TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

A Racy Letter to Be Published Weekly by the Whig.

BY SIGEL ROUSH.

Port Said owes its existence to the Suez canal and, like most seaport towns and coaling stations, offers little outside of its shipping interests to attract the traveling public. Here we went aboard our ship for Colombo, and were soon steaming for the entrance of the canal. Our boat, the Morea, of the P. and O. line, was a beautiful new twin-screw vessel just from the builder's shops. She was most luxuriously fitted up and provided with every comfort and convenience for the passengers. Electric fans in the state rooms, well ventilated lounging divans, a large commodious dining saloon, spacious decks and accommodating officers, all tended to promote the enjoyment of a voyage through tropical waters.

The trip through the world-renowned canal was an interesting experience. This famous waterway, opened to traffic in 1869, is ninety-nine miles long and one hundred and twenty-one feet wide and admits of the passage of vessels possessing a maximum draft of twenty-eight feet. The management of the Suez canal is vested in thirty-two commissioners, ten of whom are British subjects. It is exempt from blockade and all ships whether in time of peace or war, armed or unarmed, are permitted to pass through it. The toll rate is seven and three-quarter francs per ton, which yielded in 1907, a revenue to the company of 4,640,000 pounds sterling. All ships while making the passage must proceed at reduced speed and when another vessel is met one of them must tie up.

The Morea made a speed here of about six miles an hour, which brought us on the following day into the Red Sea. I have often wondered why this body of water was called the "Red Sea," but after four days of sweltering heat here I have concluded that originally it was termed the Red Hot Sea," but as time went on second word became so hot that it had to be dropped. Instances are quoted when the heat aboard the vessels in the Red Sea became so dangerous when sailing with the breeze that it was necessary to turn completely around and steer directly away from their destination in order to obtain a head wind. The abundance of fans and favoring winds made life aboard the Morea, however, fairly pleasant, although it was undeniably warm.

Before losing sight of land we note on the left the bleak, barren peak which is pointed out as Mount Sinai. Further along is the port of Mecca, to which all good Mohammedands strive to make at least one pilgrimage before ending their days on earth.

On the morning of the fourth day from Port Said, we reached Aden, one of the hottest and most desert-like places in the whole world. Here we lay baking in the merciless rays of a torrid sun for the ten hours the ship consumed in coaling, a process accomplished by about a hundred practically naked natives, who transferred the coal in the sacks from the lighters to the ships bunkers. It was a former custom for passengers during this stop to amuse themselves by watching the native boys dive after pennies pitched into the sea, but a few years ago one of the divers was gobbled up by a hungry shark right before the eyes of the audience, since when the ship has forbidden the practice.

Strange Starry Firmament.

After leaving Aden the weather freshens and life aboard the Morea becomes one long summer day's outing. By day the hours were wiled away with games and gossip, while the eventide gradually unveiled to the denizens of the north a strange and brilliant starry firmament. Nightly I have watched the constellations familiar to our northern clime slowly sink behind the edge of the sea. The great dipper sank slowly to the horizon, first one star and then another disappearing below the water till after a few nights the constellation was completely lost to view. But with the loss of our northern constellations came others wonderfully bright and beautiful. There was the Southern Cross, for example, that group of brilliant stars extravagantly extolled by some and at the same time belittled by others. Personally, I thought it beautiful. Though not a perfect cross still it requires but little imagination to trace the outline of the object from which it derives its name. The natives of Australia hailed the appearance of their favorite constellation with undisguised joy, for to them, some of whom had been away for a long time it meant the beginning of the end of their homeward voyage.

To me, however, it is not any one particular star or constellation that renders the southern heavens so wonderful, but rather their exceeding brilliancy. One seems to be literally enveloped by this scintiallating vault, with its impressive sense of vastness and mystery.

We spent Christmas day aboard the Morea, and to the dweller of the northern lands the weather seemed wholly out of keeping with the holiday. The spectacle of going about on Christmas morning with fan in hand and attired in the lightest of summer costumes, wishing one's ship-mates a "Merry Christmas," and commenting on the heat of the day, tended to deprive the occasion of its genuineness. One was inclined to suspect the perpetration of a huge joke somewhere. However, where a few English are gathered together there will also be found the unalterable English habits of life. So, as hot as it was, after Christmas services in the saloon, we sat down to a heavy Christmas dinner, with plum pudding and mince pie included in the menu.

