

## Some Comments on Robert Knox and his Writings on Ceylon

THE most well-known and, indeed, the most historically valuable of Robert Knox's writings is "*An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon, in the East Indies...*" published in London in 1681<sup>1</sup>. But Knox has left behind certain other writings which were published only in quite recent times or have not yet been published. The Manuscript entitled: *Concerning Several Remarkable Passages of my Life that hath hapned since my Deliverance out of my Captivity*, a work generally referred to as the *Autobiography*, was first published in 1911<sup>2</sup>. Knox's manuscript *Sinhalese Vocabulary*<sup>3</sup> was published by D. W. Ferguson in 1896. Two letters of which Knox was, in each case, one of the signatories, were found amongst the Dutch records and published in the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>.

There is however, an interleaved copy of *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon...*<sup>5</sup>, in which there is much additional material on the Island, and this material has not hitherto been published. It appears that a second edition of the *Historical Relation* had been contemplated, because this interleaved copy was specially provided for Knox in 1684-85 on his second voyage to the East, in charge of the *Tonquin Merchant*. It was on this voyage that the ship's crew mutinied and left Knox stranded at St. Helena. Ultimately, the only property of his which Knox recovered was this inter-

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1. Copies of this first edition are hard to come by. In general use is the 1911 Glasgow edition of James Ryan to which was appended Knox's *Autobiography* (published for the first time). Ryan's edition is inadequate and defective in many respects. He does not use italics to indicate direct and indirect speech in the manner of the first edition. He inserts dates on the margins without indicating that it is an innovation of his. There are also sins of omission and commission in the index. To give some random examples—There is no reference to "religion," "Malabars" and to the girl "Lucca." The index refers to the adoption of a half-caste boy, when actually the evidence points more to the adoption of a girl. Moreover, inadequate editorial help is given towards the elucidation of peculiar words and phrases and the identification of place-names.

2. See note 1 above.

3. Which seems to have been partly copied out by Dr. Robert Hooke, who seems to have been Knox's most important contact with the world of learning. It was in Hooke's library that Knox says he saw the *Hortus Mallabaricus* of Van Rheede. For Knox's Sinhalese vocabulary cf. *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JCRAS)*, XIV. 47 (1896). 155 ff.

4. By J. R. Blake in *JCRAS* IV. 14 (1867-70), 143-150. cf. also E. Reimers "Rajasinghe II and His British Captives." *JCRAS* XXX, 78 (1925) 15, 18, 19.

5. Christy Library (43e) Dept. of Ethnography, British Museum.

leaved copy ; all his other property on board had been distributed amongst themselves by the mutineers. Knox did not conclude adding information here and there in this copy until 1711, the year in which he wrote his will and concluded the *Autobiography*. On 5th July of that year he wrote a concluding note in which he said, *inter alia*,

“ I find in many particulars I have bin too breife, which then were so freesh in my memory, that I could very well have much enlarged there one, as I now wish I had done, since I find the booke hath met with good exception in the World, which then I feared it would not, Some few additions as I read alonge, I have scribbled on these loose papers . . . .”

The additions referred to by Knox though less than what he might have made had his memory been fresher, are nevertheless very considerable and valuable. For instance, there is much new information on military affairs, on the Great Rebellion of 1664, Rajasinghe and some of his Chiefs, social and religious life of the people and on trade and economic activities.

In the following pages, I propose to take into account all the writings referred to above and draw attention to certain details and features which have been hitherto overlooked or not sufficiently emphasised when discussing<sup>6</sup> the reliability and general historical value of Knox's work.

It may be noted at the outset that Knox was not a keen and percipient observer throughout the entire 19½ years of his enforced stay in the Island. For several months after he was captured by the Sinhalese in April 1660 he appears to have been too preoccupied with looking after his father and bemoaning the fate that had overtaken them, to take much note of his strange surroundings. He was unable afterwards to identify the place near Kandy where he and his father were first lodged for some two months. Till some time after his father's death in February 1661, he seems to have been oblivious to much that was happening outside. He spent much of the day meditating and in a “ heavenly Converse with my two books”<sup>7</sup>. He was himself ill, stricken down with “ Ague ” every three days for some

