

New Light on the Identity of 'Philalethes, A. M. Oxon'

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THE history of Ceylon, from the earliest period to the year MDCCCXV published in London in the year 1817 under the pseudonym of 'Philalethes, A.M. Oxon.' is a quarto work of 341 pages, with a 10-page introduction, and presented in 57 chapters. To it was subjoined a reprint of Robert Knox's 17th century HISTORICAL RELATION OF THE ISLAND OF CEYLON and his account of his 20-year captivity in the island. The book is embellished with a portrait of Knox; a map of Ceylon which is not a reproduction of Knox's map but one specially engraved for the 1817 edition according 'to the latest survey' and published by J. Mawman on 1st July 1816; and illustrations based on but not identical with the originals of 1681. There appear to have been some slight variations in the making up of pages for the copies that formed the 1817 edition: in some copies (including one now in the British Museum) the portrait of Knox precedes the second section of the book, the new edition of his own work. In others the portrait faces the title page of the book.

Of this book L. J. B. Turner states that it 'contains little that is new, but is interesting on account of the author's anonymity. Mr. Lewis, in his *Tombstones and Monuments* (p. 448) ascribes it to Revd. Robert Fellowes, LL.D., while Barrow (p. 8) and Tennent (I. p. xxiv) give it to the Revd. G. Bisset'. Thus far Turner.¹ The problem of the identity of 'Philalethes' interested another researcher; many years before the publication of J. P. Lewis's work, W. Skeen in a book on Adam's Peak (*Siri Pāda*, Ceylon's 'holy' mountain) devoted four and a half pages to it and recorded his findings.²

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1. L. J. B. Turner, *Collected Papers on the History of the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon 1795—1805* (Colombo, 1923) p. 22. References are to J. P. Lewis, *List of Inscriptions on Tombstones and Monuments* (Colombo, 1913), Sir George Barrow, *Ceylon: Past and Present* (London, 1857) and Sir J. Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon* (London, 1859) 2 vols.
 2. W. Skeen, *Adam's Peak* (Colombo, 1870).

NEW LIGHT ON THE IDENTITY OF 'PHILALETHES, A.M.OXON'

Skeen's researches convinced him that the author of the 1817 HISTORY was a clergyman named Fellowes, who had attracted Skeen's attention through a statement in Clark's *Summary of Colonial Law* (1834) p. 439, that 'the History of Ceylon, published under the assumed name of PHILALETHES, is, in the copy deposited in the British Museum, attributed to Mr. R. Fellowes'. Inquiry elicited the information (sent to Skeen by George Bullen, Superintendent at the time of the British Museum Reading Room) that 'in the Museum copy the name R. Fellowes, written in pencil, follows the words, 'by Philalethes, A.M., Oxon.'³ Since Bullen further stated that Fellowes, was one of the superior officers in the British Museum at the time the work was written; that it was written by him at the British Museum; and that he himself wrote his own name in the Museum copy'⁴, Skeen concluded that there could be no more uncertainty on the question of Fellowes' authorship of the book, and gave the following details of the clergyman's career:

Born in Norfolk in 1770, educated at St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, ordained a clergyman of the Church of England in 1795, and recipient of the Oxford degree of Master of Arts in 1801, Dr. Robert Fellowes, LL.D. published between 1799 and 1807 several theological works, *Religion of the Universe, Christian Philosophy, Guide to Immortality, Religion Without Cant*, etc., and in 1806 a volume of poems; he was 'a stanch partizan of Queen Caroline during her prosecution', and a close friend of Dr. Parr and of Baron Maseres, who was said to have left Fellowes £200,000; he had helped to found London University, endowing it with two annual gold medals, known as the 'Fellowes Medals'; he had edited the *London Critical Review* for many years, up to at least the year 1820; he had seceded in his later years from the established Church and joined the Unitarians; and died in 1847, the HISTORY OF CEYLON being his last published work.

