kerosine oil and sulphur. Though distrustful of strangers she knew her keepers, and allowed them to handle her; but the very sight of an ankus made her turn away terrified, and strain hard at her ropes. A lad hooked the weapon on her spine and drew its merciless point towards her tender head, down went Letchemie on her knees, bellowing in abject awe. Such is the power of the implement with which man tames these forest monarchs.

As we left Ampari a few evenings later, we again passed the Pannikyans on business bent. Their light-hearted banter as they sauntered along, suggested they were going to an after-dinner show rather than to perilous adventure.

The *savoir faire* of the Pannikyans, and the care they bestow on the animals they take at so much risk to themselves, are in eloquent contrast to the crude methods that obtain in kraals. There, starved, thirsting herds, after being

surrounded for weeks by a vast cordon of howling humanity and encircling fires, are driven terrorised into a stockade, babes and centenarians alike, the former often trodden to death in the stampede.

Is it not time the barbarous custom ceased? The spectacle is grand, no doubt. One may motor to kraal-town in the heart of the jungle, through roads newly made for the purpose; there, occupying lofty pavilions of satin-wood, you survey in security the driving in of the demoralised herd, and the mahouts mounted on tame elephants hemming the wild ones in, while crouching noosers do their work.



All that is well enough—but who pays the piper? Why, when you get to the bottom of it, the poor villagers themselves—chieftains' show though it is held to be, for the entertainment of visiting princes and resident rulers.

The main objection, however, to the kraal is its *appalling elephant mortality*. There have been kraals where every single animal captured has died, and others where but two or three have survived. It is no exaggeration to say that fully three-fourths of the animals taken at kraals are too old to tame, and die of the starvation and cruel

treatment supposed to be necessary for their subjugation. Also many of the beasts, in trying to rush the human barrier, are shot at and wounded, and some are killed.

Within a week the fierce glory of kraal-town, the culmination of some three months patient labour, has passed, and the forest is emptied of the bustling human hordes. The show is at an end. But what of the days that follow, when the tired villagers, absent from their homes for weeks, limp back to their neglected crops with nothing gained, and the captive elephants die one by one?



Besides, many of the penned animals too truculent for taming have eventually to be set free. Apropos of this, is a conversation I overheard one night as I lay in bed on the last day of a kraal.—A small group of villagers were talking: “Those elephants that were released to-day,” said one, “did you see how they ran? *Giddi, giddi, giddi, intha amma!* By now they must be miles away.”

“You think so, do you?” said a more authoritative voice. “I’ll tell you what they are doing now—despoiling some poor fellow’s fields! Once an animal is penned, it should never be set free again; better that it be shot dead.”

“Why do you say that?” asked a third.

“Do you imagine that elephants, surrounded by fires and shouted at for weeks, will ever have the same respect for man afterwards? It is the surest way of making rogues of harmless animals.”

Elephants, as a rule, like all other jungle fauna, leave man alone—though they do often help themselves to some tempting human possession, such as a field or chena. A herd that becomes fearless of man is a scourge to the forest villagers.

At Liyangahatota on the banks of the Walawe river is a circuit bungalow standing in a half acre of garden. Seeing its neglected state I asked the caretaker why he did not put to better use that fertile soil. He answered that it was not worth the trouble. Once he had grown a fine garden there, and carefully watched it every single night for six months. It became a sight to gladden the eye, with its maize, gourds, brinjals, chillies, and much else.

Then he and his family, like every one else in those parts, went down with malaria. But whether he worked or travelled far for medicines by day, or shivered with ague all night, he never failed to keep his nocturnal vigil.

His youngest child of three years came to the point of death, despite all English and native treatment. At his wit’s ends, he decided to hold a Bali Ceremony to drive away the devil that possessed his little one. The drums and incantations of three devil dancers resounded in that half acre of ground all night long; therefore he presumed the watch-hut could, for the once, do without its occupant. Towards morning he thought he heard a soft crunching sound, and rushed out, only to find his garden a veritable threshing floor; what the elephants had not devoured they had trodden down—and all so silently. His six months’ labours were reduced

to rubbish in a single night—but he had saved his child!

An Inspecting Medical Officer once said to me: “I was making my annual inspection of a dispensary in the Kolonne Korle, when I came upon so unusual sight for those parts that I paused to consider it. There was a neatly built hut set in a trim compound, with well-spaced fruit trees thriving around it, and a fine vegetable garden. I asked my guide why other homes in the district were not like this one; here was an example all should follow. He merely smiled sardonically. Returning that way three days later, I found my answer. Not a thing was left standing; there was no hut, or tree, or human being; the elephants had known a good thing when they saw it!”

“On another occasion,” he continued, “I travelled nine miles to a backwood dispensary, mounted on an elephant. (Incidentally, for a week after that I walked with legs apart, like a Gothic arch!) For some reason that elephant was *perily* (mischievous) all the way, and obliged the mahout to use his ankus freely; he also hurled abuse at the animal all the time, calling it not an elephant but a dog and the son of a dog, and much more besides. The beast seemed to resent the abuse even more than the goad; it was evident there was no bond of sympathy between the keeper and his ward.

“A day after my return I learnt that the mahout had been killed and the elephant had broken free. With a fierce hatred for human beings, he roamed the jungle, destroying chenas and scaring the villagers.

“Two days later, a man was brought into hospital all a-tremble, with his buttocks and back completely flayed. The story he gasped out was this:

‘I was asleep in my hut at night, when suddenly I was awakened by the collapse of a wall; it had been pushed through by an elephant, which stood there. I crouched in a corner. The beast saw me and laughed—you may not believe me, but laugh he did, for I saw him plainly in the moonlight. Reaching out his trunk, he seized and rubbed me on the floor. He held me up before him and laughed again, and then thrust me away, realising perhaps that I was not the man he sought, having forgotten he had already killed his keeper.’ The man kept shuddering with fear for weeks afterwards.”

Such are tales of ordinary elephants. What of the “rogue,” ostracised by its herd, that deliberately sets out to kill every human being it encounters, and wantonly destroys his handiwork? An eye witness has described to me the manner it ambushes its victim.—Whilst feeding behind the cover of some tree bordering a foot-path, its leg, we will say, is listlessly uplifted and a leafy branch is in its mouth; the animal now hears approaching human footsteps and voices; instantly it becomes motionless, and gently, very gently, first lays down its foot and then the twig it was eating—and waits. No sooner is the unsuspecting victim within striking distance, than out shoots the ponderous trunk—an inert mass of humanity is flung yards away. The beast walks up to the body—whether that will be torn limb from limb, or trodden to a pulp, depends on the slayer’s mood. Even so were criminals sometimes executed by Ceylon’s ancient kings.



TO ELEPHANTS DOOMED AT KRAALS

Hail, O ye wild ones !  
Now we come nigh you,  
Lords of our jungles !  
Pride of our land !

In eras long vanished,  
Your stature was moulded,  
Your sinews made tireless,  
Meet for the prime.

Into your fastness  
Man thrusts his roadways—  
Yielding before him,  
Farther you go.

Your day, like the mammoth's,  
Declines to its ending :  
Your forests, they'll echo  
To axes of man.

That's far in the future—  
But now do we hound you  
For pride of the chasing,  
And joy of the show.

Away, in your arbours,  
Songful with wild birds,  
Heard you no omens  
Of anguish and woe ?



Photo by Platié Ltd.

Captured.

The cordons close round you,  
The shoutings redouble,  
And flare in the bivouacs,  
The fires you shun.

What aileth your leader ?  
Ah, see how he falters,  
Who lorded and led you,  
So fearless and free !

In sunlit arena,  
As sheep ye are herded,  
That trod the wild woodways,  
Like ghosts of the gloom.

Secure on high perches,  
The onlookers revel,  
Who count not the game  
More great than the prize.

They have glee of the pageant—  
Woe to the vanquished !  
Fallen the mighty !  
Monarchs in pain !

The vast frame is famished,  
The racked limbs are seared,  
The proud spirit broken,  
Glazed is the eye.

But, mark you, who triumphs—  
Not he that enchaineth,  
But he, that by dying,  
His freedom regains.

Pardon, O doomed ones !  
The wrongs that we do you—  
Lords of our jungles !  
Pride of our land !

## A CHIEFTAIN OF THE WILDERNESS

THE old Sinhalese chieftain, whose home lay in the roadless forests of Kolonna, had long intrigued my fancy; many were the tales I had been told of his hospitality and proud independance.

There was, for instance, that episode, perhaps some fifty years old, of the German princes, guests of the Government Agent of Ratnapura. They had completed a day's snipe shooting in the fields of Pelmadulla, about fourteen miles from Ratnapura, and awaited at the rest-house the horse coach from Rakwana to take them back. The coach arrived with four passengers—two arrack renters, a Moorman, and Maduwanwella, *ratemahatmaya*\* of Kolonna Korle, the subject of this sketch.

When the coach pulled up, the resthouse keeper, under instructions from the Government Agent, requested the driver to empty it of its occupants to accomodate the German aristocrats and their paraphernalia. The passengers ruefully acquiesced—all save Mr. Maduwanwella. He kept his seat and told the driver that if it came to an argument he would feign ignorance of English.

The coach was loaded with the princes' equipment, and they walked up to occupy it. Seeing a native in the favoured front seat, they ordered

\**Ratemahatmaya* (R. M. for short) is a native chief. He is often named after his land. Maduwanwella's real name was Molamure; but he assumed his mother's name on coming into the inheritance of her ancestral possessions.

him to get off. This was interpreted to the R.M., who replied that, as he had paid for his seat, he intended to keep it, and that if the gentlemen wanted the whole coach for themselves, they should have booked it previously. This reply was translated to the princes.

"Does he know who we are?" asked one of them haughtily. "Tell him that I am a German count and my friend is a prince, and that we are the guests of the Government Agent at Ratnapura."

"I don't care who or what you are," rapped out the incensed chieftain, this time in English. "You may be white princes of Europe. I am the *Kalu Kumaraya* (Black Prince) of Ceylon, and will not give up my seat to you or any other." Saying which, he flung out a gun case and bag of birds that had been deposited near him; and, calling to his previous fellow passengers to resume their seats, ordered the driver to proceed, saying he would pay for the entire coach. The driver, not daring to anger so powerful a patron, did as he was bid.

It was well past midnight when the tired and chastened princes arrived at Ratnapura in a travelling bullock cart secured for them by the local R.M. The dinner laid out at the Residency that night had been eaten in the absence of the guests of honour.

And yet, the following afternoon as Maduwanwella drove in his coach and pair past the Ratnapura Club where the princes were being entertained, shouts of "Come in Black Prince. Come in and join us," hailed him, for he was *persona grata* with the planters, who, like everyone else in the neighbourhood, had by now heard of the previous evening's episode. He entered the club—and in a little while the princes, Government Agent, Maduwanwella, and planters

were all a friendly crowd.

On another occasion the old chief was sent an invitation to a reception at Queen's House, but being at the time on a visit to one of his *ninda-gamas* (estates) he did not receive it. Nor did he find it on his return, as a messenger despatched with his letters had taken a short cut, and missed his master. Then came an urgent telegram from the Government Agent of Ratnapura asking the R.M. to "come immediately, prepared."

Although he was mystified by the wording, he lost no time in answering the summons.

"Well R.M., I hope you have come ready to accompany me to Colombo to-morrow," said the Government Agent. "His Excellency has specially asked me to bring you."

Maduwanwella, ignorant of the letter the Governor had sent him, was piqued by the casual manner of the invitation, and felt that this was no method of summoning a chief even to Queen's House.

So he excused himself, saying, he had not brought his court dress with him, and had not then the time to send for it.

"Oh, I'll get you the uniform of another R.M.," said the Government Agent.

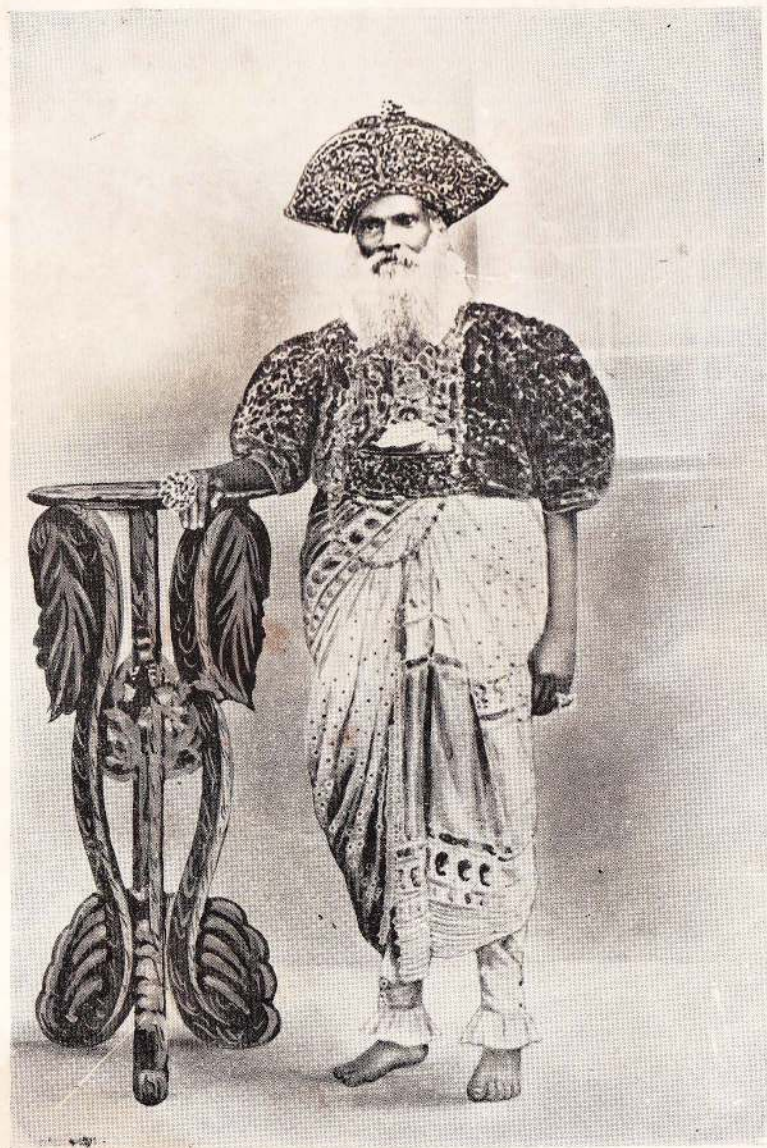
"Why should I wear another's clothes?" was the rejoinder. "Besides, I have brought no money with me."

"I can easily lend you that," said the G.A.

"Why should I borrow your money?" was the reply.

The upshot of the matter was that Maduwanwella did not attend the reception that year.

The Governor, when he learnt how his express wishes had been flouted, had a copy of a minute he made, sent to Maduwanwella informing him that in future he would be excluded from all



Maduwanwella R. M.

Queen's House functions.

The reply His Excellency received was both prompt and ingenuous. It thanked him very much for his decision, which would not only save the writer much future trouble, but would also spare him the necessity of having to drink adulterated champagne at Queen's House, when he could drink pure champagne at the Bristol Hotel!

Nevertheless, many months had not elapsed before the Governor (who afterwards learnt the facts about the invitation), accompanied by the Principal Medical Officer, paid the Maduwanwella *walawwa* (house) a personal visit, and was sumptuously entertained.

When the Duke of Clarence was expected in Ceylon, the Government Agent called a meeting of the Kandyan chiefs at Ratnapura, and carefully acquainted them with the procedure requisite for the reception of royalty. He demonstrated to them how, obeisance having been made, they should retire backwards.

"And now," said he, "to make sure that you all understand what I have said, and will make no mistakes, we'll have a rehearsal."

Solemnly seating himself on a chair placed on a platform, he said, "Imagine now that I am the duke; you all come one by one before me, in order of seniority, and pay me homage as I have shown you."

Maduwanwella, who should have been foremost, backed quietly behind another chief and jostled him forward.

"Oh, no, Mr. Maduwanwella," said the G.A. observing this; "that won't do at all. You are senior and must come first."

"I'll do it when the duke comes," said he, "but not to you." The rehearsal collapsed

amidst general laughter.

A Government Agent on circuit, accompanied by his Mudaliyar who had once been unfortunate enough to anger Maduwanwela, once came to his *walauwa*. While the G.A. was suitably entertained, the mudaliyar was accommodated in a room in the stables, and given his meals apart. On their return, the mudaliyar complained to the G.A. of the treatment he had received. The G.A. wrote to Maduwanwella demanding an immediate apology, saying that in insulting his mudaliyar he had also insulted him. Maduwanwella replied, "If you bring a *rodiya* (outcast) to my house do you expect me to treat him as I do a G.A.? G.As. and mudaliyars are paid batta for travelling, and are not expected to sponge on R.Ms."

Such were the tales I had heard of the old man, and I longed to see him before he died, since he was now very old and decrepit and had not left his forest home, as he was periodically wont to do, for years. Always a hard drinker, he was that now, and might be dead any day. Would I ever see him? was a question I often found myself pondering over.

Returning home one morning after work in hospital, I found, seated on my verandah, a rather diffident young man and an older mutual friend who had come to introduce him. They brought two letters, one from the chieftain's wife, and the other from the local doctor. They both requested a professional visit as the old man was seriously ill.

It was, I remember, the day Amy Johnston, with her name on the lips of the world, reached Colombo, on her return home after her solo flight to Australia. The Rotarians were entertaining her to lunch, which I was reluctant to miss. I attended that function, and left for the wilds of

Kolonna immediately after. But, if I were asked who claimed my interest more, the valiant girl or the dying old man, I would answer, the latter. For if the one stood for the most heroic achievement of her sex to that hour, the other symbolised the passing of an era.

Soon we were travelling along a road unsurpassed for rural scenery in Ceylon. We had left behind us monotonous stretches of rubber, depressing to contemplate with that commodity at thirteen cents the pound. One estate flaunted the sign "Leo's Rest," though obviously it was not Leo but the rubber that rested. Two adjoining plantations, under separate ownership, were named "Paradise" and "Hades"—the latter, a prophetic flippancy, presumably in derision of the former, perpetrated at a time when even rubber planters could afford to joke.

The fortunes of rubber may come and go, but the benison of the rice fields abides. How good to turn from the one to the other. The rubber so trim and eloquent of efficiency. The paddy, flowing into the flats between the hills, so pleasing to the eye, so harmonious with the scene; and, dotted among the fields and hills, beneath groves of fruit trees, the crude mud huts of the simple folk who by their muddied labour contributed to this miracle of beauty. Against that clump of emerald bamboo, flashes in the sun of noon the cadmium of the oriole. Over the yellow fields, in the quiet of evening, languidly sails a flight of heron to its roost, telling of the calm of rural things, of peace beyond the setting sun.

It was about ten at night when we reached the Bulutota gap where the motor road ends abruptly. There I found awaiting me six sleepy men with a chair lashed to poles, in which to convey me through the twelve miles of roadless jungle to

the Maduwanwella home.

I chose to walk—for the first part of the journey anyway. A man with a lantern went ahead; the rest of us trailed behind in single file along a rough foot-path that wound tortuously down the steep hill-side. We were descending from the heights of Rakwana (the old watch rock of Rakka a chief whom Parakrama Bahu sent to conquer Ruhana) into the valley of Kolonna—just such a rugged forlorn country from which a Rip Van Winkle might have emerged.

To the right of us were the Wijeriya falls. They poured into a dark rocky pool, in the depths of which, we were told, on full-moon nights, could be seen the wheels of a chariot and fragments of a golden crown, abandoned after a fight by Vijaya, the founder of the Sinhalese race. These treasures were said to be guarded by a great eel with golden ear-rings. The pool teemed with fish, which no one might molest—a Moorman once rash enough to attempt dynamiting them, was never heard of again!

The journey was becoming irksome, and I suggested a tale to enliven it. At first no one would own to a gift of narration. A little persuasion, however, brought out the man we sought. We saw nothing of him, but his easy eloquence proclaimed him the raconteur born. And this was the story he told.—

Once upon a time there were two orphan sisters, and they decided to marry two brothers. With this object they set out on a journey, and as they went along they came to a paddy field which two young men were ploughing.

“On what journey do you go?” asked one of the men.

“We are two sisters in search of two brothers, that we may wed them,” answered the elder girl.

“Then why not wed us, for we are two brothers,” said the man.

And so the two brothers took the two sisters to their village, and were married to them—the elder to the elder, and the younger to the younger. They lived in separate houses in the same garden. In the course of time two little girls were born to the sisters.

The brothers continued to work in the field all day, and their wives took them their meals. But the meals cooked by the elder sister for her husband were always tastier than those cooked by the younger for hers; and while the one was always praised, the other was often blamed. Also the elder brother would often chaff the younger saying, “See, my food is better than yours.”

So the younger sister grew jealous of the elder. And this jealousy was increased, because the elder couple were the more prosperous and their child the more fortunate. Therefore the younger sister decided to kill the elder.

One day, as the two of them carrying their husbands' meals were passing a pool, the younger said to the elder, “Sister, there is some mud on your back.”

“*Anay* then wash it away,” said the elder.

“Come to the pool,” said the younger.

And as the elder sister bent over the pool, the younger pushed her in and she was drowned.

Then the younger sister, rejecting the food she had prepared for her husband, took instead the food her sister had cooked, and gave it to her own husband.

And when the elder brother asked her how it was that his wife had not come, she answered saying she had not seen her, but that no doubt she would follow later.

The two brothers shared the single meal between them, deciding to do the same with the other when it arrived. No sooner had the elder brother tasted the food, than he knew it was his wife's cooking, but he said nothing.

They worked in the field until evening; but the missing woman did not come, so they returned home. The elder brother searched everywhere for his wife but could not find her. As he sat disconsolate, his little daughter came to him and whispered that she knew her aunt was jealous of her mother. This made him search again, until eventually he found the dead body of his wife in the pool, and brought her home and buried her.

After this, the elder brother and his child took up their abode with the younger. And the two brothers shared, as was the custom in those days, the single wife.

Since her mother's death, the elder sister's child took to carrying her father's meals to him. One day as she passed the pool where her mother had been drowned, she saw a milk tortoise (*kiri ibba*) that spoke to her and asked her to come there every-day on her way to the field, that it might feed her. And this the girl did, and throve although her aunt always ill-treated and starved her. Her aunt grew suspicious, and one day, spying from a distance, saw the tortoise feeding the girl.

She soon devised a plan to be rid of the tortoise. Feigning illness, she lay groaning on her mat. When her husband came home from work that evening, he asked what ailed her. She answered that she was very seriously ill and that no medicine would cure her.

"Is there nothing I can do to save you?" asked the distracted man.

"There is but one remedy," she replied. "If

you will kill the tortoise that lives in yonder pool and brew it into a broth and give it to me, I shall get well."

The orphan child overhearing this talk, quickly bore it to the tortoise.

"Never mind, my child," said the tortoise. "When I am killed and cooked, you too will be given a share of the broth, and in it you will find a fragment of bone. Take that bone and plant it by the edge of this pond."

The following day the man having drained the pool, caught the tortoise and killed it, and made a broth of it and gave it to his wife, and she recovered.

As the tortoise had foretold, the little girl was given her share containing a bone, and this she buried by the border of the pond. In time it grew into a mango (*mee amba*) tree, and bore fruit. And whenever the orphan child went under the tree, the fruit would fall into her hand, and the branches droop within reach of her, so that she could pick her choice. But when the younger sister's child, observing this, went under the tree and lifted her hands, no fruit fell, or if any did they were full of vermin; the branches too would recede from her. All this she conveyed to her mother, who watched and found it to be true.

So once more the younger sister feigned illness. And when her husband, having tried all remedies and failed, asked her whether there was anything more she would like done, she said, "I shall never recover unless you place me beside a fire kindled from the wood of the *mee amba* tree."

This also her niece overheard and told the tree.

Then said the tree to her, "When I am being hewn, a chip of wood will fall near you. Pick that up, my child, and throw it into the pool."



The man cut down the tree, and made a fire, and warmed his wife, and she got well. As the tree was cut a chip of wood fell beside the girl, and she picked it up and cast it into the pool; and the chip was turned into a water lily (*manil*).

Soon the lily threw out a blossom. And whenever the orphan child went to the edge of the pool, the flower would come to her, and she, smelling its fragrance, would find her hunger appeased. And so she thrived apace.

The two children had now grown to be two beautiful young women, and were very like each other, being the children of two brothers and sisters. But the daughter of the elder sister, in spite of her aunt's ill-treatment, was the more beautiful. This made the daughter of the younger sister jealous.

One day, as she watched her cousin, she discovered the strange behaviour of the lotus flower. Going to the brink of the pool herself, she stretched her hands towards the flower, as she had seen her cousin do; but the flower, instead of coming towards her, only withdrew.

And the fame of the lotus flower became known throughout the land, until it reached the ears of the king, who came to see it. He, seeing the lovely blossom, attempted to grasp it, but the flower evaded him, and also every one of his courtiers who tried to pick it.

Then the king had it proclaimed that whoever secured that flower for him would, if he were a man receive a large gift of gold and land, and if a woman be made his queen.

Many tried to pluck that flower and failed.

Now, when the younger sister heard the king's proclamation, she knew that only her niece could succeed. So she seized the girl, and poured dirty water over her head to make her look ugly, and

locked her up in a cage.

One day, as the king's heralds passed close to the imprisoned girl beating their drums and proclaiming the king's decree, she cried out that she alone could do as the king desired. A herald, overhearing the remark, carried word to the king that an ugly woman imprisoned in a cage claimed to be able to fulfil his wish.

The king came to the place, and had the girl freed, and led to the pool. No sooner did she stretch out her hands towards the flower than it floated towards her, and she picked it and gave it to the king.

And the king ordered her to be cleansed in scented water, and clothed in royal raiment. Then did her beauty shine forth. The king took her away with him as his queen, and the flower with her.

Now the younger sister, more envious than ever, determined to have her revenge, and patiently awaited her opportunity.

The time came when the king left his country to war against another. As he took farewell of his queen, she gave him the lotus flower, saying, "If one day you find that the petals of this flower have closed, then you will know that I am dead."

Her aunt, seeing that her long awaited chance had come at last, prepared oil cakes with the eggs of cobras; these with other sweetmeats she, accompanied by her daughter, took to the queen. They reached the palace on the ninth day after the king's departure.

The queen, in spite of all the wrongs her aunt had done her, welcomed her visitors, and set about to entertain them, going into the kitchen to order refreshment. Her aunt begged her to spare herself the trouble, saying she had brought

viands enough for them all. The queen, however, refused the food. Then her aunt, sitting next to her, forced a poisoned oil-cake into her mouth—and the queen died instantly.

The king that day had won his battle, and was about to return to his kingdom, when he noticed that the lotus bloom had closed its petals. He hurried back in all haste.

Meanwhile the aunt, assisted by her daughter, dragged the queen's body into the garden, and secretly buried it under a heap of refuse. Arraying her own daughter in the queen's clothes, she left her to receive the king, and returned to her home.

The king arrived, and seeing the queen, gladly hurried towards her. But she, unused to royal ways, stepped awkwardly back. Then did the king know her to be an imposter. He searched everywhere for the real queen—until eventually he found her body buried under some sweepings. He brought the corpse into the palace, and placing it so that the neck lay on the threshold, he uttered a prayer and smote the neck with his sword. In answer to that prayer, the severed head was transformed into a she-cobra (*happini*), and the body came to life again as his queen. Her cousin, the false queen, was made a servant in the palace.

After her re-birth, the long-suffering queen thought it time to be avenged. She had her cousin killed, and a portion of her flesh curried. This, with a gift of boiled rice, she sent her aunt, who on receiving it was overjoyed; for was it not a present from her daughter, whom she so artfully had made the queen of the land? She made great preparations for a feast, inviting her neighbours too to partake, with her husbands and herself, of the royal gift. When they had all

arrived, she opened the basket of food and emptied the contents into an earthen dish, and taking a spoon began serving out the meal. What was her horror to find in the first spoonful she scooped, a stunted and beringed human finger which she instantly recognised as her daughter's. The truth then flashed across her mind. She thrust the spoon she held in her hand into her hair knot, and, wailing "*mai lamaya co? mai lamaya co?*" (where's my child?), fled into the forest, and became the *ulama* or Devil-bird.

And now, they say, that whenever the *ulama* cries in a village, some one there will surely die.

With such talk we beguiled our journey through the sinister, starlit jungle. I could see but little of the land. That we had descended into a wild valley among the hills was apparent. Sometimes we passed a sleeping hamlet with drowsing cattle on the path. Often we skirted deep gullies beset with eerie shadows, said to be haunted by human wraiths that suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and vanished as startingly as they came, striking the beholder with terror. The villagers are more afraid of these *holman* (ghosts) than of wild beasts, and never travel at night except in company, talking volubly the while to warn any straying spirit of human approach.

About midnight we came to what seemed an incongruity in these backwoods—a railed concrete bridge across a turbulent stream. Its presence there was thus explained.—Maduwanwella had repeatedly applied to the Government Agent of the province for a bridge across this stream which was frequently liable to floods. But that official had as often refused to sanction it for the reason that the Kolonna folk only paid a poll tax of Re. 1 instead of Re. 1.50, as elsewhere in the Island, a concession Maduwanwella always

defended on the plea that his lands were roadless—a state of things, I have heard it breathed, for which the conservative chieftain was himself solely responsible.

The Government Agent usually paid his infrequent visits to Kolonna on horseback. On the occasion, however, with which we are now concerned, he chose to walk. Having completed his business at the village of Maduwanwella, he asked the R.M. for the loan of a horse to take him back. The R.M., anticipating the request, had his saddles hidden away, and answered that as all his saddles had been sent for repair, he was sorry he could not provide a mount, but would arrange for a chair and carriers. So, in this fashion the G.A. was borne until he came to the middle of the stream under discussion. There something suddenly happened; no one quite knows what—but one of the bearers owned to having stumbled. Any way, the G.A. was tipped out of the chair into the rushing water, and was rescued, but not before he was badly scratched and bruised. Before the next official visit was due, the present secure bridge spanned the stream!

Mention of the chair reminded me that my legs could do with a little rest, and that I might avail myself of the travelling chair so thoughtfully provided me. So I took my seat, and was hoisted on the shoulders of four men—two fore and two aft, each of whom held an end of the two bamboo poles to the middle of which the chair was lashed by its arms.

I had not gone far before I realised the drawbacks of this mode of transport. The carriers were of unequal height to begin with; and though they did their best, poor fellows, to hold me level, the gloom and inequalities of the foot-path kept defeating their endeavours. I was therefore more

often than not at a tilt, now clinging to this pole now to that, lest I follow the example of the unfortunate official of whom I had just been told. Nor was this all. From time to time, one or other of the men would stumble on a stone, or jerk up and dip suddenly down to extract an offending thorn from the sole, or shift his end of the pole overhead from one aching shoulder to the other. And, however good their intentions, they could not refrain from bickering among themselves. Now the argument would be between the two in front as to who should keep to the foot path and who be forced up the slope or shoved on to the thorns; now the two in front would join issue with the two behind somewhat as follows.—

“We are in a hurry, it is true, and do not mind what hardships we suffer as long as the *hamu-duruwo* gets well. But that is no reason why the two of you behind should swing and thrust us about, the way you do, over a path we cannot see.”

At best it was an undignified mode of travel for one who still had the use of his limbs, however weary, and after a bare half mile of the experience I dismounted, to the obvious relief of the carriers.

It was two in the morning when we arrived at the doctor's bungalow at Kolonna, to be met by the furious barking of a savage dog which, thank goodness, was securely chained to a verandah post. The uproar brought the sleepy medico out. I complimented him on the picturesque site of his bungalow, built on a rise overlooking a sweep of enforested hills. He was not enthusiastic.

“It may look all right by moonlight,” he declared. “But it is a different thing, I assure you, in the heat of noon.”

From what we have seen of this land so far,

it will not be wondered at, that the Medical Department only sends young bachelors to this hot-bed of malaria and parangi, and that, for not much more than a year or so at a time—a period the young fellows consider by no means short, if their repeated petitions to the head office for transfers are any criterion. But if collateral proof of the justness of their demands were needed, it was amply supplied by the spiritless scare-crow, once a vigorous youth, that eventually presented himself to back his petitions.

If such be the truth regarding transitory officers, how about those resident there for life? They stoically accept the endemic diseases as companions from cradle to early grave; going about with protuberant abdomens that hide massive spleens, and scarred distorted limbs that proclaim the ravages of parangi, a disease which, thanks to the "914" of Ehrlich, is now rapidly disappearing from the Island.

There are some residents, however, who, thanks to robust immunities, live even there to good old age. Was not the patient of eighty-seven I had come to see, a resident in Kolonna all his life? And he was no careful liver, for throughout his long span of life, drink, especially champagne, had been as food to him; nor did advancing years moderate his tastes.