6. I am aware of the following editions, articles, translations and reviews relating to Knox and his writings (apart from those already mentioned). Acharya P. Vajiranana, *Knox-ge Lanka Itihasiya*, (*An historical relation by Robert Knox, translated into Sinhalese*) Vol. I, Mahabodhi Press (Colombo), 1928 ; *Knoxge Lanka Vistharaya* (No editor or translator mentioned). Lakehouse Press ; E. F. C. Ludowyk (Ed.) *Robert Knox In The Kandyan Kingdom*, O.U.P. 1948, Philalethes, *The History of Ceylon (to which is subjoined Robert Knox's Historical Relation of the Island. .)* London 1817 ; D.N.B. Article on Knox ; D.F. (Ed.) “ Letters from Captain Robert Knox to his cousin, John Stripe, the Antiquary ” *The Monthly Literary Register* Vol. II (Colombo 1894) 177 ff. F. H. DE VOS (Trans.) “ Extracts relating to Ceylon from the Dag-register, Batavia ” *JCRAS XXVI* (1918) 181-981 ; C. R. BOXER “ Ceylon through Puritan Eyes, Robert Knox in the Kandyan Kingdom 1661-1679 *History Today*, October 1954.

7. *Autobiography* fo. 86/88.

sixteen months. Even afterwards, he made very slow progress in learning to communicate with the Sinhalese and understand what was happening around him. He says he was unable to speak or understand Sinhalese “ for severall yeares<sup>8</sup>.” He admits that even after 5 years he could speak the language only “ somewhat.”<sup>9</sup> The knowledge of the language which he ultimately acquired, though rather considerable, still had many limitations. For instance, the common greeting of *Ayubowan* (*Oiboa*) Knox renders as “ Many lives ” when it actually means “ long life ! ” or “ may you live long ! ” To give another example, Knox says that *Annuna min yain ecka ourowaying younda epa* means ‘ Go not with a slave in one boat ’. As is obvious, this is a gross confusion of words, *Annuna min yain* (*sic*) stands for “ a foolish man ” and not “ a slave,” and *ecka* stands for the conjunction “ with ” and not the numeral “ one ”. Hence : “ Go not with a fool in a boat ”.

Knox's experiences were limited not only by difficulties of language but also by certain other restrictions. Till the close of 1664 he was at one place—Bandara Koswatte some thirty miles to the north west of Kandy—where he was allowed very little freedom of movement, so much so that he lived for nearly one and a half years at this place without even knowing that some of his countrymen were quartered only some 15 or 20 miles away<sup>10</sup>. At Akkaragala where he was next quartered for over an year he obtained greater freedom of movement and permission even to visit his former quarters at Bandara Koswatte further to the East. Thereafter he was quartered at Lagundeniya (near Gampola) where his movements were severely restricted for three years—till the end of 1669. It was only in the following year or somewhat later, that he began to enjoy very considerable freedom of movement, when he took up residence at Eladetta (not far from Lagundeniya). This freedom Knox enjoyed for about nine years till his escape in 1679. It is important to note that even during these nine years his travel was restricted, on his own accord, to an area to the north-west of Gampola and Kandy. Knox was hoping to escape to Dutch territory from the north-west and hence in the course of his peddling he always frequented that region<sup>11</sup>. That is how Knox had first-hand knowledge only of the region to the west and north-west of Gampola and Kandy. When he speaks of other parts of the country, he is depending on hearsay, even though his descriptions are at times very graphic<sup>12</sup>.

8. *Ibid*

9. *Ibid* fo. 89/91.

10. *cf. Hist. Rel.* 130.

11. *Ibid* 145, 153-55.

12. *cf.* also Knox's very graphic description of Rajasinghe (whom he never really saw) See below, p. 23.