In the course of his researches into the identity of Philalethes', Skeen discovered a likely author for another anonymous work, *A Narrative of Events Which Have Recently Occurred in Ceylon*, written by a 'Gentleman on the Spot' that was published in London in 1815. Tennent had suggested that 'the identity of the materials' in the *Narrative* with the 25th chapter of 'Philalethes' HISTORY made the two accounts appear to have been written by one and the same person, adding 'and evidently by one who was present whilst the occurrences he describes were in progress'.⁵ Skeen's candidate looks at first sight the identical personage described (or postulated) by Tennent: Robert Fisher Fellowes a lieutenant in the army served in the 4th and 2nd Regiments of the Ceylon Rifles from March 16, 1810 to April 10, 1826. Lieutenant Fellowes had, therefore, genuine experience of active service in Ceylon, and possessing the same name (spelled slightly differently) as that of Dr. Fellowes, might well

3. Still visible when the senior author examined the copy in 1970.

4. Skeen, *op.cit.*, pp. 391—5.

5. Tennent, *op.cit.*, II, p. 90.

have been a relative of the latter and a possible source of information.⁶ On further inquiry, however, part of the theory postulated by Tennent breaks down : since Lieut. Fellows went on home leave on 6th September 1814 and remained in Britain until March 24th 1817, Skeen points out that he could not, physically, have been the ' Gentleman on the Spot ' who wrote the *Narrative*. With regard to the second possibility (that the HISTORY's 25th chapter was based on personal communications) it must be noted that ' Philalethes ' makes no mention of the help of a ' Lieutenant Fellows ' nor, for that matter, does he acknowledge the assistance of any other living person. Skeen's discovery of the soldier must therefore remain a matter of interesting conjecture and possible future inquiry as far as Lieut. Fellows' hand in the writing of the 1817 HISTORY is concerned. It is certainly an extraordinary coincidence that his unusually long period of leave covered the period of the book's preparation, and Skeen's theory that Dr. Fellowes' reluctance to appear as sole author of a book based on second-hand sources might have dictated the use of a pseudonym, has much to recommend it.

George Bisset, to whom the HISTORY was attributed by Tennent, was a clergyman, and as Lady Brownrigg's brother and the Governor's chaplain, accompanied Sir Robert Brownrigg on his expeditions into the Kandyan country in 1815, and during the period of bitter fighting after which the central region of Ceylon passed into British hands. While his first-hand experience of events, and his acquaintance with the chief British officers of the time qualify him, possibly, to have been the anonymous author of the *Narrative* of 1815, they disqualify him from authorship of the HISTORY of 1817. R. S. Hardy disputed the identification of ' Philalethes ' with Bisset on the authority of Barrow and Tennent, with the reasonable argument that ' it is evident that he (Philalethes) never was in the island'⁷; every reader of the HISTORY will agree on this point with Hardy, even without the support of Skeen's reference to the ' puzzling difficulty evidenced throughout the work, that the writer had never himself been in Ceylon '. Besides, ' Philalethes ' insists on his dependence upon such second-hand sources as Valentyn, Cordiner and Percival ; Bisset, had he

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6. We are grateful to Mr. W. J. F. La Brooy for directing our attention to the following note by J. P. Lewis, in 'Lieutenant. Colonel James Campbell of the *Excursions*', in the *Ceylon Antiquarian and Literary Register*, VIII (1922—1923) pp. 214—215 : 'The Staff Officer of Galle from 1821 to 1825, we learn (but not from the shipping list) was Lieutenant Richard Fisher Fellowes of the 2nd Ceylon Regiment, a relative of the Rev. Robert Fellowes, the author of the *History of Ceylon*, whose *nom de plume* was Philalethes, and we are told in the DNB that it was from Lieutenant Fellowes that Philalethes derived his information about Ceylon. It is interesting to find him here as fellow-voyager of another Ceylon writer ; also that on the authority of this writer, 'Mrs. F.' was 'a very lady-like person'. Lieutenant Fellowes, on leaving Galle, went to Kurunegala as Staff Officer and died there on 9th April 1826, probably another victim to the climate'. Lewis does not give the authority on which he asserts kinship between Lieutenant 'Fellowes' and the author of the HISTORY, nor, it would seem, was he aware of Skeen's earlier researches.
7. In another, less reliable, objection to Bisset's authorship, Hardy bases his opinion on an assumption that 'Philalethes' . . . initials are H. W. B.' Hardy was misled on this point by the letters *H. W. B.* that appear at the lower left-hand corner of the last page (ix) of the author's Preface, opposite the pseudonym 'Philalethes' and immediately above the printed date, November 13, 1816. Skeen sensibly suggests that initials placed in this manner are likelier to indicate the initial letters of a place of residence than provide clues to the anonymous author's identity, and offers 'Holly Wood, Blackheath' as a likely alternative to 'Bisset' (or 'Bennett' : J. W. Bennett, author of *Ceylon and Its Capabilities* (London 1843) has also been cited as a possible author of the 1817 HISTORY).

