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Ceylon

Howland

American Board of Commissioners for
Foreign Missions.

THE CEYLON MISSION.

1816-1905.

A CONDENSED SKETCH.

By Rev. SAMUEL W. HOWLAND, D.D.

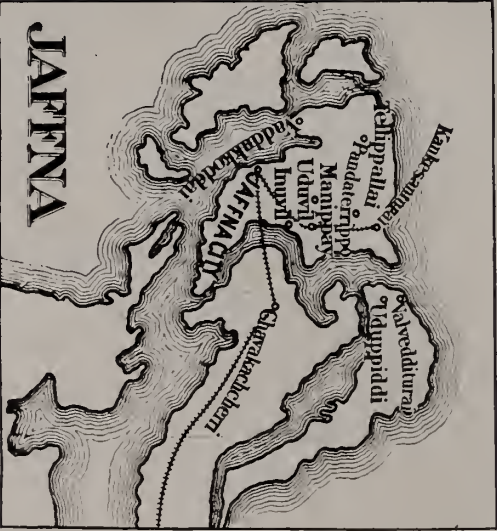


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JAFNA



CONDENSED SKETCH OF THE CEYLON MISSION OF THE A. B. C. F. M.

LOCATION. — The Ceylon Mission of the American Board is confined to the peninsula of Jaffna which is the northern part of the island of Ceylon, and connected with it by a sandbank on the east. Its length is forty-two miles from east to west; its width fourteen miles from north to south, in the widest part. The people of southern and central Ceylon are of a different race and religion, speaking the Singalese language and professing Buddhism. The country for a long distance south of Jaffna is very sparsely settled, while the peninsula itself is very populous. Jaffna town is in latitude $9^{\circ}-47'$ north, and longitude $80^{\circ}-9'$ east.

THE COUNTRY AND CLIMATE. — Jaffna is of coral formation, and rises from seven to thirty-five feet above the level of the sea. In general the coral has been solidified into hard limestone.

The soil is good, in some districts slightly clayey, in others sandy. There are no streams.

The salt river is an estuary, which in the wet season is largely filled with brackish water, but in the dry season its bed furnishes a deposit of some thousands of tons of salt which is exported by the government. Wells fifteen to thirty feet in depth abound, and are very necessary for irrigation in the dry season. The nearness of the sea tempers the heat, in the house the mercury rarely going above 93° , or below 76° . The heat of the direct rays of the sun, as measured by the vacuum thermometer, varies from 148° to 164° . There are two hot seasons, April and August, when the sun is directly overhead. The rainy season comes with the north monsoon in October and November, followed by the dewy season. When the south monsoon blows, from May to July, is the pleasantest part of the year, with very little rain. The annual average rainfall is forty-five inches. The climate is generally healthful, though in certain localities fevers prevail, and about once in eleven years cholera comes in from India and carries off its thousands. The longest active service of any missionaries of the A. B. C. F. M. was in Jaffna, that of Dr. and Mrs. Spaulding, from 1820 till 1873 and 1875.

PRODUCTS.—Millions of the palmyra-palm growing in groves cover “many a palmy plain.” The people call this “the tree of life.” and with

many it supplies almost all their needs, food and drink, bed, house-timbers, thatch, doors, fence, etc. One fourth of the food of the district is derived from it. Its timber and sugar are exported in considerable quantities. The cocoa-palm is also abundant. Tobacco is the principal cultivated product, estimated at over 6,000,000 pounds yearly. Rice constitutes the principal food, but not enough is raised for the use of the population. The villages touch one another, each house having a large yard with gardens and numerous shade-trees, so that the country is well wooded. All the usual tropical fruits are found, the most abundant being plantains, mangoes, and the jak, which is the largest edible tree-fruit in the world. The gardens furnish a great variety of products for home consumption, especially tapioca, egg-plant, peppers, and the like.

POPULATION. — While the census of the whole island of Ceylon gives 3,578,333 inhabitants, Jaffna has less than 350,000. The people of the peninsula are Tamils, having come over from the near coast of India about 200 B.C. They have straight black hair, and generally good features, and, though dark brown, would be classed as Indo-Europeans, did their language permit. The Tamil is the leading member of the Dravidian group of languages, spoken by

the peoples who occupy all southern India, and who evidently came into India from the north-west long before the Aryans, who brought in the Brahman religion. The majority of the people are agriculturists, the low castes being less numerous proportionally than in India. The Brahmans or priests are also comparatively few. There are about 5,000 Mohammedans, all of whom are traders. The government is well administered by the English, Ceylon being a Crown Colony. The village officers and a few in higher offices are Tamils.