In addition to linguistic and geographical limitations, Knox's experiences were also limited by the undoubtedly narrow circle with which he had intimate contacts. It is apparent from evidence throughout the book that he had no access to people who had some learning. He found no Sinhalese who could tell him anything about their origin.<sup>13</sup> A garbled version of the Vijaya legend was related to him not by them—but by some Portuguese. This is not surprising because Knox appears to have generally moved amongst sections of the people who were in very low economic, social and cultural circumstances. With perhaps but one exception Knox had only the business of a humble supplicant with even the petty chiefs<sup>14</sup>. In February 1680 (which was about four months after his escape from the Kandyan Kingdom) Knox declared before the Dutch authorities at Batavia that "he could not say anything certain about the condition of the Sinhalese or of Raja (Sinha) as he had always kept aloof from the court and the chiefs. . . . and, for this reason he had only once asked for sustenance from the old Adigar."<sup>15</sup> On page 172 of the *Historical Relation*, we find Knox replying to the query of the Dutch Governor of Ceylon as to whether he had "any Acquaintance or Discourse with the Great Men at the Court": "I answered that I was too small to have any Friendship or Intimacy, or hold Discourse with them". It is also apparent that Knox had no acquaintance at all with the most learned section of the people, namely the Buddhist *bhikkhus* or monks; and this, not merely because he was "too small", but perhaps also because of his strong religious prejudices. It was, of course, possible for Knox to observe, from a distance as it were, and to hear from others much about these higher classes of society, but such observations and knowledge could not be anything but superficial and inadequate. One has also to remember that Knox was no sociologist or historian collecting information, and that whilst in the Island he had no idea at all of some day writing a book about the country and the people.

Looking a little more closely at the people with whom Knox (like almost all his fellow-captives) was thrown into close contact, one tends to conclude that they were people of low-caste<sup>16</sup>. The English captives seem to have been all quartered in *gabadagam* or royal lands at the trouble and expense of certain inhabitants therein. Beef-eaters, such as the

13. *Hist. Rel.* 61

14. cf. *Hist. Rel.* 150.

15. cf. *JCRAS* XXVI. 71 (1918) 190; also *Hist. Rel.* 150.

16. This fact is of importance in view of the tremendous social significance attached to the institution of caste in Knox's time (and even later).

English were, were considered so unclean<sup>17</sup> that the people detailed to look after them could not be of high caste. It is also well-known that criminals guilty of serious crimes were kept in banishment in *gabadagam*<sup>18</sup>. Knox found that this was the case at Lagundeniya. "And oftentimes into this Town did the King use to send such Malefactors as he was minded suddenly to cut off". Knox states that he and three other English captives derived some comfort of mind only after they were informed by a message sent, it is said, on behalf of the King, that they should not think they were being considered as "Malefactors" but as men "whom His Majesty did highly esteem"<sup>19</sup>. The people who had to look after the Englishmen and the "Malefactors" were palanquin-bearers and "keepers of the King's Cattle". These were, therefore low-caste people<sup>20</sup>. It is also noteworthy that at Eladetta where he lived from 1670-79 he had to take precautions against thieves, because among his neighbours were "many Thieves of outlandish people that are either slaves to great men or inhabitants, whereas the naturall borne Chingulay so much abhors Thieverc."<sup>21</sup> Knox also often refers to the poverty of the people amongst whom he was quartered<sup>22</sup>. It is apparent therefore from all that has been said above, that he was moving most often and most intimately amongst people of low economic, social and cultural circumstances.

This conclusion, however, comes up against certain statements of Knox, in which he claims that "White Men" and Christians were given privileges and accorded a respect by the King and his people which raised them above the native inhabitants<sup>23</sup>. Some of his claims relate to rather trifling matters and many indicate a great deal of naïveté on his part. He refers to the privilege, which "White Men" had, to wear any manner of apparel and also a sword; also the privilege they had to whiten their houses with lime<sup>24</sup>.

17. cf. *Hist. Rel.* 67, 138; Interleaved copy addition to p. 122.

18. cf. R. Peiris, *Sinhalese Social Organisation*, Colombo (1956). 51.

19. This "high esteem" was however, not apparent in the way they were being treated.

20. *Hist. Rel.* 142-43. cf. Sir John D'Oyly, *A Sketch of the Constitution of Kandyan Kingdom*, (1929) 11, 43, 66.

21. *Autobiography* fo. 91/93.

22. cf. e.g. *Hist. Rel.* 143, 150, 188; *Autobiography* fo. 86/88.

23. In a letter of 23 January 1670 to the English Governor, at Madras, however, we find Knox and other Englishmen referring to "this hellish condition in which we are" and requesting the Governor or "any good charitable Christian" to bestow on them "any deed of charity." cf. also letters of Loveland and Knox, 21 August 1669. *JCRAS* XXX 78. (1925) 15, 19.

24. *Hist. Rel.* 187.