been the author, would not have needed to do this. The present writers further suggest that the kind of laborious scholarship involved in the composition of the HISTORY is not in keeping with the level of intellectual ability Bisset's letters evince⁸; and that the book's ponderous grace of style and the high ground it takes on the questions of the purpose and justification of colonial expansion in the East are similarly beyond Bisset's reach.

Skeen's candidate for authorship of the 1817 HISTORY appears to be identical with 'Fellowes, Robert, LL. D. 1771 — 1847. Philanthropist ... grandson of William Fellowes, of Shottesham Hall, Norfolk' described on pp. 1164-5 of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, VI (Re-issue). Apart from a few minor discrepancies between the two accounts⁹, Skeen's tallies with the *D.N.B.*'s on all important points, and to Skeen's account of Fellowes the *D.N.B.* adds the following information: Fellowes erected to the memory of Maseres, his benefactor, a monument in Reigate Churchyard with an eulogistic inscription in Latin; in 1826 Fellowes gave benefactions to encourage the study of natural philosophy at Edinburgh University; the gold medals with which Fellowes endowed London University were awarded for proficiency in clinical medicine and were presented out of gratitude for the professional services of Dr. John Elliotson, Professor of Medicine at University College¹⁰; Fellowes interested himself in the opening of Regent's Park to the public, and in the emancipation of the Jews; he was an advanced liberal in politics but drew the line at universal suffrage; he purchased the *Examiner* in 1828 and made Albany Fonblanque its editor; his religious publications always advocated practical philanthropy; in his mature work, *The Religion of the Universe*, he aims to divest religion of most of its supernatural elements; and some of his publications were issued under the pseudonym 'Philaethes, A.M. Oxon.' To this should be added an announcement in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of July — December 1825, p. 546, that Mr. Fellowes of Ryegate, Surrey,

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8. Cf. S. P. G. Archives. The Fulham Papers. Files: 1813—1827.
 9. The Fellowes of the *D.N.B.* account was born in 1771, and not in 1770; he edited the *Critical Review* between 1804 and 1811, and not until 1820.
 10. Dr. John Elliotson (1791-1868) delivered the Lumbeian Lectures on 'Recent Improvements in the Art of Distinguishing the various Diseases of the Heart'; was founder of the Phrenological Society and its first President; was President of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London in 1837; was Harveian Orator in 1846 and published his *Principles and Practice of Medicine* in 1839; was an ardent student of mesmerism and held seances in his own house; was honoured by the dedication to him of *Pendennis* by W. M. Thackeray in 1850 in gratitude for his services; and received a similar tribute from Dickens. (*D.N.B.*) Elliotson's work at the University College could have provided a link with Fellowes, whose name Skeen lists among the founders of London University; and his interest in mesmerism may have had a certain fascination for Fellowes, whose benefactions encouraged the study of natural philosophy at Edinburgh, and who (as his literary career shows) was turning away from established religious attitudes towards Unitarianism, and aiming to 'divest religion of most of its supernatural elements'.
 11. The British Museum Catalogue lists 18 publications of a religious and moral nature under the name of Fellowes, Robert, LL.D; and lists 371 largely similar works under the pseudonym of 'Philaethes'. Many writers, of course, used the pseudonym. One with Ceylon connections was Sir Robert Wilmot Horton, who signed his *Letters on Colonial Policy, particularly as applicable to Ceylon* (Colombo, 1833) as 'Philaethes'—not, it will be noted, as 'Philaethes, A. M. (Oxon.)'. But Horton's proposals are much more closely related than are those of 'Philaethes' to the facts of colonial government, and the circumstances of Horton's career as a colonial administrator do not agree with those of the laborious, even little pedantic, research worker 'Philaethes, A. M. Oxon.' appears to have been. Born in 1784, Horton was Governor of Ceylon from 1831—1837.

