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Ceylon Tea Gatherers.

(Rev. W. Welchman, M.A., in 'The Church Missionary Gleaner'.)

A missionary once suggested that whenever those who took an interest in God's work in foreign lands drank a cup of tea they



A KANDIAN CHIEF.

should utter a silent prayer for China. And the missionaries who are working on the tea estates of Ceylon would fain make a similar request. In Ceylon many thousands of coolies, superintended by hundreds of Europeans toil in the blazing sun 'clearing,' 'digging,' 'lining,' 'plucking,' and 'pruning,' while others are working in the store, 'weighing' leaf, laying it out to 'wither,' 'rolling,' placing on 'fermenting' tables, 'firing,' and packing; and day by day a little band of God's servants are doing all they can to tell these workers of the love of God, and to teach the children of Him who took the little ones in His arms and blessed them. Will not those at 'home,' who love their cup of tea, pray that God's blessings may come down upon those to whom they owe so great a luxury.

It is difficult to find people nowadays who do not know at least a little about Ceylon. Many have friends in the island, and many have read Miss Gordon Cumming's and other fascinating books speaking of the land and people. Yet there are some who do not know, as for example the old woman in a Midland town who, when the curate told her that he was going to Ceylon, prayed him not to do so as he would be eaten by cannibals. On being assured that there were none in the island, her fears did not abate, for she supposed that even if there were no cannibals there were tigers, and he would most certainly be devoured by these. For the sake of those who are ignorant of the country, we would wish to write much about it, and it is difficult not to do so. We gaze in this fair land on scenes of indescribable beauty. Nature has showered her charms with lavish hand, and has welded together giant peaks, rippling streams, dancing fountains, dense jungles, and pleasant plains into one sweet fairyland. And not in the landscape only. There are beauties everywhere—in the rich colorings of birds and insects, and in a thousand other objects. But not of these things must we speak, but of human souls.

Visitors to Ceylon generally take a trip 'up country.' The journey is delightful. Leaving hot and steamy Colombo, one ascends gradually in the train to a height of about 6,000 feet, and the climate becomes simply perfect. The views all along the line are magnificent, and generally call forth exclamations of astonishment and delight from those who see them for the first time. Very soon after leaving Colombo the tea estates appear, and continue more or less in evidence all the way up. Sometimes the eye is wearied by the monotony of the straight lines of tea, but where the growth is more

luxuriant, the field looks like a soft carpet of delicate green. Pretty bungalows are often seen, and stores, and factories, and other sights which tell of the activity of the tea industry, and of the important part it plays in the commerce of Ceylon. There are now about 1,500 tea and coffee estates in the island, employing a labor force of about 400,000 Tamil coolies. There are besides in each estate a small number of educated Tamils who have the more responsible and difficult work to do.

Ceylon is not the home of the coolie. He comes from India, and is generally more or less of a rover, and in this and other ways gives his doré (master) a good deal of trouble. His great idea is to save a few rupees and go back to his 'coast.' Of him much might be said, both bad and good. He is on the whole a very good worker, but is not noted for truthfulness or morality of any kind, and is as a rule utterly indifferent about religious matters. Though nominally a Hindu, he knows very little about his religion, and seems principally to fear demons, whom he tries in sundry ways to propitiate. On each estate there are long rows of buildings called 'lines,' in which the coolies live, often huddled up together in a way that might make Charles Kingsley turn in his grave; but great credit is due to the planters, who are doing all they can to make the dwellings of the people better and more conducive to morality. But 'Ramasami' does not like a nice house. Give him a close, stuffy, tumbling-down hut; utterly unventilated and full of smoke, and he is supremely happy.

At daybreak the coolies are summoned by the 'tom-toms' to work, and it is interesting to watch them coming from all parts of the estate to the 'muster-ground.' Some will be clothed in old, cast-off frock coats, some in scarlet military uniform, while some will have simply a cloth tied round them, or a blanket to keep them warm. After 'muster'

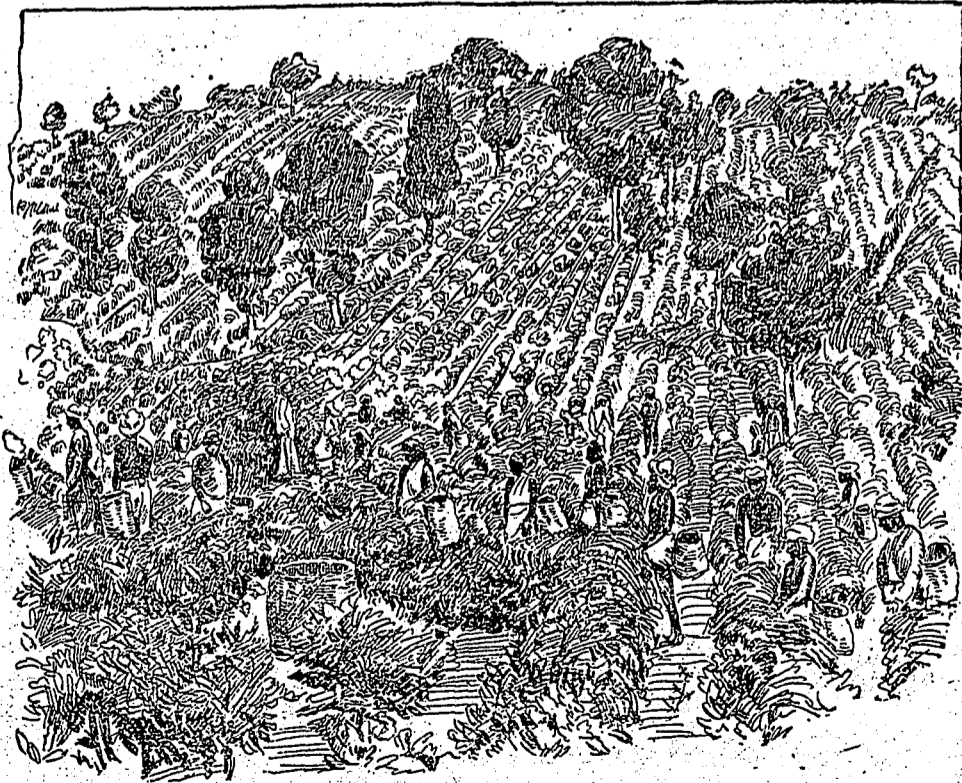
they are all sent off to their various duties, and at four or five in the evening they return and give an account of the day's work, and have their names entered in the 'check roll.' Their work is then finished for the day, and they return to the 'lines.' The women prepare the rice and curry, and the men squat,



COOLY WOMAN PLUCKING TEA.

sit, or lie about, talking, smoking, or gambling, the inevitable 'tom-tom' being the noisy accompaniment of all. They generally retire early, but on moonlight nights they often sit up and dance, and seem thoroughly to enjoy themselves.

It is among these people that the Tamil Cooly Mission works. About forty years ago the Church Missionary Society was invited by a number of planters to commence the work, and since then it has been carried on uninterruptedly. The society is responsible for the stipend and expenses of the European missionaries, but the planters themselves provide most of the funds for the native catechists. At present there are three European superintendents. Each has



AT WORK IN A TEA PLANTATION.