The freedom to wear any manner of apparel stemmed undoubtedly from their being foreigners, who did not fall into the caste-system of the country. But the privilege of wearing a sword seems certainly to have been confined only to those who served the King as soldiers or at the palace, notwithstanding Knox's statement. In none of the brawls or incidents in which the ordinary Englishmen were involved is there any reference to swords. Moreover, when Knox set out on his escape, the weapons with which he and his companion were armed were nothing more than an axe and a knife<sup>25</sup>. As regards the supposed privilege of whitening houses with lime, he himself gives definite evidence to the contrary<sup>26</sup>. Knox also makes much of the fact that the English captives lived at the expense of the people amongst whom they were quartered<sup>27</sup>. The people of course were not doing this because of any respect or regard for the foreigners but only because of the royal command. Incidentally, it may be noted that the Moorish beggars and the rodiyas (who were at the very bottom of the social ladder) had similar privileges so that they lived "as well, or better than the other sorts of People"<sup>28</sup>.

Knox also claimed by implication that Rajasinha's appointment of many Europeans to high posts gave further proof of a superior status attached to "White Men"<sup>29</sup>. It certainly appears that as men of war, the King believed (with much justification) the Europeans superior to the generality of his own subjects; but he gave high office only on condition of loyal service. Out of about thirty English captives only three were given employment under him. And of these, one was disgraced for disloyalty and sent away to a remote place, a second was executed for the same reason; only the third, (who held the only important office out of the three) "had the good luck to die a natural Death". A fourth man, William Vassal, seems to have enjoyed some favour at the King's hands though he apparently held no office<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, it would be a mistake to believe that offices and favours were bestowed in this manner to foreigners on the basis of race or skin colour. Rajasinha I of Sitawaka had raised to the highest office a South Indian named Aritta Kivendu Perumal; Vimaladharmasuriya I had as one of his chief ministers a Portuguese (Manuel Diaz) who proved loyal to him to the last; one of Senarat's

25. *Hist. Rel.* 162.

26. *Hist. Rel.* 131.

27. cf. *Hist. Rel.* 128, 188.

28. *Ibid.* 71, 85.

29. *Ibid.* 187.

30. cf. on the above. *Hist. Rel.* 134-36; 147; Six Englishmen also served as volunteer soldiers for a while and had a miserable time according to Knox (*Hist. Rel.* 148).

Adigars or Chief Ministers was a South Indian<sup>31</sup>. And we know from Knox that one of Rajasinha's Adigars was also a South Indian<sup>32</sup>. Thus by considering the Kings' favours and appointments, it is difficult to conclude that a superior status was attached to Europeans.

What of the attitude of the ordinary people? Did it justify Knox's claim? "And indeed all over the Land they do bear as it were a natural respect and reverence to White Men, in as much as Black, they hold to be inferior to White"<sup>33</sup>. In theory the social position of the "White Men" was superior to that of the lower castes. "All Outlandish People (foreigners) are esteemed above the inferior ranks"<sup>34</sup>. But from Knox himself we know that regarding the "Whites" there was "an abatement of their Honour that they eat Beef and wash not after they have been at Stool; which things are reckoned with this People an Abomination". That was why even the low caste people would not permit the contamination of their clay water-pots by the touch of Knox and his fellow Englishmen<sup>35</sup>. It is also noteworthy that the people assigned to feed the captives provided them with no mats to sleep on or clothes to wear, but performed only their minimum obligations. Moreover, during about three months in 1665-66, no one provided the captives with food because no orders had been given for their maintenance. As a result the English were forced to beg in the streets<sup>36</sup>. These and other such facts indicate that there is little or no substance behind Knox's claim of "a natural respect and reverence to white men" amongst the Kandyan people<sup>37</sup>.

The question then arises as to how and why Knox was induced to make such a claim. It is possible, that to some extent he may have been misled by the flattery of some of the inhabitants with whom he came into contact. It is almost certain that he was misled to some extent by the people's sense of humour, a quality, which it is generally recognized, Knox sadly lacked. The Kandyans—at least in Knox's time—could

31. cf. Treaty of March 1612 between Senarat and the Dutch, Commonwealth Office library, *Dutch Records*, B. Vol. 3.

32. *Hist. Rel.* Interleaved Addition to p. 72.