had donated £200 to the University of Edinburgh 'to enlarge the physical cabinet connected with Professor Leslie's Class, £50 to two Students' Prizes, and £75 to the two best essays on comets'.

Now evidence that has recently come to light appears to support Skeen's conviction that the Rev. Robert Fellowes, LL.D. was the anonymous author of the 1817 HISTORY. A copy of the book that is in the possession of the present writers bears the following inscription in faded ink on the upper right-hand corner of the title-page,

John Smith Esq., M.P.
With Mr. Fellowes's kind regards.

The fact that this inscription appears on the title-page, which itself bears the date of publication, suggests that the copy in question was presented to a Member of Parliament at the time of publication, and therefore most probably, by the author himself. There is, naturally, the remote possibility that the handwriting may have been a secretary's, whose duties may have included the sending out of presentation copies of his employer's book to his friends and colleagues, politicians and others. Otherwise, a comparison of the title-page inscription we have described with the pencilled inscription (see page 2, and footnote 3) in the British Museum copy would help, perhaps, to establish Fellowes' authorship of the book beyond doubt. In view of certain other evidence, however, set out below, it seems that such comparison would not be necessary.

Inquiry from the Home and Parliamentary Affairs section of the House of Commons Library has yielded convincing evidence that the 'John Smith, Esq., M.P.' to whom the HISTORY was presented by 'Mr. Fellowes' was the Member of Parliament for Wendover 1802-6, Nottingham 1806-18, Midhurst 1818-30, Chichester 1830-31 and Buckinghamshire 1831-4. Born in 1767, he would have been 50 years old in 1817, and a contemporary of the (then) 47 year old Fellowes. But of greater significance than that fact are two others: Smith is described in *Dods Parliamentary Companion* as 'a London Banker and an East India Proprietor. One of the Council of the University of London, and a Director of the Imperial Fire Insurance Company'¹². The East India connection could explain the interest in Ceylon, but while this fact links Smith only with the giver of the book and presumably with its subject, the other (that he served on the Council of London University) links him with the Dr. Fellowes who was one of the founders of the University and among the number of its benefactors. What further links the religious attitudes of the two men may have provided one can only conjecture; but the determination to end the monopoly of established religion in education that resulted in the foundation of London University was a strong one, and we can hardly doubt that Smith and Fellowes were engaged in a common cause.

12. Communication to the present writers from Mr. John Palmer, of the Home and Parliamentary Affairs Section, House of Commons Library, London, S. W. 1.

The fact that Smith was an East India proprietor casts an interesting light on certain specific proposals made in Philalethes' Preface for the maintenance of power in Ceylon, and for the enlightened rule of that island. In the second paragraph the author states his conviction that

whatever may be the wealth of Ceylon in vegetable, animal, or mineral products, in cinnamon, ivory, or precious stones, the circumstance, which renders the possession more particularly valuable to Great Britain, is the great facilities which it offers for the preservation of her naval superiority in that part of the world. The harbour of Trincomalee alone, is, in this point of view, an inestimable acquisition. Here, on the confines of a wide, perilous, and inhospitable ocean, the whole navy of Great Britain might ride in security, whilst the eastern monsoon was tempesting the neighbouring sea, spreading terror through the bay of Bengal, and covering with wreck the shores of the adjacent continent.

