

Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Early British Period—IV

(iii) **The Beginnings of the work of the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon, 1818-1826**

THE Church Missionary Society was founded in England at a meeting held on the 12th April, 1799 in the upper room of a hotel in Aldersgate Street, London, where four years earlier the London Missionary Society too had been formed. The chief purpose of the sixteen clergymen and nine laymen who met under the chairmanship of the Revd. John Venn, Rector of Clapham, was to send missionaries to Africa and other parts of the world in which the already existing missionary societies of the Church of England were not working. As early as in 1801 Ceylon was considered by the C.M.S. as a possible field of work ; but it was after the interest created in Ceylon by the Revd. Dr. Claudius Buchanan and Sir Alexander Johnstone that any serious attention was paid to the island. The C.M.S. suggested to Sir Alexander that he should take steps to form a C.M.S. Association in Ceylon and send two young Ceylonese to be educated in England at the Society's expense. Johnstone agreed to the earlier suggestion and a C.M.S. Association was formed in Colombo and branch associations formed later in Jaffna, Galle and Trincomalee. But the scheme to send young Ceylonese to England was postponed because the Society resolved to send two missionaries, the Revd. William Greenwood and Thomas Norton to the island. After a short time in Ceylon, however, these missionaries were diverted to India. And it was only on the 29th June, 1818 that the first missionaries for " permanent " service in Ceylon arrived. These were the Revd. Samuel Lambrick who was stationed in Colombo, the Revd. Benjamin Ward who was given charge of Mannar and Kalpitiya, the Revd. Robert Mayor who was sent to Galle and the Revd. Joseph Knight who was sent to Jaffna.¹

At Galle where there was a mixed population of Sinhalese, Muslims and Europeans, the Revd. Robert Mayor who was accompanied by his wife found a government chaplain already ministering to the Europeans and a Wesleyan missionary working among the others. As missionaries all over the world have done, the Mayors set about exploring the country for new fields for work

1. Proceedings of the C.M.S. Committee, April 1st, 1801; May 4th, 1801; July 21st, 1802; Dr. Eugene Stock: *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, Vol. I, pp. 68, 74 (London: C.M.S. 1899); C. Hole: *The History of the C.M.S.*, pp. 67, 84; 146-8; *C.M.S. Report*, 1813; pp. 83-4; 1814, pp. 231-3; 1815, pp. 618-20; *Missionary Register*, 1819, p. 442. *C.M.S.R.* 1819, p. 186; W. M. Harvard: *A Narrative of the Establishment and progress of the Mission to Ceylon &c.* (London 1823) p. 316; James Selkirk: *Recollections of Ceylon after a residence of 13 years* (London: Hatchard and Son: 1844) p. 195.

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and eventually selected the village of Baddegama where they first built a small hut and later in 1819 a more substantial mission house overlooking the Gin Ganga. In 1820 they were joined by the Revd. and Mrs. Benjamin Ward and together they learnt the Sinhalese language to get to know the people of the country and their ways better. Even in this area twelve miles away from Galle they found many who already called themselves Christian and had been baptized in Portuguese and Dutch times but who were, as many still are in other parts of the Church, "ignorant of the Gospel" and in fact bound by superstition. Among those who welcomed the missionaries was the village headman and with his help and that of other villagers they preached the Gospel and also began educational work in the area. By 1821 they established 7 vernacular schools with 159 pupils in and around Baddegama and by October, 1822 a vernacular school for girls too was started. By 1826 despite much illness in the district the schools reported 263 pupils with an average attendance of 172. As the government had no one to supervise its own schools from 1822 the missionaries were appointed to superintend the vernacular schools run by the government; and they also did a considerable amount of social work specially in times of illness assisted by the knowledge that Mayor had of medicine and surgery. It was in Baddegama too that the first Anglican Church for Ceylonese congregational worship was built. The foundation stone was laid on February 14th, 1821 and the still magnificent and imposing building set on a hill was consecrated by the Rt. Revd. Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta, when he came to Ceylon on his episcopal visitation in 1825.²

At Kalpitiya the population consisted of Hindus, Roman Catholics and Muslims and although Ward began by opening a school for the teaching of Tamil and English to the village children, the mission work at the station does not seem to have been successful. At first more than 100 pupils attended the schools but later "partly from ill-health, partly from the indifference of the people to send their children to the school and to attend public worship" Ward gave up the work and left for Jaffna and later joined the southern mission in Baddegama.³

The Revd. Joseph Knight who had been appointed to the Jaffna area moved to Nallur and began his work by studying the Tamil language and opening vernacular schools. By 1820 he had acquired a sufficient knowledge of the language "to enable him to prepare a Tamil discourse weekly" and besides holding regular services, he also visited the village homes. Up to

2. *C.M.S.R.* 1819, pp. 190-1; 341-4; 1822, pp. 177-8; 1823, pp. 171; 174-5; 1825, p. 157; 1827, p. 146; James Selkirk op. cit: pp. 228-237; 240-1; *M.R.* 1826, pp. 132-5; 142; Reginald Heber: *Narrative of a Journey through the upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824-1825* (with notes on Ceylon) etc. 2 vols. . . (London, John Murray, 1873), Vol. II, pp. 169-70; 245-6.