Accompanied by the doctor, I sauntered to the Maduwanwella *walauwa* about two miles away. We entered the gardens through a carved stone gateway, now janitorless. Proceeding along a neglected drive, flanked at short intervals by broken lamps that toppled on their pedestals, we reached the house, which stood in a clearing at the foot of a wooded hill. From here came, even as we entered, the startled bell of a sambhur followed by the hungry roar of a leopard.

Surrounding the house were magnificent forest giants—prominent among them a sacred bo-tree of vast age, encircled by a low wall niched for oil lamps; on a granite altar was an offering of withered flowers.

We entered the house by a narrow doorway, and came to a small square court-yard open to the sky, with a marble statue in its centre. Bounding the court-yard was a square verandah, on to which gave the doors of dark rooms. In a recess of the verandah, all huddled up on the antique wooden bed on which he had been born, lay the wizened old chief. Cob-webbed bottles of champagne stood on the ground by the wall.

He was in a high fever, and his leg was swollen with a painful cellulitis. All the spirit was knocked out of him; he spoke barely a word. It was sad to see, reduced to such doddering incapacity, the proud wilful being that had maintained so effectually the autocratic traditions of Sinhalese chiefs, despite the iron laws of British administration.

That he lay on his death-bed was evident. He willingly submitted, contrary to my expectation, to the necessary operation. Hardly was he out of the anaesthetic, than, true to his reputation for hospitality, he mumbled orders for our refreshment to the bare-bodied servant who attended him hand and foot. Then he quietened into stupor again. He lasted longer than I anticipated, lingering a month after I had seen him.

Two hours of restless, dreamy sleep in a close room on a clean Kandyan bed, and I was awake. By the light of day I was better able to judge of the *walauwa*. It was rather a rambling structure of no set design. The original nucleus of it was very old and considerably obscured by later renovation. A satin-wood door three inches

thick, showing the dents of Dutch bullets, and a wooden pillar with scorched base were evidence of siege and arson that the old house had sustained in the days of the Dutch, whose outposts the chiefs of Maduwanwella continually harassed.

As for the rest of the building, every room and passage of it was the repository of a strange medley of things. Amid much that was old and rare, was much that was cheap and modern. Ancient swords, spears, daggers, ornaments and china, lay side by side with crude clay figures, and modern garish stuff. Rare prints and autographed photos of distinguished personages hung on the same walls with oleographs, outdated almanacs and tinsel things.

There were massive and elaborately carved pieces of furniture of ebony, tamarind, cala-mander, and satin-wood. The top of one great table was a single jak plank, inlaid along its edge with ebony. At it was entertained the Dutch Governor van de Graaf, by Kodithuwak Nilame, a chief of the Kandyan king's army, grandfather of Maduwanwella. The Governor on that occasion presented his host with an embossed betel box of gold. The object of the visit was to parley for the supply of paddy to the builders of the Urubokke dam, constructed in 1787.

There were heirlooms there that would have made the heart of the collector leap with envy; the most valuable part of it being loot from the last king of Kandy, the Tamil tyrant Sri Wickrama Raja Singhe, whom Maduwanwella's maternal grand-uncle Eknelligodde helped the British to capture—though most of that plunder is said to have gone to Thambi Mudianse. There were the king's silver plates, cups and saucers, and gold betel box: an alexandrite pendant, the size of a halved hen egg, so conspicuous a feature of

portraits of the last Kandyan queen: and the staff of Ehelepolla Adigar, whose children's decapitated heads the cruel king had made their mother pound in a mortar, before severing her hands and drowning her in the Kandy lake.

But oh, the faded splendour of that house—it seemed to wilt around that stricken figure curled up in bed, as if the lives of the two were indissolubly entwined. Everywhere was an air of sad neglect. Dust lay heavy upon everything, on furniture and floor and statue. It rose in a cloud at every step on the rich carpets, or pat on the elegant upholsteries. Behind every picture the spiders spun their webs.

There were servants in plenty, but no one to direct them. The chieftain's wife and daughter and many relations stood by helpless, seemingly paralysed into inactivity by the calamity that threatened them. The only person to show some initiative was the bare-bodied attendant who administered to the old man's every need.

Such were the last days of Maduwanwella, possessor of 82,000 acres, where dwelt some 30,000 tenants. Almost a province was his—by right of *tham.ba* and *ola sannas* bearing royal signatures, handed down by his ancestors. His lands mainly consisted of wild virginal jungle, abounding in satinwood and ebony, where roamed great herds of elephants and all the other forest fauna of Ceylon. The elephant kraals of Panamura were famous from immemorial times. As you made your way through those forest aisles, hardly ever were you out of sight of satinwood trees. And as you passed the highways flanking his boundaries for miles on end, you saw ranged alongside the road, gigantic logs of that precious timber, each holed at one end, to accommodate the strong iron chain by which they were hauled

through miles of forest between the teeth of a single elephant. But once these logs were set down by the road, they required a cart and three bulls for the conveyance of each, or a motor truck by which they were taken to Colombo and thence transhipped to Europe to panel the interiors of ocean liners and sumptuous mansions all the world over.

The possession of all these lands must not, however, be taken as an indication of great monetary wealth. To possess forests of valuable timber is one thing, to exploit them successfully quite another.

The manner in which a single person came to acquire such vast acreages requires comment. The *nindegama* of Panamura, consisting of 54,000 acres, was gifted to Maduwanwella's great-grandfather by Raja Singhe II, for having taken to him the head of a low-country Sinhalese general in the service of the Portuguese, whom he is said to have shot at Kotagoda near Matara by the light of the cigar the general was smoking after dinner.

The *nindegama* of Maduwanwella, 28,000 acres in extent, was a gift to his ancestor from Sri Wickrema Raja Singhe, the last King of Kandy, for having presented him with a white sambhur (*ali gona*) that had long roamed the forests eluding capture.

Still another grant of land was the reward for driving a herd of wild elephants past the pavilion of a king.

So much is authentic, and is borne out by *sannas* in the possession of the family.

But many legends are related of these lands so plentifully bestrewn with ancient ruins.

One story concerns the choice of the site on

which the Maduwanwella *walauwa*\* stands. Until quite recently a great tamarind tree of vast age towered in front of the house. The saying goes that, from a platform built on this tree which overlooked a glade, an ancestor of Maduwanwella used to watch for game. One day as he sat there, a hare came out of the edge of the jungle; in a little while a jackal appeared out of the opposite edge. The two approached each other across the open glade until they met—and then the hare chased the jackal! So remarkable an occurrence was thought to be indicative of a lucky site for a house, and there the *walauwa* was built.

The village of Maduwanwella was not always known by that name. In the time of Kirtisiri†

\* A similar legend is associated with the building of the Sinhalese king's palace in Kandy. Wickrama Bahu III, who was reigning at Gampola, while out hunting in the forests north of his capital, reconnoitred the locality with a view to finding a more secure place for his residence. He came upon a cavern occupied by an old Brahman named Sengada and explained to him his quest.

The Brahman retired into his cave, filled a leather wallet with pebbles, and respectfully desired the king to follow him. He proceeded towards a dense part of the jungle and threw a stone into it, when a hare sprang out and ran at great speed. Then the Brahman cast another stone, and a jackal leapt out and pursued the hare; but soon the jackal gave up the chase, and turned tail closely followed by the hare. "Dost thou see, O King," said the sage "that this is the place the gods have ordained for thy kingdom. This is the *Jayabhumiya* or Victorious Ground, where thou shalt be protected by mountains and forests, and, instead of fleeing before thy enemies, thou wilt turn round and put them to flight, even as the hare did the jackal." So the king removed the seat of his kingdom from Gampola to Kandy.

† Yet another version of the foregoing legend is as follows:—

Narendera Singhe, a Sinhalese king, had come to Kondasala to inspect his fields. There he met a beautiful Tamil damsel with her brother. The king instantly fell in love with the girl and married her.

Years passed, but the queen bore the king no heir. Then one day the king died.

According to the law of the land no monarch could be buried unless a successor was found. The nation was in a quandary. The Councillors met and decided to hold a *perahera* procession led by a riderless elephant, and to adopt as king the man to whom the elephant would pay homage. The choice fell on Kirtisiri (the younger brother of the queen) who thus became the first Tamil to be elected by the Sinhalese as their king.

Rajasinghe it was called Dederagama. The legend is that in those days a large herd of *maduwas* (wild buffaloes) devastated the country destroying the crops of the people, who begged their king to help them. The king sent elephants carrying boulders with which they blocked the narrow passage by which the herd had entered, and thus destroyed them. Since then the place is known as Maduwanwella or field of the *maduwas*.

On the summit of a high hill-top to the west of Kolonna is a hollowed rock poised on three stones, said to have been the cunjee (rice porridge) pot of a *yodaya* or giant.

A village close to Immaduwa on the Akuressa-Deniyaya road is called Minimaruwa (murderer), once reputed to be the residence of a Tamil king who was afflicted with a chronic cough. He consulted the Mattiyawalage people regarding a cure; they recommended the *thudaranawella*—a thorny creeper—which they directed the king to swallow and then draw out again, thus extracting the phlegm which coated the gullet. This they advised with the intention of killing the king. But he, learning of their treachery, captured the Mattiyawalage, and split them asunder by tying their limbs to the tops of two adjacent saplings bent forcibly down, and then sprung apart.

Kirtisiri, like his predecessors, was harassed by Tamil invaders, and had no settled capital. A Vedda named Senkada used to supply the royal household with venison. When out hunting one day with bow and arrow, he wounded a hare. Three drops of blood fell on the spot. The Vedda followed the hare with his dog for about a mile, when, suddenly, the hare stopped fleeing, and turning round gave chase to the dog!

The king, on hearing of this wonderful episode, visited the scene. The place where the three drops of blood were shed was called *Le-valla* (bloodstained sand), and that where the hare turned on the dog was called *Senkadagala Nuwera*, after the Vedda. Here the king built four *devalas*, (temples). Thus arose the present town of Kandy, the last stronghold of Sinhalese kings.

At the foot of the hill called Attanagallagawe, by a huge *nuga* tree, runs a river, a deep hole in which is said to contain golden beds, chairs and tables. Formerly these would float to the surface once a year, but have never done so since a woman attempted to secure them with a hooked stick (*kekke*). A great eel is said to guard those treasures in the dark depths of the water. Being fond of *madu* leaves, it used to travel along a river-side path to the Paragoda *vihara*, a mile and a half away, where the leaves were to be found. One day some wayfarers noticed the eel's tracks issuing from the water to the path. They sprinkled the spot with ash, and kept watch. When the eel came to the ash, it could not proceed, wriggle as hard as it might. Then one of the men taking an axe chopped off its head which fell back into the hole in the river-bed, where the eel still lived—though, of course, a much shorter creature than before! The villagers fed on the body of that eel, only to succumb to cholera soon afterwards.

In the secluded valley of Kolonna, redolent of old tradition, were perpetuated many of the customs of a by-gone era; and in the chieftain Maduwanwella smouldered the spirit of the feudal overlords who ruled their own men in their own way—autocrats all, beneficent or tyrannous according to their natures.

Maduwanwella was always impatient of official interference in what he considered his own affairs. This brought him, as we have seen, into frequent conflict with the Government Agents of Sabaragamuwa, who, while they found it good policy to treat him with deference and conciliate rather than alienate him, at the same time always considered him something of a thorn in the side of Government. He once told a high official

who threatened to carry out some measure he did not approve of in his district, "All right, we'll see what you will do," and left him. Before many days had passed that officer had to leave Kolonna in hot haste, being unable to purchase a single article of food from the villagers.

A forest officer, whose conscientiousness in inquiring into the illicit felling of Government timber led him to encroach on the Maduwanwella territory, received a hint one day that if he remained there much longer he might possibly be mistaken for a sambhur and shot.

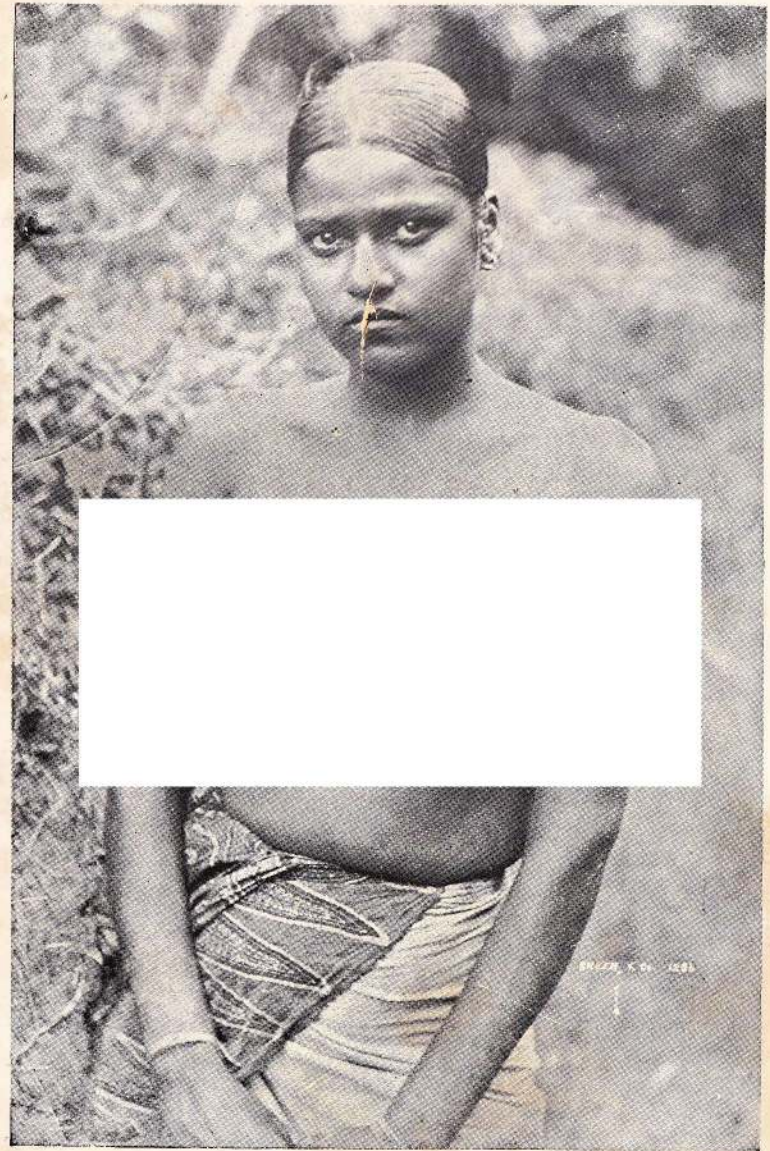
His behaviour during the riots of 1915 was characteristic. While authority was set at defiance everywhere in the Island, and martial law prevailed, Maduwanwella easily kept his people under control. The Governor, however, had been informed that serious trouble was brewing in Kolonna, and summoned the chief to appear before him. Maduwanwella telegraphed back that he was sorry he was unable to come—and there the matter ended.

During one of the many elephant kraals held at Panamura, Maduwanwella, clothed in a silk sarong like any other Sinhalese and carrying a stick, was proceeding towards the stockade when a couple of Europeans went past him.

"Where are you gentlemen going?" asked the old man politely.

"Who are you, that we should tell you where we are going?" arrogantly retorted the older visitor, a commercial big-wig of Colombo.

"I'll show you who I am," thundered the chief. Stepping forward and drawing a line across the path with his stick, he said, "Step across that line if you dare, and you will soon learn who I am." With that he beckoned to his men, and



"Buxom beauty nude to the waist."



in a moment the group was surrounded by cordon of armed beaters ready to do their master's bidding at a word.

The astonished visitors stood there quaking and sweating, while the R.M. told them what he thought of them, and added the information that the kraal was a private one on his own land. There was no way out of it but by an abject apology from the visitors, who were then allowed to go, but with the advice neither to overstep the line that had been drawn, nor to approach the stockade.

His manner of dealing with the delinquencies of minor headmen was summary. A tree stood in his garden called "*aratchie kithule*" to which many a recalcitrant one had been bound and chastised.

In his spacious reception hall he received his vassals with their tributes and grievances. His granaries were stored with a third share of the chena produce of his district. He was a father to his people, and no one who came to his house wanted for food or shelter. He was arbiter of their disputes, and few cases ever went from Kolonna to the law courts beyond. Events could occur in that remote valley that need never be known outside it, if its lord so willed; and nothing happened there without his cognisance, for his lands were well sentinelled.

He permitted none of inferior caste to enter his grounds except bare-bodied. One who has seen it has told me of the sorry spectacle of a group of school children, varying in ages from four to sixteen, who attended a treat at his *walauwa*. Outside the gates of his garden they all stopped, in order that the low caste ones among them might divest themselves of their jackets before entering. His grounds were swept, and in his

kitchens the paddy was pounded, by buxom beauties naked to the waist.

He was a perfect host and always fond of good company. When coffee was in its glory, every week-end the planters would ride down to his place for tennis, racing, and bibulous merriment. A great friend of the old planters, he helped them many a time to open their lands, by drafting to their service at sudden notice a labour force of even five hundred men. Straggling coffee plants, sad mementoes of those days, may yet be seen at Wijeriya and on the hills above Kolonna.

I left Maduwanwella on my return journey to Colombo by way of Panamura. As I walked along the forest path I heard the yodelling of *tavalam* drovers, and met their bulls with laden sacks bound for the *walawwa*. The custom continues, the individual passes away.

My route led through the deserted kraal of a previous year. The satinwood palisade, lashed with cane, still held together. Scattered about were the crumbling huts of kraal-town, which for a sudden week was a hive of humanity—then the accustomed desolation again.

This was the immemorial *mise-en-scène* for the capture of elephants by the chiefs of Maduwanwella. By nature the locality seemed designed for the purpose. To judge by the fractured boughs, the droppings, and stamped earth, the precincts seethed with elephants. We knew they drowsed even now in arbour and brake, though in the heat of noon the silence of the sepulchre prevailed, except for the occasional note of a bird.

Within the midst of the ample palisade camouflaged among the trees, bubbled a perennial spring, which attracted the elephants in the months of drought. That the spot was revered by man was evident from the little fane at which he made

offerings before embarking on the high adventure of trapping the goliaths of the jungle. A decaying tree trunk lay fallen across the restless mossy water. I started to walk along it, only to be cautioned not to do so, for it was a profanation of a sacred place, and the tutelary god might be angered; the log might snap and I might disappear in the quagmire for good and all, as even elephants had done.

Colossal trees towered around, many of them in the grip of massive writhing vines carrying on a remorseless struggle for mastery through the long years. Verily, here was a titanic arena where the cunning of man might match itself against the power of the elephant.

### THE GOIYA

Hid in a corner of the vale,  
Where blithesomely a runnel bends,  
And softly purling dowers the dale,  
His field the muddied ploughman tends.

Set in this spot of earth by God,  
As his divine prerogative,  
From birth he's wedded to the clod,  
That gives him all a clod can give.

Beneath the shade of friending trees,  
Stands his crude hut of leaf and clay ;  
'Tis there he finds repose and ease,  
When close the ardours of his day.

And mark him where he drives his plough—  
Nor deem that he need lonely be :  
His friends, the halcyon on the bough,  
The heron watching patiently.

To see the breeze his paddy swing,  
His home from penury to shield,  
To hear his children's laughter ring—  
These are the gifts his labours yield.

Oh ! who that's pinnacled by fame,  
What minion of luxury,  
May claim that either wealth or name  
Doth yield him such serenity ?

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And hast thou known, strange voyager,  
Chasing thy dreams around this sphere,  
Aught that like this the soul can stir ?  
For where is charm, if 'tis not here ?

Here where the valleys of the land,  
That the immortal hills enfold,  
Clothed in their serried grain-fields stand,  
Lit by gleaming sunset's gold.

## THE DEVIL-BIRD

*"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest  
tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert  
land enchanted—"*

E. A. POE.

ALWAYS alluring is the unknown. The Devil-bird is one of the many mysteries of our Island; it is eerie and evasive, a terror both to man and lesser creatures. Like the "singing fish" of the Batticaloa lagoon, it has so far baffled us. Long may they both continue to do so; for to have full knowledge of a thing is to rob it of romance.

The Devil-bird owes its name to its weird and appalling voice, heard only in wild places in the silence of night.

The human mind has a leaning to the supernatural; one may therefore pardon the usually extravagant descriptions that have characterised the reports of those who have had the good—or bad—fortune to hear the bird.

Here, for instance is the story as told by an old time planter.\*—

"It was just before the breaking of the big monsoon. The night was warm and close. I had been dining at a friend's, and was riding home

\* *Monthly Literary Register*, Dec. 1893.

quietly and soberly along a bridle-path, in and out among the deep ravines. Suddenly there was a cry; then another still more piercing. My pony, a brisk, black, little Pegu, cocked his ears and bolted. He flew, and in the twist of a ravine he had me off like a shot. There I lay on my back, kicking and struggling and crying blue murder. And all the time shriek followed shriek, curdling my very marrow; and the mountains shrieked in concert, until my cheek paled and I began to pray. I would have given my soul for a stiff horn, for I was in a devil of a fright, I can tell you. At last they died away—those awful cries—in one long unearthly wail, and I rolled out more dead than alive. I got home and went to bed. I did not then know there was such a thing as a Devil-bird in the Island. I certainly thought some wretched girl was being killed. I never slept a wink, but got up before the sun, and down I went to the next village to rout the villains out. And there I got to know all about it. 'You see,' said the headman, 'last night one of our women died in labour, and her spirit went at once into a Devil-bird, which must have been sitting handy. So when your Majesty hears a Devil-bird again, lie still, for it is always the soul of a woman in pangs, and it's best to give it a wide berth!'"

*Legends*

There are many legends relating to this awful bird. Here is one.\*—

A long time ago there lived a man, his wife, and their little daughter. The man was a great drunkard, and arrack made a wild beast of him. One night he came home with a hornful of arrack and a fine hunk of beef off a neighbour's cow. Handing the meat to the woman to be cooked for

\* *Loc. cit.*

supper, the man sat on a stool and drank. Now, the woman had left the meat in the kitchen, and gone out to pick chillies and spices to flavour her mess. When she got back the meat was gone. She hunted high and low for it without success. Knowing her husband's temper, and expecting the stick, she approached him in tears and confessed the loss. To her surprise he did not thrash her, but quietly left the house saying he would fetch her a joint which would do as well. In the garden he found their only child, a dear little girl. Taking her by the hand, he led her to a dismal place, and killed her; he then cut up her tender body and took some of her flesh to his wife. She, poor woman, received the meat thankfully, and cooked it. When all was ready she invited her husband to the meal. But alas! while she was sharing out the flesh, she was horrified to find in her wooden spoon, the finger of a child. Then an awful thought darted into her mind, and she exclaimed, "*Mai lamaya co?*" ("Where is my child?") The man looked at her and grinned like a demon. That told her all. With one heart-rending shriek she pressed to her head the hand still clutching the spoon, and fled into the jungle never to return; for there she turned into the Devil-bird; and they say, whenever a soul is fleeing, she spies from her perch a funeral passing below her, and sees the face of a corpse; then in the darkness of night she shrieks her frightful screams.

Another version of the story, of which there are many,\* is this.— There were two Vedda brothers, the younger of whom had a wife the elder coveted. When they were in the jungle one day, the elder brother slew the younger with an arrow, brought home his flesh, and gave it to the house-

\*See also the chapter "A Chieftain of the Wilderness."

hold to be cooked. As the food was being apportioned, the Vedda, who had up to now secreted one of his brother's fingers in his betel bag, threw it on to his mother's share. She, seeing the finger, had her suspicions roused and asked him where her younger son was.

"He will be coming soon," replied the brother.

"Soon? Why here's his finger!" said the distraught woman, and holding her spoon to her head, she fled into the forest, shouting "*Pootha co?*" ("Where's my son?")—which is an imitation of the Devil-bird's cry.

#### *Theories Regarding the Bird's Identity*

Now let us examine some of the theories held with regard to the identity of this elusive bird.

So far the consensus of recorded opinion seems to be that it is an owl (*Strix indranee*). Tennant,\* Layard,† Kelaart,‡ Legge,§ Neville,¶ and many others accept this view; but most of them seem merely to refer to what the others have said.

Legge is very unconvincing in his attempts at proving the bird's identity. Neville seems to be rather tied up in knots, seriously giving as possible solutions of the cry, "the dreadful shrieks, like those of a young child, made by frogs in the jaws of rat-snakes, or in the cruel talons of an owl or night-hawk." And when a contributor to the *Taprobanian* says, "Another animal which in mortal terror utters a cry also like the screaming of a child in dire distress, is the hare," Neville is drawn sagely to remark, "This I regard as very important; it opens a clue to the strangulation

\* *Natural History of Ceylon*, p. 246.

† *Journal, Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. ii, part i, p. 209.

‡ *Journal R.A.S.*, vol. ii, part ii, p. 170.

§ *Birds of Ceylon*, pp. 155-158.

¶ *Taprobanian*, pp. 36, 37, 72.

cries attributed to the Devil-bird."

(Incidentally Neville gives a similar explanation to the myth of the *Bodrimar*, "a sort of Banshee, the ghost of a pregnant woman who died and was buried with her undelivered child still alive. From time to time her weary spirit wails round houses to warn other women. The *Bodrimar* is said to have been several times shot at, while uttering her mournful wails, and on each occasion she vanished, and a dead lizard was next day picked up on the spot. It is quite possible a lizard caught by a snake uttered the strange cries, and was disgorged by the snake when fired at." My belief is that the myth of the *Bodrimar* has grown around the Ceylon loris).

Mr. Wait speaking of owls\* is "convinced that the cries (of the Devil-bird) vary considerably and probably are not all made by the same species. Two species—*H. nipalensis* and *P. badius assimilis*—are probably genuine Devil-birds, but as they are either rare or restricted in range, and as the Devil-bird's cries are reported from all over the Island, I cannot imagine that they are the sole authors of the ill-omened sounds."

He further says, four owls are held in suspicion.—The Brown Wood-owl (*S. indranee*), the Forest Eagle-owl (*Huhua nipalensis*), the Ceylon Bay Owl (*P. badius assimilis*) a rare bird peculiar to Ceylon, and lastly the Brown Hawk-owl (*N. scitulata hirsuta*) a small species found all over the Island, mentioned by several Indian observers as making noises like a strangled cat or a hare caught by hounds.

Now, if we sift the evidence that identifies one or other of these birds with the Devil-bird, I think we shall find it so meagre as to justify us in excluding each and all of them. As for the

\* *Birds of Ceylon*, pp. 242-243.

last two we may do so summarily, for the Devil-bird, as the jungle villagers will tell you, is neither rare nor small. It is possible, however, that one or other of these birds may be responsible for weird cries that have been mistaken for the Devil-bird's, just as those of terror-stricken frogs or hares have been.

The Brown Wood-owl (*Syrnium indranee*) has, as I have said, the largest number of advocates, but most of them obviously recapitulate the remarks of others without contributing any fresh proof whatever. The quadrisyllabic "oot-oot-tu-whoo" note of this bird is not in the least like the Devil-bird's.

Mr. F. Lewis states\* that on two occasions he had heard the hooting of the Brown Wood-owl which can only be described as blood-curdling. On hearing them he thought a woman or child was being murdered. "I heard," he says, "on a moonlight night, a few feet from me a deep hiss, followed by a chuckling sort of laugh, and this again by a gurgling sob. Then followed a deep melancholy wail, ending in something like a scream. I saw just above me a large owl moving its body and putting out its feathers as each cry followed the last. The close bold barring of the feathers could be clearly seen." Later he obtained a *syrynium* chick and reared it to a full-sized bird, but never heard it produce any sound but a hiss or a contented sort of chuckle when he gave it food. The bird Mr. Lewis saw on that moonlight night, to judge by his vivid description of the cry, must undoubtedly have been a Devil-bird, but, I think, he was mistaken in thinking it was the Wood-owl.

There is a note on page 48, vol. ix, of *Spolia Zeylanica* stating that Dr. Oliver Perera read a

\* *The Ibis*, July, 1898 p. 343.

paper on the Devil-bird which he said was the Mountain Hawk-eagle. One wonders why his remarks were not published—for the reason, perhaps, that they were unorthodox, for we are told that an interesting discussion ensued, and the Brown Wood-owl was not dethroned.

The Forest Eagle-owl (*H. nipalensis*) is said authentically to have been shot by Mr. J. H. Stephens while uttering the cries of the Devil-bird.\* But as Mr. Wait himself remarks, it is a rare species in Ceylon, and its cry as described by Jerdon is “a low, deep and far-sounding, moaning hoot”—which is no description of the Devil-bird’s cry.

I was particularly interested to note that Mr. Wait prefaces the remarks I have quoted on owls with the following statement:—“The villagers in the Puttalam district ascribe this cry (the Devil-bird’s ‘loud piercing, single scream, audible at a great distance’) to the Crested Hawk-eagle (*S. cirrhatus*), and I believe that in some cases they are right. I have heard this cry at night in the North-Central Province, and although the effect was blood curdling, there was a ring in it not altogether unlike the ordinary note of an eagle.” Now that is valuable first-hand testimony coming from so skilled an observer as Mr. Wait. And I think that little scrap of information he has given us, may well be weighed against the opinions he has recorded of others.

Emerson Tennent, in a foot-note to his remarks on the Devil-bird,† states that Mr. Mitford, to whom he was indebted for much valuable information relative to the birds of the Island, says,—“The Devil-bird is *not an owl*. Its ordinary note is a magnificent clear shout like that of a human

\* Wait’s *Birds of Ceylon*. p. 243.

† *Natural History*. p. 247.

being. It has another cry like that of a hen just caught. But sounds which have earned for it its bad name, and which I have heard but once to perfection, are indescribable, the most appalling that can be imagined, and scarcely to be heard without shuddering. I can only compare it to a boy in torture whose screams are being stopped by being strangled.” He never obtained a specimen of the bird, much as he tried, and surmised it to be the *Podargus* or Night Hawk.

Perhaps the best record of personal experience is that of Mr. S. C. Munro.\* It is a pity that his description of the birds is tantalisingly meagre, and just falls short of enabling us to identify them, for he seems to have struck a whole group of nesting Devil-birds in very combative mood. He says.—“I was on a cocoanut estate near Batticaloa and had retired to rest one night when I heard a low hoarse screech, repeated regularly every two minutes, precluding my sleep. The same thing occurred the next night, and I seized my gun and started after the disturber. On approaching, it flew off about fifty yards uttering yells much as if a dozen fowls had been caught at once, and were in apprehension of instant death; and for the first time I knew that a Devil-bird was the enemy. I followed it all over the estate until I drove it into the jungle. At times it uttered screams, but the screech was the favourite note, and recommenced at once every time it settled. The game went on every night for a week, and I stumbled after it in vain, till some moonlight came to my assistance, when I sighted and killed the bird. It proved to be a *large brown bird with the head similar to an eagle’s*† but the body of an

\* *Taprobanian*. p. 72.

† The italics here and elsewhere among the quotations are mine.

owl, without however the extent of claw usually possessed by birds of prey." A few days later the cries recurred, and another similar bird was shot. Then the coolies brought in a young one, not quite able to fly. "As soon as it was dark he began the old creak; his cries brought two more Devil-birds and the screeching went on worse than ever. At my approach the old birds attempted to drive me away by an imitation of the noise of a wild beast; just like the half grunt and half shout of a bear preparing to charge. Eventually they were all shot, and the young one did not long survive, which I did not regret much as tying it out in the estate every night was a nuisance."

In a foot-note to this, the incorrigible Neville must needs comment, "There can be no doubt Mr. Munro's noisy visitors were *Syrnium indralee*." How a creature with a "head similar to an eagle's" could possibly be the Brown Wood-owl is more than I can see. The meagre description is, I think, much more suggestive of the Hawk-eagle, though no mention is made of a crest, which in this bird only consists of a few feathers not very apparent unless the bird is roused; the detail may have escaped the memory of one who obviously jotted down his experience, years after its occurrence.

### *The Cry*

In endeavouring to unravel the mystery of the Devil-bird, our first duty is to determine, if we can, what precisely are the notes of the bird, as much confusion has arisen from different interpretations of the cries heard.

To begin with we may safely eliminate those fantastic theories that attribute the cry possibly

to frogs, lizards, and hares in their death-pangs, however plausible and ingenious those theories be. These cries do not carry anything like the distance of the Devil-bird's.

We must also set aside the common hooting of owls so often ignorantly attributed to the Devil-bird. The "to-who-hu" note of the Brown Fish-owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*), for instance, is commonly heard at dusk in the sombre bosage round jungle tanks. Ask the villagers what cry that is, and the more ignorant of them will at once confidently aver that it comes from the *Ulama* or *Pe-kuruwe* (the Sinhalese and Tamil equivalents of the Devil-bird). But never will a real jungle dweller tell you that. I once asked a rest-house keeper, with some pretensions to English, whether he knew what the Devil-bird was like. Promptly cocking his index fingers on either side of his head in imitation of an owl's ear-tufts, he answered, "That same keeping this kind; this way keeping two. I throw away, taking stone!" But that sort of information we must of course ignore.

