The Way We Grew

THE WAY WE GREW

Open wide, the windows of the mind

D. T. Devendra

"Last night (December 13, 1960), Tissa, my elder son said that he thought that the story of my life has much of human interest and that I should sit down to write it."

D. T. Devendra (1901-1972) - teacher, archaeologist, researcher, Buddhist scholar and writer - began the notes that form this book, for his grandchildren - all but one yet to be born. This, however, is no children's book, but one for young adults. It is not about his life, either, but only about his village childhood, for he does not go beyond the day he finished schooling and left home to earn a living. What he has recorded, however, makes it a commentary on the social *mores* of the period, important to a readership beyond his family, and that is the rationale behind its publication today. It is no narrative of the *minutiae* of daily life in a village, of good times that stand out in memory, and nostalgia. He does not romanticize village life, nor whitewash its realities. Caste, he deals with as a fact of life; he is not overly sensitive about his, or any other caste. For these reasons, alone, if for no other, any student of this period will appreciate his honesty, his compassion for, but refusal to glorify "the good old days". The book, therefore, may serve as a "control" to the many books written by other writers, who have narrated their own village childhoods - each in his or her own way, and each equally valid.

A note on his life after 1918 and a chapter, by his eldest son, on the life he gave his own children, have been added to place the writer in perspective, as a parent.

His life was a full one, with new interests and old, old friends and new, and adventures every day. On January 1st., 1972, he listened as usual to the 9.30 news at night, went to seep, and never woke up. The next day he passed away.

S.D

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THE WAY WE GREW

Open wide, the windows of your minds

Written by

D.T.Devendra

(1901-1972)

for his grandchildren

and posthumously published in the centenary year of his birth.

2001

Written by their Muththa for:

Jaliya Asela

Rashmi Tamara

Upul Anuruddha

Asitha Sirinaga

Mugalan

Nalaka Sumedha

Kumudu Ranmali

Mihiri Arundathie

Kapila

Samadara Priyadarshini

Geethanjali Swarnamala

Dedicated

(as he would have wished)

to his Mother, and to his Wife,

of whom he says:

“I do not know of any wife,
bar one,
who was so devoted to her man
as my mother was to my father”

CREDO

"I haven't the least desire to dishonour. I am only a recorder, of events that show the actors themselves to be warmly human, with all too human eccentricities tingeing them into life.

"I wouldn't like my grandchildren - for whom I write these notes - to think of them as anything more than that.

"Maybe my own sons and daughters will, some day, tell tales like these of me and, when they do so, as harmlessly as I have done."

D.T.D.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

"Last night (December 13, 1960), Tissa, my elder son said that he thought that the story of my life has of much human interest and that I should sit down to write it."

With these words, D.T.Devendra (my father) began the notes that form this book. It was one year after the marriage of the first of his children and six months after the first of his grandchildren was born. Beginning the day following Tissa's suggestion, he set down most of his narrative, in stages, between December 1960 and January 1961. It was one continuous piece of writing, including separation into chapters, following a consciously pre-determined pattern. His memories of the generations before his parents; of his parents and their immediate relations; and of the way they grew up as children, were what he limited himself to. The light-hearted anecdotes he had related to us over the years, he left out.

Two years later, in June 1969, he read through his MSS, adding little bits he had since remembered. It was an exercise that, he says, he "braved" rather than relished, but doing it made him add a few pages dealing again with some matters previously mentioned or dealt with. In these seeming redundancies, set down immediately after re-reading his MSS, he not merely deals with what seemed important to him. There is a difference in his emphasis, the second time round (nine years later). It may be that and these were in fact, the essence of what he had wanted his grandchildren (and us, his children) to think upon and absorb. Whatever the reason, he then put the MSS aside. We knew it was there, but he never showed it to us. And it was while we were sorting his papers after his death that we discovered it.

Some anecdotes and observations that are too personal for a general readership have been deleted. Some, though, are not as they are essential to the narrative. If any of these causes a reader some discomfort (after all, the book is about real people, and this has to be anticipated) I can only say that I am sorry, but my father never meant to offend them.

Some changes in phraseology became necessary. He was writing in a relaxed and pensive mood, as if talking to us in the kind of verbal shorthand familiar to, and used by us, mock-seriously, among ourselves. Wherever its strangeness appeared to rob the narrative of its strength, minimal changes were made. The inquiring bent of D.T.Devendra, the researcher, also creeps into the story, particularly at the beginning of the narrative, but he shakes it off when he gets into his stride.

A very special aspect of his reminiscences is his growing compassion towards family members who, he felt, had not been as fortunate as him, and also towards those of the village who thought differently from him and whose actions, therefore, seem unfeeling now, when written down. This compassion, and a feeling of sadness is particularly visible in his later accounts of his father. Perhaps this was due to the moderation that age brought on, or perhaps it was brought on by the very act of re-visiting his own narrative. Whatever the reason, there is more than a hint that he felt that he had been unfairly favoured by

Fortune. These last chapters were written nine years after the beginning. He was nearly seventy by then, and after heart-attacks and strokes. I think that, in many ways, his perspective of his childhood had undergone a change from the time he began his narrative.

Keeping to Tissa's requirement, he does not write the story of his life, but only an account of his childhood and the family he grew up in. He does not delve very deep into the origins of the family, confining himself to relating stories he had heard, and speculating, mildly, on them. A reply to a letter written to a cousin, seeking clarification of his mother's family, has been incorporated as a parenthetical note: it does not form part of the narrative but serves as a footnote only.

He does not go beyond the day his schooling finished and he left home to earn a living. The chronological period covered, therefore, is from his birth in 1901 to 1918 when, aged 17 years, he had passed the Cambridge Senior Certificate and become a teacher. His next visit to the village of his childhood was 30 years later, he says – which makes it 1948 or so – for the funeral of his uncle, grandfather's younger brother. There was not to be another.

What motivated me to publish his 'notes' was that this narrative that makes it a source document of the social *mores* of the period, important to a readership beyond his family. Though he began to write for his grandchildren – all but one yet to be born, when he began – what he did write was no children's book, but one for young adults. It is no narrative of the *minutiae* of daily life in a village, festivals, the good times that stand out in memory, fun and jokes and nostalgia. Village life is not romanticized, nor are its more earthy and less than sanitary realities "whitewashed". The institution of caste he deals with as a fact of life, making no attempt to seek higher status within it for his own caste, or to be overly sensitive about any other caste. For these reasons, alone, if for no other, any student of this period will appreciate his honesty, his compassion for, but refusal to glorify, "the good old days". The book can, therefore serve as a "control" to the many books written by other writers, who have narrated their own village childhoods - each in his or her own way, and each equally valid. Father had a great love for J.Vijayatunga's "Grass for my feet". Vijayatunga was from a village close to his own, and he could relate to, and visualize many things Vijayatunga relates so delightfully. But when the time came for him to write, father chose another way to say what mattered to him. His choice was not the path of nostalgia but of cold reality: to tell it as it he had seen it, warts and all. His family were ordinary folk with no claim to high birth or wealth. Their constant companions were poverty, hunger and want. Hard, demanding work was a constant goad, sometimes leading to the yearning for eternal sleep. His father had understood that being wedded to the village, was not the way forward. Education was the way to the future, and he guided his children's feet towards the fork in the road, nudging them onto the path that, eventually, led them away from the village.

One man straddles this narrative as no other: our grandfather. Conscious of his duty as family patriarch. Contemptuous of titles and officialdom. Poor, but generous beyond his means. Deeply influenced by the philosophy of Buddhism. Iconoclast extraordinary. Ever willing to note the good qualities of non-Sinhalese, such as Chettiars and Tamils. Quick to praise the generosity of the "*Siyan Nikaya*" monks who gave him, a nameless wayfarer, shelter without question. Aware that it was only

Education that could lift his children out of the rut of the village. His son, my father, too, absorbed many of these traits, but they were tempered by the influence of his mother and later, that of my mother.

Father was barely 60 when he wrote the greater part of this. Between then and 1969, when he added his last words, he himself had changed. All his children were married, all his grandchildren had been born. Yet, he had no thought of writing about the rest of his life or of re-casting his earlier notes. The rest of his life, he reckoned, we knew: it was his growing years he wanted us to understand, gather what we could from, and pass on to his grandchildren. That day, when he wrote the last part, he had meant it to be the end.

Shortly before, he had suffered yet another stroke and his left side was paralyzed – so much so, that he refused to go with us to greet Tissa and Indrani who were returning from England the next day, as the sight of him would have shocked the returnees. He must have written these words while we had gone to fetch them (although his handwriting gives no clue of his semi-paralytic condition). Recording the imminence of Tissa's return, he adds even more details of the fare they had as children and says, in one of his most telling phrases, "Hunger is agony". Typically, his last story is of the poverty and high-mindedness of his fellow teachers at Nalanda Vidyalaya, even which he ends, on a positive note: "Life, then, is not so frightening."

It was in 1995, when I was older than father was when he wrote these words, that I made a definite attempt to, and discovered, "Arachchi Gedera", the house in which he was born and grew up. It was a personal whim, a kind of curiosity to see the stage on which he had been an actor, for 17 years. The photographs of the house, which appear on the cover and the first chapter of this book, were taken at that time. Kalegana had been a border village - a "*Kadawatha*"- in older days, and is yet one of the "Four Gravets" of Galle, though it is semi-village and semi-suburb now. The descendants of Thepanis *Seeya* still live in the house. Once the initial wariness wore away, we were welcomed as of the family. Then, and on the one other occasion - when I took father's last surviving brother, my Uncle Edward, to see the rest of the family - the welcome was spontaneous and genuine. In passing only, and without rancour, it was mentioned that it was my father's family which had chosen to leave the village to seek its fortunes elsewhere. In their own lives, the village remained the epicenter. A valid village perspective, of course, but to me, the final proof that grandfather's decision to say "goodbye" to the village was right.

S.D.

Dehiwela

1st. April, 2001

"Last night (December 13, 1960), Tissa, my elder son said that he thought that the story of my life has of much human interest and that I should sit down to write it. With his wife, Indrani (nee Mivanapalana) and baby son Jaliya, he was on his way to Diyatalawa where the rest of my family, are on holiday with my second son, Somasiri. Tissa's party was spending the night at Kandy with my younger brother, Edward.

As I am working at the office of the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism in the University Park, Peradeniya, as Administrative Officer and Assistant Editor, I have been living with Edward, since February this year when he was transferred to Kandy from Colombo. I go home to Colombo, for the weekends. There lives my wife (Clarice Ruth, nee Felsianes) with my two daughters Yasmin and Ransiri Menike, and my schoolboy nephew familiarly answering to the name "Sonna", a son of my eldest (living) sister, Alice.

At the time I begin these notes, I am well on my way to the sixtieth year. My certificate of birth gives April the First of 1901, as the date of birth. It is challenged by the horoscope which puts the date earlier, to March 27th.,1901. The astrological combinations favour the horoscope date. As for my preference, there is none. I am quite indifferent to this esoteric stuff, no doubt as a result of my father's cynicism towards the supernatural - although, on occasions, I have seen him as a votary!

1

THE HOME

Grandparents

I shall begin with the times of my paternal grandfather, Don Hendrick Lokudevendra.

He worked as a carpenter in one of the Shipping Companies that prospered in Galle, an important harbour (the harbour, in real fact) of the island. I think it was Clarke, Spence & Co., but I am not certain of it. It was only shreds of information, which came to us from my father. At our young age, and even later as we juniors were moving out of the traditional grooves to run along those of the English educated, these things were not of any archival interest. My grandfather's house, where we ourselves lived, is at the village of Kalegana, a couple of miles from the city of Galle, on the main road (at the time) to Baddegama, where it crossed the Ginganga. It was a sizeable one, by village standards, of the Dutch colonial type (with only two rooms) characterized by turned wooden pillars, fretwork above lintelled doorways, and such features as distinguish the type.

Grandfather rose into recognition and was made a *Wadu Arachchi*, so that our house was known as *Arachchi Gedera*. We lived in a cluster of people who were related to us, at different levels of kinship. Then, people of the same caste herded together. For instance, coming from Galle town one had to pass through a village of the people of the "*jaggery* caste" (insultingly called *Hakurugoda*) to come to our village. No derogatory label was attached to our village as such – at least I know of none such. Close to us was a potters' group (*Badahela-goda*) and behind us a group of people (*Oli*) who were traditionally

the feudal servitors of those of my own caste (*Navandanna*), the goldsmiths - *Badal*, opprobiously. My grandfather's picture still hangs in my brother's house. It shows the ancient village worthy at the age of 72 years. He is wearing a coat of office with a *kasthane* and other marks of his rank. He is dark and has a large nose, pretty big nostrils, (reproduced in my father: my mother would say they were broad enough to admit a double bullock-cart!) and slightly bent forward - by age, no doubt, for we are generally firm of spine!

I heard of my grandmother but once: and that, too, from my father in his unclear old age. She is said to have suffered from hallucinations of evenings, when she would mutter to herself. When my father's memory had weakened after a stroke and a resultant mild paralysis, he would speak of his mother as having ample breasts to feed himself to his fill. No picture, then, could be conjured of her. She had died by the time we were born, but grandfather was alive and used to fondle me as a baby, crooning to me "*Taiyo-ne*".

It seems he had built me a bed as a gift. A female cousin of mine told it to me, about half a dozen years ago, that it is yet being used in a relative's house, having - according to her story, of course - been sold by my father long, long ago when we were agonizingly poor. To record this is not to whimper. My grandfather won us the highest place in our little society; my father upheld that dignity in his direst days; and we, ourselves, reached still greater heights to surpass them in the largest of our worlds - Ceylon - (and, now, even beyond its shores.)

Of my maternal grandfather I know not much more. He was plying the traditional trade of goldsmith and was known to have been a very likeable figure, named *Modera Acharige Pieris Hamy*. His village was *Kammalgoda* in Panadura (the name has, since, been changed to "Dias Place" to obscure the ignominious origins!). When he married, his bride (who, as seen in her old age, must have been very pretty and light-skinned) was in her early teens. There is a story, which she herself told me, of how she brought her dolls and other playthings of a girl when, a bride, she left her home for her bridegroom's.I remember my maternal grandmother who survived into my early twenties. Her face was long, appearing excessively so (for she was short) because it had turned slightly and was bent somewhat from the neck - the permanent stiff neck resulting from an old chill.

2

A N C E S T O R S

Anecdotes

How far back in time can I go in these notes? I cannot say, like a British aristocrat could, "My folks came over with the Conqueror". Perhaps people of our caste came from South India in the times of the Kotte Kings. I do not see how the names they bear - Dantanarayana, Devanarayana, Devasirinarayana, Wijenarayana - could have otherwise emerged.

They may have belonged to clans rather given (so the names strike me) to Vaishnava than to Saiva worship; and they may not have been quite the *para demalu* to which capacity we, the Sinhalese, consign the Tamils. The Vishnu worshipping Hindus must have been more closely akin, though living in South India, to their fellow-votaries in North India. The two cults

are quite sharply divided in India on a regional basis. After all there are, to this day, groups in South India who insist that they are Aryans, not Dravidians. Malayalees and Konganis are among them.

Whatever the correctness of these guesses, our own family name is in pure Sanskrit, in terms of etymology. It not of south Indian origin, although very common in south India. My classing ourselves with families of the group bearing the above names is purely an analogy, and in order to explain ourselves ethnologically. It isn't scientific. There was the historically best-known Devendra in the day of Sri Wickrama Rajasinha, Devendra *Mulachariya*, the architect of the Audience Hall of the Kandyan kings. But there are more Devendras in Galle and Matara. Since these parts once belonged to the Kingdom of Kandy, perhaps the famous architect was a southerner, from the Kandyan King's country?

As a Presiding Officer at the General Elections in the early 1950's, at Udugampola in the Gampaha District, I came across voters bearing the name Devendra. They could have migrated there from the southern coast, of course. I have also come across a reference to Godapola Galladda, the owner of the *wadu riyana* of the Mulachariya. (It is 31"long, while the Gadaladeniya etching is 30". *See* Ananda Coomaraswamy in *The Ceylon National Review, II, 1906, p.235*)

Our full name, as I learnt in my childhood from my father, is *Matara Kotuwegoda Don …(personal name)…Lokudevendra,* to which my grandfather added the honorific proper to his rank as *Arachchi,* namely, *KULASEKARA.* My father, being not only a puritan but also an iconoclast, dropped all this and confined himself to *Don Alwis Devendra*.

If we are "Lokudevendras"(and I know it comes from my paternal grandfather), we must be ahead of other, less loftily styled, families bearing the Devendra name. But I know of no "Punchidevendras", only of plain "Devendras".

My paternal grandfather, I have heard, had an elder brother whose name I do not know, and an elder sister *Matara Kutuwegoda Lokudevendra-ge Laiso Hamy.* His sole younger brother - we called him *Punchi Mutta* - had, to my knowledge, two sons, Arnolis and (I think) Carolis. The sole son and child of Arnolis *Loku Appochchi* is surviving. He is a Dispenser working at Cargills (Ceylon) Ltd., of Colombo, and living in Dehiwela.He goes by the name "Loku Devendra" (Don Hendrick

Loku Devendra). Fortunately, our standing, in the degree of family ranking, has been saved by the fact that he has no children! If he had, then history will record him in the senior branch of the family honour and we, ourselves and our descendents, in the lower branch – that is if, in the days to come, our common blood should be forgotten!

From the connections to Matara and Kotuwegoda, it is clear that a remote ancestor came to Galle from there. My paternal grandmother was from Koggala, between Matara and Galle. A younger brother of hers, who my father called *Bala Mama* (Younger Uncle), and we knew as *Koggala Mutta*, lived with my grandmother's family at Koggala. There is just one memory of a remoter ancestor. I got it from my father when I was a schoolboy. The story was that some great-grandfather (perhaps an even earlier one) had come to Galle to settle down. His wife, it seems, belonged to a higher circle - at least that is what one may infer from his subsequent action of giving (perhaps himself and) his children the family name of his wife: *Devendra*. How Matara Kotuwegoda can be tacked on to this, is not clear to me (perhaps it was tacked on his own family name to preserve his identity?). However, the ancestral eccentricity, dictated by ambition, has somewhat knocked us off a pedestal - unless we accept the matriarchal name as valid for family standing as descent was for Sinhalese kings in the 12th. Century.

(Which puts in mind a momentary, and diversionary train of thought. These "greats" would have lived in the time of the last king of Kandy. If so, the adopter of his wife's name may have lived in 'Binna', according to Kandyan custom. Then, of course, he would lose individuality just as his offspring would belong to the wife's clan. The giving of the wife's name could be understood that way. Devendras being from Matara, it is not he, but a descendant of his who migrated to Galle. Which would make the change of name dated to the time of my great-great-grandfather, I fancy.)

Anyway, this great-grandmother (?), the one whose name was adopted by her spouse, was a tall, upstanding female; her consort a puny fellow.

Puny though he was, he seems to have been one of fierce temper - especially in his cups. There is a tale that he had casks (jars) of toddy buried in the garden. When inebriated and angered by the bawling of his child he would seize the little chap by

the hand and march him to the end of the garden - mammoty in hand - to bury the "squalling little devil". His spouse would hasten to rescue the boy from a living grave and her husband from the gallows. The spouse, discovering a "buried treasure", would soon be diverted from his murderous inclinations! I think the incident refers actually to my great-grandfather on the paternal side. Whether it was he or his father (my great-great-grandfather) who took on the wife's name is not very clear to me.

However, being a strict teetotaler myself, as my father and his father were, I have to say that the alcoholic predilections of the "great" of child-murdering inclinations (grandfather's father) never influenced the line, except in the opposite way.

There are one or two incidents that I can tell on my mother's side. My mother's father - who I am said to resemble most - was known as a kindly and lovable man. The only hard words I have been told of having been spoken by him were on a day after our New Year when he was setting out of the house for work in the year that had been ushered in. The first person he met was a miserable ragged woman of the village, a virtual beggar notorious as the most inauspicious ("kalakanni") human being. Grandfather told her:

"Look here, woman, today I am setting out for work after a year. And you have to be the first to appear to me. If I should return unlucky, as I should according to the ill omen of meeting you, I will kill you! Remember that."

