

**THE SINHALESE PEOPLE AND THEIR ART.**

TO many it will appear that in this work Dr. Coomaraswamy has attempted too much; certainly the three purposes for which he tells us the book has been written have so little in common that a book which even in measure shall satisfy all three cannot be otherwise than loosely knit and somewhat amorphous. This volume, we are told, is written "first of all for the Sinhalesé people as a memorial of a period which at present they are not willing to understand. . . . Secondly it is meant for those in East and West who are interested in the reorganisation of life, and especially of the arts and crafts under modern conditions. Thirdly, an endeavour has been made to render it as far as possible of value to the anthropologist, and to students of sociology and folklore." It seems very doubtful whether the Sinhalese people, with the possible exception of a few of the "educated" of whom Dr. Coomaraswamy speaks with scant sympathy, will appreciate the effort made for their benefit, and though there is much of interest

The arts and crafts of Ceylon, as they exist at the present day, represent the result of the action of western influence on the mediæval conditions which prevailed until the British occupation of Kandy, less than a century ago. It is with the remains of this late-lasting mediæval culture that Dr. Coomaraswamy mainly deals, and we are thus given an account of the work of the craftsmen of a feudal period in which there was no great attainment in fine art, brought about by the genius of a few men, but in which there was a widely spread popular art largely based upon early Indian traditions, for "Sinhalese art is essentially Indian, but possesses this special interest, that it is in many ways of an earlier character, and more truly Hindu—though Buddhist in intention—than any Indian art surviving on the mainland so late as the beginning of the nineteenth century. The minor arts and the painting are such as we might expect to have associated with the culture of Asoka's time, and the builders of Barahat. . . . It was the art of a poor people, the annual income of whose kings did not in



FIG. 1.—Verandah Ceiling Painting, Dalada Maligawa, Kandy, 19th Century. Now destroyed. From "Mediæval Sinhalese Art."

to the folklorist and anthropologist in this sumptuous volume, it is as a work of art done for art's sake that the work is most interesting and valuable, and certainly few will be found to imitate Dr. Coomaraswamy's example at a time when publishers tell us *éditions de luxe* do not sell.

Not only the contents of the book preach the gospel of art, but, as it has been printed by hand on handmade paper, it is itself an excellent example of the point of view which, since this is a pioneer work, the author has been free to express with the least possible constraint. It is, indeed, in the fact that so much new ground is broken that the high merit of this volume lies, for it is certainly the first time that a detailed account of the arts and crafts of a small area in the East has been given, and it is well to remember that the culture here described was really limited to some two million people, inhabiting, roughly, two-thirds of an island, itself about the size of Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> "Mediæval Sinhalese Art." By Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Pp. xvi+340; 53 plates. (Broad Campden, Glos.; Essex House Press, Norman Chapel, 1908.) Price 37. 3s. net.

the eighteenth century amount to 2000*l.* in money, besides revenue in kind."

The first chapter of Dr. Coomaraswamy's book is devoted to the Sinhalese people and their history. The next chapters discuss the social organisation of Sinhalese society, and while the difficult question of caste is but lightly touched upon, considerable space is devoted to the personal services rendered to the king and his high chiefs. This account shows how true was Knox's narrative, and it is pointed out that Sinhalese villages were self-contained to such a degree as to be dependent upon the outside world for little but salt. The religion of the people is rapidly sketched, and certainly too little stress is laid on the large element of demonism—"devil-worship"—in the actual working religion of the Sinhalese. A most interesting account is given of the *nētru mangalaya*, or "eye ceremony," by which the image in a temple is dedicated. This consists essentially in the painting of the eyes of the image, when the figure, before this, "not accounted a god but a lump of ordinary metal" (Knox), becomes so full of power that in some cases

anyone interfering with it is smitten with sickness. In this ceremony a mirror was held to receive the first glance (*belma*) of the image while the eyes were being painted.