What then are the real notes of the Devil-bird? There are said to be two.—One *a long drawn 'hoo'* "like that made by villagers who have lost their way in the jungle, and calling or screaming at most in despair, with no idea of death agony or anything half so terrible." The other, the '*strangulation cry*' variously, but always most graphically described as for instance, "most wild and thrilling, or "fiendish cries that simply froze my blood—as if some one was choking and dying," or "piercing convulsive cries so horribly agonising that it was difficult to believe murder was not being committed."

It is the human note in each of these cries that is their appalling feature—the one that of a lost



soul, the other that of a person being garotted. What wonder the villagers in the localities the bird haunts, hold it in holy terror, and its cry as of ill omen. So afraid are they, that if the bird be heard while a person is seriously ill, his relations will lose interest in him, and leave him more or less to his fate, saying intervention is useless. They will run away from the sound, if it be heard close, as if the devil were at their heels, and stay hushed indoors apprehensive of impending calamity, while the children will tremble and cry.

Whoever has heard the real cries of the Devil-bird, whatever his claims as a writer be, becomes at once a literary artist when he tells of the experience, as many of the descriptions I have already quoted show.

Now, the question is, *Are the two cries—the long-drawn "hoo" and the guttural strangulation cry—made by the same bird or by different species?*

I myself, though I have often heard the "hoo" cry, have never yet heard the strangulation cry. From many of the descriptions, it will be seen that the two cries have been attributed to the same bird. The most realistic imitation I have had was from a Vedda, and he nearly dislocated his larynx in the effort: "guk-uk, guk-uk, ugu kuk, guk-uk-kovaaa." Another gave it thus: "boku-boku, boku-boku, boku-boku, kovai," and added the information that the bird dances on the branch, flaps its wings, twists back its head, and puffs out its breast, when emitting its most blood-curdling notes. They liken the first repetitive notes, probably the strangulation part, to the beating of a drum (*meene-bera gahanawa*); the last note ('kovaa') is obviously the 'hoo' heard even at great distances.

From what evidence we have, I do not think there can be much doubt that both the "hoo"

and the strangulation cry are made by the same bird, though not always at the same time. There are many who have heard the two together.

Mr. J. P. Lewis says the cry "begins with a deep hiss followed by a chuckling sort of laugh, and this again by a gurgling sob. Then followed a deep melancholy wail ending in something like a scream."

Another says, "The prolonged 'hoo' note was persistently repeated, then began the loud agonised and strangled sobbing. The sound struck sheer, stark, unexplainable terror, and died away somewhat abruptly."

#### *Evidence of the Bird's Identity*

The Devil-bird, ever since I first heard its eerie "hoo-oo" one midnight at Anuradhapura many years ago, has always appealed to my fancy. Since then I have never failed to make inquiries about it whenever the opportunity offered.

All the Sinhalese legends I have recorded, furnish us with a clue concerning one feature of this bird, namely, its crest; not, mark you, the symmetrical ear tufts of some of our owls, but a single crest—for the mother of the murdered child "pressing her head with the hand which clutched the spoon" fled into the forest and became the bird. Now, I would make something of this point, for we cannot afford to neglect the evidence even of folk-lore on a quest like this. The persons responsible for those weird stories undoubtedly had knowledge of the *Ulama*\* or Devil-

\* I am indebted to Mr. V. D. de Lanerolle for the following interesting entomological note.—

The two terms *ulama*, found in common speech, and *ulalena* or *ulaleni*, found both in common speech and writings, are identical in meaning and application. But the *-ma* in the former term *ulama* it is difficult to explain. On the one hand it may be regarded as a formative suffix, and, on the other, it may be taken as a contraction of *-muva* in *ulamuva* 'the owl-faced.'

bird; otherwise why that strange touch?

By repeatedly questioning scores of people I had met in my wanderings, carefully sifting the evidence I obtained, and discarding all doubtful data, I came to the conclusion that the Devil-bird was, (1) no owl but a crested eagle, (2) a large bird, and (3) streaked in its breast feathers rather like a jungle hen.

*There are any number of people in Ceylon who have shot the real Devil-bird while it cried* (just as there are some who think they have); but they are not the people who usually write down their experiences. I myself know half a dozen or more of them; and the descriptions of every one were in agreement. Some of these, I have been able to confront with a specimen I had in captivity for nearly a year, and they agreed that that was the very species of bird they had shot.

I once asked a man who had spent a great part of his life in our forests, whether he knew what a Devil-bird was like.

"It is an eagle with a crested head," he promptly replied.

"How do you know?" I queried.

"I shot one" he answered, "while it was hooing and gurgling on a large dead tree one moonlight night by my camp. I not only shot it, but ate its flesh to prove to my terror-stricken coolies, who ran away when they first heard the cry, that it was no devil but a bird!"

The term *ulalihini* occurs in the Janavamse in a list of names of birds. The first part *ula* of this compound probably comes from the Vedic, Pali *uluka* 'an owl' c f. Latin *ulula*, Old High German *ula*, Anglo-saxon *ule*, English owl etc. The Sinhalese term for Vedic *uluka* is *bakamuhunu* or *mahamuhunu* (lit. 'the large faced'). The second part of the compound, i.e., *lihiniya* means 'a bird.'

Accordingly in point of etymology the word *ulalena*, *-leni*, or *-lihiniya* means 'an owl-bird.' It may therefore be said that the bird in question belongs to the owl family, or, at least, that those who originated this name thought so, owing perhaps to the fact that it is a night bird as much as the owl is.

Mr. Karl Jansz, a surveyor, writes.—"Twenty years ago while camping on the banks of the Navakiri *aar* (river) about a mile from Divulana, I was told by the villagers there that the place was haunted. My coolies suggested my camping in the hamlet, but I did not care to do so as the majority of people were parangi-stricken.

"I was seated on my camp chair the first evening, when I noticed two or three fairly large birds alight on one of the *kumbuk* trees on the borders of the *aar*. That night I was suddenly roused from sleep by a great disturbance within my tent and the upsetting of camp chairs and tables, to find my whole gang of coolies inside, trembling with fear because 'the devils had arrived and were screaming at us.' I succeeded at last in calming them but could not induce them to leave my tent. They 'preferred to die with their master than go out and be eaten by devils.' Not able to sleep I settled to read. I must have been up a couple of hours when suddenly I heard something that made my hair stick up—two or three long-drawn blood-curdling notes as of one being strangled. There was no doubt about it, I was really alarmed. And the coolies said, 'Did we not tell you, sir, they are devils?' I went out with my gun towards the *kumbuk* tree, when we heard another yell more dreadful than before. I banged off in the direction of the sound, and was just able to see in the starlight two or three birds fly off with a loud flapping, uttering the most awful notes.

"I watched for several evenings after that, but the birds did not return, nor did we hear their cries. However, one night, on my return to camp, my boys gave me the news that two big birds had come to the *kumbuk* tree and were still there. It was too dark to shoot, and I did not disturb

them. That night we heard the cry again. The following evening I watched, and just as it was getting dusk, my friends turned up. I gave them both barrels and bagged the pair. They were a species of eagle (nothing of the owl in them), with reddish brown back, and very light breast with dark streaks. It was then I saw the crest for the first time—a narrow one, a few inches long on top of the head. I remained in that camp two months longer, but never heard the cries there again.”

One dark night I was seated by a fire at Bingoda with some Veddas. Suddenly the “hoos” of a Devil-bird rent the air.

“Ah!” said one. “That’s the devil I might so easily have shot this evening as it sat insolently ogling me from the branch of that *opulu* tree by the brook. But what was the use of wasting good shot on such carrion.”

“A pity you didn’t” said I. “That’s the bird I’d give anything to know about. What’s it like?”

“A large bird, with a back the colour of burnt earth, and a white breast; he has a crest on his head. He is common enough; we shall see him as we go along to-morrow or the day after.”

“Hoo-oo!” came the piercing wail.

“Hoo-oo!” gibed a Vedda.

“What an awful sound,” said I.

“That’s nothing” said another, “you should hear the other cry it makes. Then your hair would truly stand on end, and your blood go cold.”

“What’s it like?” He gave a gruesome guttural rending of it, choking himself in the effort.

“Ah, but that must be another bird,” I suggested.

“Don’t we know?” said he confidently. “Have we not seen?”

“Well, you must show me this bird;” I said, “and a good present will be yours.”

“Hoo-oo!” mocked the elusive demon of the night.

Next morning I saw a large bird on a tree and inquired what it was.

“It’s like the *Ulama*,” said a Vedda. “The colour is right; but one must see the crest to make sure. And you won’t see that till it stoops to fly,” he called after me as I approached with my gun. But the bird swung off and was gone before I could get a shot, not, however, before I saw its crest.

On getting back to Colombo from Bingoda, I made it one of my first duties to visit the museum, to see if I could recognise the species to which the bird that so exasperatingly evaded me belonged. I found there at least three species of eagle that resembled the bird I saw. I looked up Legge, but that authority confused me the more. Of one thing I was certain, the creature was no night owl, but one of the Hawk- or Serpent-eagles, and of these I strongly suspected the crested Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*).

I had come to a dead end; for I knew that, with my limited opportunities for visiting the jungle, I could not hope to add the final touch of proof necessary, by securing for myself a specimen of the bird while it cried, or even seeing one that had been shot by a reliable informant.

I now told Mr. E. C. Fernando, the museum taxidermist, all I knew about the Devil-bird, and suggested to him that the only way to clinch the matter would be for him to try and shoot the bird while it cried. This, I had no doubt, he would, sooner or later, have the opportunity of doing when camping out collecting specimens, for he was a young and ardent sportsman with a good

knowledge of birds.

A couple of months later I was pleasantly surprised to receive a telephone call from him telling me he had shot the Devil-bird, and had several specimens of it to show me.

"What bird is it?" I eagerly asked, fearing his discovery would not fit in with my data.

"The Hawk-eagle," said he.

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,  
When a new planet swims into his ken.

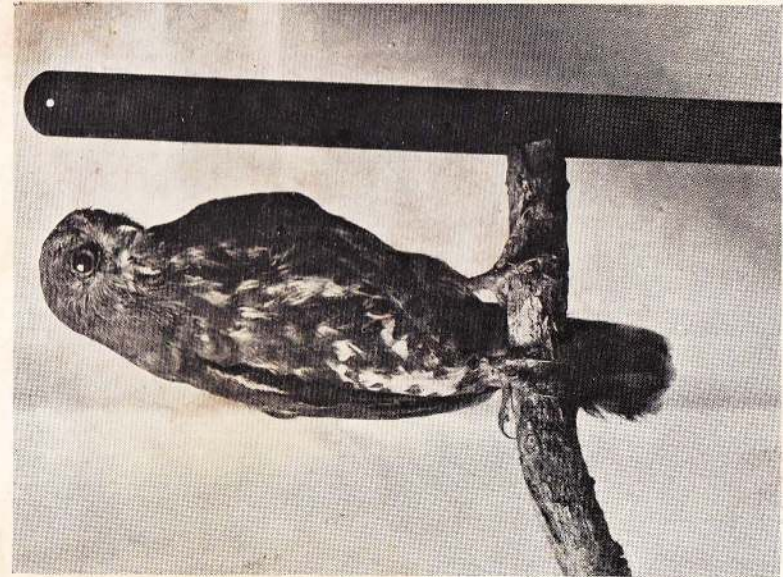
The circumstances under which he shot the birds were these.—

Towards the end of November, 1924, he was camping at Divulana, when he often heard at night the "hoos" of a Devil-bird coming from a certain direction. He also observed that a "harsh cough" sometimes immediately preceded the "hoo-oo," and conjectured, rightly or wrongly, that the first note might be the male's and the second the female's.

One afternoon he shot a large bird that had swooped down on some prey on the bund of the Divulana tank. A few days later he shot another on a big tree in close forest. It did not occur to him to associate these birds with the sounds he had heard at night.

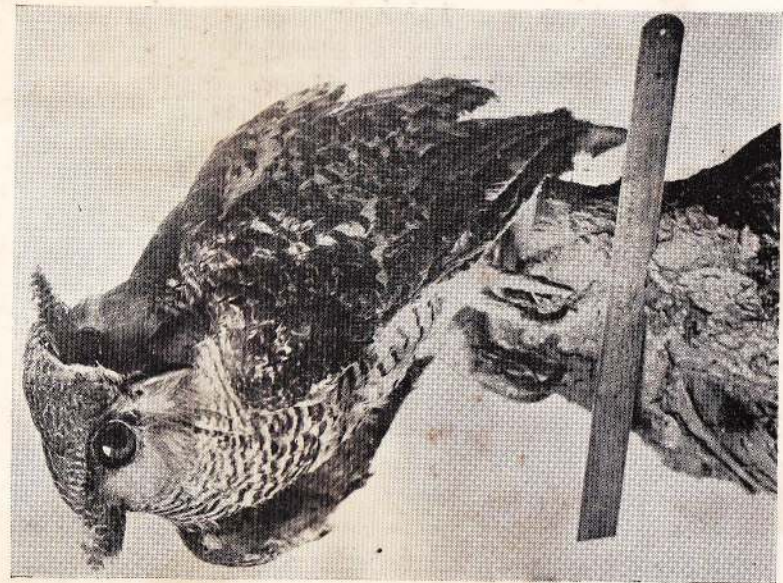
On his return journey from Divulana, he spent twelve days at a forest-ranger's house at Vellavaly—the veritable home of the Devil-bird, judging by their nocturnal calls.

Some thirty yards from the house was a stream flanked by giant *kumbuks*. Towards dusk he repeatedly observed certain large birds fly to the trees to roost; and it was from there the cries had come. Late one evening he was loitering under those trees, when the harsh throaty chuckle he had so often heard prelude the "hoo" cry



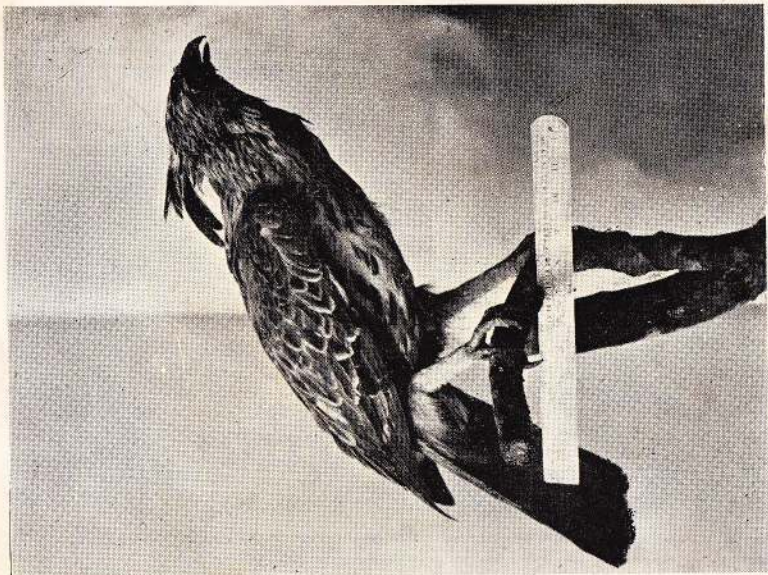
Times of Ceylon

Brown Hawk-owl.  
(*N. scintillata hirsuta*)

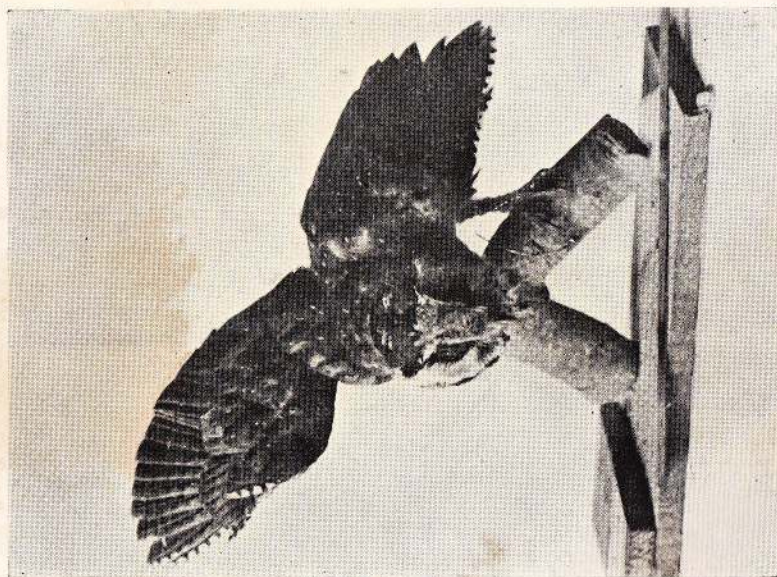


Times of Ceylon

Forest Eagle-owl.  
(*Huhua nipalensis*)



Times of Ceylon  
Ceylon Hawk-Eagle—the Devil-bird.  
(*Spizaetus cirrhatus*)



Times of Ceylon  
Ceylon Bay Owl.  
(*P. badius assimilis*)

made him look up. There, seated on a branch, was a large bird, the author of the weird noise. He shot it. It was not different from the two birds he had secured at Divulana. They conformed to the essential characters I had given him of the Devil-bird—a large crested bird, with breast feathers mottled like a jungle hen's, and the back the 'colour of burnt earth,' as the Veddas had put it.

The next day, when it was even darker, he shot a similar bird making the same noises on a neighbouring tree; but its plumage was much lighter than the others, its breast feathers being white—presumably an old bird. Two days later he shot a fifth under similar circumstances. All the specimens were Ceylon Hawk-eagles (*Spizaetus cirrhatus ceylanensis*). There were no other birds about, that might have uttered the cries.

In the stomachs of two of these eagles were found weaver-birds, and in that of another, a green lizard (blood-sucker). These birds are said to breed early in the year, and that perhaps accounts for their vociferousness in December.

Such is the evidence I have gleaned that the Devil-bird is the Ceylon Hawk-Eagle. To me at least it seems convincing—though I am still open to conviction, provided evidence of the right sort to the contrary is forthcoming. We owe Mr. E. C. Fernando a great debt of gratitude for taking us well towards the solution of one of the most evasive and tantalising problems of our jungles.

#### *Habits*

The Hawk-eagle is found in dense forests. Its favourite roosts are large trees, such as *kumbuks*, by rivers and tanks. The Veddas plume their arrows with feathers of the *Ulama* picked up along

dry stream-beds.

The bird's cry is heard soon after dark, about midnight, or towards dawn, especially on moonlight nights. The "hoo" cry carries far, but apparently not so the murder cry; either must be heard close, to reveal its appalling character. I have been told by those who have observed the bird against the moon, that when the strangulation cries are uttered, the bird hops on a branch with opened wings and ruffled plumes, twists its head round so as to look backwards, swells out its throat, and forces with effort the choking, sobbing notes that have made it so notorious.

The character of the bird is in keeping with its voice. It is a fierce marauder, the terror of the lesser creatures of the jungle. From the dark covert of trees it ambushes its prey. Swooping down like a bolt from the blue it snaps off their perches bulbuls or bayas, pigeons or jungle fowl; it kills peacocks with a stroke on the head from its powerful claws; it litters river banks with the wings and beaks of hornbills. All snakes, even the poisonous ones, like cobras and polongas, are its prey; and it is said boldly to assail the great hives of the dreaded bambaras, which it greedily gobbles, bees, comb and all.\* It even slays young apes and hares and moose deer (chevrotan) the large pathetic eyes of which are the first things it plucks out and devours. When a larger creature is killed, often the brain alone is eaten, smaller birds are gulped down whole.

Passing a ruined dagaba, surrounded by tall trees in the midst of a rocky forest glade, I once flushed a Hawk-eagle which winged into the

\* Mr. E. C. Fernando tells me that my informants may here have mistaken the Honey-buzzard for the Hawk-eagle which it closely resembles. The Honey-buzzard, has no tarsal plumes, and its crest is fashioned of short, pointed, bristle-like feathers.

cover of a belt of trees. Suddenly the joyous chatter of parrot, oriole, bulbul and squirrel, was replaced by a medley of harsh warning cries, and succeeded by a sudden expectant silence. Then I realised the great fear that brooded in that land of song.

#### Controversy

A short paper I read on the "Identity of the Devil-bird" before the Ceylon Natural History Society in June, 1925, gave rise to a good deal of interesting controversy in the press, as invariably happens whenever public mention is made of the bird. The majority of correspondents, on that and subsequent occasions, confirmed my opinion that the Devil-bird was the Hawk-eagle. There were, however, a few dissentients whose opinions cannot be disregarded.

I shall only give here extracts from the letters of *first-hand observers*, that seem to me to throw light on the subject. I italicise passages which seem to me most significant.

*Opinions in support of the Hawk-eagle being the Devil-bird.*—(i) "In common with everyone who goes into the low-country jungles, I have heard the cry of the Devil-bird many times, but only once have I seen what probably was one. On a moonlight night in the Hambantota district, I, with two others, heard the bird in a tree above our camp. I saw him fairly clearly against the moon. We obtained a similar view of him again three times, following him from tree to tree in the open jungle. He *did not appear to fly with any degree of certainty, and had not the soft, flapping flight of an owl.* He sported a tuft on his crown. He had a thinnish short beak, a fairly long skull, and seemed brown. He *threw his wings up,*

*ruffled his neck, and cocked his tail when screaming; but his other noises were made with close feathers and straight tail. His appearance gave the impression of intense malignancy, fear, or defiance. These facts were deeply impressed on my mind*" (Mr. W. G. Adam).

(2) "I am sure many of the writers could never have heard the real Devil-bird cry, or such theories as frogs making the row would never be advanced. Having spent a good many years in the Moneragalla district, where this bird's cry was often heard, I had many opportunities of hearing it. Two birds lived in the rocky jungle hill opposite my bungalow, and only some two hundred yards away. During windless moonlit nights these birds often came out, and made the 'hoo' cry for hours. It is long-drawn and ends with a short 'ah' sound, generally cut short with a sort of gasp, but occasionally lengthened on a rising note. *I was not sure, however, that the same bird made the strangling cry, till one night it performed just outside my bedroom window on a rubber tree.* I fired two shots into the tree with a revolver. The bird merely went into the next tree and made the cry over again and worse. I followed it up, while it continually gave the 'hoo' cry, being answered by its mate near the jungle. I must have followed it a quarter of a mile, and was often under the very tree it was on, but thick foliage prevented a clear sight. From what little was seen of the bird and its flight, it *did not appear owl-like* as to its head, although its flight was not rapid, and it was content to go only a few trees at a time. My neighbour who was keen on the study of birds declared it to be the Crested Night Hawk. It was seldom heard before about 7 or 8 p.m., and never when rainy" (Mr. E. C. Marsh-Smith).

(3) "I have shot this bird many a time while watching at water-holes. It is *a crested eagle. The two noises come from one and the same bird.* One is made with the beak to the front 'face forward;' the other, the inhuman voice, with neck turned round and face backwards" (Mr. R. A. Wijayatunge).

(4) "In 1908 I was stationed as Medical Officer of Maha-Oya in the Eastern Province. Between 5 and 6 p.m., I walked to the tank bund, gun in hand, to shoot something for dinner. The way led through a stretch of trees for not more than twenty yards. I was about half way through, when suddenly I heard a noise. It takes a lot to frighten me, but I was literally petrified and in a dazed condition for about half a minute. When I regained my senses I found I was still alive, and was tightly clutching the gun. Instinctively I looked up, and about six yards above my head was *a huge hawk, looking down on me with his wings raised.* I shot him down with number 4 shot, but he took a lot of beating with the butt end of the gun before he was finally killed. I had never heard of the Devil-bird then. The cry was so powerful and unusual that the rest-house keeper came down to the tank to inquire what it was. One thing that struck me was, that was not the usual cry of the hawk, as I believe I had seen the same kind on other tanks; but on this occasion at least the cry was uttered when it was suddenly frightened by my walking beneath its roosting place" (Dr. A. Simon Silva).

(4) "Those familiar with the cry of the Devil-bird will not confuse it with the heart-rending cry of the frog in the mouth of a snake. The Devil-bird's cry could be heard at a distance of half a mile on a still night; a frog's cry would not carry a hundred yards. The Devil-bird's cry is very

common in this country (Maha-Oya) and during certain seasons is heard almost every night. I assure your readers that this bird is a member of the hawk family and has a crest and an immaculate white chest. I take it that it has the vision of an owl at night. It cries not only at night but occasionally also during the day, as the following experience will show. I was on my way to Dolagalwella, and had just emerged out of dense forest to open talawa land, when I found the decomposed carcass of a sambhur. There were some hawks and jackals preying on it. At about 4 p.m. I returned to the spot in the hope of getting pig that are fond of carrion. Suddenly I heard the blood-curdling cry of the Devil-bird just above me on a majestic kumbuk, and there I saw it perched high (beyond range of my gun) with white breast feathers and crest plainly visible. It uttered another cry and flew off. The villagers told me it had come there to prey on the sumptuous repast that was lying in state with an open invite! They also told me that its cry is often heard even during the day in the far interior of desolate forests" (D. G. S. Dambadeniya, R.M.).

(5) "I had a full-grown crested Hawk-eagle in a cage for a little time, and occasionally at night it would give a loud screaming 'hoo.' It did not make any strangling cries. I also have a pair of large Forest Eagle Owls which so far only give a shrill hiss" (C. R. B.).

*Opinions against the Hawk-eagle being the Devil-bird.*—(1) "I am able to say that the bird responsible for the weird and blood-curdling noise has been seen and shot whilst making it. In 1912 my father was dining with several others at a bungalow in Bogawantalawa situated very near the jungle. During dinner they heard the Devil-bird's cry. It being a bright moonlit night, my

father went out with a gun, and saw a large bird fly down on to the lawn making the famous wailing scream likened to a woman being slowly strangled. The bird was shot and was found to be the Eagle Owl (*Huhua nipalensis*). This owl has for the last twelve or fifteen years completely disappeared from the up-country jungles, and, as far as I know, the cry of the Devil-bird which was once quite common, has never been heard again. Dr. Spittel's theory that the Hawk-eagle is the Devil-bird is entirely ruined by the fact that the Hawk-eagle does not fly about or make a noise at night, whereas the cry of the Devil-bird is only heard during the hours of darkness" (Mr. W. A. D. Kelly). Despite the assertion in the last paragraph, it is a well-known fact that many eagles do cry at night.

(2) "In a copy of Holdsworth's Birds of Ceylon, in which he says his informants always described the Devil-bird as an owl, there is a pencil note in the author's own handwriting which reads—"Miss Gordon Cuming, in 'Two Happy Years in Ceylon' vol. ii, page 115, says that Mr. Stevens\* of Gampola shot a bird in the act of uttering the unearthly cries of the so-called Devil-bird, and it proved to be *Huhua nipalensis* (the Forest Eagle-owl). As, however, this owl is confined to the hill districts, and the cry of the Devil-bird is well-known in the low country, there may be some question as to the identification of the species or the cry."

(3) One of my informants, Mr. G. Johnston, who shot the bird some years ago while it cried, also thought it resembled the Eagle-owl more than any other.

(4) "I was seventeen years in the wilds of Panawa Pattu and tried several times to shoot the

\* This is undoubtedly the same Mr. Stephens alluded to in Mr. Wait's book, and quoted earlier.



Devil-bird while giving vent to its blood-curdling cries without success. Eventually once at midnight on a moonlight night, I managed to bag one in the act. It was only hit lightly and fell down wounded, and I kept it alive for a few days feeding it with small pond fish and frogs. This bird was no other than the Ceylon Bay Owl (*Photodilus badius assimilis*)" (Mr. G. H. Canagasabay).

As this bird is a rare species and only met with in the hills and the bases of the ranges, it is very probable that the writer was mistaken in the bird's cry or its identity.

It is interesting to note that not a single first-hand observer, except Mr. F. Lewis (p. 199), championed the claims of the Brown Wood-owl (*Strix indranee*), the bird hitherto popularly held to be the Devil-bird.

The correspondence also confirmed the fact that kindred birds exist in other parts of Southern Asia.—

Mr. G. B. W. Gray writing from *Malacca* said.—  
 "There is a bird in this country that makes a hideous noise at night more like the whistle of an eagle hawk high up in the air—loud at first and then developing into almost a wail, known to the Malays as the *Burong Hantu* or Devil-bird. The Malays are very superstitious about the cry of this bird, and say that it generally signifies someone's soul in the *kampung* (village) is about to depart from earth. There is also a species of owl in this country that makes a similar sound to the bark of a red deer—quite a small owl, like the *bassa* of Ceylon."

A correspondent from Malaya "Alim" wrote.—  
 "Here we have a bird which the Malays call *Toh-ka-tampi* (Old man winnow rice for burial feast) which I am sure is the Ceylon Devil-bird.

In Sir Frank Swettenham's book of "Malay Sketches" he speaks of this bird as a *banshee*, and describes its cry as 'a long drawn out distressing wail as of a lost child, and next a piteous half-choked sob.' The Malays say that there are two other birds of ill omen with a similar cry and call them *Tumbok larong* (Nail the coffin) and *Charek kafan* (Rend the shroud)."

Finally, the controversy was not without both its acrimonious and humorous aspects. I give the following in illustration of the latter.—An anonymous writer ended his letter with, "Surely the Devil-bird is an Indian Drongo-shrike belonging to the family *Dicruridae*, and whose cry is "deil deil deil take ye." (His authority I afterwards found was an encyclopaedia).

Mr. A. N. Weinman replied to this as follows.—  
 "The Scotch 'deil' and the Indian Drongo-shrike is really rich, but here is one better:—A friend of mine informs me that hearing fiendish moanings and gaspings in a tree one moonlit night, he fired at a dark mass. Down dropped two rusty spotted cats which the moonlight had no doubt rendered romantic! Hence there is now another competitor for the honour of being called the Devil-bird—the Rusty Spotted Cat, *con amore!*"

#### *Reply to Critics*

It will, I think, be seen from the evidence here set down, that the case for the Ceylon Hawk-eagle being the genuine Devil-bird is a strong one. It is difficult for the opponents of this theory to get over the facts, (1) that so many, who have actually seen and shot the bird while it uttered the "hoo" cry, have identified it with live and stuffed specimens of the Hawk-eagle;

(2) that several have heard the "hoo" and strangulation cries uttered at the same time by the same bird, and (3) that one even "had a full-grown Hawk-eagle in a cage which occasionally at night would give a loud screaming 'hoo.'"

There are, however, certain arguments, at first sight strong, against our theory, that must be met.—

I. At least two observers (Messrs. Kelly and J. H. Stephens), who secured specimens of the birds while they cried, have proved them to be Eagle-owls (*H. nipalensis*); while another (Mr. G. H. Canagasabey) who also shot his while crying found it to be the Bay Owl (*P. badius assimilis*)—the Northern Indian form of which is said to make a noise "like half a dozen mad cats."

How are we to explain away such testimony? It can, of course, be done in Mr. W. E. Wait's way by assuming "that more than one species is responsible for the Devil-bird's cry." But that only begs the question, and is a very unsatisfactory shift; for, is it not a fact that (apart from imitative birds) no two species on this planet utter exactly the same notes?

No, I think the explanation lies in a confusion in the interpretation of the Devil-bird's cries. What exactly the qualities of its cries are, I have tried previously to define. That the two specimens of Eagle-owls shot made the "blood-curdling" and "unearthly" cries attributed to them we cannot doubt. But were they the Devil-bird's cries? How are we to settle this point?

I suggest that the clue to the mystery lies in the "hoo" and not in the strangulation cry, variants of which latter are produced undoubtedly by *H. nipalensis* (our only serious rival) and possibly by the Bay Owl, and a number of other creatures. I am not aware that *Huhua* ever emits the 'hoo

cry;" and that fact alone disqualifies it from any claim to the title of Devil-bird.

The traditional Ulama or Devil-bird of Ceylon is a single species, and it alone is capable of uttering precisely that forlorn "hoo" (co-o) referred to at the end of practically every folk tale concerning it, while ignoring the strangulation cry. That this bird happens to have another and even more appalling note which certain other birds can imitate, is, from the point of view of its identification, unfortunate, while it makes the mystery all the more intriguing. Find the bird that gives voice to the genuine nocturnal "hoo," and you solve the mystery of the Devil-bird. And this, I venture to think, the evidence here produced goes a long way towards establishing.

The Ceylon Hawk-eagle is essentially a low-country bird. And when we are told that the Devil-bird has been heard above an elevation of 3 or 5,000 feet, I think that the cries might possibly come from Legge's Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus nipalensis kelaartii*) which is exactly the same bird as the Ceylon Hawk-eagle but about twice its size—or perhaps from the Forest Eagle-owl for which the Devil-bird is apt to be mistaken.

