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THE EARLIEST AMERICAN IMPACT ON SRI LANKA

The American Mission Seminary in Jaffna

JAMES T. RUTNAM

The earliest American contacts with Ceylon, now known as Sri Lanka, were trading vessels that called at Galle, Colombo and Trincomalee from 1788 onwards. The first serious attempts to establish contacts of a more enduring nature in Asia by Americans came not from traders but from Christian-Missionaries. Their intention was to make India their field, but they were faced with the refusal of the British East India Company to permit them to do so. It was thus that Samuel Newell, who had gone with the first batch of these missionaries to Calcutta and been forced to quit in 1812, proceeded to Mauritius and then to Ceylon, arriving in Galle in 1813. Following Newell's report, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston, Massachusetts, decided in 1815 to send a band of missionaries headed by Daniel Poor to Ceylon and eventually to the Tamil speaking district of Jaffna, in the north of the island and closest to India.

The War of 1812 was over with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814. The missionaries left New England the following year on 13 October and arrived in Ceylon on 22 March 1816. Poor came with his wife and was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. James Richards, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Meigs, Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Bardwell and Mr. Edward Warren. Of these, the Bardwells went over to Bombay. The rest stayed for a few months in Colombo assisting other Christian missionaries. In the meantime they learnt Tamil under Gabriel Tissera, a son of Roman Catholic parents, and Franciscus Malleappa, a son of a Tamil proponent under the Dutch who had held the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon before the British.

Tissera and Malleappa were evidently good teachers, for, Poor, no mean scholar himself, was able to preach in Tamil within a year of his learning the language. Soon the two Tamil youths were ready to accompany Poor and his colleagues as their interpreters, for Jaffna. Warren left first arriving at Jaffna,

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travelling in a palanquin along the western coast, on 11 July 1816. The others reached Jaffna soon afterwards. In a letter dated 13 June 1816 to William Wilberforce, Governor Brownrigg of Ceylon covered these events as follows: When a foreign missionary, an American, came to the island in 1813, he wrote his reception was such as to produce a letter of thanks from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a copy of which I enclose. I will not enlarge on the subject, except merely to state that during the stay of that Missionary in Ceylon, I was placed in a very delicate situation, for I had reasons to apprehend that my protection of American Missionaries might involve me in some embarrassment with the East India Company's Governments. The five American Missionaries announced in the Commissioners' letter are arrived, and I have just acceded to their request of establishing themselves in Jaffna, the Northern Province of this Island.

Conditions prevailing at this time are best described by J. V. Chelliah in his book "A Century of English Education". When the first missionaries came to Jaffna, he wrote, there were only a few Tamil schools here and there, and only a few could read, and write with style and *ola*, but very few could read the printed character with ease and fluency. The missionaries, therefore, strove to raise up a reading population by establishing free vernacular schools in different villages. But they found that the desire of the people for education was so small, and their prejudice against missionary work so great, that it was a difficult task at first to induce parents to send their children to these schools. The teachers were, to begin with, necessarily Hindus, and it was difficult to procure even these. The first free schools were established at Tellippalai and Mallagam with 30 boys. These were taught to read and write the Tamil language and had instruction in small works of poetry and arithmetic and geography on the European Plan. They had in addition, instruction in Scripture. Some of the pupils, who had studied under Rev. Mr. Palm, an L. M. S. Missionary, who had worked at Tellippalai before the advent of the Americans, were given assistance in the study of English.

The missionaries, we are told, were not satisfied with the meagre education in these free schools, and were anxious to attempt a more thorough system of training by keeping promising pupils entirely under their influence. They decided to start Free Boarding Schools, the first Free Boarding Schools, it is believed, in Asia. The children were slow in coming. Six small boys formed the first batch at Tellippalai. Another school was started at the other centre at Vaddukoddai. With the extension of Missions at Uduvil, Pandaterruppu and Manipay, Boarding Schools, too, for both sexes were established at these places. The pupils, Chelliah states, were boarded and clothed free, and their expenses were paid by individuals and associations in America. Names designated by the benefactors were given to the pupils. Instruction at these boarding schools was given to pupils in English and Tamil. The subjects included Scripture, Arithmetic, Grammar and Geography.