It is said that in no year had he prospered better, than in that year!

(This brings to mind another diversionary train of thought, this time about some later omens. In 1927, when I was setting forth for the first paper in the London B.A., I had forgotten to take my lunch packet with me. I had gone for a short distance, when I remembered it and asked my rickshaw man to turn about. That was a sure sign of failure to come. And I had banked so much on the examination, which was to be the crowning achievement - for salary purposes - in my then profession of teaching! More important than that, on gaining that professional position, I was banking to get married to Miss Clarice Ruth Felsianes to whom I had "plighted my troth". But - I passed the examination, inauspicious omen notwithstanding.

Again, we were living at Tiriwanaketiya, Ratnapura, when Tissa was due to take his first public examination, the Senior School Certificate from Sivali Vidyalaya of which I was the Principal. He set out for his first paper, had crossed the compound and was about to go over the "kadulla", or barbed wire fence (which separated our garden from the neighbour's, a shortcut to the village committee road) when my wife said, "Tissa, you've forgotten your hat. Come and take it." I was disturbed, in spite of my own disinclinations towards omens and the like. But before I could open my mouth to tell Tissa to go ahead without bothering himself about the hat, the boy turned about and came back to pick up his hat. The outcome of the "badawa",- ill omen - was as with his father. For Tissa passed the examination in the First Division with four coveted Distinctions, establishing a record for Sabaragamuwa Province which - so I think - is still unsurpassed.)

However the inhibitions and fears ingrained from childhood in the village occasionally stand above the clear surface of reason acquired in modern scientific learning. The proof of it will be seen occasionally in these notes. My hope is that my sons and daughters who were nurtured in clearer air will not have these "superstitions" as part of their make-up.

My mother's mother has a story of the supernatural. She was then expecting a child when, one night, grandfather returned from work and, instead of entering the house, he called for a mat and pillow to sleep on the verandah. The wife was puzzled but, of course, husbands were "Men" in those days and the wives, "Your obedient servants", and she could not express her bewilderment. Grandfather told her, on no account, to step out of the house in the night. She went to sleep but got up in the middle of the night on a call from nature. Being hazy of mind at that stage of awakening, she automatically opened the back door, went into the backyard to attend to her need. She was squatting when, in the moonlight, she saw a herd of cattle stamping down towards her. "Sho! sho!" she cried out to them. But on they came and - it happened very quickly - one bull almost charged her. It lowered its horns and pressed with them on her abdomen. She screamed and fell down. Grandfather heard her and came running to the back compound. He saw his fallen wife, I think she had then fainted, picked her up and brought her in. Naturally, he had not a few things to tell her for her disobedience.

I remember my grandmother (or was it my mother?) telling that the child was still-born soon after. This, however, was Act 2 of the drama. Act 1 had taken place when grandfather was returning home that evening. He had encountered a boar (or a herd) crossing and re-crossing him from one edge of the woodland path to the other. He did not quite understand what the action of the beast meant, and tried to drive it off. After a great deal of noise and threshing in the bushes, there was silence. As the road was now clear, he proceeded on his way home. Now, he gave thought to the unusual experience. Then he understood its significance: the boar is the *vahana*, or vehicle of the fearsome demon *Mahasona*. And that is why he did not go into his house on his return but called for a mat to sleep outside. The expectant woman was likely to receive the contagion of Evil, which, if he had gone into the house, would have affected her.

In these notes I shall not refer to the generation later than "grandfathers". Among them there are two of them I have mentioned: *Punchi Mutta* and *Koggala Mutta*. With them I shall close the notes.

When we first knew *Punchi Mutta*, a carpenter by profession, he lived between the two roads, Wakwella and Bope, beyond one garden's distance towards the latter road and just touching the upper (our side) end of Oligoda. He was a very fair-skinned, toothless old man, quite short and fleshy. His sons (Arnolis and Carolis) I have already mentioned. We did not know (not I, at least) his wife.

He was a very great *upasaka*, always behaving generously towards my father whom he helped with money in our hard times. He was also a mild 'charmer' whom I remember practising on my elder brother who had a toothache. The old gentleman was called. He used the raw stalk of a papaw leaf, one end of which he placed on the crown of the affected tooth. Through the other he blew a *mantram* in. I have no clear memory of whether the ache disappeared. It must have, for who then did not believe in the efficacy of this kind of treatment?

We had heard of Punchi Mutta's prowess in his strong, young days. He had been a wild roisterer and had the Headmaster of Kalegana School, now non-existent, as his drinking crony. In their cups they were a savage pair who often tried

to break their necks on a racing-hackery cart. By the time we had experience of the pair, they were steady men. But his elder brother, my grandfather, never seems to have forgiven *Punchi Mutta* the sins of his younger days. As I recollect, we did not go very freely go to his house. The secret of the dislike lived closer to our house in the form of a darkish lady, *Punchi Mutta's* mistress after his wife's death. Whether she was of our set I cannot say; possibly she was, but certainly of much inferior status for we were scarcer at her house than at *Punchi Mutta's.* Further, the houses of the man and the woman were two separate establishments. One reason may be that *Punchi Mutta's* younger son by his legal wife lived with him; he could not, of course, live there if his father's mistress (who was anathema to him) was also there. A daughter (Bachchina) and son (Carolis ?) were the fruits of *Punch Mutta's mesalliance.*

I remember Punchi Mutta with great love. Often I used to be father's emissary for loans. And the old man would sometimes grumble to himself, plead lack of money, but yet produce it. Whether father was able to repay these small sums (according to today's standards) I do not recall.

Koggala Mutta, father's youngest maternal uncle, was a sour sort. Father was sometimes brusque with this, his *Bala Mama.* Once he lived with us for some time, having come to assist father in making an almirah for a monk in Poyagala temple. Like King Dutugemunu who desired to enjoy the full merit of building Ruwanveli, father wanted the entire spiritual wages for himself. He therefore employed his uncle, and whether the latter had all the worldly wages in the end, I cannot say. He, however, was our venerable (non-paying) guest.

I would watch them at work. One day the imp got into me and I quietly sprinkled some wood-shavings on Koggala Mutta's head. His carpenter's pencil was stuck in his little bun of hair, and this made some of the rubbish fall over, disclosing my trick. The old man blazed. With the tool in his hand at the time, a sharp chisel, he turned round. In fear I bolted. Holding the chisel in the attitude of stabbing, he chased me into the house. Screaming I ran to mother and clasped her from behind. By the time the old relative stood facing a protective woman, his niece by marriage, he had calmed down - but mother always said that the shame of it calmed him.

Anyway he went away, hissing: “If it had been another child, I know what I would have done”. Of course I kept off him thereafter! But my elder brother, who was showing his love to minister to suffering even in those early days, would coax him to permit himself to be bathed and shaved. The shaving of a medium sized beard showed patches of skin irritations that we then learned was the reason for *Koggala Mutta’s* unceasing scratching of the beard. That was the very reason for brother’s solicitousness.

Koggala Mutta, as I remember him, was not a pleasant man to look at. Mother always called him evil-tempered and unsympathetic - an *asathpurushaya.* But probably the views of both of us were coloured.

I do not remember the ends of these two worthies who were so closely woven into the life of my paternal “grands”

Of the “grand” relatives only these do I remember. Some of their direct descendants, however, appear in these notes as I go on.

3

M Y P A R E N T S

Father was the third in a family of seven (as far as I knew) raised by grandfather. He was the eldest of three sons. In order, the seven were:

1. A daughter (name unknown)

   - married the widower Don Abraham Dewasurendra of Motagedera, Matara.

2. A daughter (name unknown)

   - married to Singho Hamy Bartholomeusz and with the home in Bope village, about one mile from our house.

3. My father, the eldest son, in the ancestral house at Kalegana.

4. Father's immediately younger brother, Thepanis

   - married from Kirinda in Matara District and mostly living there.

5. A second younger brother (seniority with those who follow, uncertain), Theodoris

   - training to be an Ayurvedic Physician.

6. A third daughter, Anohamy,

   - married to the only (elder) brother of my mother, in Panadura and, last of all (subject to the position of uncle Theodoris in the family),

7. A fourth daughter, Geeso (or Agnes)

   - married to Lokuliyana Badalge Johannes de Silva of Kittangoda, Hikkaduwa.

(Of these more later, except, of course, of my father.)

Father was a spoilt child, used to being indulged and so having his way - no doubt in our tradition of the eldest son. He had an early education at Richmond College, Galle, that is, an English education. Not much is known of how he fared, but he was tolerably familiar with the language, both reading and writing, not to speak of conversing. He does not seem to have gone as far as the higher classes. Whether he lacked the stomach for English or was designed to follow the caste occupation I do not know. The only thing we knew of his Richmond College days was that he used to wear gold buttons on his coat, to school, and he was invariably set upon on the way and the buttons torn off! This was not because of their market value of the buttons, and it was not a matter of theft. But it was for the same reasons as had governed society in ancient days: those of the higher caste (in this case Goigama) resented the up and coming lower castes!

What we do know for certain is that, at a certain time, he had his own "factory" in which men were employed in turning out articles of jewellery. He had dealings with the *Chetties* and was under a load of debt to them. The wilful son was a problem to his doting father. I heard a story of how father, as a young man, would be out for long hours in the evening - perhaps on the dashing *race thirikkaley*, or "race hackery", with a fiery young bull as untamable as the owner! When the son did not turn up at the hour of dark, and the village turned in for the night, then the father would be a very, very anxious man. He would spend his time walking between the home and the entrance at the main road, swallowing *ghee* to "cool the heart". The youngster who turned up from his frolics - they were never unseemly ones - knew nothing of the agony which the father had undergone.

Notorious for being fractious and having his own way in everything, father seems to have terrorized even his elder relatives. Which shows how much grandfather deferred to the eldest son - the most distinguished bearer (at least, as so designed) of the name. It is good to see this weightage being lessened in modern times and all children regarded as of equal regard in a family. I, however, suspect that this balance is being maintained only by an enlightened few like us.

Glimpses of my father will appear as I proceed. For now I shall only say that he married my mother when he was 32, and say something about her .My mother's name was Nonno Hamy. She was a younger daughter of Modara Acharige Peiris Hamy, of Kammalgoda, Panadura and Ratnaweera Acharige Phillippa Rabel, (Punchi Nona). I think she was ten years younger than my father. Along with the members of her family - bar the youngest, Elisa - she was fair of skin. Her mother was also fair. My mother was pretty and, in height, small. She was sweet-tempered, an unusually uncomplaining wife of a masterful husband, a hard worker, bearer of numerous children (of whom I have lost count - father himself, to mother's intense disgust, would exaggerate the number when conversing with others), and a life-long partner of peerless type to her man.

Of course even she turned sometimes, like the proverbial worm. Father, she saw as being too devoted to his own folk and she was not always forgetful of it. I remember her telling us how he would bring his sisters, the younger two particularly, *kachchis* (bolts) of cloth for the New Year, hinting that on such occasions, she herself was by-passed. I must say that father took his responsibility as the first male very consciously; he sort of felt that he was the "patriarch" and must keep the family together. Apart from that he was, by nature, a very self-less and generous man. Never did he send away any monk, beggar or any other, empty-handed, so long as I can remember. He did practice the Buddhist virtue of *dana* in his days of direst poverty. He also rid himself, as far as was permitted to him by fortune, of the attachment to self in worldly goods. I imagine, at the same time, that he also liked the idea of being a patron, to be patronizing, although not in a conscious way, of course.

I do not know of any wife, bar one, who was so devoted to her man as my mother was to my father. Occasionally, as human nature goes, there was the echo of a row between the two; and, mercifully, it is by a stray chance that we heard it. One of

these was when mother tried to earn (for her husband and children) a little income from a retail business. I remember her selling kerosene oil in the house. Somehow, there arose some displeasure over a transaction with someone, possibly with a sister-in-law. And I distinctly recall father laying hands on her, and her crying over it. It cut us to the quick. But I forgive him, because I know that all his life was one of intense attachment to her.

One New Year's day he had gone to pay his respects to the house of his elder sister at Bope. There he found his younger sister Anohamy. Some displeasure there must have arisen. I think the sisters-in-law were censorious about my mother. Anyway, father raised his hand to hit his younger sister. The brother-in-law (his elder) stepped in between and hit my father. Father, always conscious of our religion, not only checked himself, but also went down on his knees and worshipped Singho Hamy uncle. When he returned home, however, the incident was rankling in his mind. He was very tender towards my mother that day and went on repeatedly saying how much he loved her against the entire world. That's what makes me think that the talk at Bope was cattish about my mother. I have a feeling, though I am not certain, that that was the sole New Year Day on which we were not asked to pay our respects at Bope.

Mother took to the saree in later years, early 1920's. But that was because of the fashion becoming popular. It was I who gave her the first saree, in silk. I was teaching at Ananda College, Colombo, at the time. I did not know how to set about it and went to a tailor who prepared the saree. I remember writing a postcard about it to my elder brother who was a teacher at Trinity College, also in Kandy: "By Jove! You must see mother glistening in her silk saree!" I think it was just before she left for Kandy on a short visit and also to prepare the mind of my brother lest he should miss seeing her at the station.

The clothes she wore in our early days conformed to the fashion of gentlewomen. They were skirt, reaching to the heels, and jacket. There was jewellery of course. Women often borrowed these articles when they were exhibiting themselves on important occasions; but I do not remember whether mother did so. Sometimes a long slender chain worn on the breast held up, pinned to the bosom, a "gold" watch - often for ornament, for its mechanism did not work! The jacket, at times, had to be

rushed to a woman expert in pleating on a sheet of glass (*katuru allanawa*), when a sudden journey for next morning was planned overnight. I have gone on these missions.

I do not remember father suffering from any grave illness. But we were told of one in the case of mother. It seems to have been dysentery of a sort. She was at death's door according to her and her mother's accounts. Grandmother, always got down by father from Panadura, in such situations as when mother was expecting a child, or ill, would bustle about in her homely way, an utterly capable woman-about-the-house.

She told us that the doctor (western trained) - a Dr.Van Geyzel whose name she pronounced *Punguysel* - who attended on mother was suspected of being unable to do anything more for the patient. This she guessed when he gave her medicine with a red label on the bottle.

"That meant that he was going to poison her - don't I know, child, the significance of the red label? I'm no fool. This is the way of doctors. When they can do no more, they kill their patients. But I was too sharp for them. I took the bottle away and buried it by the *davata* tree down there in front."

Thus did she save the life she had brought into the world. That illness cost father a lot. Mother used to point to an enamel cup and say that, when she fell ill she had it with her, brimful of sovereigns. Upon her recovery, not one was remaining! Anyway in those days the sovereign circulated @ Rs.7.50 - Rs.10.00. Yet, as the exchange shows, it was a lot of money. The purchasing power must have been the same proportionately as today (1960) when it is 9 times, computed mathematically.

Father was a character who was held in great regard by our own folk, also because in him was reflected the status of my grandfather. In the extension of our folk to Bope, I think there was another family who were entitled to official recognition. This was the *Maha Vidane gedara*, the best lineal descendant of which is Karunanayake, who retired a couple of years ago, from the post of Chief Postmaster, Kandy.

If there was a villager who was contemptuous of the high and mighty of local society it was father. Somehow what seems to have rattled him was the standing of another of the higher caste. He was arrogant, as far as he could reach, towards the *Mudaliyar* - and *that* worthy was a demi-god! A Notary who came to live in "Ananda Villa" across the road, he used to call *Notheya*! And so on. This surely was also an inferiority complex, stemming from a high sense of the family standing of his grandfather.

How was the bread earned for so many mouths of ours? It seems father had had his prosperous days. But of these I recollect little. I remember him mostly in the plumbago trade, along with Hikkaduwa uncle. Uncle had a fierce and sturdy cart bull, and also I have the happy memory of our having an oil-press, or *sekkuva*.

More than these I recall his wistful speech about this *Chetty* and that, "good men", he said (he had a soft corner for the tribe and for Hindus in general), to have been in whose debt he was very proud. For the much money he owed them reflected his own money status! He boasted about his debts to all and sundry, as it was a measure of his credit-worthiness. That created a very healthy impression of his (erstwhile) prosperity. The debit side of his cavalier attitude was that one day his creditors, themselves, thought that he was a man of substance who was deliberately trying to cheat them of their dues! Warrants, therefore, were issued for his arrest for unpaid debts. And one day when in the ox-shed (and legally unsiezable) the Fiscal's men got at him and hauled him away!

Mother (and we) set up a howl and the neighbors came in running, joining in the hullabaloo. But the arrested debtor, as always jealous of the family honour, hushed us all, called for his outdoor clothes and accompanied the officers. He was taken to Colombo in due course, but contracted Asthma very severely, the city invariably giving him an attack. We bore upon Carolis (Matara aunt's eldest son), familiarly "Bennett Aiya" (more of him later), to buy him off. Whoever the creditor-Chettiar was, he was no fool to continue to pay for the keep of his debtor and, when he came to know that father really had no assets, the prisoner was freed. (We covered this episode, a blot on the family escutcheon, - until father himself in his feeble-minded days

shot it out to Tissa one day at Ratnapura. For some time I did not tell him of it. But when he was able to understand the implications of it I did explain matters).

Most vividly I remember father in his worst days of poverty. Then he had learnt the art of guilding. With his things in a carpet-bag he would travel well away from home and ply his trade. For him the task was mean and a dishonor to his father. Therefore he went to distant villages and was sometimes away for more than two or three days [?] at a stretch.

He would remit his takings by Postal or Money Order to Galle. There, one of us would go and bring the cash. The trade was profitable, so we learnt, because the return was many times more than the outlay. But how he must have suffered physically! For he had to walk many miles a day; there were no conveyances in those days and, even if there were, he had to save every cent to feed so many.

When the call came father was capable of stupendous effort. He would walk interminable miles and hungrily; a cup of tea in a boutique ate into the precious cash for home. He spoke well of the village temples with their kindly monks, mostly of the *Siyam Nikaya*, the Siamese sect. He always placed them first for their humanity and last as monks - he called them, in this latter estimation, *dussila* (lack-disciplined). Even as they had the latter failings, so had they human failings and therefore their hearts were melted by the sight of the dusty, hungry, itinerant trader who father was. Once, there was not a scrap in one temple that he reached rather late. Father asked for the dog's feed and (I remember my elder brother saying it recently) he retrieved his meal from what had been thrown to the dog.

Sometimes he would be fed in the houses, which gave him work. I do not think he ever spoke ill of his patronesses. That shows his essentially generous nature, just as his sufferings reveal that he was a hero of a rare type. But he was Micawber all right, ever waiting for something to turn up - mostly after having bought a "Galle Gymkhana Sweep" ticket.

He used to develop bouts of laziness and then we, who lived from day to day, would go without meals. Whatever could be scraped from the garden - jak, young coconuts and once, even *habarala* we had to eat. The stomachs of the young are tough.

We certainly grew up on this rough fare for, generally, we are a healthy lot with no corroding constitutions. It is almost with the glee of being the "first with the news" that one of us (juniors) would find out the position in the larder and announce to the rest, "*Ada kanna ne !*" (no food today). I do not think we ever cried for having to go without food.

Father once despaired of earning enough in spite of his having to, perpetually, steal out of the house at dawn - his job being a secret from all - and return at nightfall. Left with no alternative, he mortgaged some part of the property and bought loads of rice, *parippu* and such stuff. For two or three months we lived like kings. Even during this period of "prosperity" father was not mean with the intention of making it last a little longer. To a monk or beggar he was as generous as ever, perhaps more reckless. His physical hardships toughened him and, mercifully, he was spared of illness as such. Which was well for us.

There had been times when he longed for rest - and forever. Once, in such a fit of depression, he had talked to mother about giving us all poison and taking it themselves, so that our sufferings may be no more. Easy enough it was, and must have been very tempting. We had in the house both nitric acid and potassium cyanide for father's daily work. But mother talked him out, drawing upon the religion to which both of them were so given. I think father, a tough and headstrong man, would not have been dissuaded by any other argument.