2. If the Devil-bird is a common species, why are its cries so seldom heard?—Because, I submit, they are nocturnal and only emanate from the dense forests which the bird affects. The strangulation cries are seldom heard for the probable reason that they are alarm or mating calls, and only carry a short way. The "hoo" cry, however, reaches a long distance, and is much commoner than many people not thoroughly acquainted with jungle sounds, suppose. Often have I had to quieten camp talk, and call the attention even of "jungle wallahs," to the faint "hoo" in the far distance.

*Why should a bird with diurnal habits make nocturnal cries?*—It is common knowledge that many eagles (diurnal hunters) punctuate the night with calls from their roosts—as those who have kept vigil at water-holes will tell you.

4. *Why does the Hawk-eagle in captivity not entertain us with his demoniac repertoire?*—C. R. B.'s bird did at least utter the "hoo" part of it (while his Eagle-owl only gave a shrill hiss); and Mr. Munro's (p. 201) the more blood-curdling part—though here we are on less certain ground.

The live specimens of *Spizaetus* at the museum zoo have never, so far, uttered the distinctive cries of the Devil-bird, nor did one I had for a year in a large enclosure which, to reproduce natural conditions, included a bushy mulberry tree. During the day my bird would sometimes emit the "cooey cooey-kik" one often hears it make in the wild state. (Captive Brown Wood-owls, and Eagle-owls too have never produced anything approaching Devil-birds' calls).

Such negative evidence, however, carries no conviction. It is well known that birds in captivity (apart from favourite cage birds) do not necessarily make the cries they do when free. They have not the natural enticements to sing, and this is specially true of the Devil-bird whose home is in the serenity and seclusion of dark forests. Nor, perhaps, have they, like the captives of Babylon, the heart to sing:

For they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

#### IMPRECATORY VERSES TO SILENCE THE DEVIL-BIRD

The wings you fly with, may they break and fall  
The feet you perch with, may the same befall:  
The throat you wail with, be it stricken dumb.  
Ulalena ! in seven days may you succumb.

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If you call from on high, may your wings be bound :  
May the same befall if you moan from the ground,  
Or if from a rock your voice resound ;  
If you cry from a rock, may your wings be bound.  
Lord Buddha bind thy wings with bands :  
Restrained be thy mouth and hands.

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To Wellassa for rice you go,  
In Vediratte work your woe ;  
You reek with unborn childreans' gore.  
O, goddess ! Why then cry for more?

## ABOUT SNAKES

## I. CAN SNAKES HEAR THE CHARMER'S FLUTE?

THIS is a question that never fails to evoke controversy when mooted. Many ophiologists aver that though snakes are highly sensitive to vibrations through the ground, they are utterly deaf to air-borne vibrations, and therefore to the music of the snake-charmer's pipe gourd or bin.

In support of the snake's sharp perception of ground-borne vibrations, we read in Emerson Tennant's *Natural History of Ceylon*: "Such accidents (snake bites) to the natives appear chiefly to have happened at night, when the animal, having been surprised or trodden on, inflicted the wound in self defence. For these reasons the Singhalese, when obliged to leave their houses in the dark, carry a stick with a loose ring, the noise of which as they strike it on the ground is sufficient to warn the snakes to leave their path."

Pliny notices that the serpent has the sense of hearing more acute than that of sight; and that it is more frequently put in motion by the sound of footsteps than by the appearance of the intruder—"excitatur pede saepius."

Frank Wall and Phipson are emphatic that snakes are not attracted by the charmer's flute, and so is Dr. L. Nicholls to whose stimulating letters on this subject in the press I am indebted for some of my information.

Wall, the greatest authority on Indian and

Ceylon snakes, has conducted many tests on their hearing after first covering their eyes; these he describes in his *Snakes of Ceylon* (p. 467 *et seq.*): "I had," he says, "a kerosine tin in hand and when the snakes were recumbent I beat this with a stick close to their heads without their taking any notice whatever. Similarly, I blew a bugle close beside them, but they were not charmed!" He remarks that every care is necessary to eliminate other possible means of arousing the reptiles. In some of his earlier experiments the walking of a servant in an adjoining room was sufficient to cause his reclining and blind-folded snakes to erect themselves, so sensitive were they to ground vibrations. He goes on to say (p. 469): "As a matter of fact a snake-charmer in Bangalore with whom I had become very familiar admitted to me that snake-men knew that snakes were deaf, and that the whole of their 'charming' was a hoax."

Acton and Knowles\* (p. 723) state: "The music played by the snake-charmer is superfluous because *when erect the snake has no appreciation of sound, as it has a bony ear without a tympanic membrane.* The only sounds heard are vibrations transmitted through the skull *via* the ground. The sound of approaching footsteps, or anything falling on the ground, can be heard only if the snake is lying on the ground. As snakes cannot hear sounds, if the bin is played and the cover of the basket gently removed, the cobra will be found quietly coiled up and indifferent to the music."

Now, ever since I witnessed an old gipsy, clad only in a loin cloth, catch a wild cobra with the aid of his flute (see *Wild Ceylon*) I am convinced that cobras, at least, do hear the charmer's

\* *The Practice of Medicine in the Tropics*, edited by Byam and Archibald.

music. And there are many others, whose letters I shall quote later, who support me.

This does not imply that every gipsy is capable of piping a cobra out of its lair; the feat requires special skill and great patience. As a rule, the gipsy only catches those snakes he accidentally comes upon; when deputed to call forth wild snakes with his pipe gourd, he finds it easier to hood-wink one by surreptitiously letting them out of a bag he has got permission to carry at his waist on the pretext that the antidotes it contains may be required at a moment's notice.

The experiments of Wall and Acton I have quoted, though at first sight convincing, have been performed, we must remember, on captive snakes. Are we justified in concluding that, just because handled cobras do not respond to harsh and loud noises, they therefore do not hear them at all? Perhaps they do hear them, but not necessarily as startlingly loud as we do, and choose to ignore them like many another impression they must be sensitive to. Do we react to every sound we hear? Do not familiarity, preoccupations, distractions, and a variety of factors play an important role in determining our response to auditory stimuli? Are we justified in presuming that every pedestrian who does not leap out of the way of a tooting car is deaf, or that snakes, apparently indifferent to the charmer's flute in captivity, are necessarily so in their wild state amidst a quiet environment with their senses alert for the chances of food? We shall see later what the gipsies say.

Dr. Hans Gadov states that in the snake's ear "there is a long columellar rod with a fibrous or cartilaginous pad at the outer end, which plays against the middle of the shaft of the quadrate, every motion of which conveys the vibrations

directly to the fenestra ovalis and the internal ear. The tympanic cavity, the Eustachian tubes, and the tympanum are abolished, and no external traces of the ear are visible. However, in spite of all this, snakes can hear very well"—which, of course, does not settle the point with regard to air and ground vibrations.

Mr. D. R. R. Burt writes to me: "It is of interest to note that the ear of the snake differs from that of other reptiles—crocodiles, lizards, and tortoises—in having its tympanum, Eustachian tubes, and tympanic cavity suppressed. In the Frogs and Toads the ear resembles that of Lizards in possessing the above apparatus. But there are a few families among the toads where the condition approximates that found in the snake: in *Bombinator*, the fire-bellied toad, and in *Pelobates*, the spade-footed toad, the tympanum is absent and the Eustachian tubes are very minute. I have experimented with these animals many times and have noted particularly the acuteness of hearing. A blind *Bombinator* can catch butterflies guided by the sense of hearing; it can hear the beating of the wings of the butterfly against the sides of the vessel in which the toad is contained."

Acton and Knowles give as a reason for the snake's deafness its "bony ear without a tympanic membrane." But this is not proof in itself of the reptile's deafness to air conducted sounds.

Take for example the human ear. It is a well known fact that impairment of hearing may be very slight even in the presence of large defects of the drum membrane as the result of chronic middle ear disease.

It is by means of the cochlea (a rudimentary form of which snakes possess) that we discriminate

the three prominent characters of sound—intensity, pitch and quality.

There are certain aural diseases in which either the conducting or perceiving mechanism is disordered, where high-pitched notes are not heard but low-pitched ones are ; where whispered speech is heard better and at a longer distance than ordinary conversation ; where hearing for the watch is bad as compared with the voice ; where hearing is better in a noise. And the clinical tests for hearing are conducted by means of bells, whistles, tuning forks, watches, speaking voice and whispering.

All this to show how subtle is the problem involved in the determination of deafness, and that captive reptiles, apparently irresponsive to the blaring of trumpets and drumming on tins, are by no means therefore necessarily deaf to the soft notes of the pipe. A friend of mine, living in a snake-infested district, has told me that he often noticed cobras come out in his garden when he played bagpipe music on a gramophone in his verandah. I was unable, however, to elicit response to similar music in a caged cobra.

I once set, in a quiet corner of my garden, away from all disturbance, a box faced with wire-netting containing a cobra. After many hours, I sent my servant with a tin and stick, stealing noiselessly to the back of the cage so that the snake could neither see nor hear his approach. From a distance of twenty-five yards I focussed binoculars on the reptile. At a signal the servant smote the tin. I saw the snake give a distinct start and raise its head. But this happened only once ; it took no notice of repetitions of the experiment, probably associating it with its human tormentors.

## 2. GIPSIES AND SNAKES

SOME time ago I came upon an Indian juggler who told me that the idea of a cobra being able to hear the pipe was all twaddle. He admitted though, that legerdemain and twisting himself into knots were more in his line than snake-charming which he only practiced to cater to urban tastes, and also to clear the circle of his spectators when they thronged too closely around him ; then seizing a cobra by the tail he would twirl it at arm's length and thus never fail to secure ample space for his performance.

That the common herd of gipsies are imposters I am quite ready to admit, for I have had ample proof of their adroit trickery.

I was once spending the week-end on a coconut estate, when a gipsy visited me. I told him that if he or any of his band would come over with their pipes and catch a few wild snakes for me I would pay them a rupee per snake.

The following morning five of them arrived with their chief, who took no part in the subsequent performance. The others went through the usual procedure of divesting themselves of their garments to show that they carried no concealed snakes. They insisted, however, on wearing at the front of their waists, in the event of their being bitten, open pouches containing snake stones and antidotes. The various compartments of these bags they had previously displayed to dispel any suspicion I might have that they harboured snakes.

As we proceeded to a place I was to indicate, the youngest of the group, a lad of sixteen, would every now and then, out of an exuberance of spirits, let out an exultant blast on his pipe in anticipation of the fun! That he had been brought merely as musical ballast was evident.

I instructed the gipsies to keep together and so enable me to see for myself the snakes they attracted. The music began, and continued in good earnest for some fifteen minutes, when the knot of pipers gradually loosened out. I asked my servant to keep his eye on two, while I watched two others. The youngest we agreed to ignore; he was enjoying himself too palpably to be bent on serious work.

Sathan, a slim young fellow, the most plausible of the lot, quietly approached a heap of coconut husks. Squatting down, he peered into it intently, and went on with his piping. I surprised a sly glance he cast towards me, and marked him the more carefully after that. My attention was but momentarily diverted, when he suddenly shouted, "*pambu, pambu*" ("snake, snake"), and tugged at the tail of a cobra that crept sluggishly among the husks.

"What sort of a snake is this?" said I. "It seems hardly to have the life to move. Let me see its teeth."

The gipsy prized open the poor creature's jaws, and, saying he had already broken the fangs, rubbed the toothless gums so vigorously with a fold of cloth that they bled; he then drew the fabric a time or two along the gums and only just succeeded it getting it caught on the invisible stumps.

"This won't do," said I. "Play again, and catch a wild snake, not one you have brought."

His feelings were hurt! "Where could the

creature have been? Did the *dorai* not see that I had no snakes on me?"

"Never mind all that. Carry on. And let us see good fangs this time."

The piping was resumed. Sathan was nearing a hut, the door of which was closed; he motioned that it should be opened, and this was done. I kept close at his heels as he entered the room. He looked covertly out of the corner of his eye to see where I was, and finding me near him, continued piping awhile and came out again without making a capture.

Almost immediately there was a cry of "*pambu, pambu*" from one of the others, and another cobra was dragged out of a litter of fallen branches—but it too carried no conviction, as I told them.

They chewed a quid, grumbling; the job was not as easy as they had anticipated.

Again they sent forth their droning melody, and soon another cobra was shown me slinking into the thatched roof, and captured. This one may have been wild; it possessed fangs; but I was not on the spot when it was first seen.

"I am not convinced yet," said I. "Give me your pouches, let me examine them."

"Have we not already shown them?" they sullenly protested.

"Let's have another look."

"We can't," said Sathan. "We are going away."

"All right. But you will not get a cent from me."

They sulked and mumbled a lingo that was Greek to me. Then they made as if to pipe again.

"Don't," I warned. "You can clear out—unless you let me inspect your bags."

"We can't do that."

"Very well then, go away."

Thinking better of it, three of them handed me their pouches which I found had no snakes. Sathan, however, though he again demonstrated the contents of his pouch, would not place it in my hands; nor would he let me scrutinise it to my satisfaction. The inference was obvious; he had a third snake concealed.

We returned to where their old chief rested, and I explained to him the impasse; he listened passively without comment.

I then told them they could only convince me of their *bona fides* and earn their reward, if they lured a snake after leaving their bags behind. Sathan would not consent to this, but the other three half-heartedly undertook the task after some delay. I led them to another spot. They piped till the lungs of even the youngest of them ached, but no snake came.

On another occasion I took an incorrigible sceptic many miles to convince him of the powers of a band of gipsies that had been specially recommended to me. Three performers awaited us. Having satisfied us that they carried no snakes on them or in their bags which they retained on the usual plea, they performed on their bins for about an hour and a half. In all they captured three cobras and a small Russell's viper—two of them with fangs intact and poison bags full of venom; but the only snake that was demonstrably wild beyond the least doubt was a cobra that came down a tall tree surrounded by dense scrub in full face of us all. This the sceptic dismissed as an accidental happening!

The moral of these experiences is that if ever you have the opportunity of testing a gipsy, deprive him of his bag, or inspect it for yourself before allowing him to carry it, and then follow his movements very closely.



A gipsy playing his pipe.  
(Note the open pouch at his waist).





A gipsy chief.

As I have said before, not every gipsy can catch snakes in this way; but there are those who undoubtedly can. Any one who has observed the gravity, concentration, and watchfulness of the skilled gipsy at work cannot but be convinced that he believes in the power of his flute.

I shall now set down *the experiences of others*—The following extract (I only give the barest essentials of a vivid narrative) is taken from an article by 'E.O.K.' describing an experience while he camped on a tank bund in Southern India: "A large cobra had escaped into a hollow in the trunk of a tree. They had tried all ways they could think of to get it out, including shoving a long bamboo into the hollow and rattling it about, as well as smoking. Two snake-charmers, itinerant gipsies, hearing of this, came from a village two miles away. They walked round and round the tree, one of them playing their weird pipe. My servants and I watched from ten yards away.

"In about three minutes both men suddenly came to a halt, but the music continued; then the one who was not playing advanced very cautiously with a blanket, and about the same time I saw a snake moving out of a hole at the bottom of the tree.

"After a few seconds, the blanket was thrown on to the snake, and the man who threw it followed it up like a flash, and secured the snake, while it twisted and lashed itself round his arm, hissing in a most alarming manner. The fangs were quite visible and went to confirm that it was a really wild one just caught for the first time.

"In spite of having seen this snake caught before my eyes, I still thought there might have been some trickery about it. When I told this to the snake men they laughed and said I had chosen as a camping ground a place which, from

the look of it, must be infested with snakes, and they felt sure they could catch more. I challenged them to do so, and insisted on their stripping themselves of all clothing, except the minutest of loin cloths.

"One of the men was allowed to carry a basket for the snakes and a small blanket, which I examined before starting, and the other carried the musical instrument. A quarter of a mile away I stopped at a likely place and told them to produce a snake. They commenced as they had done before, moving slowly forward and very much on the alert, the pipes being played quietly all the time. In a few minutes both came to a standstill, and the next moment the blanket was cast on another cobra. In a very short time two more cobras were caught in the same manner."

Mr. C. L. Vizard writes: "For the last eighteen years I have used snake-charmers for catching cobras in my bungalow compound. I have always employed men attached to gipsy camps who come round about every six months. The men, generally two, in loin cloths only, follow me to some spot, such as a large rookery or the stables, where I have reason to think there may be a cobra. They then start playing their pipes, moving about very stealthily, and I stand by with a thick cane and generally in considerably less than an hour three to five or more cobras are found and are all killed by me. There are several others in the neighbourhood who employ these gipsies in a similar way. In fact we generally pass them on to each other. Cobras always appear to come straight along the ground towards the music, never stop and erect themselves."

Mr. Stanley Green writes: "When I first came to Batticaloa, I lived in a bungalow, the compound of which was used as a storage ground for the fire-

wood used by the lake steamer service. Report had it that the piles were infested with cobras. One day a snake-charmer came along and he accepted an offer of one rupee for each snake he produced out of the stack of wood. We stripped him of everything but the usual string, and watched him very carefully while he slowly walked round the wood piles, tooting quietly on his pipe as he went. After making a circuit of all the piles, he squatted down in an open space between them, continuing his music in a low subdued key. Within five minutes a large cobra was seen coming from a hole half way up one of the piles, which on reaching the ground advanced towards the charmer, who was waving his knee to and fro in the usual way, until he was within about ten feet of him, when he sat up with his hood distended. We killed the snake and found fully-developed poison fangs which were wrenched out by the charmer with a bit of rag. Within half an hour the gipsy had fetched five cobras, all of which we killed on the spot. He left with six rupees and many salaams, well pleased with his afternoon's work." This description, in addition to confirming the influence of the pipe on cobras, also demonstrates the well known fact that cobras are so absorbed by rhythmic movements that they are then oblivious to all else. It would be futile to suggest that these snakes were attracted solely by the movements of the gipsy's knee, which they could not have seen until they had come out of their lairs and were close up, as snakes are notoriously shortsighted especially during day.

I can quote from many other letters describing similar experiences; but I think I have said enough.

To show what lengths gipsies can go to with snakes, I give the following extract from Rosita

Forbes' "Raisuni," though it concerns Morocco : "Hearing that strangers were in camp some gipsies came and stared at us. One man held a snake in his hand to which he was crooning gently. He then held it at arm's length and adjured it in the name of dead saints. Then, opening his mouth, from which foam dripped at the corners, he put out his tongue and let the reptile fix its fangs in it. Blood stained the foam and, with veins congested and eyes turned inwards, the gipsy began eating the living snake, first swallowing the head affixed to his tongue, and then chewing the body, which writhed up and struck him on the cheeks. All the time the others kept up a curiously hypnotic chant which appeared to stimulate the fervour of the performer."

Let us now see *what the gipsies have to say concerning the hearing of snakes*.—A grizzled old chief and four younger men laden with sacks containing cobras, pythons, vipers, charms and antidotes, seated themselves before us. We explained to them that all we wished to know was the truth about the hearing of snakes, and that was what we were paying them for. The chief nodded complaisantly.

"Can cobras hear?" I asked him.

"Assuredly they can," said he.

"How do you know that?"

"If you follow a cobra and speak, he turns and looks back. He hears the squealing of rats and chases them; that is how he gets his food; he cannot see far but he can hear much farther."

"Perhaps it is the sound of your footsteps on the ground he hears."

"No, he hears the voice right enough; even if one stands still and talks he hears."

"Can he hear your pipe?"

"Oh, yes."

"We are told he can't, and that you keep him in play solely by the rhythmic movements of your knee and gourd."

"We do that, it is true; but he also hears our music."

"Do all snakes hear?"

"Every snake can hear; mapilas, polongas and pythons sometimes come to our piping."

We asked one of the group to put the bin to his lips, and to play as motionlessly as possible, when we directed him; we then told another carefully to lift the cover of a basket which revealed a coiled quiescent cobra; we motioned to the first to pipe. The cobra lay still, and after a while, as if uncomfortable at the exposure, wormed his head deeper amid his coils!

"Doesn't look as if he hears, does it?" I remarked.

"He hears it all the same," averred the gipsy.

"Why then does he not put up his hood when he hears the pipe?"

"The flute notes soothe him. To make him expand his hood you must anger him so," and with that he blew on the snake and poked it with his fingers. Up rose the hissing reptile.

"Now wave your knee, but stop your piping," I directed. The cobra continued swaying its uplifted hood.

"Now stop moving your knee but pipe as motionlessly as possible." The cobra remained poised.

We made various other experiments, but to all seeming, the cobra was as deaf as the proverbial adder. As it lay coiled in its uncovered basket *we struck the cement floor sharply a foot away from its head, but failed to disturb him*; and no one will deny he must have heard that—the earth vibration. The old gipsy saw our puzzled looks,

as we probed our minds as to how we might clinch the matter.

"You cannot judge of the ways of snakes by the behaviour of these captured ones," he said. "For that you must observe the wild ones. These are frightened out of their wits by the closeness of man and the light of day. Their one desire is to dig their heads within the darkness of their coils and to be left alone."

We asked one of them to pipe the tunes that lured wild cobras. And as he played, the ancient spoke: "Not everyone can do that." "There are but two men in our company of thirty who can. You want great skill for that; it is a gift. The player can say from the tone his pipe assumes whether there are snakes near by or not. Those notes he is playing now are calling the snake: 'Come here, come here,' they say; 'we will give you eggs and trogs and *avarang* (brahmin lizards), and take good care of you while you are with us, and then set you free again. And those notes now are imitative of the cries of rats: mark them. And that is the '*anakata mantharam*,' the spell which locks the snake's mouth so that it dies in three days!"

"How do you usually catch your snakes?"

"Most of them by sight; only a few by calling them with our flutes; snakes taken in this way do not live long as a rule, so powerful is the charm with which we bind them. When a snake is startled and takes cover, no amount of piping will bring him out; it is the same if he be hidden deep within an ant-hill where the flute notes cannot reach; these we dig out. The best time to call snakes is after a shower of rain when they are abroad in quest of food, in the cover of grass and thin scrub. You must tread softly and pipe quietly, cajolingly, patiently, skilfully, and with

great concentration; then only will they come. It is difficult to lure them during the mating season, easier after the eggs have hatched."

So spoke the old gipsy with quiet candour. And if some of his claims seem too fantastic for our belief, we must not dub him charlatan and discredit all he has told us, but remember that to the gipsy the lore of the snake is at once an accomplishment and a cult.

I continued the cross-examination:

"Is the cobra afraid of the polonga?"

"No, a cobra kills a polonga with its poison and swallows it; but a polonga is afraid of even a small cobra which its poison cannot kill."

"How do you know that?"

"Once, when we were out hunting we saw a cobra strike a polonga, and we captured the cobra. On passing the place the next day we found the polonga dead."

"Have your cobra's their poison fangs?"

"No, we snap them off once a month with pincers."

"Are you afraid of cobra venom?"

"Not if we can apply our charms immediately. Look at this: it is the *nagatharana*, of the smell of which cobras are afraid. The fronds of the tree are like snakes; see how this cobra with the raised hood cowers before the fragment. And this is the *suthu elavara* root that the mongoose chews when bitten by a cobra. This snake stone is made of the teeth and the gall of cobras and mongooses, and the eyes of coucals (jungle crows) mixed with various herbs, all of which we melt down and make into these smooth pellets."

A ten foot python, recently captured, was produced out of a gunny sack—a man's load—and held out helplessly by the head. We were told that such a python could swallow a deer.

And when we expressed incredulity, the method was explained: "The python applies its foremost coils round the deer's neck, and its hindmost ones round the buttocks; it then stretches out the parts between, elongating the animal, which it swallows whole. Afterwards it may creep under a fallen log or between two close standing trees, and thus squash the meal within its abdomen. If the deer has antlers, the python begins swallowing it from the hind quarters until the horns alone are left protruding out of the mouth, eventually to rot, become infested with maggots, and fall away."

They fed their captive python on iguanas and hares once a week, their other snakes on rats and frogs, and on eggs which were swallowed whole and then crushed by the gipsies within the reptiles' bodies.

### 3. MONGOOSE AND SNAKE

**T**HE Sinhalese say of two inveterate enemies, that they are "like cobra and polonga." The story is this:—

A cobra met a polonga (viper) during a period of drought.

"Tell me where I can have a drink," said the polonga.

"I can easily do that," the cobra replied; "but you are such an irascible fellow that I fear you will do someone harm if I tell you."

"I swear I won't. Do tell me. I am so thirsty," pleaded the polonga.

The cobra, having made the polonga take a very solemn oath, said to him: "Go down that way, and you will come to a house. In the compound you will find a vessel of water, and beside it, a little child playing. As you drink, the child will playfully stroke your head. Do not hurt the child."

"All right," said the polonga gratefully and crept swiftly away.

Hardly had the polonga gone, than the cobra repented having told him the secret, and followed in all haste.

The polonga reached the house, and found there the vessel of water and the child playing by it. As the polonga drank, the child put out a hand and touched its head. Acting on sudden impulse the polonga turned and bit the child. The cobra arrived only just in time to see, but not to prevent,

the tragedy. It hurled itself on the polonga, and they fought each other until the latter was killed.

Ever since then, whenever a cobra and polonga meet, they fight to the death.

Here is another story :—A man had a child and a pet mongoose. On returning home one day from work he saw the mongoose flecked all over with blood. "You have killed my child," said the man, and slew the mongoose on the spot. He then went indoors to find his child playing unscathed, and near it a dead cobra the mongoose had killed after a hard struggle. It is the story of Bet Gellert if we substitute cobra for wolf and mongoose for hound.

Not long ago, a great black cobra, a little over six feet long, recently captured, arrived in a small ill-ventilated case out of which it was tumbled into a box faced with wire netting.

A conspicuous bulge about its middle showed that it had partaken of a recent meal, the nature of which was soon revealed when the snake, as the result perhaps of the jolting travel entailed, disgorged another cobra but six inches shorter than itself! That the repast had not been won without a struggle was manifest from the numerous fang-marks that pitted the victim. We may take it then that the cobra is a cannibal.

For a few days, eggs, rats and frogs formed the leisurely menu of the snake. Then there came a three and a half foot Russell's viper (*tic polonga*), as thick as a man's wrist, with beautifully be-ringed skin, stubby tail and as baleful a pair of lidless eyes as ever gleamed out of a fiend. It was put into the cobra's cage.

Now, as we have seen, the cobra and Russell's viper have no love for each other. The two deadliest snakes of Ceylon were cage fellows,

and they were well matched at that, for what advantage the one had in length the other had in girth.

At first neither showed interest in the other. Before long, however, the viper, nosing tentatively towards the cobra, received so smart a bite that it recoiled into a corner. They remained apart all that day.

The following morning, a good nine inches of the viper, head end on, had vanished within the gaping maw of the cobra, which with calm determination was dealing similarly with the strongly protesting remainder of its victim—when, with a last despairing effort, the engulfed wretch gave a sudden backward jerk and freed itself. The cobra did not then renew the attack.

Two days later, the cage was found to have but one occupant; the viper had gone, and a tell-tale tumour on the cobra revealed where to. But if further testimony as to the fate of that viper were required, it was furnished by the absolute distaste the cobra had for food for the better part of the next week, and the increasing litter of viper scales that kept accumulating in the cage from day to day!

What chance would a mongoose have against so formidable a creature?

To decide this, the cobra was turned into the cage of a ruddy mongoose; nothing happened, except that, like the viper, the mongoose was warned off with two vicious bites. The addition to the cage of the mongoose's mate made no difference; both gave the cobra as wide a berth as the limited space permitted. After an hour the snake was noosed and removed.

Was it thus the famed mongoose behaved in the presence of the cobra it was reputed invariably to attack? Perhaps the snake was an outside

even for a mongoose; and no wonder, or shame either, considering the prowess it had displayed with its own species.

So the matter rested till one day a man brought along a female grey mongoose he had just captured—the smallest of its kind. Would it be fair to oppose it against that fearsome reptile? It seemed a shame, but curiosity was ever a human failing, and the sight of a fight hard to resist.

To give the little gladiator a chance, the combatants were let into a six by eight foot wire mesh enclosure.

The mongoose, at first scared by the onlookers around and to all appearances unconscious of the cobra's presence, scampered wildly about the netting attempting to escape. The cobra meanwhile waited with uplifted hood, and struck out wildly whenever the mongoose scurried past—Ah, what was this? A challenge?

The mongoose had suddenly come to a halt and faced the cobra with a snarl. Gathering its coils more tightly, the cobra rose higher in an instant with a savage hiss, and stayed thus swaying and blowing, its great be-spectacled hood menacingly uplifted—a horror to behold. And there within a foot of it capered the grinning mongoose with bristling fur and brushy tail. What suicide was this? What chance would the frail thing have against those poisoned fangs, that deadly stance?

The cobra was now in no hurry to strike. It seemed to realise that here was a foe of different fibre than the cobra, viper, or ruddy mongoose with which it had recently been associated. Even as two boxers in a ring, they eyed each other, taking mutual measure—the mongoose with head impudently cocked, the cobra majestically poised.

Suddenly the mongoose stepped closer in and bared her teeth tauntingly as it were, daring the

cobra to do its worst—oh, beware! Swift as a whip-lash came the stroke, the outspread hood melting in a spear of motion.

Quick as was the blow, it was not fleet enough for the alert mongoose. She shot clear even as the cobra's head thwacked the ground. The first exchange was over.

For the cobra to recover was the matter of a moment; hardly had it lunged out than it was up again, swaying and hissing more irately than ever. But the undaunted mongoose rocked within that deadly reach, emitting now and then, its peculiar little battle cry—"kek." A minute or two of this and the cobra struck out again—and missed; but this time before it could win back, the mongoose had buried its teeth in the thick neck, shaken it, and let go, as she was swung aloft by the whipping recoil. Then running to a dish of water she quenched her thirst.

The mongoose now half-circled round the cobra, which turned to face her, but not briskly enough to prevent its coils being lightly nipped. Having provoked the snake thus, she spun round to the dangerous position she favoured within the radius of the reptile's strike, bristled up and glared. The snake opened its mouth and flung out at her, and this time did not miss; for all her alacrity the poisoned fangs had gashed her flank. The mongoose, not seeming to mind, refreshed herself with a drink and was back again, repeating her tactics of circling round and dancing in.

A few ineffectual exchanges on the part of both followed. And then the mongoose, leaping from behind, secured so good a hold of the cobra's neck that she shook it as a terrier does a rat, even as she was somersaulted by the snake's vigorous rebound.

The cobra was now hurt; its hood hung low.

Pushing her advantage, the mongoose sprang at the cobra's head as it was about to descend, and bit well in, crippling the reptile grievously. But the snake struck home twice before being injured again.

And so the battle raged, a fight to the death, the cobra always on the defensive, the mongoose always the aggressor. Never once did the cobra chase the mongoose. To all appearance, it might, under natural conditions, have preferred to relinquish the fight and slink away. Its main concern seemed to be to keep its head off the reach of those cruel fangs.

The mongoose set the pace of the fight. Circling, feinting, dodging, snarling, she would assume so balanced a pose in full face of the cobra, that she could leap off at any angle the second the reptile struck. Sometimes she waited for the cobra's blow before shooting aside and snapping at the head. And often, especially after the cobra was spent, she would leap at the upstanding hood. Her aim seemed to be to crush the brain or spinal cord which instinct taught her where to find. With her it was all a matter of adroitness and nice timing, and one guessed rather than saw what actually occurred—the hurtling encounter and a whirligig of motion when the antagonists locked.

Compared with the amazing alacrity of the mongoose, the cobra's movements seemed sluggish. A poor judge of distance, it frequently missed its stroke and thus exhausted itself, giving the mongoose her opportunity. Besides, poised on its vertical length, the snake was unable to strike short, and the mongoose, apparently wise to this, always feinted well within its guard, forcing the snake to throw its hood further back and weaken its delivery.

The rounds, for so we must call them seeing there were intervals of rest between the fighting bouts, were of unequal length. Sometimes the bout would be short and sharp; at others the two would keep each other long in play before coming to grips.

Here were foes whose chances of success depended on quite different qualities—the cobra's on its power and its poison, the mongoose's on its nimbleness and partial immunity to cobra venom. Once the tactics of the two were realised, the odds seemed all in the mongoose's favour; but the great size of the cobra in this instance tended to equalise the hazard and it was fierce work for the mongoose. A smaller snake would undoubtedly have had but short shrift.

Despite its agility, the mongoose was by no means unscathed. At least six times in the course of the fight it received bites, any one of which would have meant death to most creatures, including man.