Proselytizing in the sense we now understand—a term that describes a misguided religious zeal—was never practised by the American Mission. There were no forcible conversions. The missionaries depended entirely on precept and example to gain their spiritual objectives. They set great store on education, on dialogue and finally on conviction and a genuine change of heart, for which consummation they were ready to pray and wait patiently. This explains why there was not a single case of baptism of a non-Christian in their field for as long as five years.

With the rapid expansion of missionary activity, particularly in the field of education, additional personnel was needed. Early in 1820 Levi Spaulding, Miron Winslow, Henry Woodward and John Scudder arrived in Ceylon with their wives. Brownrigg was still Governor of Ceylon, but as it transpired later, these missionaries had not come a day too soon. They arrived just as the Governor Sir Robert Brownrigg was retiring from office. His official consent to their residence was given the day before he left. When the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Edward Barnes protested, he said that he was Governor as long as he remained in the island, and he it was who should give permission. Sir Edward Barnes replied, "Very well, they will soon die off and we shall not allow any more to come".

The canard that the Ceylon Government had relegated the American missionaries to the "arid" north (of Ceylon) to perish there appears to have sprung from this story. Indeed it should now be clear that Jaffna was selected for other reasons. "It is a curious fact", says a writer, "that from the announcement of this programme (by Barnes) till its withdrawal in 1832 (by Horton) the American Mission lost only one man by death and suffered little from sickness. Two members of this company lived and worked fifty years in Jaffna". The "curse" had no effect.

But Barnes did have his revenge. For after Brownrigg's departure in 1820 when Barnes was Governor, James Garret came over to Ceylon to take charge of the Mission's printing press. Barnes would not allow him to stay, and he had to leave finally for Bombay. Barnes, a Waterloo veteran, fumed and fretted that he considered it "an impertinence on the part of Americans to come to Ceylon for Missionary work since every needed effort in that direction was already being made by his Majesty's Government".

Barnes sneered at the Americans and got his Deputy Secretary William Granville to write to the Missionaries in a letter dated 22 September 1820 that when he considered the vast extensive regions of the American continent, many of the populous tribes of which were to that hour in all the darkness of heathen barbarism, he could not but think their pious labours might be far more advantageously exerted in their cause than in that of a people already subsisting under a Christian Government.

He even dared to reopen the question of the other missionaries who were earlier permitted by Brownrigg to stay, and his dispatch to Lord Bathurst, the Secretary of State, dated October 10, 1820 affords interesting reading. He did not think it expedient or prudent to allow the subjects of a foreign State to gain that influence over the minds of the Natives, which as their religious instructors, these men and their successors might in time acquire.

Barnes, whose objections were really political, not religious, continued to be a menace to the Mission and a nightmare to unhappy Poor. It must however be recorded that towards the end of Barnes' administration in Ceylon, he seems to have been impressed by Poor's persistent protests, for, in his letter dated 11 March 1829 to George Murray on Ecclesiastical Establishment and Education he says, "At stations within a short distance of each other and a few miles of the Town of Jaffna are five American Missionaries with their Native assistants. They are very well informed, indefatigable and painstaking men, have had much success among the Malabars, and have very flourishing schools with an institution at Batticotta for further education of the most promising youth who have made considerable progress in the higher branches of Education. Their annual Examinations have always given the greatest satisfaction to all present, among whom have been some of the best judges in the Island". Righteousness seems to have triumphed finally, though belatedly. Note the word "indefatigable" used by Barnes. That was the measure of Poor's triumph over his opponents.

With the addition of capable and earnest men and women (thanks to Brownrigg), Meigs and Poor felt emboldened to extend and raise the educational services of the Mission. Chelliah says that some of the boys were so far advanced in their studies that it was felt that fuller provision should be made for their further education. With this object in view the missionaries resolved to establish a central institution to give higher education to deserving boys, and issued an elaborate Prospectus, which they presented to the Prudential Committee of the American Board, the Ceylon Government, and to friends in England, America, and the East.

The position on the eve of the establishment of the Seminary is given in an early report of the Mission. In 1822, it stated, there were 42 schools with 1800 pupils maintained at a cost of 270/- pounds Sterling, including presents, premiums, and the wages of the teachers who, instead of receiving a regular salary, as at present, were paid according to the progress of the scholars which was determined by a monthly examination.

In 1823 the Mission supported more than 105 boys and 28 girls at the Free Boarding Schools at their five stations. Not a few of the pupils in these schools, continued the Report, had made such advancements in their studies and given such promise of further advancement as to warrant an attempt to place within their reach the advantages of higher education in a Central High School.