He liked his relations in a distant way, helped them when he could, but maintained a proud reserve. Where caste honour was involved, he constituted himself the head of the clan, so to say. So others would come for advice to *Allis* (Alwis), as they called him. He would be told by an elder cousin, for instance, that he could not go on thus educating his children indefinitely when he had no income. Such well-meant opinion he would scorn to follow. He suspected that jealousy was the motive that inspired such advice. He was also set on giving us glimpses of the higher life which fate had denied him.

"Even if I descend to the streets with a coconut shell in my hands, yet will I give my children a worthy education," he maintained.

And he did, to the best of his resources, sending us to Richmond College, Galle, an honoured institution, even paying our fees during most of our time there.

Father's desire to help another in time of trouble, even when he himself was not equipped to help, was evident in several - sometimes even comical - ways. For instance, there was a semi-paralytic uncle of ours, Adirian. (D.P.Weerasinghe, the Ayurvedic physician of Sarikkamulla, Moratuwa and husband of Asilin,- daughter of a younger sister of father - is a son of his).

Adirian uncle was bathing at the well one day, when he slipped into it as he bent over. Hearing screams, father shot out of the house and jumped into the well himself!. He could not swim to save his soul, the other one in the water was a paralytic! Somehow the neighbours fished the duo out. I remember mother's withering remark to father:

"Really! did you think you could swim, that you so cheerfully went into the water? Didn't you think of a possibly orphaned family to leave behind?"

"Just you keep quiet," was his reply. "I wanted to save that *angsabage* (paralytic) chap. I meant to put my foot under his buttocks until someone rescued us."

It was typical of the man that he thought only of another. Greater love hath no man than that he should lay down his life for his brother. This was father, the real, inner man.

He stood for the honour of the clan, and as gloriously, once. A family of the lower dregs of our people - Bentara Rala - had come into our village. I do not know why, but everybody resented their presence - poor devils! And we were told, on our part, never to step into their garden. One of the sisters-in-law of Bentara Rala, an unmarried and not too young woman, suddenly "caught a chill" and died overnight. The village was excited and fearful, because an inquest and a post-mortem were to be held. Such a thing as cutting up the body of a female, and of a young woman at that, has never been heard of. It had to be prevented. The disgrace was not so much the exposure of the maiden's body to the gaze of total outsiders, males, as to the honour of the living - the living who had regarded her with her relatives as an outcaste of outcastes!

Father, ever a man of resource, discovered the identity of the Judicial Medical Officer as a Dr. Pieris, elder brother of Sir Paul of later day fame as a historian. Grandmother from Panadura was with us then. It was known that from her husband's time they were "professionally" connected with the Pieris Walauwa where our folk had gone to make jewellery. On this slender connection father tried to preserve the clan name. He asked grandmother to speak to Dr.Pieris.

Now, father could have tackled the matter himself, for he knew the Coroner, as a Goigama worthy from the village next ahead of ours, Hapugala. But he, a proud man in our circle, scorned the man – the Notary was "*Notaya"* to him after all! And who would go to a Coroner fellow!

Well, egged on by the son-in-law, grandmother approached Dr.Pieris, worshipped him, and explained her presence, begging him not to cut up a body for such a disgrace had never fallen upon our tribe. The doctor was wise; he sent her away and said he must do his duty. The post-mortem revealed that the "maiden" was no virgin. A foetus, a couple of months old was extracted. Grandmother was called up and received the "shelling" of her life from Dr.Pieris. He said he half suspected her of having known the condition of the dead woman and that she came deliberately to cover up a crime, which, if he did on her assurance, would have put him in trouble.

"I have half a mind to send you to jail, you silly woman. I hope you have today learnt the lesson of your life not to poke your finger into such matters," he ended.

The Coroner, interested in the asides, sought for some light. Said the doctor, "Oh! I know that woman. I have nothing against her, of course, but her son who used to make jewellery for our family is a damned rascal!" Mother never forgave father for having been the cause of humiliating her mother and for the dishonouring of her own kinsfolk in public! But father's motives were clean.

After the incident, village tongues began wagging. A workman of Bentara (or Beruwala) Rala was said to be the seducer. The young woman was sent away to her married sister's when the secret came out in her own village. She used to be

eating unripe pineapples to bring about a discharge. One day after this "treatment" she bathed, when she was having a mild discharge, caught a chill and died of it!

"Look!" said gossiping women, "that married sister of hers once tied the feathers of a fowl on her buttocks and wore her cloth so that the theft of the bird may not be discovered. Good heavens, if we wear an extra cloth our figures will even show that. No wonder that this graceless sister of hers managed to conceal her growing tummy. Oh! what has happened to our village, for such a family has come to soil it!" Brave words these when, as I will later tell, the holy characters of these pure ones shone as brightly as that of the poor dead one!

Father, the patriarch, was the leader in clan matters, the more so when the other members were in need. He once fixed up a marriage for one of his cousins, said to be ageing and in want, with Adirian Mama (of the well incident) who was a widower. Driven by father's noble intentions, we had a "grand" wedding at a time we were poorly off. The bride wore a veil, orange-blossoms decked it, and she glowed in a satin dress. She drove off in the Rolls-Royce of the time, an open Phaeton, drawn by a prancing horse whipped up by a *"Muttu"* (horse-keeper - himself an awesome figure for us boys) in white long coat, white shorts, puttees (but bare-footed) and a lordly turban on head with scarlet edging! Of course there was a wee lass of the *Oli* caste, our hereditary servitors, holding the large *avupatha*, palm leaf umbrella (as of a Ramannya Nikaya monk) over the bride. That was our particular insignia. Leesi Hamy was the bride. I think she was a Koggala cousin, father's *Bala Mama's* daughter.

Father's fertile mind dreamt up a solution for another marriage problem. Mathes mama was a fine upstanding youth with a physique excellent to view. He had a thin moustache, so trimmed as to follow the artistic curve of his upper lip. His *konde* was man-size and had a tinge of brown. The bride was Ahangama Acharige Karunawathie, elder sister of Jinadasa who used to see my family occasionally in Colombo, when he himself was living in Kotahena. (The eldest of that line, from an earlier marriage, is the man we call Gabriel Aiya residing at Angulmaduwa in Beliatta. A daughter of his married a junior Hemachandra..) Karunawathie, in stature, looks and age was a perfect match for Mathes mama. Figure to figure, not to tell of

other accomplishments, I do not know of a better-matched pair in all my experience. Very young they were, and it seemed to have been stamped upon their heads by *Maha Brahma* for this precise union. The marriage was irregular in law, an irregularity regularized by fraud - I think inspired by my father whose fertility of ideas was too well known to us.

It seems that Karunawathie's mother was only a mistress, not the wife, of her man. So how could she come forward to sign as mother - the bride being fatherless (in law) and, at the same time she being below majority?. Upon father's prompting the natural mother stood back while another, the legal wife, deputized for her before the Registrar. In all this, the parts were played by all quite willingly. The bride was blessed by her real mother who, too, was present and stood with the gathering - though not in her true relation!

They were undoubtedly happy, this young pair. It was with jealous eyes that I used to watch the strong, young bride drawing up well water for her husband - jealous because I myself was longing for such apparent compatibility one day when I would come of age !

But alas! *Maha Brahma* had not stamped long life on Mathes mama. He caught typhoid - a deadly disease at his age and development - and died before a child was born. Like a plantain trunk cut down, we said, was this sad death.

From Jinadasa, about 40 years later, I heard that his sister was hale and hearty. About a widow so young, whose empty life stretched out over countless years ahead, I had questions to ask; but it was not seemly to do so. I only hope she married another man worthy of her.

Father, the *"chandiya",* revealed himself once. There was a family (our relations) where a nephew of his lived with his wife and children. This nephew was Carolis, the one and only ornament of Bacchus in the village. Fair-skinned, his face was charged with the "heat" of arrack and further coloured by the betel which he was incessantly chewing.

His wife, Manjo Hamy, had leucoderma: she was a dark woman on whose lips the white patches were horrible blotches. Once, when Carolis was away from his home for a long period, father had scolded her for something or the other and, I think,

he had even hit her. Manjo told of it to her husband on his return. Bold chap that Carolis was, he called on father the next day. It appeared a duty call by nephew on uncle. I remember asking him how he got on, whether he prospered in the trade, and other such matters. But the devil was lurking in Carolis' heart and, all at once I heard him say,

"Uncle, was it proper for you to strike (or scold) a woman when her husband was away?" - a very just question.

My next recollection is a thunder-clap! Father gave him a mighty slap. When he was short of breathing it out, the other cheek caught its share. Down fell the drunk and his sarong broke loose. He lifted his hands above his head and begged father not to hit him any more. He began his retreat after his escape but as the distance between our house and his lengthened his tone grew loud. When last his shouts were heard they were to the effect that he would eat my father!

Of father's eccentricities there are other incidents, too. Uncle Abraham (familiarly Tambi Singho mama) was regarded as the black sheep of all our families from the dawn of creation. I will tell of him as he comes into place. Here I will only say that the cause of his crime was no greater than that of having a mistress, to rid him of whom his parents brought about a marriage between him and father's younger sister Anohamy. One night, when Anohamy auntie was at our house, uncle was paying her a visit at the ancestral home. She must have spilled the beans to her brother - at any rate she must have impressed upon him that she had suffered recently - for his peccadilloes were as old as Time. Suddenly we heard loud talk on the verandah, and uncle whose visit we were looking forward to, was known to be beating a summary retreat with tingling cheeks. Father had done the Carolis on him, too, and kicked him out (metaphorically)!

Then there was an elderly uncle Marukku Naide, the husband of my mother's eldest sister, Mungo Nanda. Father was respectful, being the junior, to sister-in-law and husband. But he never quite got over his suspicion of uncle who was an apostate from Roman Catholicism. Which was queer, as the dice was loaded in his favour; being a man well born with the *ge*-name *Lokuliyana Badal-ge*. However, father eyed his change of religion askance - at least where taste in liquids ran. For I myself saw him one night getting his elder relative to open his mouth and breathe out for fumes of toddy! The old gentleman

was swearing mightily that he had not touched a drop. I am sure father was disappointed, in the experiment, to be proved a wrong guesser.

Then, of course, there was Thepanis (same initials as mine) whom (though the only younger brother, surviving into our clear memories) he considered with contempt and scorn, for a queer reason – that he did not father a large brood!. "That fellow, Thepanis", he would say, "why, he hasn't the life to have more than a couple of kids!" *Pana nethi Miniha* , was how he described uncle Thepanis.

Father was a man tremendously resourceful. No wonder, when he had so many mouths to feed, as many heads to send to college for a good education, and no visible means of doing it. Nothing would daunt him. He was as Henley described: head bloody, but unbowed.

He was also strangely prophetic. As most people did, who took up this attitude towards family upbringing, he imagined that all the relations were preparing to give their daughters as wives to his sons. "Let them not deceive themselves," he would say, "From the ditches (*kanu palleng*) I'll bring Tamils and Burghers as wives for my boys!" This was prophetic to the extent that one, at least, married a Burgher! And that was me!

About others, too, he was free with his prophesies. Of one: "This fellow is a born thief. He will pass his exams. And get into a job - a Government job. Then he will steal and be chucked out!" And of another: "He will be like a mad dog. He will hang on and bite despite the kicks he gets." And he was not too wrong about either!

Deeply learned in the religion were both father and mother and forever discussing some abstruse point, one by no means inferior to the other. We would hear them arguing on it at midnight after a spell of sleep and a refreshing chew of betel. They were so attuned to each other that after mother's death father went to pieces.

Our lives were deeply influenced by their religious attitude. They had no room in their thoughts for other religionists. It seems to me that they were not concerned with other people's beliefs - not even when these others were Buddhists like us. All

that, father might have remarked was an incidental, "He is a Christian, a sinner who killed animals and drank spirits." But even this, which was quite in passing, was an indifferent expression of opinion in general. We had no relations other than Buddhists.

Strange to say, I do not recall anyone of our people conscious of Kataragama as the high and mighty of today are. I do not think we even heard the word mentioned, except in the sense of "*onay kataragamak giyaway*" which means the same as "*onay Dilli(Delhi)yaka giyawe*." Why was this? Perhaps we knew that our one *sarana* (refuge) was the Triple Gem. So today we seem to be more intellectually on the road to spiritual development through the grace of godlings who are more to us than the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha! *O tempora, O mores*. Strange are the tricks man's mind plays on him. Just as we could do without *Vishnu* or *Kataragama,* even so in our family we managed without invoking the aid of supernatural beings. It was not that our parents did not believe in them. I think they did, as once when an infant sister used to be constantly crying (mostly in the evenings - or so we thought) we had the belief that the demoness *Balagiri* was the evil genius. Except for an occasional charming for tooth-ache or the Evil Eye or some slight trouble, when a minor *baliya* was performed, we managed to do without the usual devil-dancing ceremonies (so beloved of us) performed at others' houses. Of devils who lurked in byways, and *pretayo* and the tribe we stood in holy dread. But we were too matter-of-fact to be bullied by them. And this was due to our parents' attitude.

Father had three temples to serve. The first of these was "Sweta-bimbaramaya" (Polkandavila) in the village. It is an institution of the caste with Buddhasiri Thero at the head. He was not much cared for by our parents. I went to its Sunday school. The next nearest was towards Galle and familiarly known as "Gallindagoda" temple. Kebiliyapola Dhammaratana Thera (who is still alive at the time of writing), a younger monk, was its head. (He is a younger brother of Sadiris Rala, the sculptor and painter of Wewurukannala temple in Matara district.) To him my elder brother and I were sent to learn Sanskrit and Pali. This was also a caste temple.

But father liked best - as natural to a rebel - a temple of the ascetic Ramanna sect (the other two are Amarapura) situated on a lovely hill-top farther away. Known as "Poyagalakanda" temple it was surrounded by scrub jungle which also cut it off

from "Gallindagoda" temple. The head monk was a well born Kandyan, Matale Sasanadhaja Sri Sumanatissa Thera. He was a very light-complexioned old man, forever chewing betel with the few blackened teeth he possessed. His next in command was of giant size, an ex-Catholic, still possessing the fierceness of the pig-killing, toddy-drinking kind from whom he had turned aside. Dhamminda was his name. This temple had as its chief *dayakayas* a village of the barber caste and was insulted by the others with the name of *Panikkigode pansala*. In my father's eyes its situation enhanced the sanctity of the monks.

When monks from here, especially the older ones came to *dana*, we received them not only by washing the feet but also by applying ghee on their tired soles. Dhamminda Thera was nicknamed *Dhanda-Kastha-vira* by the Gallindagoda monks on account of his size. An *abittaya* of this temple blossomed into a monk one day. We, his quondam playmates, used then to call him *Appuhamy Hamuduruwo*. I never knew his name in the Sangha!

Father would apply for loans to these Ramanna monks when in need. They never hesitated to help him. I used to be taken to the inner room where a sort of Burmese lacquer box was in the almirah and made to open it and handle the coins to be given out. (How they were put in, I do not know). We hardly saw a currency note in our early days.

It was to gift to this temple that father was making the almirah which I have earlier mentioned in my nasty adventure with Koggala Mutta. The job completed and handed over was a brave show. He was a good *dayakaya* of the Ramanna Nikaya and was in touch with sister temples. From one in Panadura he obtained the great favour of a loan issued to him in a vast bag of coins, I quite remember, the offerings of hundreds of devotees. Kodagoda Upasena Thera was the chief monk there and it was with the consent of the chief *dayakayas* that the collections were loaned. That was during the dire days of the First World War and the hoard - not much Rs.17 (or 70) odd - was a godsend.

We practically never raised our heads for umpteen years after this, and father considered this a weight on his conscience, a grievous one because offerings were involved. He always hoped to repay it with so much self-calculated interest and so free himself. But he was trying to pay it in one shot and we could not spare up to that high ambition - not even with the remittances

regularly made home by brother and me (these were sorely used at home itself) - so that the thought of the great sin upon his soul was eating into him like a canker. He wanted to clear himself before he went to his grave. I do not remember whether he succeeded.

To be sure the Polkanadvila and Gallindagoda monks did not view with much favour father's connections - as purely a *dayakaya* (not a debtor to) - for these took him into another caste! However, with the caste temples he maintained a worthy dignity, I think. He did not have much regard for their inmates but was rushing to their aid in trouble. When, during the riots with the Muslims, he joined a band of self-imposed defenders of Polkandavila temple which, said rumour, was about to be attacked: - the usual fake report - the greatly religious man my father was, wielded the house axe and joined the marching rabble. My brother, Lolie, had the rib of an umbrella sharpened and tied to a *pol pitta*, this being his weapon - he was a little over 11 years then!

We all took "*Sil*" on important days but for the most part were at home. And although mother did the usual cooking and other household work it was always a full 24-hour observance which we followed. Mother, as so usual with women, was as observant of monks as of layfolk. Dhamminda thera, for example, was scrutinized by her. I think her instinct, much sharper than a man's, told her that his *sila* was indeed less than that of his venerable teacher. I sensed that she suspected him of a softness towards her - this I say from her lack of enthusiasm over him. That was a reflection of the (mental) advances apparent to her in his attitude. Of course I had no other hint than this, my own, interpretation.

That the monk had not wholly shaken sex off him was more than once known to us. He once told us of a meeting with a Muslim woman (in some connection which I forget) and how he immediately had the desire of kicking her over. I have a hunch that it was the result of his vision of her in a tantalizing posture. Anyway what did he mean by telling such a story in mother's hearing unless it is some satisfaction of repressed eroticism?

Then, again, mother once made a great dish of boiled gram. He, it seems, ate the whole of it - he had the capacity, of course - and mother was ever repeating this picture of his "gluttony". She had no need to do it, so reverent were we all towards the Sangha - but as an expression of her repressed dislike of him.

Maybe I think and interpret more than the incidents justify. And yet mother was an attractive woman. Long years after, when father's mind was unsteady after the loss of mother, I heard him rambling over an incident in her early life - married or maidenly, I could not catch - when a workman (that is, one of our own folk in the home jewellery "factory") who was enamoured of her had seized her face and kissed her. But she was a chaste woman and never a wicked word had we ever heard about her - not even from the sisters-in-law about whose (the two younger ones') amatory adventures with Bope uncle, she used to tell us, the bigger boys. All that we sensed in them was the usual in-law enmity.

But she was jealous of father! From one or two incidents, even when father was elderly, I know she was watchful of him. Whether it sprang from a known cause, or from an excess of affection, I do not know. These are, after all, nothing more than frank recollections of remembered days of some 45 years ago, and must be regarded as of no greater value than Old Wives' Tales. I haven't the least desire to dishonour the names of my beloved parents. I am only a recorder, of events that show the actors themselves to be warmly human, with all too human eccentricities tinging them into life. I wouldn't like my grandchidren - for whom I write these notes - to think of them as anything more than that. Maybe my own sons and daughters will, some day, tell tales like these of me and, when they do so, as harmlessly as I have done.

One thing that overshadowed me all through life was the dread of POVERTY. From parents, mostly father, I picked up a few lessons that I followed throughout life, on how to deal with this. One was never to waste a grain of rice; the plate must be as if licked clean. Another was to use money wisely, so as not to be forced to starve for a meal. These impressions are etched deeply on me, so much so that I know that some of those close to me think that I pinch and scrape in an undignified way. They are the lucky ones who never remember the pangs of hunger; then, in their own sincere hearts, I must be miserly.

But I have also learnt from father to be generous, to regard money as dirt (which sometimes sticks) and never to hanker after wealth. Wealth I do not despise, but is not my yardstick of worth in self or another.

And now to other relations in or beyond the village……..

4

UNCLES, AUNTS AND ASSORTED FOLK

Of the close relations of my parents I turn first to those of mother.

In her family there was only one male, Tambi Singho uncle, officially *Modara Acharige Abraham Singho*. Of him later.