There was one fierce bout that bade fair to end the struggle. The cobra had opened its mouth preparatory to striking, when the mongoose, turning half over in its evading leap, fastened on the reptile's lower jaw; with fangs interlocked, the mongoose's muzzle well within the cobra's mouth,\* and her body securely gripped in the cobra's coils, the pair of them rocketted and tumbled over and over. Thus clasped together, they spun so prodigiously, that it was impossible to say which was cobra and which mongoose. It seemed certain that nothing short of the death of one could possibly end that grapple. The mongoose's only

\* "The cobra usually seizes its victim and, holding grimly on continues to inject venom until its prey has become inoculated with a sufficient quantity to induce paralysis of the nerve centres." (F. W. Fitz Simons).



hope was to bite so deep and hard as to force the cobra to slacken its suffocating hold.

The whole affair was but a matter of seconds ; and when the two fell apart, the cobra's mandible was fractured and sagging, the mongoose was bruised and breathless. She limped painfully away, whisking the blood off her snout, and was glad of a long drink of water. This time she loitered long before returning to consummate the task she must end one way or the other.

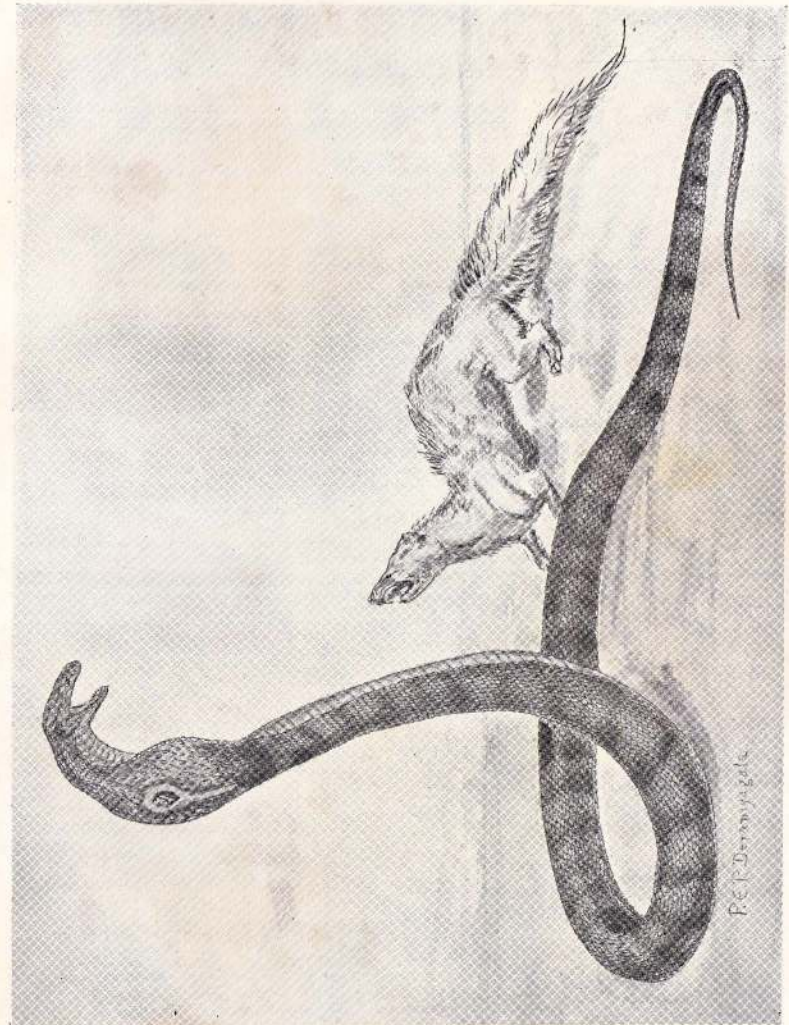
The cobra, visibly spent, labouredly raised her bruised and bloody head to meet the challenge, it knew that fight it must so long as the mongoose willed it.

Hear what little Red-Eye saith :  
 'Nag, come up and dance with death !'  
 Eye to eye and head to head,  
 (*Keep the measure, Nag.*)  
 This shall end when one is dead ;  
 (*At thy pleasure, Nag.*)\*

They struggled on and on ; the vigour of the fight latterly being nothing to what it was at first. The cobra's head hung low ; its lunges were wild and weak, but it was game to the end, and, whatever it felt, there was no token of distress in its expressionless, lidless eyes.

At the end of two hours the contest was stopped, the cobra having obviously got the worst of it. That creature so terrible once was now a pathetic sight—spiritless, woebegone, mangled, with hardly the life to rear its head. It was returned to its cage and expected to die. But it survived, reptiles being amazingly tenacious of life. A half hour after the fight it swallowed an egg, and killed, within five minutes of striking it, a guinea pig that was placed in its cage to test the potency of

\* Rudyard Kipling.



“Nag, come up and dance with death!”



“With fangs interlocked and bodies gripped, they spun prodigiously.”

its poison.

The mongoose lived too though severely bitten. Its ultimate fate, however, was sad ; within three weeks she was killed and eaten by two ruddy mongooses, the cage of which she had shared since the fight !

That the mongoose has a relative natural immunity to cobra venom, the issue of the encounter we have described plainly proves. This does not mean that a mongoose will survive large doses of collected venom injected hypodermically, but only such doses as a snake ordinarily injects when attacking.

There are four species of mongoose in Ceylon :—  
 (1) The Grey or Silver Mongoose (*Ali Mugatiya*).  
 (2) Legge's Ruddy Mongoose (*Hotembaya*). (3)  
 The Ceylon Brown Mongoose. (4) The Badger  
 Mongoose (*Loku Mugatiya*). Of these, the grey  
 mongoose is the only one reputed to give battle  
 to the large poisonous snakes, especially cobras,  
 which it apparently fights as much from enmity  
 as for food, since it frequently devours its victim.

The great badger mongoose, though it is strong enough to prey on such animals as hares and moose-deer, is said to leave cobras alone. I have seen a ruddy mongoose, after a tentative sniff at a small poised cobra in a cage, suddenly get hold of the reptile's head and chew it for a good few minutes, before the snake squirmed free and, *mirabile dictu*, raised its mangled head in defence; the mongoose, philosophically accepting it as a hard case, showed no further interest.

It is commonly held that, after a fight with a cobra, a mongoose runs away into the jungle and chews the bark of a certain tree only known to itself, which is an antidote against snake venom. This belief probably originated from the fact that, in the intervals of a fight under natural conditions,

the mongoose bites the bark of any plant within reach. The ingenuous interpretation of this is that the animal by acting thus confuses onlookers and preserves the secret of the antidote for itself; but the true explanation probably lies in the thirst a fight develops.

There is a tradition, that when a mongoose finds itself getting the worst of an encounter with a specially large cobra, it goes into the jungle and returns with a king of its species on its back, a white animal even smaller than itself, to which the cobra invariably succumbs.

The following account of a *Fight between a Mongoose and a Cobra* is taken from the *Madras Times* of July, 1863.

On Saturday morning last whilst we were seated in the Mess House with several officers of the regiment, a servant came and stated that a snake had been seen to enter a hole in the ground. We immediately sent for a mongoose (a tame one, the property of an officer), and put him to the hole; he soon began to scratch away the earth: and in half an hour a fine cobra, about a yard long, came forward, with head erect and hood distended, to attack the mongoose which seemed to care nothing for the reptile, but merely jumped out of the way to avoid the blows of the snake. The mongoose, unfortunately, had just been fed and consequently did not show sufficient inclination to go in at the snake and kill it; so we secured the snake and kept it awhile.

After a couple of hours rest we placed the cobra in a room with closed doors. The mongoose was let in and the fight commenced.

*The Fight.*—The mongoose approached the cobra with caution, but without any appearance of fear. The cobra, with head erect and body vibrating, watched his opponent, apparently aware of how deadly an enemy he had to contend with. The mongoose was soon within easy striking distance of the snake, which suddenly throwing back its head struck at the mongoose with tremendous force; the mongoose, quick as thought, sprang back out of reach, uttering at the same time savage growls. Again the reptile rose on the defensive and the mongoose, nothing daunted by the distended jaws and glaring eyes of his antagonist, approached so near to the snake that he was forced, not relishing such close proximity, to draw his head back considerably; this lessened his distance from the ground, and the mongoose, at once seizing the advantageous opportunity, sprang at the cobra's head and appeared to inflict, as well as to receive a wound.

Once more the combatants put themselves in a position to renew the encounter: again the snake struck, and again the mongoose's agility saved him. It would be tedious to recount the particulars of about a dozen successive rounds, at the end of which neither foe seemed to suffer more than the other. We will, limit ourselves to describe the final and most interesting bout.

*The Last Round.*—The fight had lasted some three-quarters of an hour and both combatants seemed now to nerve themselves for a final encounter. The cobra, changing his position of defence for that of attack, advanced and seemed determined now "to do or die;" his watchful enemy with equal courage awaited the attack. The cobra had now approached so close, that the mongoose owing to want of space behind was unable to spring backwards out of reach as it had previously done, so it nimbly bounded straight up in the air. The cobra missed and struck the ground. As the mongoose alit, the cobra struck again, and to all appearances fixed his fangs in the head of the mongoose. The mongoose, as the cobra was withdrawing his head after having inflicted the bite, instantly retaliated by fixing his teeth in the cobra's head; this seemed to convince the reptile that he was no match for his antagonist; he unfolded his coils and ignominiously slunk away. Instantly the mongoose was on him, and burying his teeth in his brain, ended the contest.

The mongoose now set to work to devour the snake, and in a few minutes had eaten the head and two or three inches of the body.

We should have mentioned before that previous to this encounter the snake had struck a fowl which died within half an hour of the infliction of the bite, showing beyond doubt its capability of inflicting a deadly wound.

After the mongoose had satisfied his appetite, we proceeded to examine, with a pocket lens, the wounds he had received; on washing away the blood from one of these places, the lens disclosed the broken fang of the cobra deeply imbedded in the head of the mongoose.

To discover whether a prophylactic exists in the blood of this extraordinary animal, rendering it innocuous to the bite of a reptile fatal to all other animals, we have had the mongoose confined ever since (now four days) and it is still as healthy and lively as ever.

We consider, therefore, that there no longer exists a doubt that in the blood of the mongoose there is a prophylactic, and that the idea that it derives its immunity from a herb is one of the many popular errors.

We beg to subscribe ourselves as witnesses to the above narrated encounter.

Major K. MACAULAY.  
Capt. C. J. COMBE.  
Lieut. H. G. SYMONS.

Trichinopoly, July 15th, 1863.

The following extracts concerning *Indian Snakes* is taken from an authoritative article which appeared in the *Calcutta Statesman* some years ago:—

The krait, cobra and hamadryad are colubrine snakes, their poisons acting chiefly on the central nervous system (cord and brain) and causing death by paralysis of the respiratory centre in the brain; while viperine poisons, *e.g.*, that of the Russell's viper, have a very marked effect on the heart and blood, causing death by paralysis of the vasomotor centre, exhaustion from haemorrhage, or from blood poisoning due to germs.

Reputed Indian antidotes, such as the application to the wound of so-called snake-stones, certain vegetable pulps, charms, etc., have so far as investigations go, no foundation in fact. Apparent cures by these means are really attributable to various other reasons. For

example, it is an established fact that undoubtedly venomous snakes often bite without injecting any poison; it is also quite possible to be poisoned but to receive a sublethal dose, and according to Lamb 30 per cent. of cobra poisoned subjects would not die for this reason. Then again the snake may have expended all its venom previously, be out of form, or have some mechanical defect in its poison apparatus which prevents it functioning properly, or it may have been a perfectly harmless snake believed to be poisonous. Conversely, there are many recorded cases of persons actually dying from the bites of quite harmless snakes, death being due to sheer fright! It is also known that many professional snake catchers render themselves immune to the bites of certain poisonous snakes by inoculating themselves with very minute doses of the poison over a long period. It may here be stated that the mongoose is not immune against the bite of a venomous snake. If bitten viciously and fairly by the latter, the mongoose most certainly dies.

The poison glands of the cobra are capable of containing 10 to 20 lethal doses (for man) and the hamadryad much more, being a larger snake. The common krait is capable of injecting 3 lethal doses at one bite! While the Russell's viper carries about 12 lethal doses.

Provided that a full lethal dose has been injected, death from cobra bite (in man) takes place in  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 6 hours usually, but may be prolonged to 12 and even 24 hours. As may be expected, bites from the krait and hamadryad prove fatal much quicker, while in the case of the Russell's viper the usual period is 24 to 27 hours.

All snake venoms are acutely irritating substances which when introduced into living tissues cause instantaneous pain of a severe, stinging and persistent character, accompanied by much swelling which comes on within a few seconds or minutes and increases for hours. There is also a continuous discharge of blood or bloody serum from the punctures, and any one of these symptoms indicates poisoning. If, however, there is little pain at the seat of the wound beyond that caused by the mechanical injury, no immediate swelling, and the punctures become sealed up within a minute or two, it may safely be assumed that the culprit is a non-venomous snake, or in the alternative that no poison has been injected. The pattern (if any) of a snake's teeth on the part bitten is absolutely no guide whatever as to whether the offender is poisonous or not.

As a rule snakes are not aggressive unless roused, though the cobra and hamadryad are known to be so when watching their eggs and will chase approaching intruders. In most cases of accident the snake is unwittingly trodden on, generally in the dark. The actual danger to those wearing boots and shoes is however small, since these not only afford good protection but convey warning of approach to the snake which generally scuttles away. It is the unshod individual with naked and silent feet who usually falls a victim to snake-bite.

## KUMUNA

ANOTHER blasted derelict!" exclaimed C. As we rounded a bend—then leaping up in his seat and jerking back his head: "By the Lord, it's my car!"

The brakes jammed and we leapt out.

Overtaken on the grass was our baggage car that had gone ahead, poised on its crushed hood, its wheels in the air, one shattered in fragments.

The hunting-kit lay scattered; four servants and the chauffeur stood helplessly by, dazed but unscathed, miraculously enough, except for a few scratches. They had crept out of the ruin like bewildered rats.

Well, well! we had much to be thankful for: no one was hurt, the car was insured, most of the effects were intact, and we were but five miles short of our destination—a half day's delay at the outside.

"Now look at that," said A. J., the owner-driver of the car that carried us, examining the wheel-tracks. "Careless driving, I'll wager!"

"What happened, driver?"

"I was turning corner. I hear noise in wheel; then car fall."

"Were you going fast?"

"No, sir, slowly."

"Hm," murmured A. J. shaking his head sceptically. "That's what they always say. Going round the corner, hell for leather, was what did it, most likely. Just like them: always in a

hurry to get there. That's why I am so deuced careful when I am on a trip like this. A little carelessness—and the whole show spoilt!"

We decided to push on and send succour. A. J. took the steering wheel, the car began moving. "Now hold on tight," said he, turning towards a fumbling servant on the foot-board. "Not the door, you idiot, this strut!" The car left the road, and was half way down the steep bank before the driver was aware of it. It struck a stump nearly capsizing us, then bumped over a ditch and buried itself in the bushes!

Did we laugh and make facetious comments about being 'deuced careful'? Why, I am sniggering now, two years later!

We spent the next day at Arugam, while bullock carts retrieved our belongings. Leaving an armed guard over the "blasted derelict" in the jungle until such time as the help we wired for should arrive, we set out on our journey.

The noon following we lunched by the Heda Oya: then walked on to Panawa for the night, heading the procession of carts and servants.

At Helawe, seven miles south, the shooting began; it reached its height at Bagura, eight miles on past Okanda, where we camped for a few days under a grove of dhang trees on the edge of a large plain containing a lagoon. Here wild buffalo fed or wallowed all day and night. Every afternoon an elephant would emerge on the summit of a flanking hill and feed on a patch of grass.

Sparing the reader a hackneyed recital of trophies won and sportsman's ecstasy, I shall try instead to recapture a quiet evening at Bagura.

I set out of camp at five with a tracker. A solitary buffalo bull, its flank cruelly gashed, stood gazing longingly at a bevy of cows, from whose

company he had been ruthlessly ousted by a stronger rival, that now grazed unconcernedly. So pre-occupied was he with his feelings that he failed to notice us until we were within a few yards of him, when he lumbered away.

Skirting the plain, we came to an elongated glade with a pool down its length, and sat behind a screen of bushes to watch.

On a sandy shoal were four languid snippets, two black-winged stilts and a brace of golden plover that fed perfunctorily, preened a wing or drowsed on a leg. Four teal circled low, whistling plaintively, and settled among the others; they looked about a bit and waddled to the water—all save the sentinel that stood motionless with craned neck where he alighted. I watched the birds for awhile; then, fancying a teal for dinner, approached cautiously with a .22 rifle. I had settled full length on a bed of leaves for a shot, when a small herd of buffalo strode into the glade. The birds straightened up alertly, but seeing who the intruders were, resumed their occupations: the sentinel teal, however, was not comfortable. Just as I covered him with my rifle, a red ant, on a nest of which I had inadvertently lain, drove its vicious pincers into my neck. I squashed it and resumed my aim: this time two ants simultaneously nipped the backs of my bare knees so suddenly that I could not help but slap at them loudly with a curse. The teal whistled 'good bye' and were gone. I consoled myself by laying out a plover that stood handy; its companions scattered melodiously away.

Going to pick up the bird, the tracker pointed to a large, ringed snake that lay coiled within two feet of the water, presumably awaiting a hapless frog. I stood over it, and placing the rifle almost in contact with its head, fired. The creature

swung round with a hiss, just missing me as I jumped clear, and hurriedly glided towards the leafy covert I had but now occupied.

"What snake is that?" I asked the tracker, as he came up with the dead bird.

"A polonga," he replied.

Phew! had I but known it! I had played unwittingly with one of the deadliest reptiles in Ceylon, mistaking it for a harmless python!

We were returning to camp at dusk by a narrow path, when the crack of a branch a few feet away caused us to peer low through the undergrowth: the legs of an elephant were moving towards us. We stood and waited. "Swish, swish, swish," beat the heavy wings of a score of pied hornbills, circling low overhead.

The elephant came out of the jungle browsing leisurely. He turned sideways, and got behind a small rock. Peering round, we saw two more elephants sauntering along. The tracker whistled twice, and the animals, realising the sound was man's, moved slowly out of our way.

We had gone but a few paces, when from behind a partially submerged rock came a great flopping and a floundering, and a fine sambhur, his head thrown back, his horns levelled, careered magnificently into cover not twenty yards away.

"Kack-kack-kack-kack-kack," mocked the school of hornbills, now settled for the night. From the distance a peafowl on its lofty roost sent out a mournful wail.

A full moon was taking possession of the paling sky as I walked into camp with only a plover to show, but with a vast contentment in my heart, for nature had been kind to me that day.

"Tri-n-n-g," went the alarm.

"Boy, *neruppu podu*" ("make the fire"),

shouted C. as usual.

A creaking of camp-beds, a rubbing of sleepy eyelids, a stretching of lethargic limbs—and we were awake to prepare for the strenuous day we had planned. A quiet efficient activity in the kitchen, and within fifteen minutes a refreshing pot of tea stood before the pyjamaed *dorais* smoking cigarettes in the dark, before ever the birds twittered the advent of dawn.

Then a more strenuous bustle as the tents were dismantled and furniture packed, and the carters and their bulls got stirring. By 5-30 the camp was deserted, and the train on its way.

Letting the carts go ahead, we stayed behind to shoot a reedy pool, an inspection of which the previous day gave promise of sport. Only three birds fell to our guns—a whistling teal, a garganey teal, and a quacky duck, the fastest flier of all.

The banks of this tank, Thunmulla, like many another we came upon, were bestrewn with the bones of crocodiles of all ages. They were the victims of a gang of Moors who had slaughtered them for their skins, which were said to fetch thirty-five cents the square inch.

They carried out their fell work during the drought when the tanks were nearly dry. The manner of their hunting was this:— A man with a powerful carbide light fixed to his forehead, accompanied by one with a gun, and an oarsman, went out in a canoe on the tank at night. The light was flashed over the water, making the eyes of floating crocodiles gleam like balls of fire. The boat was then rowed up to the blinded beast, which was shot at point blank range with the muzzle to its eye.

In the smaller tanks the work was done by day. Armed with a spear shaped like a harpoon, the detachable metal V-shaped head of which is fixed to a

long pole secured to an iron chain, a man stabbed the mud of the tank-bed from a canoe, until he struck a submerged crocodile. Then, feeling along its back for the spot where the spine joined the head, he drove in the spear; detaching the shaft, they hauled the beast ashore by the chain attached to the embedded hook, and with a long-handled axe, hacked it on the head, and the root of the tail to prevent it lashing, while it writhed and moaned most pathetically. It is a cruel sport, but quickly ended.

With Bandua, a lean old tracker, leading, we followed in single file: each of us three committed to keep just behind him in half hour turns. Sambhur, lairing in shady pools at noon were our quarry; we had nine miles to go.

Two of us had our half hour spells behind the tracker without result. The third had all but gone his time, when Bandua, cautiously peering into every spot his lifetime's experience of those jungles taught him as likely, put out a cautioning hand, stepped back and whispered "*gona*", (sambhur). He took A. J. past us, round to where a tree stood on a rise that sloped to a pool—an expectant silence—bang! No other sound: no hurtling beast broke cover: no second shot. We moved cautiously towards the gunner. He stood with contented smile—a great beast lay anchored in the mud, kicking feebly, stretching its neck endeavouring to rise—then a quivering spasm, a few gasps, and a lolling tongue—the sambhur's noontide lair had proved his destined death-bed.

While we settle down to pipes, the trackers pull the quarry up the bank and sever his massive neck, hacking and twisting it till the vertebrae crack. They cut up the flesh, and covering it over with leaves, hang it on trees beyond reach of



*Photo by W. A. Paterson.*

Axing to death a speared crocodile (p. 257).



A pangolin or scaly ant-eater (p. 260).



A sounder of wild pig.

*(Photo by G. M. Crabbe)*

Wild buffalo and deer.

*(Photo by G. M. Crabbe)*

passing carnivora, awaiting men who will be sent back later from camp.

With two coolies carrying on poles the fine head, the hide, and a few choice morsels of meat, we resume our journey.

It is now my turn to keep on Bandua's heels. He breaks a leaf of grass, black with a myriad barely visible tics, and holds it out to me: "Creatures born by destiny," he murmurs as he goes along. "How do they come into being?—from the grass, as mosquitoes do from the water? What a life is theirs; swarming on a parched blade of grass; being dried and dried by the sun, awaiting a wandering animal." ('Follow in a tic-infested jungle, lead in a leech-infested one', is wisdom: for the one who goes first collects the tics he brushes past, but only disturbs the leeches for them that follow!)

The glare of noon beats up like a furnace from the sandy track of the glades, but Bandua's vigilance is not abated; he slows down, scrutinising every probable spot. Suddenly he halts on the border of an opening, looks hard, and then indicates indifferently a sow grubbing in the baked mud of a dry pool.

We are about to proceed, for pig is carrion in this land of plenty, when a scurrying little form catches my eye—then another, and another, as a litter of striped piglings, each no bigger than a young rabbit, gambol about. I change my mind as to the edibility of pig, and taking my .22 work up to a small rock and pry round. The little fellows are all scurrying off, the mother is nowhere to be seen. I look further round—there, half hidden in the dry grass is a wriggling mass composed of the recumbent mother with the youngsters competing noisily for her dugs.

I steel my heart and draw the trigger. With



a grunt of alarm the sow leaps up, the young squeal and scatter—all except two that are kicking the dust. The mother approaches them with concern; seeing their plight she looks about, fight in every upstanding bristle, for her hidden foe, the leopard—but seeing it is man she lopes reluctantly away, shepherding with solicitous grunts the rest of her fold.

With a sucking pig jostling a sambhur liver and saddle of meat at either end of a pole, we resume our sweltering way.

We meet a pangolin (*kabalava*) stalking quaintly along on the backs of its inturned toes. At our approach it curls up into a compact imbricated ball with no evidence whatever of its head or limbs—a strange creature. It is often roasted and eaten by the jungle folk.

Tired and thirsty we make for the rock of Bowatagala, which contains a cool cave and a *kema* (rock water-hole). Here we break our fast, befriended by a brace of yellow hammers, but shunned precipitately by two visiting hornbills scared out of their wits.

Though we are in as remote a wilderness as it is possible to be, the cave we occupy reveals the craftsmanship of old time man; the dome is smoothed, parallel drip-ledges run along the overhanging brow which is also engraved in ancient script, fragments of brick lie about—all of which go to show that here long ago stood a built-in cave partitioned into temple (*pansala*) and monastery (*vihara*), as in many another forest rock of Ceylon. Recent occupants obviously were bear, sambhur, and Kataragama pilgrims.

A cool breeze blew over the shaded rocky height that dominated the forest. From it we overlooked the Southern Game Reserve between the Kumbukkan and Menik rivers, embracing the vast

plains of Yala and Potana with their wild, care-free herds.

Shadow shapes with sweeping horns  
Glinting in the level rays,  
Shapes that through a thousand dawns  
Feed along the meadow ways.

Standing out of that sea of forest, like austere sentinels, were the crags of castellated Mandagala, Kotadamuhela and Wadumbuwa—all with their ancient caves and *kemas* similar to those on the rock we occupied—and Kiribathdana hela and Dematagala, the highest peak of all. Scattered about those haunts of bears and leopards, were the monoliths, frescoes and images of an ancient civilisation, for all this wilderness was the peopled Ruhuna of old. Not far to the north-west of us was the country of Leanama, where were reputed to live those strange outlasted creatures, the Nittaewo.

In the near distance we could see the Kumuna *villu*, a marshy expanse, studded with moving forms which our glasses revealed to us as buffalo, pig and egrets. An hour later we were skirting the plain.

A herd of deer stood gazing at us. Taking sudden alarm they trotted away. What were these among them? A brace of white goats? No, by all that is wonderful, two milk white does! It was the capture of one such that earned an ancestor of Maduwanwella his vast acres. Even the trackers, bred in those jungles, had never seen such a sight before. Could they be hinds, they wondered, sacred to some forest god? We never saw the animals again, though we trod those woods for days.

An elephant sauntered to the water, chasing away viciously the pigs and cranes in his path; he drank, and made for the shade of a *palu*, under

which he stood listlessly.

“Did you see the way that elephant chased those creatures?” asked a tracker. “That tells you he’s a rogue; ordinary animals don’t do that.”

A buffalo, detaching himself from a herd, challenged us full in our path. Seeing that we did not slacken our pace, he strode towards us throwing up his magnificent head in a lordly gesture. We stood with rifles ready—he changed his mind.

It was four in the afternoon of a gruelling day when we reached the Kumbukkan Oya and immersed our aching limbs in its shallow refreshing waters. There we camped, a mile from the hamlet of Kumuna, the home of most our trackers.

Late that evening, as I was walking along a game-track close to camp, there stepped out of the wilderness a spare young fellow, driving a bull laden with a sack of grain. He was Garua of Kumuna, returning from Sinhala, three days journey away.

It being unusual for a villager to travel by himself far into the jungle, I asked him whether he was not afraid to do so, unarmed as he was. He answered that there was nothing to fear. I inquired what he did at night, to which he replied that he tethered his bull, lit a fire, and slept under a tree—‘some’ fatalist! I afterwards learnt that he was a dare-devil who often disappeared into the forests for weeks, visiting far-spaced hamlets, and then came home with a bull carrying a load—how acquired, he alone knew!

Bandua’s son, a youth of eighteen, told me in his quiet wistful way, of the forest deities. At Kebilitte, many miles from Kumuna, where long ago had stood a village, was a deserted shrine—merely a few stones under an antique tamarind—sacred to the most fearsome of the jungle gods;

even Skanda of Kataragama was more merciful. Skanda, in his fine temple, might show some lenience, not so Pattini *devi* of Kebilitte, though her fane was but a few rude stones. Anyone passing these, should not fail to make an offering, burning pepper, chillies and cotton on the altar; if that was done the wayfarer was protected, if not, some calamity would befall him. When you got benighted in the jungle you should, before lying down, ask the Kebilitte *devi*’s protection, then you would know that spirits would guard you: you might even see them in your dreams or waking moments.

There were other demons—one not a stone’s throw from our camp. He was appeased by an offering of boiled rice and the blood of a pigeon or an animal wrapped in a leaf. When starting on a hunt, if you promised him an offering of flesh, you would not have travelled far before making a kill—but be sure you kept your promise, or you would rue it! Then there were the ruder gods, such as Bandara *Vanniya*, who were conciliated by Y-shaped sprigs bestraddled on boughs or bast lines.

Kumuna stands close to where the Kumbukkan meets the sea. The nearest habitation to it is Panawa, twenty-five miles north.

The inhabitants are low caste Paduas—about thirty of them, all told. For generations they have lived and died there. They are closely inter-related, for their morality is loose, and close kinship is no bar to marital relations. In that community it is therefore difficult to say who is half-brother and who half-sister. Bandua, the patriarch, is reputed to be autocrat and reprobate and father of most, though to look at him you would say he was virtue itself!

From this village come some of the finest

trackers in Ceylon ; many of them are sanctuary guardians, though that is no deterrent to their killing what game they desire, a proclivity that has earned them the name of poachers. But who can help being such, placed as they are—perhaps not even the smug shikaris who slaughter ruthlessly for trophies and leave carcasses to rot, or shoot deer to bait leopards with. Most sportsmen, however, are agreed that for jungle villagers to slay proportionately to their needs is justifiable; it is the traffic in dried meat and the butchery of sambhur and deer at waterholes in the drought that lead to their decimation, which the Game and Fauna Protection Society is striving so hard to avert.

The time is fast coming, if it has not come already, when all water-hole shooting at night, even of so-called vermin, should be interdicted ; there are those who think it should be stopped now in the Resident Sportsmen's Reserves, where leopard and bear are getting scarcer and scarcer every year. The increasing use of electric torches at water-holes gives the animals no chance whatever. Our game sanctuaries should be inviolate, even from zealots wishful to thin down old bulls—incidentally with good heads!

But the greatest menace of all to game are the 'spot-light sportsmen,' who, invading the sanctity of the midnight jungles in cars with glaring headlights, blaze away at every blinded beast they encounter. Unless this form of "sport" is stopped with a heavy hand, our forests will soon be utterly impoverished of animals.

And those who indulge in this pastime only starve themselves of the healthy recreation and quiet rapture that stalking game in their natural environment provides—a pleasure so easily available in this small island with its hundreds of

roadside places, within a few miles of which excellent shooting may be had.

Singularly enough, it is the hunter who concerns himself most with the preservation of forest creatures, not so much that they may afterwards be shot, as because to him, as Julian Huxley says, "the sight of wild animals living in untouched surroundings is profoundly stirring and indeed one of the valuable things in life." That is why a keen collector of trophies often ends by becoming a keener photographer of wild life.

Kumuna, placed as it is on the confines of a champaign, is visible from afar. The clustering heads of coconut palms and the vast dome of a bo-tree, in contrast to the forest vegetation around, tell you where it is. You approach the hamlet by a wide detour along a path, often submerged, that winds cunningly through a bog, rank with thorny cane-brake and tall rushes, which gives it natural protection.

As we entered the village we surprised an old dame bathing at a draw-well. She turned as coy as a maiden of bashful fifteen, looking this way and that for a means of escape, then decided to crouch on her hams, shivering with cold.

About ten huts stood in fenced gardens, most of which included cattle-pens. Two enormous bo-trees of great antiquity cast wide their shade, bearing evidence that here must have stood in former days a considerable town with monastery and temple. The ruins in the jungles, the crumbling tank bunds, and the extensive game plains—fertile fields of old—also showed that these lands were once thickly inhabited.

A more casual and improvident folk than those of Kumuna it would be hard to find. Their gardens were conspicuous for an absence of fruit trees and vegetables. There were a few *murungas*

(drum-stick trees), a single lime tree, and a grove of plantains by the swamp—but no arecanut palms, jaks, bread-fruit trees, etc., as in other village gardens. When asked to account for the absence of useful trees they artlessly replied that no one planted them, and one remarked that a jak sapling did grow there once, until someone cut it down to pick limes with!

We must presume that it is the abundance of flesh available to these people that makes them careless of other food, which they obtain by barter from the more industrious folk of Sinhala, who exchange tavalam loads of grain and fruit (mora, jak, betel, plantains, etc.) for dried meat and salt—both contraband!

I had been told that Kumuna was the only village in Ceylon without a single dog. I arrived there to find the place over-run by about a dozen ill-used mongrels, the progeny, we were told, of a pregnant bitch abandoned by Kataragama pilgrims. The curs had become so great a nuisance that the youths of the village contemplated tying stones round their necks and casting them to the crocodiles.

How tranquil a place is Kumuna! The jungles encompass it, the sea breeze fans it. Far on the horizon passes an occasional ship. The lonely lighthouse on the Little Basses throws out its rhythmic beams over the waste of waters and the desolate land. There is little to disturb its quiet—except the annual passage of the Kataragama pilgrims (to whom the boys sell peacock plumes sacred to the Hindus), the seasonal encampments near the estuary of fisher-folk from Matara, and occasional hunting parties like ours. How welcome must these contacts with civilisation be to the lonely people. But cars nowadays are bringing things nearer to them, and once even

an aeroplane flew overhead, as they tell you with wide-eyed wonder.