The proposal of the missionaries was to establish a college of university rank with, it is supposed, a charter to confer degrees in due course. The Prospectus that was dated Jaffna, Ceylon, March 4, and signed by Meigs, Poor, Winslow, Spaulding, Woodward and Scudder is a historic document. It is an extremely far-sighted and comprehensive blue-print for a truly liberal education of "Tamul and other youth".

It is a thousand pities that this magnificent plan was not fully implemented. Had it been executed in the grand manner as envisaged by its architects it would have heralded a national and cultural renaissance not only in Jaffna but throughout Ceylon and South India. It was noted in the plan that there was a considerably large Tamil population in the Island, and some millions on the continent, that might need the aide of a literary Seminary, and there were many native youth of good talent who would prize its privileges and employ them "*for the good of their countrymen*". What vision! What philanthropy! What patriotism!

It will be observed that the builders spoke of good "talent" not of good "birth". This, we suppose, was done advisedly, and is very significant; for although it so happened that the recruitment of students by the American Mission was drawn generally, with a few exceptions, from a particularly favoured class of the Hindu community (unlike, for instance, the Catholic missionaries who cast their net far and wide), the method of education imparted and, as we know in several instances, the manner in which the social crises and challenges of feudal pseudo-superiority were faced, testify to the determined effort on the part of the missionaries to instill what they held to be the cardinal Christian virtue of universal brotherhood among the bretheren with whom they had cast their lot.

Their method of approach to the social problem of caste was somewhat peculiar. They preferred generally to inculcate a sense of duty and social justice among those who had hitherto wrongly held themselves superior, rather than to encourage a consciousness of denied rights to those who had been forced till then to accept a position of inferiority. Thus they endeavoured to avoid the bitterness of a class struggle. Admittedly this was not the radical way. But it did raise the social tone of the community. The least that it did was to make indifferent Hindus better Hindus even if they had failed to make them Christians, good or bad.

The objects of the proposed College were declared in the Prospectus. The first object, it stated, was to give native youth of good promise a thorough knowledge of the English language. The great reason for this is that it will open to them the treasures of European science and literature, and bring fully before the mind the evidences of Christianity. A knowledge of the English language, especially for those designed for "native preachers", is in this point of view, important almost beyond belief. Their minds, it was urged, could

not be so thoroughly enlightened by any other means. Emerson Tennent, a British Colonial Secretary serving in Ceylon, had stated in his "Christianity in Ceylon" published some years later, that the Seminary like all others founded by the Mission was essentially a Christian institution. The missionaries were of the opinion that a liberal education was an essential requisite for the reception of the Christian gospel.

The missionaries disagreed with the position taken up by William Carey and his colleagues in India who had earlier in 1817 established an educational institution known as the Serampore College, a body somewhat similar to, though much less catholic and liberal than, the one contemplated for Jaffna. The controversy between the two was over the place of English in the educational structure.

The question of the national language *vis-a-vis* English has been the subject of debate ever since the British undertook the educational development of their subject people in India. This debate still continues even after the withdrawal of the British. Scientifically it has been held desirable that one must learn first in one's own mother tongue. This has never been refuted by the Missionaries. But they had realized that English Education at that time was an urgent need in order to open the windows of the world to their promising wards who were hungering after learning and knowledge. The Prospectus in a spirited advocacy of the stand taken by the missionaries had declared that the great efforts they were making to transfer the learning of the West into the language of the East, was a matter of most sincere rejoicing; and the Seminary here contemplated was designed to assist in doing this good work. It is in this way only that the great mass of the people could be enlightened. The most important works in English must be translated, epitomes made of them, or new works written; but to accomplish all or any of these objects a large number of English scholars must be raised up from among the Natives. It is a work, according to the Prospectus, which foreigners, comparatively ignorant of the language and customs of the country, could not be supposed qualified to do.

The second object declared in the Prospectus was "the cultivation of Tamul literature". It stated that to maintain any good degree of respect among the native inhabitants, it was necessary to understand their literature. The Tamil language, it continued, like the Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, etc. was an original and perfect language, and was in itself highly worthy of cultivation. The high poetic Tamil was, however, very difficult of acquisition, and required all the aids which the College was designed to furnish. The Puranas and all the more common sacred books were to be found translated into high Tamil in which they were read in the temples, and it was particularly desirable that some at least, if not all of those who were set for the defence, or employed in the propagation of the Gospel, should be able to read and understand them.

