

A VISIT TO A CEYLON COFFEE ESTATE.



It was in the month of April that we found ourselves in the picturesque little town of Kandy, which is prettily situated amongst the numerous hills of the Central Province of Ceylon. On some of the slopes we noticed coffee estates, and determined to take an early opportunity of visiting one, to ascertain the mode of cultivation carried out in

the island. One of the chief beauties of Kandy is its artificial lake, which was formed by some of the old Kandyan kings by means of forced labour. It is a good-sized sheet of water, and apparently floating on its surface is a small island containing a ruin and some groups of feathery bamboos.

The most interesting spot in the town, however, is the "Maligawa," or "Temple of the Sacred Tooth," deeply revered by all pious Buddhists, as it is said to contain one of the teeth of the great founder of their religion. We paid a visit to this building, which is surrounded with a moat and shaded by dense palm-groves.

Some Buddhist priests with close-shaven heads, and clothed in yellow robes, met us at the entrance and courteously offered to show us the sacred shrine. The interior of the building was so dark that we were provided with lights before venturing further. The sacred tooth itself is not exposed to the vulgar gaze, but we saw the shrine in which it is preserved. This is plated with pure gold and encrusted with valuable jewels. Dim lamps burned around, and near by were deposited in great abundance floral offerings, the air being quite heavy with their perfume. Once a year the tooth is borne around the town in a procession of elephants, a number of which are kept at the various temples.

In another part of the building we saw crystal effigies of Buddha, and on almost every wall birds, animals, and reptiles were depicted in tawdry colours. Outside a kind of low tower, is a rude balcony, from which the Kandyan monarchs were wont to harangue their subjects, or witness the public executions when the criminals were trampled to death by elephants.

Early one morning we started for our visit to a coffee estate a few miles from Kandy, and as it was situated on the slopes of Hantane Peak—whose summit rises 4,000 feet above sea-level—we determined first to scale the mountain, as we had heard that the view was magnificent. After a toilsome climb we reached the top, and were well repaid for our trouble, for a panoramic scene lay before us which it would be hard to describe. Far away in the dim haze of a

tropical morning could be traced the faint line of ocean's horizon, and in every direction hill rose above hill, and valley succeeded valley, till the mind became bewildered.

Far below rolled the broad Mahavillaganga river, encircling Kandy like a silvery serpent, but here and there lost to view amongst thick forests and towering cocoa-nut plantations. Eastward was a fine range of mountains, over the summits of which the sun was now gloriously rising and pouring his beams into the still shadowy and slumbering valleys.

After scrambling down over almost inaccessible cliff-like rocks, we found ourselves on a large coffee estate which proved to be the one we were in search of; and we soon found our way to the bungalow of the manager, where we were received with the hospitality proverbial amongst coffee planters.

After a bath and breakfast we sallied out with our host to see the estate. We found that the coffee-trees were all planted in rows, each about six feet apart and stretching right away up the hill-side. The tree rather resembles the laurel in foliage, but is not allowed to attain any height, being topped down when four feet high. The coffee-tree takes three years after planting before it will yield fruit, and requires shelter from the wind and a good soil to make it bear well. We were informed that the young plants are put out in holes eighteen inches deep and wide, which are previously filled in with good jungle mould, the greater portion of the soil of Ceylon being naturally poor. The jungle is, in the first place, felled by Singhalese contractors—this race being famed for their skill with the axe—towards the end of the year, and is generally finished and ready for burning by March. The great forest "burns" are one of the most curious sights in Ceylon. Imagine torches being applied to a hundred acres or so of felled and lopped trees which have become as dry as tinder from exposure to a burning sun. The tremendous blaze which instantly ensues, and the dense clouds of smoke forming and hanging over the scene like a pall, are something astonishing and can be seen for miles around. The following morning nothing is to be seen but cinders and charred logs, the sole remnants of former forest giants, destroyed by the ruthless hands of the enterprising planter to make room for the coffee or tea plant. The operation of planting is usually finished by the month of August if the season is favourable, but diseased and sickly plants have to be constantly supplied by fresh ones till no vacancies are to be seen. In the second year the planter gets a very small crop called the maiden-crop, and in the third year the estate is said to be in full bearing, when the pulping-house and other necessary buildings have to be erected. The berry, when ripe, resembles the ordinary cherry in shape and colour, and appears in crimson clusters on the trees, delighting the eye of the anxious proprietor. In every berry are two beans, which are pulped out by machinery, the beans disappearing into the fermenting