CUSTOMS. — The houses of the people are usually built with mud walls about six feet high, and covered with a thatch of palm-leaves, the wealthy having brick walls and tiled roofs. A mat forms the bed, though a corded frame bedstead is now coming into use. Most of their life is spent out of doors, the yards being shut in by hedges made close by palm-leaves. The dress of the women is graceful, consisting of seven yards of cloth wrapped around the waist, reaching to the ankles, and carried over the shoulder. Many wear also a short-sleeved jacket. Jewels are an important part of their dress. The men wear a piece of four yards around the waist, with a colored piece to throw over the shoulder, and a turban on the head. The zenana system does

not prevail, and the women go freely to any place, yet they are usually busy at home in preparing their meals, pounding the rice, and grinding the curry stuffs, taking much time. Men and women eat at different times. They use their fingers for eating, and never touch a drinking-vessel to their lips. Some of the more strict Hindus will eat nothing that has had life, but most of the people eat a little fish. The caste system is substantially the same as in India, originating in part in race distinctions, — the Brahmans and Pariahs being of different race from the Tamils, and forming the two extremes of society, and in part in occupation, — fishers, artisans, barbers, etc., keeping distinct. All are married at an early age, from fifteen to eighteen, and even widows are remarried, registration being required by government. Palm-sap, fermented, or distilled to arrack, is used to a considerable extent, although drunkenness is not often seen in public. Their farm implements are simple, and the people are very conservative and do not respond readily to attempts to introduce improved plows and the like. Custom rules with an iron hand.

RELIGION OF THE PEOPLE. — The Dravidians were originally devil-worshippers, and this form of religion still prevails to some extent, espe-

cially in outlying districts. The Brahmans, however, centuries ago, thoroughly engrafted their religion on the people, and idolatry holds them with a grasp that must be seen to be understood. As distinct from some in India, the Jaffnese are Sivites, asserting that the third member of the triad, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, is the one only and original god, basis and source of all other deities or manifestations of divinity. They nevertheless worship incarnations of Vishnu as well, and, in general, the largest attendance is at the temples where there is the greatest attraction in the way of car-drawing, fireworks, etc. A belief in transmigration and fate deadens their sense of sin, and elaborate and mystical systems of philosophy sustain their pride in their religion.

THE MISSION OF THE AMERICAN BOARD. — Jaffna was occupied by the Portuguese in 1617, and they used every means to propagate Roman Christianity. The peninsula was divided into thirty-seven parishes, and large churches erected. Many of the people are still Romanists. After forty years, the Dutch took the place, and, by government influence and almost compulsion, filled the large churches with nominal Protestant Christian congregations. But the Christianity of the people was only outward, as shown by the fact that when the English took posses-

sion in 1796, and the government was declared neutral in religion, the attendance on the churches immediately ceased, and when the American missionaries came, in 1816, all traces of Protestant Christians had disappeared and, except the Romanists, the whole community had relapsed to heathenism and naturally believed that Protestant Christianity is merely a matter of form. Mr. Newell, of the first company of missionaries sent out by the American Board and afterward located in Bombay, visited Jaffna and strongly recommended it as a place for a mission, both because of the favorable attitude of the government and because of the relation of the island to India.

In 1816 the mission was begun by Messrs. Richards, Meigs, and Poor, with their wives, and Mr. Warren. In 1820 they were joined by Messrs. Spaulding, Winslow, Woodward, and Scudder, with their wives. But no more missionaries were permitted by the government to come until 1832. Permission was given to repair and occupy the ruined churches and parsonages left by the Dutch, and seven of these became mission stations. From the first the most feasible method of work seemed to be by schools, and in 1826 the Vaddukkoddai Seminary and the Uduvil Female Boarding School were started. The former continued until 1856, do-

ing a grand work educationally as well as religiously. Its legitimate successor is the Jaffna College, begun in 1872, suggested by native Christians, and supported by endowments of \$70,000 raised in the United States of America, and not far from \$8,000 given in Jaffna. During 1903 no less than 133 students were enrolled. They pay their own expenses, the institution receiving no aid from the Board or the government, yet being thoroughly missionary and having none but earnest Christian instructors, two of them from the United States, besides the Missionary President. When the Seminary closed in 1856, a self-supporting English High School was started by a native Christian and has been maintained with an attendance of about 300, part of the time under an American principal. The Uduvil Girls' Seminary has had a history with no parallel in a heathen land. More than 1,000 girls, mostly from heathen homes, have been trained for the Church. Miss Agnew was the principal for forty years. It has now a beautiful building, a gift from the Woman's Board of Missions, accommodating its 100 pupils, and has become self-supporting, depending on its endowment and the tuition of pupils to supplement the government grant-in-aid. The Uduppiddi Female

Boarding School, with 49 pupils, has been doing a similar work since 1867.

