A GREAT deal has been written concerning the scenic beauty, the rubber plantations, the tea estates, and the wonderful commercial value of the little island of Ceylon; and all these things are undoubtedly of much interest. The traveller, however, during his usual short stay in the island, either fresh from Europe on his way to the Farther East, or replete with the beauties of Japan on his return journey homewards, is generally satisfied with what he can see by means of the train, or during a short motor journey to Trincomalee or Kandy. But to the student of history there are many things other than Nature’s charms which may with advantage be explored, and incidentally he will also see the ordinary items of interest which usually suffice the more casual traveller.

In these modern days of motor cars the outlying districts are open to all. The roads are excellent, and the rest houses (the dâk bungalows of India) are provided with everything necessary for the comfort of even a European tourist. It is true that if the common barn-door fowl should become extinct the rest-house menus would diminish to almost vanishing point. The fowl in the East holds that exalted position which bacon-and-eggs commands in England. To exterminate either would mean national disaster. As the fowl, however, still remains indigenous to Ceylon all things are in readiness, at any time, for him who may care to loiter at the wayside caravanserai.

A motor tour such as has recently fallen to my lot, visiting as I did, firstly, the most ancient structures that Ceylon can produce, and later on, those relics of the comparatively modern history of the Portuguese and Dutch occupation, affords joys for the antiquary that any country might envy.

My geographical guide, a subaltern friend in a British regiment in Ceylon, offered to convey me in his motor car. He warned me of his own small knowledge of cars and his want of a qualified chauffeur. His Tamil boy, who had learned what he could during the previous few weeks, was reputed to be useful enough to take with us. It may as well be recorded, first as last, that this boy was worth the rest of us put together. In fact, considering the scarcity of his real knowledge of machinery, he must at times have been little short of inspired.
We started from Colombo along the western coast line. The driving is difficult there on account of numerous native bullock carts and two-wheeled ekkas, which refuse to make way until the last moment. Beyond smashing the shaft of one ekka, however, we came to no harm before luncheon. Passing Negombo, a couple of miles on our left, we rushed through miles of cocoanut palms and rice fields to Chilaw. Shortly after leaving the latter village one begins to catch glimpses of the great Puttalam lagoon, and 81 miles from Colombo the road runs abreast of this refreshing stretch of water and one finds oneself at Puttalam rest-house, where tiffin waits.

Forty-six miles remained to be covered before Anuradhapura could be reached. As the latter sacred ruined city was our goal, my host decided to push on early. We ran out into the jungle with light hearts, and all seemed well. But within eight miles we found that the water had boiled away! The country was as dry as a cinder. The engines were smoking and almost red hot as we pushed along through virgin forest. Beer was suggested for the radiator, but we prized our few beer bottles, and, in any case, doubted its efficacy. My resourceful friend at last assuaged the beast's thirst with cocoanut milk, but the quantity was insufficient. At last, at sunset, after we seemed to have burnt away half the cylinders, we sighted some chatties of water, placed by the charitable under the trees for the use of thirsty coolies. We did not hesitate. If money can avail a thirsty native no more need be said, for we left a coin in the empty vessel and fled once more into the fast gathering dusk.

After dark, country carts, lampless, loomed up with startling suddenness across our path. We dodged these miraculously. The moon rose above the tree tops. Still we pressed onwards, through country devoid of rest-houses and as forlorn as the heart of Africa. An animal or two crossed the road far ahead amidst the shadows. A bear or panther might at any moment be expected. Suddenly a couple of great water buffaloes gazed casually up the road in the moonlight. My steersman's accuracy was never his strong point. A buffalo failed to move at the critical moment. In another second the car ricocheted off the animal's rump, turned at right angles, and away we went, down a bank and across the sun-baked paddy fields, until a front tyre burst against a bunker.

We breathed a prayer of thankfulness for our lives, but said other things relative to buffaloes and all their kind. For the moment our beds at Anuradhapura seemed but vain imaginings.
To get the car back to the road appeared a hopeless task. The Tamil boy was here, however, at his best. With all his soul in his work, and a coolie to help him, he adjusted a Stepney wheel in the quickest time on record, and, together, we heaved and sweated at the wheels as the wretched car panted up the bank between us and the road.

The exertions of the engines then fused two sparking plugs, but the Tamil correctly diagnosed difficulties and "tickled" the carburettor with such harlequin movements from his seat, that eventually he was rewarded by landing us, unhurt, at our destination. At midnight we raised the echoes of the sacred city, snorting in the moonlight past ghostly stone pillars which at once reminded one of Stonehenge, and awakening the rest-house with our calls for drink and food.