The following morning at six o'clock we reached Colombo harbor and after taking leave of our ten days' companions bound for Australian ports we went ashore. Here we were confronted by a new and marvelous world. While walking from the landing jetty we realized that we were, indeed, in a tropical land and that our wearing apparel must be regulated accordingly. So, entering one of the curious shops located under a sheltering arcade, we provided ourselves with linen suits and with helmets. These helmets are peculiar to the tropics and are here universally worn. They are made of pith or cork about half an inch thick, and covered with white duck on top and lined underneath with green-colored material. The sweat-band is connected by braces to the main part of the hat, leaving an air space about half an inch in width between. This allows ample ventilation to the head. In the top of the helmet there is also an opening or air space which with the long brim furnishes at once a most complete tropical head dress which serves both as hat and umbrella. It is light, airy and is altogether an admirable, and, for the European at least, an indispensable article of hot country apparel.

The "Rickshaw" Men.

Thus equipped we proceeded to make our acquaintance with the rickshaw, the vehicle of local transportation. These "man cabs" literally over-run Colombo. They are a two-wheeled conveyance with a leather top like the top of a buggy. They are made to seat one passenger, and are drawn by native coolies. So we climb into the rickshaw and the coolie steps between the shafts, which are joined in front by a cross bar, grasps the sides, tilts the carriage to a horizontal position and starts off. As a rule the coolies are stark naked, with the exception of a loin cloth and a turban, and as they swing along inclined forward at an angle of about forty-five degrees the sun's rays falling on their satiny coal black skins causes them to shine like polished ebony. The sensation produced on the passenger as he rides along for the first time of these over-grown baby carriages is unique. He has no reins to guide his black steed and immediately becomes conscious of the presence of his hands. Then he realizes the necessity of guiding his coolie by means of motions, for but few of them understand English. All the while he is being bowled along at a considerable pace, for they make as good time as the average cab horse, and as they dart around and between bullock carts and other street vehicles, he isn't quite free from a feeling of impending danger. However, he soon gains confidence, for his steed is both horse and driver; picks his way along a crowded street with human intelligence. Only once after the first few moments did I feel for a second a sense of insecurity and that was on our approach to a railroad crossing where a train was bearing down at full speed. For the time I forgot that my steed was endowed with reason. My coolie stopped long enough to allow the train to pass, when on he sped to our bungalow two miles from the city.

The ride was through most marvellous tropical scenery. Cocoanut groves, bread fruit trees, mangoes, pawpaws, jaks and half a hundred other kinds of unfamiliar vegetation lined the red road that led through the shady nooks and along the silvery lakes of this earthly paradise. Then the natives' homes, curious carts, snake charmers, fruit vendors all make a most bewildering picture.

The appearance of the natives themselves was the most striking evidence that we were in an unusual land, for both men and women were dressed very much the same as were Adam and Eve before the fall. And the children, without an exception, bore unmistakable evidence of never having even heard of the apple eating incident. These wingless ebony cupids thronged every doorway and gazed at us in mild surprise as we wheeled along. Some of them wore a bangle or a string of beads, but here their wardrobes ended. There is a persistent tradition that the Garden of Eden was located in Ceylon and the native dress—or rather absence of it—would tend to give some color to the supposition. However, there are degrees of nudity here, for civilization and clothes advance along similar lines. One sees among the natives in Ceylon all the different stages from the "altogether" to the "entirely." Some have had a college training "at home" as the English always say when referring to England and come back arrayed in tweeds and a silk hat. Between the highly educated native and the simple dweller of the jungle one witnesses a most marvellous variety in style and quantity of wearing apparel. These nondescript costumes are most interesting. I saw a big black Tamil parading the streets of the native town arrayed in a loin cloth and a "plug" hat, an outfit which, judging from his proud bearing and haughty swagger, he considered the acme of swelldom. In adopting the European costumes the native begins, as a rule, with the head, the feet being the last to submit to the uncomfortable dress of his white rulers. Nothing less than an English college degree will compel the native to bow to the European dress in its entirety and imprison his feet in hard, hot, unyielding shoes. It's a pity, too, that he considers this style of dress a necessary adjunct to education, for to witness his awkardness and discomfiture when rigged out in the costume of civilization is extremely painful.

