

# Canadian Presbyterian Magazine

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"SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY GO FORWARD."—*Exodus* xiv, 15.

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## Religious Intelligence.

### LETTER FROM CEYLON.

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

KANDY, CEYLON, August 13th, 1852.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,

I have much pleasure in sending you an account of the next three little books to be printed at your expense. The subject of the first is "Creation." The people of Ceylon do not believe in the existence of God, the maker of all things. They say that there are innumerable systems of worlds which are successively destroyed and reproduced. At the end of a period of time, called a Calpe, seven suns arise, the system catches fire, and is utterly consumed. As when oil is burnt in a pot, not even ashes are left, so it is with the worlds. Afterwards, in some extraordinary manner, they again come into existence. When the Singhalese are asked to explain how men came into being, the answer generally given is, that they are born in consequence of the merit or demerit of actions performed by them in previous births. It is objected that persons must have first existed before they did anything good or bad, as trees must be in existence before they can bear fruit; that it as well might be said that a hen was hatched from one of its own eggs, as avert that a man derived his origin from the virtue of his own deeds. This often puzzles them, and they are prepared to listen with more attention to the account of creation given in the Word of God.

The second publication will contain translations of two little tracts, published by the London Religious Tract Society. One of them entitled "Daily Mercies," shows the numberless blessings we are every day receiving from God, and the debt of gratitude we owe Him. The other, "Now! Now!" points out the importance of attending to religion immediately and the awful consequences of procrastination. The third little work is a translation of a tract called "The Broken Cup." It is designed to show the sin of lying, a vice fearfully common among the Singhalese. Truly do they deserve the character given of the Cretons, "always liars." Even in courts of justice, perjury is the rule, truth the exception.

VEDDAHs.—I shall now give you a description of the Veddahs or wild men of the jungle, the descendants of the original inhabitants of Ceylon. According to the native annals, Wijeya, the son of an Indian king, landed on the island with 700 followers, about 543 B.C. He gradually made himself master of the country, but some of the aborigines fled into the depths of the forests of Bintenne, and there preserved the purity of their race, and their ancient superstitions. The district they inhabit lies to the eastward of Kandy. It is wild and hilly, with immense forests scattered through it. Being occasionally subject to severe droughts, and very unhealthy, it contains only a scanty population, and is seldom visited by people of other parts of the island. It abounds, however, with deer, wild elephants, bears, and cheetahs.

The Veddahs are of a dark brown colour. They are small in stature. They have long black shaggy hair, tied up in a knot behind. Their only covering is a very small piece of cloth round the loins. Those who cannot obtain cloth, use the bark of trees. This, when gathered is cut into pieces of the proper size, the inner coat is then separated from the outer, and steeped in water for a few hours, after this, it is beaten between two stones until it becomes very soft, smooth, and pliable. It is next dried, and is then ready for use. If they wish a larger covering, they sew pieces of the bark together with fibres obtained from the descending shoots of the banyan tree. They generally carry about with them bows and arrows, their principle weapons for the chase.

The village Veddahs have rude huts constructed of branches of trees, sometimes with walls and sides, but often without, and open to the weather all around. They are usually placed against large trees for support. The walls and roof are formed by interweaving in the simplest manner, the smaller branches, and pieces of bark. This class of Veddahs cultivate small patches of land, and carry on a little traffic with the other natives.

The forest Veddahs wander from place to place, and in dry weather often sleep under the trees; during the rainy season they sleep in caves or overhanging rocks. The flesh of the deer or elk is their principal article of food; this is usually eaten boiled or roasted, with yams or such other edible roots as are found in the forest. They are skillful hunters, and approach the game so stealthily, that they seldom startle it; hence the Singhalese believe that no wild animal will fly from a forest Veddah. When the quantity of deer killed is more than they can consume, the surplus is cut into pieces, placed on a wooden frame over a fire and dried; it is then soaked in honey, carefully packed in bark, and hung up on a tree, as a supply against future necessities. They eat also wild hogs, monkeys, lizards, and various other animals. They never cultivate the ground, or attempt to raise rice, yams, sweet potatoes, or other vegetables, although they are sometimes put to severe straits by an occasional scarcity of food. The last resource in this case, is to strip off the bark of the wild mango tree, which is then pounded and eaten with a little water.

The Veddahs hunt wild elephants for the sake of their tusks. They creep up close to the animal and shoot to the heart. Should the elephant charge them, they evade it by their agility and presence of mind. If it escapes after being severely wounded, they follow it until it falls from exhaustion, or by fresh attacks, when, in addition to the ivory, they recover their arrows.

I never went myself to the Veddah country, but I had an opportunity, in Kandy, of conversing with some of them. A Veddah was tried for murder before the supreme court, and three male Veddahs and one female came to give evidence. They were exceedingly ignorant. They could not count beyond five, and even in doing so, they used their fingers. To express a great number they hold up the fingers of both hands repeatedly. When the Veddahs are told to do anything in six or seven days' time, as many knots must be made on something, one of which they loose each day, and when the last is untied, they do the thing. Those with whom I spoke, did not know who gave them being. When asked who Buddha was, the founder of the religion most prevalent in the island, the eldest answered, "I never saw him." A Buddhist priest was standing near with his long flowing yellow robes, the Veddah did not know exactly what he was, but he said he did not like him because he wore such a long useless dress. Sickness, in many cases, is ascribed by the Veddahs to the influence of demons. They therefore perform devil dances to cure the disease. Upon these occasions, they procure cocoa-nuts, rice, fruit, &c., which they offer as sacrifice to the devils. When any of their number dies, they bury him and leave the place. They have no idea of any state of existence beyond the grave; they believe that they perish like the brutes.

I may mention that the Veddah was found guilty, but the sentence of death was commuted to that of imprisonment with hard labour. He was sent to a prison, admirably conducted, near Colombo, and part of the preceding account of his tribe was obtained from him. He is now learning to read, though very slowly, since he took three months to master nine letters. In arithmetic he has succeeded somewhat better, as he is now able to count as far as eighteen. When telling the age of his children, he places his hands at such a distance from the ground as the head of the