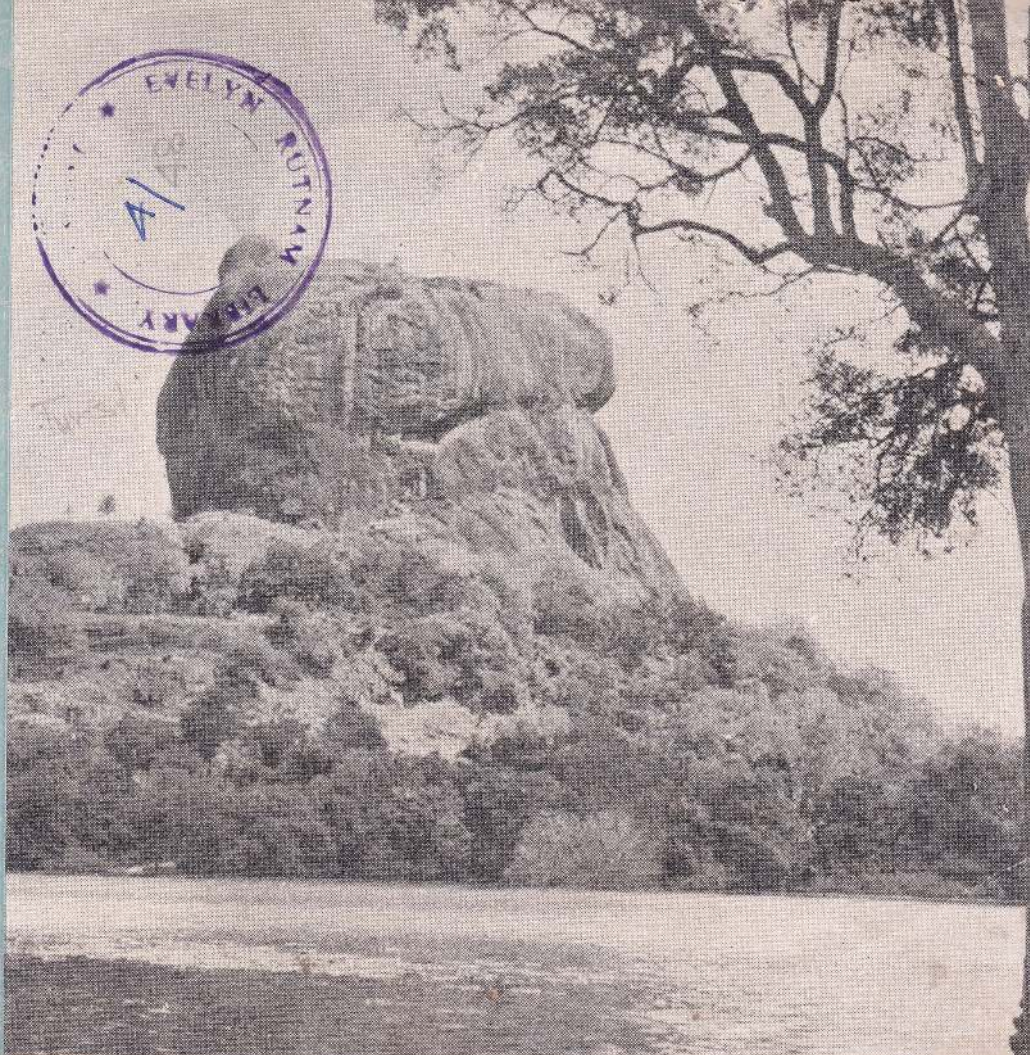
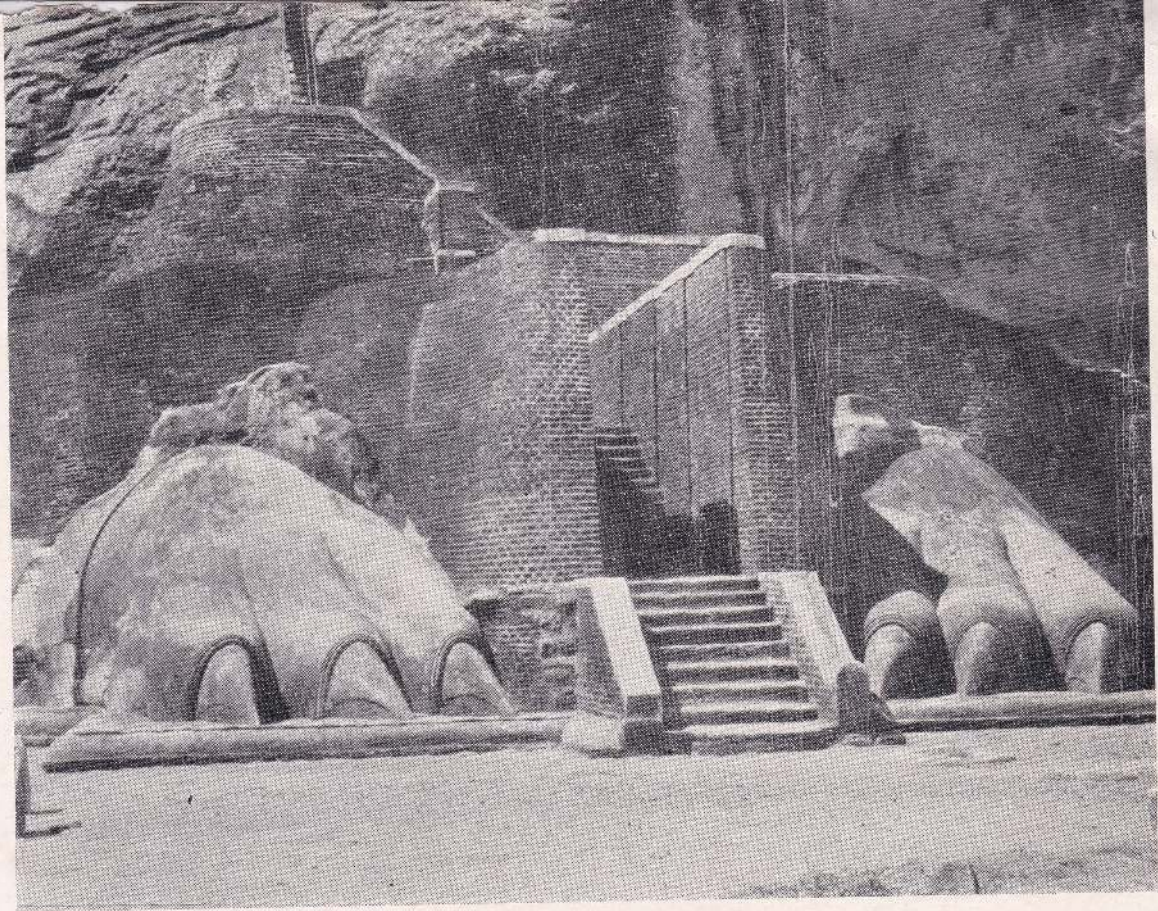