Mother's eldest sister, Mungo Nanda whom Marukku mama (of the toddy smelling incident) took to wife, must have been quite a pretty woman in her day. She was slightly deformed in one heel and had a gap in her front teeth as far as I can think of her. A very fine aunt she was, eternally poor, burdened with a string of daughters, never complaining even at her husband who was no great wage-earner. Whenever mother was in the family way, a way which seemed to be the one she was ever traversing, Mungo Nanda did not hesitate to send a daughter of hers to help mother through the difficult period. More often it was grandmother, herself, whom she spared with much sacrifice to herself, I am sure.We used to be sent to her place for occasional holidays, when father could collect the train fare. I suspect that was because then we would be better fed for a few days than at home. However, father sent only one of us at a time. I was initiated into delicacies like *hakuru* and *vandu appa* which we never knew at home. With our female cousins, all so much older than me, there would be out-door bathing parties, excursions at dawn-break to pick *kadju* and mangoes and *kottamba* and the like. We were not permitted to go out like that in

our own village. Then we would go to the bazaar to have the haircut, or a shirt fitted on. I remember being carried pick-a-back or riding on the shoulders of uncle one night - Tambi Singho uncle - with a paper cone of chillies. The jolting loosened the wrapping and, until I came to the house, I did not know (nor did my uncle) that it was only the bare paper that I had been clutching!

(There is a similar experience of Somasiri, the kindergartener, returning home in his rickshaw in Kandy: cover of book in hand, the rest of it somewhere along the road!)

All these childish delights were possible in aunt's home, which was the *mahagedera* of grandfather. Marukku uncle, the ex-Catholic, who had no standing with anybody, was regarded with amusement, I don't know why. I only know of his queer mannerism of lifting his eyebrows and opening his eyes as his conversation proceeded. His voice always sounded muffled - they said the uvula (*raha-diva*) had "dissolved" from an attack of small-pox he had had. Certainly he was pock-marked. He and his own (paternal) family were the butt of a great joke. They were described as one which ate up a whole family of hares. (That was, of course, in his "Catholic" days.) He used to regale us with a fearful story. He and his people had had a great dinner one day, with pork and what not. The meal was over and the bones were there on the plates. Suddenly some evil hand came over the head of one person and collected the bones! *"Anay malliye"*, screamed an elder brother and clasped uncle (then a little chap) on to his breast. Uncle swears he saw the huge hairy hand and the thick hairs on it; also that the cloth of the fearsome intruder had little spots on it the size of *mung* grains. Of course, it was the horrifying *Mahasona* come for pork, the flesh of his *vahana*.

This uncle used to be sent out on jobs that required no thinking. However he was not treated any less than as an elder who had to be duly respected. But all his younger male relatives (on our side) must have regarded him as so much lumber.

He had several daughters: Baby, Punchi Nona, Nonno and Mary. Baby akka married the champion drinker, Tambi Hamy, and was a martyr all through her life. She also discovered him periodically disappearing from home, perhaps nursing a

hang-over, for long intervals. He would also go abroad and was an expert jeweller, even if unreliable. She was a tall woman, fair in her day, somewhat stooped at the neck. But she was a woman of lifelong sorrows.

Punchi Nona, the next, was a sturdy woman with eyes which perpetually smiled and lovely regular teeth. She was a strong and full-bosomed lass who once got hold of a young chap by his waist, bodily lifted him from the floor and threw him out into the road. Her husband was Lavarenti Naide, an elderly widower (she deserved someone younger) but withal a fine and devoted husband. She was called "Innoyi" by her sisters. I wonder why?

Nonno Akka was the ugly duckling with a great flat face (like a hopper), a perpetual smirk and a quick tongue. She also used to come home in times mother needed help in the house. She is now married to Cornelis Hamy of Godakawela, a chap of no great significance in our family circle, known as a mere talker and no doer – perhaps, though, because we know so little of him.

The youngest, Mary Akka, was a lissom maid, handsome and doubtless eye-taking to young men of her circle. She had the perpetual family smile and gaiety. I do not know whom she married, but it was said that it was to a man of standing too high for her others, who seemed to have lost touch with her as a result. This was a pity for we knew the others' husbands. We have not seen her, nor do we remember her, after her marriage.

It seemed that the next elder sister of mother, Lusiya Nona, resided in Kalutara. She had contracted a *mesalliance*, having eloped with an uncle, and was spoken of only in whispers. We, however, had a daughter of hers, Podi nona, staying with us for some time. But we were sternly warned to keep her at a distance and received the impression that her character was not above question!

Tambi Singho uncle brightened an otherwise drab village life. A handsome man in his youth, he was a gay lad as well, who took a mistress unto himself. To cure him of these questionable affairs of the heart he was made to marry father's sister Ano- hamy. She was certainly more presentable than her rival, but must have failed as a wife in some way, for her man kept

both women running a common household! One instance of his lack of interest in the wife, I remember. It seems that his wife and my mother were going somewhere with him when they had to cross a muddy patch. The women, who were ahead, had to lift their cloth almost up to the knees. Looking at the bare legs of the two, uncle is reported to have shown mother's legs to someone and said.

"See her legs. Look at Ano Hamy's, they are only sticks - like those of the *kasturi muva!*"(musk deer)

Showing up the wife's defects did not mean a thing to him. However he was ever known as a wit and even used to indulge in impromptu versifications. A friend and he were, one day, comparing the graces of the women they knew, and did so in verse. Suddenly uncle saw the friend's wife on the road. He composed a stanza about her. I remember the last line:

"Maga yana punchinona ingeva - room"

as it is typical of his fondness for the opposite sex.

By his marriage to Aunt Ano, he had a daughter, Asilin, who is the wife of Weerasinghe, self-styled vedamahatmaya. Aunt Ano also had a somewhat (mentally) defective son. He used to be the cruel butt of all our jokes - how wicked boys and girls can be! - but to his mother he was, of course, *"magey lena patiya."*(my little squirrel).

Podi Singho, Uncle Thamby Singho's son outside his marriage, was the sole joy of his mother - a sturdy little man he was, as he should be, in his hostile world. But we were friendly.

At times the two women were actively hostile towards each other; then they cooked in separate kitchens. Whose rice uncle favoured must have been a secret to us! Uncle was a good workman but utterly faithless. So he never prospered when he, who had two wives to feed, should have earned more. Grandfather, they said, died of a broken heart caused by the peccadilloes of his only son. He used to say: *"Thoth ganiyek vunanam mata kochchara hondada!"*(How much better for me if you, too, would have been a woman!)

In the end he (uncle) suffered greatly, for even his daughter, who had no children of her own, ceased to care for him. He ended up as a beggar and was last seen in that profession at the door-step of my elder brother at Hikkaduwa on the day of the wedding of my youngest sister, Lakshmi. He, for his part, did not seem to know to whose house he had come for alms. Mercifully we, the elders of the day, were spared the miserable experience; brother's boys had hurriedly given him alms and sent him away. As for his end, I know nothing. Aunt must have died and been buried in the accepted way. Mother's youngest sister Elisa Nona was mother's twin almost, except for her dark colour. She could never pronounce the name I was called by, "Freddy", and rendered it as "Sally"! Her husband was *Payagala Badalge Adirian Hamy*, a good village workman. But, as usual with our people he would come for help, although he had an only child (a son) and a wife and himself to earn for. He came to see me when I was teaching at Nalanda Vidyalya. I could not help him for our earnings were sent to my home at the time - I was then unmarried. We have little recollection of the cousin in this family. A coupe of years ago it seems Weerasinghe had brought him to Edward for a job. He was Eramanis, familiarly "Erama"!

There was an adopted son of my maternal grandfather, a great chum of ours, by the name of Simon. He was a short, fair, curly-headed man. Taken as an infant born into Goigama caste, he grew up with mother's family and became quite one of it. Anyhow it was very infrequently that he came to our house. He had a flair for motor mechanism, I remember. He contributed generously from his earnings to the family income, until one day he disappeared without leaving a trace!

The Panadura womenfolk of ours were good jewellers in their own way and my cousins were a great help, I am sure, in doing their part for their family. The only iron worker was Lavarenti, the work is said to be too base for our folk, but he proved to be the most devoted son-in-law to my aunt. Punchi Nona surely deserved such a husband. His elderliness must have lent grace to his character.

At Panadura I spent some of my loveliest days of childhood and that is a compliment to the family which lured us to their circle during school holidays. Alas! when we became "big men" in the world we were in no position to help them. For

our own family had to be given all we could. But the tribute we can honestly pay them is of our happy memories we have of them.

I do not know anything about this grandfather, whom I have been so often said to resemble physically. Grandmother we knew in our manhood. She was a "city woman", so to say, having lived in Colombo (Kotahena). She used to say how all the young girls used to hide in the house when the *"mari"* (Marines) came ashore. She knew some Portuguese, too, as a result of her *sidadi* (city) experiences. She died in my early years on the Ananda staff, in 1922 or 1923. Mother and I attended the funeral. It was mother who bought a handsome coffin for the dear old lady. She loved us deeply and, I think, was fonder of her son-in-law, my father, than of any of her own family.

(After writing the above, I tried to find out more about this family and this is one of the letters I got of Mother's family history, set down by Weerasinghe, of Sarikkamulla, Moratuwa, husband of my cousin Asilin, daughter of the youngest sister, but one, of my father:

1. The name of the Panadura grandfather: Modara Acharige Peiris Hamy.

2. The present name of Kamhalgoda in Panadura: Dias Place.

3.That grandmother's name: Ratnaweera Acharige Phillippa Rabel, known at home as Punchinona. Originally from Kawdana, Dehiwela and lived at Kotahena at Sember Street (?)

4. Their children: Three daughters and a son. They were named:

1.Mungo Nona, married to Loku Liyana Badalge Marukku Naide of Sarikkamulla.

2.Lusiya Nona (Kalutara Loku Amma). The downfall of this family dates to her elopement.

3.Emmo Nona, given to Punchisingho Weeraratne of Kotahena, Colombo.

4.Nonno Hamy, your mother.

5.Elisa Nona. Husband, Payagala Badalge Adiriyan Hamy of Payagala, Pahala Wadugoda.

6.Podi Nona who died before getting married.

7.Abraham, also known as Thamby Singho, the third child in the family.

Arachchi Mutta's own, eldest brother was my grandmother's father. Arachchi Mutta's elder sister's son was my mother's father. The names of these two: Adirimuhandiramge Nikulas Hamy and Matara Kotuwegoda Loku Devendra ge Laiso Hamy. (My) Father's name: Weerasinghe Acharige Adiriyan Hamy.)

My father's eldest sister, whose name I never know, was given in marriage to Motagedera in Kekanagedera village, Matara. Once in a way we used to be sent there for holidays. Uncle Abraham (Abarang mama) was a very dark short man whose job was carpentry. He has been described to us by mother as a *parama asathpurushaya* – for, was it not proven by the fact that his chest was hairless! (Strange are the ways of village reasoning!) Anyway, we could not ourselves say anything for or against him. With Abarang Mama and his family we did not move too closely, that was a fact, and it was not due to distance, for his home was much closer to us than grandmother's at Panadura. Aunt saw us very rarely, but uncle more often. I always remember his bringing that milky coconut known as *Dee-kiri*. And also loaves of bread, a gift *par excellence* in those days.

The eldest son in this family is Bennett Aiya (now gathered unto his fathers) officially Don Carolis Dewasurendra - a blacksmith, not very well-off, somewhere in Katana, who would write occasionally, on one pretext or another, and succeeded to some extent in making me generous. I sent the money in instalments, each the result of a veiled request for more, which was why I doled it out, until I could no do no more.

My father took him over in his childhood and sent him to Wesley College, Colombo. But he never throve, refused to follow his studies and was finally employed as a clerk in odd plumbago ventures, including those of other uncles. Then we were in a bad way and would go to him for money. In his own bad days he would come to us! I have never seen his wife or any sons or daughters. I have heard that he is quite estranged from his own brothers and sisters - perhaps because of his poverty. He is tall and dark, being more like us in looks.

Next to him was a sister, Panchina (mother of Karuna, who suddenly came to see us in Lunawa, in 1967) a thin, very loving cousin much like her mother. She married late in life and died too soon after for me to know anything about the family she joined.

Thelenis, the brother next to her, was tall like his elder brother. He was a fine carpenter and, as a man, noted as the best of this bunch of cousins. He was eternally chewing tobacco and perhaps the constant wad gave his thin lips a rise to give the appearance of a leer. One day when I was staying with them he suddenly took it into his head to march out of the house after morning tea with crowbar on his shoulder. He went into one angle of the compound and started digging mightily in the earth. "Treasure", he told me in reply to my question, "last night I dreamt that a great treasure is lying buried here". Poor devil! It was the first sign of a growing malady. For he went off his head when a fully grown young man and died young.

The next, Siyadoris, was the image of his father - except that he was light-skinned. He was said to have his father's qualities, too. He was an individualist of whom we knew little. He died long ago. I met a son of his many years ago as a boy attending Rahula Vidyalaya, Matara. (He is, in 1967-69, an Anagarika in Valagamba Ashramaya, Maradan-kadawala. A brother works at Hemachandra's)

Podi Nona, the youngest, never married, died recently I recall her as a soft-hearted woman and fond of us - though we ourselves did nothing for them.

Both sisters were industrious weavers of grass cases for cigars, purses and the like - *hambili banawa* was a cottage industry, along with weaving lace. These boxes used to be set in a *vattiya* on a tea-poy in front of the house and by the road. Passers-by would stop and buy what their fancy leads them to. No roguery or mischief was tried on such articles of industrious labour - though, as always, there were imps who stole mangoes, guavas and other fruits. The girls of a household turned out these things quite artistically and did it quite well. In no house of the village did one know of a girl who did not put her deft fingers to these tasks. They had no public distractions, then, like cinemas and carnivals. All they had were the temple functions or all-night devil-dancing.

Father's next eldest sister was Bope aunt whose name I don't think I ever knew unless, from a faint echo, it was Justina Hamy. Her husband, who was a little younger than she, was a handsome and higher born man, a lazy man who never turned his hand into anything I knew of. Whenever the family increased he threatened to go away; so much so, that we got the impression that he was tied down to them by the strong persuasion of father's family (greater) who seem to have fended for him. My sister Alice is reputed to be a small edition of Bope aunt, both in looks and ways.

Bope aunt was complaining of perpetual sickness - some chest trouble, though there was none we could see. Once she dreamt that she sucked the "juice" of a tree snail, whereupon, on waking, she told her man of it. He spent a good half day shinning up arecanut trees to prize out the tenacious creatures. When he had collected a good number he, stuck *ekels* into them and poured out the "juice" - which his good wife drank and - hey presto! - was said to have been cured of her chest ailment. We used to throw her the angry nickname of *gombili saru*! (This year my wife and I saw a "short" at a cinema of the same drink taken by airmen in the Sahara desert which helped them to go long without water! So the old lady's dream was not such a phantasy after all.)

Lolie, a younger brother of mine, had some protruding front teeth and used to be nicknamed *Naloris*. Bope uncle used it a little too often for our liking and we ganged together to call him (among ourselves, of course) Naloris. *(Strangely, Somasiri's son, Nalaka, is also called this by his elder cousins!)*

Aunt's family had only four surviving daughters, the first three grown-up at our time. There was a boy somewhere, but he did not survive long - for was he not born in the year 1899? In that year, it seems, there was a girl in our family, too, ahead of me; she, too, died young. A story goes that aunt's son came to her in a dream and told her he had come only to reclaim the debt of a grain of salt.

The Bope cousins were more deft with their hands than those of Matara. They were good at *hambili*, very good at lace-making and fine cooks and critics of cooking - the last accomplishment always the butt of mother's jokes. Mother was an excellent cook herself, but must have suffered the stings of the Bope cousins!

Bachchina, the eldest, was the biggest made of these cousins and was the elder edition (in looks) of the youngest, Noney. She married late but died without a family and early, too. The second, Podi, was a very pretty woman with a lovely oval face, white teeth and a golden complexion. I think she died before marriage. The next, Abanchina, was as pretty but her face was round. Poor thing she had no one to look after her and father's younger brother got her to marry Thepanis (nicknamed *Kalu kondaya* - "Black Ant"), an ugly rascal as black as night. He shone in dark deeds and would have ruled Chicago, if an American. He was more in love with opium and ganja and pilfering than with his pretty wife. She developed elephantiasis in one leg ("Galle Leg") and was living with her younger sister, Noney, till her death in 1969).

Noney married best, a chap who earns well and has given her a big family. Sharp, with a biting tongue and a head full of schemes, and is the only relative who has clung close to all of us, never failing to track us (or our children) down to the ends of the earth. We had some experiences after she had married and now, after some sharp words from me, during the days of the wedding of Denister's third daughter, Chitra, I was hoping Noney has ceased to pester me. Vain hope! She tracked me down to our house "Meegaha Pedesa," Colombo, in 1968 and again in 1969!

Our parents used to warn us off this aunt. They felt we would be "drugged" for marriage to our cousins and the invariable instruction was that we should never to eat or drink in her house! We did go during the New Year etc., to pay them

our respects - but I think we mostly obeyed injunctions. The deaths of those who are not with us I do not much recall except that, for the funeral of either aunt or uncle, father forced me into giving him my one-buttoned blue serge suit of coat and trousers for him to travel down from Peradeniya to Galle. I protested most vehemently against his donning, at his age, the clothes of a modern youngster. Besides, I said, he could not tackle the English that was expected of the wearer of a complete kit. But he was not the man to be deterred by the protest of son, or sneer of a fellow traveller. He was not to be dissuaded for, to him, this dressing up in the best clothes was an act of courtesy and homage to the dead. These were his true feelings. He had no other motive.

The others of father's family were younger than him. Thepanis, the next younger brother, a dark short man, always appeared (to us) a stern figure. We were scared of him but not of his wife who seemed a gentle body though we did not know her well. It was his brother whom father was scornful of; neither father nor mother said anything against aunt so that she must have been "satisfactory". Father's pet grievance against uncle was the latter's physical disability (or was it his disinclination?) to have the string of children that father himself had! Uncle, though, was no less man than father. (Aunt is yet alive, in her nineties, in 1969!)

Uncle's children were only three so far as we can recall. Lily is married to a chap in Kalutara; Piyadasa, as "life-less" as his father is very gentle and much liked by his colleagues in H.M.Prisons in which service he is stationed at Watupitiwela as a Jailor (Industries, or some such branch). Poor devil, in his thirties he had an attack of heart disease. Hematilaka, the youngest, died of phthisis in his late teens, perhaps in the early twenties - we knew him only slightly.

We were very aloof from this family. So the dislike between the elders must have been mutual. I heard uncle ranting against mother one day in my presence in his house where I had gone to get some money. "We could see how she will get on when her boys bring home their brides", or some such thing. Whereupon I (so I told mother) felt like picking up the small iron pestle then near me and hitting the speaker - a story in which mother never ceased to romanticize me!

But uncle taught me a thing or two. A lifelong lesson to remember was when I brought him a cup of water with my thumb bent into the water. That this is simply "not done" is advice I yet pass on, to all and sundry.

Uncle could not have had such an intense aversion to us, children, for he did not altogether lose touch with us. Like father he was a Dravidophile and enjoyed the spells of work in Jaffna. Father's had a special softness for the Chetties; uncle spoke admiringly of our own Tamils.

Again, like father he had his prejudices. He was conscious of his status - his father's glory reflected. When Panchina akka of Motagedera married, he it was who sat in the place of honour as the bride's eldest surviving male relative and *in loco parentis*. We heard that, then he had admitted that it should have been my father who should have been there - we were roaming the country away from the village and its ties. But if my elder brother had come to the wedding, said uncle, he would have refused him a place at the wedding feast - a hint that he disapproved of brother's marriage!