There are several reliable books which can be studied by those anxious for an exhaustive knowledge of Anuradhapura, of which "The Ruined Cities of Ceylon," by H. W. Cave, is perhaps the best. There is, however, little to learn from books beyond scanty history. To study thoroughly one of those structures which rise above the trees like some lost dome of a St. Paul's or St. Peter's, is to see them all. It is said that even India can produce no structural Buddhist relic of such ancient date as these. Each dagaba—as the bell-shaped mass of masonry is called—is several hundred feet in height, rising from a base covering anything up to 8 acres. The largest is said to be 50 ft. higher than St. Paul's Cathedral, with a diameter of 360 ft. A dagaba is constructed of nothing but a solid mass of bricks originally covered with cement. Its base is terraced for the purpose of supporting images of Buddha, &c. The sides of the terraces are covered with stone-carved animals, mostly elephants, but above the three or four lines of terraces the great dome rises up free from decoration. There is nothing inside a dagaba. The solid mass of brick is nothing but a blind offering to Buddha. Around the base of a dagaba there are several acres of stone pavement, forming a platform to which lead stone-carved steps from the jungle below. The carving of animals upon the balustrades of these approaches is remarkably good, resembling modern carving far more than those one is accustomed to find in other countries dating from 300 B.C., as these do.

The symmetry of these buildings, the architectural culture displayed in the general scheme of structure, and the beauty of the carved pillars found in the vicinity, which have formed parts of princely pavilions, cause one to pause in wonder. From whence came the knowledge of these things?
History relates that the son of King Asoka, who ruled practically the whole of India, was sent by his father to Ceylon to convert King Tissa of Ceylon about the year 310 B.C. Tissa seems to have been an easy convert. He at once ordered his followers to embrace Buddhism, and with his own hands ploughed with a golden plough the boundaries of the sacred city, for which he cut twenty square miles from his own pleasure park. But to embrace a new faith does not impart a knowledge of craftsmanship! The Indian missionaries must have done more than teach the tenets of the new religion.

Asoka also gave Tissa a branch of the fig tree beneath the shade of which Buddha studied. This was planted, amidst much ceremony, at Anuradhapura two thousand years ago. Surrounded by temple walls, it is still growing, and is called the sacred bo-tree. I was offered some of its leaves as souvenirs by the priest in charge.

About a mile out of Anuradhapura lies an interesting rock temple. One climbs a stone stairway and finds a little temple upon a great rock about thirty feet up. Two priests in their yellow robes, carrying huge keys, did the honours. A great brass-bound door was unlocked and we entered an antechamber, where lay offerings of flowers, a gramophone, and framed photographs. Amongst the latter was an autograph of the German Crown Princess, presented to the old priest this year. Having shown his treasures and insisted upon singing an unintelligible chant, the old man opened the second door. An enormous image of Buddha, painted yellow,
loomed up in the dim light. At its feet reposed many smaller images, and a large tray, covered with silver rings, bangles, and money. The latter offerings, he explained, would eventually be melted down and fashioned into a silver Buddha.

To understand the elements of the Buddhist faith is no easy matter. The explanation seems to be that its followers themselves do not clearly know what they are asked to believe. I had been reading various books which seemed to me to be extraordinarily contradictory. By means of an interpreter, in the shape of a young English police officer, I opened out into questioning. The priests were quite ready to give their views, but not without certain deprecating shrugs and doubtful assurances. Plain answers to plain questions are in things spiritual notorious stumbling-blocks.

The ideas of the Buddhist faith which I had assimilated were as quoted in Cave's book. The transmigration of souls is clear
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enough. To become obliterated would seem to be the hope of eventual bliss. To become so good that the soul enters a Buddha would seem to be the last stage before final extinction and rest. The original Buddha, therefore, should be dead long ago. My priestly instructor nevertheless did not admit this. He said that the spirit of Buddha was still in the heavens. There seems no doubt, however, that despite contrary opinions which I have heard, there is no supreme God which they worship.

The four broad dogmas of their belief would seem to be as quoted by Cave:—

(1) Existence is sorrow.
(2) Desire for existence is the cause of sorrow.
(3) The cessation of sorrow is effected by the eradication of desire.

(4) The way of living which leads to the extinction of sorrow is the practice of right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right recollectedness, and right meditation.

I asked the old man what he expected to be in his next existence. He did not know, but thought that he might be good enough to be another man instead of an animal. "Could you be an Englishman?" I asked. "Yes," was the answer, "or even a woman." But to be a woman would, he explained, be descending in the scale. As he had no god, what did he pray for? I asked. He prayed against devils. The spirit of Buddha could help him in this.

Jaffna Fort from outside (old Dutch church in middle).
The doubtful points concerning a clear understanding of this faith would seem to be accounted for by the various phases which the religion must have passed through since its invention by the first Buddha—Gotama—who opened his campaign in and about Benares in the sixth century B.C. The history of the various sects into which the Christian religion has unfortunately been divided affords quite sufficient parallel. No doubt also the ordinary wayside Buddhist priest is not highly educated, which would account for much incorrect word-of-mouth teaching.

The ruined condition of Anuradhapura is due to the raids of the Tamils, who for many years usurped the Cingalose throne.

We spent several days at this interesting centre until our minds were steeped in relics. In the meanwhile a new tyre and new
sparking plugs had arrived by train. We also added our friend the police officer to our party. With renewed hope and our trials of the days before forgotten, the Tamil boy once more “tickled” the carburettor, my subaltern host took his seat, and we rushed forth once more to conquer or die. We had wired for tiffin to be ready at noon at a rest-house sixty miles along the road to Jaffna. Our police officer lived in the fort at Jaffna, and we were anxious to dine there that night and dream away the evening looking out upon the moonlit moat of the Dutch fort.