SIGIRIYA

A fortress in the sky





THE LION'S PAW

SIGIRIYA

A fortress in the sky

"ONCE upon a time there was a King. And the King had two queens. One was beautiful but of unequal birth, and the King loved her. The other was plain but of noble blood and she loved the King. And the King had two sons. The son of the beautiful queen was handsome but wicked. The son of the plain queen was ugly but wise. The King also had a charming daughter who was the apple of his eye.

In the course of time the Princess Charming was given in marriage to

her cousin, who was the Commander-in-Chief of all the King's horses and all the King's men. But she was not happy. She had a mother-in-law who ill-treated her.

The King was very, very good when he was good ; but when he turned nasty he was too nasty for words. On hearing of his delicately nurtured daughter bleeding from whip marks on her body, the King in a frenzy of rage, had her mother-in-law burnt alive.

Now, the Commander-in Chief was the bosom friend of the King's wicked son by the beautiful queen. And cunning beyond compare was the Commander-in-Chief. He roused in the wicked Prince a desire to be King betimes.

After seizing the throne, he murdered the King by burying him alive in a wall.

And so the mother's death was avenged. After thus doing away with his royal father, the new King tried to kill his brother too. But the Wise Brother was too quick for him (otherwise he would not have been wise) and fled the country.

Fear of his Wise Brother and the mute disapproval of his desperate people made the new King's life a misery in the Sinhalese capital. Choosing an unscalable mighty rock,

standing sheer and stark out of the vast low plain in the wilderness, he built for himself an impregnable, twisted city of steps and stairways with a palace crowning the summit.