He happened to visit my parents when we were living in Gangodawila; I had then married only a few weeks earlier. When he was leaving, we (my wife and I) knelt down before him. He told this story later to dramatic effect that when my wife bowed down he had turned his back on her: "*Mama puka harewwa!*". But I do not hold such things against one who was but the creature of his own traditions. For, in his worst days he did not hesitate to be a father to some nieces ("deserted" by us, his more prosperous relations) and give them in marriage. That kind of thing showed his nature and the positive side of traditional values.

Uncle, who (it seems) had been designed for the Sangha, fell on very hard days and even went to jail. We learnt later, that it was on account of his inability to raise money to repair the lavatory of the house as required by the Local Authority. At his death which I attended (I was returning after 30 years to the home of my childhood) we gave him all the honours by us - the "big shots", as we imagined, of the generation - attending to the body. He was carried on *pavada* to the burial place in the back garden but, to impress better, along a circuitous route. I left some money with aunt after bowing at her feet and with cousin

Podi Nona of Motagedera, when I came away. In death uncle looked so shrunken and small, certainly he was clad virtually in rags.

Aunt was said to have had good connections and well-to-do. I remember the name of one of these worthies *Naurunne Arachchi Mahatmaya*, who used to visit us once in a way. He sported a silver head comb on his bald head. It formed a close-fitting arch over the front part of the skull, the "horns" at the temples. A silver comb was a stamp of wealth when men in those days used this article of attire. Aunt is now with Lily in Kalutara, I imagine. We ceased to have news of them after uncle's death.

A younger brother, Theodoris, was training to be an Ayurvedic Physician, but died of Tubercolosis as a young man before he had completed his studies. His position in the family I do not recall, nor any other thing about him. I faintly picture him on a bed in some dark room. He was seated on the bed, drinking *cunjee* and eating some black stuff off a saucer. I asked him what it was and he replied, *Balu goo*!; it was lime preserve. Had he lived on he would have been the first of our family name to have started a career away from the traditional. As it was that honour was reserved for us, his eldest brother's family.

Aunt Anohamy was the third (and younger) sister in father's family. A thin woman, unattractive, with a perpetual catarrh ("scraping of the throat") troubling her, we did not much care for her. Besides, she suffered, I think, from the cloud under which her husband (Thamby Singho uncle) was. She is supposed to have flirted, in her maiden days, with her brother-in-law, Bope uncle; so it was also rumoured of her younger sister who later married in Hikkaduwa. She was the cause of mother once being thrashed by father, and father by Bope uncle. So we were prejudiced against her.

Once she came home with several bundles of coconut jaggery for some medicinal purpose. These, my elder brother got hold of and ate up, (with all of us getting our share!), himself eating such a quantity that he had several loose motions! At another time we had collected some coconut-shells of sand on a night so as to frighten her in sleep and make herself scarce from us in the future. We had planned this in the morning but it rained in the night, a bit of luck for us. All was still, when brother

quietly stole up to the sleeping aunt and emptied a shell of dry sand. Up she got, in terror, looked at the cause found it was dry sand and immediately thought of ghosts. "I was petrified - *mang galthangu vuna*" she vividly described later - an unusual expression which became current with us for a long time.

Mother knew who the ghosts were. She restrained herself, with great difficulty, from bursting into laughter. The two sisters-in-law discussed matters and went back to sleep, having concluded that the rats in the ceiling had stirred up some dry sand lying up there. Another rain of dry sand after some time and aunt rose in terror this time. She did not like this at all.

So mother went with her and the bottle-lamp from mat to mat peering into the face of each "sleeping" child of hers and exhibited successfully to aunt that they were long in the Land of Nod. I forget how it all ended, but for a long time *galthangu* was a favourite expression we used.

Her younger sister, Geeso Hamy (Agnes) was the one who married best, that is to say, most prosperously. Her husband, Jancy Hamy (L.B.Johannes de Silva) was from the village of Kittangoda in Hikkaduwa; it could be reached from Dodanduwa as well - in fact for cheapness it is to this station that we booked when on a loan mission or sent on holiday. He was a plumbago merchant, his whole family was in it through the association of an elder brother of his, L.B.A.de Silva. As my father and his family gloried through the name of grandfather, so did these these Hikkaduwa members bask in the glory of this L.B.A.de Silva. My father once happened to use the word *umba* in addressing uncle's youngest brother - a right he had in the standing of an elder "brother". And I remember that gentleman feeling very huffed about it and saying, "*Mama L.B.A.de Silvage malli"!* (I am L.B.de Silva's younger brother!)

How did the fabulous L.B.A.de Silva rise into fame? One reason was that he was partner of a *goigama mudalali,* Kovis de Silva and the "higher" touch was it! Another was that they really did good business and earned well. He ultimately married a daughter of one of the Roberts - Proctor or Doctor Emmanuel Roberts, I cannot say. Mixed with Burgher blood though they were and denationalised by change of name from Ratnaweera, their professional standing and the caste-grade of the men

themselves put them in the first rank of our caste. All this very gradually percolated downwards into the L.B.so-and-so gang! They also had a large house for those days - the standard of a rich and influential man.

(Today is also Duruthu Poya Day in addition to being the Calendar New Year. I am continuing my notes during the week-end (Sunday) at home at No.508, Timbirigasyaya Road, Colombo 5, contrary to my practice so far of writing only during the days of my work at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, University Park, Peradeniya.)

Jancihamy uncle was our most well-to-do uncle. He ran a plumbago shed where men and women worked. These employees used to draw their weekly rice and wages from aunt at the house in Hikkaduwa. Sometimes he had establishments in distant places, too. He also worked in partnership with uncle Thepanis. I think it was in this combination which possessed an embossing seal entitled "D.T.Devendra & Co., Plumbago Merchants" which I used to sport on my own books! Whether business was prospering at this stage of the venture, I have no knowledge. I suspect the happy days when they netted in money were very few, the seal notwithstanding! In his later years uncle was poor and was taught the gilding process by father. He also used to carry a carpet bag like father and used to retain his erstwhile status by going about this new business as secretively!

Mother used to call aunt (to us) *meda laeli*, contemptuously, the feminine of *mudalali* by which name we all knew uncle. They had two children, daughters both. Clara, who died of tubercolosis after she had grown up, was the elder and our playmate. She had intentions of marrying me and in fact sent a proposal to this effect in a letter when I was a young teacher at Nalanda Vidyalaya in Colombo. It must have been in despair and instigated by aunt, poor folk who were badly off then. Somehow I could never reconcile myself to such connections with childhood playmates.

The younger girl, then an infant, is still living and was a self-chosen ward of uncle Thepanis after the death of her parents.

Clara, disappointed and ill, was particularly fond of her sister for whom she tried to do much, but achieved little. This girl was married off apparently well to some government servant who, in the end, left her. On our side not even a lawsuit for maintenance was contemplated.

Uncle used to see us not too rarely. It was he who gave a job to cousin Bennett. He must have helped me. I certainly would go to his house and collect money for the family. I would be asked to stay a few days during which I was sure of regular food. It was lack of nourishment that did kill off some of the relatives through tuberculosis.

Father seems to have understood for, whenever he had the cash, he would buy things like curd. Mother would urge us to eat our full otherwise she said our taste-buds (*rasa-nahara*) would dry up.

Loafing in Hikkaduwa was fun. It gave us a planted garden, *chenas*, wells in the field and such things so romantic to a boy's heart. There was one "crime" which uncle and aunt committed against our family, in mother's opinion. Clara, then at some convent, caught typhoid there and, with father's consent (he was never a man to behave without sacrifice) was brought to our house. We were a houseful of boys and girls and naturally enough some of us caught typhoid. I was the worst sufferer and it is said I hovered for many days between life and death. My brother Denister recovered quickly under Ayurvedic treatment, so also my sister Alice.

But poor Clara was very gravely ill. As they had money uncle took western treatment from Dr.J.E.Amarasekera *hamu dostara*. His fee was very high - Rs.5/-! - for the time. His son Leslie and I were then class-mates (1915) and we had the benefit of his treatment whenever he called in for Clara. We were not charged for. Mother who called him simply *mahatmaya* - she had imbibed father's scorn of the high and mighty - told him who I was: he was very gracious then.

A queer experience at this time came with Clara. As usual with us, the hair of a patient was never combed as the face was not washed. By the time danger had well passed, and there was none from a relapse it was the season to attend to her body. This advice was from my all-knowing father - more of the kind is to follow in these notes. So, on his own, he took the scissors

to the matted knot on the girl's head, her hair having been merely collected together on top. Cutting was tough and father only shaved off a small quantity. Clara said she felt quite relieved by it and that the whole place had, so to say, lightened up for her by it.

But a couple of hours after she was seen to be very odd. Her face underwent a visible change, it sort of got lengthened mouth went crooked and, most horrible to see, the eyes went askew. Aunt gave a scream which brought us running to the bed. We were thoroughly frightened by the sight of her, especially when she started up on the bed and to throw her pillows about. She then stared at the ceiling, a part of which was open, and telling her audience of people looking at her from there. Who were these, of course, but evil things? Then came father from somewhere. He was the only one of whom Clara was frightened. He shouted at her and she calmed down little by little, but not without a touch of (unnatural) impudence even towards him.

These attacks continued to come on from time to time and there were times when she was so cheeky to father that he was forced to ignore her and let the attack run its course. Even after these, we were hesitant to approach Clara. She got over them in the end, but I think it was after a long interval.

After I was married, and living at No.37/4 Baseline Road, Borella, Colombo, aunt became very ill and came to ask me to get her into the General Hospital. She was very, very ill. I had her admitted and used to call on the patient regularly. When she died there, I sent a telegram to my father who immediately rushed down and himself attended to the final rites of his youngest sister.

It must have been very sad for him but he did not show it. How he felt I understood from two incidents: he did not want anyone else, not even me, there; then, he was keen to get the services of an *aganthuka* (unknown, accidentally met) monk at the grave in Kanatte. He got one.

The recollections of these, our closest elders disclose that our attitude towards the paternal side was not as warm as those with on mother's side. This must be necessarily unfair and prejudicial towards them, though inevitable as it was coloured by

such impressions as we receive from parents, mainly mother, between whom and them there certainly was some bad blood. This is a real tragedy of life that must be avoided. It leads me to a position that is unfavourable to relationship. This is in the normal course of even average village folk, but acts more intensely on people like us, designed for a more intelligent and sophisticated life. These are lessons from which each generation must learn in order to address them to their own special problems. On the whole, I think we should have grown up in greater harmony with our own relations, particularly so as we are a minor social group.

On one side of our house, towards Galle town, was the next garden in which lived Veda Nanda. She was a noted specialist on the cure of boils and received honoured treatment everywhere she was medically summoned. She apparently passed on her knowledge to grandson D.P.Weerasinghe, who is now (i.e.1960) in practice at *Sri Devendra Aushadalaya* in Sarikkamulla, Moratuwa. Or did he pick them up himself? So far as I knew him, and we were playmates, (when we called him Punchi Singho) he never learnt anything remotely connected to medicine!

Veda Nenda (a Devendra, related to us in the paternal line in some way I don't yet know) had a fuzzy head of hair. Her jaws were ever champing on betel. Stern and aloof she appeared, minding her own business, keeping off all by her stiff nature; yet all relatives gloried in her position! For, the highest caste paid her the honour of the highest seat.

Unless in a glorious phaeton she never attended on a distant patient, which enhanced our awe of her. Being a woman, albeit elderly at the time, she never travelled unchaperoned. I used to have that ride of honour sometimes and suspect that the taciturn lady had a soft corner in her heart for me. Father, I noticed, was distant with this elderly relative of his. Perhaps the rankling of an ancient family squabble?

She lived in a well-appointed house, newer than ours, and its surroundings were spotless. The Galle houses ever had a well-swept compound and backyard. When Veda Naenda died we were sure she had returned to us as a *preti*, that horrible spirit with enormous belly, needle-thin throat which ever tried, always unsuccessfully, to drink to fill the great belly, the chiefly food

being pus, phlegm and the like. The old lady must have been a shining example of miserliness (in parental opinion) for us, children, to be fearful of passing her house of nights after her death.

We felt her as one of these goblins. In fact, a cousin saw her likeness one night in our garden, soon after her death, and got fever from the shock and fear of it.

Good old Veda Nenda! I imagine you were very greatly maligned for some ancestral enmity. You were really kind in your own way to us, kids, in spite of it all.

At the back of Veda Nenda's garden lived the "out-castes", namely, the family of Punchi Mutta's mistress. Punchi Mutta, himself, lived in a house still further behind, with his widowed younger son Carolis. This uncle, whose wife who died long before him was not very close to us. Rumour had it that he was fancied by another aunt, the wife of Nikulas Loku Appochchi, the elder sister of Thepanis uncle's wife and of our own village. Perhaps she caused the gossip, childless woman that she was, by visiting a widower oftener than was discreet. Carolis uncle finally died of a diabetic carbuncle on the leg.

Coming round the village and on the side of our house facing Bope one could see our nearest neighbours of the "Pahala gedera". This house was actually two houses, each opposing the other and separated by a compound. In the first lived a relation - his name I cannot recall - who was a drunkard. It was amusing to see the gent, one day in his cups, up the *uguressa* tree of their garden, behaving like a monkey. He had two sons: Hendrick and Simon. After his death, well after, we suddenly discovered his widow with child by his younger brother, Davith. Anyway, soon after, he married her.

In the opposite house lived Panchina, his sister, whom we used to call Akka. Her husband was in the country the known as "the Federated Malay States" and it was to me she used to come to for letters written. These letters always began *Magey adaraneeya swamipurushaya vethatayi*, ("To my dear husband") and she would promise me a specially baked hopper as writer's fee. The man - we have little recollection of him - used to send her money. How long her *adarey* remained I cannot say, but one day she was discovered with child! The male party, it was discovered, was a one-eyed uncle (of sorts), Juwanis,

who had pretensions to Ayurveda, and affectionately known to elders as "Potta Juwa". The offspring, sprang; husband was away and what he could not own had to be removed. One day the infant was dead! Tongues wagged and it was said that in place of the breast the poor brat was given potassium cyanide, (commonly called "potassis"), the deadly poison which all goldsmiths use. The advisor was said to be Potta Juwa!)

The garden beyond was occupied by two families whose houses were rather more far apart, forming two distinct establishments. In the larger one lived aunt Dochchi, an elderly cousin of father's, as well as uncle Nikulas her cousin.

Of the husband of this aunt we know nothing; she was a widow. Her elder daughter, Bala Hamy was reputed to be "frisky". Mother even attributed worse things to her. "Don't you see how she wears her hair bun, hanging on to the nape of the neck? That is a true prostitute's sign." Her sister, Podi, was thin and long and said to be as liberated as the elder sister who had even effected a clever abortion. What stories to hear in our impressionable years - but then all rural life is as raw and natural! They used to have lovely devil-dancing rites that we witnessed well into the small hours.

The next family I have already mentioned in passing. There is little to say except that uncle Nikulas was a kindly man, coming home whenever we cared to call him. He was father's elder and termed the younger man Allis. His reddish eyes - if he drank it was once in a blue moon - and thin moustache trimmed in front with tails at each end are what I picture most vividly of him. Also the fact that his coarsened tongue, by ever chewing betel, could not pronounce words properly. His wife was a harmless woman, derided by my father for her unfaithfulness (he used to call her *vanda pukki*), whom I remember not for her liaison with Carolis uncle but for her nasal voice caused by a perpetual cataarh - *moley kunuvela* as usually described.

Cousin Carolis (of the bottle) and his dappled wife Manjo Nona occupied the next house with their brood. Once they fell on such evil days that a part of the hut was rented out to an old Tamil woman and her son - a great dishonour to the village! I used to watch the woman at work as I was curious to find out the kind of food that Tamils ate. I was horrified one day to see

her gripping a wriggling field fish, rubbing it on the sand for a grip and cutting it with much blood. After that my curiosity was stilled. Porolis was the son of cousin Carolis.

The last house, a fairly prosperous one, was occupied by a family of inky blackness. Though of the same caste, nobody claimed any direct connection with them. They were known as *Roona Girawayas*, that is to indicate they came from the far south. Thepanis, the petty thief, who later married Abanchina our Bope cousin, was from this house.

Beyond all these was the village temple and a larger extension of the village of our people. We were either at the beginning, of caste habitation, or on the outer fringe of the village, depending on whether one comes from Kalegana or Bope. Near neighbours of the village, to go by caste, were the *Oli* folk, - the traditional servitors of ourselves - *tom-tom beaters* who were also astrologers, and *goigama* folk with their traditional *wahumpura* servitors. Between the last of our houses, Bentara Rala's, and the first goigama household, was a potter family, with the name of Pandithage.

5

CHILDREN TOGETHER

We were drilled into keeping together, and in our young days we received the first exercise of being close to one another in every way. Barring those who died too young to have enjoyed themselves with us (Anula was one such) we were in the following order: Henry,the eldest (registered Abraham), and then myself (registered Titus, though originally registered as Alwis).

(The first and the second sons were meant to be named after grandfather and father. This, despite father's scorn at even registering the births of the children: so did not know his children's names!)

Then came Denister, Lolie (registered Lionel), Alice, Chandra (died, a growing maid, in 1922 or so), Krishna (registered Lily), Edward (registered Wepulla) and Lakshmi (registered Achirawathi). The two youngest members, Edward and Lakshmi, so much younger than we, formed a duet by themselves. Their experiences and views of us would illuminate me.

We (the boys) began at the Kalegana village school, and ended up at Richmond College, that is, except the last two. I have a faint memory of being in a sort of Burgher Nursery School in Karlsruhe Gardens, opposite Campbell Park, Colombo. The echo of a class-mate's (girl's) complaint runs in my ears: "Teacher, look at Norman!" I wish I could trace to its origin. At that time my elder brother attended Wesley College, with Bennett aiya. We used to live a roving life in Colombo in those dim

days with father flitting from place to place: Forbes Road, Avondale Road, Green Street, Kuruwe Street are some localities I have heard being mentioned.

My brother and I were fairly good at our lessons. In the village school I once got a double promotion and, on entering Richmond College, I was fairly under age. I was kept back one year there: the gap (in English) caused by College subjects being too widely different from the village school ones to bridge in one year. All the same, I passed my public examinations under age; so did brother. Denister was intelligent but was not a book man. To our disgust - we Richmondites, including father - he did not thrive in our school, but attended alternatively St.Aloysius and Mahinda. I am not sure he did not go to All Saints', too, and thus complete the cycle of English schools in Galle! We used to call him *iskola paluwa!* Lolie finished up at Richmond, getting into a scrape there in his final years, being sent out, and running away (in fear of father's wrath) to a friend's at Weligama. From there I had to drag him home when I was wired to by a friend of his. Then I was teaching at Ananda College, Colombo. The girls attended Richmond Girls' School - now Rippon College.

We were our own playmates, cricket, football, the game known as *upul paninawa* (or otherwise, *lunu adinawa*), and a mock battle with shooting devised by us and opening with the words, "Begin the battle!". We did not keep company with all and sundry. Sometimes, of course, we had our village relatives in; but we considered them too low for companionship, except in the unintelligent games or when we lacked of our own numbers. Thepanis (*kalu kondaya*) was a born thief; he would, after some play, steal the very cricket ball! We liked him, however, for he stood a physical attack on him with great cheer and his body was "like rubber" and could not be hurt. He smiled through all this so that one day, when brother gave him a mighty thrashing and he shed tears, we all felt very bad.

He would also steal Punchi Mutta's brass spittoons; in fact, anything that lay at hand. This was his own failing, for Jamis his elder brother was a respectable youngster and his eldest sister, who was as forbidding in her looks as "Thepa", was a straight, if very stern creature. Thinking back, I feel the unwritten law against consorting with outsiders was healthy. Porolis is a good example. He used to bring us news of the carousals of his arrack-bibbing and graceless father, and speak of the fragrance

of *rata beema* (foreign liqour). I remember being fascinated by his tales. Then, after much persuasion by us, he would bring us the dregs - as he used to call - and we used to sample them. They invariably tasted of water, so that he must have deceived us. I only hope it was water and nothing more biological!