3. *C.M.S.R.* 1820, pp. 195-205; 353-364; 1822, pp. 187-193; James Selkirk: pp. 227-8; 270.

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1823 the services were held in the Mission House and in the schools but as the congregation increased the Government allowed them to use an old Dutch Church with the contiguous land where new mission buildings were erected. The Revd. James Selkirk points out that as early as August, 1820 there were 270 children in the schools "a number exceeding half of the children in the parishes where the schools are situated". And in 1826 it was reported that the mission had 11 vernacular schools with 411 boys and 73 girls. At first the boys and girls were taught in the same schools but when the Revd. and Mrs. William Adley joined the Nallur mission special girls schools were begun although the response to the education of girls under the C.M.S. appears to have been poor compared to the work of the American missionaries at this time. But the Nallur mission maintained a successful boarding school for boys. In 1825 this school had 18 students a number which increased to 30 in 1826: the full number allowed by the headquarters of the C.M.S. in London to be admitted to the school.⁴

In 1815 the Kandyan provinces came under the control of the British but the disturbed condition of the area was not such as to permit a missionary to be stationed there and the Governor had discouraged the Wesleyan missionaries who had sought to begin evangelistic work in the area. Later, however, with the increase of the civil and military establishment in Kandy, Sir Robert Brownrigg appointed the Revd. Samuel Lambrick as Chaplain to the forces there in 1818. At first he worked among the Europeans. Buddhism was powerful in the area and it was said that "mischief might arise from the jealousy of a numerous and powerful priesthood". But the tolerant spirit of Buddhism welcomed new truth and Lambrick having studied the vernacular continued to preach the gospel also among the Sinhalese in the district winning the goodwill of both priests and people. In 1821 he was joined by the Revd. and Mrs. Thomas Browning who took charge of the mission on Lambrick's departure in 1822. Lambrick had opened a vernacular school in the district and buildings for further mission work were completed in 1826. In 1822 a day school at which 6 girls had "instruction in reading the native language and sewing" and a boarding school for destitute Kandyan boys were started. In 1823 there were five schools belonging to the Kandy branch of the C.M.S. with 127 children while in July, 1826 the numbers had increased to 243. After Lambrick's departure, Browning continued to act as Chaplain to the garrison besides visiting the hospital and prison in Kandy and continuing the other mission work.⁵

4. *C.M.S.R.* 1820: pp. 198-205; 357-364; 1822, pp. 187-193; 1824, p. 176; 1825, pp. 165-6; 1826, pp. 120, 150; *M.R.* 1826, p. 150; 1827, p. 114. James Selkirk, p. 270; 273-6; 280-1; 286-7.

5. W. M. Harvard: p. 296; *C.M.S.R.* 1819, pp. 187-9; 1822, p. 174-9; James Selkirk: pp. 196-7; 201; cp. *M.R.* 1826, pp. 138-40.

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After leaving Kandy, Lambrick began work in Kotte. Here he built a mission house on the verandah of which he began a school where he taught both Sinhalese and English, opened another vernacular school in the area and established a printing press earlier intended for the Kandy mission for the publication of tracts and school-books.⁶ He also conducted services in the outlying villages but his main efforts were devoted to education. By 1826 he had established 8 vernacular schools which had 187 children on the rolls. He also planned out a school for training Ceylonese lay missionaries and in 1827 the foundation of this "Christian Institution" was laid by Governor Sir Edward Barnes.

Kotte had seen Christian work in the times of the Portuguese and the Dutch. But it was a strong Buddhist centre and there were many who had professed Christianity only for political reasons. The honesty of conviction, the evangelistic zeal and the educational work of the C.M.S. missionaries, however, won many sincere converts and the church congregations, the schools and the "Christian Institution" was to grow in strength in later years.⁷

By the end of 1826, after only 8 years stay in the island, the C.M.S. had established four important mission centres in the island. The Society had 8 missionaries attached to these centres and employed 26 Ceylonese lay assistants in their work. As with the other missions so with the C.M.S. the task of evangelism went hand in hand with education chiefly undertaken in the vernacular. As with the temple so with the church these twin duties were never divorced from each other.

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6. *C.M.S.R.* 1823, pp. 168-9; James Selkirk, pp. 309-311; *C.M.S.R.* 1826, pp. XV, 110-112; *M.R.* 1826, p. 141.

7. James Selkirk: pp. 327-320; pp. 311-12; *M.R.* 1826, p. 67.