A PLEA FOR

THE

BETTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT

OF BENGAL

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A Plea for the Better Local Government of Bengal

BY

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CHAPTER I

REASONS FOR WRITING

BELIEVING that I have something of use to say on the subject of Local Government in my old province of Bengal, I take the opportunity, on the eve of my retirement from the service of Government, of jotting down such ideas about it as seem worthy of record.

Bengal is a province having an area of 150,000 square miles and a population of over seventy millions. It is divided into forty-seven districts, each under a district officer, who is to his district what the colonel is to his regiment, or the captain to his ship.

At the head of the province is the Lieutenant-Governor with his Legislative Council, four secretaries, and some fifteen heads of departments. Independent of him, and controlling the judges, is the High Court.

The Lieutenant-Governor is under the Viceroy, and he under the Secretary of State, who represents the British nation.

The office of the Lieutenant-Governor was created

just before the great Mutiny, up to which time the province was administered direct by the Governor-General, who, since the Mutiny and the transfer of the Government from the Company to the Crown, has also been known as Viceroy.

Since the creation of this office, the province has in many respects become more like a State. Its Government has become more and more elaborate —department after department being added to the staff, and laws and rules innumerable having been evolved. As facilities of communication—railways, telegraphs, and post office—have increased, the headquarters staff of the Government has come to take a much more active part in the details of the administration.

The administrative staff is divided into two great classes—the headquarters staff and the "mofussil" or, as we would say, "country" staff.

These two great classes have, owing to circumstances, drifted apart. My remarks are made from the point of view of the "mofussil" staff, to which I have belonged throughout my service.

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTION OF PEOPLE—RELIGION

As the key to the problem of Local Government is the finding of a motive power, I shall try to convey to the reader an idea of the people who are to be dealt with, of the efforts made in the past by Government in search of a motive power, of what are the conditions of success, and what is the existing state of things, which must be our starting-point.

The chief points about the people which should be noticed are (*a*) religion, (*b*) instincts, (*c*) manner of life, (*d*) occupation, (*e*) institutions, (*f*) relations with one another, and (*g*) relations with Government.

Religion is the most important part of every man's life—the strongest motive, and the strongest restraint.

In order of numbers the people are divided into Hindoos, Mahomedans, Animists, Buddhists, Christians, and smaller bodies.

The Hindoos are by far the most numerous, and are arranged in castes, the most sacred being the Bramin. Modern Hinduism is Braminism. The Bramin caste claims for its members divine origin, and the worship of all Hindoos; to be fed, obeyed,

and petted; having power to bless and to curse; to offend whom is sin.

The number of castes and sub-castes is almost beyond counting. Even the same sub-caste is divided by distance into communities, the members of each of which meet occasionally and are under the same managers. Except in the case of one or two of the highest castes, a community of this sort, though in theory only part of a caste, is in practice a caste by itself.

The reader will perhaps best understand what is a caste if he can imagine all the religious congregations in a single area of England separate from one another—not intermarrying, or eating together, or following the same occupations, or joining in social functions. Where members are numerous the area covered by a caste community is small; where they are sparse they are necessarily scattered over a larger area.

The caste community is under managers who are members of it, and hold office generally, like all Oriental offices, hereditarily, by virtue of the informal consent of the caste. The managers are changed occasionally, sometimes by peaceful methods, sometimes by those usual in Eastern revolutions. Long and fierce are sometimes the struggles between rival candidates—fiercest, because of the hereditary principle, when they are near relatives.

The caste has its ministers, the Bramin priest, the barber, and the washerman. The profession of priest is not followed by all Bramins. Indeed a

Bramin who is a priest (hereditary again) is lower than his fellows who have no occupation. But every caste has its Bramin priest. The same Bramin cannot be priest to different castes, and the priests, among themselves, take rank according to the castes they are attached to. The priest is minister to, not manager of, his people. His presence is necessary for the performance of family worship, and of family ceremonies, such as naming the child, funerals, and marriages. The services of the barber are also ceremonially necessary on many occasions. Every domestic ceremony is the occasion for a feast, to which members of the caste are invited. To omit giving, or to refuse, an invitation to a feast, unless for good cause, is considered a deliberate slight. Caste fellows are always meeting, and generally some one of them is smoking. It is similarly an obligation to pass the hookah round. It is considered obligatory on a Hindoo to get his daughters married before reaching a certain age. The husband must be one of the caste (which for this purpose must be understood in the large sense).

In normal circumstances the services of the caste ministers and the social intercourse go on. So dependent is the Hindoo on his caste that the caste seems almost an individual of whom he is a part, rather than an aggregate of individuals of whom he is one. To cut him off would seem destruction. The power of discipline resting in the hands of the caste managers consists in their power of cutting off a member. A member cut off, unless he is strong

enough to carry with him a sufficient faction in the caste, is deprived of all that makes life worth living—the services of the caste ministers, the social intercourse, the opportunity of marrying his daughters. We have adopted the word—outcast. The punishment strikes in double measure his women, who are generally most devout. A faction is sometimes, in exceptional cases, formed to make the outcasts independent of the managers, and a struggle begins which sometimes ends in the overthrow of the managers, or a permanent split. The usual consequence of the managers' sentence, however, is the submission of the erring member, who abandons his error and pays such penalty, usually a feast to the caste, as may be ordained.

It is worthy of special notice that the managers—those at least holding the office of managers, for, as in other countries, there are often secret wire-pullers—are simply leading members of the caste, elders as they would be called in Scotland, who control the actions of the caste ministers, bidding them give or withhold their services. The managers seldom act on their own initiative. If a member of the caste is blamed, some one must denounce him, whereupon a caste meeting is called, and it is determined by the managers, after consultation with the caste, whether he is to be outcasted or not. Denunciation, if followed by proof, is generally acted on, and the whole of a family is outcasted for the offence of any member whom it has not put away. One ordinary defence in such a proceeding is to denounce the family of the

accuser. If the offence charged is one very generally practised, the offender is safe from the caste, no member of which is in a position to denounce him. Thus a European was talking to a Bramin in a town where the young Bramins notoriously drank strong liquors and ate beef, and asked why the caste discipline was not employed. "Because," answered the Bramin, "the practice is so general. No one can denounce a family, because it would at once retaliate by denouncing his own."