cistern, and the husk into the pulp-pit, where it accumulates for manuring purposes. The beans are suffered to ferment for thirty-six hours, and are then drawn into the washing cistern, where they are thoroughly cleansed with spring-water, whence they are carried to the "barbacue," an open space paved with cement or asphalt, where they are spread on matting, fully exposed to the rays of the sun, to dry. When the drying operation has been repeated three or four times, the "parchment," as it is called, is sewn up in stout bags and despatched by bullock-carts to the nearest railway station, whence it is sent on as quickly as possible to Colombo, where it is again thoroughly dried and the parchment skin removed by a "peeler;" it is then put through a winnow, which takes off a delicate skin still remaining, called the "silver-skin," and it is then called "clean coffee," which, after being separated into various sizes, is at length fit to be shipped to the home market, and is usually packed in casks for the voyage.

Having followed our friend to the large estate store, which was a substantial building of brick with a corrugated iron roof, we found ourselves in the "pulp-ing-house," the floor of which was laid down with asphalt. The pulper itself was a machine consisting simply of a cylinder covered with copper, standing on an iron frame and which was turned by the action of a large water-wheel close by. The cylinder in turning presses against an iron bar called the "chop," which removes the skin of the cherry; the bean falls over into a sieve below, and the skin is dragged behind by the cylinder and escapes by a spout to the pulp-pit; the bean passing through the sieve is carried by a spouting of water to the cistern, where the water escapes by a drain, the entrance to which is covered with perforated zinc to prevent the beans falling through. There are many other varieties of pulpers in use in Ceylon, some large enough to be driven by a steam-engine.

Adjoining the pulping-house we were shown the large stores, double-storeyed and capable of holding many thousands of bushels of coffee: at the time of our visit they were empty, the crop season having been over some time. We were next taken to the cattle establishment, which was on a rather extensive scale. We were much struck by the fine appearance of the large Indian bullocks, which are used in carts for transporting the coffee, and are remarkably strong and docile. There were also a large number of cows, imported from the neighbouring coast of India; they are of a dun colour and rather handsome, but the yield of milk is not so large as that from an English cow, and is inferior in quality. Closely adjoining the cattle-shed we found a large piggery. The pigs are usually of native breeds, though some planters have imported the Berkshire and other kinds from England. In the jungles adjoining the estate—our friend informed us—were many wild pigs, and at night they did much damage amongst the coffee, coming up even to his kitchen garden, close to the bungalow, and digging up cassava-root and other delicacies of which they are fond.

The labour force on a Ceylon coffee estate consists of Tamil coolies, who are imported in large numbers from the neighbouring coast of India, chiefly from about the region of Tinnevely, Trichinopoly, and Madura. These coolies gladly come so far from their homes, as they are better treated and receive higher pay in Ceylon than they would in their own country. The planter entrusts his "kankani," or headman, one of known influence and popularity in his own village, with a sum of money styled a "coast advance," backed with which the "kankani" is nearly sure to bring over a good force of coolies.

The women do almost as much work as the men on the estates, indeed seem to be preferred by many for "picking," and the children—who are remarkably precocious—are enlisted at an early age for weeding and other duties. All struck us as being very unprepossessing and anything but cleanly in their appearance, though we were told that the men delighted in a cold shower-bath under one of the numerous waterfalls after their day's work was finished. The Tamil language sounded to our unaccustomed ears most inharmonious, especially as it is always spoken in a remarkably high key, as if the person addressed was far distant when really standing close by. The domestic arrangements prevalent amongst the Tamils are peculiar, it usually being the custom of the men to take on their intended wives for at least a year on trial, and if they turn out bad-tempered, or bad workwomen, they are discarded and a fresh spouse chosen. Polygamy is allowed, but the "kankanis" alone generally avail themselves of it, an ordinary coolie being barely able to sustain one wife and a family.