How favoured a land is this!—the forest with its game, the waters with their fish, the sea-shore where the turtles bury their eggs, for which, on moonlight nights, the folk vie with the pigs. To judge by the abundance of fish in the lagoons and the paucity of tackle in the village, the aquatic life is little disturbed—though crabs are occasionally spitted with spikes, prawns snared with eikel nooses, and *lulas* caught with prawns. The best time to fish in the estuary is when the river rushes muddily into the sea: then the big sea fish, mackerel and pomfret (*parau, wawwo, goli*), come to eat the river fish swept into the sea, and are caught with lines (*yoth*) baited with little mullets (*godayas*) deprived of their tails, or a fragment of *warala* bark. An enterprising individual once got a net from a Malay of Kirinde; casting it one day for prawns, he caught a crocodile—with what result to the net may be imagined!

By the river, where elephants, leopards and peafowl come to drink, stand patiently and silently the anchored leviathans of the tree world. So strong, so vast are they, as to seem everlasting and awful; yet their crumbling limbs in the grip of living cables here and there remind you that they too are mortal.

They tower up to the sky. In their topmost branches the eagles nest, the parrots chatter, the imperial pigeons moan; amidst them wander monkeys and squirrels. They spread a vast surface of shade around, starving of light and air the sturdy saplings destined to replace them long years ahead. Beneath them is no undergrowth, scarcely a blade of grass, but merely a carpet of fallen leaves and decaying boughs, where the sambhur loves to rest.

All is silent there except for an abrupt melody or a startled cry.

### *A Bird Sanctuary*

Not far from Kumuna is a *kirilla*\* jungle growing out of a swamp, which affords a nesting place to thousands of water birds. It is a natural sanctuary very difficult of access except in the drought when it is bereft of feathered life.

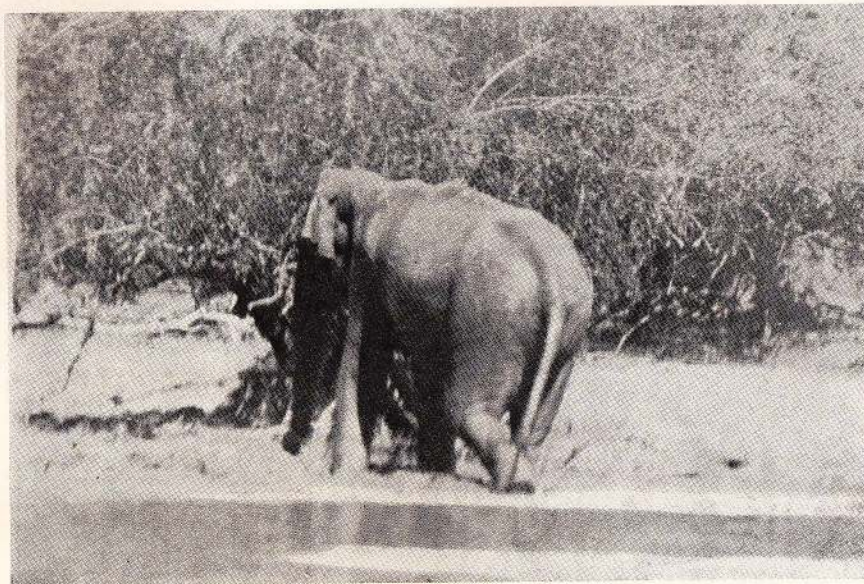
At any time of the day, during the nesting season in the early months of the year, birds may be seen flying over this patch of forest. Almost invisibly in the blue, circle painted storks, easing their cramped wings after patient perching; pelicans, herons and adjutants sail out and in, relieving each other; there, falling to its waiting brood, statuesque, with drooping wings and sagging legs set to an inch, is a parent stork, its crop well freighted with fish gathered in marshes miles away.

To invade this sanctuary we had brought with us, all the way from Pottuvil, a canoe in a bullock cart, for Kumuna possesses no craft whatever. One morning, armed only with cameras, we set out to explore.

My friend and I took our places in the boat, while two men with hatchets, one in front and the other behind, stepped into the fen, rank with tall grass and the seemingly impenetrable barrier of mangrove which stood like silent sentinels dumbly protesting against the violation of the sanctuary they were appointed to guard.

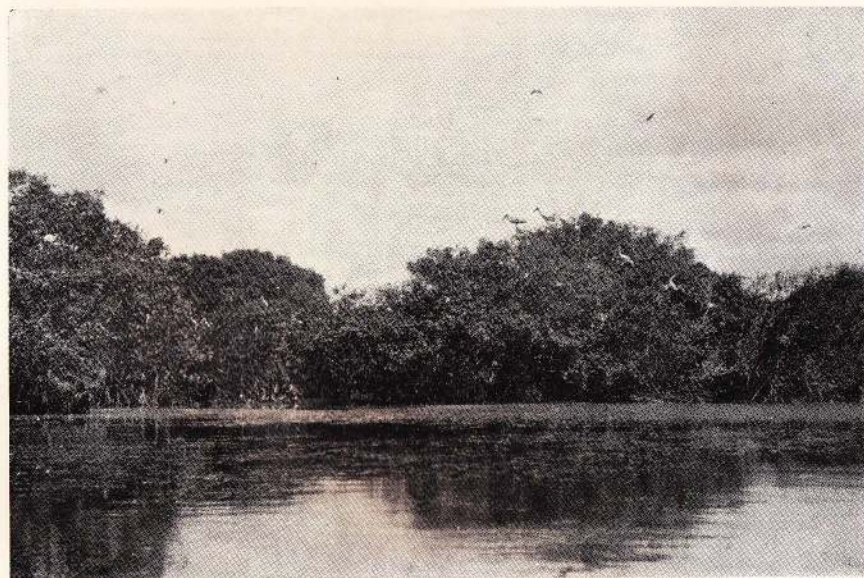
The man ahead hacked a way through and dragged the boat foot by foot helped by the other who pushed from behind. We zig-zagged haltingly between the close-set trees and their cluster-

\**Sonneratia acida*.



Wild elephant.

(Photo by G. M. Crabbe)



The bird sanctuary.



Young pelicans in nest.

*(Photo by G. M. Crabbe)*

Young heron in nest.

*(Photo by G. M. Crabbe)*

ing aerial prop roots that, sticking a foot or so out of the water, kept gripping the canoe. And so, less often afloat than floundering, we patiently made our amphibian way, the men shouting every now and then to scare away crocodiles.

At length, we glimpsed the lake between the tree trunks. The man behind climbed into the canoe and took an oar, the other gave the boat a final shove and set us adrift.

We found ourselves in a strange setting. Did we wake or dream? Had we, by some good fortune, come through the looking glass with Alice into Wonderland? Nowhere had we seen a sight like this before. Birds, elsewhere so shy of man that they did not permit him to approach them within five hundred yards, here stood on trees, a few feet away, gazing trustingly on.

The boat glided over the lucent sheet that mirrored to perfection the tall surrounding trees and the small islands—all laden alike with their nesting colonies. There were two regions here, one above the water, the other in its unruffled depths; the one seemingly as real as the other.

Not many birds were on the water itself—a teal or two, an occasional cormorant, dabchick or kingfisher. Spreading out from the shady borders, the lotus flaunted its carpet of glory woven of pink and snowy blossoms and leaves of satin sheen bediamonded with dancing waterdrops gathered from the dews of night.

It was the tree-tops, however, that presented the most wondrous spectacle, with the birds perched beside their great untidy nests, which stood, not within the seclusion of branches, but on tree-tops, leafless with incessant perching; they lay open to the sky that their tall builders might have free head room, and their young gaze on the fields of air their wings would one day

fan. The security of the nests lay, not in the secrecy of their setting but in the inaccessibility of the sanctuary; once this was invaded, all was helplessly, nakedly revealed.

If ever warranty was needed for the adage "Birds of a feather flock together," one had it here; the feathered communities, comprised perhaps of a dozen species, kept for the most part to themselves in splotches of grouped colour. The pelicans were together, the gray herons together, the shell ibises together, and the painted storks together; but the egrets, cormorants, pond herons and darters, more democratic-minded, homed indiscriminately on the low trees of the scattered islets.

It being April, most of the eggs had hatched out and the young were well grown, but a few of the mothers were still brooding.

The young were in all stages of growth. Some were callow and sank stuperose in their nests except when spasmodically gaping for food; others stood stupid looking and at a loose end, especially the gawky young gray herons with their stubby beaks, which it was difficult to imagine would one day develop stiletto points. The little pelicans, all jelly and down, squawked and moaned intermittently; the maturer ones already assumed the ludicrous dignity of their elders. Most of the youngsters were ravenous; some had obviously gorged too much; all were badly behaved, as we discovered to our cost when we got beneath them: one overfed pelican brat varied the performance by vomiting a putrid six inch fish on my companion's head!

Every nest was protected by at least one parent bird, for sentinels of death, hawks and eagles, were ever alert from covert and sky awaiting their chance. The feathered guardians gazed on as we

approached, loath to move away; but there is a limit even to parental courage, and one by one they left their perches with a swishing of reluctant wings.

"Look!" exclaimed my friend. "One of them's carrying off its youngster." But he was mistaken; it was a hawk with a sagging pelican squab in its talons; it tore to pieces the succulent morsel on a neighbouring bough, in full view of the other birds, but quite unheeded by them. After that we were careful not to approach the nests too closely.

Many of the young birds were wise enough to be perturbed by our nearness, and in their flurry tumbled among the branches, and encroached on each others nests. Two fell into the lake—a pelican and a gray heron. You would have thought that would be the end of them, but they were not as helpless as they seemed; not for nothing did some of the boughs droop into the water. The ungainly creatures flapped once or twice and then, by dint of beak, claw and wing, clambered up and up. The pelican's acrobatism was specially remarkable: thrusting its great beak over a branch, (placing its chin on it, as it were) it levered itself up helped by toe and pinion, and so from branch to branch, until eventually it composed itself in its own nest with droll gravity. The boughs that dipped into the lagoon were polished smooth, showing they served as ladders to fallen birds, provided they escaped the crocodiles watchful for a *bonne bouche*.

The islets that studded the lake allowed of easy investigation, for the trees on them were low and had their bases submerged, so that the boat could be manoeuvred among them, and the nests and young handled if we wished.

These trees were shared by herons, egrets,

cormorants and snake-birds. The young cormorants, black little fellows covered with white down, were sly, oh so sly! They flattened themselves down in their nests and lay very still imagining they duped us; some, as also the darters, took awkwardly to the water, but once there ducked and swam adroitly. The egrets were flustered and tumbled about; but the perky pond herons were combative, and with wicked eyes, ruffled necks and poised beaks, stood ready to defend themselves. One rotting little thing hung like a bedraggled garment from a thorny bough near its nest.

We moved about in that sanctuary as we would in a church, and left it to its accustomed serenity as silently as we entered.

Of flamingoes (*thevarajah*) we saw none. They are migrants, and probably do not breed in Ceylon—though one or two nests (cupped mounds of mud) of loiterers have, I believe, been discovered on the borders of lagoons. Our guide told us they never nested in the Kumuna *villu*, but did so on the rocks of far seas.

Now for some tales of these lands—both mythical and true.

#### *Liyatambura*

There is a flower that grows in the wilderness, called the *liyatambura*, which is said to excite men to passion. A young devotee once went into the forest, and seating himself under a banyan tree, was lost in contemplation. He did not move from the position he assumed, and only ate such food as was brought him by the wind or the jungle people. In the course of years the banyan threw down roots from its branches; two of these,

descending closely in front of the hermit's shoulders, imprisoned him immovably between them and the tree trunk against which he sat. One day a *liyatambura* suddenly blossomed before his eyes. So great was the longing it inspired, that he burst asunder the roots that held him, and, regardless of his vows, returned to the world he had renounced, saying: "If the allurements of women be so great that it can imbue me, a starved eremite, with strength enough to break through bonds like these, how can men who live on milk and rich food be proof against them?"

#### *The Last Veddas of Leanama*

About thirty-five miles north-west of Kumuna is the land of Leanama. Some of the Veddas there once went to the annual festival at Katarama and witnessed the offerings made to the god. Returning to their country, they said, "Let us do likewise at our shrine here." They imitated what they saw as best they could, but sinned in this, that they burnt on the altar, not vegetable oil, but the fat of pigs.

The god was angered and sent a leopard to destroy them. One by one the Veddas were killed, until only two remained. They escaped by sleeping at night on a steep rock inaccessible except by means of a ladder which they always drew up after them. One night they forgot to do this—and the leopard got them both.

#### *Thunminigala*

There is a partially submerged rock on a bank of the Kumbukkan, which the folk of Kumuna use as a bathing and fording place.

Wise old Kuilawella *gamarala*, who dwelt on



the other side of the river, would, whenever he desired to cross over, dissolve a certain herb in the water and then summon a large crocodile that dwelt there. Mounting its back, he would be carried across to the rock, bathe, and return in the same fashion.

One day, his two wives who were sisters, accompanied him on the live raft. Reaching the rock, one of the women climbed on to it, while the other standing on the crocodile, held out a potful of limes, and said, "Catch this." The crocodile, imagining the command was intended for him, seized and devoured all three of them! Hence is the rock called Thunminigala or Three-people-rock.

#### *Bandua's Tale*

When the Kumuna lagoons dry out in August, deposits of salt are left behind. This is the property of Government which none but its emissaries must touch. Once a year, the chief headman comes with a posse of workers, collects all the salt he can, and gets the rest trampled into the mud by cattle, that no one else might use it. The Kumuna folk, however, always contrive to get some for themselves and use this for barter with the people of Sinhala.

On one occasion, when such a transaction was taking place, Alagu, a Tamil, happened to be living at Kumuna. He secretly carried word to Kalu Bhai, a Malay watcher of the sanctuary, that the people of Kumuna were giving salt to those of Sinhala. The parties were surprised, and a tussle occurred, as a result of which several offenders were taken into custody, tried, and fined or jailed.

One man, however, escaped with a bag of salt

on his pack-bull to Sinhala. Passing the shrine of Kebilitte, he made an offering and beseeched the god for vengeance on Alagu.

Soon afterwards, while Alagu was on the watch-hut of his chena, a leopard walked into the village of Kumuna, and looking about, frightened the women and children, till the men came up and drove the beast away.

It went straight to Alagu's chena, and finding the man dozing in his watch-hut on the tree, climbed up and killed him, then rolled the body down and carried it into the jungle.

Later that evening Alagu's partner went to the chena to take his turn of the watch. What was his surprise to see a gory mess at the foot of the tree! Looking up, he called to his friend, and receiving no answer, hastened back with the news of the catastrophe to Kumuna.

Ten men, including Bandua (then a youth) proceeded to the spot, armed with two guns. There they saw only too clearly what had happened: the *maessa* (trestle) was foul with the blood and offal of Alagu. Following the trail of the dragged man, they discovered his mangled remains in the jungle.

It was now nearly dark, and the men were afraid to return the mile to Kumuna, with a man-eating leopard about. So they bundled into a cloth what was left of the unfortunate Alagu and hung it on a high bough; then they all ascended the large tree on which the watch-hut was built. The small platform would accommodate but four of them with difficulty; the others sat on branches to which they bound themselves with their cloths and prepared for the all-night vigil, holding their noses, and spitting frequently for the odour of Alagu's inside.

Old Muthua, their leader, cautioned them to

keep very still and do nothing while it was dark, but wait till the moon rose towards dawn.

Hardly had an hour elapsed when they could hear the leopard moving beneath them. It came to the foot of their tree, sniffed about, and then, to their horror, began climbing. The rasping sound of the creature's claws against the bark came nearer and nearer, but they saw nothing. This was too much even for the prudent Muthua. He pointed his double-barrelled muzzle-loader where he imagined the beast to be, and pressed the trigger—there was only a click! It was the same with the other trigger. The men were now all in a tremble. The leopard continued to climb.

Bandua levelled his single-barrelled weapon and fired. With a blood-curdling roar the beast fell to the ground and leapt into the forest—then all was quiet.

The men stayed on the tree till dawn, but no one slept. Leaving the body of Alagu behind and afraid to go after the wounded quarry, they returned to the village.

Two messengers were despatched to the headman at Pottuvil, about thirty-five miles away. He arrived two days later. A score of people, accompanied by the dead man's wife to identify his remains, proceeded to the chena. There an inquest was held.

The proceedings over, Bandua and Muthua decided to go in search of the leopard. Bandua led with Muthua's gun. He had not gone far when he suddenly saw the leopard in a thicket. Stepping cautiously back, he aimed carefully, and fired both barrels; taking his own gun from Muthua, he put in a third shot. They waited the better part of half an hour to make sure the animal would die. Then, having re-loaded both guns, they crept slowly up to find the beast alive

—with maggots! Bandua's first shot from the tree at night had broken the creature's neck—it had been dead three days!

So ended the man-eating leopard which the Kebilitte *deyyo* had sent to punish Alagu, the tale-teller.

#### *Hudha and Hudhi*

Here is as poignant a love story as it is possible to find. The events occurred but a few years before our visit to Kumuna.

Hudhi, an orphan, was the belle of the village and Bandua's ward. Hudha loved her, and she him. The two had grown up together. One day when Hudhi was sixteen and Hudha a well-set fellow of twenty, scarred by a bear, he declared his love.

But Bandua had other plans for Hudhi. He marked her for his step-son Carolis. When, with his discerning eye, he discovered that the girl's affections were being diverted, he brought things to a climax by forcing her to marry Carolis, and sent them away to Yala where Carolis was a watcher of the Game Reserve.

For many weeks Hudha silently nursed his sorrow. Then, unable to bear it any longer, he stole away to Yala, that he might at least see his beloved. He stayed there a few days, and returned to Kumuna with the memory of love tokens he had read in Hudhi's eyes.

He had barely been back a month when Yala beckoned him again; and once more, on some pretext or another, he answered its call. This time he contrived to stay there longer than before, for the more he saw of Hudhi and her unhappiness, the more he longed to be by her.

Having no excuse to stay on indefinitely at Yala, he returned to his home. Soon he took to

spending more of his time at Yala than Kumuna, and whispers went about that the lovers saw more of each other than was apparent; but no one bothered, for love went very much its own way in those lands.

One day, Bandua unlocked his money chest at Kumuna to discover that all his carefully hoarded savings (twenty rupees) had disappeared. He first questioned and then threatened every individual in the village, but all denied knowledge of the deed. Bandua was very angry, and said he would call down so dire a curse on the head of the thief that it would kill him or her. Still no one confessed. So, one morning, Bandua bathed in the river, put on clean clothes, and journeyed to the shrine of Pattini at Kebilitte, than whom there is no more vengeful deity in the jungles.

He took a silver ten-cent-piece, and cutting it in half with his arecanut-cutter, placed the two pieces on the altar, and besought the goddess to reveal the offender to him within seven days. If she did this, he promised further offerings, but if she failed him, he declared he would not believe that such a one as she existed, and would show his contempt by burning the fat of swine on her altar. The incensed old martinet, accustomed to having his own way in everything, determined at any cost to spur the deity to action.

Within seven days Hudha, then at Yala, contracted dysentery. In the next few days his illness became so acute that he had to be taken twenty-five miles in a litter to the Tissamaharama hospital. There he steadily got worse. Not until he was at death's door did he confess to the theft. He sent Bandua a message imploring him to call off the curse he had laid, and vowed to make good the money by earning it, or giving

up the only cow he had. But it was too late. He died before the messenger reached Bandua; nor, from what I gathered, would it have availed him if it had been otherwise, for Bandua was without compassion.

When Hudhi heard of Hudha's death she was distraught; her grief was the more unbearable because she could not give open expression to it, and because she knew that it was to provide her with the simple fineries she loved that Hudha had taken the money. Nursing her sorrow in silence, she went about her duties, giving no indication whatever of her anguish.

One evening, a week after Hudha died, Hudhi went to the house of Mr. Englebrecht, the Boer guardian of the sanctuary, and asked his servant for some "Atlas Preservative," saying her husband required it to cure a skin. That night, she mixed the poison with her rice and ate it, and died in agony. And her soul joined Hudha's in the realms of peace.

When this story is told, even by those simple, unemotional people, a sad wistfulness shadows the face of the teller; but Bandua professes no regret for the sorrow he caused, saying the punishment was deserved.

Carolus is still a watcher at Yala; his wife is now the beautiful Nagi, Hudhi's younger sister.

### THE WOUNDED DOE

A hunter, happening on a glade,  
Espied a quietly browsing doe  
That rooted gazed with eyes afraid  
At levelled gun, but feared to go.

The gun sang death, but e'en its pain  
Gave to the halting feet no wing ;  
Echoed the woods to death again,  
Again the poor beast felt the sting,

And limped away some screen to find,  
When from the brake sprang to her side  
A gentle frightened little hind  
The man till then had not espied.

It smote the hunter's heart with awe,  
Nor followed he the deed he'd done ;  
With anguished, trembling soul he saw  
His home, his wife, his little one.

### KATARAGAMA

**D***eviyange kelle*—the god's jungle—is the name by which the forest wilderness in south-eastern Ceylon is known to its dwellers. The very silence of those solitudes is vocal with the menace of this grim god ; the traveller there must ever be heedful that he does nothing in disrespect or defiance of him, for whoever sins may pay for it with his life, losing his way in the jungle or falling a prey to some wild animal (elephant, leopard, bear or snake), the instrument of the deity's doom.

Scattered about those jungles are fanes—merely a few stones under the trees here and there—that bear witness to the incessant reverence of man for this powerful presence. At those altars the wayfarer makes his offering when setting out on a journey or finding himself in distress, and proceeds confident in the ability of the god to protect him.

Who is this god ? How came he here ?

His origin reaches back to the heroic age of Hindu mythology when gods fought Titans on earth, and consorted with the daughters of men.

At Kataragama is his chief temple, to which pilgrims—mainly Hindus, but also Buddhists and Mohammedans—flock in thousands once a year from all parts of Southern India and Ceylon. Devotees from far Kashmir, travelling down the length of India on the pilgrimage of their lives, declare there is no holier place on earth.

Kataragama\* derives its name from Kartikeya, the war-god of the Tamils, or Kanda Kumara of the Sinhalese. He is said to have visited Ceylon when it was not an island but part of the lost continent stretching from Madagascar to the Malay Archipelago.

Long ages ago the inhabitants of India were the *devas* or gods.† For many centuries they were under the dominance of the Asuras or Titans who weaned them from the devout practices ordained in their holy writ, the *Vêdhas* or Agamas.

The *devas* sought the help of many supernatural beings without avail. At length, led by their king Indra, they went to the great god Siva at Karlas, and worshipping him as god of gods, begged his assistance.

Siva listened to their prayers and was moved. He had five faces, each with three eyes; he now assumed a sixth face. From the central eye of each face there burst forth six sparks of light, which made all the dwellers of the three worlds—gods, Titans and human beings—shudder. Then Siva recalled the six sparks and placed them with Agni, the god of fire. Agni, unable to endure them, set them in the Ganges which bore them to the lake Saravana, where the six virgins, Karthika, brought up the six sparks as six children.

One day Siva came to the Saravana lake with Uma, his consort. She asked him whose those

\*Tamil *Kāḍirai malai*. Kataragama is a shorter form of *Karthigeya grama*, the village of Karthigeya or Kartikeya, one of the names of Skanda.

†The mythology that follows is taken mainly from information supplied me by Dr. S. Ramanathan, whose religious zeal, when I met him among the pilgrims at Kataragama, prompted me to make the request of him. Though I, like anyone who has visited the place during the festival, could not but be touched by the fire of holy fervour there, still I felt that the inner significance of its austere ritual could only be done justice to by one strongly influenced by faith in its guardian god.



“ Scattered about those jungles are fanes that proclaim the incessant fear of man ” (p. 281).



A yogi from India *en route* to Kataragama.

lovely children were. "Uma, they are yours!" replied Siva. Thereupon she rushed forward and embraced them all together, and they united to form a single child with six heads and twelve arms—and so Skanda,\* the Hindu war god, was born.

The child grew up to be a strong and handsome youth, and the gods made him their leader. From among them he selected an army of a hundred thousand soldiers under eight officers, all armed with the *vel*, a lance with a flame-shaped blade. Hence the *vel* became the symbol of worship of the mighty son of Siva.

A great battle† was waged by Skanda against the Asuras. Skanda was victorious and so became the saviour of the gods. Indra, king of the celestials, in his gratitude, gave Skanda his daughter, Deva Sena, in marriage, and they departed to Kanda Velpu and lived happily.

Agas rolled on.

One day a Vedda chief living at Parana (old) Kataragama—four miles up the river from the present village—came across a baby girl lying amidst wild creepers of the Valli yam. She was the offspring of a doe by a hermit.

\*Hence Skanda is called by a number of names:—Kuha Nethra Sutha (Son born out of the Eye): Kartikeya, because adopted by the Karthiya virgins (the six Pleides in Taurus): Gangeya or born of the Ganges: Sivananaparam: Subramania: Sanmugam or six-faced (Tamil, Arumugam): Kandaswami. He has numerous other names as well.

Skanda was born in the Himalayas. His home for twenty centuries has been in South India, and his worship is chiefly among the Tamils, who brought him down with them from the North where he is now little known or esteemed (Sir P. Arunachalam).

The best statue of him is at Ranod in Gwalior: one of the best in Ceylon is in the rock vihara of Mullegama.

†This is said to have occurred either in the sea, south-west of Cape Comorin, or on land, long before Rama fought Ravana about 2387 B.C.

The coming of Skanda is commemorated in the beautiful poem *Kumara Sampava* (Advent of the Son) of Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit poet and dramatist: in the Sanskrit *Skanda Purana* (5th century): and the Tamil *Kandapurana* (8th century) of the South Indian priest, Kachchiappa Siva Achiriyia.

The Vedda chief took the infant home to his wife who was childless, and they adopted her, calling her Valliamma from the circumstance of her birth. She grew to be a lovely maiden.

The divine messenger, Narada, a Brahman *rishi* (also called Brahma-putra, the son of Brahma), came to Kataragama in his tour round the three worlds of gods, Titans and men, and saw the girl. To her he praised the virtues of Skanda.

Returning to Kanda Velpu, he in turn extolled to Skanda the virgin beauty of Valliamma, saying she loved him with a pure unalloyed love.

There came a day when a tottering old mendicant (*sannyasin*) stood at the door of the Vedda chief's hut, and begged for alms and food. Valliamma, the only person in at the time, gave the man some millet flour and honey, which he ate and complained that, being too dry, it stuck in his throat. The girl asked him to go to the river close by and have a drink; but the cunning old fellow coaxed her to show him the way; she did this taking hold of one end of the staff he carried.

On the way to the river he suggested that Valli should become his wife. Very annoyed, she threatened to leave him instantly. Just then an elephant broke cover. The terrified girl clung to the sannyasin beseeching him to protect her, and even promised marriage if only he would drive the animal away. No sooner had she done this than the elephant withdrew, and before the astonished girl stood, not a decrepit old man, but a handsome youth. Valli, falling at his feet, begged his pardon if she had treated him disrespectfully, for she now knew the mendicant to be none other than Skanda, always the object of her adoration. The youth wooed the maiden and took her away.

Another version of this part of the story is that Skanda or Kumar, the Hindu war-god, descended from heaven, armed with a sacred javelin (the *vel* or *swami*), to the milky ocean, and was borne in a miraculous granite raft (*gal poruwa*) to Devi Nuwara or Dondra.\* The malodorous dried fish here being too much for him, he decided to leave the place. So he flung his sacred javelin into the air; it flew seventy miles and fell on the hillock at Kataragama, which he adopted as his abode.

This warrior prince Kumar (afterwards the god of Kataragama) was married in India to Thevaniamma (Deva Sena), as we have seen.

While the prince was out hunting one day, he came upon the beautiful Valliamma (daughter of a hermit and a doe, foster-child of a Vedda chief) in a field (*thana hena*). She rejected Kumar's advances.

Returning home, Kumar told his brother, Ganapathi (Ganesha), of his love. Ganapathi offered to help him by assuming the form of an elephant, the only animal, Kumar had learnt, of which, the girl was afraid. But before doing this, Ganapathi entrusted a pot of water to his brother, with instructions to pour it on him when the stratagem had succeeded, to enable him to regain his human form.

Kumar went to his wooing disguised as a hermit, and found Valliamma in a field eating millet which was choking her. He gave her a drink of water from the pot he carried, and relieved her distress; but in his solicitude for her, he upset the vessel and spilt its contents.

At this juncture Ganapathi appeared as an

\*He is said by others to have landed at Munnessaram in the north-west of the Island or at Swami Rock in Fort Frederick.

elephant. The terrified girl clung to the hermit for protection. He offered to shield her on condition she promised to marry him; she agreed, and the animal was driven away.

The two then returned to Kataragama, where they found Ganapathi; but as Kumar had spilt the water that was to restore his brother to human form, this could not be done, and Ganapathi remained ever afterwards with an elephant's head on a human body.\*

Meanwhile, the Vedda chief returned to his hamlet to find Valliamma, "the light of his home," gone. Calling his band of men together, he set out in search of her, and finding her with Kumar at Parana Kataragama, attempted to capture them.† But Kumar was a match for them all, and with his warriors, slew them in battle.

Valli was so greatly grieved at the death of her people, that Kumar to appease her, restored them all to life; and the Veddas made him obeisance.

The chief begged Kumar to go through a formal marriage ceremony with Valli, that disgrace might not befall his house. Narada officiated according to Vedic rites, and Kumar lived on the top of Kataragama hill, with Valliamma as his consort.

Later, Thevaniamma, Kumar's former wife, came over from India escorted by Brahman attendants and settled down at Kataragama; Valliamma then lived in a separate house, which Kumar used clandestinely to visit; this is still perpetuated in the ritual of the annual festival.

\*Another account makes no mention of the pot of water; Kumar had merely to wish that his brother would rechange his form as soon as the ruse succeeded, but forgot to do so in the ecstasy of the moment.

†One tradition states that Kumar, on being discovered with Valli, instantly converted himself into a tree at a spot still indicated at Parana Kataragama.

In the course of time, the Veddas, having learnt who Kumar was, began to worship him as the son of Siva himself\*.

But how is it that a Hindu god comes to be feared and worshipped by Sinhalese Buddhists?

After the advent of the Sinhalese, the Vedda race dwindled in power. The Sinhalese were in their turn dominated time and again, by the Tamils who drove them southwards. Ruhuna was their refuge, and Kataragama, in the heart of Ruhuna, was for a time their capital. Here, far south of their great cities harassed by perpetual wars, were heard but the echoes of strife; here dynasties might nurse their armies and wait their day; and so, many a prince of Ruhuna became a king at Anuradhapura or Pollonnaruwa.

According to Buddhist annals, king Maha Sen was at Kataragama when Buddha visited the place about 569 B.C.; and according to Tamil tradition, Vijaya, who became king about 543 B.C., built a temple to 'Kadirai Andavar'—the god-king.

In the Mahawansa we read that Devanampiya Tissa had a sapling of the bo-tree brought by Sanghamitta from India planted at Kataragama, because the place was hallowed by Gautama.

\*It is easy to see in this story (which bears resemblance to that of Vijaya and Kuveni) the conquest of an aboriginal race by Indian invaders, and the partial conversion of that race to the religion of the conqueror. It also explains the intrusion of the Vedda element into the Hindu ceremony as practiced at Kataragama to-day.

Both Sinhalese and Tamil myths combine to create a romantic atmosphere round this prince of old, subsequently to be deified as an incarnation of Skanda and worshipped, by common consent of both Buddhists and Hindus, as one of the most honoured of tutelary deities.

According to a Sinhalese tradition he was a prince who reigned at Kataragama about 569-543 B.C. Another legend mentions him as merely a Tamil juggler from the Palamai Hills, near Kodaikanal, who had been told by the *rishi* Narada of the existence of the beautiful Valiamma, and came to win her. By his juggler's art he convinced her credulous people of his supernatural powers and came to be worshipped as a god.



In 661 A.D. Aggabodi, chief of Ruhuna, built a temple and monastery there.

Once, about 1059, a Chola general from Polonnaruwa invaded and laid waste 'the city' of Kataragama.

The Mahawansa paints a vivid picture of Dutu Gemunu's successful bid to wrest the land from the Tamils. Tissamaharama was the capital of Dutu Gemunu's father, in spite of whose pious injunctions the 'disobedient' son gradually built up an army and marched away to give battle to the well trained troops of the great Tamil king, Elara, who ruled at Anuradhapura.