Another consequence has to be noticed of the fact that, for all practical purposes, the caste is a limited congregation on which, except possibly in the case of a few of the highest castes, there is no influence exerted by other congregations of the same caste. These congregations are limited by distance, and limited in that each of them contains only a section of the population of an area. There is probably one for each square mile of the country, where the Hindoo faith prevails. Each of them, individually, being of little power outside its own members, the machinery of discipline in the hands of its managers is most often at the service of the great men of the neighbourhood, and becomes an asset in the stock of influence which it is generally one of the chief objects of each of them to gather in.

It will be seen from this sketch that the caste system as practised, while a means of keeping order in each separate caste, and of united action under a master or man of influence, is an obstacle to any union in action, or in thought, or in interests among

the people of any given area. The interests of each member are bound up in his own caste, and seldom extend beyond it.

I do not forget the great assemblies for the chief religious festivals, and the pilgrimages to the great shrines. On such occasions, however, the people assemble, but can hardly be said to unite.

Now and then an excitement gets up which spreads throughout the whole Hindoo community, such as the cow-killing agitation. The normal religious interest of the Hindoo is, however, in his local caste or congregation, and as for outside matters he cares for none of these things He is swayed and influenced chiefly by the managers, and they by those men of influence who control them. Great influence is also exerted by the women of his house, who are like most women, devout and conservative. Ceremonies, which are the essence of caste, are jealously maintained, while the "weightier matters" have very much to take their chance. The devotion of members is divided between the idols of the family, the great shrines, the sacred cow and bull, the Bramins with their sacred threads, and the fakirs or devotees smeared with ashes, who wander from village to village.

Of the Mahomedans many millions are descended from converted Hindoos of the lower classes, and continue many of their ways under other names. Instead of the caste they have the mess, which is managed in much the same way. Their religion, however, gives them a unity, an equality among themselves, and a community of interests which the Hindoos want.

They are also much more inclined to fight than are the Hindoos, as is natural in the followers of a faith that was dominant in India for centuries, and that has been militant from the beginning. They are, as a rule, less easily cowed than the Hindoos, and are more capable of forming large leagues with united action. All Mahomedans do not understand and obey the Koran, any more than all Christians do the Bible; yet they are under its influence, and value the ceremonies which they believe it to prescribe.

One doctrine held by some of them is politically dangerous, viz., that a Mahomedan ought not to obey non-Mahomedan rulers. Those who hold this doctrine, though a small minority of the Mahomedans of India, have long been, and still are, a thorn in the side of the British Government. The Mahomedans, like the Hindoos, have their public assemblies, pilgrimages and processions, and their Friday's meeting for prayer, corresponding with which the Hindoos have nothing. In religious ceremonies they have no place for women. Their religion is considered to be a man's business. Their custom of shutting up the women has been extended to the Hindoos during the long period of Mahomedan supremacy, and still prevails among the better classes of both sections of the people.

There is continual danger of breach of the peace on special occasions, such as the meeting of two rival Mahomedan processions, or when the Mahomedans meet to sacrifice a cow, which to the Hindoo is an abomination. For the most part, however,

Hindoo and Mahomedan, living as neighbours and doing business with one another, tolerate each the other's religion, sometimes even joining in the sports at his festivals, a sign not so much of broadness of mind as of division of interests and want of a common spirit. While the spirit of the caste, or the small society to which a man belongs, is strong and moves him more strongly than it does an Englishman to act and make sacrifices for members of the family or caste, there is little or no public spirit. National spirit the circumstances of the country have prevented from being developed. There is a nearer approach to both of these among the Mahomedans than among the Hindoos.

Buddhists are few in number, and I have had little to do with them; I therefore pass them over.

Animists—spirit-worshippers, or devil-worshippers, as they are called—are chiefly of the older tribes, which were driven in early days into the hills and forests, and are by nature a race of hunters living face to face with Nature. They have no caste, but are organised by tribes. It is believed that many of the minor castes of Hindoos, especially agriculturists, are whole aboriginal tribes absorbed into the system. The Hindoo religion can thus absorb communities, gods and all. They have a vague belief in a Supreme Being, but their distinctive faith is in the power of evil spirits and of witchcraft. They have, like the Caffres, witch doctors. They believe that disease is generally caused by some

one's evil spirit, and cruel murders are often committed, on the denunciation of the witch doctor, of the person supposed to harbour the evil spirit. They are usually organised in villages, with village officers, one of whom is village priest and arranges the village worship and festivals. Probably these tribes will in time become Hindoos, Mahomedans, or Christians, their own religion not being strong or distinct enough to retain their faith in the presence of the stronger ones. It is from among them that Christian missionaries in Bengal have made most of their converts.

Christians we know about, and I need not describe them. Conversions have been going on for so many years that large communities of them have sprung up, whose members have mostly been born Christians, and grow up as such, having social intercourse, and intermarrying with one another. They are looked on by the Hindoos as a new caste, and, I dare say, have a good deal of caste feeling among them. Being so much under the influence and control of Europeans, they are fairly well united under the various mission bodies. Were it not for this, we should probably find them developing great varieties—heresies—like the early Christians. Their numbers are not so great as to render them important from the point of view of the present discussion.

A review of the religious position of the natives of Bengal would not be complete without a glance at the Brahmos, among whom are many of the "England-returned" Hindoos. They would describe

themselves as reformed Hindoos, having become emancipated from the trammels of caste, the shutting up of women, and other corruptions of the pure Hindoo religion. By reason of the caste system they have been forced to become a sort of caste by themselves, as they cannot get social intercourse with, or husbands and wives from, the recognised castes. Their importance consists not in their number, but in their position and intelligence.

The votaries of other religions do not need mention here.

It may just be noticed that, as in all cases where men for the most part inherit their religious beliefs, there are many who are indifferent to their professed religion. Many of these, nevertheless, are capable of strong efforts and great sacrifices in its behalf if it is attacked or insulted.