Karunanayake of Mahavidane gedera used to regale me with sex talk, dragging Prince Siddhartha and Yasodhara into them. As he was so much older than I, the stories had to be believed for we were ignoramuses, being house-bred, in these matters. We survived all these, but the law, I think, was fair enough.

We were all "goody-goodies". Occasionally we trod the crooked path - as I once did with tobacco-chewing. The habit was quite a fashion with the grown-ups and, one day, I asked mother why on earth chewers spat out so. She explained that tobacco was potent and if spit should be swallowed the chewer would feel giddy. Well, that was a ruse of mine. I snicked some tobacco and enjoyed myself the liberties of a grown-up.

Unhappily, I did it from an easy chair in the verandah and the floor was a real mess as I was too young to aim too far out. So mother caught me. Father was ill that day, but she had to report the matter to him.

He thrashed me by proxy! He got my elder brother to tie my outstretched hands to a door bar, to look like Christ on the cross, and also to use a guava stick on me! Worst of all, the juniors were watching. But brother was a great man, he did not hurt me deliberately. I have a feeling the complainant herself was not happy at the outcome. But I did have my tobacco, one day, in another form - the stump of a cigar. My head went whirring and I threw out. With great difficulty I staggered on to bed and slept it off. Nobody caught me that day!. On the sly we also used to smoke dried *adathoda* or plantain or even coconut leaves wrapped up in odd bits of newspaper. But these were all sins that passed off in a short time after their first thrills.

Whether in the use of foul words or even in early sexual 'crimes' I had been schooled into not taking too much notice in immature folk, when I came to handle them as a teacher. These are only means of satisfying of some passing curiosity. I would even consider as non-evil some things like stealing, as one brother did when he flicked a grand stamp album from Dhamminda

Thera. As ill-luck had it, father sent it to the same temple in order to pawn it for some badly needed cash! The secret was out, but nobody bothered very much about the "crime". I am sure we had a reformed brother.

We did not go out to other houses as a rule and that was a direct cause of our not knowing many a relation. So that when Paulusz, ex-African businessman, narrated details of his own house so close to ours, I could never place him.

Father was a congenital experimenter, and he indulged in his fancy even in our education. But first, one or two other incidents to show his penchant. When my first haircut was due he was sent, by my grandmother and mother, to consult an astrologer for the auspicious time. He obeyed the bullying females and brought back the *nekatha*. My hair was shorn off and - so everyone says - almost immediately the neck muscles weakened, and my head could not be held up straight. Apparently I had suffered long with this chill, as it must have been that. Even when I recovered, gradually, after copious applications of *siddhartha,* oil they often spoke of the almost ineradicable coat of dirt at my neck. I used to sing a song to myself, taught by my guilty parent:

Buddhang sarane balayeng - mage leda hondavendai!

Long after, it was disclosed that father had been definitely advised against cutting my hair on that day! (That was the stuff of which my father was then made!)

Then, again, he was very fond of Dravidians and used to tell us that these sturdy men worked in the estates as coolies, nourished on plain rice mixed with cold water and a broken chilli or two. He tried it himself but we said, "No thank you" in effect. He attempted to drink water through his nose, on the argument that the nose and mouth ultimately discharge to the throat. He was described as having just escaped death by choking.

That such a character was moved by idealism was obvious. So that when a saintly "caste" gentleman by the name of Weeraratne started a new English school in the upstair building styled "Kondanna Hall" in Galwadugoda village and was looking out for boys, there was father ready to supply four of them. Mr.Weeraratne belonged to the top grade. He was mad on

the religion, so much it was said he never cleaned his teeth in order to let the germs live on. A short, fair-skinned moon-faced man he used to teach Mathematics at Mahinda College, just long enough to collect money for his pet schemes. That scheme was the construction of the Hall in a spot of hilly jungle and sufficiently secluded to make a Forest Hermitage of it, chiefly for foreign monks. There were several Burmese, Siamese and European monks who resided in it from time to time. We were amused to see the Burmese eating tender and raw mango or cadju leaves with their rice. (Father used to delight in eating raw margosa leaves with his rice!)

Weeraratne master used to know French, which he used to teach me; he closeted in his room and I well away, each shouting to the other! He had other accomplishments, too, knowing Physics, Latin and the like - certainly a versatile man. He was a holy man, never lost his temper, perpetually smiling, devoted to the practice of the Dhamma. In his last years he donned the robe and led an exemplary life at Kalutara, his birthplace. When he started the school he had a Britisher by the name of Godd as its Principal. We were drafted there, but merely by absenting ourselves from Richmond. Brother used to complain that there were no proper teachers and so he was returned to Richmond. I held on longer, learning Chemistry from a tiny book at the hands of a cloth-wearing gent with a *konde* (hair tied in a knot), whose only apparatus was the wee text-book and the laboratory was the class-room!

I used to be excited about Godd, the live Englishman closest known to me. I was walking up the stairway one noon when he was coming down and then he told me something. I did not understand a single word - spoken by an Englishman, the language was not as we pronounced from books. I went on calmly climbing. By the time the man returned, he stared at me, said something equally unintelligible and then slapped me! Apparently I had been told to get off the stairs.

A Tamil man cooked for Godd and of evenings I used to watch his dinner, mostly rounded off with a large pancake, being done by the servant. What a delicious smell the frying of this *arthapal rotiya*, (Potato-bread) as I called it, was wafted on to my nostrils! But I used to steal silently up and swill Godd's condensed milk, having acquired an extraordinary taste for it, as

I had had it as my principal baby food. I was never seen and so trusted that the servant used to complain to me about the greed of boys who stole Godd's milk!

This was not the only incident of our school wanderings for, one day, the bunch of us were taken to Mahinda College, the hated rivals of Richmond. That was because we could not manage to pay our fees and father suddenly remembered to exploit our religion! Mr.F.L.Woodward, the great Pali scholar, held out no hopes to us - and, I think, quite properly as we did not seek admission right at the beginning. When we came away disappointed, father described this Englishman as a vinegary and even hard-hearted man into whom the religion had not properly seeped. He contrasted him with Rev.W.J.T.Small the charming Richmond Principal who was full of "Maithri"! I must say, in father's favour, that this excursion to Mahinda College was due to dire need, and to no eccentricity or romanticism, as it had been with Kondanna Hall.

In the village school, where we were before joining Richmond, we were terrorised by Hendrick Master. I had - for the most part - a comfortable time, suffering only once from a murderous slap which Hendrick Master gave for not answering a loud summons from him. I was then in practically the top class having done very well through to it. So I did not deserve to be so mercilessly stung, but then I was busy in loud talk with another and drowned Hendrick Master's shout (even as my son Tissa does to this day) and Hendrick Master's temper was aflame! He had either a cancer in his right jaw or a perpetual toothache. He would send for milk coffee at odd times and whilst bits of cream were still clinging to his moustache, open his jaws to breathe out fire (as when chillies are bitten) and, in like pain, go on massaging the jaw with his open palm.

We regarded him with awe. He was soft towards us, the children of an erstwhile pupil of his. Every New Year we were sent to him with betel. Even when we had become "gentlemen" at College, if ever we met him on the road, we doffed our hats. His younger brother, Anderson, also taught me; "Andeshun Master", we used to call him. He did not seem very enamoured of Hendrick Master, his elder relative, and was certainly different from him due to a certain gentleness and, physically, by much shorter height. We used to say that Hendrick Master did not pay his younger brother regularly.

"James Master" was the youngest of a trio of teachers. He, like Hendrick Master, but not like Anderson, wore his hair in a bun. He was a very good and somewhat aloof man, though he would thaw when necessary. He did not like any boy near him and, if close approach was inevitable, he would hold his fist in front of his mouth. There was a black and prominent encrustation outside of the front of his teeth in the lower jaw which thrust out the lower lip to give a bulge. Perhaps his breath was offensive because of this growth and, being the good man that he was, he spared his pupils' feelings. (My wife once remarked that I particularly noticed another's teeth. That is so, but I was not aware of it until she told me. She, for her part, is very conscious of eyes; to me, they mean nothing.)

We had orders to call father "Pappa" and mother "Mamma". Some time during the years of World War I (1914-18) we begged father to allow us to call them by Sinhalese terms, but it was refused. By error I once called Anderson Master "Pappe", more than once in fact. He did not hear it, nor did the boys and so I escaped being made to look a fool.

Near the school was Kalegana junction with its *watakade* as the leading general store. It was run by "*iskole mahattaya*" so honoured as he had taught somewhere for a few days only! We used to run an account there and I do not know whether father could ever bear the load although rice was sold for about 6 cents. a measure. *Samba* (which we called *surumaniyang*), at 12 cents was for millionaires and Table rice (*Mese hal*) for multi-millionaires!

We would be fed right royally when there was money. Father must have suffered terribly when he could not earn enough for that plus the school fees at Richmond. The kindly monks of the Barbers' village (Ramanna Sect), particularly Dhamminda Thera (*Dandakasthaveera*), would ask brother or me (most often me) to be sent to him when the monks were invited to an almsgiving. I was in the *status quo* of an *abittaya*, but, being dressed in short trousers, did not do any service of the post! Actually I returned home from these trips after veritable feasts. I was rather thin and a bookworm and therefore it was feared that I might contract tubercolosis; so I suspect. Therefore the *abittaya* job must have been a conspiracy between monk and father. I have no reason to think that I was the pretty "boy-girl" and so received favours. It is Denister who is reputed to have been our handsomest. Against my elder brother, however, I scored heavily in looks. Assorted aunts used to compare us to

Jayampathi and Kusa in the "*Kusa Jatakaya*" and tease brother that if ever he went a-seeking his Pabavati, he must show me to her if she were to be lured!

Father would put us up at about 4.30 a.m. for studies. We had to go to the well at dawn and upon drawing the first bucket he had taught us to take three drinks murmuring *siyalu satwayo niduk vetva, nirogi vetva, suwapath vetva*. To this day I have not failed to repeat the phrases though not in the morning but as I close my eyes to sleep. Could that be why I hardly remember evil dreams and also why I sleep soundly? The latter ability, though, is a hereditary trait!

We had to do household tasks in the morning, taking them in rotation - sweeping the house, front yard, garden (or collecting fallen leaves), washing plates, rolling up mats and so on. The cleaning of the dirt in drains was father's greatest joy. And he did it with his hands! Burning heaps of collected leaves and twigs in the night was our joy. Tree-climbing in the proper style was an accomplishment of Denister's; we just could not manage it in the professional way.

Night study was by coconut-oil brass lamp. There is a confirmed belief that the light from its wicks is soft to the eyes. Nine o'clock was very, very late in the village where there was no public lighting. When one was compelled to go out, it was with a *chulu* light. *Chulus*, or *hulu athu*, were stacked in every kitchen. The night lamp was the universal bottle lamp, generally made of an eau-de-cologne bottle. Kerosene oil was economized by being poured on top of a large column of plain water. The long cloth wick absorbed the oil directly below before burning.

Father would get an attack of religion on some days, when it took the form of dinning the *Dhamma* into young heads. Then he would preremptorily command us to sit alongside each other on small chairs and expound the intricacies of the doctrine, after prefacing his sermon in some words such as these he once shot out: *Thopila kalakanniyo. Mewa thopilage kane yavul aninawa vage.* (You are sinners. This is like boring into your ears with an awl!). The three eldest were very subdued, but Lolie would, after some time, start to pick up a bit of paper or rag or thread from the floor and start breaking it up, chewing or throwing it. Then would father burst out at the "sinner", *Moo diha balanna. Moo giya jatiye veddek. Kochcharavath ath deke*

vadai. Neththam bili bannek. Ama amunanavai mugey vadey. (Look at this fellow. In his previous birth he must have been a Veddah. Always fidgeting with his hands. Or he has been a fisherman. All the time he's baiting his hook). Lolie, the youngest, was cheeky. He would generally go on murmuring to himself some sort of retort.

I am sure father knew this, but was really indulgent. He had an enlarged navel, had Lolie, and we used to call him *loku buriya*, in addition to *naloris*. Memories of them (Lolie and Denister) when very young are very hazy now. Almost all I remember is an invitation from Lolie, then a young lisper, to his immediately elder brother, Denister. Lolie was standing on the hillock overlooking our backyard and had his little cloth raised well up and ready for nature. He did not want to go alone, so he called out: *Enna hinni aiye henna yanna*. Such invitations were invariably responded to, for that is how most people - at least children - nearer to nature than city folk, time their natural functions.

Denister, though the handsomest in my maternal grandmother's eyes - he was her greatest favourite - was not clever, except in the ways of the world; *kapati kam*, in the opinion of our elders. To us he was as dear as the other brothers and sisters were. He did not thrive on books and was the boy described as an *iskole paluwa*, who attended the three big colleges.

At one time his hearing was affected, when he was said to be under the effect of an evil star. Where sharpness of wit was to be used, Denister was our emissary: a decoy to steal a few things from the miserly boutique-keeper in front (*sevalaya*, to us boys), to palm off a dud coin, to steal mangoes from someone's garden, and to drive a successful bargain with a boutique-keeper and so on. He was strongly rumoured (by us, his siblings!) as pinching our marketing money!

However that may be, once we had a great and unbelievable treasure - a real wrist-watch - and on one of our bad days we had to send him out to sell it. He came back with the story of how a stranger robbed it. As he narrated it, a man came up to him and suddenly asked:

"Have you a wrist-watch, boy?"

Whereupon Denister crossed his arms and said:

"No".

"You're lying" said the man pulling his hands apart to take the watch and calmly go away.

A story to tell the Marines, it was. But what could we do?

When we had nothing to sell or pawn, it was an ancient (but very fine) pair of mother's tailors' scissors that used be pawned, the broker being a neighbouring relative. We never could get more than 50 cents for it all throughout its wandering career; but fifty cents was a lot of money, in a way, in those times for the food so essential for us. I used to take it around and when I became "respectable" (by going into a higher class and graduating to long trousers) the turn fell to the brother next, who was Denister. He did a better job than I and, certainly, suffered the humiliation of it many more times. And when a brother suffers, children are very sympathetic towards their luckless fellow. To this day I feel a great affection, deep in my heart, towards Denister whatever fate had in store for him.

A cruel picture of him, which I cannot erase from my mind, was an act of wicked mischief by me. We had a seat with a back and its seat itself was divided into accommodation for two by two square planks let into a frame. I took away one plank when he was about to sit on it but deftly without his noticing it. Down he sank through it to the floor. He was slightly bruised luckily, but I still remember his mental hurt and reproachful remark that my joke may have killed him!

Denister was our tree-climber *par excellence* though all of us would tackle overhanging mango branches and work our way into the tree to eat the fruits, skin and all. This we did it on the sly for, I think, fruit was forbidden to us. We would eat ripe *lovi* from the tree by the side of the house, but would be thrashed if caught. *Bovitiya* and *gandhapana* (lantana) we ate freely; they were not in the category of fruits, anyway. Ripe *jak* and plantains and an occasional papaw or pineapple were also in the fare. We loved to get into the vegetable cultivations (of others) and pluck young cucumber. Often we had our fill of the small left-overs from the picked crop. Denister was once caught up a fruit tree and was temporarily lost sight of – until the

rumour caught up with us that the angry owner had seized him and kept him tied to the tree. Brother was sent at dusk to ransom him. The jailor was only a caste man and had meant no more than to frighten the lad.

Brother, though he played with us, was a little too big for us. More, he was a sort of teacher of ours, not slow in using his fist - particularly on me at mathematics, in which he himself was gifted. The three younger boys were more together. As a little chap brother seemed, from all reports, to have been very wilful and ferocious. He was excellent at chewing off people who looked after him, so Balahamy Akka used to say (- when an infant, of course!)

The girls were tom-boys amidst us. There was Alice, whose registered name was Seelawathie (I remembered this only yesterday), the stubborn girl who lived thoroughly up to this reputation, in her adult life. Chandra, the gentle, died in the early 'twenties at Peradeniya Junction of malignant malaria; she had attained to maidenhood then. Krishna (registered Lily) died of tuberculosis after two children were borne by her to Albert Halpita whom she married.

Lakshmi (registered Achirawathie) was hardly noticed, as was her immediately elder brother Edward. Edward was born in the year I took the Cambridge Junior, when I was on my way to my sixteenth year. These last two, Edward and Lakshmi, were practically out of our reckoning.

Having read adventure stories Denister, Lolie and I would go a-hunting wild men and animals within a patch of scrub jungle used as a lavatory. We had iron blades (blunt) of arecanut-cutters stuck in our waists, and come away having grappled with savages and carnivores! We were voracious readers to whom these experiences were vivid. In College I was particularly unrivalled as a reader of stories, with the record of a 500-page adventure book read in a day, beginning after 4.30 p.m.!

One of our chores was to look after a she-goat and kids that we hired out for milk for the family baby. As mother was having too many babies - she would flare up when father, in loose talk with a crony or other, would exaggerate their number unconsciously - she was short of breast milk to feed them. The Salagama villagers of Dadalla, on the way to Gintota, kept goats; we were on excellent terms with them. Father would make a bargain with a Dadalla man and obtain a she-goat with kids,

sometimes two such mothers, on a monthly hire. So we became goat-herds in turn. After school we had to take the mother and the kids to feed, well away from our own garden where there was not much of the fodder they liked.

They liked best jak-leaves but it was not easy to get them off big trees. *Eramudu,* thorny but rich in milk-giving content, was particularly relished. *Kaduru,* the field variety with its cricket-ball fruits, was easier to get; but the goat was wilful towards it. *Nidikumba* it liked very much, but took long to collect it with its long lips. *Madu* and *ginitilla* were also very useful. Except for *nidikumba,* all the others we ourselves had to work for. Up we would shin, with cloth or sarong tucked through the thighs into an *amude,* and enjoy the hewing of branches. Much husbandry was needed so that a place may not be emptied of all fodder and also that some stuff was left handy for the rainy days in which we could only make quick outings. We also had to keep a weather eye on the kid, the thief!

On fine days, when a library book caught the fancy, I would take it and, having attended to the goat by tying it securely or throwing a bundle, would ensconce myself on the fork of a big tree and soon be lost in the pages of adventure.

But the responsibility of the goat was not forgotten in my absorption for, if its own kid stole the milk, a baby sister of mine would have to go hungry. I think we all did a good job as watch-fellows. After feeding the animal we had to bring home a large bundle for the night; greedy goat is as common, in our experience, as greedy pig - in fact, more so, for we hardly ever saw pig in our Buddhist villages except when well dressed for the table. Then it was we who were greedy for pig. Our family, not mother much, was fond of pork.

These excursions were great days and we loved to see wild life in its little ways, particularly the birds, tiny ones of the hedges, their nests, eggs and the young. Never would we lop off a branch that had even the beginnings of a bird home. We would watch the parents feeding the young, try to identify the different kinds of bird-feed, quietly try to insert a finger into the door of the nest to excite the little ones and make them open their vast mouths, and indulge in a hundred such pleasant experiences.

In these pleasurable excursions were the beginnings of a great love for helpless animals which all of us learnt. We were ever on the lookout for the young of birds, not very shy, which could be brought home. We would then get father to make temporarily cages of *ekel,* for captives. The fledglings would only be such as nested near the house. Then we would hang up the cage on a string connecting the original bush with another in the garden - safe from devouring crows - and watch the parent birds in their first boldness in approaching their caged young to feed them. As they grew familiar with the surroundings we would gradually move the prison nearer the house and even into the verandah. That was always successful, but most so with mynahs from the old jak tree in the back garden. We had five of them together once. They would be released for outdoor feeding being herded by one of us. We always let them off for good, once we felt them strong enough. Once, however, we had the young of that white bird-of-paradise, *redi hora*, but overnight tree-ants (*dimiyo)* had travelled along the string and the poor thing was found dead in the morning. The sorrow remains with me to this day.

Sometimes, though I think it was before the love for animals caught me well, I would do cruel things as well. However I did not induce others to follow me. I would seize small butterflies and other insects and feed them to a swarm of homing ants. These, I now think, were scientific experiments for I would feed the ants with various kinds of grains of grass and so forth to test what they eat and what they reject. Watching their ways gave me a great time.