In the 5th paragraph Philalethes reverts to the subject of Trincomalee, the situation of which appears to have caught his imagination, and upon which he appears to have felt very strongly that the British Government should found its plans for a permanent presence in the region :

The territorial sovereignty of India may, hereafter, be wrested from this country... but, whenever this catastrophe may occur, still the possession of Ceylon will, in a commercial and maritime point of view, be no inadequate compensation for the loss... As long as we possess that great naval power in the west, which is likely to be coeval with our present free government, the harbour of Trincomalee will, more than anything else, favour the permanence of the same power in the East. The dominion of the land may be more gratifying to the thirst of military distinction, but it is the dominion of the sea, which alone can afford security to commercial enterprise.¹³

The views set forth here, it should be noted, echo those of James Cordiner in 1807¹⁴ and were themselves quoted with emphatic approval by Charles

13. pp. iii — v.

14. 'The Harbour alone renders the island so valuable as a protection to our Indian commerce. The Harbour from its central position and easy ingress and egress which it affords at all seasons, is better adapted for being made a marine depot and rendezvous for His Majesty's Squadron than any station in India,' James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon* (London, 1807) p. 266.

Pridham in one of the most authoritative studies of Ceylon in its historical, political and statistical aspects to be published in the 19th century.¹⁵ In Chapter 47, Philalethes takes up the subject once more :

The harbour of Trincomalee is what gives a singular value to the possession of this island. The possession of this harbour is indeed of such importance, that it facilitates, if it does not ensure the command of the ocean in that part of the world ... The proximity of Trincomalee to all the English settlements in the bay of Bengal, renders it of inestimable value to this country... It is at present strongly fortified, and indeed there is no military post in Ceylon, which is capable of being rendered so impregnable as Trincomalee.¹⁶

Although the Preface appears to make a case for the development of Trincomalee (see note 15), all the evidence available suggests that the research on which Philalethes' HISTORY is based had begun many years before the capture of Kandy in 1815 made the publication of an up-to-date account of Ceylon a likely source of financial profit. In a note on page 139, the author notes that 'during six years and a half of a laborious literary life, from July, 1807 to December 1813', his attention had been frequently directed to certain claims that Hugh Boyd, one of Britain's early ambassadors to the Court of Kandy, had been the author of the *Letters of Junius*. The HISTORY amasses an amazing stock of facts concerning every aspect of the island; and as Skeen has noted with reason, at no point is there the least suggestion that the author had ever visited Ceylon, or that he had drawn from sources other than literary ones. Knox, Valentyn, Percival and Cordiner are all extensively quoted, and their accounts on several points diligently compared. Even on a question such as the personal appearance of the 'native singalese', where surely if Philalethes had ever seen a Ceylonese he would have found it

15. Pridham, *An Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon and Its Dependencies* (London, 1849). 2 vols. This contemporary view of the situation regarding Trincomalee Harbour, incidentally was speedily revised if not abandoned. Cf. H. A. Colgate, 'The Royal Navy and Trincomalee. The History of Their Connection from 1750 to 1958', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol. VII, Jan-June 1964, No. 1, pp. 1—16: 'Trincomalee's vital strategic importance was limited to a short period in the 18th century. It was not until 1781 that the need for a base on the east side of India became essential. This situation lasted only until 1783 and did not arise again until 1795. Then France overran Holland, and forced the British to seize Trincomalee so as to forestall the French. Almost as soon as they did so, its importance diminished. India was made secure, not by a Fleet based on Ceylon, but by Nelson's victories in the seas nearer to Britain. After 1822 the Colonial Office in London, the Ceylon Government in Colombo and even the British Admiralty lost interest in the port. Whilst it is true that from time to time, ambitious admirals re-echoed Cordiner's remarks, they found little support in Britain or in Ceylon'. According to Colgate, the rise and fall of Trincomalee's importance in British eyes can be summarized as follows : In 1813 plans were drawn up for a first class naval base in Trincomalee, since in 1810 the decision was taken to move the Headquarters of the British Fleet from Madras to Trincomalee. In a short time, however, the increasing use of steam-ships rather than sailing ships lost Trincomalee its value as a sheltering place during the North-East Monsoon ; docks and machinery now became essential, and Trincomalee lacked both. Philalethes' HISTORY makes a case for the development of Trincomalee just before the Colonial Government began to abandon all interest in the harbour, which change in attitude took place after 1822, according to Colgate. We are indebted to Mr. W. J. F. LaBrooy for this reference.