CHAPTER III

TRADITIONAL INSTINCTS

We come now to the second point for remark, viz., traditional instincts, on which a very few words will suffice. These have been fairly well described under the head of religion, with which they are bound up.

Though it seems somewhat commonplace, the remark must be made that these people are Orientals and their instincts are Oriental. In common with all Eastern races, they are despotic in their instincts —must have a master. As another form of this instinct, perhaps, they are gregarious, and must herd together. We have been considering the caste, and the remark was made that among the Hindoos the community seems to be the individual or unit, and the members parts or limbs of it. Our Western creed is that "A man's a man," and is the natural unit. This Eastern system we believe to be artificial and unnatural. That, however, does not prevent it from holding the field in the East, or make it any the easier to get rid of. It involves almost necessarily a belief in the divine right and absolute power of the Sovereign. With us, people think for themselves. For scores of generations the people on one side and

the Sovereign on the other were parties bargaining and contending; and if there is now no contention, it is because the Sovereign no longer attempts to dominate, but stands as his people's representative.

It is perhaps one of the hardest things for people with our traditional instincts to believe that there can be great communities who believe in the divine right and absolute power of a Sovereign, and who, when satisfied that "it is the King's will," submit quietly. Yet in India this is so. The difference is no doubt masked by the fact that both in Britain and in India the people are law-abiding. But in Britain they obey laws made by themselves; in India, laws made by the Sovereign. It is the will of the Sovereign to fix and embody his will for the time being in written laws, and his will is sacred to his people. They have nothing to do with the making of the laws. The laws, because they are his, are sure to be right and wise. It is a great gift from Heaven when the country has a wise and loving Sovereign; but even if the Sovereign be foolish and tyrannous, his will must be obeyed. The people, like the rushes in a wind, may bow and bend to avoid the consequences of his tyranny, but do not resist.

This instinct of personal loyalty to the Sovereign has been tempered or modified in the time of the British rule by two main causes, viz., the substitution for arbitrary power of a reign of law, and the abdication by the Sovereign of many of his rights. By the former, the Sovereign has practically, for

everyday purposes, subsided into the position of one of his own subjects—under the law; by the latter, his influence over the affairs of his subjects was vastly reduced. No doubt both changes have been for the better, since the arbitrary power and the influence over his subjects' affairs which belonged nominally to the Sovereign, being really wielded by his servants and underlings, became an occasion for universal corruption. It is doubtful, however, whether the nominal emancipation it has brought has been so extensive as is imagined. The instincts of the people do not change. The ruler may bid them be free, and refuse to exercise or suffer its officials to exercise despotism over them; but their instinct seeks a master. All over the country, if we like to search, we find, not, as in England, public servants chosen by and doing the will of the people, but masters who have sections of the people under their control and obedient to their will. There is no formal election; it is not an acknowledged fact, but it is perhaps the most solid and widely spread fact—the fact interfering more with our attempts at civilised government than any other fact in the country. So far as it is not implanted in the original nature of the people (and that it is, a Briton, believing in the oneness of humanity, will be slow to admit), it seems to have been caused first by the centralisation and arbitrary nature of authority under former Governments, which were despotic, and its abdication by the British Government. The vacuum caused by the determination of the latter not to

continue the despotic methods of its predecessors has not been filled as was intended, and necessary, and has therefore been filled up otherwise.

I draw special attention to this fact, because, widespread and universal as it is, we seldom see any signs, except in the reluctance of the Government to delegate its powers to local men of influence, that it is known to Government, or that a remedy is being devised for the abuses that spring from it. It has also a very close connection with the proposals I shall put forward, pointing as it does to an explanation of the indifference of the people to plans devised for their welfare. Instead of being due to apathy, it may be due to energy misapplied, a force which may be tamed and made use of.

CHAPTER IV

MANNER OF LIFE

I SHALL now attempt, by means of a few prominent facts, to bring home to the English reader an idea of how the people of Bengal live. He cannot realise it, fully. To do that, he would have to be in the climate and himself live the life.

The first fact is the density of the population. The population of Europe is about one soul to seven acres. The most densely peopled country in Europe is Belgium, whose area is 11,350 square miles, and its population a little less than one soul to the acre, largely mining and manufacturing. The average of Bengal is nearly as dense as that of Belgium. Only one-fourteenth of Europe has a population of half the density of that of Belgium, while Bengal has nineteen districts whose united area is more than four times that of Belgium, and whose *rural* population exceeds that of Belgium in density.

This is the human population only. It is mainly agricultural, and to it must be added an equal number of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry, of which the miners, traders, and manufacturers of Belgium keep few.

This great population, human and animal, derives its support almost entirely from the country. Of its food, most of its clothing, fuel, building materials, the great mass is consumed where it is produced. Its main articles of export are food grains. It imports little save salt, cloth, and some metals. The density of its population is therefore more remarkable than, and of an order different from, that of Belgium where the people are, it is true, closely packed, but indent for their supplies on the world. Where food, fodder, timber, and fuel have to be produced locally, as in Bengal, we can only wonder how on earth it is done.

There are in all the nineteen districts referred to above, no mines and hardly any factories. Except steam on the railways and wind on the rivers, no motive power is used save that of men and cattle. This is one secret of the dense population.

The people all live in "villages." Even the large towns are aggregations of "villages," not greatly differing from single villages in character. The number of villages in Bengal is about 203,658, counting each "town" as one. 165,305 contain under 500, 35,287 over that and under 2000, and 3066 over 2000.

Among these are 190 "towns," which contain only 5 per cent of the population. Our concern is with the remaining 95 per cent. We pass from the "towns" to a consideration of the "villages" which make up this 95 per cent.

The villages are distributed, about three to every

two square miles, everywhere—on plains, in valleys, among marshes, on or in rivers, in forests and on hill-tops. The village, like our parish, means a certain area, both the inhabited part and the fields around it. It is usual for people of the same race, faith, and caste to draw together into the same village. Where the village is a large one, they draw each into a separate quarter of it. There must be half a million villages, if all these separate quarters are counted separately. Besides the great producing classes there are the public servants of the communities, such as blacksmiths, barbers, and the like, who are dotted about singly at convenient points.

