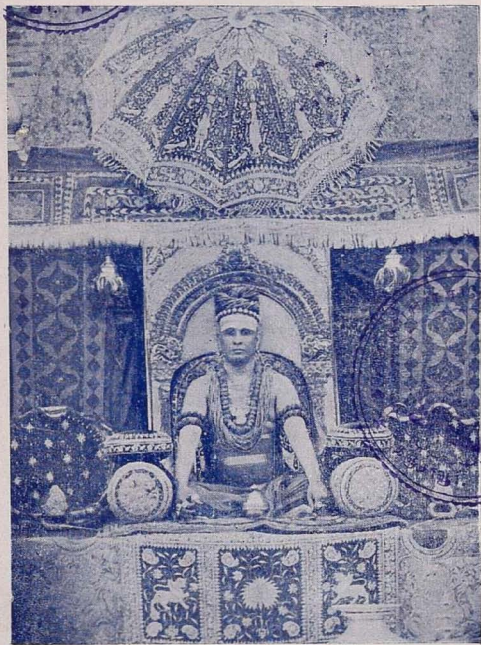


A  
GARLAND  
OF  
TAMIL POETRY.



THE  
KARANTHAI TAMIL SANDHAM  
TANJAVUR, SOUTH INDIA  
1942









A GARLAND OF TAMIL POETRY.

*"The author has been informed by an American  
\* \* \* a man of high education and unusual gifts as a  
preacher and writer, that he esteemed the Tamil a finer  
language to think and speak in than any European tongue  
known to him."*

*William Dwight Whitney*

A  
GARLAND  
OF  
TAMIL POETRY.



THE  
KARANTHAI TAMIL SANGAM,  
TANJAVUR, SOUTH INDIA

1949



FIRST PUBLISHED 1949.

500 COPIES.

*Grass, herb, worm, tree, animal of sundry kind  
Bird, snake, rock, man, devil, angel, Titan  
Of evil might, sage, godling—  
These and all else in this wide Universe  
Have I been born, and I am weary, O Lord.*

*St. Manickavasagar*

9th Century A. D. ?

MADE IN SOUTH INDIA.

A GARLAND OF TAMIL POETRY

PRESENTED TO

HIS EXCELLENCY COLONEL HIS HIGHNESS

MAHARAJA SHRI

SIR KRISHNA KUMARSINHJI BHAVSINHJI,

K. C. S. I.

(THE GOVERNOR OF MADRAS)

AND

HER HIGHNESS

MAHARANI OF BHAVANAGAR

on the occasion of their visit to

THE KARANTHAI TAMIL SANGAM

on

Saturday, the 3rd December, 1949.

BY

HIS HOLINESS SRILASRI

AMBALAVANA DESIGA PANDARA SANNADHIGAL.

MAHASANNIDHANAM OF TIRUVAVADUTHURAI ADHEENAM,

TIRUVAVADUTHURAI, TANJORE DISTRICT,

SOUTH INDIA.

*“The whole world our home  
And all men our kin.”*

*-PURANANURU*

## FOREWORD.

This tiny volume of translations of Tamil verses, chosen without any plan, is a collection from a vast field of literature brought out during a period of over 2000 years; but they are arranged in a chronological order. The vastness and beauties of the Peruvian forests cannot be represented by a few twigs collected from that forest; similarly these small pieces cannot, even in a small measure, be representative of the Tamil literature, which, in antiquity, stands shoulder to shoulder with Greek and Hebrew; in modernity, shakes hands with English and French; and in vitality, stands unique. However, these verses will give some glimpses of the main phases of Tamilian thought besides illustrating the truth, that true poetry links up the hearts of the ancient and the modern world.

Though of equal importance, if not greater, to Indian culture, Tamil literature has not found many interpreters as Sanskrit in making its greatness known to the outside world. But the intrinsic value and beauty of this language have earned the admiration of really great men like Fr. Beschi and Rev. Ziegenbalg in the early part of the eighteenth century, Dr. G. U. Pope and Rev. Caldwell in the nineteenth century, and Mahatma Gandhi in the early part of this century, not to speak of the venerable sages of the Vedic age like Agastya who settled in Tamil land to assimilate the Tamil culture within the expanding Aryan culture.

This volume of translations is mainly intended to acquaint foreigners who could not have had an opportunity to know the Tamil language and also the really useful section of the learned Tamilians who have trained themselves to understand and appreciate easily through the medium of English, with the beauties of Tamil literature.