On the way, it is said,\* Dutu Gemunu halted his men on the banks of the Menik Ganga. He was much worried over his schemes of war, when a *pandaram* or Siva *sannyasin* (holy man) appeared to him in a dream and asked what troubled his mind.

Dutu Gemunu, recognising Skanda in the holy *pandaram*, told him of the impending war, and besought his aid. Skanda promised to help, saying that the sign of his presence on the battlefield would be a dark cloud which would overhang the Sinhalese armies and protect them from the sun.

The prince then asked the god how he might worship him. Skanda planted the *vel* at the site of the present shrine. Over it Dutu Gemunu built a shelter of boughs cut with his own sword, performed *puja* (worship), and continued his march northward through Alupotta, Bintenne, and so on.

\*The *Kanda Upata*—a Sinhalese poem—describes the episode.

Another version has it that Duttu Gemunu was warned in a dream not to fight Elara against his father's mandate, unless he first secured the aid of the Kataragama god. He made a pilgrimage there, and underwent severe penances imploring divine intervention, when the god appeared to him in a dream, etc.

The story of Dutu Gemunu's victorious fight against Elara has been told elsewhere (page 8). On his triumphant return, the grateful monarch had the present shrine built, enacted the performances of rites according to the Sivagamas, and donated lands for the service of the temple.

And so Old Kataragama declined and was supplanted by the New as a place of pilgrim worship. But Hindu pilgrims of the Siva sect still visit Old Kataragama and the Kataragama Hill (Vedahitiya Kanda), which the first warrior prince Kumar chose as his stronghold, when the surrounding forests were peopled only by hostile Veddas.

Sinhalese kings often married Tamil princesses, and embodied in their religious practices the worship of Hindu gods.

All this explains why two systems of faith venerate one god.

Kataragama has undergone many vicissitudes, but its great fame as a sacred place has never declined.

Sinhalese kings and Hindu merchants enriched its temples, and thus tempted pillage:—

In Ribeiro's *Ceilao* we read that in 1642 a Portuguese detachment attempted unsuccessfully to sack the shrine:—"Here are preserved," he writes "the offerings which had been made for many years, consisting of gold, jewels and precious stones, and five hundred armed men were always maintained for its defence. We had several times made inquiries about it, in our desire to obtain this wealth and to relieve them of their anxiety regarding it. At the beginning of 1642 I was one of a company of one hundred and fifty Portuguese and two thousand Lascarins, the majority of whom were Christians, under the command of Gaspar Figueira de Cerpe, who was held in high respect among them, a man of ability

and well versed in their language and customs. When we came near the spot where they said the pagoda stood, we captured a native residing close to the spot, and our commander inquired from him if he knew where the pagoda was. He replied that he did, and that it was close by; he acted as our guide and led us through a hill covered with forest which was the only one in that district, and this we wandered round and recrossed many times. It was certain that the pagoda was at the top of it but I do not know what magic it possessed, for out of the five guides whom we took, the first three were put to death because we thought that they were deceiving us, for they acted as if they were mad and spoke all kinds of nonsense, each one in his turn, without the one knowing of the others. The last two deceived us and did exactly the same, and we were forced to turn back the way we had come without effecting anything and without even seeing the pagoda which is called *Catergao*."

Robert Knox, writing in 1681, says of the Kataragama god:—"The Lewavas (salt pans) are environed with Hills on the Land side, and by Sea not convenient for Ships to ride; and very sickly, which they do impute to the power of a great god, who dwelleth near by in a Town they call *Cotteragom*, standing in the Road, to whom all that go to fetch Salt both small and great must give an Offering. The Name and Power of this God striketh such terror into the Chingulayes (Sinhalese), that those who otherwise are Enemies of this king, and have served both Portuguez and Dutch against him, yet would never assist either to make Invasions this way."

Whoever the Kataragama deviyo may have been, the Veddas worshipped him first at Parana Kataragama. Then the Sinhalese, from Dutu

Gemunu on, worshipped him at the present shrine, where the officiating priests to this day claim descent from the original Vedda priests.

The Veddas have chief claim to the temple of Valliamma, and until recently Veddas with drawn bows guarded the shrine when the procession visited it. The Brahman sannyasins of the Puri sect have charge of the fane of Deva Sena, which a Sinhalese princess endowed with much of her property, making it at one time the richest shrine at Kataragama. The Mohammedans too have a place of worship here. So all the great oriental religions meet at Kataragama and their votaries bow to a common god.

For the theologian, Skanda forms one of the Trinity—Siva (father), Sahthi (mother), Sutha (son); for the astrologer he is Mars, the ruddy planet; for the Tamils, he is one of their chief gods who guarded their race, language and literature; for the Sinhalese, he is the god of war and has a shrine in most Buddhist places of worship, and plays a prominent part in their ceremonials; for the yogee, he is the most advanced and perfect one, a guide to all following the path of yoga; but above all, he is the living god for the Kaliyuga—the present age.

The most popular form in which Skanda is worshipped is as Murukan, a tender child of three years, with bejewelled anklets, wristlets and girdle, and necklace with pendants, holding in one hand the sacred flame-shaped vel, and in the other, a peacock—his particular *vakanam* or vehicle. Murukan may have been originally a local deity, later merged with Skanda.

The dying Asura king entreated Skanda to allow him always to be near him. This boon was granted by the conversion of the king into a peacock for the *vakanam* of the god, and a cock

for his standard. So in these forms the Asura king is always with Skanda.

The two consorts Thevaniamma (Deva Sena) and Valliamma with the *vel* (regarded by gnostics as desire, will, and action) are said to be twin sisters who entreated Skanda, when he lived in Saravana lake, to wed them; but he declined, saying he had first a mission to accomplish on this earth. Thus he is the great example of a dutiful being.

All sorts of pilgrims come to the shrine of Kataragama; some to ask favours in worldly life, others to expiate their sins, a few to seek the life everlasting. The worship of Skanda confers not only *dharmā*, *artha* and *kama*, but also *mahsha* or heaven itself. These four things every devout Hindu aspires to.

The *mantra* used in invoking Skanda is *Hara Hara\** (Sanskrit), or *Ara-Ara*, or *Aro-hara* (Tamil).

The remarkable thing is that there is no image at Kataragama. The unknown god is worshipped there as beyond the comprehension of mortals.

#### *Kataragama To-day*

At the present time Kataragama is but a jungle village inhabited only by a few small families attached to the temple service as its tenants.† For fifty weeks in the year it is forlorn, but during the fortnight of the festival, the place is like a crowded town.

\*The philologist will see in this word the Sumerian Ra, and also the same root in Ararat—"the house of God"—the region round which is thought by some orientalisists to be the home of the Aryans.

The pure rituals in the temples of Skanda are contained in the *Kumara Tantra*.

†The civil guardian of the temple and temporalities, which include about 60,000 acres, is the Buddhist headman of Buttala, the Basnayake Nilame. He has sole charge and draws a share of the pilgrims' offerings, most of which is said to go to the organisers of the pilgrimage.

About June, may be seen in Colombo, as also in many another place *en route*, ash-besmeared fakirs from India with matted hair, and sometimes a man with skewered cheeks bearing on his shoulders a peacock-plumed frame called a *kavadi*, accompanied by a drummer, to whose short sharp bursts of music the other dances from door to door of the devout, collecting alms. These, regardless of the modern amenities of travel, do the long journey to Kataragama on foot, in fulfilment of vows.

There are three festivals held annually at Kataragama:—

(1) The *Esala Perahera*, the chief festival, begins with the new moon of July and lasts fifteen or sixteen days. It starts with the Magul Perahera (celebrating the marriage of the Kataragama god with Valliamma), and ends with the water-cutting ceremony on the day of the full moon.

(2) The *Ilmaha Kachi* festival is held during November, and lasts three days.

(3) The *Aluth Aurutha* festival takes place in April on the occasion of the Hindu and Sinhalese New Year, and lasts only a day.

So arduous was the journey in former times that it was precluded by the making of last wills. But motor buses and trains have rendered the trip much easier to day, though even now the final part of it has to be done on foot.

Many paths converge towards Kataragama from convenient roadside places. There is the footway down south from Buttala through Galge; that from Pottuvil along the coast past Panawa and then through the Game Reserve; another due east from Tanamalwila; and the easiest of all from Tissamaharama, which is but eleven miles from Kataragama.

This last is the main pilgrim route. Tissa-

maharama that Kavan Tissa made resplendent is now but a small malarious town, the reputed haven of riff-raff. During the festival it becomes a bustling mart, where commodities fetch thrice their price, and the sharper and the bully thrive. Here the buses unload their crowded human freight.

From Tissa a rough boulder-strewn track leads through dense scrubby jungle infested with wild beasts. This path has not been improved of set purpose, that the merit of the pilgrimage may be enhanced by hardship. The wealthier pilgrims travel in bullock-carts well padded with straw and cushions, but even so, those who respect their bones prefer to trust to their legs.

As the time of the festival synchronizes with the hottest season of the year, the journey is best done by night. Water is so scarce that it is sold on the way.

Along the narrow path files the long procession, composed of the young and old of both sexes, and even children in arms; the wilds are stirred by the hum of voices and fanatical shouts. One is struck by the spirit of camaraderie that prevails; caste and class distinctions have been forgotten, and pilgrim greets pilgrim with the immemorial salutation, '*Haro-hara.*'

In the old days epidemics of cholera and dysentery were common. The wayside was strewn with corpses of men, women and children, to the joy of carrion-feeding beasts. Death on such a journey was thought to be a sure passport to heaven. But the scared peasantry, through whose lands the pilgrim route lay, abandoned their fields and kept to their villages; public and irrigation works were crippled; the salt of Palutupana became valueless from neglect at the critical period when its collection was imperative; and

the coffee planters regarded the festival with the real apprehension because their pilgrimaging coolies brought back with them cholera, dysentery and fever.\*

After a wearisome journey of eleven miles, the shallow crystal waters of the Menik Ganga (Gem River)† overshadowed by kumbuk trees, greet the pilgrims' eyes. And there they wash away their impurities before presenting themselves at the shrine, for fear the god might otherwise not listen to their supplications.

On the further bank of the river stand the austere fanes of Kataragama. There are no grand edifices here such as its renown would suggest, but merely crude buildings devoid of the least architectural pretensions. There is, however, a solemnity about them denied to finer temples. Even the Maha Devale (great temple), once so magnificent with the gold and gems of Sinhalese princes and Hindu merchants, is now as humble a structure as the rest.

Tradition decrees that the *devalas* (temples), like the jungle track leading to them, should not be touched, and so they remain unchanged despite the lavish endowments of rich Hindus. One wonders what happens to the wealth that must flow to the temple coffers. It is rumoured that much of it passes into the hands of thieves and gamblers who stay behind in the jungle after the

\*Dr. John Davy (brother of Sir Humphrey Davy) physician to the forces (1816-1820) says, "The number of pilgrims is now annually diminishing and the buildings are going to decay. In a very few years probably they will be level with the ground, and the traveller will have difficulty in discovering their site. Such we must hope will be their fate and the fate of every building consecrated to superstition of this very degrading and mischievous kind." But to-day, after more than a century, owing to improved preventive measures and efficient supervision, the festival is as popular and well attended as it has probably ever been.

†In July 1873, and occasionally in previous years, the river ran dry with very serious consequences to the pilgrims.

festival is over, to prey on the weakness of the all too human custodians.

The sacred places at Kataragama are many :—

*Kataragama Peak* or *Vedahitiya Kande* (one of the seven hills of Kataragama) on which Kumar is said to have first lived, is 2,500 feet high, and three miles south-east of Kataragama. During the festival a light is kept burning there all night. Many of the more devout pilgrims make the arduous ascent in a sort of trance, obedient to the mandate of the god.

*Sella Kataragama* or Old Kataragama, four miles up the river, is the site of the love-scene between Kumar and Valliamma. Near it is a shrine dedicated to Ganesha who is reputed to have played so prominent a part at that meeting.

One mile short of Old Kataragama is *Valli's Cave*, where she is said to have churned milk, as evidenced to this day by the dark slimy deposits (of butter-milk!) on the rock face within.

All the temples of Kataragama, except the Thevaniamma kovil which is in the custody of a line of Brahmin priests from Benares, are in charge of Sinhalese who claim descent from the ancient Poojaries—just as the priest at Buddha Gaya is a Hindu. The temple *dasis* or serving maids are said to be descendants of Valliamma. The chief incumbent is the *Basnayake Nilame* under whom are eight officiating priests including a *Maha Kapurale* (high priest) and *Kuda Kapurales*.

The buildings used to be contained within two adjacent squares. The larger, surrounded by a brick wall, enclosed the Kataragama devale, the devale of his brother Ganna, a neglected Buddhist *vihare* with a fine bo-tree, and six little *kovils*, mere cells, dedicated to the goddess Pattini and five demons. The smaller square contained a *karandua*

(casket) sacred to Iswere, the *Kalanamadima*, a *kovil* dedicated to the demon Bhyro or Bahira, and a rest-house for pilgrims, or chetties' *chatram*.

At the end of a long avenue leading from the main devale is a ruined dagaba, the *Kiri Vihare*.

The *Maha Devale* consists of two apartments, the outer of which only is accessible to visitors. Its walls are painted with representations of battle scenes between gods and Titans, and its ceiling is a cloth decorated with mystical figures. In the dark, windowless inner apartment (*adytanam*), the deity is thought to reside. Its door is screened off by seven curtains, and no one but the officiating priest may enter it, and that only after cleansing his hands and feet in a small foot-bath and basin beside the door. In this holy of holies is kept no idol as in other temples, but a casket said to contain a mystic diagram engraved on a golden tablet (*yantra*) which is thought to possess divine power and grace.

At the Maha Devale three pujas are done daily by the kapurales: the first between 5 and 6 a.m., the second between 11 and 12 noon, and the third between 6 and 7 p.m.

The *Karandua of Iswere*, an oven-shaped casket containing a little effigy of this god, stands on a platform in a small room.

The *Kalana-madima*, a special object of reverence, is a large seat of clay standing on a platform. It is covered over with leopard skins, and contains instruments used in the performance of temple worship. It was the seat of Kalana Natha, the first priest of the devala, whose great piety is said to have enabled him to pass to heaven without dying. Each of his successors in turn have used it but once at the hour of death, and this the present custodian fervently looks forward to doing.

The *Valliamma Kovil*, about three hundred

yards from the Maha Devale, also has its sanctuary shut off by a curtain, which is here painted with pictures of the Vedda girl and her mother, the doe.

Adjoining the Valliamma Kovil is a *Moslem mosque*, and a monument of a saint named Kamra Nabi who is said to have discovered a hidden spring here which made immortal those who drank of its waters. Mussulman fakirs from India frequently visit the shrine, but, singularly enough, not Ceylon Mohammedans.

The *Kiri Vihare* is an ancient dagaba said to have been founded by king Mahanaga of Mahagama, about 300 B.C.; others attribute it to Dutugemunu.

The *Esala perahera* procession takes place at night from 7 to about 9 or 10 p.m. The casket containing the relic of the god is brought out of the Maha Devale wrapped in a cloth, and is carried on the back of an elephant for fourteen successive nights. The main participants in the ceremony are the Basnaike Nilame and kapurales, attended by *alathi ammas* (vestal virgins) carrying lamps. Flambeaux (*avariapadam*) are borne by *karava* (fisher) folk, thought to be descendants of those who accompanied the prince.

The perahera is preceded by the puja to the god, beginning about 6-30 p.m.

Long before the appointed hour, the grounds of the temple swarm with devotees, many of whom carry on their heads earthen pans containing holy ash and burning camphor; prostrate forms, clutching coconuts, roll on the ground; the thundering of drums and the screaming of flutes (*nagasuram*) drown the mellower music of *Bajana* parties chanting divine songs (*thevarams*), and shouts of 'Haro-hara' rend the air.

Amidst the din and confusion, a kapurale

emerges from the inner shrine and stands by the outermost of the seven curtains, the only one pilgrims are permitted to see; it is painted with a figure of the god mounted on a peacock, and his consorts Thevaniamma and Valli on either side of him.

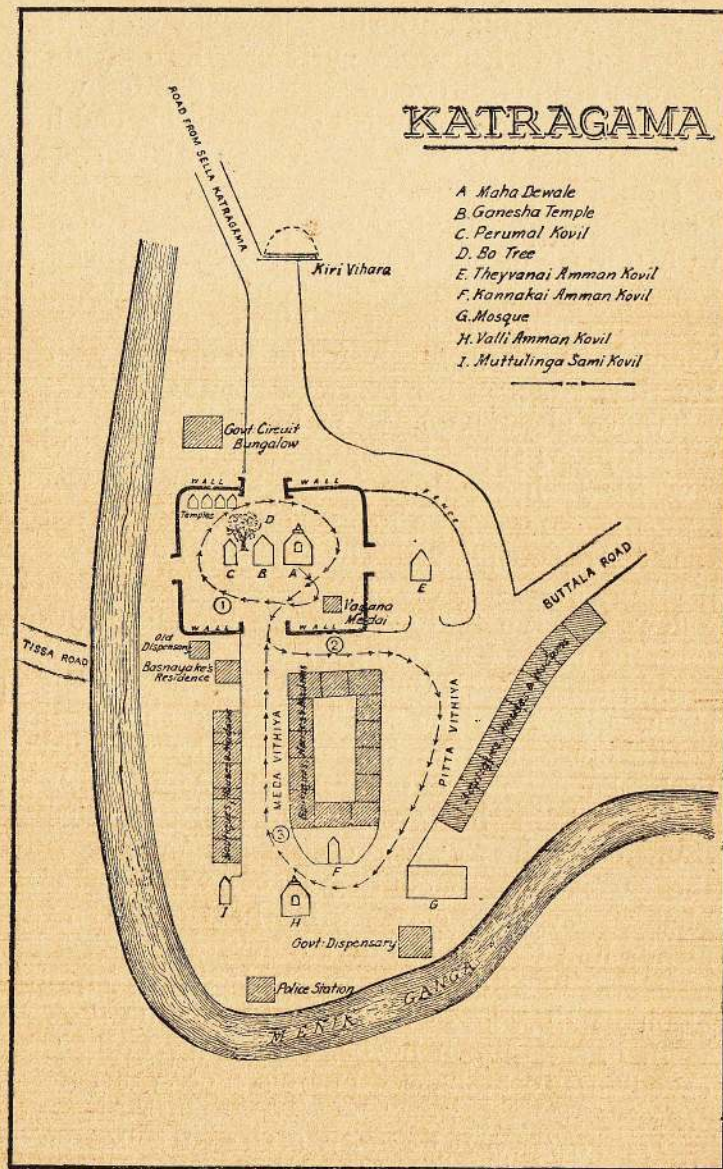
The appearance of the kapurale is attended with immediate silence. In answer to a signal from within the shrine, he faces the curtains and raises his arms in silent salutation and prayer, while holy cries break forth from every lip. He then resumes his previous position.

Twelve alathi ammas\* with small brass lamps (allathi) now approach him, and to each he gives a wick. Lighting these off one of the great brass lamps at the entrance to the shrine, they perform the 'alathi ceremony.' The kapurale now repeats his first act of silent salutation; this is again followed by the alathi ceremony; then for a third time the priest hails the god.

Two kapurales, bearing between them a large cloth, appear on the scene ready to shroud the chief kapurale as he issues from the sanctuary with the casket containing the divine symbol. Shut off from the eyes of the people, to solemn drum beats, he slowly proceeds the few paces to the *vaganameda* (mounting place) where an elephant, previously cleansed in the Menik Ganga, awaits him to bear the divine burden.

It is only after the kapurale is seated on the elephant that he is made visible to the crowd. High priest though he be, he is very ordinarily clad like any Sinhalese, but his mouth is bound

\*These correspond to the *Deva dasis*, the slaves of the gods, or Nautch girls of South Indian temples. Those I saw at Kataragama were not prepossessing, owing to the effects of chronic malaria; one was a bespectacled matron!



with a bandage (*mukavadam*)\*; before him is the covered casket.

The perahera proceeds at a slow pace along the route indicated in the plan:—First round the three temples within the walls, then out at the gate and down the Pitta Vithiya to the Valliamma temple. At a pedestal here the elephant is halted and the Kapurale descends with the mystic symbol, concealed as before, and enters the sanctuary, where for about half an hour he refreshes himself in the company of his favourite wife.†

The procession then goes by way of the Medda Vithiya back to the Maha Devale, where the same rites as at first are enacted, and the sacred casket is deposited in the holy of holies. The perahera is at an end, and the pilgrims, tired out by their days activities, retire to rest.‡

The pageant becomes most imposing after the arrival of the sami or vel from Colombo at the beginning of the second week of the festival, which then daily increases in splendour to reach a climax on the final night. On this occasion the relic is conveyed to the Kiri Vihare to enable the Hindu god to pay respect to the Buddhist shrine. Here a Buddhist priest officiates, and both Buddhists

\*This is a precaution against contamination of the casket by saliva, an act of ceremonial cleanliness; it may also be a token of secrecy. Another explanation is that the Veddas, who were the original officiating priests, could not be taught to chant the Sanskrit *mantrams*, and so were trained by the Brahmins to perform the ceremony by symbols.

†Pattini Devi is said to be another of the consorts of this amorous god. It will be noticed that the temple of Thevianamma (daughter of the great god Indra though she be) is ignored by the procession. This is because Kumar is thought to have resented her coming to Kataragama. One tradition asserts that Kathirai Nabir (Kamra Nabir) and Mutulinga Sami came from India on a mission of conciliation between husband and wife. The whole affair is so human, that it is difficult to avoid the surmise that all these gods and goddesses were at one time real human beings.

‡For information with regard to the ceremonial details of the perahera, I am indebted to Dr. T. Ramanathan.

and Hindus make offerings. The procession then follows its accustomed route.

It moves slowly in the wake of the caparisoned elephants and their attendants, while the drums throb, the pipes shriek, the conch shells moan, the bells tinkle, and the multitude shouts. The air is heavy with dust and the suffocating fumes of camphor and frankincense burning in vessels borne on the heads of the worshippers. The spectacle, in its wild mysterious setting under the clear moonlit sky, is indeed eerie.

On this last day, at the precise hour of the full moon the water-cutting ceremony is enacted. A magic circle is drawn in the river by the priest with a sanctified sword or rod. Within this circle the casket, placed in a palanquin enveloped in a cloth, is immersed. The music bursts out wildly, the people shout and bow before the bathing god with upraised hands, then plunge into the sacred waters, confident that their sins will be cleansed and the security of their future lives assured. With this last ceremony the festival ends, and Kataragam assumes its ancient calm for another year.

In July 1930, I paid a flying one-day visit to Kataragama, travelling there and back on two successive nights. In spite of the shortness of our stay, both my servant and I brought away with us as mementoes of our visit, malaria as well as influenza!

As we motored to Tissa, I inquired of my travelling companion, a frequent visitor to Kataragama, though not from religious motives, what it was that attracted him to the place so strongly.

After a moment's thought, he answered, "I like to see them paying their vows."

"What is there so alluring in that?" I asked.

"You must see, doctor, the kind of things they do. Wait till you get there."

We reached Tissa about ten at night. I travelled the eleven miles to Kataragama in a bullock-cart heavily padded with straw and pillows, kindly supplied by the two friends who accompanied me. I had not gone far before I realised that to sleep would be impossible; a restless drowsiness was all one could expect, but that can be a vast luxury on occasion.

We had chosen for our visit the last and most important day of the festival. Though the majority of pilgrims were already at their destination, yet the fervent 'Haro-haras' we heard exchanged all night told us there were many still going there, and some returning.

About midnight I woke to find my cart halted in an opening where stood a few temporary boutiques and pilgrims' shelters. While I took the opportunity to secure an hour's unjolted repose, my two friends, I afterwards learned, partook of a substantial feast of 'string-hoppers,' as a set-off to the ardours they had undergone; unknown to me, the kindly souls had put into my cart all the straw available, leaving nothing for themselves, and four of them, including servants, had travelled in a single cart shaken together like dice, when they were not stubbing their toes against roots and stones, by way of change!

At dawn we neared Kataragama. Vedahitiya-Kande was on our right, with a light burning on its peak. Along its crest we caught occasional glimpses of pilgrims between the trees, and faintly heard the shouts with which they encouraged each other.

As we forded the Menik Ganga, a weakly, drenched woman raised a sudden shout, and, wild-



eyed, began the difficult ascent towards the summit we had just passed.

On the other side of the river was a vast assemblage of houseless humanity. They sat huddled in groups under the trees and along the river bank—cooking, sleeping, thinking. Many were foot-sore and fever-stricken.

The temple precincts wore the semblance of a fair. Traders of all races were selling their merchandise—food-stuffs, sweet-meats, clothes, brass utensils, beads, camphor, frankincense, etc. Garish oleographs of Ganesha, and many-headed Skanda and his consorts were conspicuous.

Diseased and deformed beggars, lined up in a row outside the temple walls, with alms-inviting cloths spread before them, did good business.

The entire atmosphere of the place was reverent. A devout good-heartedness prevailed but no levity. Though the people, Brahmins and untouchables alike, could not help jostling each other, they did so with a mutual deference good to see. The faces of the Hindus were set and serious, reflecting the stern purpose that brought them from their distant homes. Whatever raiment they affected elsewhere, (and there were many prominent Tamils in high positions among them), here they were humbly clad in cool white garments and bare-footed or sandalled.

Leaving our shoes outside the temple gateway, we entered; we were glad of the precaution we had taken, for many curious eyes travelled from our faces to our feet, eyes luminous with devotion, presaging resentment of any affront to their god. We felt intruders there.

This famous temple, how lowly it seemed, yet how austere for that very lack of pretension! On its stony threshold, flanked by great brazen oil-lamps, votive coconuts (specially favoured by



Maha Devale, Kataragama (p. 297).  
*(Photo from T. Ramanathan)*



Beggars outside the temple wall of the Maha Devale (p. 304).



*Kavadis* awaiting bearers on the banks of the Menik Ganga (p. 306).



"A fakir of noble mien with a *kavadi* on his stately shoulders" (p. 307).

Ganesha) were being shattered.

Behind the temple was a great bo-tree said to be a branch of that at Anuradhapura, and 2,200 years old. Under it was seated a white-robed Sinhalese, whose attitude was one of earnest abstraction. Quite oblivious of the people around, he was absorbed in a book. What cause did he champion, or what vow did he redeem? I wondered.

My unspoken question was soon to be answered, for that afternoon the man introduced himself to me, and openly declared his mission. He had walked all the way to Kataragama from Beruwala, as far as possible along the railway-line to avoid attention. He now spent his days under the ancient tree, invoking vengeance on a political rival who had defeated him at the polls!

"Mark my words," said he. "Carefully watch Mr. . . . and see what happens to him within the next three months. I have called down such curses on his head that no human being can endure. He is finished as far as this world is concerned, and his lot in the next will not be enviable." The individual in question is still very much alive and active!

The Kataragama god is both feared and loved. (What god is not?) To him is attributed ability to cause and cure disease. Wherever a loved one's life is at stake, or misfortune overwhelms, his votaries make vows redeemable by pilgrimage and often by barbaric torture. The high fashion at the festival is penance and pain. In the naked light of day are there enacted deeds that call for stout stomachs on the part of the onlookers, trials so bravely borne as to demonstrate the triumph of the mind over the body, and to vindicate the potency of strong faith.

Recrossing the river, we made for the opposite

bank where the insistency of drums told us something was toward. The water, though but ankle-deep, swarmed with bathers of both sexes; the disregard of decency on the part of the old men was really ridiculous.

A comely beggar girl, scratching her lousy head, her squalid transparent garment clinging to her slim figure, cast bold ingenuous looks at the men passing by.

Ranged along the river bank were sacred *kavadis* awaiting bearers. These were domed frames, adorned with upstanding bundles of peacock plumes, and fitted with a transverse bar for resting on the shoulders of the bearer. Silent emblems of the god's duress, they challenged the faithful, as most of those who carried these had first to undergo some torture, for which purpose were placed beside them plates containing silver hooks and skewers.

A young man stood with clasped hands tightly outstretched before him. His eyes were closed, his body quivered, his aspect was one of self-commiseration. To monotonous drum-taps an old priest was chanting; his words conveyed nothing to me, but the earnestness of his intonation suggested a prayer to the god for strength for his victim. All the pleading, however, did not seem to influence one jot the strained statuesque figure with puckered brow. Why, poor fellow, thought I, if you feel as bad about it as all that, do you not give up the struggle and go away? Still, the music-makers seemed confident, and intensified the persuasiveness of their melody.

Suddenly there was a slight stir; a stripling of twelve years whom I had not observed before, with the pallid face of a martyr and a lime clutched prayerfully in his hands, moved timidly forward and put out a hesitant tongue. Instantly a cloth

was thrown over his head, a man fumbled under it, and when the covering was removed, the boy's tongue was seen to be pierced with a silver spike. The chant ended in a triumphant note as the little fellow was shepherded away by his relatives.

Hardly had they moved off, than the immobile youth I have mentioned, burst into a sudden snatch of song, shivered, glanced round, and dragged forth by the hand another victim. He then resumed his rigid attitude and expression of hesitant fear, while the invocation recommenced.

How mistaken I had been! That strange youth was no trembling coward, but with singer and drummer, a protagonist in the cruel ritual. Looking at him more closely, I found on his cheeks and back recent scars that told of penances undergone.

I was attracted to where a grey-bearded fakir of noble mien danced with the facile verve of a trained athlete, while the kavadi he bore, rocked and swayed on his shapely shoulders, and the spectators thronged around him. Willingly he posed to my camera, and readily accepted the reward I proffered.

An ash-besmeared woman with tongue and cheeks just transfixed, turned on us her mad exultant face, grinning hideously, gesticulating wildly.

Near by, a man of thirty was having his endurance put to the test. No drum or orison did this stoic need. His ordeal was quiet, deliberate, long. A man bent over his arm, pinching up the skin and pushing through small silver hooks; another began working similarly on the other side; and when they had finished there were about twenty-four of these in two rows on each arm. They then passed skewers through his cheeks, tongue and chest.

A handsome fellow passing by, lingered awhile and surveyed the other with the sedate indifferent look of a connoisseur, to see how he stood the ordeal. As he turned away I noticed that his skin too was whealed with fresh wounds. In contrast to his apathy was the pained look on the face of the victim's young wife with a babe at her breast. She alternated her devoted, pitying gaze between the field of operation and her husband's stolid, averted face.

An old man, seeing perhaps with his paternal eyes, what others missed in that patient look, now placed the limp arms of his son on his own shoulders, while the tormentors set to work on his back. This time they pierced the flesh between the shoulder-blades with two converging rows of large hooks, about six on either side, each attached to a cord. All the cords were then gripped together and held by a man behind, while his feet were shod with nail-studded sandals and that proud emblem, a kavadi, was put on his shoulders.

For a while he stood swaying uncertainly, then pulled himself together and began walking slowly across the river and up the steep bank, towards the temple. What rash vow had he made to necessitate so dire a penance?

By now I had fully appreciated the significance of my friend's remark when he said that it was the payment of vows that attracted him to Kataragama. But I had had enough, and forsook that pitiless river bank. Yet all day long, the desultory throbbing of drums, barely distinguishable in the distance from the wind in the trees, reminded me of the merciless deeds enacted there.

I mixed with the crowd in the scorching street. Something pressed against my legs; I looked down

to find the prostrate, sweltering figure of a man, with a coconut in his hands, rolling along the dusty ground on his long way round the temples. He was but one of many for whom pedestrians had continually to make room.

Other payers of grievous vows passed along the street from the river to the Maha Devale, where they offered to the god the various instruments they had endured. The women and boys moved slowly on; but the young men, with the worst tortures, went with the majesty of gods. One whose hooked back was held in leash by another, pranced hither and thither to the drum-taps, straining like a restive horse at the curbing thongs, till the flesh of his shoulders stood out in a ridge, and the kavadi he carried tossed like a wind-blown tree-top. Every now and then he swung his body backwards in a sinuous gesture, beautiful to see, and swept his cumbrous head-gear from one side to the other, under the reins behind.

In the temple grounds a man grovelled unconscious in the dust, bleeding profusely from a deep, self-inflicted gash in the throat. A dab of sacred ash, a rough bandage, and he was lifted away.

It will not come as a surprise that Kataragama is sometimes the scene of fatal tragedies.

We had arrived early that morning just in time to witness what was perhaps the greatest thrill in that place of thrills—the *fire-walking ceremony*.

This is usually done on the last day of the festival, in front of the Maha Devale. A large area is overspread with about eight cartloads of tamarind firewood, the embers of which last longer than any other. At about 9 p.m., after the perahera is over, the pile is lit and kept burning throughout the night. By 5 a.m. the next

day the red-hot cinders glow along a course some twenty-five feet long by fifteen broad, and are now ready for use.

