

**A ROMANCE
OF CEYLON**

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A romance of Ceylon by E. O. Walker

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BY
E. O. WALKER
C.I.E.



LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
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A Romance of Ceylon

CHAPTER I

THE sea was breaking in crisp waves upon the coral reef that faced the white beach of Kollupitiya, and a gentle breeze stirred the glistening fronds of the elegant palms that fringed the shore, as a group of children issued from the School of Santa Maria, to be dispersed up and down the long, dusty road that skirted the sea. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was still hot, and the bullock carts, drawn by weary teams, slowly meandered along the well-used and familiar highway. A girl, rather taller than her companions, had separated from them, and was pursuing her way to a small, red-tiled house, half-hidden among bananas and hibiscus, its porch embowered in convolvulus. Her pale, fawn-coloured skin contrasted strikingly with the dark tints of the work-people in the street; the pallor of her cheeks and the dark circles round her grey eyes witnessed to habitual seclusion in the semi-darkness of her home, or in the deep shades of its leafy surroundings; her nose was straight, and slightly widened at the nostrils; her lips rather more full than those of the north countries, but elegant in outline, and

velvety in texture; her hair was drawn tightly back from the brow, and was shiny with scented unguents, fastened behind in a knot, and wreathed with a small chaplet of white flowers; her figure was slight, the swell of the bosom beneath the snow-white linen bodice showing that she was leaving childhood behind; the feet were small and without covering, revealed below a wrap of blue silk, worn tightly round her form from the waist downward; one rounded arm supported a slate, a writing-book and work-basket, the implements of her school life, and the other was raised, while she shaded with her hand her eyes from the slanting rays of the sun. As she turned out of the street into the little walk which led up to the house, her mother came out to the porch and received her at the door with an affectionate pat on the shoulder, which was responded to by the girl slipping her arm round the mother's waist.

'Kirimanica, my child, are you glad to be home?'

'Mother, to me it is better than all the world outside, and your love more than anything the world can give.'

She put down her burden and busied herself in watering some pots of favourite flowers which were disposed along the verandah, looking up from her occupation every now and then to smile at her mother.

The latter was of Kandyan race and retained the costume of the country similar to that in which the girl was dressed; of thirty years of age, she retained much of her youthful beauty, with the marked profundity of expression in the dark eyes which is not uncommon in the East. Married at

seventeen years of age, her daughter was now fourteen. Her husband, Panabokki, was a scion of an old Ceylon race, of conservative habits and feelings, whose ancestors held land at Matila in the Kandyan province, and were once of consequence at the native Court. He had so far conceded to modern exigencies as to qualify for practice as an advocate in the Supreme Court, and dressed in English costume when at his daily work. The members of his family circle were simple folk, following agriculture, as they have always done, and knowing little of English ways. Against the latter he was prejudiced, especially as regards the use of intoxicants and the freedom of habits displayed by women. This in particular made him more rigid than he would naturally be in the management of his own household. His wife kept much indoors, both by taste and in deference to his desires, and his daughter went out little save to attend school. In his opinion the knowledge of a woman should extend only to those things which will render her a good housekeeper, a faithful wife, and a careful mother, but he had yielded to the advice of friends in sending his daughter to the Catholic school of Santa Maria. There was no Buddhist seminary, save an elementary one, in his neighbourhood, and, under the Sisters of Santa Maria, the child was acquiring mental training equal to that afforded in Europe. She had passed the age at which some are withdrawn by their parents from school, but Panabokki wisely refrained from pressing the girl to think of marriage while still a child in thought—a common practice with those of his race.

The father used to mix largely with the English

and men of other nationalities in the course of his legal practice, and was not prejudiced enough to ignore the good qualities that each possessed, nor sufficiently blind to see that each had, in the large world of Colombo, his own and proper sphere of action. But in social relations, as has been hinted already, he preferred to retain the primitive exclusiveness native in an Eastern race. The mother and daughter, with their two faithful attendants, a man and his wife, stayed largely at home, their only change being an occasional visit to other Singhalese ladies, or a long and refreshing sojourn with their relations up among the hills, in the cool areca groves of Matila. Modern life, the bustle and excitement which are its pronounced features, were at their very door, and they viewed its many curious phenomena as a panorama from afar off, and so much being outwardly repugnant to their simple tastes and natural timidity, fresh incentive was afforded to remain apart, merely as wondering spectators. And yet they were not wholly ignorant of the impulses and feelings which actuated the figures that paraded upon their stage, for the girl Kirimanica would read many English books, both alone and often aloud to her mother. They had learned to admire the manly strength of character depicted in Western people, and saw its results in much that had been achieved in the Ceylon of to-day. They had learnt to know that courage and enterprise need not exist apart from generosity and kindness, for, indeed, the pictures they found painted in glowing words, both in history and romance, displayed heroes who combined attributes such as these. But in strong contrast with so much that was admirable there were

barbaric tastes and mannerisms which discounted the impressions formed, and, especially in the latitude permitted to women, there seemed to be open encouragement of impurity.

Dharmaputa, the Buddhist priest, who conducted the service at the temple, and who would often sit for a time in Panabokki's house, clothed in his yellow robe, would enlarge upon this peculiar feature in Western life, and deplore the bad example it set to Orientals, who believed that a woman should look upon no other man than her husband. He would argue that filial obedience and reverence would be withheld by the children from a mother who would spend much of her time in the society of strange men, and who could learn to find their smiles and praise and constant company necessary for her pleasure; and if that came about, would not the divine light nurtured through this sacred relationship between mother and child fade away? He had seen among his own mountains the evil taint born of lack of reverence for the marriage tie, and he was ever warning against intercourse with a people from whom such a tendency might be contracted. He would even to Panabokki deprecate the girl's attendance at a mixed school, where her simplicity and single-mindedness might be imperilled. But he could not but admit that the circumstances of life in the East had entered upon a new phase which made learning necessary both to peer and peasant. If that were so, mothers should know enough to be the teachers of their infants. Kirimanica herself, in addition to natural ability, had the curiosity engendered in one who is living upon the verge of a new and unexplored country, and who is as yet