It has always been an aim of this Sangam to bring about a cultural unity by introducing the outside audience to the grand and venerable culture of the ancient Tamils with all its beauties of literature, experiences of religion, evolution of philosophic thoughts leading to eclecticism, systems of morals and treasures of art. The Sangam would feel amply rewarded if any of these few pages could create an interest in any scholar or arouse the curiosity of any individual or society in any part of the English knowing world, in Tamil culture.

The Sangam feels grateful to His Holiness the Maha Sannidhanam of Tiruvavaduthurai Mutt for the financial contribution made towards the publication of this edition.

*The Karanthai Tamil Sangam.*

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We pay our respects to the memory of Dr. G. U. Pope from whose translations Nos. 2, 7 and 13 of these pieces have been taken.

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INTRODUCTION  
PRAYER.

This musical composition, the lowest age limit of which cannot be fixed later than the first century before Christ, is a portion from Paripadal, one of the Eight Anthologies rescued from the ravages of time. The highest ideal of the Tamilian in his life is better expressed here. The logical arrangement in an emotional poem like this testifies to the well disciplined mind of the Tamilians.

*Kaduvan Ilaveinamar* is the author of this piece. This was set to music by *Kannan Nahanar*.

## PRAYER.

**W**E pray Thee not for gold  
The gold that gives us wealth ;  
We pray Thee not for wealth  
The wealth that gives us pleasure ;  
We pray Thee not for pleasure  
The pleasures we enjoy ;  
We pray and pray Thy Grace  
The Grace that comes of love,  
We pray Thee for the love  
The all embracing love ;  
The love that comes of Righteousness ;  
We pray Thy Grace to lead us all  
In the path of Righteousness.  
Oh ! God of Kadamba wreath !

*Paripadal*



INTRODUCTION  
ADVICE TO THE KING.

Food problem, which engages the formost attention of the humblest to the highest in the world today as the most immediate one, is as old as Sangam period (1st and 2nd centuries before and after Christ). This passage advises the king Pandya about the necessity for increasing the food production. The poet remarks with derision the unenterprising attitude of taking things as they come and emphasises the adoption of the noble spirit of getting things as we want.

What was said of irrigation 2000 years ago is true even to-day. Will we awake ?

## ADVICE TO THE KING.

THOU Mighty Ruler, listen to my song,  
Who gives to frames of men the food  
They need, these give them life;  
For food sustains the mortal frame.  
But food is earth with water blent:  
So those who join the water to the earth  
Build up the body, and supply its life.  
Men in less happy lands sow seed, and watch to skies  
for rain,  
But this can ne'er supply the wants of kingdom and  
of king.  
Therefore, O!Ceriyan, great in war, despise this not;  
Increase the reservoirs for water made.  
Who bind the water, and supply to fields  
Their measured flow, these bind  
The earth to them. The fame of others passes swift  
away.

*Purananuru*—trans. G. U. Pope.

INTRODUCTION  
DAUGHTERS' GRIEF.

This pathetic piece from Purananuru is the painful expression of the daughters of Pari, a mountain chief, whose fame and munificence evoked the jealousy of the ruling princes leading to the complete extinction of the chief and his country. Many are the songs in praise of him by the greatest scholars of that age. In subsequent ages, his name has become synonymous with philanthropy and nobility.

On the conquest of the country, bereft of their father, the royal princesses had to wend their way in search of an honourable shelter. They were accompanied by the poet, Kapilar, a scholar friend of their father. The poetic piece given here, is the outcome of their feelings, when they saw their father's home, the mountains at a distance.

## DAUGHTERS' GRIEF.

THAT night,—the pleasant night  
The silver rays the Moon did shed  
On our hills which none did take.

Our loving father was beside.

This night,—the painful night

Pale falls the rays of Moon

On the hills, the self same hills

Which with drums of victory

The Kings did take—a scornful deed.

We lost not the hills alone

We lost our father too.

*Purananuru.*

INTRODUCTION  
MAIDEN'S FEELING.

This passage from *Kurunjippattu* one of the Ten Idylls of the Sangam age, expresses the dilemma of a noble maiden. In her marriage choice her heart has been already conquered by a noble youth. Her modesty would not reveal this to any one. In her home parents are talking of her marriage and several names are being mentioned. She takes strength to reveal to her mother, the love at her heart. Then comes a trouble. What to do if her parents' choice does not fall upon her lover? This passage expresses her feelings and faith.