Here and there we find bazaars, or quarters of shops and traders; and markets, or places for weekly exchange of goods. Rajas and great landlords live, like the rest, in villages—their great houses jostling with the humbler dwellings around. Few, even of the artisans, are landless. The "busti," or inhabited part, is intersected with narrow streets or gullies, beset with homesteads. The homestead is the ground set apart for houses, which are all built after one general design—the courtyard, and huts or houses round it. The number of huts and of rooms varies with the needs of the family, from the single shanty to the great man's warren harbouring hundreds. Except those of a few great landlords or bankers, which are of masonry, the houses are built with walls of mud or bamboo matting, and roofed with thatch. The people in one homestead constitute a family, which is usually under a single head. When one of the sons

marries, he brings his wife to the home, building a new hut if necessary. The homestead, if of any size, has generally a reception room, and, in the case of Hindoos, an idol house. There are also cow-houses, cook-houses, and granaries. The great man's house differs from that of the small in that it has more rooms and outhouses, and a larger reception room.

The village water supply is generally common to the village, not private for each homestead. The fields of the village are spread around the inhabited portion, and vary in size from a tenth of an acre to several acres. Except rice-fields, which have ridges round them to retain the water, they have no very distinct boundaries, and are seldom fenced. The fields of each villager are not in a ring fence, but are interspersed with those of the others.

The number of family homesteads, such as I have described, is probably some fifteen millions, each under the management of its head. Viewed from without, this great multitude must seem like a confused mass. Yet, if we put ourselves in the place of the individual member of a family, the crowd disappears below the horizon, and the little world of his immediate neighbourhood which remains above it is not bewildering or full of strangers. This is his world, and within it is his life. Except for a little metal, cloth, and salt, all his wants are supplied from within it.

His food is grain; his building materials bamboos, wood, earth, and grass or straw; his instruments nearly all of wood; his dishes, when not of metal,

are leaves or coarse earthenware. The outside world, in the shape of the trader, the banker, and the landlord, comes to him, not he to it. He has his own local weights and measures, and his transactions are mostly by barter.

Life is in the open air. There meals are taken, and people bathe. The women, when going to bathe, do not hide their faces from the neighbours, though they would from a stranger. Except to bathe, however, the women seldom leave the homestead. There they work and gossip, and the children play. There can be no privacy when the neighbours can hear and see most of what goes on, and where gossip is universal and incessant. Every one in the village knows about every one else's affairs. There is, however, a great deal of politeness between villagers, which makes life in such circumstances bearable. No people in the world are more sensitive than these to abusive language. If a man hears it used regarding himself, he must resent it. Thus in my early days I was tickled with the account given by a constable of how he got hold of a man who was in hiding. "I gave him abuse," he said, "and he came out." Thus, like the fear of the dirk in the Highlands of old, the fear of the tongue inspires politeness in the villagers.

In such close quarters quarrels are bound to arise over the mischief or quarrels of children, trespass of cattle, and like incidents. They add spice to the somewhat monotonous life of the ladies, and are generally settled without the need of calling in the

village elders. To an outsider, life in such a society must seem like a perpetual egg-dance—a constant effort to avoid giving offence. In the houses of the great things are much the same as in those of the common people, except that, owing to the size of the households, the quarrels are between its members instead of with neighbours. No doubt, however, though we hear more about the quarrels, the normal state is peace. A serious quarrel between families is hard to settle. So many fresh causes of offence are constantly arising, that it frequently long outlasts the original occasion. The village is fortunate if all the neighbours are not dragged into it.

Abnormal occurrences—the village tragedy, the lawsuit, epidemic or famine—we need not notice here. They come occasionally and pass, leaving the village to resume its normal life.

There is a want of strenuousness about the work of the village. The agriculturist and the artisan have their busy and their slack seasons. Festivals are many, but then there is no Sunday. The amount of labour a man puts forth is limited by two main causes—in the case of the agriculturist, the size of his holding; in that of the artisan, the demand for his out-turn; in the case of all, the absence of a desire to accumulate. The pressure of the landlord and the creditor is needed to make men work.

There is a growing class of labourers for hire, though it is still but a small part of the population. Formerly the labouring classes in the country districts lived on starvation fare, being employed at

convenience on low wages by the better classes, and turned adrift in times of trouble to sink or swim. Having nowhere to go to, they had to submit. Now the steady demand for labour, from the tea-gardens, coal-mines, railways, and public and private works, has opened up opportunities to all of steady employment at good wages, to exercise which many emigrate for good, and many more for a time. Another effect of this is that local employers have to treat the labourers better if they are to keep them at all, and altogether the "dignity of labour" has been raised from its old forlorn estate.

Children are over-indulged, little disciplined, and seldom crossed.

Next to food for the family, the householder finds that the most difficult things to get are wood for fuel, household purposes and implements, and fodder and grazing for his cattle. This difficulty is a growing one, as forests and trees are being gradually cleared away, and grazing ground comes under the plough.

Here, as elsewhere, people talk of their daily interests — crops, weather, prices, and domestic events. They talk but rarely and think as seldom of anything beyond their narrow horizon.

Occupations.—By far the most important occupation is agriculture. There is a system of double ownership, that of the landlord and that of the tenant. The landlord has all rights over the land except those of the tenant, who has generally fixity of tenure, and of rent within limits, and sometimes

freedom of sale. It is generally the tenant who provides the house, instruments, seed, live stock, and labour, and who makes improvements.