Dr. Scudder began medical work, but the medical department was fairly started by Dr. Ward in 1833, and carried on by Dr. Green with aid from the government. Over 100 students have been trained in Western medical science, using the same textbooks as students in America, latterly in the vernacular, Dr. Green having translated them into Tamil. At the present time there are two large and well-equipped hospitals under the care of the American Board. The largest is called the General Medical Mission, located at Manippay; the other is the Woman's Medical Mission located at Inuvil. At Manippay both men and women, while at Inuvil only women, are treated. Both hospitals have native nurses trained in schools, and in both the evangelical work is emphasized among the patients. In 1903 these hospitals had 1,368 in-patients. This medical work is supported by special fund given for that purpose, and the mission is much indebted to Misses Mary and Margaret Leitch for their efforts in England and the United States in raising funds not only for the plant but also to carry on the work.

A Training School for Teachers is nearly

supported by government grant. Over 10,000 children in 136 village schools form an encouraging feature not equaled elsewhere. These schools, although almost entirely supported locally, are under the control of the missionaries, and are a powerful auxiliary in the work. The first native pastor was ordained in 1855. There are now eighteen pastors. The first native church to become self-supporting was Vaddukkoddai, in 1867. Now there are eighteen independent churches, only one of them receiving a little aid from the mission. At nine out-stations a part of the preacher's salary is paid by the people, and in each of these places it is hoped that churches may be started before long. The total membership is over 2,000. The contributions of the people average over \$4 each per year, which is the equivalent of the ordinary wages for forty days' labor. The general rule among the Christians is to give one-tenth of their income. They have their Home Missionary Society, which supports three preachers in the islands to the southwest of Jaffna, among a population of 28,000. They have also a Foreign Missionary Society which raises funds and supports missionaries upon the east coast of India. The Theological School is not continuous, but classes are taught when a sufficient

number of suitable candidates are found. The mission enjoyed the services of a missionary printer for twenty years; first, Mr. Minor, and then Mr. Burnell, some of the time with four presses in constant operation. The press has been a very important auxiliary and has done a great work. During those twenty years 172,000,000 pages were printed, nearly one-third being the Word of God. From that time, under native management, it has continued to render important service, until 1903, when it passed again into the hands of the mission. *The Morning Star*, a semi-monthly paper, has been kept up since 1841. The Ceylon Mission has always given much attention to different forms of educational work, but village preaching has by no means been neglected, and a good force of catechists and Bible-women has been employed for direct work among the heathen. Tent work and moonlight meetings are carried on in the villages, and house-to-house visitation to such an extent that every house has been visited repeatedly.

Although heathen temples are thronged more than ever at the great festivals, it is largely as holiday affairs, and there is a very general expectation that Christianity will prevail. The soil is prepared, the seed is sown. Jaffna was

the basis for beginning the Madura Mission in 1834, and at all times Jaffna men have held positions of influence in India. The first convert of the American Board from heathenism was in Jaffna. Nowhere else in a heathen land has Christianity so strong a hold on the whole community. There are now four missionaries and their wives and three single ladies connected with the mission. Although the native church is independent, the work of evangelizing the heathen cannot be left to it until the time of great ingathering, which we hope is near.

OTHER MISSIONS IN JAFFNA. — When the American missionaries arrived they found the English Wesleyans already in the field, and the agreement was made that the Wesleyans take the towns of Jaffna and Point Pedro, and the Americans take the country population. Two years later the English Church Mission also entered the field and took up some unoccupied districts. These three missions work harmoniously side by side, each in its own portion. The Church Missionary Society has a population of 50,000 in its field, the Wesleyans 52,000, the Americans 155,000. The two former have missions in the main part of Ceylon, but the Americans have not extended their work in that direction.

The government authorities in Ceylon have recently changed the orthography of the names of cities and towns to conform, it is said, more nearly with the native pronunciations. The changes are so great that several of the stations of the American Board would hardly be recognized under the new spelling, which is now adopted by the mission. Batticotta is now spelled Vaddukkodai and Tillipally is now Tellippallai.

CEYLON MISSION — 1905.

MISSIONARIES, WITH THEIR STATIONS AND DATE OF JOINING THE MISSION.

Miss Susan R. Howland . . .	1873	Uduvil.
Rev. Richard C. Hastings . . .	1879	Vaddukkodai
Mrs. Minnie B. Hastings . . .	1882	
Rev. Thomas B. Scott, M.D. . .	1893	Manippay
Mrs. Mary E. Scott, M.D. . . .	1893	
Miss Isabel H. Curr, M.D. . . .	1896	Inuvil
Rev. Giles G. Brown	1899	Uduppidi
Mrs. Clara L. Brown	1899	
Miss Helen I. Root	1899	Uduvil
Miss Annie Young, M.D.	1899	Inuvil
Rev. James H. Dickson	1900	Tellippallai
Mrs. Frances A. Dickson	1900	
Miss Laura Caswell	1905	Inuvil