33. *Hist. Rel.* 187.

34. *Ibid.* 69.

35. *Ibid.* Interleaved addition to p. 122.

36. *Hist. Rel.* 140; cf. also Declaration of William Day and Thomas Kirby in April 1683 *JCRAS* XXX. 78 (1925) 23.

37. Note also in this connection, Knox's complaints about the insolence of the Kandyans. *Hist. Rel.* 121, 125. When he asked the people of Bandara Koswatte to help carry his dead father to the grave, they "brought forth a great rope they used to tie their cattle withal, therewith to drag him by the Neck into the woods" (*Hist. Rel.* 125).

heartily enjoy a joke at their own expense. He relates how they told him about a god who came down to earth one day and asked everyone to "come before him and demand what they would have and it should be granted them". Everyone's wishes were granted. The "White Men" asked for Beauty, Valour and Riches and obtained them. But the Sinhalese, who came last, when asked by the god, what they came for, answered *Nicamava* ("I came for nothing"). And the god replied "Do you come for nothing, then go away with nothing"<sup>38</sup>. It is also possible that Knox misunderstood the friendliness of the people, and the indulgence and justice of officials<sup>39</sup>, towards strangers, as being the result of "a natural respect and reverence to White Men". But besides all these reasons, there was a perhaps much more important one behind Knox's claims. He had a very strong racial and religious pride and prejudice, which is apparent throughout his book<sup>40</sup>. His exaggerated claims on behalf of the superior status accorded to the captives, stem, whether consciously or unconsciously, very much from this pride and prejudice.

The claims on behalf of Christianity seem to have been the result of similar factors. "But on the contrary both King and people do generally like the Christian Religion better than their own. . . . and do believe there is a greater God than any they adore"<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, in this matter, Knox was misled by the extraordinary religious tolerance of the Sinhalese—a tolerance such as Europe had not witnessed up to Knox's time. In after years, when Knox had more time to reflect on this question, he touches upon the truth when he writes :

"As they (the Sinhalese) are not biggotted in their owne Religion ; they care not of what religion strangers that dwell amongst them are of, they doe beleeve there is a plurallity of Gods, and more than they know ; therefor all nations have a free liberty to use and enjoy their owne Religion, with all or any manner of Cerimonies, thare to belonging, without the lest opposition or so much as Rideculing."<sup>42</sup>

Knox's religious and racial prejudices partly account for another set of statements, which on examination do not hold water. These relate to the supposed differences between the highlanders and lowlanders. For example, he says :

38. *Hist. Rel.* 106.

39. cf. *Ibid.* 129-30, 134. But *cp.* 147.

40. e.g. ". . . it came to pass that we must be separated and placed asunder, one in a Village, where we could have none to confer withall or look upon, but the horrible black faces of our heathen enemies." *Hist. Rel.* 121. cf. also 128, 134, 169.

41. *Ibid.* 83.

42. *Ibid.* Interleaved add. to p. 72.

"For there is a great difference between the people inhabiting the high-lands, or the mountains of Cande, and those of the low-lands. . . . who are of a kinder nature by far than the other. For these countreys beneath the mountains formerly were in subjection unto the Portuguese. Whereby they have been exercised and acquainted with the customs and manners of Christian people, which. . . have begot and bred in them a kind of love and affection towards Strangers, being apt to shew Pity and Compassion on them in their distress."<sup>43</sup>

It is evident from Knox's narrative that he received enough "Pity and Compassion" from the highlanders ; but on almost every such occasion he ascribes their actions to God's intervention.<sup>44</sup> Long afterwards when he was reflecting on what he believed was the lack of true charity amongst his contrymen in England, he set down the following observations which clearly show that the Sinhalese (whether lowland or highland) did not learn pity, compassion and charity from the Portuguese :

"The Heathen Pagans on Ceylone account releaving of the poore so well pleasing to God, that. . . . there are strangers that come from beyound the seas one purpose to begg. . . . I have often scene the beggar will scarce stay till they come out to give them, and then they will follow him with their Charity as if it were the beggers just due, which they dare not Detaine. . . these heathen are very Compationate to indigent people of what nation or Religion soever and their Common or usuall saying in such a case is (Omme gea Durria) he was a Mothers Child."<sup>45</sup>