The sentiments expressed by Shakespeare's Desdemona \* may favourably be compared with the first portion of this passage. But there is nothing to compare with the sentiments of the last lines.

*Kurunjippattu* was composed by poet Kapilar to teach the beauties of the Tamil culture to an Aryan king more than 1900 years ago.

---

\* " Good name, in man and woman, dear my lord,  
Is the immediate Jewel of their souls ;  
Who steals my purse, steals trash : it is something ; nothing.  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;  
But he that flinches from me my good name,  
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed."

## MAIDEN'S FEELINGS.

**R**AREST Jewel of gold inlaid  
With pearls and gems of flawless rays,  
If lost is not a loss to me.

Noble nature, honoured name  
Of the family, and virtues  
Of purest class if lost is lost.  
None could wash the stain it makes ;  
“ Even the seers of clear vision  
Can't retrieve the loss sustained ”,  
So says the moral works of yore.  
Why not tell the mother the love  
That has entered deep my heart ?  
Now the marriage talks they talk ;  
Will not my lover come and ask ?  
What to do if they refuse ?  
If not destined to meet my love  
In this world in which we met  
I will meet him in the next.  
Firm ! firm !! is the maiden's heart.

*Kurinjippattu*

INTRODUCTION  
HEAD AND HEART.

This passage from *Narrinai*, one of the eight anthologies of the Sangam classics, the age of which ranges between the first century before and second century after Christ narrates the disturbed mental condition of a young man who has left his home for foreign lands in search of wealth. On the emotional side, his heart drives him back to his home to be of comfort to his wife who is pining after him. Just he wants to return back. On the intellectual side his head warns him of his duty and the silliness of leaving a task unfulfilled. He is at a fix. The simile of the old rope between two elephants is very apt and beautiful.

## HEAD AND HEART.

ONLY lives my lady,  
Dark shines her back  
With long and lovely lock ;  
Her cooling gaze did bind  
My heart with her heart ;  
Back sends my heart  
To cheer the pining soul ;  
So I turn to home  
Wishing wings to fly.  
“ Haste not ” cries the head  
“ To take a task and leave  
Unfulfilled is base,  
Foolish and unwise ”.  
What about my body  
In this mighty fight ?  
Is it to decay ?  
Like a old old rope  
The strands of which are worn out,  
Held in tug by elephants  
Of bright and mighty tusks,  
Standing front to front.

*Narrinai.*



INTRODUCTION  
HILL AND THE SANDAL.

This passage is from *Kalithogai*—one of the Eight Anthologies of the Sangam age, which ranges from the 1st century before and 2nd century after Christ.

In a desert track a fond mother going in search of her missing daughter meets some religious men and enquires whether they met her daughter going with another woman's son. The religious men realising the anxiety of the mother reply comfortingly. That reply is the content of the passage.

The author of the piece is known as *Perunkadunkone*.

## HILL AND THE SANDAL.

EXCEPT to those who smear them,  
Of what avail is the fragrant Sandal to the hills,  
Though they had their birth in hills.

Think well,

Your daughter is of equal use to you. 1.

Except to those who wear them  
Of what avail is the precious white pearls to the water ?  
Though the water gave them birth.

Consider well,

Your daughter is of equal use to you. 2.

Except to those who hear them  
Of what avail is the sweet tunes of seven strings to harp  
Though the harp gave them birth.

Ponder well, Your daughter will be of equal use to you. 3.

Do not be distressed on account of this lady of countless  
virtue.

She has simply preferred her lord and has followed him.  
This is the true path of virtue in this life and for the  
next too. 4.

*Kalithogai.*

INTRODUCTION  
SAYINGS OF ST. VALLUVAR.

These sayings are taken at random from the One thousand three hundred and thirty sayings from Tirukkural, a Masterpiece of Tamil Literature and one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought. The author of this work is one of the geniuses of the world and he is to be ranked with the ancient Hebrew prophets, Confucious, Socrates and other early leaders of human thought and morals. This work is one of the select number of great works which have entered into the very soul of a whole people and which can never die.

It has found a home in England, France, Germany and Italy. Every sectarian in India—at least in Southern India, claims kindred with the author. The Christian Missionary has gone so far as to call this grand system of morals, an Echo of the Sermon on the Mount. The Rev. Drew wrote in 1840 thus:—"The Kural has a strong claim upon our attention, as a part of the literature of the Country, and as a work of intrinsic excellence. The author, passing over what is peculiar to particular classes of society, and introducing such ideas only as are common to all, has avoided the uninteresting details of observances found in Manu and the other Shastras; and thus in general maintains a dignified style."