At the end of the front garden and abutting the highroad was the boutique of the old miser called "*Sevalaya*" whom we children would rob of *jaggery*, clay vessels and the like, for mischief. He got his name from a traditional story. An uncle of his called on him in his boutique and the nephew gave him a chew. When going away, the uncle felt he should buy something and called for a hand of betel. He counted the number of leaves he got - that was the usual thing to do - and found it was short by one. When he asked his nephew why so, the latter said, "What about the one you had for your chew?" The uncle then said, so we hear, *"Apoi bung umba thamai hari sevalaya*".

As a rule we kept to ourselves, mixing little with the neighbours of our age, or travelling about, so that we do not know much of the places not far away from the village. We were regarded with a certain amount of awe, on our own rights, as boys

and girls engaged in studies to which none of our folk in the village could aspire. Thus we were not "running wild", so to say, but content to be know-alls of our area.

The fairly regular journeys were to Galle town by foot and mainly to the post-office to cash the money or postal orders which father would despatch in the course of a long itinerary. The day of his return would be advised ahead and one of us boys would meet him in town; I think I did it most often. He had a standing order placed with a Moorman on the side of the Galle bazaar who ran a small eating-place. The man would place a bowl of fine soup, beef, with the meat very well boiled; a basin of leaves accompanied it. We would enjoy the feed immensely. Invariably the account came to the same trifling amount and we used to wonder whether he was hiding somewhere and watching the number of leaves we ate, for he never seemed to count how many of them disappeared!

An occasional well-to-do relative of Bope, Janishamy, would give us a grand feast of *godamba* he met us in town. Rumour said he was after Bachchina Akka, our eldest Bope cousin and we exploited him by manoeuvring to get a hackery ride at his expense. It is to his shop that one of us would go to buy the gold which was required for father's business. The small quantity would be hammered into a thin long strip which mother would cut into tiny bits for dissolving in acid to make up the mixture that was used to gild the jewellery.

Janishamy's brother, Bais Hamy, would be the supplier and beater of gold. One of his eyes would be opened much larger than the other, as he went about his job. This used to fascinate us.

We would sometimes also buy fish and beef in the great market. How we fared in business I do not remember. I was known to be greedy for dried fish (*karola*), and an aunt dubbed me *kunu karolaya*. Buddhasiri Thera of the village had read in my horoscope that I was a very kind-hearted boy, and when I proudly conveyed this opinion to mother, it was with the remark that however much *karunawantha* I was, I would never give up dried fish!

Came a stage when some of us - at least I - became too superior to bring fish etc. I know of a day when I took the umbrella for this job and brought home the whole fish inside it - imagining all the way that every passer-by was inquisitive of the bulge in the umbrella! After dark we would go to the junction where *Lavaya*, an "*Oli*" man would bring fish. We would watch his pricing of the slices preparatory to separating them. Then we would bid for the money we had.

[*The narrative begun in December, 1960, and continued in fits and starts, is abandoned in January, 1961. However, the MSS is picked up eight years later, in June, 1969, and some additional notes made, before it is completed.*]

6

HUNGER IS AGONY

From the Unpleasant to the Pleasant. There was many a day when, getting up from our mats - we used to stretch a couple of them lengthwise but sleep across, thus getting a lot of room – exclaiming: "Today we have NOTHING TO EAT!" How agonizing to a large and young family. Father would have set out at the crack of dawn for work. But he would come towards nightfall. And, if he were away in another postal region, his letter and remittance would arrive not on our hungry day but on the next!

Now, what exactly was father's job? Rumours I had heard, before the age of understanding, had it that he had a group of goldsmiths in the house working for *Chettiars* in Colombo. But he worked so "big" that, in the end, he was indebted to them. Typical in the *Chettiar* tradition, they believed he had a heap of money but in actual fact he was decidedly poor – why, and how, I do not know. One instance came to my knowledge from mother. She fell ill of a murderous diarrhea. At that time, this from her mother my grandmother, there was in the almirah a "cup full of gold sovereigns". Upon her recovery none of the

hoard was left. Probably they were there for gold work. But then, here they went. Could this have been the beginnings of his hard days?

And so, life! Mother never liked the men who worked in the house for father. She would cavil at the way their *konde* hair stood out in wisps from the temples "rusty coloured and stinking". She swore the goldsmith never prospers because it is the royal head of the coins he first flattens out with his miserable hammer.

And now to Hunger! What could we do? Sometimes we stripped the two king coconut palms of all their fruits. Sometimes we dug up, cooked and ate - with agonizing stomach pains - the great big *habarala* yams which throve in utter magnificence behind the house, because of the ash and kitchen refuse we threw there.

More sad than all this was when mother's great big pair of (possibly tailors') scissors had to be pawned to a certain neighbour (always in the night, to save the family shame) for never more than 50 cents! When we had to go on these pawning missions we often had no decent cloth to wear. Then either mother or father would strip off theirs for the nonce. To redeem the scissors, we had to wait until father sent a Postal Order from some (then remote) Post Office.

There being no sub-Post Offices, one had to go to Galle Post Office, 4 miles along our red gravel roads - not tarred or macadamized. To come back with red-dusted feet was a joy for that was a sign of our noble endeavour and exertion to help the family. Most often it was one rupee or 1.50 he sent, and hardly ever such a "million" as 3.50. In the Post Offices of those days we hadn't to get our signatures certified. There was less dishonesty then, perhaps?

Most of the Post Office journeys fell to my lot, and much of the pawning missions. I never grumbled. After I had "graduated" into the Upper Forms of Richmond College, nearly all of the pawning of the scissors fell upon the brother next to me, Denister. The troubles Denister shouldered for the family have never, to this day, ceased to endear him to me. I suppose two in the family next to each other are closely conjoined in many ways as I found Denister and Lolie often to be. Even now, in my 69th.year I can clearly call to mind the scene of Lolie standing on a ridge in our back compound with his sarong (or cloth, we

little chaps had no sarongs then) and calling upon Denister thus: *Enna hinni aiye henna yanna*. Our lavatories were the clumps of *pinna* bushes further beyond. But Denister, and the sadness he bore for our sakes, I never forgot. Denister's was a chequered life - as a small boy. As a child, he was amazingly pretty: and was my grandmother's dearest grandson. But he did not prosper in a single school - from father's time the family were Richmondites - *kande iskole* - folk, it being the closest to us. He couldn't get on long there, even though he was, in the lower school, a classmate of the Dahanayake (W & K) twins! He left us for other schools - in fact for the other three of Galle's best known ones: Mahinda, All Saints' and St. Aloysius'. How they were considerate enough to take in such a "discard" I never knew! But, it is said his horoscope (since lost) "predicted" these meanderings. Finally, at some point in his young life he went temporarily "deaf": perhaps because of wax accumulating in his years.

My father was notorious for changing our names. In a paternally nostalgic moment he called himself after his father, Hendrick Don Alwis. My elder brother, D.A. was Don Abraham Devendra - nobody knew him so for he was, to us all, Don Henry Devendra. I was known as Titus (but Freddy within the family). By what quirk of imagination he gave me a Roman General's name, I do not know, but there were senior Titus' in our town. But when I went to collect my Birth Certificate at the Galle Kachcheri (I was under age, 16, for the Cambridge Junior and not eligible for Honours and Distinctions) I found, to my consternation, that I had been registered as Don Allis Loku Devendra! What name my brother Denister bore, I don't know but the next brother, registered as Lionel, was freely Lolie (after *"Loli Thuma"* in India, was father's explaination). Alice (registered Seelawathie) suddenly became Mallika, but the sister next to her (who died of suspected meningitis in 1922) fortunately escaped the "changing" fate. But not so Krishna, the next, who had been registered Lily - as I myself saw when searching for her birth certificate before her marriage.

How can I ever forget poor unfortunate Krishna who died, with only her parental family around to tend to her, in Ward XI A of Kandy Hospital, on Monday, April 5th. 1943 at 7.30 p.m.? I still have the details of the Death Certificate being issued at the Kandy Out Door by Dr.Outschoorn. It was wartime and I accompanied her alone on her Death Journey, appropriately in the

night, in A.F.Raymond & Co.'s Funeral car for her cremation at Kanatte Crematorium at 10.30 a.m. on 6th. April, 1943. The money, Rs. 250/-, I paid in the name of my elder brother (Receipt dated April 6th, 1943, No.466.)

But – back to childhood. When it rained we had no raincoats or umbrellas when going to school - and yet, with a martinet of a father, to school we had to go. We wore no shoes till we boys came up to the upper forms - a very sensible thing - and, more sensible still, we wore hats. In place of raincoats, which I don't believe we ever saw, father would wrap us up on some cloth and were horrified at being seen on the public highway like rolled up mummies! We would slink across the back garden, cross the road by the Bope toddy tavern, cut across gardens and get on to the railroad - and then to peel off the "mummy wrapping" directly when out of sight from our garden - and march honourably on! The gain to the honourable (and King's) highway required another route: out of the front of the house, turn right onto the high (red-gravelled) road, past Kalegana Junction (cross-roads), on to Velagedera Hamine's house, right on to the railroad via gardens and up the hill.

Such is life. Now, with these memories still searing our souls, our sons and daughters must understand why I have been recently appearing to them to be close-fisted. My wife, too, had her share of miseries but she was too young to feel them so close to her. My brother, Edward, too knew little. He was a tiny tot who, with our parents, sought the Elysian fields forever giving up our ancestral home bought by my paternal grandfather, Don Hendrick Loku Devendra (subsequently Kulasekera). I remember when, on my first teaching job at Siddhartha College, Balapitiya (then I was only 17 - but I had, along with my brother, to earn for the family), how a letter from home came to me. And I remember that, in it, was a piece of *roti* enclosed by Edward, with his love. Its recollection brings tears to my eyes to this day.

When we had nothing to eat - sometimes father was dead tired, too tired to roam the world every day and must rest his weary limbs; sometimes he was physically unwell; sometimes it was raining, - then I remember telling that living saint of my school principal, the Rev.W.J.T.Small, of all our unhappiness. I had no indication as to whether he thought it was the usual Sinhalese trick to cadge money or whether he did, in fact, believe my story. For I got nothing for my recital, except perhaps, some relief in the telling.

One thing, however, he did for me. When the time came, in 1916, to send up my fees to Cambridge for the Junior Local (I was under age to be awarded Honours and Distinctions) my father could only give me half the fee. With it, I explained my plight to the Principal. Very graciously, he undertook to advance the balance from the school funds on the condition that I would meet it if I failed. Luckily I happened to pass, being one success in about 8 out of some 20 or more - a great achievement for a carpenter's grandson whose home language was not English. Prouder still was I two years later, when I sat for the Cambridge Senior Certificate and passed it in 1918, scoring the only Distiction in English in the Southern Province and also the first ever Senior Distinction in that language in the annals of Richmond College, among whose alumni were folks of the brilliance of C.W.W.Kannangara, P.de S.Kularatne, etc. etc. There, again, was what a village-bred, Sinhalese-speaking boy could do. Up on the Honours Boards of my school - unless they have since been removed under a new dispensation - you will find my name first (under the relevant subject) as well as the fact that I had been awarded the coveted "Old Boys' Essay Prize". English, it must be remembered, was then the most honoured subject in school!

I have spoken much about how we used to go hungry. But this I must add, that is, that we never stole a thing from any garden for food. We had a large and aged jak tree in the front garden; but it was in full vigour and used to bear good fruit. One night, when my uncle Thepanis happened to be in the house our cousin Carolis of the cups was discovered (by the rustling of the branches) on the tree knocking off a fruit or two. It was our village and then there were no thieves as we now have them.

Uncle went up fearlessly under the tree and ordered the thief down. Poor Carolis! He begged our pardon for his crime. Uncle's reply was this; "Carolis, if you and your family are starving, why don't you ask us for food? You know we'll give whatever we can spare."

Hunger is Agony. We stripped all trees of edibles - even immature - to appease it. Even *kurumba atti* we did not allow to remain. Semi-mature jak we would skin and cut the seeds across with *renu* and shell, mix with coconut and boil into a concoction styled *polu gahanawa*. The most poignant experience within my sight was that in which my elder brother was involved. We had some workers (in gold) in the house who prepared their own meals. We were supposed to have had our

dinner (but in fact we were starving that night) when brother got involved into an argument with one of the men who were about to eat their plate of food. The argument resulted in an offer of .25 cents to brother if he could finish off the full plate - we having given the impression of having fed heartily. Well, my starving brother passed the test and won the bet. I suspect the man threw the bet deliberately, to help one of our starving family.

What, exactly, did we eat? We ate a lot of fish (you remember that as Bertie Wooster's reason for Jeeve's quick thinking?) A kind of fish we then called *larggo* (now, as city-dwellers, *salayo*) with a faint, salmon-pink ridge, small chaps, these were in plenty and cheap. So were *halmesso* and *handallo* their somewhat elder brothers. Of the bigger kinds we had *bollo* (now *kumbalawo*) and *alagoduwo* (now *ra guduwo*). The biggest were *thalapath* for whose fishiness we had a dislike, distinctly. Salt fish was a-plenty. We used to bring it - horror of horrors! - with "worms" (mosquito lavae) in the juice of the *gus muttiya.* We loved salted fish. So little of it gave so much zest to one's plate of rice. Dried fish was also popular, but not to the same extent.

Our vegetables were all the village kind, except for radish. Carrots, knol-khol, etc. were unheard of. Cabbages came once in a way but with the awful smell of flesh in corruption.

A home plant with the same horror was *kidarang.* But, it being so, we only took its tenderest and unfolding leaf-in-the-making, taking care to tie it up in the middle with a thread (to prevent the exudation of poison by the leaf's opening, so I thought!) but, by adults thought, to prevent the irritation on the tongue. But we weren't to speak its name when eating it! As a dry curry and properly served with maldive fish, it was divine. Pork was no less divine, when present.

We loved, most of all, the day mother, in her inimitable way, prepared Yellow Rice for us, for no special occasion. All we had was rice cooked in yellow water, plenty of onions (cleaned and boiled) with sliced maldive fish – cooked together. None of your other stuff, like *ghee,* meat, *brinjals, seeni sambol* and the rest. Mother's simple preparation was, to me at least,

as aesthetically appealing as the very plain *dagoba* - with only its simple flower altars without ornamented *Vahalkadas* to hide the nobility of an edifice which should not be obscured.

Reading (school lessons only) we did for an hour or two in the night, by a brass lamp with several coconut-oil wicks. In the kitchen we had *eau-de-cologne* bottles three-quaters full of water and kerosene on top. The house was lit with the usual *gedi* lamp, with chimney and a "hopper" hood - you see them today. A house like ours had hardly more than a couple in use. Of rooms we had only two, one hall, a verandah, kitchen and back work-yard.

We, none of us, needed that persuasion to go to school, as the parents of today seem to need to do. In the village school I attended - it's now moved out and unmanageably big - we would eat sugar-cane which was being sold for a few cents during the interval. They, surely, must have benefited our health more than the "popsicles" of today!

Sometimes, however, Poverty interfered with studies At College - Richmond - we had been asked one day to bring a new exercise book. I went without one - because we hadn't the few cents - I think .04 or .06 - for it. What, then, could I do? Report to the teacher our poverty or stay away? It was the latter I chose.

7

L A S T W O R D S

Twenty or more years have now passed (since my village childhood) and perhaps I am now speaking of the 1930's. This is as good a place as any to end my notes.

I had been a teacher on the staff of Ananda College (under the Buddhist Theosophical Society) for some years, since January, 1922. Those were the days when school fees were collected. Nalanda Vidyalaya, starting as Ananda's extension, began as a private school on its own on 1st.November, 1925. The day-to-day collections were slow - we had a boarding establishment - to demand on them. Salaries fell into arrears. On every Friday we, teachers, foregathered in the office for what we called the weekly dole. Principal, J.N.Jinendradasa, clever actor no less politician, spent most of his time after school at the playground where the cadets were being drilled. Having given his teachers-in-waiting sufficient time to get out, he quietly slipped into his office. There he directed his clerk to dole out fair amounts to those waiting, but a larger quota was assigned to those who had babies for whom milk food had to be bought - even then Rs.10/- was a big quota. The school always honoured its obligations to all of us when the Government Grant came in, at year's end. Not a cent was kept back.

And now, here is the story. In these conditions I had nothing to do but pawn my wedding ring and borrow money from folk who never give more than 100/- at a time @ 120% interest. That is, Rs.10/- was called for by a debt collector right at the end of the month. Failure to honour meant this great avenue closed forever. But, to me, was shown some degree of compassion!

Life is, then, not so frightening.

FINIS

A LIFE BEYOND THE VILLAGE

He left home to take up an appointment as a Teacher at Siddartha College, Balapitiya. He worked there and at St.Anthony's College, Kandy, for two years, till 1920. From then on, till he left the teaching service in 1948, he taught at Buddhist Schools, starting at Ananda College, Colombo under the charismatic Principal P.de S.Kularatne, where he became seriously committed to the Buddhist and Nationalist movements, and adopted the "Ariya Sinhala" costume he wore for the rest of his life. When Kularatne formed Nalanda Vidyalya, tansferring his best teachers and pupils there to give it the correct start, he was one of that team and he remained there till 1936. It was during this time that he earned his Bachelor's Degree from London, got married, had all four of his children, and started to spread his wings as a writer and researcher into Sri Lankan history. His learning earned him a place in the government's Historical Manuscripts Commission during this time.

A call from Kularatne came again: this time to Dharmaraja College, Kandy. In Kandy, where the last vestiges of our last Kingdom yet flourished, he found the place of his dreams and had, perhaps, his happiest days. The first of his four books, "This Other Lanka" was written at this time. But a Principal was needed for Anuruddha College, Nawalapitiya and, in 1943, there he went. But it was a short stay, and he was snapped up as Principal of a privately-funded Buddhist School, Sivali Vidyalaya, Ratnapura. In the four years he spent there, he made it Ratnapura's finest school. But when C.W.W.Kannangara's idealistic "Free Education" Bill, and the creation of the Central School system – both of which he believed in – he persuaded the Attygalle family, who had funded the school for many years, to give it over to government, thus making it Sivali Central College. Serendipitously, soon after, he was asked to apply for the newly created post of Assistance Archaeological Commissioner (Publications) and appointed 1948. Thirty-one years of teaching ended.

But he became a national and, later, world figure in this new appointment. Beginning the Department's series of Guide-books, he began to study Archaeology in the field. It seems impossible to believe that he served with the Department only for eight years, till he reached the optional age of retirement, when one considers the corpus of publications he put out during this period. But again he heard another siren song.

This time it was his old friend Malalasekera who asked him to join the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism as Senior Assistant Editor-cum-Administrative Officer. Here, again, he revelled in his research – this time into religion and philosophy – and there are many entries under his name in the fascicles of the Encyclopaedia. The green hills of Peradeniya, next to his beloved Kandy, were a happy setting for him, and he even had time to serve on the National Education Commission. This was the period of the "Buddha Jayanthi" and his personal homage to the event was the publication of his book, "The Buddha Image and Ceylon". This was followed by the book he was most satisfied with, "Classical Sinhalese Sculpture" published by Alec Tiranti of London. But the inevitable date of retirement arrived and, in 1961, he retired.

Retirement, to him, was not for idling. He joined M.D.Gunasena & Co. Ltd. in their Publishing Department, where he assessed would-be publications and took-over their Vesak Annual. He was happy with his work and the new people he came to know. He found the time to distil the experiences of his lifetime in what was to be his last new book, "Tanks and Rice". This was the last phase of his working life since health problems now became a cause for concern. His real retirement began then, soon after the last of his grandchildren was born. During this period,

between the starting date of his memoirs and their completion, saw him translate his "Buddha Image and Ceylon" into Sinhala as "Buddha Pratimawa ha Lankawa", and a collection of papers, also translated into Sinhala as "Sandakada-pahana saha venath lipi".

His life was a full one, with new interests and old, old friends and new, and adventures every day. On January 1st., 1972, he listened as usual to the 9.30 news at night, went to sleep, and never woke up. The next day he passed away.