It is also worth noting that on occasion Knox reveals two different attitudes towards people of the same place. Perhaps the people who behaved most uncharitably towards him were the people of Bandara Koswatte who, when requested by him to help carry his father for burial, brought a rope used for tying cattle and prepared therewith to drag the dead man by the neck to the place of burial. Knox was righteously indignant at "this Insolency of the Heathen". But several years later when he visited Bandara Koswatte he was treated well by these same inhabitants. And referring to this welcome one finds him explaining : "for the people in the lowlands are naturally of a kind and friendly disposition"<sup>46</sup>. Now all this reveals another defect in Knox's work which ultimately stems from the fact that he was no historian or sociologist but an ordinary layman. He often does not analyse, compare and collate all the evidence he had on any particular matter ; and thereafter, give a balanced view or interpretation. Thus, he gives opinions or conclusions taking into account only those features which strike his attention most at any given moment. If he had taken all the evidence into account, it is obvious

43. *Hist. Rel.* 121.

44. cf. *Ibid.* 120, 128, 129, 142, 144, 147. But *cp.* 169, 173-74 ; *Autobiography.* fo. 70/72 where acts of "Pity and Compassion" from others such as the Dutch are given their just due.

45. *Autobiography* fo. 116/114.

46. *Hist. Rel.* 125 ; *Autobiography* fo. 90/92. Incidentally, the people of Bandara Koswatte cannot be classed as lowlanders as they are so much to the interior of the island, and it is extremely doubtful whether they were ever under Portuguese rule.

he would not have made the unfavourable comments on the highlanders noted above ; not perhaps, would he have made such extravagant claims regarding the position of Europeans and Christians in the Kandyan Kingdom.

This criticism also applies to a considerable extent to Knox's portrayal of Rajasinha and his government. It need not be doubted that Rajasinha was a tyrant. But an unmitigated tyrant such as Knox portrays him to have been he certainly was not. In the *Historical Relation*, he gives many gruesome details about the King's cruelty, and declares that "He seems to be naturally disposed to Cruelty : For he sheds a great deal of blood"<sup>47</sup>. But it is highly significant that these statements were made primarily on the authority of rumours<sup>48</sup>. For in a statement to the Dutch authorities at Batavia he declared in February 1680 :

"Of Raja's government he had heard that it was very cruel and that many people were killed on his orders, but during the 19 years he was there he had only seen four being killed at various places, and also some dead bodies and skeletons on stakes in the roads and villages. . . But that Raja's reign since his 19 years stay has become worse, killing on the slightest provocation his chief rulers and families. . . . although he can only report what is rumoured."<sup>49</sup>

Besides, a good deal of the alleged cruelty derived from the King's supposed murder of his son—a rumour later found to be false.

In addition to alleging extreme cruelty, Knox stigmatises Rajasinha's government as being :

"Tyrannical and Arbitrary in the highest degree : for he ruleth Absolute and after his own Will and Pleasure : his own head being his only Counsellor."<sup>50</sup>

There is, however, much evidence in the *Historical Relation* itself which tends to diminish the force of these strictures. For instance, Knox admits that he committed a capital crime in white-washing his house but that he was excused because he had done it in ignorance of the law<sup>51</sup>.

47. *Hist. R-I.* 40 ; 53-54.

48. In this connection, it is important to note that Knox was thrown very much amongst dissatisfied people. The people in *gabadaḡam* would naturally have complaints against the king on whose behalf the lands were cultivated and the English captives and other prisoners looked after. Besides, it was natural for Knox to seek the company of dissatisfied or disloyal elements as he himself was soured against the king on account of his captivity. The English sympathies were with the rebels in 1664 and even after the failure of the rebellion, they exchanged confidences with some of the rebels (cf. *Hist. Rel.* 138-39). Incidentally, it is interesting to note that although Knox was so very bitter about his captivity he happily employed himself as a slave-trader in after years. He even mentions regretfully that although Sinhalese women were pretty, there seemed to be no possibility of catching any of them.

49. *JCRAS* XXVI. 71 (1918), 189.

50. *Hist. Rel.* 43.

51. cf. *Ibid.* 131.