The crops are broadly divided into those of the rainy season, winter, and spring. By far the most important crop is the winter rice, both because of its extent and because of the amount of labour it requires. A nursery has first to be prepared, where the grain is sown and grows into plants. This needs water, and ploughing, and labour in sowing, and in preparing the ridges. Then the fields have to be prepared; the boundary ridges for the retention of water are repaired, and the land ploughed as often as there is rain till it is liquid enough for the planting. The seedlings have then to be lifted, tied in bunches, and carried to the field, where they are planted by hand—about 150,000 to the acre. The growing crop has to be weeded, watched, and tended till it ripens, when it has to be carefully guarded against the inroads of thieves and cattle. It is reaped with the sickle, carried to the threshing floor, threshed, and disposed of. The work of the winter rice-crop is spread all round the year, and causes extreme pressure at the times of planting and of harvest. It is no use to plant too soon, and every day saved when the time comes adds to the chance of the rice ripening at harvest. This crop can easily be ruined by want of water, at three times especially—at planting time, reducing the area planted; at any time while the crop is growing; and just before harvest, when the ears are filling. It is

easy to realise how huge is the effect of a good or bad rainfall in a country where so sensitive a crop is grown on many millions of acres. Till the harvest is actually reaped it is never possible to say how much food the labour of the many arms employed has produced, and whether it will suffice to fill the mouths they belong to.

All other crops are minor, compared with rice; yet many are of great importance—the food grains in all three seasons, the oil-seeds, the fibres, the dyes, root plants, sugar-cane, vegetables, spices, and fruit. They do not, however, suffice to employ the full labour force in the times when work in the rice-fields is slack. Besides the human labour there is the labour of the cattle. Great is the difficulty, especially in times of drought, of getting the cattle their food, and the first showers often find them in ill condition to draw the plough. Milk is not an ordinary article of sale by the peasants. There is a special class of herdsmen who keep cows and sell the milk and its products, and another of shepherds, who keep sheep and sell the wool. The ordinary peasant, however, has nothing to do with grazing except for his plough cattle and their increase, which he sells from time to time for beasts of burden. Their flesh is not eaten by Hindoos, and little by any one else.

Of the artisans, whose main occupation is some handicraft other than agriculture, the most numerous are the hand-weavers. This is the only class whose product was ever exported on a large scale from

India. Now the export has practically ceased in face of the competition of the factories both in and outside India; but within the country much of the coarse clothing of the poor, and of the finer cloth for the women of the rich, is still woven by hand. Many of the old weaving villages have fallen into decay. Of the descendants of the old weavers some have left off the work, some are to be found in the cotton and jute mills, and many have taken to agriculture. It is enough here merely to enumerate some of the other trades, whose chief business is to supply the domestic wants of the village communities—the carpenter, blacksmith, potter, barber, oil-presser, thatcher, leather-worker, mason, scavenger, and day labourer. As mentioned above, most of these have some fields and a family home, to which they like to return. Their ambition is rather to add to the fields than to prosper in any other occupation.

It is interesting to watch the efforts of the country to adapt itself to modern conditions, and provide for itself armies of industry other than agricultural. Till of late years, the tendency has been the other way. Agriculture has expanded enormously, invading the forests and waste land till it has endangered the supply of fuel and timber, and of grazing for the cattle. The agricultural population has become, and is still becoming, more and more crowded, so that there is less land for each. The result has been in part more careful cultivation, but, I fear, still more, less average

efficiency of those engaged in the industry, who have not enough of land whereon to exert their industry.

Meantime there have arisen great industrial enterprises—the tea-gardens, the factories and works, the railways, the mines—and sanitary works in the towns; and for all these numbers of labourers, skilled and unskilled, are needed.

On all sides there is the same complaint, that they cannot be got in sufficient numbers, and, when got, are not efficient. But the armies of labour are being gradually formed and trained, drawing recruits from the labouring and industrial classes in the country, and from the poorer agriculturists. The small proportion of those engaged in these new enterprises, important though they seem, to the mass of the population; the reluctance of the people to move, and of employers to give wages that will attract; and the novelty of the situation—all make the movement a slow one. The movement, though slow, is general, and the situation, even where there seems to be no movement, is being modified from day to day, especially in the case of the labouring poor. In the old times, the poor labourer of the village who had no land was at the mercy of his landed neighbours. They sent for him when they needed him; he was generally in debt to some one for whom he had to work when required, while in slack seasons he starved. Credit he could not get, having no land to give as security. He was despised by all his neighbours, who thought it degrading to work for hire.

The demand for labour in the tea-gardens, mines, factories, and works has changed all this. Large numbers of these half-starved labourers have been drafted off to the industrial areas. Of those who remain, very large numbers emigrate to these areas during the slack months, and employers are obliged to treat their labourers well to prevent them from clearing out altogether. It is likely that large numbers of the migrating labourers will in time settle permanently near their work. The problem of housing all those additions to the industrial ranks in a healthy way is among the most anxious ones that confront the sanitary authorities. How this movement will end we cannot tell. It seems one to be encouraged, as relieving the overcrowded ranks of agriculture, and thereby rendering those engaged in that industry more efficient, besides supplying other industries with the labour they need. The moral change which it represents is a gradual breaking down of the contempt felt by the rural population for labour for hire, and the impression on their minds of a feeling of respect for labour. It is interesting, while home industries in India are meeting with no great success in their efforts to attract the labour they need, to watch the flutter of alarm in other countries at the idea of an overwhelming rush of Indian labour into Africa or Australia, as if the people of India were homeless nomads, instead of the home-loving and stay-at-home workers that they are.

A few words now about the remainder of the population—the landlords, the merchants, bankers,

shopkeepers, traders, professional men, and waifs of society. Of the landlords a few are great, a larger, but still small, number are substantial, and the greater part small and poor. The great and the substantial landlords are amply occupied with the business of their estates, which consists less in the devising and carrying out of improvements, or in the cultivation of land, than in extracting from their vast numbers of tenants what they can in the shape of rent and other contributions. This work is generally in the hands of numerous low-paid subordinates. The landlord class are not of active habits. With a few exceptions, they do not ride or follow any vigorous bodily pursuits; they do not travel or go about among their people; they are not well educated, and their tastes are not elevated or refined. "What are they, then?" the reader will ask. They are men who have enough to live on, and nothing particular to do with their time. They believe in the dignity of having nothing to do and the comparative degradation of work, and their chief ambition is to gain precedence in society over their neighbours. Where the landlord can rescue himself from the slough of sensual indulgence, from the pit of extravagance in spending, and from the fire of litigation or faction-feud, he is usually building up his family by adding to his estates. The practice followed by the great landlords in England of embarking part of their fortunes in trade and industry has not yet made great progress in Bengal, though a beginning has been made.