It further stated that a more important benefit would be the cultivation of Tamil composition, which is now almost entirely neglected. It is common to find among Tamil people men who can read correctly, who understand to some extent the poetic language, and who are able perhaps to form a kind of artificial verse, who cannot write a single page of correct prose. The attention of many must be turned to writing intelligibly and forcibly in their own language. Original native composition, on account of the superior felicity of its style and idiom, will be read when the production of a foreigner or a translation, will be thrown aside. To raise up, therefore, and qualify a class of native authors whose minds being enriched by science may be capable not only of embodying European ideas, but of putting them into a handsome native dress, must be rendering important aid to the "interests of learning and Christianity". It will be observed here that the missionaries held firm to the view that the "interests of learning and Christianity" were not contradictory. Thus their ultimate Christian objective was not overlooked.

The missionaries had also planned to give a select number of the pupils a course of study in Sanskrit, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. This was generally intended for students proposing to be "native preachers". The Prospectus stated that in addition to these Languages, and through the medium principally of the English, it was designed to teach as far as the circumstances of the country required the sciences usually studied in the Colleges of Europe and America. The course at present contemplated, according to the Prospectus, would embrace, more or less extensively, Geography, Chronology, History, Mathematics, Trigonometry, Natural Philosophy of the Mind, Elements of Geometry, and Natural and Revealed Religion. In teaching these it was designed to provide as fast as possible elementary works in Tamil for the assistance of the student. The public lectures would be delivered principally in English with suitable explanations in the native language. That all the students would be able to make great advances in most of their different branches was not supposed, but that many will thereby obtain an expansion of mind and the power of receiving and originating thought, which would not only free them from the shackles of superstition but enable them to guide others also, was not only hoped but confidently believed.

There were other benefits too contemplated by the architects of this institution. Agriculture and mechanic arts were to be improved; learning would rise in estimation, and gradually obtain a dominion over wealth and caste; the native character would be raised; and the native mind, freed from the shackles of custom, would imbibe that spirit of improvement which had so long distinguished and blessed most European countries. A college such as the one intended would give a new tone to the whole system of education in the district, and exert an influence which would be felt in every school and village. "In short", Chelliah wrote, "the founders had in view not only the

raising up of competent Preachers and Mission Agents, but also well educated citizens, Christian and non-Christian, who would serve Government and Society in the work of the uplift of the country".

This plan was thought by some to be "rather large", but according to an early Report of the Mission it was warmly approved by the friends of the Mission in America and generally also in India. Funds to a considerable amount were conditionally pledged in America, and would have been given, had not unexpected obstacles from the local government prevented its projectors from carrying the plan fully into effect.

What were these obstacles? The Ceylon Government under Barnes would not allow the work to be carried out as proposed. It was expressly stated that no more Missionaries could join the force and no "College" could be established.

Poor was undeterred. Within four months of the issue of the Prospectus, Poor and his colleagues presented everybody with a *fait-accomplis*. The "College" was begun, although at its birth it was wrapt in swaddling clothes. There were no buildings to speak of. Funds had to be collected. Even the final sanction of the Board had to come. But the Professors were there. The students were there too. Together, these pioneers formed a University College, the first of its kind in Ceylon, and the second in Asia, the other being Serampore College in India.

Let others contend, Poor would have told himself, for the name we shall have the substance. For, the name of the institution remained unresolved for a number of years. Even the siting of the institution at Jaffna, the metropolis of the Peninsula, so desirable from many points of view, was abandoned from a fear that the organisers would be thought of as being too ambitious.

Poor, however, continued to press his claims for due recognition of the institution by the local government under Barnes. He sought the aid of the Board in America to make a direct approach to the British government. This too was done, but to little avail. A College such as the one proposed "had to be under instructors from Great Britain". That was the furthest concession that could be wrung from unwilling hands. This proposal was however politely ignored by Poor.

The term "Seminary" which was finally used to describe this institution was an innocuous word that could mean different things to different men. The missionaries appear to have toyed with the word "Academy" too. At the end, they agreed, modestly, upon using the word "Seminary" for their University College. In this manner the missionaries cleverly side tracked Government disapproval of the term "College".