The author was born some 2000 years ago at Mylapore, a suburb of Madras, then a leading emporium of Tamil land and one of the centres of Tamil learning.

## SAYINGS OF ST. VALLUVAR.

UNLESS His foot, 'to Whom none can  
compare,' men gain,  
'Tis hard for mind to find relief from anxious pain. 1

Spotless be thou in mind ! This only merits virtue's  
name ;  
All else, mere pomp of idle sound, no real worth  
can claim. 2

There is no lack within the house, where wife in  
worth excels,  
There is no luck within the house, where wife  
dishonoured dwells. 3

Kindness shown by those who weight not what the  
return may be ;  
When you ponder right its merit, 'tis vaster than  
the sea. 4

Manly excellence, that looks not on another's wife,  
Is not virtue merely, 'tis full 'propriety' of life. 5

Forgiving trespasses is good always ;  
Forgetting them hath even higher praise. 6

A sleepless promptitude, knowledge, decision strong ;  
These three for aye to rulers of the land belong. 7

*Tirukkural.*—trans. G. U. Pope.

## INTRODUCTION

## EARN THE WEALTH.

The eighteen moral works also belong to the Sangam age and are didactic. The morals are couched in fine verses which will happily settle in the minds of those who read them in original. The following are the remarks of Mr. Gover in 1871.

“ There is a great mass of noble writing ready to hand in Tamil and Telugu folk-literature, especially in the former. To raise these books in public estimation, to exhibit the true products of the Dravidian mind, would be a task worthy of the ripest scholar and the most enlightened government. I would especially draw attention to the Eighteen Books that are said to have received the sanction of the Madura College and are among the oldest specimens of Dravidian literature. Any student of Dravidian writings would be able to add a score of equally valuable books. If these were carefully edited, they would form a body of Dravidian classics of the highest value ”.

## EARN THE WEALTH.

### I

**E**ARN the wealth to give;  
Learn the books to walk  
On the ways of virtue;  
Speak the words with grace;  
These three will save us all  
From the dreaded Darkness.

*\*Thirikadugam*

### II

The desire of the destitute to do  
benevolent deeds is painful  
To dwell in a city of palaces to the poor is painful  
To wait at others' doors to take one's food is painful.  
Friendship of those who desert you in  
adversity is painfull.

*\*Inna Narpathu*

### III

To raise a man because of wealth  
To places high and leading,  
When he hasn't got control  
Of his self and passions,  
And in conduct low and base  
It is to give the burning stick  
In the hands of monkey.

*\*Pazhamozhi*

\* Eighteen Moral works.

EIGHT

INTRODUCTION  
BORN OLD.

The age that followed the Sangam age i. e. the 3rd and 4th centuries has produced a voluminous mass of literature which is not available to us still.

The tendency was to do things in a grand manner. One of the collections which has come down to us is called Muthollayiram or Three Nine hundreds. They are very crisp and witty pieces. It is a misfortune we have so far rescued only about 100 pieces of that 2700.

This quatrane (venba) sharply accuses a mother. Modern readers may find a shavian wit. Many may remember Mr. Shah's remarks some years back. (Children are born old in England.)

BORN OLD.

WHAT a wonder !  
My bosom friend of beautiful eyes !  
Mother chides me not to look

The *Maran* of the mighty spear.  
Was she born old ?

*Three Nine hundreds.*



INTRODUCTION  
MY LORD'S FEET.

The religious period in Tamil Literature which ranges between the 6th and 12th centuries after Christ has produced many valuable poems of Devotional type with literary excellence and philosophical trend.

These passages are from *St. Appar's Thevaram*. In these he expresses the joy of a devotional frame of mind and regrets that many have not turned to that side. In the third piece he decries the formal worship without true love. St. Appar is one who has made experiments with religions and finally settled in Saiva Siddhanta. He lived to the ripe age of 84. He belongs to the 7th century A. D.

## MY LORD'S FEET.

THE faultless harp, the evening moon,  
The fanning breeze of Southern hills,  
The splendour of the rising Spring  
The pond where bees do humming swarm—  
So soothing is the shelter sweet  
Of God my Father's holy feet.

Though signs and symbols, temples fair,  
And creeds and thousand scriptures speak  
To teach His ways that you may learn,  
Oh Stupid men, why, why is it  
Your minds to Him do scarce incline ?