Inevitably, in a land where the joint-family system exists, the managing head of a family finds his freedom of action much restricted and his energy largely absorbed in family affairs, even when there is no open quarrel going on.

Every family of landlords, great or small, has its correspondingly large army of poor relations, of whom those for whom employment cannot be found must be maintained. Poor men of this class will not do manual labour, and are not trained to industry. Preferring idleness, they go, if they have to work, as clerks, or into positions in which, as bailiffs, overseers, police constables, or peons, they have authority. Their hereditary occupation is exploiting, not land, but the people living and working on it.

The moneyed classes are the merchants, bankers, and traders. There are merchants of the class we know who live by buying and selling goods—wholesale merchants and retail shopkeepers. There are no manufacturers of any consequence, the weavers—the principal and only important manufacturing artisans—most generally working in their own homes for dealers, who supply them with raw materials, and dispose of their wares. Retail shopkeepers and hawkers are generally in connection with some large wholesale dealer, who supplies goods on credit, and gets paid as the goods are disposed of. The most generally diffused method of employing capital is money-lending. Loans are seldom taken for the development of industries or the making of improvements, but are wanted for the discharge of debt, for

display, or for strife. In many ways India is still, though under a Government with enlightened ideas, a barbarous country, and the energies of her people, like those of our own less advanced ancestors, are much more engaged in the destruction of capital in those two ways than in its creation and increase. Even the interest, which is high, does not lead to much accumulation; for, in the first place, bad debts are numerous, and expenses of collection great; in the second, the capital is mostly distributed in small parcels, and even a high interest represents but a scanty living. The necessity of meeting obligations, for rent to the landlord and for interest to the money-lender, is in Bengal, where making a fortune is not usually an object of ambition, the chief spur to exertion. It is a common thing for a landlord, whose demand for rent is fixed by law, to encourage the tenant to fall into arrears and then get it with interest, which is a cheap way of getting an enhancement.

Of the professional men little need be said. The most prominent are the lawyers. Men of this class are found only near courts, which are not numerous or close together. There is no class corresponding to our country solicitors, who are in every village. Deeds, except when of great importance, are most often drawn by unqualified men, and the lawyer's main practice is before the courts. Each court has its own bar, whose lawyers generally form a society of their own. They seldom travel; they do not, I believe, belong to any great central society; nor are they under any discipline save that of the

courts, and, to a certain extent, of the local bar library. The leading lawyers and the leading bankers—the only classes who accumulate money—are founders of future great families, thriving out of the improvidence and quarrelsome disposition of the landlords of the present day, whose estates, when they become sufficiently involved, go to the hammer, and are bought chiefly by men of those classes.

Teachers for the most part are poor, getting as pay little more than will keep body and soul together. They are a numerous class, but nearly all above the very humblest grades, except a few in private colleges, are Government servants.

Medical men with qualifications, though to be found here and there and increasing in number, are not a numerous or important class. There is a sprinkling of engineers, also very scanty, but also increasing. Religious men are, among Hindoos, of three main classes—the spiritual guide of the family, the panda or priest attached to a temple, and the fakir or devotee, who wanders about and begs. With the exception of the last occupation, which is adopted at pleasure by men of any class, the occupations are hereditary and are not prepared for by any college or school training, nor is there any general controlling body corresponding to our Church. Among the Mahomedans, the Friday's worship is often led by a layman. Mullas are attached to the greater mosques, and there are travelling preachers. Both among Hindoos and among Mahomedans there are to be found schools of divinity, and men learned in the

religion they teach, but there is little check on the religious teacher beyond the particular caste or social circle in which he happens to be—while the character of fakir, or professional mendicant, is often assumed by rogues for their own ends. The great mass of professional men in Bengal is still composed of servants. Judges, revenue officers, police, engineers, teachers, medical men, and clerks form the bulk of those under Government, and there are others in the employ of the great companies, firms, merchants, and landlords. There are few journalists pure and simple, but many men write for the papers. The chief authorship is that of school-books. It is not usual to find anywhere that class of independent professional men which is so numerous in England, and when found, they are not, as in England, under the control and discipline of any society.

Of waifs and strays the most important for notice are the village ruffian and the village bad character. The former is one who has gained a reputation as a bold and unscrupulous rascal. He is generally in the pay of some great man who protects and uses him. He sometimes sets up on his own account as a blackmailer, and this, in a land of thatched roofs and straw stacks which can readily be set on fire, is a good business while it lasts. Sometimes he starts or joins a gang of thieves or robbers, in which case he generally spares his fellow-villagers and robs or steals at a distance, spending his spoils at home.

The bad character includes this class, and also

others—the village sneak thief, who steals his neighbour's crops; the convict, who is ever after conviction a servant of the police, and is made to pay them money to be let alone; and the man without money, land, or kin. These classes are all unpopular, and the acts of the sturdier ruffians are not infrequently fathered on them.

CHAPTER V

VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS—RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT

RESERVING the institutions connected with the Government for consideration later on, we shall now consider those which are part of the village life. The object is not to give a full and exhaustive description of every institution connected with the village, but to remind the reader that a family in a village, as families elsewhere, is composed of human beings each with his own wants, difficulties, and problems, which he cannot escape from, and has to face from day to day.

