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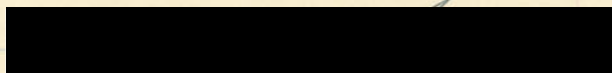
MARGARET
BEST PRIZE

~~Commented~~

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Name : Donald Battley

Date of birth :



Address : 20 Entrican Ave.

Remuera, Auckland. N.Z.

Name of school: Remuera District School.

Essay Competition: Class C.



LOTON

of

CEYLON

A small ^{Singhese} Ceylonese boy sat on the earthen floor of his mud house. The dawn had not yet fully broken although Loton, for such was his name, was fully awake, hastily eating his customary breakfast of rice. His parents, both of them tea-pickers in a nearby tea-plantation, were also awake although Loton's father had not yet risen. His house was made of mud bricks, and was furnished in the usual way of the peasant people, mainly with his parents' two bamboo beds which were divided from the rest of the house by a large curtain, and some large earthen pots, used for carrying water and rice. Outside there

was an old stove on which Loton's mother prepared their rice and sometimes the small silvery fish that could be caught in the fresh-water streams that were plentiful in that district. Fairly close by were his father's cow-sheds, where their cows, as well as some of the neighbours' cattle, were kept for the night.

It was Loton's job to go out each morning and cut some grass for the cattle to eat at night, for they were always herded to the grazing grounds in the morning by the village herder, whose responsibility it was that they returned back safely at night. Loton was soon setting out, armed with a large, curved knife like a sickle, for the border of the jungle close by which surrounded the whole village and plantation except for the road.

leading to the main depot on the coast. Loton had his favourite spot for cutting his grass and as he hurried towards it he sang a native song he ^{had} learnt.

Soon he returned with a monstrous load of grass and busied himself around the house. Although Loton's parents had no clocks or time-piece they were never late for work as a huge gong was sounded at a quarter to eight, for work as well as school started at eight, calling the people to work and the children to school. Suddenly the gong went and Loton's parents hurried off. At the same time Loton set off for school, which was only quarter of a mile away, only pausing to settle his torn piece of red cloth on his head and to pull his

loose shirt over his loin cloth. As he hurried along between the rows of teabushes he saw troops of grey monkeys swinging through the trees disturbing longtailed paroquets and other colourful birds.

When Loton reached the school the teacher was already there surrounded by some of his pupils. He was a very poor man as he was only paid twenty-five rupees a month which is the equivalent to under forty shillings. When all of the few pupils had arrived the school teacher commenced the lessons by distributing round slates for the pupils to write on. At the native schools they only studied writing and reading as all other subjects were considered unnecessary and were not needed by the peasant people. The children, most of

them boys, squatted on the floor with their large slates on their knees. School finished at twelve o'clock, as it was too hot to work for the next two or three hours. As Loton went home he took his time and walked through the rows of shops at the bazaar. As he wandered aimlessly around he gazed in fascination at the many sights, both interesting and wonderful. Sitting cross-legged in front of their stalls the shop-keepers looked hopefully at the passers-by often calling out to attract peoples attention. But Loton was not interested as these were every-day happenings although sometimes he studied their seemingly wonderful and costly wares (often about two annas)

However, his gaze soon wandered to a large crowd of people gathered around a man who was playing on a native pipe or flute. Loton had soon mingled with the crowd and beheld a small wizened man sitting on the ground playing his pipe, while out of a reed basket issued a long evil-looking cobra. It was then that Loton realized the strange man was a common snake-charmer. As the man slowed down the music the snake disappeared into the basket again and Loton realized it was time he was home and he hurried off, panting in the hot sun.

When he arrived at his mud house, his parents were already there eating their lunch and while Loton ate

Donald Battley.

his hungrily he received his orders for his afternoon activities. When Loton had finished his simple yet sustaining lunch, he set out on his first chore. Picking up his curved knife he set out again for the jungle verge, as his father said the cattle needed extra fodder because some more of the villagers had hired the use of his cowsheds. Suddenly Loton heard the gong go again and he realized his parents would be again hurrying to the plantation. He had soon returned with a load of grass and was again setting off to weed his father's rice paddy.

By the time he had finished that job, the sun was well down to the horizon but all the same

Loton set off hopefully towards his favourite creek in the hope of catching some fish. It seemed as if the fish had become obliging, for Loton found, that by the time the gong went dismissing all the workers from the plantation, (Loton) ^{he} had three of the best fish he had seen lying on the bank. He arrived ~~at~~ home just as his parents were appearing on the road to their house, and he ran joyfully towards them with his three fish in his turban.

That evening a family of three sat around some bowls of rice, currie, and fish, enjoying their evening meal. A little later a tired brown Ceylonese boy lay down on his mats in one corner of his mud house.

Donald Battley.

He was Loton, son of
Ram Lal, chief teapicker on
a Ceylonese tea-plantation.

Books consulted.

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