Man, however, can but propose. With my late host at the steering-wheel, it would be ridiculous to cultivate ideas of certainty! The car buzzed along with never a hitch. Virgin jungle and villages flew by at full speed. The steersman smiled happily. Tiffin was but ten miles off, and we counted the milestones. Suddenly four country carts appeared on the horizon. Their drivers sat beneath them, preparing their midday meal. A heap of stones intervened. In another incalculable period of time our mud guards were like depressed concertinas, and one of the back wheels fell like a house of cards with every spoke broken.
Speech was beyond us. The car was left in charge of the Tamil boy; the police officer quietly, but firmly, used his authority; a dozen frightened carters pushed the car into a ditch out of the main roadway, and, shouldering our boxes, preceded us, lunchless, worn, and sad along the dusty road. At length, after miles of walking in the heat of the noonday sun, we found the railway, and some hours later a train.

Crossing Elephant Pass in the cool of the evening we at last reached that ancient and renowned fortress of Jaffna. The moon-
light streamed across the lagoon, and touched with silver the ripples of the moat. Within the fort was to be found our dinner. I, for one, possessed a thirst which few people who have not visited the East have known. The great stone house of our host, at one time the residence of some officer of the Dutch garrison, welcomed us. The stone baths, large enough to swim in and fed from a deep cool well, awaited us. We had earned our refreshment, and we got it. I wondered upon what the Tamil boy, alone amidst the shadows of the jungle, meditated concerning motor cars and other kindred devils of the night.

The fort at Jaffna was built in 1680 after the fashion of Maurice of Nassau. Upon its site originally stood an old Portuguese fort which the Dutch besieged for a year and captured. The Portuguese defences have disappeared, but within the old Dutch church inside the fort are to be seen the memorial stones of certain Portuguese officers. These have been preserved from the old Portuguese church, which, like the fort, was replaced by the more modern Dutch structure.

The fort at present is in an excellent state of repair. Built in the form of a pentagon and surrounded by an extensive moat and outlying bastions, it encloses a space of about twelve acres. Far out in the lagoon lies a small fortification acting as a sentinel to the greater fort. The Dutch (it is reported) captured this small fort and so prevented the arrival of any reinforcements from Goa by sea. They then sat down about Jaffna and starved the Portuguese out. Within the fort there are several spacious stone houses built by the Dutch. That once occupied by the Commandant is now the dwelling used by high government officials when on tour. The police officer, the Civil Service representative, and various minor officials live within the walls also.

The Dutch church, dated 1706, is a handsome and spacious edifice. No services are held there now, but the organ loft, the Commandant’s pew, the pulpit, and certain other pews, constructed of polished wood not common to the country, are very interesting. A Portuguese bronze bell occupies a vestibule, the sole remnant of the original Portuguese church of “Our Lady of Miracles.” The memorial slabs in the pavement of the church and a few upon the walls record to some extent the history of the fort to the passing stranger. Here lie several commandants, officers in the Portuguese or Dutch army, the principal of which would appear to have been Baron de Reder. The British occupation, in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, comes into minor evidence in the shape of
records of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment. This regiment is no longer in existence.

There seem to be no legends of love and tragedy handed down, but one cannot wander about the silent ramparts and echoing corridors without wondering somewhat of the histories of those who have trodden the selfsame stones before. Trincomalee Fort has its story of a despairing maiden who sprang into the sea from the fort above the cliffs when she saw her lover sail away. Surely Jaffna must likewise have been the scene of more than one romantic history! And yet amidst the stone passages one sees no ghost of fair maiden nor hears the sighs of restless souls. The Dutch were ever a stolid race!

The native town of Jaffna, inhabited by some 45,000 Tamils and Moormen is much more akin to Southern India than Ceylon. It is laid out in parallel streets of native dwellings, each compound being neatly enclosed by fences of palmyra or cocoanut leaves. The beach, upon which the unloading of the fishing boats is a daily occurrence, is an excellent place for the zoological adventurer. The bag of one boat, seen by me the day after our arrival, consisted of three sharks, four devil fish (a variety of skate), six turtles, and a heap of smaller fry not unlike large perch. Turtle soup is cheap and plentiful at Jaffna.

There is a prison here also, where 217 native prisoners from various parts of Ceylon serve their terms. They are mostly murderers, but are fed well, and, as in all convict prisons, are not worked unduly hard.

The Dutch were apparently not left in peace at Jaffna, but were kept on the defensive by the Portuguese for some time after their occupation of the district. There are several smaller forts higher up the coast for twenty miles or so, but none of them are on the same footing as Jaffna with its original armament of 142 guns.

My subaltern friend captured a native carpenter, who may with truth describe himself in future as a motor builder. The broken wheel was excellently respoked. To return seventy miles by train and start motor life anew required a little courage. The Englishman may feel fear, but he must not show it. We started. What happened next, or what sights we saw, must remain, I fear, for the present untold. The world possesses many travellers. Some others, no doubt, will wish to speak.