THE CHILDHOOD HE GAVE US:

Growing up with D.T.D.

Listening to father's occasional reminiscences of his childhood in rural Kalegana we began to realise that it was vastly different from our own urban, middle class, 'English-speaking' home that he and our mother had established. It was in an attempt to record this forgotten life at the turn of the 20th century that I suggested that he noted down his memories. I had just become a father myself, and had begun to feel the need to document the very different world of my father's childhood for his grandchildren. The wheel has come full circle and, here I am, writing of our childhood for my own grandchildren, at the turn of yet another century, a hundred years after father was born. He would have been pleased.

We were a family of two boys and two girls, and I am the eldest. Six years was the gap between the eldest and youngest. Of our early days in Colombo, when Father taught at Nalanda Vidyalaya, I have but hazy memories. I know we lived in three houses at Borella, Campbell Avenue and Campbell Place before we moved to Kandy, and Dharmaraja College, at the request of Principal P de S. Kularatne. Clear recollections of our family, as a distinct unit, begin from our home at Cross Street, Kandy, where we lived from 1939 till we left for Nawalapitiya in 1943. It was a fairly typical 'middle-class' household – father and the children left for school every morning, on foot, leaving Mother to manage the domestic staff of '*kussi-amma*', '*boy*' and *'ayah*'! This team was standard in those long ago days, serviced by the dire poverty of village life.

Although Father was a teacher, and Mother had been one, there never was any pressure on us to keep at our text- books once we got home. Our playground was the pavement of our quiet street and our playmates our neighbours. We were a noisy lot but this

never bothered Father who did all his work at one end of the living room at a large desk we were prohibited to touch – but whose artifacts fascinated us, particularly a brass headless tortoise used as a paper weight. It is only now, as I prepare a bibliography of his writing, that I am amazed at the concentration and industry with which he produced such an immense volume of scholarly writing – apart from correcting bundles of schoolboy exercises and preparing lessons and test papers – unfazed by the mayhem of a raucous family. It was mother's management of this household that freed him for his scholarly labours. I am afraid we children did not appreciate her contribution to posterity – especially when it was backed up with a cane!

Unlike most of our schoolmates in Kandy we had no 'gama', no "ancestral home", the search for livelihood having dissolved the links with Kalegana. (As children, we also secretly felt deprived of the traditional 'ge' name that all our friends had, and were later thrilled to know that we had had one, which our iconoclastic grandfather had cast aside!) But our lives were enriched by a truly extended family of the friends our parents had made as young people committed to the hopes and ideals of Ananda College (headed by Kularatne) in the heady 'twenties. Father and his friends remained steadfast to these ideals – nationalism, Buddhist education and social egalitarianism – and their friendship to the end of their days. Our parents' very marriage was the product of this commitment to ideals that crossed ethnic and religious divides. This unlikely couple - Mother, a Burgher Presbyterian from Dehiwela, and Father, an '*Arya Sinhala*' wearing Buddhist from Kalegana - met, and subsequently fell in love, during the vigorous Temperance Campaigns, which united Buddhists and Puritan Christians in agitation to close down taverns.

Foremost among these friends were Malalasekera, Ananda Mivanapalana. W.E.Fernando, N.J.Wimalasena, M.E.Dharmadasa and D.C.Lawris who were all our 'uncles' (before today's devaluation of this title). Their families and ours grew up together and we spent extended holidays in each other's homes. Our Cross Street, Kandy, home was popular in August as the Perahera passed our front door-step and our many visitors could view it from there, within touch and smell distance from the elephants, or from our upstair windows.

Father's many interests blossomed in Kandy. It was the heart of our last kingdom and yet a living museum of customs and rituals – all of which he researched and wrote about. He took friends , students – and those of his children old enough – on his rambles to temples and devales in and around Kandy where he held long conversations with bhikkus, kapuralas, dancers and drummers. He was no elitist scholar (these hardly existed at the time) but a great believer in sharing and popularising knowledge.

As such, he wrote regularly to the English newspapers and various 'little' journals that flourished in that era: among them 'Leisure Hours' and 'Young Ceylon', now sunk without trace. Old students of Dharmaraja yet recall his memorable excursions, by bus, to the ruined cities and Sri Pada. Hospitable old boys were tapped to host the busload of noisy boys. I remember dossing down in the halls of the D.M.O. (later Professor) D.A.Ranasinghe at Polonnaruwa and of Rate Mahatmaya (later M.P.) Mahadivulweva at Kalaweva. These outings were lessons in living history with father pointing out interesting features such as drip-ledges and the ever-popular ornamental urinal stones.

Kandy in the early 1940s had a lively intellectual life. It was home to the Kandy Historical Association and the Kandy Literary Society whose liveliest members were teachers of the 'big' schools - Dharmaraja, Trinity and St.Anthony's - together with lawyers. They met regularly and discussed, very knowledgeably, historic sites in the region and heard visiting speakers such as Dr.Paranavitana, or 'veena' recitals by visiting musicians. It was a lively group and Father, characteristically, took me along to listen and, hopefully, pick up something (other than tea and sandwiches!). Father never had a 'not in front of the children' attitude and, those of us who were interested, listened into his long conversations in our Cross Street house with his old friends and others such as Paranavitana, C.W.Nicholas, D.B.Dhanapala, Pieter Keuneman, the Dutch Bhikku Dhammapala, his erstwhile pupil, the Ven. Piyadassi Thera, Arlin Perera the Theosophist, J.Vijayatunga, the racy raconteur and amateur historian Alan Caldera and our older uncle D.A., a teacher at Trinity. Father always had a soft spot for eccentrics and unusual strangers whom he readily welcomed home. Tireless talker Darrel Pieris who had been a swami in Hollywood (or so he said) and now toured the country as a singing propagandist for the Food Production Drive was one of them. Another was mother's old Uncle Harry from Penang who visited us once in a rare while and regaled us with stories and (then) strange Chinese food. Meanwhile the War had come to Kandy and we were witnesses to huge convoys of camouflage-painted trucks roaring along Kandy's once-quiet streets, carrying English, African, Sikh and Gurkha soldiers.

One day a truck stopped in front of our house and, to our consternation, a tall English soldier walked in and asked for a glass of water. He drank it up and thus began Father's friendship with Peter Watts who now became a regular visitor and chatted long and late, even with us curious children. He had literary ambitions which he discussed with Father who encouraged him to write a story of Aiyanar the guardian deity of the Vanni. Watts was moved to Burma but, before leaving, he left with us a box of his writings which were to send on to his wife if he was killed. He survived, and we sent him back his papers. Watts kept in touch with us and went on to publish a first novel in which he had a character, "Guruwadena", based on Father.

Many of Father's journeys to faraway, and little-known, historic sites was on foot. With a group of kindred souls he travelled by car or bus to the take-off point and they hiked for days wandering around, observing and talking to the villagers, of Sorabora or Elahera. They returned tick-bitten and beat, but full of fascinating adventures and material for more writing. He was a self-taught photographer, first with an Agfa and later a Rolleiflex. He had an innate feel for composition and a knowledge of what feature he wanted to illustrate in taking a picture. But he was no dark room fanatic and had his prints developed at Silva Studio in Castle Street. His photography was so good that it caught the eye of the legendary Lionel Wendt who published his photo documentation of the long-forgotten sleeping Buddha of Elahera in the classic 'Observer Pictorial' of 1940 he edited. Wendt and Father never met, though they wrote to each other. Long years after, we realised that it was Wendt who had paid for a copy of George Keyt's beautifully produced limited edition translation of the 'Gita Govinda'. Keyt sent it to him with a note saying that it was the gift of an anonymous admirer.

Ours was a house of books, and no restrictions were ever placed on what we children read. We were also encouraged to read from the libraries of his friends: Dhanapala, Malalasekera, Mivanapalana and others. Father's interests were eclectic and not restricted to history or archaeology and his collection of books reflected this attitude. Travel books fascinated him and 'lost people' on the fringes of civilization. Thanks to him most of us have a nodding acquaintance with the Jivaro of Peru, Bushmen of the Kalahari and the 'sky burials' of Tibet – long before today's packaged trippers. Our acquaintance with 'Tyranasaurus Rex' and his contemporaries pre-dated today's 'Dino-fever' by half a century. This is what led him to contribute to 'Wide World' (now probably defunct) and the 'National Geographic' Magazines. He was a light-hearted man who could always see the amusing side of a mishap which bothered mother. And he read and swapped, with fellow aficionados, Wodehouse's 'Jeeves', Richmal Compton's 'William', Herbert Jenkins' 'Bindle', W.W.Jacob's 'Night Watchman' yarns, Stephen Leacock, Jerome C. Jerome, James Thurber and many others. More seriously he digested the 'Problem' books of that maverick educationist A.S.Neill. He was amused no end to see me chewing over these books. Over the years he quietly built up an invaluable collection of original editions of books on Ceylon history and archaeology which he read and annotated with care. I never cease to be surprised at his erudition and memory whenever I come across yet another note in his perfect script – which he retained to the very end.

Father's devotion and dedication to Buddhist Educa ---tion were sparked during his twenties, as a teacher in Ananda College, where he came under the inspired leadership of Kularatne, determined to make this school an exemplar for specifically Buddhist based

education in Colonial Ceylon. Together with his team of youthful enthusiasts this dream was made reality. Father's loyalty to this cause was absolute and unswerving When Nalanda Vidyalaya was established he was in Malasekera's team of 'founding fathers' and even survived on 'starvation rations', barely enough to sustain his first-born child, so dedicated was he to the welfare of the school. This self-sacrifice would not have been possible without our mother by his side, inspired by love and loyalty to support a cause so different from the Christian background she had left a few short years ago. And father, true to his nature and beliefs, never wanted her to change her religion before or after marriage: such a demand would have been unthinkable.

Father did not think twice when Kularatne called him from Nalanda in Colombo to Dharmaraja in Kandy. He was a team player, and his team was the Buddhist Theosophical Society (BTS) which managed the Buddhist schools. He took up work at Kandy within three days. In 1943 the BTS wanted him to become Principal of Anuruddha College, in Nawalapitiya, and we packed up our bags again.

But the BTS, alas, had become enmeshed in politics and was no longer the glorious flagship of Buddhists that it had been. Political pressures were exerted on him to make a decision he knew was wrong. After agonising deliberation he resigned from the BTS rather than do what he was convinced was incorrect, although he had neither alternative employment nor private income to fall back on. For his, and our, good fortune his old friend D.B.Dhanapala arranged for him to be Principal of the independent Buddhist School, Ratnapura's Sivali Vidyalaya, run by the family of Sir Nicholas Attygalle. Dhanapala the journalist had become his friend when Father wrote articles to Lake House. He was impressed with the clarity and elegance of the English with which Father described the ancient places and unusual people he visited. This had inspired him to publish Father's book "This Other Lanka," a collection of his writings, as the first publication of the Ola Book Co. in 1941.

Our move to Ratnapura brought us to the loveliest home, and some of our happiest days, in the village of Tiriwanaketiya. It was a large and delightful old house set in a spacious, and rather wild garden. At last we had found a 'gama' of our own - some years after the short lived idyll at Ekiriya, where the Wimalasena family gave us refuge in their own'gama', to escape the Japanese invasion that never came.

Father loved the place, and tried to revert, in some ways, to the village ways of his childhood . We, too loved it up and lapped up father's enthusisms. We took to the life of village worthies, with the enthusiasm of the convert. For the first time in our lives we depended on well water and I had to stretch muscles, I never knew existed, to draw water from a deep and mossy well by a creaky 'bolokkay' (pulley block). Wartime shortages meant the disappearance of toothpaste, perhaps toothbrushes as well, but Father was happy to introduce us to the 'virtues' of using charcoal and burnt chaff – and their by-product of black-rimmed nails. He introduced us to the good villager's habit of polishing our teeth with gauva and other twigs. He also relished a well bath when - to our great embarrassment - he insisted on girding on an '*amuday*'. To school we travelled by buggy cart, jogging along and getting to know every inch of the road, and getting our carter to race the other carts like mad when Father wasn't on board. Every month the boys were dragooned by Father to dig up the gravel expanse in front and clear it of weeds. A pointless task, but much praised by him as a necessary rural task. It left us with calloused palms – and cheeky grass sprouting again in a few days. But we did learn to handle an '*udella*' and to sweep the sand in the approved coconut-frond pattern.

It was in our in our home in Tirawanaketiya that father's father, our Seeya, came to spend the last few years of his life attended by our Aunt Lakshmi, his youngest daughter. I have only the haziest recollections of Seeya and Achchi, when she was alive. But I do remember that they moved house pretty often – Horana, Angulana, Katukelle before they finally gave up running a house and went to live with our Uncle Lolie at Dickoya. Achchi died there, and the trauma caused Seeya to suffer a stroke. He was a tall and sturdy man and he recovered physically with only a slight unsteadiness – but his memory was affected. This was, unforgivable but inevitably, a source of great fun for us children. We sat at his feet, while he rested on his 'hansi putuwa' smoking the juicy black Jaffna cheroots he loved, and mischievously needled him into recalling yarns of his childhood and early youth which he punctuated with full-throated guffaws. In quiet relaxation he chanted *gathas* and *slokas* with the gusto of a true devotee of the Buddha and never failed to pick a few blossoms from our garden and offer them to the Buddha image gracing our hall. He was a big man with a bushy white beard, which he carefully groomed everyday, and was a great favourite of the Malalasekera children whenever they visited us. We had been too young to ever have known him in his heyday but he did become part of our lives – and left a void when he was gone.

Sinhala Avurudu in town had merely meant the exchange of trays of sweetmeats between neighbours. Tiriwanaketiya , however, celebrated it in traditional style and we became part and parcel of it. Ensohamy came home to fry the most scrumptious 'kavuns' and other sweets. Pupils came with 'bulath' to pay obeisance to their Principal and father got the bright idea that we should do the same and

we complied after some initial reluctance and joshing. At the end of every school year father sat down at the dining table with some of his senior teachers and got down to the task of drawing up the time-tables, allocation of staff and so on. It was onerous, but handled with industry and good humour all round. It was during this time that father bought his first car. Luckily our garden was large enough for him to acquire his driving skills and venture on the roads where the irreverent schoolboys christened the old Ford as '*dhoong boattuwa'*. It was also in these peaceful surroundings that he gently nudged us into writing to the papers, for "Aunty Wendy's" and "Tinkerbell's" columns and later, to the school magazine. He encouraged us to look in directions we had not looked at before, and which still retain their hold on us. He would have been glad that three of his children became published authors, though death deprived him of seeing the late blooming of his youngest daughter.

Meanwhile the two older children, my sister and I, had been sent on to Colombo schools and lived with family friends, of Nalanda vintage. Father and Mother felt it was time the family came together again – not merely for holidays. Serendipitously, Dr.Paranavitana the Archaeological Commissioner invited father to join the Department as his Assistant Commissioner responsible for publications – a position after his own heart. So we came back to Colombo, thirty-two years after we had left.

We moved into a pleasant house in Torrington Avenue, long before it became the uncomfortable admixture of elites and slums that it is today. We were no longer children but rather irreverent teenagers. No longer were we disciplined and gradually our parents evolved a system which held us together as a family. This was the institution of the dining table conversation. It just happened. We sat around during and after dinner talking of everything under the sun – our neighbours (a fascinating lot), amusing events at work, any odd scrap from a book that somebody had read and father's archaeological 'doings' in office or in the field. It was a wonderful sharing of experiences and recorded tongue-in-cheek in a many-authored family diary.

Ours was a home from home for kith, kin and sons of father's old friends. It was never confined to our nuclear family. Father's youngest brother Edward, the Apothecary, was a permanent resident and an amusing bridge between the generations – but he was very much with his nephews and nieces. Daham Wimalasena, son of an old friend, joined our home to attend Royal College and was the good-natured butt-end of our jokes – till he was displaced from the most junior slot when Vasantha Kulatunga came to attend Ananda: his sister Anula had also lived with us, away from her family, in Nawalapitiya and Tiriwanaketiya. Vasantha was a rather reluctant schoolboy

and many an attempt at playing truant had to be judiciously papered-over by father. Our saddest 'refugees', however, were little Lloyd and Rita, motherless grand-children of mother's long dead sister. They were rescued from orphanages and looked after at home by our parents and sent to school till their father, after some arm-twisting by our father, was in a position to take charge of them. These children were great fun to us all. Looking back, I am amazed at the open-hearted generosity of father and mother towards all the people who passed through their home.

This account would be less than complete without reference to the World Fellowship of Buddhists the brainchild of Malalaskera where father played a major role. The inauguaral conference in 1950 was probably the first international conference,of any sort, held in independent Ceylon. A team of helpers was conscripted from families and friends to be receptionists, ushers and dogsbodies at the Borella YMBA, which was the venue. We saw an exotic parade of Burmans and Germans, Bhutanese and Vietnamese, Laotians and Thais, in styles and costumes never seen before and chattering away in a medley of tongues. For weeks we had them all around and we, willing conscripts, had to double as interpreters, drivers, guides and our parents as hosts to these Buddhist guests. The Conference was a great success and, as a follow up, Malalasekera embarked on a tour of the participating organisations just after deciding to establish a newsletter as a global Buddhist link. Father, with his publication experience and his personal wavelength to the Founder was the obvious choice for Editor. Thus was established the "WFB Newsletter", a Registered Newspaper, which became a joint effort of the entire Devendra clan at Torrington Avenue – the Registered Office!. Malalasekera sent regular air-letters from various corners of Asia, vividly describing the activities in the host country. Father sat at the typewriter and tapped away while I read the writer's scrawl. The whole set-up was then pasted together with any other items of Buddhist news and pictures culled from newspapers and journals. Father then took the package to the printer and saw to it that his exacting standards were met. When the bundle of Newsletters came, all the family sat around and carefully put them into brown-paper wrappers and pasted on address slips. Then it was a round of the post-boxes we knew, which would be stuffed to overflowing. Finally, Father would go along to a friendly Sub Post Office, and sit beside the Postmaster to work out the postage due for each of 'those faraway places with strange sounding names'. An exercise typical of father, a loyal friend, a great organizer and team leader, a perfectionist and a stickler for detail.

Father enjoyed the company of those who shared his interests. And during this fruitful period he came to know many scholars, archaeologists and historians from many countries. He carried on a vigorous intellectual correspondence with a range of such scholars. Some of them visited him and were welcome to share our simple dinners while engaging in lively intellectual discourse. These visitors

even spread the message around that D.T.D. was a scholar who had to be met by any scholar visiting Ceylon. Thus we came to know a fascinating array of people who became our friends – and many who remained so even after father was no more. William Watson of the British Museum, Millard B.Rogers of Boston's Fogg Museum, the Architect F.Frederick Bruck of Harvard and, most interesting, a British anthropologist with an aboriginal Dayak wife who spoke no English but quietly sat smoking an enormous cigar, were among the many who crossed our threshold and went on to become father's friends.

The years passed by and in 1953 I left home to begin my career 160 miles away – and I was no longer under the immediate shelter of the parental umbrella. This bird had flown the nest. Others followed.

One final anecdote illustrates the man he was. At his funeral a rather shabbily dressed, elderly, well-spoken, man quietly came up to me and asked to have a word. This is what he said " I was taught by Mr.Devendra, long ago when he was a young man. I came from a poor home and no longer could afford to buy my school books to continue in school. I had no alternative but to leave school and I told Mr.Devendra the reason. He thought for a while, and said 'Don't leave school. I will buy you your books. But do not tell this to anybody.' He bought me the books and I stayed on in school. I have not been a success in my life – but that has nothing to do with my teachers. As soon as I read your father's obituary I knew I had to come and tell you this story - that only he and I knew. He was a great man."

There is no doubt that, in the mirror of his mind, father saw a poor schoolboy who did not have the money to sit the Cambridge Senior Exam, telling his own sad story to his Principal, Rev.Small, whose personal generosity led him from the village to the world. The rest is history.

Tissa

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