The twenty-second day of July 1823 is a day for ever memorable in the annals of the educational history of Ceylon. This is how the event and circumstances are described in an early report of the Mission: "The institution was commenced in a modified form at Batticotta in 1823 by bringing together the most forward lads from the different Boarding Schools and placing them under the care of one of the missionaries who, with assistant teachers, was to devote himself principally to their instruction in Literature, Science and Religion. The number at first received was forty-eight, who after qualifying themselves by further attention to some elementary subjects, entered upon a course of study both in English and Tamul, similar to that laid down in the original plan of the College".

Poor had achieved his purpose, although perhaps in a guarded and disguised way. He had succeeded in giving effect to his original plan despite all objections and obstacles. Poor was the obvious choice for the post of Principal which place of honour and responsibility the Mission unreservedly awarded him.

The band of American missionaries present at the opening of the Seminary was small. Besides Poor there were Meigs, Winslow, Spaulding, Woodward and Scudder. Warren and Richards were victims of tuberculosis contracted before their arrival in Jaffna. Warren was sent back for a sea voyage and he died at the Cape of Good Hope on 11 August 1818. Richards was one of the five students of Williams College in Massachusetts, who launched the idea of this Mission in 1810 from a haystack in Williamstown, and who joined in establishing the American Board on 29 June that year. He was the only one among this lot of five pioneers to labour in the foreign field. Soon he left his mortal remains at Tellipalai in Ceylon where he died in 1822.

Strangely enough it was the afflicted patients, Warren and Richards, who became the first medical missionaries in Ceylon, although Scudder was not too far behind. Warren and Richards had a short course of Medical study at the University of Pennsylvania and some practice at the hospitals at home. Within a year of their arrival in Jaffna they had opened, with the help of Government officials and private individuals, a temporary hospital at Tellipalai "for the cure of both soul and body", which function, they had felt, was their mission in life.

Poor, of course, was most concerned with soul and the *mind*. Poor too had been afflicted with tuberculosis, but some kind fate seems to have saved him for his great mission at the Seminary. Poor is reported to have had at the beginning the professorial assistance of Winslow, later to be the great Tamil lexicographer, Woodward, who remained in Jaffna until 1834, and Scudder, who was a practising Doctor of Medicine in New York when, according to him, the "call" came to leave the surgery at once, to work as a missionary in the foreign field.

The course of study at the Seminary at the beginning extended for six years. Emerson Tennent had written that the course of education was so comprehensive as to extend over a period of eight years of study. The course he was referring to perhaps included a post-graduate term. Tennent described the curriculum as embracing all the ordinary branches of Historical and Classical learning, and all the other higher departments of Mathematical and Physical Science, combined with the most intimate familiarisation with the great principles and evidences of the Christian Religion.

Tennent also wrote that it was part of the system to apply the annual contribution of some one friend of the Mission if it amounted to the stipulated sum (which was £4/3/0 per annum) to the exclusive education of one individual who, on admission, assumed, in addition to his own name, that of the distant benefactor to whom he was indebted for his presentation. This is the genesis of the large crop of American names in such a far-off place as Jaffna in the little island of Ceylon. Most of these names came from Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maryland.

When the first class of fifteen graduated there were two hundred applicants to the new class. L. J. Gratiaen, a prominent educationist in Ceylon, exclaimed that the Batticotta Seminary was for some years the highest achievement of education in the Island. This was high praise indeed. He further remarked that a bright boy in one of these village schools might go to a Boarding School, learn English, enter the Seminary and go back to school as a teacher or enter the mission service. Till the Americans developed this idea, the English and the vernacular students were distinct, one being for Headmen's sons and the other for the village. Here therefore is not only an admirable school system, but the beginning of a social revolution.

In September 1830 C. H. Cameron and Col. Colebrooke, members of a Commission of Enquiry sent by the British Government to Ceylon, visited the Seminary and conducted an examination. They were much impressed and soon reported that the Barnes prohibition of further missionaries from America should be immediately rescinded. This paved the way for the arrival of Dr. Nathan Ward and H. R. Hoisington in 1833, and James Read Eckard in 1834.

Colebrooke in his report in 1831 wrote that while the English missionaries had not generally appreciated the importance of diffusing a knowledge of the English language through their schools, the American missionaries were fully impressed with the importance of English. He referred approvingly to the Seminary where the students made some creditable proficiency in several branches of useful knowledge.