From here he ruled the kingdom for eighteen years, surrounding himself with lissome, voluptuous women and living a riotous life, trying to forget his aching conscience and the gnawing remorse in his heart.

At long last the watchers on the rock pockets, scanning the horizon day and night, reported the approach of a mighty army. The Wicked King boastfully leapt out of his eyrie and marched out in battle array to meet the Wise Brother's avenging army.

At the height of battle, the Wicked King, seeing his army fleeing in disorder, drew his sword and cut his

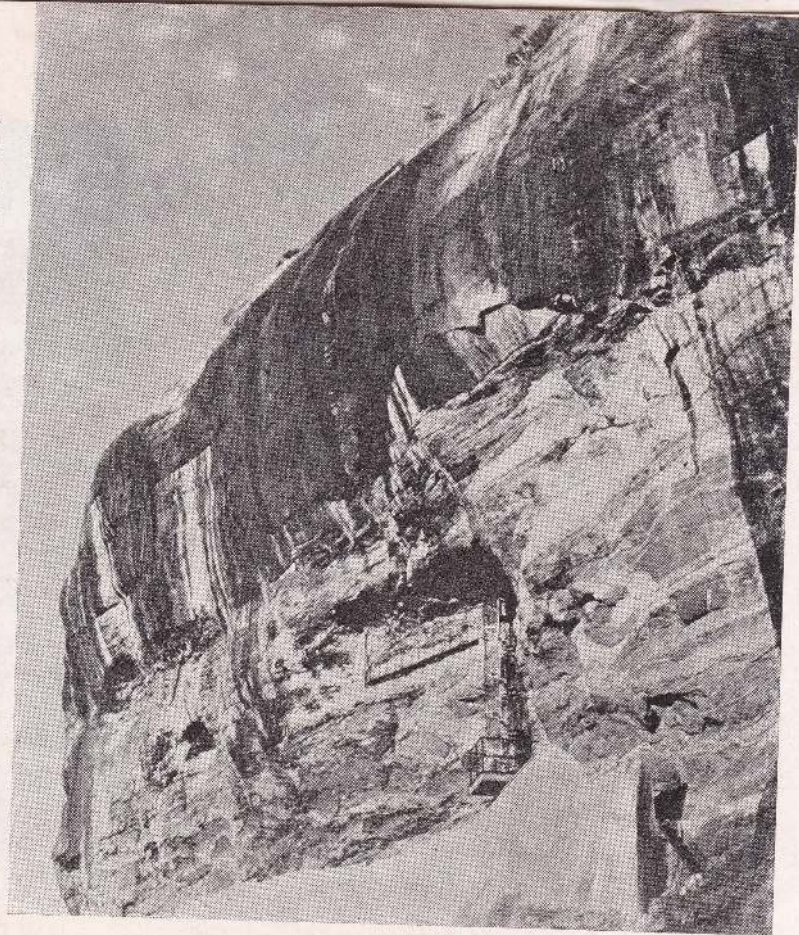
throat. The Wise Prince, after thus avenging his father's murder, entered the forsaken capital in a triumphal march, became King, and lived happily ever after."

The time was the fifth century of the Christian Era ; the country, Ceylon ; and the fabulous, impregnable fortress city on a rock was Sigiriya.

It was here that the parricide King Kasyapa (478-496 A.D.) after killing his father, Dhatusena, lived in buildings perched on rockly pinnacles and in strange caves hidden under giant boulders, until his brother, Moggallana, returned from India (whither he had fled), with a mighty army to destroy him.

It was this mighty twist of fierce Rock, in itself a geological phenomenon, that Kasyapa turned into a

