

Early Travels in Ceylon

Geography

FRIAR ODORIC in *Contemporaries of Marco Polo* (Boni & Liveright):

I passed also by another island called Ceylon, which contains in compass above two thousand miles; wherein are an infinite number of serpents, and great store of lions, bears, and all kind of raving wild beasts, and especially elephants. In this country there is a huge mountain where, the inhabitants of that region report, Adam mourned for his son Abel the space of five hundred years. In the midst of this mountain there is a most beautiful plain, wherein is a little lake containing a great amount of water, which the inhabitants report to have come from the tears of Adam and Eve. However, I proved that to be false, because I saw the water flow into the lake.

This water is full of horse-leeches, and blood suckers, and of precious stones also; these precious stones the king takes not for his own use, but once or twice every year he permits certain poor people to dive under the water for the stones, and all that they can get he bestows upon them, to the end that they may pray for his soul. That they may, with less danger, dive under the water, they take lemons which they peel, anointing themselves thoroughly with the juice thereof, and so they dive naked under the water, the horse-leeches not being able to

hurt them. From this lake the water runs into the sea, and at a low ebb the inhabitants dig rubies, diamonds, pearls, and other precious stones out of the shore. Wherefore, it is thought that the king of this island has greater abundance of precious stones than any other monarch in the whole earth.

In this island there are all kinds of beasts and fowls, and the people told me that these beasts would not invade nor hurt any stranger, but only the natural inhabitants. I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese, having two heads [the rhinoceros hornbill, which has two bills] and other miraculous things, which I will not here write of.

Traveling on further toward the south I arrived at a certain island called Bodin, which in our language means unclean. In this island there live most wicked persons, who devour and eat raw flesh, committing all kinds of uncleanness and abominations. For the father eats his son, and the son his father, the husband his own wife, and the wife her husband, and this they do in the following manner. If any man's father be sick, the son straightway goes to the soothsayer, or prognosticating priest, requesting him to demand of his god whether his father shall recover of that infirmity or not. Then both of

them go to an idol of gold or of silver, making their prayers to it in manner following: "Lord, thou art our god, and thee we do adore, beseeching thee to resolve us, whether such a man must die, or recover of such an infirmity or no." Then the devil answers out of the idol. If he says he shall live, then his son returns and ministers things necessary to him, till he has attained his former health. But if he says he shall die, then the priest goes to him, and putting a cloth to his mouth, strangles him therewith. This being done, he cuts his dead body into pieces, and all his friends and kinsfolk are invited to the eating thereof, with music and all kinds of mirth. But his bones are solemnly buried.

When I found fault with this custom, demanding a reason for it, one of them gave me this answer: "This we do, lest the worms should eat his flesh, for then his soul should suffer great torments." I could by no means remove from them this belief. Many other novelties and strange things there are in this country, which no man would credit, unless he saw them with his own eyes.

However, I—before almighty God—do here make record of nothing but of that only of which I am as sure as a man may be sure.

Science News-Letter, July 21, 1928

The Science of Parenthood

Psychology

JOHN B. WATSON, in *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (Norton):

No one today knows enough to raise a child. The world would be considerably better off if we were to stop having children for twenty years (except those reared for experiment purposes) and were then to start again with enough facts to do the job with some degree of skill and accuracy. Parenthood, instead of being an instinctive art, is a science, the de-relation to his own daily life seems decidedly remote.

Will you believe the almost astounding truth that no well trained man or woman has ever watched the complete and daily development of a single child from its birth to its third year? Plants and animals we know about because we have studied them, but the human child until very recently has been a mystery. Radium has had more scientific study put upon it in

the last fifteen years than has been given to the first three years of infancy since the beginning of time. How can we get the facts on how to rear children unless we make the studies necessary to obtain them . . . Most mothers perhaps feel quite naturally that all infant and childish activities, whether "good" or "bad," are due to the unfolding of the inborn equipment of the child; and that they as parents haven't much to do with the process of growth.

But in the last few years there has come a social Renaissance, a preparation for a change in mores, a scrutiny of age-old customs that bids fair to become much more of an epoch in history than the scientific Renaissance which began with Bacon in the 16th century. This awakening is beginning to show itself in mothers who ask themselves the question, "Am I not almost wholly responsible for the way

my child grows up? Isn't it just possible that almost nothing is given in heredity and that practically the whole course of development of the child is due to the way I raise it?" When she first faces this thought, she shies away from it as being too horrible. She would rather load this burden upon heredity, upon the Divine shoulder, or upon any shoulder other than her own. Once she faces it, accepts it and begins to stagger under the load, she asks herself the question, "What shall I do? If I am responsible for what this tiny being is to become, where shall I find the light to guide my footsteps?" When such thoughts drive is it any wonder that there has been recently an almost frantic interest in what the laboratories of the behaviorist psychologists have to say about infant culture.

Science News-Letter, July 21, 1928