

4. KĀLIDĀSA IN CEYLON, 522.

SIR,—Whether a bee was ever enclosed in the petals of the lotus, into which it had entered in pursuit of honey, is very doubtful. But Mr. Grierson has quoted in the *Indian Antiquary* (xvi. 284) a very pretty couplet, in which the first line states that a bee was so caught, and the second that his wife, the female bee, ‘adored the lord of day’ to save him. For, as is well known, the lotus at dawn opens its petals.

It would be very interesting to know to whom this poetical idea first occurred, and whether the verse has any history on the continent of India. For in the island of Ceylon a similar one is connected with a very interesting story.

It is this. In 522 A.D. there was reigning in Ceylon an accomplished prince and poet, named Kumāra Dāsa, the author of a Sanskrit poem still extant in its Sanna, called the Janakī-haraṇa. He invited Kalidāsa to his court. Both king and guest were enamoured of a certain lady, and one day on the wall of her chamber the king wrote the following riddle, with a promise of great reward to him who should solve it:—

Wana tambarā mala no talā ronāṭa wani
Mala dederā paṇa galawā giya sewani.

That is: ‘The forest bee got to the honey without hurting the flower, but (being caught in the flower as it closed) he got away with his life to the cool shades of the jungle only when (in the morning) the lily unfolded its petals.’

The poet coming soon after, being on a like love’s errand bent, felt at once the allusion, and inscribed underneath the solution, which ran:—

Siyat ambarā siya tambarā siya seweni
Siya sa purā nidi no labā un seweni.

That is: ‘The relation of the sun (the king, of the solar race) seeking the society of the lotus-eyed (beauty) enjoyed indeed her company, but sleepless was caught in her toils.’

When the king saw that his riddle had been solved, he enquired for the anonymous author of the solution. But the covetous beauty concealed his name, and on his next visit had him murdered by her attendants, and claimed both solution and reward as her own. Something, however, aroused the king’s suspicion. He had her premises searched, and the murdered body was discovered

beneath the floor. The king ordered a pyre to be made as for the cremation of a king, and on the appointed day attended with all his court, and scarcely had the flames reached the body, when the king, overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his friend, to which he felt he had himself contributed, rushed into the burning mass, and was himself also first suffocated and then consumed.

As the story is only found in two very rare books (Alwis's *Sidat Sangarāwa*, p. cli, and Knighton's *History of Ceylon*, p. 106), I have given an abstract of the whole of it. Neither of these authors gives the name or date of the book in which they found the legend. But it is referred to in the *Pœrakum Bā Sirit* (*Parākrama Bāhu Caritra*), a work of the fourteenth century, as being then well known; and this at least is certain, that when it was first told, the common belief among Ceylon scholars was that Kalidāsa belonged to the beginning of the sixth century of our era.

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