"A MIGHTY FIERCE TWIST OF ROCK" ▷

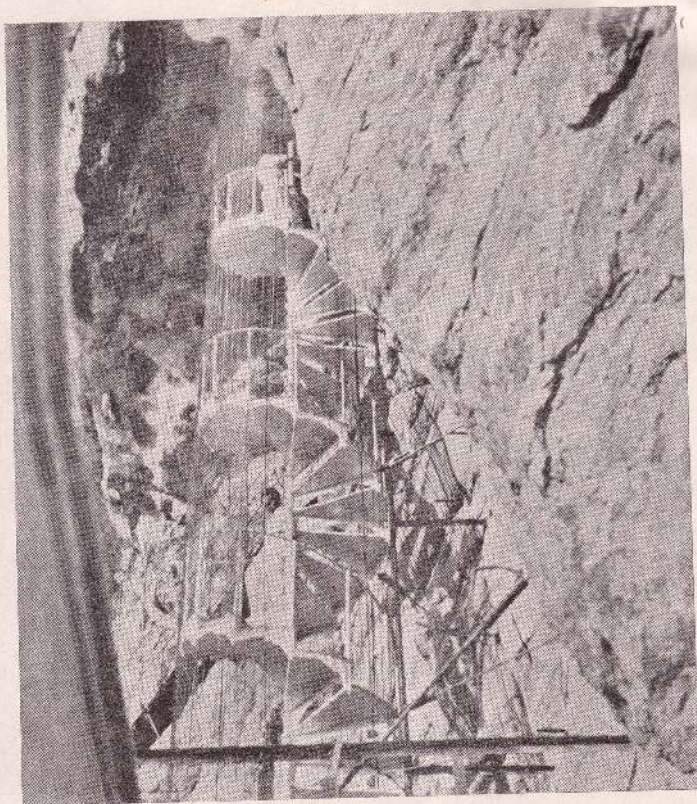


veritable citadel in full armour, and flood-lit it with a blaze of glory that converted it from a mere freak of nature into a wonder down the ages.

Sigiriya is 103 miles from the port of Colombo ; 50 miles from Anuradhapura, the ancient capital ; 40 from Polonnaruwa ; and ten miles from the Dambulla Rock Temple.

Half way between the 50th and 51st Milepost on the Dambulla-Trincomalee Road a sign-post at Inamaluva points out the 55 mile branch road to Sigiriya to the right. The surrounding jungle shuts in the road on both sides until the grim giant of granite, over 600 feet high, bursts into full view when the road ends abruptly at the foot of the first flight of steps.

SPIRAL STAIRWAY ▷



Terrace by terrace these steps, worn out by the countless tread of pilgrim feet, lead the visitor to a 4-foot gallery flanked by a parapet wall that coils itself like a snake half way round the belly of the rock, where the latter concaves, thus allowing the overhanging beetling crag, towering above, to provide shelter from sun and rain. The mirror-polished ancient wall has served from the 6th century upwards as a kind of Log Book for visiting bards whose extempore poetry recorded here, is some of the oldest extant literary work—the Sigiriya Graffiti.

Like most men of his type, when he had gained what he desired by crime, Kasyapa seems to have become a kind of connoisseur.

That his court abounded with the best of artists is shown by the remaining masterpieces of what must have been a



SIGIRIYA FRESCO

great art gallery, yet clinging to the surface of a precariously-located rock pocket, vertically 40 feet above the gallery.

A modern spiral stairway, complete with weld-mesh, has taken the place of the ancient wooden perpendicular ladder, so that now even the faint-hearted can with ease win these world-famous beauties of a thousand years ago.

The portraits of 21 ladies found in this rock pocket are the only secular pictures known to ancient Ceylon art, and seem to be a portion of the famous Ajantha Frescoes transferred wholesale from the great Rock Caves in India.

Sensuous in appeal, almost life-size in dimensions, these ladies of Sigiriya are perhaps the only example of art for art's sake coming down from ancient

times. That they are the work of a master painter or painters, opinion is agreed. But experts will never tire of wondering who they are, what they are up to, why and wherefore they were created.

Some say they are a procession of the ladies of Kasyapa's Court, proceeding to a shrine nearby with their offerings. Others think that they are maidens of heaven showering flowers on the earth.

One expert imagines they are ancient bathing beauties at a water sports meet, playing about with flowers. Another learned interpreter suggests they represent goddesses of lightning and rain. There is also one who has a theory that these heavily bejewelled and flower-decked damsels are taking part in a funeral parade, mourning for the death of the royal parricide.



SIGIRIYA FRESCO



FRESCOES AT SIGIRIYA

Whatever they represent, whoever they are, these pin-up girls of a thousand years ago have sent the fame of Sigiriya and of the parricide king reverberating throughout the centuries and the nations.