The devotees who dare this penance are not many, and they only undertake it after a rigid fast, long concentration on the god, and fervent prayers for divine blessing. At 4 a.m. they bathe in the river, and in wet garments proceed to the temple for further worship. They stand before the fire in suppliant attitude, making a last entreaty for strength to Agni the fire-god; then amid shouts of 'Haro-hara,' from the spectators, they tread the glowing path as one would a carpet, the boldest of them not once or twice, but many times. This is indeed a marvellous thing to see.

Sometimes an amateur, in a paroxysm of religious frenzy, attempts the deed, and usually gets his feet severely burnt for his rashness.

This morning tragedy was in store. One unfortunate fellow wishing to outdo the rest, attempted walking through, saddled with a kavadi. He had gone but a few yards, when he fell, and was so badly scorched before being rescued, that he died soon afterwards.

He at least perished in a good cause; not so a Kandyian school-master, who began by offering the temple elephant a coconut husk. The animal took it and cast it away. The man next gave it a coconut shell covered with a husk daubed with lime. This also the elephant took and rejected. The facetious pedagogue, elated with the success of his waggery, now lit an "elephant brand" cigarette, and placed it in the animal's trunk. This so enraged the long-suffering beast, that it rushed on the man and trod him to death—some said after first placing the husk on his chest!

Only a year ago a terrible crime was committed at Kataragama, a few weeks before the festival. The Basnaike Nilame, for some reason or other, had occasion to appoint a new custodian to the devale. Shortly afterwards, a band of men armed with guns appeared on the scene, and massacred in cold blood, in broad daylight, the newly appointed guardian's wife (who was seven months pregnant), her sister and her father. The guardian himself somehow managed to evade the assassins, and still lives at Kataragama, but in fear of his life.

These things have happened within the knowledge of our few years. Who can guess at the tragedies forgone, during the long period that has elapsed since man first enthroned this dire god in this wild setting.

At evening I sat apart from the crowd conversing with those who knew the place. The birds, regardless of the swarming multitude below, went about their accustomed lives on the tree-tops unperturbed. On a bare bough before us, minas chattered to themselves in their wise quiet way before retiring, pigeons whistled, and a pair of parrots fed their young in a hole in a tree-trunk a few feet above our heads.

In illustration of the desolation of the place we were informed that when an official bungalow, which is locked throughout the year, was opened for occupation, a bear and her cubs were discovered in a store-room; the mother had got in through a window.

One night, while the pilgrimage was at its height, dogs were heard barking furiously. A man sleeping with scores of others on the river-bank, opened his eyes at dawn to see a dark object high on a branch above him. It proved to be a bear the dogs had treed!

We were seated close to the Valliamma temple. Gradually I became aware of a persistent drumming that proceeded from the Mohammedan shrine adjoining it.

Going up to investigate, I found a number of long-robed dervishes seated in a circle on the ground, surrounded by a group of spectators. At the head of the circle sat the elders with evil-looking implements set before them, mainly long steel spikes, and what looked like knobberries—hollow metal globes, studded with short lengths of chain, mounted on stout six-inch spikes; these were called *daboos*.

A devotee picked up one of these and began to dance. Twirling the implement between his palms, he stepped to the rhythm of the drums. His movements, quiet at first, soon quickened with the music. He leapt, twisting his body and tossing wildly his unkempt head. Alternately he spun the *daboos*, and held it on high. Now he was leaping about like a maniac, stamping in perfect accord with the drum-beats. That there was more to it than a fanatical dance was evident from the insistence of the music and the expectant faces of the onlookers, in contrast to the stern, indifferent aspects of the fakirs themselves, and the complacency of the plump, jewelled woman of their camp.

Suddenly the dancing figure swept down his head and drove in the spike. Then he straightened himself, supporting the instrument with his hand, and continued his dance. When he had done, he plucked it out, replaced it among the others, and resuming his place in the circle, picked up a drum and was soon contributing to the music.

A young bare-bodied Muslim now entered the space. A fakir took a long, pointed iron rod

(*marathiya*) and transfixed his cheeks. He faced around exhibiting himself.

Another moved in and held out his arms. Each of his biceps was gripped in turn and pierced, the steel protruding six inches on either side. He stood thus a full ten minutes. That his immobile face belied his feelings was evidenced by the barely perceptible nod with which he indicated which skewer he wished removed first.

A short, well-set man, with cropped hair, and face more of a villain than saint, took the floor, *daboos* in hand. For a little while he pranced to the drums; then jerking his head askew, thrust the point of the *daboos* into the outer angle of his orbit. He raised his head with the weapon in place, and displayed an eyeball that stood most horribly out of its socket. Many a face was turned away in pained disgust; but I imagine the protrusion was caused more by pressure than penetration, though it could not have been the less painful for that.

And now there stepped into the circle a tall, frowzy-headed dervish of commanding look, carrying a pair of *daboos*. He cast a glance round the row of drummers, and in obedience to it the music quickened. Still he stood surveying them, turning his head from one performer to the other. Then he snatched up a drum with a gesture of contempt, and smote it hard, loudening the din, speeding its pace, and alternately varying it from double to triple time—*dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum*, and so on. He played till he was satisfied with the performance, handed back the drum to its owner, and stood listening to assure himself that the pitch was sustained.

Contented at last, he began to dance much after the manner of the first actor, but with a finer swagger, a fiercer abandon, a

surer step. All eyes were focussed on the tossing figure, treading in perfect time; all hearts throbbed to the accelerating drum-taps. Would the fulfilment justify the promise?

As he landed from a high leap, he buried the daboo in his head; supporting it with one hand, he knocked it in with the knob of the other daboo, using it like a hammer. Then he removed his hands, and there, sticking out of his crown, like the crest of a peacock, was the awful implement! He resumed his capers with unabated vehemence, while the top-heavy adornment swayed and its short chains clinked. To judge by its obliquity, it must have been driven in between the scalp and cranium. How fine a feat of endurance this was, may be imagined, when one remembers how exquisitely sensitive a structure the periosteum is, as every one knows who has had a kick on the shin, or a pebble on the head.

What wonder the man made certain at the outset that the drums should not let him down!

These fakirs are religious mendicants. Between their acts of self-torture, the begging tray goes round; but the meagre pittance they glean from the poor that watch them, is out of all proportion to their display.

Such then are the deeds of both Hindus and Muslims at the fanes of Kataragama, and a long way they come to have the privilege of doing them.

If penance be a passport to paradise, then is Kataragama but a stepping stone to it.

Some months after I witnessed the scenes I have described, I was sauntering one evening along a jungle road at Kalkudah, when I met a man carrying a daboo and marathiya (spike). He responded to my scrutiny with a

salaam. I asked him who he was and what he did with those implements. He answered that he was a Muslim fakir, and could drive the spike through his abdomen or neck from before backwards. I dared him to do the latter for a rupee, knowing quite well the feat was impossible, for his windpipe, vertebral column and spinal cord would have to be transfixed. He accepted the challenge.

Laying aside the bundle he carried, he took his two-foot skewer, and offered a short prayer to his saint. Then kneeling on the street, he gripped the instrument with both hands, and placing its point just above the Adam's apple, thrust his neck down on it, with the other end against ground. He jerked and wriggled his neck violently emitting the most frightful gasps and death rattles. I began to wonder whether I was going to be the end of him, but consoled myself with the thought that he would not have arrived at his age had he not known how to look after himself.

Soon, the point of the spike began slowly to protrude through the shaggy hair that covered the back of his neck, and now it stood out a good four inches. He seemed in such great distress that I had not the heart to part his hair and examine his skin.

With a savage jerk, and a final gasp he plucked out the weapon, fingered the marks it had made, and stood up before us, panting, but none the worse for his experience.

I asked him to demonstrate to me the points of entrance and exit of the spike, but he said there were none to show, as his saint had seen to that! The artful trickster had no doubt cunningly, but most realistically I will admit, contrived to slip the implement by the side of his neck.

On another occasion, through the courtesy of Messrs. R. H. Bassett and J. R. C. Bantock, I had the opportunity of witnessing to what further lengths these people could go.

About 10 o'clock one night a small crowd had gathered outside the gates of a Moorish house in Messenger Street, Colombo. From the well-lit garden within came the noise of drums. Moplahs (a Muslim sect) were partaking in a religious ceremony—the *Raffiyah Rathib*—in honour of their patron saint, Sultanul Arifin Seyid Ahamad Kabir Raffiyah.

We were invited to enter, and took seats on the verandah. Before us, in the garden, under a white cloth awning, two rows of men with tambourine-like drums (except for the absence of the loose metal disks), sat facing each other, a space of some six feet between them. At the head of the lines, with their backs to us, sat two priests (*moulanas*), one the *seyid* or high priest. Open on a pillow before them was the *rathib*, an Arabic hymnal, from which they intoned a plaintive chant, the choral refrain of which the others repeated after them to the accompaniment of their drums. An old man, a sort of master of ceremonies, sang, beating time.

On either side of the priests burned candles and oil-lamps, and aromatic incense smoked in a brazier which was replenished from time to time. In front of them was a collection of weapons—a sword, wavy-bladed daggers called kris, skewers (*katirai*), and, perhaps most formidable of all, the daboos already familiar to us.

Half kneeling, half squatting on his heels, and facing the priests, was a bare-bodied young man with a red kerchief knotted tightly round his head—a silent, impassive figure, whose part in the drama about to begin was only indicated by

his prominent position.

He picked up two sinuous-bladed knives and gave them to the seyid, who tested their keenness by shaving the hairs on the back of his own hand. Then blessing the daggers, he handed them back to the man who presented them for benediction in turn to three or four of the moulanas.

He rose, a kris in each fist, and strode slowly up and down between the lines of drummers. Suddenly he halted and gazed intently towards the cloth awning; as if he saw something beyond. Holding up the knives he shouted "Ya Sheik!" (My Master!)

He commenced springing backwards and stamping in accord with the drum-beats, shouting "Ya Sheik!" from time to time. Quicker and quicker he leapt; the drumming changed from double to triple time, but for all that, could not outpace his agility.

Now he bent his body down, bringing the daggers to the ground, then jerked up like a jack-knife, arching himself backward, and looking up with the gleaming blades on high. He kept repeating this body action, but varied that of his arms, crossing and uncrossing them over his abdomen with lightning rapidity in slashing movements, each time he arched back. He did this with a violence of gesture that suggested evisceration, when one remembered the razor edges with which he so recklessly played.

After a succession of such passes, he walked up and down, taking a breath, and surveying his abdomen. Then he resumed his antics again.

Watching him closely we saw no trace of blood, and surmised that here was only knife play falling short of injury. Even so, the manly grace and careless truculence of his performance was a reward in itself.



But now as he moved towards us, we became aware of a messiness on the dark skin as the blood trickled down from a score of horizontal cuts, so deftly inflicted as to leave the muscles unscathed. Gory splotches stained his white cloth. Then "Ya Sheik!" and the mad passes again, the slashes and the bounds, with unabated vigour.

He has had enough. Unfolding his red waist band, he spreads it over his bleeding belly, and returns the dripping knives to the priest, who places his healing hands on the wounds, uttering a short prayer. He smokes his abdomen over the burning incense, has a drink of water from a handy vessel, and quietly joins the crowd.

Another young fellow takes his place. He selects no instruments, asks no blessing of priest or saint. A grey-bearded man takes four skewers, and impales in turn each of his cheeks and biceps. Not by the flicker of an eyelash does he give token of pain.

Performer after performer followed, about a dozen in all, one at a time, while the drums throbbed and the priests intoned.

One man incised his arm so deeply with a kris, that it took a few minutes to stanch the haemorrhage, the priests rising and pleading earnestly with folded hands. Another took a long-bladed knife (*kataram*), called but once on his saint, gashed his abdomen rapidly and deliberately three times, and fell down in a swoon with the blood streaming. Others had long spikes passed through the floor of the mouth, ears, breast, and wrist. One hammered a daboos into the muscles of his temple, and another into his flank.

The gaunt, grizzly-bearded master of ceremonies now displayed his stamina. He repeated the

abdominal knife play of the first performer, but with more ostentation and greater respect for his skin. Seeing he had not impressed us, he bent over the cutting side of a long sword, which two men supported at either end, and lifting his feet off the ground, put his full weight on the sharp edge. This too we felt was more showmanship than torture. But his next exploit, though he seemed to think less of it than the others, fairly took my breath away. He held up his chin while another transfixed his neck from side to side with a skewer, the point entering and emerging at the anterior edge of the sterno-mastoid about an inch below the angle of the jaw, in the very line of the carotid arteries! The naso-pharynx must have been traversed.

The boldest performer of all was one who, after slashing his abdomen in a dance, knelt before the seyid, and inserting a kris deep into his gaping mouth, sliced his tongue repeatedly from base to tip till it bled abundantly. A few minutes later he re-entered the arena, picked up a long spike and knelt, covering his head with a red handkerchief; he fumbled there a minute or two; when he uncovered himself and stood up, the skewer was seen to pass right through the thickest part of his neck from side to side at the posterior borders of his sterno-mastoids!

This was an amazing act, considering that it was self-inflicted, performed after other mutilations, and involved the vicinity of the cervical spinal nerve roots. That it must have been exceedingly painful there can be no doubt; this was perhaps the reason why the man covered his head when doing it, for it is part of their proud ritual to give no indication whatever of the pain they feel.

All the acts here described I actually witnessed.

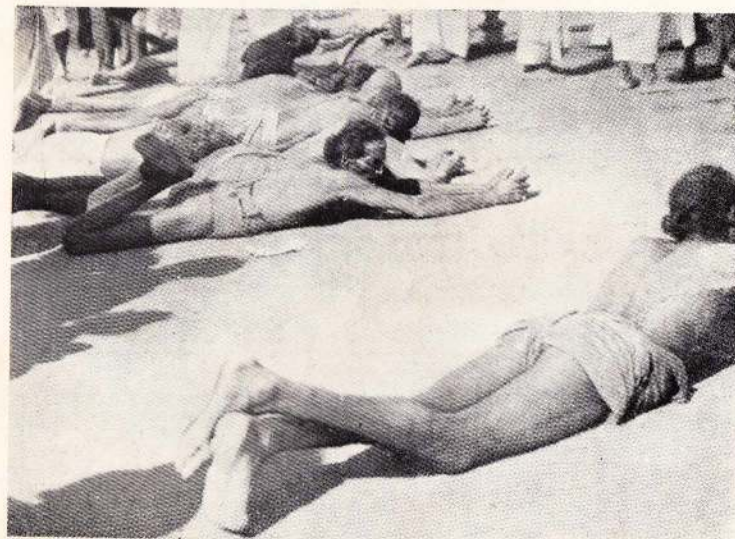
There is no fake whatever about them. I closely examined the injuries afterwards. I must confess I would never have believed some of them possible had I not seen them myself.

When a man held out another's biceps and shoved a spike through, I said to myself, these fellows have some knowledge of anatomy; but when I saw the steel go through the line of the carotids and jugulars, I changed my opinion. How they escape haemorrhage, at least in the form of extensive extravasations, is more than I can tell, for the points of their implements are as sharp as knitting needles; there was no evidence of a drop of blood at the punctures; perhaps the vessels slip away, or any wound made in them becomes sealed off, as when an exploring needle is inserted into an aneurysm.

Another point hard to explain is their immunity from infection, considering that the instruments used are quite unsterilised and picked off a mat; and sometimes even lubricated with saliva! Especially is this difficult to understand in the cases of those who transfix their necks traversing pharynx and oesophagus, and of him who pierced his forearm just above the wristjoint through the bundle of tendons.

They attribute their immunity from haemorrhage and infection, and their professed freedom from pain, to their implicit faith in their saint and the healing touch of the seyid. All the preparation they make for the Rathib is to have a bath and wear clean clothes. They certainly do not dope themselves with alcohol or drugs, which are prohibited by their religion.

The clean-living men of former times are said to have been capable of chopping chunks of flesh off themselves, cutting their tongues in two and handing the severed piece round for inspection,



Pilgrims doing penance by rolling on the ground at Kataragama (p. 309).

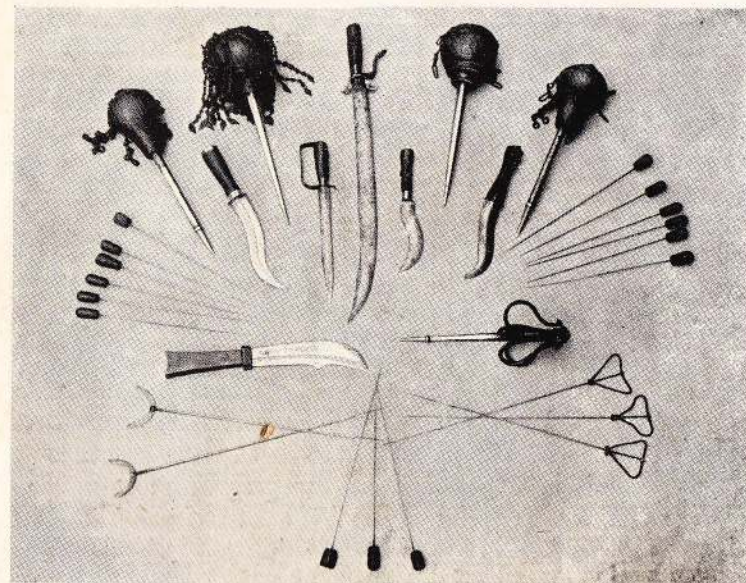
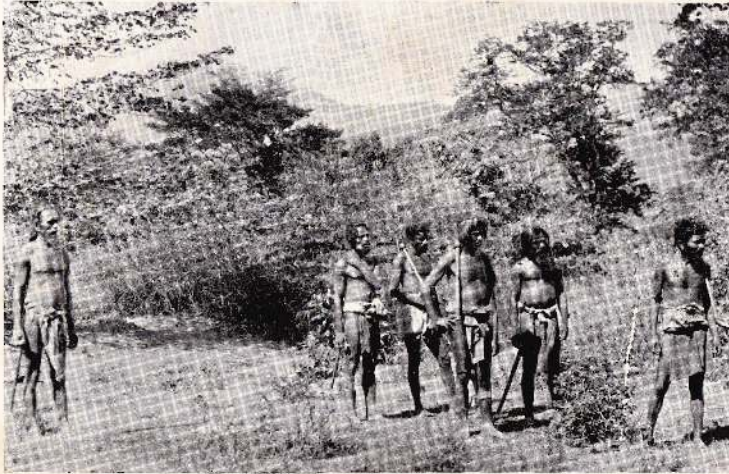


Photo by J. R. C. Bantock

Muslim implements of torture.—Long and short swords, spikes, kris, and daboos—spikes mounted on globular heads (pp. 312 and 316).

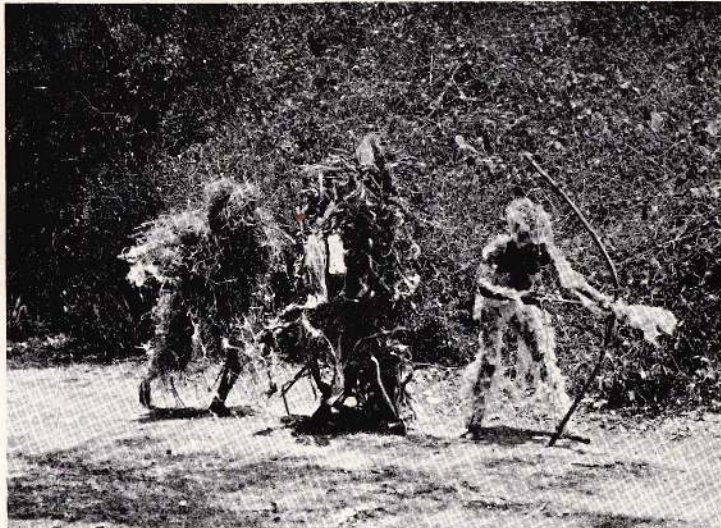
or even dividing themselves into halves, and in all instances reassembling the severed parts. These may be fairy tales, but they cannot discredit those acts our eyes actually witnessed.

What wonder these Moplahs, with their cold contempt for steel, and their unshakeable faith, make such fine fighters.



*(Photo by L. J. Baker)*

Veddas of Bintenne.



*(Photo by L. J. Baker)*

Veddas garbed in cotton, plantain leaves and straw, for their dance at Mahiyangana (p. 326).

## THE VEDDA DANCE AT ALUTNUWARA

THE throbbing of drums in the midnight jungle. We are at Alutnuwara (Mahayangana)—the central point, as legend has it, between the upper and nether regions of the earth, the ancient assembling place of the primitive Yakkas, whom Buddha overwhelmed with awe and scattered, before propounding his doctrines to his attendant devas.

The dagaba here is the oldest in Ceylon. The first small shrine was built about 500 B.C. In 310 B.C., Devanampiya Tissa erected a larger one to contain the collar-bone of the Buddha.

Dutu Gemunu, setting out from Ruhuna, crossed the Mahaweli at Rantembe, and advanced against Mahayangana, the stronghold of Mugune, Elara's general. Before giving battle, he made a vow to Maha Saman deviyo, the *genius loci*, that if successful, he would found a temple in honour of the god. This he afterwards did, and instituted a perahera which is perpetuated to this day.

Descending by a series of zig-zags down the precipitous eastern face of the central mountain barrier, we leave behind us the cool, breezy air of the Madugoda highlands, and in half an hour are enveloped in the sultry haze of the Bintenne forests.

Across the broad waters of the Mahaweli stands the crumbling ruin of the ancient dagaba. The

further shore is thronged with bathing pilgrims who, unlike us, have come on foot from scattered jungle homes, or from upland hamlets, down the steep Galpadi-hela, the old pilgrim pass of two thousand steps.

We are ferried over in the blazing heat, soon to mix with the crowd idling about the booths under the shady ingasaman trees. The place is beflagged and pandalled, yet the populace seem to lack the gaiety prevalent at similar festivals in more accessible and healthier settings. Owners of side-shows—marionettes and theatres—solicit our patronage for the night; but it is not to see these that we have come.

We have chosen for our visit the last day of the Esala perahera, the full-moon night of September, to witness the Vedda dance—and a weird one it is if report speaks true.

Looking about us, we find that within a few yards of each other are grouped, dagaba (shrine), pansala (temple), vihare (monastery)—all Buddhist—and devale (Hindu temple). The pilgrims here, unlike those at Kataragama, are almost exclusively Sinhalese Buddhists.

The perahera, as usual, lasts two weeks, ending with the water-cutting ceremony. But here the details are somewhat peculiar. On the first day, a branch of a jak tree is placed in the devale premises, and for six consecutive nights the procession goes round the streets. On the seventh day, young coconuts are hung on the branch, and the emblem of the Maha Saman deviyo is carried on an elephant at the nightly perahera.

On the eleventh morning at first cock-crow, the devale priest (kapurale), accompanied by a dhoby, goes to an ebony tree four miles away in the jungle—the shrine of Maha Loku deviyo, elder sister of Maha Saman. High up on the tree

is kept, throughout the year, a large earthen vessel containing the linen and jewelry of the goddess.

Having chanted invocations, the kapurale, fearless of guardian cobras, climbs the tree and lowers the vessel by means of a rope to the gagged dhoby, who carries it on his head to the devale. Anyone luckless enough to cross the dhoby's path is waved away, lest evil befall him.

The dhoby washes and folds the linen, and places it in a palanquin (*randoluwa*), which is carried by men with bandaged mouths, on the following nights.

On the fifteenth and last night there are two processions, when the relic casket of the pansala, the insignia of Maha Saman deviyo, and the palanquin are all taken round. This we witness.

The setting is perfect. Nature lends her kindly aid. The perfervid day has given place to genial night. A full moon in a cloudless, starry sky mantles in spectral light the broken dagaba and the little knot of devout humanity gathered in the wilderness.

At about eleven, things begin to move. Outside the devale and pansala, elephants stand patiently, swaying to and fro, awaiting the loading of the relics.

The Basnayake Nilame, in the resplendent robes of a Kandyan chief, is seated in a chair on a historic stone. Before him, Kandyan dancers step to strident drums. Two gigantic marionettes ten feet high, (Pambayan and his wife), each mounted on a man, stand beside a pandal bobbing about in ridiculous majesty.

A sudden outburst of tom-toms proclaims that the perahera has begun. The elephant bearing the pansala relic stands facing the temple with trunk uplifted in reverence. The Nilame rises from his seat and leads the procession. Behind

him are bearers of copra flares, dancers, and the elephant bearing the relic, with smaller elephants on either side; a squad of dancers separate these from the elephant carrying the insignia of Maha Saman—a casket covered with an embroidered cloth—the mounted mahout and four attendants on foot all with bandaged mouths; then follows the palanquin of Maha Loku deviyo, Maha Saman's sister, on the shoulders of gagged bearers; bringing up the rear are drummers and dancers who, stately as peacocks in their proud trappings, stamp and gesture and whirl to the twanging of the drums.

The perahera goes twice along the procession path to the shouts of 'sadhu,' halting awhile at the shrines passed. It is well past midnight when the Buddhist perahera ends, to be resumed again towards dawn for the water-cutting ceremony terminating in the 'dodang sellama' or orange game, in which men throw up and catch oranges.

In the interval between the two performances, the Vedda perahera is enacted; but of those who partake in it to-day only a few are Veddas.

Since midnight there has been much furtive activity under a big tree behind the devale. Sounds are heard of excitement and subdued laughter at coarse banter, and the rustling of leaves and straw. When one's eyes become accustomed to the gloom, naked figures assisting each other to dress, and strange bush-like forms are discernible. They are preparing for the Vedda dance.

At about 3 a.m. the Kandyan chief, now clad quite ordinarily, sits on the ancient stone outside the devale; he is surrounded by an expectant crowd.

When all is ready, he gives a signal, and a great drum begins its steady throbbing. One by one,

strange figures emerge with slow, dancing steps from behind the devale. The first of these seems cobwebbed all over, being smeared with honey to which kapok (tree cotton) has been stuck; he advances with an arrow fitted to a bow, in the crouching posture of a hunter. Behind him is a similar figure with a long protruding tongue. They are followed in single file by about twenty-five men clothed from head to foot in straw; these, by a similar number covered with dry plantain leaves; and these again by woolly men like the first two. There are about seventy dancers in all, and each holds up vertically a ten-foot velang pole.

They file along slowly, with swaying, halting steps, to the time of the drums, past the pansala and vihare back to the devale. When they have done this three times, they break rank, and mingle together, yelling and leaping wildly, and hitting each other's sticks. They turn towards the devale door and strike the ancient moonstone there in homage to the god; then dash away shrieking to do the same at the pansala and vihare gates, and race about working themselves into a frenzy.

So it goes on, till most are nude except for span cloths, and many of the sticks are broken. There is a final mêlée at the devale door; the moonstone is beaten for a last time, and the howling horde rushes off to leap into the Mahaweli and wash off the dust and sweat.

What it all means no one knows. Perhaps it represents the occasion when Buddha wrested Bintenne from the frightened Yakkas, or, may be, it perpetuates the survival of a bygone cult, in which aboriginal tribes paid homage, in their own way, to gods that superseded theirs'.

## BEAUTY SPOTS OF CEYLON

SAYS a recent writer somewhere, "The motorist who rushes from end to end, here, there and everywhere, is an ass. In trying to see everything he sees nothing, hears nothing. He will only have himself for company, and what is the good of that?"

Not a traveller visits this Island but extols its beauty. Yet, how much of Ceylon does he really see? Little indeed; though that is no deterrent to some of them putting their impressions into books. As long as these impressions are confined to what the eye sees, well and good; but when they profess to deal with the characteristics of the people, God help us!

As an acquaintance said to me the other day, "A man spends six weeks in Africa, shoots one rhinoceros, and then goes home and writes a book about Africa!"

The late Mr. Frederick Lewis who spent his life in the Island, and knew every nook and corner of it, when invited by the *Times of Ceylon* to give his opinion on its beauty spots, wrote as follows:—

"For myself I find enjoyment in all the scenes Ceylon produces; these give me their corresponding scenic sensations, or emotions. Thus looking from the top of Adam's Peak, I have felt myself lost, not so much in admiration of the views, as at the enormous mass of 'things to see' from that lofty point.

The top of the highest point in the Knuckles

beats the view from Adam's Peak for variety of scenery—at least it does so to my mind ; but when one comes to think for a moment, there are scores of gems elsewhere, say from the top of World's End in the Horton Plains, or down the canyon from Ella, or from the top of the Haputale Pass, or Bulutotta Gap, or from that lovely spot a little beyond the Madugoda Rest House.

To the lover of waterfalls, what about Ramboda ? or Diyatalawa ? or the Elfindale falls ? or perhaps the least known of them all and the highest in Ceylon—the falls in the Uraella, where one sees a cascade of nearly 1,600 feet, dashing its way down in a mighty series of magnificent leaps amid a mass of forest vegetation that hides it, as if it were a forest secret !

Or to the lover of smooth and quiet waters, can you beat Kantalai at sunset, or Minneriya on a full moonlight night ? or its beautiful little sister, Giritala, hiding with coyness a little beyond ?

Or do you wish for better than Trincomalee from the top of the old Fort walls at Ostenberg ! Or can you picture a more thought-inspiring spot than the plain at Arippu in twilight, when the after-glow of the sunset casts a pale, dreamy shroud over the fallen Doric, as the night winds shriek across that lordly ruin ?

Or can you feel otherwise than profoundly moved as you gaze upon the grey mysterious woods that spread away, like an ocean, from Mahinda's Couch ? ”

In response to the same request of the *Times* I wrote :—

“ I do not know of any one place in Ceylon of which I can say it is the most beautiful. The landscape is too diversified for that.

As for coastal scenery, perhaps the sea about Tangalle, or the view from Buona Vista outside

Galle is as good as any other ; and for rural beauty, the valley homes nestling among the patna-covered hills of Bandarawela, with their terraced paddy-fields clinging to the lower slopes.

For panoramic grandeur, where the mountains heave their heroic contours against magic skies, give me the view of an evening as one motors from Haldummulla towards Koslande, and overlooks the hill-studded wilderness stretching to the southern sea.

To me tranquillity and solitude are inseparable from natural beauty ; so there is not much appeal in the tea and rubber clad hills, stripped of their wild charm, bereft of their aloofness and mystery, harnessed to the needs of man. This aspect of things was brought home to me strongly when I visited the English lakes one summer. What a bewitching land was there, if only the thronging tourists (like myself, I must admit) left it alone, and if its loveliness were not exploited to commercial ends. Derwent Water was like some city park, with its holiday makers lined up in queues awaiting their turn in the pleasure boats. It required some effort to imagine that it was Grassmere that inspired Wordsworth to write,

The silence that is in the starry sky,—  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

But to come back. If I were restricted to the selection of one beauty spot, I would tell of a desolate forest stream, far removed from the hum of the world, which pristine mystery pervades, where the wild birds sing, and all is just as God had planned it.”

## THE MONSOON

Fast, fierce, and free—amain ! amain !  
Tense through the thongs of the yielding rain,  
The Monsoon breaks with exultant blast,  
And scours the spaces wild and vast.

It smites the cords of the tuned air,  
And pipes to a motif rude and rare ;  
The lulling waves to the measure prance  
And in heaving phalanxes advance ;

They bear aloft the tossing crest,  
They hold their course from south and west,  
And booming on Lanka's barring side,  
Die in the throes of their might defied.

Now, from the Rain, and the Wind and Sea,  
There rises a thrilling melody,  
And gulls that sweep on labouring wing  
May hear the songs that the Sirens sing.

And in the heaven's spacious halls,  
O'er-hung with cloud-inwoven palls,  
Is wrought a drama Titan-bold,  
As did the ethnic days behold :

In the burdened sky is a fiery breach,  
A crash beyond the eagle's reach !  
Then a pulsing pause—a flash so stark,  
It rends the heart of the groaning dark !

## THE MONSOON

But when the height of the storm is past,  
And its clangour dies in the dismal vast,  
A mellower sound, and a merrier play  
Mark the measure of waning day.

Then the Lightning takes a wanton's form,  
Laughs in the teeth of the snarling Storm,  
Looses the robes from the loins of Night,  
Mocks his nakedness open to sight.

She frees herself from the Cloud's embrace,  
Is lost awhile in the frenzied space,  
And leaping aloft in elfin glee,  
Fills the heaven with rhapsody.

Bedight with silver blade and sheet,  
This harlot of the sky, so fleet,  
Maddens the Gloom with flicker and flash,  
And marks his frame with a gleaming gash.

And grimly the deep-mawed Thunder growls,  
As o'er the brooding arc he prowls,  
Whilst the teasing Lightning, quick and slim,  
Draws him on and badgers him.

Fall the Rain-drops passionless,  
Moan the Winds in sore distress,  
But the laughing Lightning dances free  
To the strains of a roaring minstrelsy.

Or ever the weakening Winds are spent,  
In the languid air is a low lament,  
There's nought it holds is harsh or sharp,  
But all is sweet as David's harp.



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