At the end of 1835 Poor felt a "call" specially to perform evangelistic work, and being satisfied that he had placed the Seminary on a firm foundation offered his resignation from the post of Principal. Owing to the restrictions

imposed by Government, Poor was obliged during his term of office to sustain the burden almost alone, the other members of the Mission rendering only limited assistance in the midst of their regular missionary duties.

Poor had seen to it that the Seminary was not isolated from the life of the community. One of the functions of the Seminary was to influence the intellectual life of the people of the area. The Seminary was the centre which radiated goodwill, stimulated a spirit of enquiry and extended knowledge beyond its walls, reaching the homes and families of its students and their friends.

Hoisington was a worthy successor to Poor. The Seminary had been fortunate to have had during the first twenty-six years of its thirty-two years of existence two exceptional men to direct it. Both were diligent students of the culture of the people among whom their lot was cast. They were earnest and profound scholars of the language and philosophy of the Tamils; indeed they much appreciated and admired them, although when it came to defending their own religious convictions they were unyielding. They were good men, learned men; they held fast to what they held to be the truth, but they were charitable men too and were lavish with a true love for their fellow men.

In 1848, shortly before Hoisington relinquished his duties as Principal, Tennent, the Colonial Secretary, visited the Seminary. He has left a record of his appreciation of the work done at the Seminary. The whole establishment, he wrote, in his book already referred to, is full of interest, and forms an impressive and memorable scene—the familiar objects and arrangements of a College being combined with the remarkable appearance and unwonted costumes of the students; and the domestic buildings presenting all the peculiar characteristics of oriental life, and habits. The sleeping apartments, the dining hall, and the cooking room are in purely Indian taste, but all accurately clean; and, stepping out of these the contrast was striking between them and the accustomed features of the lecture-room with its astronomical clock, its orrery and transit instrument; the laboratory with its chemical materials, retorts and electromagnetic apparatus; and the Museum with its arranged collection of minerals and corallines to illustrate the geology of Ceylon. But the theatre was the centre of attraction, with its benches of white robed students, and lines of turbaned heads, with upturned eager countenances, “God’s image carved in ebony”. The examination which took place in our presence was on History, Natural Philosophy, Optics, Astronomy and Algebra. The knowledge exhibited by the pupils was astonishing; and it is no exaggerated encomium to say that, in the course of instructions, and in the success of the system for communicating it, the Collegiate Institution of Batticotta is entitled to rank with many an European University.

The number which the building can accommodate, Tennent continued, is limited for the present to one hundred, who reside within its walls, and take their food in one common hall, sitting to eat after the customs of the natives. For some years the students were boarded and clothed at the expense of the Mission, but such is now the eagerness for instructions that there are a multitude of competitors for every casual vacancy, and the cost of their maintenance for the whole period of pupillage is willingly paid in advance in order to secure the privilege of admission.

Tennent finally summed up: Nearly six hundred students have been under instruction from time to time since the commencement of the American Seminary at Batticotta, and of these upwards of four hundred have completed the established course of education. More than one half have made an open profession of Christianity, and all have been familiarized with its doctrines and more or less imbibed with its spirit. The majority are now filling situations of credit and responsibility throughout the various districts of Ceylon; numbers are employed under the missionaries themselves as teachers and catechists, and as preachers and superintendents of schools: many have migrated in similar capacity to be attached to Christian Missions on the continent of India; others have lent their assistance to the Mission of the Wesleyans and Church of England in Ceylon; and amongst them who have attached themselves to secular occupations, I can bear testimony to the abilities, qualifications and integrity of the many students of Jaffna, who have accepted employment in various offices under the Government of the colony.

The Seminary showed signs of decline, although it was not too noticeable, from about 1845. This was due partly to the poor health of Principal Hoisington. But the chief factor was the policy of retrenchment adopted by the Mission. At the time of Tennent's visit to the Seminary, it was to all purposes a flourishing and promising institution, but his reference to the numbers being one hundred reflected a numerical set-back, for the numbers in the past had consistently varied from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and sixty.

The American personnel in the staff was the first to suffer from the axe of retrenchment. But the Tamil assistants, most if not all of whom were graduates of the Seminary, stepped readily into the breach. Funds, however, were slow in coming. The whole vote for education from the Mission was reduced to £1,000/- in 1852, and in 1854 the recommendation was made that the number in the upper classes should be brought down. The following year, the fatal year when the Seminary was closed, the total number on the roll was only 96.

Although it took some time for the changing attitude of the Board towards the Seminary to take effect, yet it was evident that there was a good deal of rethinking in America regarding the wisdom, value and need of continuing the policy hitherto followed in the Seminary.