The figures are usually in pairs ; one dark, one light ; one a princess, the other a maid. Though they seem nude, there is more on them than meets the eye. Careful observation shows them clad in flimsy garments of a rare kind.

The gallery winds round the rock on to a broad balcony terrace. From there begins a hazardous zig-zagging ascent up the bare face of the rock through a vast mouth of a gigantic gateway with a lion. From the monster in bricks (Sinha—Lion) Sigiriya gets its name.

This precarious climb takes the visitor to the summit where Kasyapa had his palace on the rock, in area about three acres. Here you see the tank that gave water to the palace eyrie, and a carefully planned system for the palace precincts. The summit had been built upon to the farthest ledge, which is almost impossible to reach today.

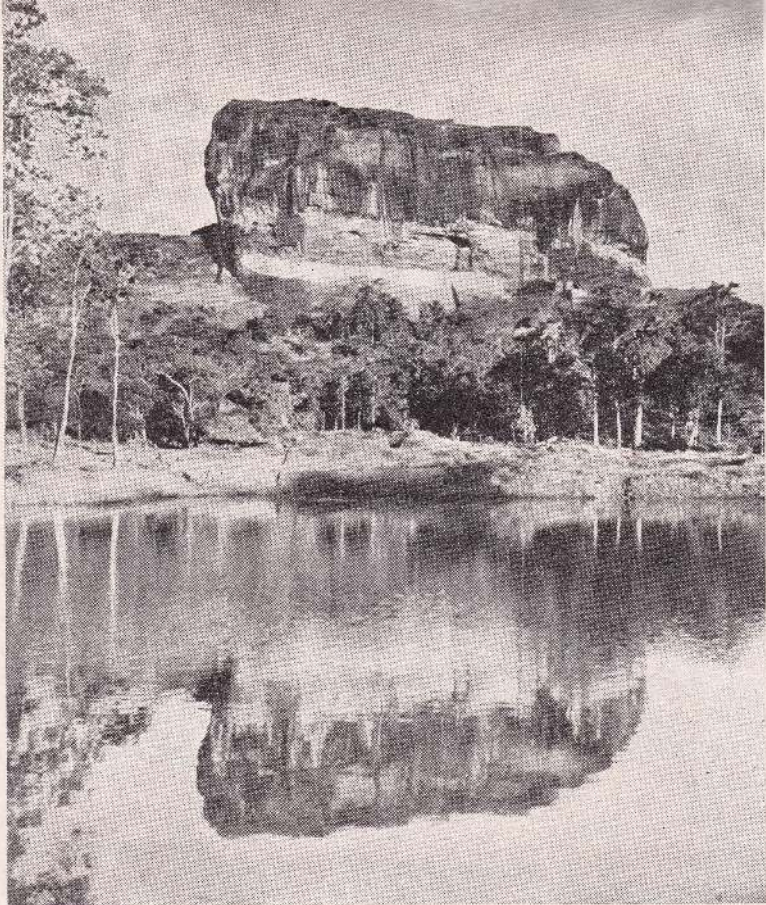
The palace, the royal throne of pink granite, a large pond, cisterns, living quarters, sentry boxes, were all crowded in this space with amazing skill.