The Lord abides in hearts of men  
That think of Him and love and pine.  
He smiles at water, flowers, shed  
In worship by the false within ;  
Ashamed for them He laughing stands.

*St. Appar.*

INTRODUCTION

WHAT SHALL I SAY ?

The author of this poem is a lady saint who lived at Karaikal and is popularly known as Karaikkal Ammaiyar. She is a mystic and smilingly derides them who talk of the Godhead without serving him.

WHAT SHALL I SAY?

WHEN Thy slave I first became, Thy Form  
I did not know;  
Even now Thy Form I have not seen;

What shall I say to those

Who ask me of Thy Form?

What is Thy Form? Is there a Form?

*Karaikal Ammaiyar.*

INTRODUCTION  
LOVE IS GOD.

Saint Tirumoolar is a Yogi. The tradition says that he lived for 3000 years. In his work, the well known Thirumandiram, the happy blending of Aryan and Tamilian religious thoughts may be found. Historically we can safely say that he lived before the 6th century. Saivaites believe that he lives in Samathi at Tiruvavaduthurai, the seat of the famous Mutt of Tiruvavaduthurai Adheenam which has given shelter to Saiva Religion and Tamil literature for the past three centuries.

LOVE IS GOD.

VOID of wisdom, people say  
"God and Love are two;"  
No one has the skill to know  
That love and God are one;  
Any to whom the truth is known  
Will rest in Love and so in God.

*Thirumoolar.*

INTRODUCTION  
MARTIAL SPIRIT.

In these passages from Purapporul Venbamalai the martial spirit of Tamil land is detailed with some vigour. The first passage expresses the Heroic Spirit of a woman; the second, the village life leading to martial spirit and the third, their noble nature after victory.

Even in this most material verse the Tamilian spirit thinks of the next world.

## MARTIAL SPIRIT.

MY father lives in stone, a hero's effigy; My  
husband fell in battle slain.

My brothers died, resisting the foe to the last.  
When all the host had perished,  
My son, like a porcupine, pierced by innumerable darts,  
Fell fighting against the foeman's King. 1.

Once in village courtyard children fitted their arrows  
to their bows  
To shoot the hares that gathered there. It's heroes now  
Ward off the strokes of hostile king's, from the mighty  
breasts  
Of their own leaders'; such is the city now. 2.

They change not as in the sky the changing moon  
Though they obtain wealth brought in ships from over  
the ocean,  
Will their excellence change, whose hearts are pure  
As the white conch shell found on the ocean's shore. 3.

*Purapporul Venbamalai*—trans. G. U. Pope



INTRODUCTION  
SEETHA IN DISTRESS.

Kambar the great poet of Tamil land describes here the state of Seetha in her distress as found by Hanuman in the Lanka. A comparison with Valmiki will be helpful.

Kambar is the author of the Epic, Ramayanam in Tamil containing more than 12000 verses. Scholars are at variance in fixing his age—a range from the 9th to the 12th centuries.

## SEETHA IN DISTRESS.

THE noble Birth, the Chastity,  
The Patience of extremest kind,  
Benevolence and feminine grace.

If all these had a form and lived  
Amidst surging sea of water,  
It is Seetha shedding tears ;  
A God with human heart is she.

*Kambar.*

INTRODUCTION  
LORD SAMBANDA.

This passage which is found in Peria Puranam describes Lord Sambanda, as the devotees of Siva at Madurai saw him.

Sekkilar, the author of Peria Puranam, was a minister of the Cholas. He devoted his later years to the cause of spreading Saiva Religion. The language of the Peria Puranam is considered to be most pure, plain and perfect. Probably he lived in the 12th century.

LORD SAMBANDA.

THEY saw my Lord at Madurai  
They saw the form of knowledge pure  
They saw in earth the celestial moon  
They saw the music scales seven—  
The music praising God Siva  
These they saw in Sambanda  
Praised be the eyes that saw.

*St. Sekkilar.*

INTRODUCTION  
DESIRES.

This passage from the works of St. Thayumanavar may bring consoling message to the troubled minds of many modern magnates. He was the finance minister of the Nayak Kingdom of Tiruchirappalli in the later part of the 16th century. He is one of the philosophers of the highest order. His poems have brought calmness to many of the disturbed minds. In his diction Sanskrit and Tamil mix in harmony like honey and milk. In his philosophy all the systems find a happy golden mean.