We have seen that the people of Bengal live in villages, and that the fields of the various cultivators are intermixed. It is evident that in such a state of things rights of way are of great importance. This is recognised in the "towns," where the public "rights of way," or roads, are sometimes as much as six or seven miles to the square mile. Inside the ordinary village the ways between the various homesteads are generally narrow, crooked, and ill-kept lanes, while in the fields there are no kept roads at all. People, in the normal state of peace and goodwill which exists

in a village, make the best of things, clubbing together to patch some place that has become very bad, getting out of one another's way as well as they can, and giving one another facilities to pass through homesteads and fields. Most even of the recognised ways are only fit for men on foot or cattle to pass over, so that, except in the dry season after harvest, when the fields are open, no cart traffic is possible. Loads are carried on men's heads, or on pack animals. Bridges are seldom found, or embanked roads, so that if water or marsh is met with it has to be waded, or, if too deep for that, crossed in a boat. Even on cart roads the track gets full of ruts and scours and boulders, which are left till they get very bad, and then, if there is room, the track is changed. It is usually by such roads that access is found to the markets.

All villages pay a road tax, which is levied and paid by the landlords with the Land Revenue. What is done with this will be explained hereafter. Suffice it to say that very little of it comes near the village, which has to depend on the voluntary, and therefore fitful, efforts of those concerned for such ways as it has. Besides the loss it occasions, the want of well-kept and well-marked ways is a fruitful source of contention whenever, as must sometimes happen, the village is suffering from internal trouble.

Water supply.—This is needed chiefly for irrigation and domestic uses. The supply for domestic uses is ordinarily obtained from a common source, a tank or a well, used by all the neighbours. The

tank, contrary to the practice recommended by Government authorities, is not usually reserved for drinking water. The people think nothing of bathing themselves and their cattle, and washing their clothes, and seeing all their neighbours do the same, in the water of a tank which they use for cooking and drinking. The wells too are not properly protected from the inflow of uncleanness from outside, or from the dripping of unclean vessels in them. While people value clean water when they can get it, they take little trouble about making or keeping clean their supply. They will even exhaust their drinking water reservoirs for irrigation in dry weather. Irrigation they do care about, and will spend a good deal over it, both of money and of trouble; but they are wonderfully indifferent about drinking water. The bathing ghat is generally a place for meeting and gossip. It is the only public place where the women who do not show themselves in public appear.

The market is a central spot, where the people of many villages meet to buy and sell. It is distinguished from the bazaar in that its shops are not permanently occupied. A market is held usually once a week, when stalls are opened, some in sheds, but most in the open air. Country produce and live stock are brought by the villagers on the one side, and cloth, groceries, and articles for the use of the villagers, by traders or artisans, on the other.

The bazaar contains the permanent shops, which take produce and sell necessaries. The villager generally has a running account with one trader in

the bazaar, who is often also his banker, advancing funds at interest.

The market and bazaar have not very accurate weights or measures, and a great proportion of their transactions are in kind, by barter.

There are few hospitals—none except what have been established through European influence—few skilled physicians, and almost no surgeons. Medical aid is given chiefly by hereditary practitioners, who are often by experience and tradition well acquainted with the ordinary diseases and their remedies, but more frequently ignorant quacks. The worst quacks are those who profess a knowledge of English medicine, and have had no training. The immense amount of preventible disease and suffering in the country, especially among the women, can be realised occasionally when, as I have seen, a sympathetic doctor has the time and takes the trouble to go round among the villages, treating cases. It is a mistake to suppose that the people are miserable or impatient under their sufferings. They are, like our own ancestors, used to the sufferings, and take them as a matter of course. New remedies or modes of relief, though at first looked at with suspicion and refused, as they were by our own ancestors, sometimes become popular, as in the case of vaccination.

Education, the sanitation of the mind, is also in a very elementary state. By the influence of the Government a proportion of the children are being taught to read and write, and a few remember and practise this in after life. But many still look

on it as an accomplishment of a caste or profession.

The clerical castes teach their children as a matter of course, and the professional classes eagerly seek advanced education as the necessary gate to a career. Traders have their own system, chiefly teaching accounts. The great masses of the people—save perhaps in Eastern Bengal, where some advance has been made even among the lower classes—trouble themselves little about education. They use what they learn not at all to read books, little to read newspapers, but occasionally, at need, to write or spell out a document or letter. The man that can do so much can generally make a living, for he is resorted to by all the countryside. While the qualifications of teachers are gradually rising, those and their pay are still low. The schoolhouse, when a separate building is provided for it, is a mean building, badly lighted and ventilated.

Education gets help from the Post Office, which frequently employs the schoolmaster as postmaster. The growth of correspondence is enhancing the desire for a knowledge of reading and writing, which otherwise the people feel that they have little use for.

The village cattle are sent out to graze with the village herdsman. When the crops are off the ground, there is plenty of space for them to roam all over the fields. It is growing more and more difficult to find them food when the fields are under crop. Villagers who are cunning or powerful do not scruple to let their animals out to graze

over their neighbours' crops. The owner of a field, if he catches an animal destroying his crop, has the right to take it, if he dares, to the pound. This he is not very ready to do, both because of the after unpleasantness, and also because the task of driving a strange and unwilling animal over a roadless maze of fields under crop to a pound which is often miles away, is difficult and troublesome.

A few words now with regard to the settlement of disputes. We all know, of course, that there are law courts, and police stations to which an injured person can go and ask for redress, and we are accustomed to hear that the people are far too fond of litigation. Yet in the daily life of the village the law court and the police station form no part, because they are distant and costly, the proceedings tedious and cumbrous, and the result uncertain. A lawsuit among villagers is like war among nations —an extreme step, rarely taken. Those who say that the people are litigious do not sufficiently recognise the immense masses of them, and the way they live intermingled, the enormous number of differences this inevitably gives rise to, and the large proportion of these which are quietly settled without the law ever hearing of them. What might be if the people were really litigious occasionally appears when the peace is broken and war is waged in earnest. I have known of a single village in which there were 20,000 rent suits within a few years, and of two disputing brothers—landlords—who had 250 criminal cases pending at once. Such things

are abnormal. The ordinary villager has a horror of litigation, and prefers simpler ways of settling his differences. Of these the most obvious, and one often taken, is to pay off the offender in some informal way, and let the matter drop. If the difference is social, an appeal is generally made to the caste, which closes proceedings by a feast all round, given at the expense of the party found to be in the wrong. For ordinary disputes, the popular tribunal is the punchayat (lit. *five* men) of village elders, whose decision, after hearing both parties, is generally bowed to. There is also connected with each village some one who, either from his position or from his personal character, is looked to as a satisfactory judge, and who is willing to give time and trouble to the settlement of disputes. Such a man finds plenty to do. There is, again, the man of influence, whom the people of the village *dare* not pass by. If they did, he would stop their social intercourse, harry them with his paid ruffians, and prevent any witnesses from appearing with them. Men of this class make good friends as well as dangerous enemies. They seek to strengthen their influence by making it worth a man's while to depend on them, and dangerous for him to seek protection from any one else—even the Government.