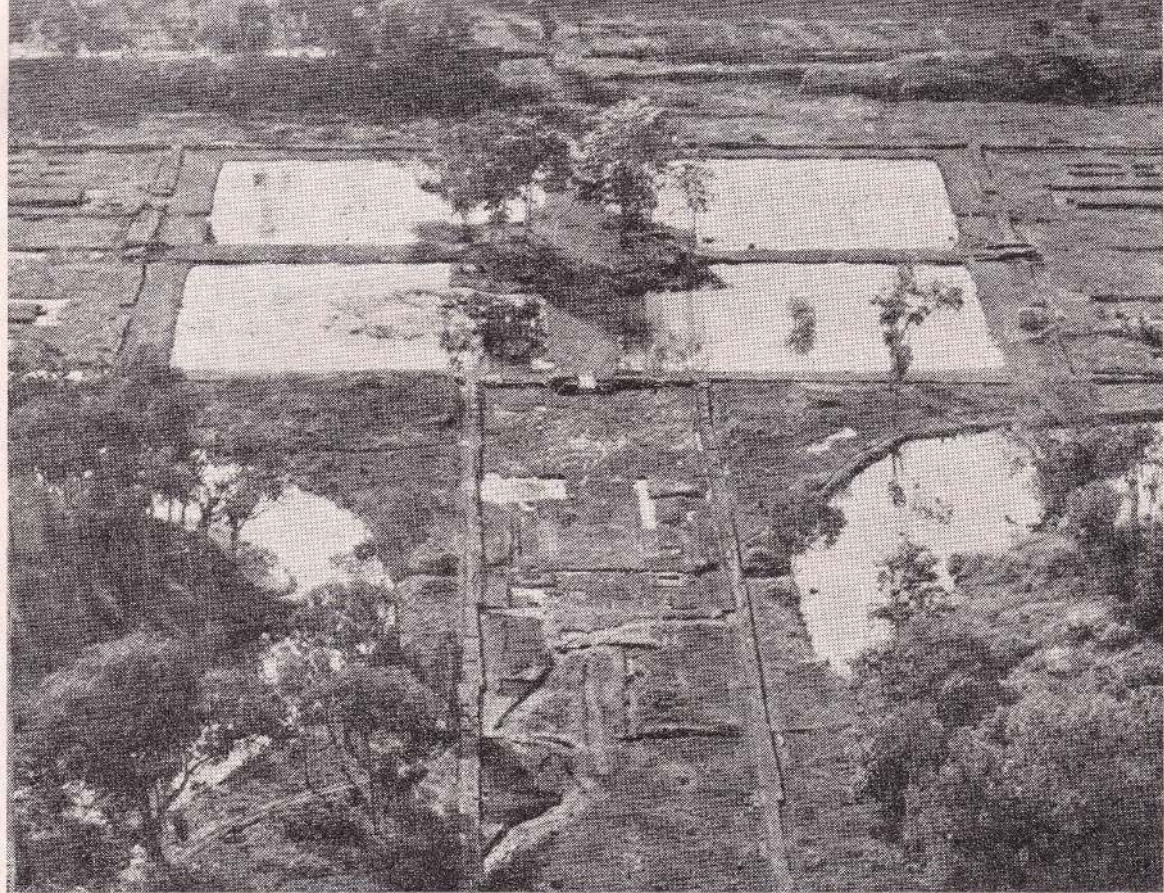
Sigiriya, as a city, had massive ramparts which are even now over 30 feet high. The great moat which ran round is as many as 80 feet wide in parts. The main entrance was reached by a drawbridge, in a line with the fresco pocket.

The Sigiriya rock when seen reflected in the reservoir nearby, with the sun smiting its sides, is a memory not easy to forget—the ghost of an elfin city of a fairy tale, a monument to a crime, a landmark in history, and a treasure house of rare art, all in one, with the spirit of Once-Upon-a-Time brooding over it.

Sigiriya is 103 miles from Colombo, 54 miles from Kandy, 40 miles from Polonnaruwa and 10 miles from Dambulla and 50 miles from Anuradhapura.

SIGIRIYA ROCK AND REFLECTIONS ▷





ROYAL
PLEASURE
GARDEN

DAMBULLA VIHARE

DAMBULLA is celebrated for its colourful Cave Temples. The caves were once the refuge of a King who later converted them into magnificent Temples in the first century B.C.

King Walagam Bahu in 104 B.C. escaping from the Dravidian invaders of Anuradhapura found shelter in this famous rock, 10 miles west of Sigiriya. From its safety he re-organised his fighting forces during the 15 years of his exile, and led them to victory over the Dravidians. On regaining his throne he immediately set about the task of converting the rock caves into a Buddhist temple, the largest of its kind in Ceylon, in gratitude for the protection the caves had afforded him.

Entry into the caves is from a ledge on the summit of the large granite

boulder, 500 ft. high and 2,000 in length. The ascent is by a picturesque stairway cut into the rock. At the top a wide vista of the Matale hills and the mountain ranges of Kandy bursts into view. Sigiriya rock rises in solitary grandeur to the east. Beneath lie the broad green acres of rice fields which the ancient kings granted as endowments to the temple.

The Dambulla Rock Temple evokes the admiration and veneration of the hundreds of pilgrims and visitors who go there daily as they undoubtedly did centuries ago. The living rock had been chiselled into five chambers and within it are a wealth of delicately sculptured statues of the Buddha, in traditional attitudes, and also murals and frescoes in vivid colours. Of special interest is the statue of the Buddha in recumbent position, 47 ft.

long, resting on an ornamental pillow. In another chamber there are fifty-eight statues of the Buddha.

