

"SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY GO FORWARD."—Ezekiel xiv., 16.

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CONTENTS.

RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE—	PAGE	DEATH OF REV. MR. ROY	PAGE
Devil Worship in Ceylon.....	177	U. P. Church History.....	186
Death of Queen of Madagascar.....	178	Defence of Creeds.....	188
Australia.....	179	Krummhaeber's Parables.....	189
Jewish Bondage in Rome.....	179	MISCELLANEOUS—	
The Land of Ham.....	179	Poetry—Structure on the Sand	
Caiffland.....	180	—The Spirit's Lure.....	190
Janina.....	181	Movement of the Bible.....	190
Synod of the U. P. Ch., Scotland.....	182	Never did a Long Thing.....	191
EDITORIAL NOTICES—		Influence of Calvinism.....	191
Professor—Preachers.....	185		

Religious Intelligence.

DEVIL WORSHIP IN CEYLON.

(To the Young People of the U. P. Church in Glasgow, supporting a Printer in Ceylon.)

KANDY, February 11th, 1852.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS—The following are the next three books to be printed at your expenses—

First,—"An Account of Angels. According to the Singalese, there are 333 millions of gods, demi-gods, and devils. They suppose every mountain and rock, every jungle and cave, to be tenanted by mischievous spirits, to whom they sacrifice and offer sacrifices. Every large tree is the abode of a demon, whose wrath would be incurred by any attempt to injure it. A few years ago, many of the primeval forests, which clad to the summits the mountains of Ceylon, were cut down by European planters to form coffee estates. The natives affirmed that the unhappy spirits, thus dislodged from their favourite retreats, roamed wailing through the country, vowing vengeance against the white men who, it was predicted, would soon fall victims to their rage. To their surprise, however, the anticipations of the people have not been realised, and the first settler, although ever and anon engaged in his work of destruction, travels about unmolested in spite of the hatred of the demons. Although the Singalese live under continual apprehension lest these evil spirits should inflict on them some terrible calamity, they do not suppose that they tempt them to commit sin; instead of resisting them, depending upon God's help, they strive to propitiate them by costly ceremonies. These are performed by a class of men called devil-priests. They deceive the ignorant people in various ways. The Singalese believe that the death of an enemy may be caused in the following manner. A small image is made, pierced with nails, to represent the individual whose destruction is sought; certain charms are repeated, after which it is buried, and should the object of their hatred chance to step over it, he is attacked by a lingering disease, and pines away till life is extinct. Occasionally, when a devil-priest is called to attend a sick man, he tells him that some one, from malicious motives, has had this ceremony performed, but he offers a large sum to find out the charm, and cause the impending evil to return upon the head of its contriver. This proposal is eagerly accepted, and great preparations are made. The devil-priest, having previously concealed a small image, uses many incantations, pretends to be seized, and while under the delirium, orders the people to dig at a certain place. They do so; and lo! the source of all the mischief is discovered. The devil-priest is praised to the skies, and departs loaded with presents.

At other times the devil-priest pretends by his charms to expel the demon who has caused the disease. A promise is made at first only to depart for a few months. With this the devil-priest is not satisfied, he repeats more powerful charms, and the evil spirit engages not to molest the person for some years. The priest, however, again mutters his spell, and the demon is reluctantly obliged to agree to leave the sick man for ever. The devil-priest demands a sign that he will keep his word; and the vanquished spirit promises, when going away to break the branch of a certain tree. The devil-priest bids the people to examine whether the pledge has been kept. They run in haste, and find the broken bough—the inference is unquestionable, the magician has triumphed, who can doubt his integrity

power! Of course the devil-priest himself broke the branch before the ceremony commenced.

The Singalese in their folly imagine they can deceive the demons. An effigy of the sick man whose cure is sought, is made of clay. Under the pretence that the person is dead, a great outcry is raised, and with much lamentation the image is taken to the jungle and buried. The evil spirit, thinking that his object has been accomplished, returns no more. We ask the people if they suppose the devil to be more stupid than a crow, for even that bird knows the difference between a corpse and a piece of clay!

Many of the native doctors are the chief encouragers of devil ceremonies. "To conceal their want of skill, they say to the people 'Oh, this sickness is caused by a certain demon, medicine alone cannot cure it, you must send for a devil-priest.' Should the patient die, of course the demon is to be blamed, not the medical attendant. Some of the doctors, however, it must be allowed, oppose these ceremonies. In certain cases, it is pretended that evil spirits entering women cause them to dance publicly, and distort their bodies in various ways. This was very common at one time in the south of the island. A native practitioner, however, put a stop to it. There is a small species of peepers here which is very hot. He reduced some of it to powder, and blew it upon the nostrils of some women who were then possessed as before described. It occasioned such agony that they ran and plunged themselves in water, if possible to alleviate the pain. This was noised abroad; and a friend of mine, who resided for about ten years in that part of the country, did not see a single instance of women dancing during the whole time.

The Devil-priests pretend to be able, by repeating certain charms, to cause any person to fall down, blood pulsing from his mouth and nose. When at the town on the island just noted for its devil-priests, I offered a reward to any charmer who would make me fall in this manner. Two of them came forward, but failed completely. A few months ago, we printed about 4000 copies of a challenge to all the devil-priests in the island, offering 300 dollars to any one who, on a certain fixed day, either at Colombo, Galle, Matara, or Kandy, the four principal towns, by means of charms, caused blood to flow from the mouth and nostrils of persons who denied their power. Not one devil-priest ventured the trial; and many of the people reproach them as a set of deceivers. A few of the more obstinate braves, although forced to admit that the devil-priests do not possess the power now, assert, that in ancient times, they were able to do such wonders. The question, however, is triumphantly asked, Why then did not the Ceylonese kings send clever charmers to destroy the Hindus, when, a thousand years ago, they ravaged the island? Why, in like manner, were not the Portuguese and Dutch repulsed when they attacked the maritime districts?

The tract on Angels will help to remove the superstitious fears under which the Singalese labour, it will point out that sickness is not caused by devils, but proceeds from a benevolent Father who "doth not afflict willingly the children of men;" it will urge, also, instead of making offerings to demons, to be removed, to humble themselves under the hand of God, and to use proper medicines, it will caution them against yielding to the temptations of Satan, yet encourage them by the thought that there are legions of blessed spirits who delight to number to them who shall be heirs of salvation.

The subject of the second tract will be Pride. This evil disposition is universal, but if it prevails exceedingly among the Singalese. The language contains about a dozen pronouns of the second person which are used according to the rank of the individual addressed. The same feeling regulates nearly the whole of their social condition. It extends to religious accounts of possessing what they affirm to be one of the "cannest teeth of the holy, the blessed, the all perfect Buddha, the teacher of the three worlds;" they fancy their nation the envy of the whole earth. The tract will show the hatefulness of pride in the sight of God, and the beauty of humility. The third tract, "John the Ploughman," is translated from one of the publications of the "London Tract Society." It relates how he acquired a knowledge of reading, gives an account of his marriage, and the manner in which his children conducted themselves.

My next letter will probably contain an account of some Ceylon curiosities, which I hope will go to England by one of the ships now at Colombo. Copies of the Magazine will also be sent in the box. Believe me, &c.  
—U. P. Jun. Miss. Mag. JOHN MERRILL.