An account of the teaching of drawing as practised at the present day serves as an introduction to a consideration of the *motifs* employed in Sinhalese decorative art. Although there is an immense amount of new material in this section, it may be doubted whether it would not have been rendered more valuable to all, as it certainly would have been to the



FIG. 2.—Guardian Deity from a Temple Door Jamb, Ivory. Height of plaque, 10½ inches. Colombo Museum Collection. From "Mediaeval Sinhalese Art."

anthropologist, if greater attention had been paid to the history of the evolution of the individual elements of decoration; for instance, the *makara*, which bulks so largely in Sinhalese art, and which occurs on the Barahat Stupa, circa 200 B.C., is dismissed in rather less than half a page of print, while the *hamsa* fares even worse. These and many other conventional elements were most skilfully combined, and the beauty of the results attained is seen in plate xvi. (here reproduced in Fig. 1), of a nineteenth-century ceiling painting from the Dalada Maligawa, Kandy, representing a forest scene.

There are chapters on architecture, woodwork, stonework, figure sculpture, and painting, the reduced colour plates of some of the wall paintings in Degaldoruwa Vihara, Kandy, being extraordinarily faithful reproductions of the originals, the spirit of which they have preserved to a surprising degree.

An interesting conjecture is made in chapter x., which suggests that ivory was comparatively little used in Indian art on account of the Hindu reluctance to use the products of dead animals; Buddhists had no scruples of this sort, and so ivory was always valued and used in Ceylon even in temples, with the result that ivory carvings are perhaps the most beautiful

and pleasing fruit of the Sinhalese art impulse, rivalled only by some of the superb inlay metal work still existing on the temple doors. Fig. 2 represents an ivory carving in the Colombo Museum of a guardian deity from the jamb of a temple door.

In the last two chapters Dr. Coomaraswamy shows that, in the present stage of our knowledge, it is only possible to indicate the main sources which have influenced Sinhalese art. The most widely exerted influence in Indian art is that due to the Asokan Buddhist missions, the culture which these dispersed being early Indian; thus Sinhalese art is largely the result of the evolution of an early Indian art, in part sheltered by the geographical position of Ceylon from that Hinduism which overwhelmed it upon the mainland. But in post-Asokan and mediæval times this art was continually exposed to Indian influence; "indeed, until the close of the period of mediæval conditions, the relations between Southern India and Ceylon were similar to those obtaining in the Middle Ages between France and England." This leads to the suggestion that the famous rock paintings at Sigiri, the like of which are found only at Ajanta, are due to a school, representatives of which were to be found both in India and Ceylon. The fine bronzes recently found by Mr. H. C. P. Bell at Polonnaruwa and now in the Colombo Museum, though of a later date, point in the same direction, for the whole feeling of these is Hindu. To sum up, Dr. Coomaraswamy sees in Sinhalese art "an early stratum of indispensable barbaric decorative motives, . . . then a main stream of North Indian Buddhist influence; and thereafter the influence of continued reliance upon and intercourse with India, especially Southern India, accounting at every period for the strong admixture of purely Hindu with Buddhist *motifs*." With this conclusion few will quarrel, though Dr. Coomaraswamy says all too little concerning the earliest stratum. It remains only to direct attention to the number and excellence of the photographs by Mrs. Coomaraswamy, and to indicate that it is owing to her energy that the remains of the moribund art of Sinhalese embroidery have been brought together to form chapter xv.

C. G. S.

#### A DISCUSSION OF AUSTRALIAN METEOROLOGY.<sup>1</sup>

THE meteorology of the southern hemisphere presents a specially attractive field of study. The large area of water surface conduces to much simpler conditions than are to be found to the north of the Equator, and here, if anywhere, the meteorologist may hope to discover the fundamental principles underlying the general movements of the atmosphere. On the other hand, he has to face the relative paucity of data. The meteorological organisations of the three great land areas are still young, and our knowledge of what is happening over the sea is woefully small as compared with the completeness with which we are able to track down changes occurring over the great trade routes of the North Atlantic. The present discussion forms a recapitulation and a completion of work published from time to time from the Solar Physics Observatory, of which abstracts have appeared in previous numbers of NATURE (lxx., p. 177; lxxiv., p. 352). At the outset we congratulate Dr. Lockyer on his success in bringing together a vast amount of information and on the skill with which he has marshalled the facts deduced therefrom.

<sup>1</sup> Solar Physics Committee. A Discussion of Australian Meteorology, by Dr. W. J. S. Lockyer, under the direction of Sir Norman Lockyer, K.C.B., F.R.S. Pp. vii + 117; 10 plates. (London: Wyman and Sons, Ltd., 1909.)