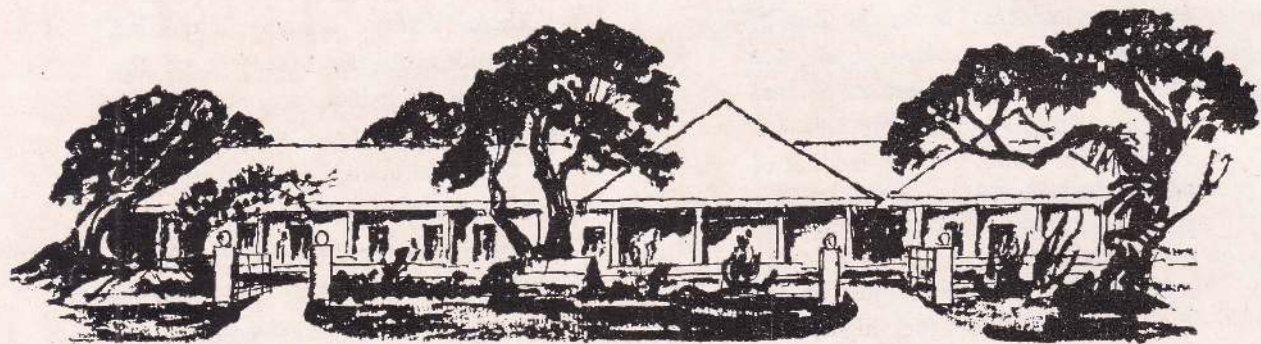
The walls of the chambers and its ceilings have been transformed into a veritable gallery of murals and frescoes depicting incidents from the life of the Buddha and events from the Island's history. The famous combat between King Dutugemunu and the Tamil prince Elara, and the landing of Prince Vijaya in Ceylon, Ceylon's first King, have been vividly portrayed.

As the eye gets accustomed to the dim religious light the highly ornamented frescoes of 2,000 years ago are seen in all their splendour. One of the caves, the Mahavihare, contains a statue of King Walagam Bahu. It is the largest and grandest cave, 160 by 50 ft., and at the entrance 23 ft. high, the roof sloping gradually till,

at the end, it is barely 4 ft. The walls depict scenes from Ceylon history. A curious feature is the size of the fish popping out of the waves at the landing of Prince Vijaya, a style affected by most of the ancient hydrographers.

There are many interesting inscriptions on the bare face of the rock, one of which is an ordinance stipulating that when absolute grants of land are made, such grants shall not be recorded on ola (palm) leaves but engraved on plates of copper, or sannasas.

A wooden statue represents King Nissanka who restored the temple in the 12th century. King Walagam Bahu's most memorable work was his assemblage of 500 priests at the Alu Vihare, in Matale, for the purpose of recording the teachings of the Buddha in writing.



SIGIRIYA RESTHOUSE

SIGIRIYA RESTHOUSE

FIVE miles from Inamaluwa Junction on the Kandy-Trincomalee Road, at the Leopard signpost, lies Sigiriya Resthouse, a haven for the traveller.

It is situated among large spreading trees, with a clear view of the massive Sigiriya Rock from the verandah, the dining room or the lounge.

The Resthouse has 8 double rooms and 2 single rooms.

Sigiriya Resthouse maintains a goodly table. Game in season and a variety of Ceylonese and Western foods have earned for the Resthouse an excellent reputation.

The rum-omelette of Sigiriya Resthouse is a famous speciality. It originated from the days when the Resthouse had kerosene lighting. The lights used to be dimmed to semi-darkness when a bevy of waiters brought in a flaming rum-omelette to the accompaniment of a crescendo of murmurings of jungle crickets. The resthouse provides a wide variety of menus.

Wild lotus flowers thrive in the moats and water-ways of this region. Among the fauna of the region are small Rhesus monkeys, elephants, deer and leopards. Bird life is also plentiful during certain seasons of the year.

NOTES

Front cover : SIGIRIYA ROCK

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RUINS OF THE ROYAL PALACE AT THE SUMMIT OF SIGIRIYA