## DESIRES.

**I**NDLESS are the desires ;  
Though the whole of earth they reign,  
To seas they think extending rule ;

Those who equal God of wealth  
In gold and riches, roam to learn  
The art of making gold and they  
That lived the longest days, do seek  
The aid of herbs to live for ever ;  
All these getting sore at heart,  
Eat and drink and nothing more !  
Let me rest content with what  
I have got as gifts from you,  
Without running hither and thither ;  
Oh All pervading Beatitude !  
Save me from the sea of passions  
Grant me thoughtless purest stage

*St. Thayumanavar.*

INTRODUCTION  
REAL WEALTH.

Will the Modern world rent with avarice for dollar and honour accept this as real wealth? No. The happy days are not very near. Kumara Kuruparar, the author of this passage was a monk of the Dharmapuram monastery. He was held in high esteem by one of the Nayak Kings - Tirumalai Nayak of Madurai and also by the Mogal Emperors at Delhi. The revival of Hinduism and building of a Hindu Temple at Banares are mostly due to the noble efforts of this monk. Tradition says that Thulasidas got inspiration for his work Ramanam from the lectures of Kamba Ramanam delivered by our author in his North Indian tours. He is the founder of Tiruppanandal Mutt—of the Saivaite Order.

## REAL WEALTH.

**M**ANY lands a mighty king rules o'er,  
Such monarch to his surprise sees  
The wealth of a greater king than he.

His own less wealth seems lesser still.

Him seizes ruinous envy foul.

Devising means to glut his greed,

He eats no food and sleeps no sleep;

With saddened heart he oft heaves forth

Long sighs of grief and discontent.

In misery groaning pines he thus.

On the contrary,

A cutter poor that carries wood

From place to place and crying vends,

And, with the little earned, lives

With children all on gruel and greens

He, proud of hut and trifles few,

Despising mocks the next door man,

Like him a son of labour too,

With brag "He is no equal of me."

Thus lives right pleased and happy he.

Therefore,

Wealth is but the heart's contentment

Desire is ceaseles penury.

No bark so sure, as Intelligence pure,

The senses five that has subdued,

To cross Desire's e'er wid'ning sea,

O Lord of famous Puliur

Thy saving Grace if I may claim,

From grip of Desire-poverty

That drowns all souls in painful births

In mercy me release

And grant me wealth of knowledge, Lord.

*St. Kumarakuruparar.*



INTRODUCTION  
REVOLUTIONARY.

This is a passage from Kapilar agaval. This agaval (lyric) is a very vehement protest against many of the popular beliefs of that age. The author says his name is Kapilar and he is one among the seven brothers and sisters. His correct age cannot be fixed now. It is at least 250 years old. The piece is revolutionary as it attacks the caste system and the insularity of social practices, customs and privileges.

## REVOLUTIONARY.

**D**OOTH the rain fall only on a chosen few?  
Doth the wind passing over some, refresh a  
chosen few?

Doth the mighty earth say of some, "I will not  
bear them"?

Is food found for higher castes in the cultivated  
lands?

And for the lower castes in the wilderness?

Does wealth or poverty or gain or pious acts, or  
death come otherwise upon this earth to some?

Caste is but one! Family is but one!

Death is but one! Birth is but one!

The Godhead worshipped is but one!

*Kapilar.*

INTRODUCTION  
MY APPEAL.

This is a passage from the poems of *St. Ramalingar* who lived in the last century. Besides being a poet and Philosopher our Saint is a very great humanitarian who spread the cult of love to all beings. His verses are in a simple soul stirring language which finds ready response in all hearts. How happy the world would be, if all of us could contribute to make this appeal a success.

## MY APPEAL.

THOSE that are Dead to Noble life,  
Should get their life and live again ;  
High and Low should disappear,  
As equals all should live in world ;  
One in soul the world should live,  
And offer themselves at Thy Feet ;  
I should live in changless state  
One with you my God ! my Father !  
This my appeal, hear and grant !!

*St. Ramalingar.*

## ERRATA.

<i>Page</i>	<i>For</i>	....	<i>Read</i>
4	Kurunjippattu		Kurinjippattu
	to me		at all
	says		say
„ 6	smecr		smear
	tunes		tune
„ 7	Confucious		Confucius
„ 8	Mr. Gover		Mr. Gower
	base		base ;
„ 9	quatrane		quatrain
	shavian		Shawian
	Mr. Shah's		Mr. George Bernard Shaw's
	( )		“ ”
„ 12	6th		8th
„ 14	centuries		century