16. pp. 274—5.

hard to resist adding some personally observed detail to his account, he supplies references to Valentyn, Keurlyke, Beschryving and others.¹⁷ His account of the war in Kandy is based, according to a footnote¹⁸, on *A Narrative of Events Written by a Gentleman on The Spot* (London, 1815). Philalethes further states his ignorance of the Sinhalese language, and reiterates his complete reliance on his authorities.¹⁹

The impression such accumulated details give, of the author having written his book at some physical distance from the island, appear to support the probability that the HISTORY was the work of a Britain-based scholar such as Dr. Robert Fellowes rather than of a military or civilian personality in Ceylon. In addition it is clear that the political facts of Ceylon's recent history arouse in the author a moral, and not a simply political concern. Philalethes expresses his desire in the Preface

that the wisdom, the justice, and the humanity of Great Britain, in the exercise of her sovereignty over Ceylon, may render that country, in modern times, what she might once have been in more ancient, the centre of a moral and intellectual light, which may scatter its beneficent rays over the whole East.²⁰

That this attitude was no mere pose can be seen from Philalethes' comments on the atrocities of British troops in the Kandyan region :

When we read that a detachment of the British troops " was employed in destroying all the houses, stores, and gardens in the rich province of Saffragam " (Cordiner II, p. 256) and that many other parts of the country were exposed to similar horrors, we turn from the recital with disgust, and our hearts will not suffer us to admit, that the plea of vengeance could sanction such enormities.²¹

This is the attitude neither of a soldier nor of a political apologist, but of a scholar inspired by moral and religious feeling of some considerable force or of an advanced liberal of the 1820's ; and it is possible to infer from what we know of Fellowes' career that he had in him something of both. The annexation of Kandy by Governor Brownrigg was saved from denunciation as blatant aggression by persons of Fellowes' thinking by the spectacular ease with which it had been effected, by the evil reputation of the reigning King of Kandy, and by the evident desire of the Sinhalese people that the British should intervene to save them from their tyrant King. Knox's account of the Rajasinha of his own time (subjoined, it will be recalled, to Philalethes' own book) would have told in Brownrigg's favour, but it seems clear from the unswerving moral rectitude with

17. p. 231.

18. p. 174. Tennent's statement that the author of the *Narrative* was identical with Philalethes himself was an obviously careless one, and easily disproved by Philalethes' reference on p. 179 to the fact that the 'Gentleman's description of the last king of Kandy 'is not quite in unison with' Cordiner's description.

19. p. 323.

20. p.v.

21. p. 169.

which Philaethes insists on the providential opportunity now fallen into British hands to redress social wrongs and make Ceylon an island over which shall be diffused the light of civilisation, that politics was not his main interest. The whole tenor of the book indicates its author to have been a man whose chief pleasure and principal interest in life lay in scholarship and moral speculation.

A proverb quoted on p. 299 as a Moral Lesson of the Sinhalese and Malabars, that

a learned man can be rightly appreciated only by another learned man, and by no other person ; as a barren woman cannot tell the pains of parturition

carries a footnote that evinces personal feeling of a kind so unusual in such contexts that it is worth quoting in full :