On another occasion he says : "As for the King's command, I dreaded it not much, having found by observation that the King's Orders wear away by time and the neglect of them comes at last to be unregarded"<sup>52</sup>. The people of Gampola disobeyed the King's orders rather than forego the pleasure of one of their village games which the King had forbidden on account of its obscenity<sup>53</sup>. It is quite apparent also that important powers were delegated to the chiefs by the king and that the normal work of administration was carried on by them. It was they who disposed of the English prisoners in various villages and saw to their maintenance (though Knox at times seems to have believed that the king was personally attending to these matters). For instance, Knox was permitted to buy land at Eladetta and shift thence from Lagundeniya by the local chief ; and when later he appealed to the Adigar to order the people of Gampola to bring his rations to Eladetta, the Adigar "upon consideration of the People's poor condition, appointed me monthly to come to him at the King's Palace for a Ticket to receive my Allowance out of the King's Store-houses"<sup>54</sup>. That the King was not such an "Absolute Tyrant" as Knox says he was, is indicated by other very striking evidence. On one occasion, the Dissawe of the Four Korales disobeyed the King's orders not to give any quarter to the Dutch troops at Arandora and instead sent them as prisoners to the King. The monarch was in no way offended and the Dissawe continued in the King's favour till his death<sup>55</sup>. Then again, when describing William Vassal's interview with Rajasinha Knox relates how "one of the Great men there present" interrupted the conversation between Vassal and the King to object to a certain man, whom Vassal had suggested as a suitable letter-bearer "to the English Nation," and to ask whether there was no better person<sup>56</sup>. Thus it is apparent that the chiefs were not only entrusted with the ordinary administration of the kingdom, but they were also given very considerable latitude both at court and outside. It is pertinent to note that this conclusion is substantially supported by Knox's own evidence before the Dutch authorities at Batavia in February 1680. Said he :

52. *Ibid.* 143-44.

53. *Ibid.* 98-99.

54. cf. on the above : *Hist. Rel.* 50-53 ; 142-43 ; 150.

55. *Hist. Rel.* Interleaved Addition to p. 181.

56. *Hist. Rel.* 136. The object of course, was to find out the persons through whom Vassal had secretly contacted the English.

"No European can have any communication with *Raja* or can say anything for certain about the *Raja* or his government as he does everything in secret and only with his chiefs. Of which chiefs he remembers having heard that the chiefs of the provinces must always reside at Court with *Raja* and the provinces are governed by the minor chiefs, *Raja* leaving everything in their hands and they, in their turn, leaving it to other rulers to carry out the orders of *Raja*."<sup>57</sup>

These and other such evidence definitely indicate that Knox has been unfair to Rajasinha by making the type of wholesale condemnation noted above. And it enables the reader to note once again that in his interpretations of men and affairs Knox is at times rather unreliable.

The question may be asked at this point as to whether Knox's rather extreme and unfair stigmatisation of the King stemmed only from insufficient consideration of the evidence, ready belief in rumours and personal bitterness towards the monarch for having kept him in captivity. The answer is that there was at least one other reason for this attitude. Knox seems to have been strongly anti-monarchical. In his *Autobiography*<sup>58</sup>, he refers to death by small-pox (in April 1711) of the Dauphin of France and the Emperor of Germany and comments :

"... by which I observe that the greatest of Mortals, who by some are esteemed as Gods vice Gerents, and have the sole power over Nations, are afflicted and cut of by the most odious disease that falls one the meanest of their subjects ; wheare is now their pretended power to Cure descases with a touch of their fingers "

Whilst on the subject of Rajasinha we might also note that at times Knox gives the impression that he saw the King. He refers to the King's

"great rowling Eyes, turning them and looking every way alwayes moving them: a brisk bold look, a great swelling Belly, and very lively in his actions and behaviour, somewhat bald, not having much hair upon his head, and that gray, a large comely Beard, with great Whiskers... His Apparel is very strange and wonderful,.....his Doublet after so strange a shape, that I cannot well describe it...." <sup>59</sup>

But in his evidence before the Dutch authorities at Batavia in February 1680, one finds Knox admitting :

"that he, during the whole term of his imprisonment did not see the King more than twice standing in his palace, but at such a distance that he could hardly see him..... his style of dress and appearance could not be remembered."<sup>60</sup>

57. JCRAS XXVI. 71 (1918). 188.

58. Fo. 78/80.

59. *Hist. Rel.* 33-34.

