

"IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE."

A TESTIMONY FROM CEYLON.

What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle,
Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile:
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strewn,
The heathen, in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.



TRUE yet sad picture of one of the most beautiful of countries and the richest crown Colony of the British Empire. A pendant from India as regards its geographical position—Ceylon is entirely independent of India as regards government, being under the control of the Colonial office, in London, and a governor in the Island as the representative of the Queen.

The Island is about one-sixth less than the size of Ireland. Nearly every existing language may be heard in Colombo, but the population of Ceylon consists mainly of Sinhalese and Tamils, the former being the rightful inhabitants of the country, whilst the latter are emigrants from India and form two distinct classes, viz., the chetties or merchant and money-lending class, and the laboring class employed on the tea estates.

Mission work has been carried on in Ceylon for nearly four hundred years, which may be divided into three epochs. First, that under the Portugese (Roman Catholic) rule when Baptism with long, high-sounding names, was freely bestowed on all who could be pressed to submit to the rite; second, under the Dutch Government, when a profession to a Puritan Protestantism was the *sine qua non* to all seeking Government appointments, and when the Roman Catholic profession of faith went by the board; thirdly that epoch which began with the British rule, who professed their impartiality to the question of religion and granted freedom of opinion to all, with the consequence that the so-called "Christians" of former days, for the greater part, threw off their religion of constraint and became practically agnostics, with a miserable idea of what Christianity, in its true sense, meant.

The true religion of the Sinhalese, as popularly practised in the present day, is devil-worship. This was the original creed before the Buddhist missionaries came over from India in 200 B. C., and though to-day, a native will offer a flower at the shrine in the temple of Buddha (the priests complain bitterly at the harm the missionaries are doing to their trade, "our people used to offer money and rice, but now they only offer flowers," say they) yet in times of sickness, birth or other important family events,

it is the devil-priest and his tom-tom beaters who are called in to aid.

Under the somewhat mixed and difficult circumstances as above stated, the missionary of to-day labors in endeavoring to convert the Sinhalese to a lively faith, in a living Saviour, with deliverance from the power of a living enemy, and to the hope of a life eternal in the presence of the living God.

Among the principal agencies for the evangelization of the heathen in Ceylon is the Church (of England) Missionary Society, having its headquarters at Salisbury Square, London, England. This society maintains sixteen ordained, three lay, and twenty-eight lady missionaries (including twelve wives), seventeen native clergy, besides native catechists, schoolmasters and mistresses, for the work amongst both the Sinhalese and Tamils.

To describe missionary work is never very easy, especially when one has but a limited space in which to do so, and therefore it will perhaps most interest our readers to relate a true case, illustrative of the result of missionary effort, proving that the gospel is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

N. was a Sinhalese catechist working under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon. Before his conversion to the Christian faith he had been a Buddhist priest, but was brought to the knowledge of the Truth as it is in Christ, the Light and Saviour of the world, through hearing the Gospel preached, outside the Court house of a village tribunal, by a Christian who had himself once worn the yellow robe of the Buddhist priesthood. Recognizing in the preacher one who had once been one of his own cloth, he invited him to his house, and offered him hospitality. Our friend had already given up his profession as a monk, and had embraced the joys and responsibilities of family life. Henceforth an intimacy sprang up between the two former devotees of Buddha, which gave opportunity for much earnest conversation on the highest subjects, and resulted in the loan of a Sinhalese New Testament. Thus as so often happens, the living voice was followed by the living Word. N. read, meditated and conversed as an enquirer for four or five years. At the end of that time he came boldly forward as a candidate for baptism, and after careful examination he was admitted as a member of the church of Christ.

The foundation of divine knowledge having been thus well and truly laid, it is not surprising that the superstructure was correspondingly substantial. It was naturally to be expected that the conversion of such a man would make a great impression on his Buddhist neighbors, and from the first he had a marked influence