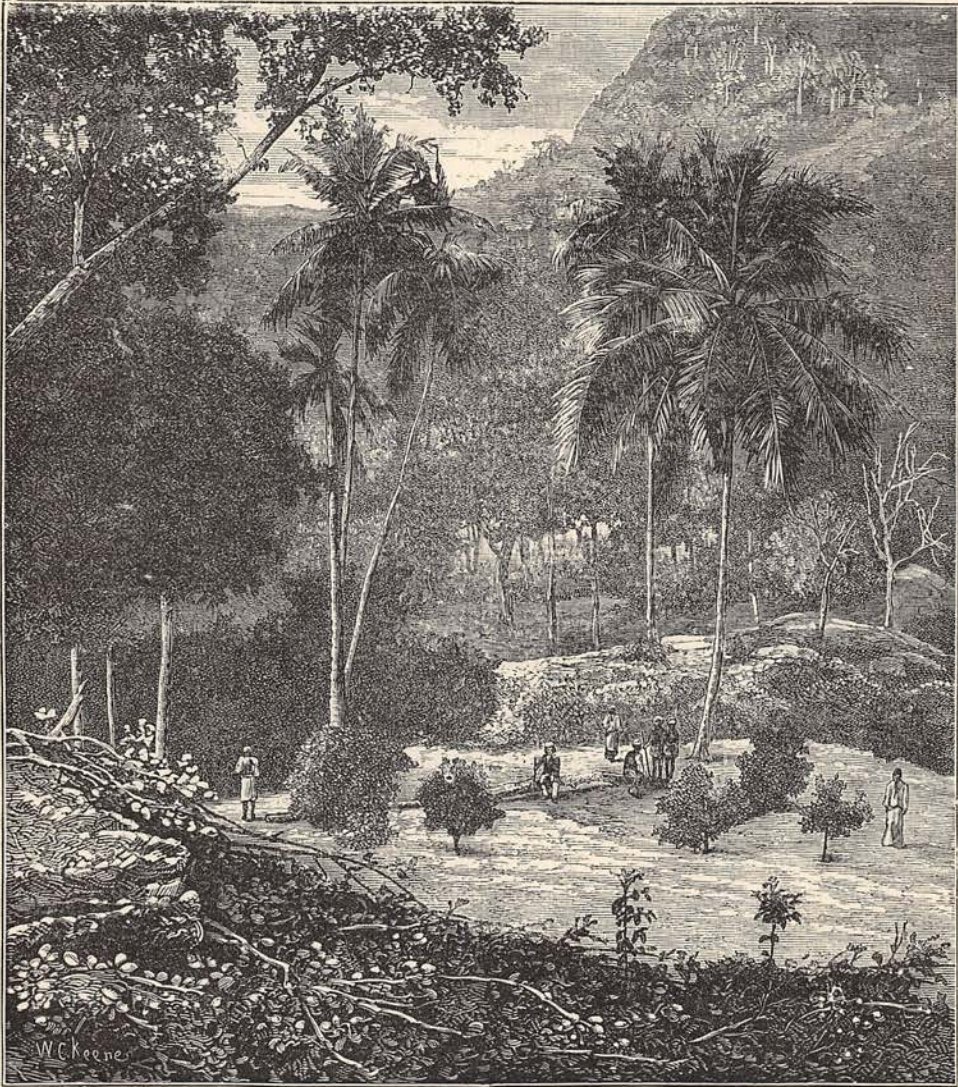
With the exception of a few converts—who, by-the-by, are principally Roman Catholics—the Tamils are Hindoos by religion, and are often devil-worshippers. On almost every estate is to be seen a wretched mud structure with a thatched roof, called the "kovil," or temple, in which is to be found a hideous idoi, and sometimes a mere stone is placed in the ground as an object of worship. Great good, however, is being effected by the missionaries, who have established a great many estate schools in all parts of the coffee districts, on the theory that ignorance is a great enemy to conversion, which doubtless it is. The coolies are housed in long low buildings called "lines," in which there are no windows, the inhabitants preferring to shut out all the fresh air and light possible, and to live in a dark atmosphere of smoke, which makes its exit through the roof. This mode of life in such a climate is inexplicable, and must be most unhealthy, but fortunately they imbibe a considerable amount of fresh air at their work during the day.

The Tamils exist chiefly on curry and rice, varied occasionally with a detestable kind of dried fish imported from India, a scanty diet enough!

We were told that the cultivation of coffee had considerably increased in the last few years, owing to the high prices ruling in the London market, there being little less than a million hundredweight exported direct from Ceylon every year; and the coffee estates are

more than a thousand in number, and yearly increasing. Tea and cinchona are also receiving attention from planters, the soil and climate being suitable for the growth of both these valuable trees, the seeds of which are being imported in large quantities, the

Delighted with all we had seen of a coffee estate, and with the valuable information imparted to us regarding Ceylon, we returned about sunset to our friend's bungalow, where we had been pressed to stay the night. After a refreshing bath and a capital



VIEW ON A COFFEE ESTATE, WITH PLANTS IN FOREGROUND. (From a Photograph.)

former principally from Assam, and the latter from Java, India, and South America. The tea at present grown in Ceylon is entirely consumed locally, and has yet to make its name known to the tea-loving English public. I am bound to say we thought the flavour excellent. Several varieties of cinchona are being experimented upon, all of which in various proportions yield the valuable medicinal bark so highly prized by chemists.

dinner, we found ourselves stretched out in long cane chairs in the spacious verandah, listening to the curious concert of cicadas and tree-frogs, whilst from the distant coolies' "lines" came floating the discordant sounds of the native tom-toms mingled with the shrill notes of a kind of bamboo flute.