60. cf. JCRAS XXVI. 71 (1918), 186. As it is apparent from the sketches in the interleaved copy of the *Hist. Rel.* that Knox was an extraordinarily poor artist, it is obvious that the man who drew the well-known portrait of Rajasinha had to depend on a mental picture given by Knox, who himself had hardly seen the King. The portrait, therefore, may have no real resemblance to the King.

Thus Knox stands condemned for giving a false impression to the reader of the *Historical Relation*. This makes one wonder whether he may not be guilty of straying from the path of accuracy and truth even in other matters. In his *Sinhalese Vocabulary*,<sup>61</sup> he refers to a pet monkey, which he had trained to bring fire-brands to light his pipe. Why he makes no mention of this pet either when giving a description of monkeys in Chapter VI of the *Historical Relation* or when giving details of his life in captivity is very strange. Or take the interview with the Dutch Governor of Ceylon: When Knox was asked why Rajasinha did not make peace with the Dutch, he says :

"I answered, I was not one of his (Rajasinha's) council and knew not his meaning."

This rather insolent reply is quite out of character with Knox and with the circumstances in which he was placed at the moment.

Apart from evidence which suggests that sometimes Knox strayed from the path of accuracy and truth as a result of his straining after effect (or for some other reason) there is also evidence which suggests that he was reluctant to mention, or determined not to mention, certain things. For instance, from letters written by Knox and some of the other captives to the English at Madras, it is apparent that they were bitterly hostile to William Vassal; and they complained that any monies sent from outside to them were all appropriated by Vassal without giving them anything.<sup>62</sup> But there is no hint of all this in the *Historical Relation*. It is, however, obvious that Knox could not write in condemnatory terms of any of the English lest their relations in England take up cudgels against him. But this does not apply to Lucea, the half-caste girl whom he had adopted<sup>63</sup> during his captivity in the island. One wonders why Knox is so silent regarding her. It is all the more puzzling because when he set out on his flight to Dutch territory, he makes no mention of Lucea and refers only to

"having left an Old Man at Home, whom I had hired to live with me, to look after my House and Goats."<sup>64</sup>

Did the girl find life with the peevish, puritanical and rather close-fisted man too unbearable and run away to her poor parents? However, that may be, we have some grounds to make us feel that there were matters on which Knox preferred to be silent.

61. cf. JCRAS XIV. 47 (1896). 60.

62. cf. JCRAS XXX. 78 (1925) 15-20. It is apparent that Vassal was being considered as the chief amongst the English Captives by the Dutch authorities in Colombo and the English in India.

63. *Hist. Rel.* 153. *Autobiography.* 64/67.

64. *Hist. Rel.* 156.

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It is also worth noting that Knox seems to have been familiar with Philippus Baldaeus's work on Ceylon: *Naauwkeurige Beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel en het Machtige Eylandt Ceylon* (1672) although he nowhere acknowledges it. At least, Knox depended for the outlines of the island and the topography of the low-country areas entirely on Baldaeus. Details from Baldaeus's map are incorporated, sometimes quite unintelligently. For instance, where Baldaeus has made certain comments in Dutch such as "Eynde van de Cancel landen" (meaning "end of the cinnamon lands") they are retained in the original form in Knox's map apparently under the mistaken belief that they refer to place-names. We cannot, however, find much fault with Knox for not indicating his debt to Baldaeus, because plagiarism was a common feature in seventeenth century writing, Baldaeus himself being often guilty of this practice.

Before concluding, one more observation remains to be made. It is generally assumed that Knox's description of economic conditions during his time in the Kandyan Kingdom are valid for the entire seventeenth century, and perhaps even for the sixteenth. But at least one important qualification has to be kept in mind. During almost the entire period of Knox's captivity, there was a very severe and effective economic blockade of Kandy by the Dutch. The foreign trade of the kingdom was virtually brought to a standstill, and even its earlier very considerable trade with the coastal areas was stopped by Rajasinha in retaliation for Dutch actions. Allowance has therefore to be made when reading the *Historical Relation* for the effects on general economic conditions within the Kingdom resulting from this interruption of trade. Similarly allowance has to be made, when studying these aspects of life in the kingdom, for the almost continuous warfare with the Portuguese that the Kandyans had to face since the late sixteenth century.

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