The dress of the middle classes consists of a loose cotton skirt, falling to the ankles and tucked around the waist. A picturesque turban completes the garb of the men, while the women in addition to the skirt wear a sort of cotton lowcut undergarment that falls about four inches short of the upper edge of the nether garment. Others wear a sort of sheet draped around them covering on a calm day, most of their bodies. There are, however, so many castes and degrees of civilization that, as before mentioned, every sort of dress from no dress to an absurd overdress may be seen at all times in and about Colombo.

Arrival At The Bungalow.

With all these strange sights at every turn breaking upon the astonished view we finally pulled up under the shady porteache of our bungalow, and after paying the runners an absurdly low price for transportation were shown by the Singhalese steward to our room. The ordinary tourist to Ceylon will stop at one of the big European hotels in Colombo and will be content with this far-from native phrase of life, missing altogether the novelty of putting up at one of these characteristic country dwellings. Our bungalow—as the native houses are called—was rather larger than the average establishment, being originally built by a rich native, but at present owned by an English lady. Everything about it was built with a view to air and ventilation. It was located in a spacious garden where every variety of tropical tree and plant grew in luxurious profusion.

Almost within reach of my room door were cocoanut palms laden with great yellow bunches of fruit, mangoes in profusion, pawpaws, with their curious oval fruit clustering around the trunk of the tree just below the crowning tufts of leaves, bread fruit trees bearing the emerald loaves among their great dark green leaves, jak fruit as large as one's head most curiously clinging to a stem that springs from the trunk instead of the new branches, and a dozen other varieties utterly unknown to me, but all used in some way or another as articles of diet. For hours I have sat at my study door studying this strange orchard. On several occasions I observed one of the native servants climb up a cocoanut palm with the ease of a squirrel and perform a curious operation on one of the flower stems. On enquiry I found he was following the custom of "tapping for toddy." This toddy is a sap given forth by this tree after cutting the stem and then daily bruising it with a light hammer, after which it exhudes for a time a juice which is gathered by hanging an earthen jar beneath. This the natives use as a beverage. If allowed to ferment it becomes very intoxicating.

European life in Ceylon from the very nature of things must necessarily partake of some distinctly local features. The climate in the lowlands is extremely enervating, the mean annual temperature for these districts being about eighty-one degrees. Lying near the equator there is no great variation in the so-called seasons, winter being only a few degrees cooler than summer. One soon feels the loss of energy here, and as a result exercise becomes extremely unattractive. The bulk of the business in Colombo is carried on during the morning and evening hours a long siesta in the cool retreat of a shady bungalow being usually taken during the heated portion of the day.

The first meal in the morning, consisting of tea, bread and butter, fruit and marmalade is served in one's room upon arising. Then about eleven o'clock comes breakfast, usually partaken of in four or five courses, and including eggs, meat, coffee or tea, fruit and some sort of curry or other hot stuffs, the latter so universally eaten in Ceylon. At one o'clock tiffin, a light lunch, is ready. Then about three or four in the afternoon tea is served, a meal similar to the first one. At about eight o'clock comes dinner, the principal repast of the day. On this occasion the diners usually appear in evening dress, which in the case of gentlemen at least presents some modifications called forth by the exigencies of the climate. The usual male attire for dinner consists of the ordinary black dress trousers, a soft white shirt, a black silk belt and a short duck coat reaching only to the waist and terminating behind, in a pointed scallop. The lapels fold back like the usual black dinner coat, the suit complete providing not only a cool dress, but rather natty and attractive as well. The dinner is the social event of the day, and the dining-room with flowers, potted palms everywhere, and a bare-footed servant in loose flowing robes, for every diner, resembles some banquet scene rather than the usual every day occasion. After this meal smoking and dancing furnish the usual amusement till bed time.

Life in Ceylon is most luxurious, and the presence of hordes of servants about every household reminds one of a southern plantation "before the war." Caste here, as in India, is responsible for the great number of servants necessary for a native would be forever "without cast" if he permitted himself to touch work not in his social sphere. But we shall be able in some subsequent letter to enter more fully into this much vexed question of the far east.

The Inhabitants Of Ceylon.