The air on these mountain-slopes is quite chilly at night, and we were glad to have the luxury of two blankets. At Newera-Eliya, the sanatorium of Ceylon,

the diversity of temperature is very remarkable; in the early morning there is often a slight frost on the ground, whilst in the middle of the day the temperature is like that of an English summer day.

Early the next morning—after a slight repast of buttered toast and coffee—we bade adieu to our kind host and set off on our return to Kandy. The air was cold and invigorating, and with regret we found ourselves gradually descending lower and lower into a warmer atmosphere: in fact from an elevation of at least 3,000 feet to one of 1,600 feet, which is the height Kandy stands above the sea. To the people of Colombo this sounds a good deal, and as there

is a railway connecting the ancient with the modern capital, they often avail themselves of the opportunity to pay Kandy a visit, the natural beauties of which are quite sufficient attraction.

ARTHUR KNIGHT.

[Since the above was written the lovely island of Ceylon has been passing through a period of great commercial depression, occasioned by the failure of the coffee crops for two or three successive years, owing to the spread of the coffee-leaf disease, and the untoward seasons. The planters, however, all seem hopeful that brighter days are not far off; they trust that the disease will wear itself out, and that more promising seasons will smile upon them. Meanwhile they are pushing on the cultivation of other products unaffected by the dreadful fungus which assails the coffee-plant, such as cocoa, tea, Liberian coffee, and especially cinchona.]

BLOCKED IN A TUNNEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A RACE FOR LIFE," ETC.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

A MEETING—AN ALARM.



YOU here, Miss Lowderson?"

The young lady thus addressed looked up in quick surprise. Before her stood a gentleman-like young man, apparently about twenty-three years of age.

"It would have been more extraordinary if you had not met me," she replied, smiling at his eager manner. "I live here."

"In Wittleseigh?" he exclaimed. "How very odd!"

"Not at all odd," she retorted.

"Considering I am the rector's daughter, it is not such a *very* curious thing that I should live here, is it?"

"Dear me! I beg your pardon. Of course not," he replied. "But you see, Miss Lowderson, I have always associated you with Bircham."

"Are you staying here?" she asked, anxious to pass on, for the young sailor was standing directly in the narrow path which traversed the little wood.

"No," he said; "I'm about to rejoin my ship, the *Niobe*, at Fairmouth. I only came over to see an old friend; you will think me strange when I tell you she is my old nurse."

"I think it is very kind of you," replied Miss Lowderson. "Don't let me detain you, Mr. Simpson. Good-bye." She held out her hand. "I trust you will have a good voyage; and, perhaps—Good-bye."

"Must you go?" he said. "It seems ages since we met."

"I am going to Bircham this afternoon; my father and sisters are going abroad on Monday. Good-bye."

He shook hands with her again, and looked meaningly into her dark eyes, and replied—

"Not good-bye, Miss Lowderson, I hope."

"*Au revoir* then," she answered quickly. Then, bowing pleasantly, she hurried on her way, leaving him gazing after her retreating figure.

Annie was the youngest of the three daughters of the Rev. James Lowderson, Rector of Wittleseigh. The young ladies were much liked by all around them, and helped their father in the parish. Annie was shy and retiring, and could scarcely be persuaded to go anywhere in "society." Change was, however, necessary for her, and so she was obliged to pay periodical visits to her uncle and aunt, while the rector, with his eldest daughters and son, took a holiday on the Continent, which Annie objected to strongly, on account of the Channel passage.

They were just then about to start on one of those early summer trips, while Annie had arranged to go down to Bircham for the time. She had met Mr. Simpson there the previous summer, and had liked him very much; while he, a (not rich) sub-lieutenant in the navy, had fallen very deeply in love with retiring Annie Lowderson. Since then they had not met; and she kept her own counsel, for she did not wish to encounter the quizzing she would surely have received from her sisters. But there was little time for anything but packing and a hasty meal. Annie reached the station in good time, her neat luggage already addressed upon a leathern strap by herself, and additionally protected by the company's label.

Annie kissed her sisters, who had come to see her off, and assured them that she was quite safe, but agreed to telegraph her arrival at Bircham.

Her sisters returned home, and speculated upon the time that they would in all probability receive a telegram from Annie. So tea got itself over somehow, and supper-time was rapidly drawing near. The rector was writing in his study, when the page-boy entered with a telegram, and put it down as he was bidden. The rector was so deep in his article for a