The Rev. Rufus Anderson, the powerful Secretary of the American Board, had expressed grave misgivings about the way the Mission was then proceeding. As early as 1848 Dr. Anderson had written to Emerson Tennant saying, "Our late doubts have risen chiefly from the apparent failure of the Mission in raising up a trustworthy (native) ministry, and the operating upon the masses of the people...I think the proportionate expenditure of the department of Education is somewhat greater than we can afford to comprehend".

Anderson's views were contrary to the broader and more humanistic approach of men like Daniel Poor. The whole world would never be converted to God, according to Anderson, by education; instead education would, imparted in English, acquire a material value and set the natives strongly towards the world. Anderson who propounded this theory in a book published in 1845 and had consistently advocated it, finally had his way as far as Ceylon was concerned.

Anderson led a deputation consisting of himself and Dr. A. C. Thompson which arrived in Ceylon on 2 April 1855. Daniel Poor, the founder of the Seminary and its redoubtable champion was getting ready to confront Anderson. He expressed his views in a long letter which reached the deputation while it was on its way at Bombay. "It became more and more evident," Poor wrote, "that nothing short of a widespread system of elementary Christian education in the vernacular tongue, and a thorough-going system of scientific and theological instruction, both in Tamil and English, were the appropriate means to be used. Such a course is indispensably necessary for securing the desired access to all classes male and female, for the one great object of preaching the gospel to every creature. Both these systems of education we have been permitted to carry to an extent beyond all our thoughts, and with a degree of success not distinctly anticipated". This was Poor's last effort to save the Seminary. He was stricken soon afterwards with cholera from which he died a few days before the deputation reached Jaffna.

The deputation however recommended that the Seminary be remodeled to accord substantially with the plans of Anderson. This was in effect a death sentence on the Seminary, and it was suspended in September 1855. Thus came to an end, wrote Chelliah, the Batticotta Seminary at one time famous throughout India and Ceylon as a great seat of learning. It lasted 31 years and cost the American Board over 20,000 English Pounds, not taking into account the money collected in India and Ceylon.

In an assessment of the impact of American education in Ceylon, chiefly of the Batticotta Seminary and the equally eminent Girls' College at Uduvil, in a doctoral dissertation submitted under the supervision of Dr. Mabel E. Rugen to the University of Michigan in 1968, Dr. C. H. Piyaratna, a Ceylonese scholar wrote: the findings support the conclusion that the educational system

established by the Mission in Jaffna, a relatively unproductive dry zone region, did contribute to its relative overdevelopment and so to the development of the country in general.....(and) the 'excellence' of the American Mission Schools supplied the example and challenge for the government to increase and improve the scanty educational facilities in other areas of Ceylon and also establish a College in Colombo. Thus, it is stated, the Mission indirectly contributed to the increase and development of educational facilities as a whole. Dr. Piyaratna concluded: "Clearly the impact of the American Mission Educational System extended beyond the Jaffna peninsula, but its contribution to the development of the peninsula is singular". This we believe is a true verdict.

Anderson led a deputation consisting of himself and Dr. A. C. Thompson which arrived in Ceylon on 2 April 1855. Daniel Poor, the founder of the Seminary and its redoubtable champion was getting ready to confront Anderson. He expressed his views in a long letter which reached the deputation while it was on its way to Bombay. "It became more and more evident," Poor wrote, "that nothing short of a widespread system of elementary Christian education in the vernacular tongue, and a thorough-going system of scientific and theological instruction, both in Tamil and English, were the appropriate means to be used. Such a course is indispensably necessary for securing the desired access to all classes male and female, for the one great object of preaching the Gospel to every creature. Both these systems of education we have been permitted to carry to an extent beyond all our thoughts, and with a degree of success not distinctly anticipated." This was Poor's last effort to save the Seminary. He was stricken soon afterwards with cholera from which he died a few days before the deputation reached Jaffna.

The deputation however recommended that the Seminary be remodelled to accord substantially with the plans of Anderson. This was in effect a death sentence on the Seminary, and it was suspended in September 1855. This came to an end, wrote Cheliah, the Batticaloa Seminary at one time famous throughout India and Ceylon as a great seat of learning. It lasted 31 years and cost the American Board over 20,000 English Pounds, not taking into account the money collected in India and Ceylon.

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