Of the three and a half million inhabitants of Ceylon about two and a half are Singhalese, a people who settled in this island several centuries before Christ. They are the superior race, and the great buried cities of Ceylon were constructed by their ancestors away back before the Christian era. The high caste Singhalese are often well educated and occupy positions of trust, both under the British government and in social and business spheres as well. In religion they are Buddists. The men wear combs on their hair in a peculiar manner. This comb, which is usually a very fine tortoise shell, is shaped like a horseshoe terminating at each end in an extension of the upper edge to a fine point. The comb is worn like a crown or halo, the open space between the points facing toward the front. The hair which is usually allowed to grow full length is done up in a tight knot at the back of the head. As a rule this one comb completes the Singhalese head dress. The shirt, with sometimes a covering, for the upper part of the body, makes up the remainder of the dress of the predominant race of Ceylon. Next in number ranks the Tamils or Indian contingent of the population. These are the coolies and laborers of the island. They dress scantily, wear rings on their toes, and the women are particularly fond of nose and ear ornaments. I have seen rings in the ears of the women so heavy as to draw the lobe nearly down to the shoulder, forming an opening in the auricular organ large enough to insert a small hand. The nose ornaments are secured by piercing the nostril and inserting the stem of the jewel through the hole, fastening it on the under side by means of a nut. On both sides of the nose are often seen these rosette-shaped jewels of gold with settings of pearl, ruby, amethyst or topaz. Their foreheads, wrists and ankles are also often elaborately bejewelled. These Tamils are of the Hindu faith.

Singhalese and Tamils compose the main population, though there is a sprinkling of Malays and Moors, both of which profess the religion of Muhammed.

Ceylon has been ruled by Europeans for over four hundred years. First the Portuguese obtained control of the island, who were dispossessed by the Dutch, and they in turn gave way to the English. The Dutch and Portugese intermarried with the natives, giving rise to a class of inhabitants called "Burghers." The higher caste Burghers fill the learned professions, are members of the civil and clerical services, while the lower classes are artisans and mechanics.

The Aborigines or wild people of the jungle are called "Veddas," of whom it is estimated about three thousand still remain. They subsist on the chase and wild honey, are very shy, and avoid the haunts of the whites. They preserve meat in honey, and bring skins and fruits to the edge of the jungle to be exchanged for articles produced by the civilized races. This bartering is carried on in a curious manner. The vedda deposits the preserved meat, skins or fruit in an open space of the jungle, together with a model in clay of the article desired in exchange and retires into the dense forest. Then his civilized neighbor appears and taking the vedda's produce leaves in exchange the article designated by the clay models. Very early on the following morning the jungle dweller returns and the transaction is completed.

Wild Animals At Ceylon.

Ceylon includes among its wild animals elephants, leopards, deer and a variety of smaller game. Butterflies and moths are most beautiful and number over fifteen hundred varieties. The cobra, viper and scorpion are some of the deadly dwellers of the land where "every prospect pleases."

No visitor to Ceylon should fail to make an excursion into the interior. There are the buried cities, the inscriptions on the remains of which show that they were built many centuries before Christ. It is estimated that the ancient city at Anuradhapura contained a population equal to that of London. The trip to Kandy is perhaps the most accessible excursion into the heart of Ceylon from Colombo.

Leaving on an early train the tourist for an hour travels through the rice or paddy fields of the lowlands. Then the scenery changes to mountains and chasms. The train laboriously crawls around ledges where one may look down hundreds of feet into a beautiful village below. The scenery varies at every turn. Alpine in grandeur, it combines the rather novel feature of being covered even to the high peaks with luxuriant tropical vegetation. Bananas grow high up the slopes, palms of great variety thrive everywhere, and so the picture never fails to please till we reach the ancient capital of Kandy, over which even at the present day a native chief presides. Here is located "The Temple of the Tooth."

This relic of Buddha is preserved in a native temple, and is exhibited to the public once in every ten years. Next to the Temple the Peradeniya Garden will be found the most interesting. Here every variety of vegetation known to the tropics grows in great profusion. The garden is about one hundred and fifty acres in extent, and contains over fifteen hundred varieties of tropical trees, plants and flowers. Every spice and flavor, known to modern confectionery and culinary art can be seen growing in the Peradeniya Gardens. A great variety of drug-producing trees and plants may also here be studied.

To The Land Of The Hindu.

In the vicinity of Kandy are many large tea estates, a visit to one or more of which is extremely instructive. If space permitted a description of the culture and preparation of this universal beverage would make interesting reading, but there is so much that is strange and interesting in the Island of Ceylon that simply to choose the subjects even proves extremely difficult. One could spend months here most delightfully, for both vegetation and climate in good variety may be obtained. But time, tide and steamers wait for no one, and we must take our leave of the "Eden of the Eastern Wave," and proceed to the land of the Hindu. SIGEL ROUSH.

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PHOTO BY JOEL FELDER.

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