Great sagacity is evinced in this remark. It is strikingly just ; and I must own that I was much surprised to meet with it in these moral observations of the Singalese. No man, who does not know by experience the toils of literary research, and the travail of intellectual parturition, can estimate them as they ought. I have often remarked, with painful emotions, the flippant manner in which men talk of the more laborious exertions of the mind, and of the facility and promptitude with which they affect to determine that they may be produced. They have no congenial sympathy, no kind feeling for the man who has wearied his eyes, debilitated his nerves, and impaired his strength, by keeping the mental faculties continually on the stretch. In fact, none but literary men can properly understand the nature, or estimate the effect, of literary toil. Ignorance cannot judge rightly, except by guess, and consequently by accident, upon any subject ; but how is ignorance to criticize its opposite, to estimate the products of the higher or even the lower order of intellects ; or to determine the difference between a wise man and a fool? Yet what is it but ignorance which is always accompanied by presumption, which in general appreciates the merit, and apportions the reward, of literary exertion ?²²

A long footnote ! Philaethes clearly regarded himself as a scholar of erudition, and it would seem that at the time he wrote the HISTORY he was not entirely free, either of selfpity or of intellectual pride. If the book was the work of Fellowes, the author would have been 46 years old at the time of its publication, not too young, probably, to have developed the somewhat embittered views on 'ignorance' and 'presumption' that are expressed in this remarkable footnote. His six years of 'laborious literary' living occupied him, then, between the ages of 37 and 43 — believable again. His conclusions are invariably drawn from general principles, unaffected by the situations and problems that would have influenced the thinking of a writer more immediately in touch with political developments in the island.

22. pp. 299—300.

While the evidence marshalled above seems to point to one person as the author of the HISTORY, that person being the 'Robert Fellowes, LL.D.' of the *DNB*, a single doubtful point remains. If the author was indeed Fellowes, his book on Ceylon was unusual among his published work, which consisted of religious and moral speculations of various kinds. It is clear, however, that although the nature of the work demanded historical detail from its author, his real interest lay in the moral lessons that were to be drawn from certain developments rather than in their political or economic value. 'I shall not lead my page with a detail of the operations by which, in 1796, the whole coast of this island became an easy conquest to the arms of Great Britain,' wrote Philalethes, but devoted in the same chapter a lengthy passage to a comparison of the moral disadvantages of the Portuguese and Dutch that resulted in their military defeat. 'Bigotry', which Philalethes believed to have been the primary motive of Portuguese activity in the island, he describes as

a blind impulse, and it has all the effect of blindness both visual and mental, in the strange deviations which it causes from the straight path of virtue and of truth, and consequently of the best policy and the most stable interest.

Of the Dutch it was his opinion that

cent per cent was their faith, gold was their object, and Mammon was their god. But.....avarice is a cold calculating feeling, and where it totally pervades the bosom, absorbing the affections, and concentrating the desires in a single object, it renders the heart as impenetrable as a stone to those moral considerations which are more particularly associated with a benevolent regard for the happiness of those who are placed in subjection to our will, or within the sphere of our influence.

Philalethes' examination of 'moral considerations' such as the above in a political context is not an isolated instance, but is frequent in the HISTORY, making it more of a piece with the rest of Fellowes' published work than at first sight it would seem to be.

On the basis of the evidence available, it is reasonable to suppose A HISTORY OF CEYLON to have been the work of the 'Robert Fellowes' referred to by Skeen and by the *DNB*. Whether assisted by such personal testimony as might have been conveyed to him by such a person as the army officer, R. Fisher Fellows, or whether relying entirely on literary and historical sources available to him at such a library as that of the British Museum, they suggest that the subject of Ceylon appears to have been the hobby of a scholar with deeply considered moral and religious views, and of a liberal way of thinking in political and social matters. It would seem further, that the conquest of Kandy by the British in 1815, with the interest this event aroused in the island, its history, and its political and commercial possibilities, provided Fellowes with an unexpected opportunity of publishing his researches with profit. From this circumstance it would seem, came the idea of subjoining to his HISTORY a reprinting of Knox's much older work which, in 1817, was still the most authoritative book on Ceylon in existence and especially on the Kandyan country; and the arguments in favour of the development of Trincomalee which would, at the time, have invested the work with an aura of topicality.