The reader has probably by this time gained a fair idea of the relations of villagers to one another. They are neighbourly among themselves, exchanging loans of little sums of money, food, utensils, ploughs, and cattle, and labour for short times, unless there

is some quarrel or faction feud. Different castes and faiths live side by side, mutually tolerant, save for an occasional outbreak of zeal, which seldom occurs, and still more rarely has serious results. Within the caste, the congregation settles disputes and keeps discipline; without it, the same duty is performed by the village elders. The whole is under the control of the local man of influence, beyond whose authority, unless he has a rival, few venture to appeal. There are two main classes in whom local influence is lodged—the landlord and the money-lender. The landlord, unless he is a small man, seldom takes the trouble to see or communicate with the villagers personally. He has his servants, of whom the village bailiff (often himself a villager) and the peon, or messenger, are in immediate contact with the village, and, with crowds of others, intercept those who would have access to the great man. The landlord seldom pays his servants more than a nominal wage. They trust for their income to the payments of the villagers, by whatever name called—bribes, blackmail, vails, or presents, which are meant to secure favour or avert displeasure. Such payments, being customary, though illegal, are usually made voluntarily. A villager finds that it does not answer to withhold them. They are numerous, have many names, are illegal, forbidden, and universally made. In a great landlord's estate, the influence which is nominally his is wielded by his servants. Pressed and fleeced as they are by this class, the villagers get on in fair

comfort, unless there are disputes among the landlords themselves, when the villagers are teased and bullied into taking sides, and are exposed to many of the horrors of war.

The other man of influence is the money-lender. He is generally a man with a small capital, and looks after his business himself. He is as jealous as the landlord of the villagers seeking any help but his own. He absorbs his debtors into his business, keeping a running account with them, which in some mysterious way always shows a balance in his favour. Whatever he can get from his debtor passes into his chest, and his debtor depends wholly on him for leaving or lending enough for payment of rent, for the food of the family, for all the many wants and occasions—purchase of cattle, marriage and funeral expenses, law costs, and the like. The debtor is an investment, and his land and labour are the means of providing, not for himself, a return on the same. The money-lender's influence frequently rivals that of the landlord, and in many a village holds the landlord as well as his tenants. Sometimes, again, the landlord combines with his own position that of money-lender. As already explained, the local man of influence wields the local forces — social and anarchic. The village has not the same facilities as the community in England for purging itself of its bad characters, who are generally in somebody's service, valuable because careless of a good name they have lost, and unscrupulous.

We come lastly to consider the relations of the people to the Government. Theoretically, the Government in Bengal is despotic, and has certain prerogatives which it alone may exercise. Chief among these are the administration of justice and the levy of taxes. The rights of every subject are supposed to be established by law, by custom, and by contract. No subject—nor even the Crown—may require any subject to give up what is his by right against his will, save by process of law, and no person may administer the law unless he has been authorised by the Crown to do so. In theory every one who has suffered injury must go for redress to the officers of the Crown and to no other. The village elders, the man of influence, and the various tribunals which settle most of the disputes, have no legal basis. Yet they punish and assess damages, and they levy petty taxes and fines.

Things of this sort occur in England also, no doubt, but not on the same scale, or to such an extent, as will appear from the following sketch of the Government system, and how it is connected with the people.

Take first the administration of justice. The main principle has been imported from England. It is that of individual right and responsibility, and, as far as possible, freedom of contract.

Under former Governments, the right of the individual existed not as a principle but by the favour of the Crown. It exists now by law, which the Crown, acting alone, may not violate. The law is

now an entity apart from the Crown, standing between the subject and not only his neighbour, but also the Crown itself and its officers. Though the Crown ultimately makes, and may alter the law, it can do neither directly. The checks are mainly three—first, its own sense of justice, which forbids capricious meddling with the affairs of its subjects; second, the Legislative Council, which, without having absolute independence, has such a position that it cannot be lightly interfered with; and third, the control of the British nation, acting through the Secretary of State, in whose system the Crown is only a part, and not the chief part, of the Government. As it repudiates practical despotism for itself, it forbids that form of control to others. Slavery as a status is not acknowledged, and every man is supposed to be a free agent, responsible for himself alone. Formerly punishments were wholesale on groups or communities; now the offence has to be brought home to the individual offender, or no one is punished.

The principle of freedom of contract is another solvent of the old communities. The individual in old days was so tied down by the bonds of ancient custom that he had very little initiative left. He was not so much a unit as part of a unit—the family, the caste, or the village. The influence of custom, though not entirely lost, has been much impaired by the spread, mainly through the action of our courts, of the idea of free contract, which induces a man to disregard custom and do what he feels inclined to

do. The general effect of this change has been that customs and institutions not expressly recognised by the statute law are ignored, and all means of doing justice, except those provided by Government, fall to the ground. Let us see how far the latter are sufficient.

A very brief notice will suffice for civil justice, which is not our main subject.

The policy of Government is to keep its judges detached from the people, and from local interests. This involves frequent transfers, owing to which judge and people remain in a state of mutual ignorance. The ignorance of the judge causes him to lean too strongly on the statute and case law, which he knows, and to give too little weight to local custom, which he does not know.

The ignorance of the people causes them to attribute to the clerical staff, and also to the bar, who are local, more influence with the judge than they have.

The heavy proportion of costs to value of suits, which is inevitable when claims are numerous and small, the long delays, the numerous appeals, the uncertainty of the result, and distrust of the court, all combine to repel the people from the court. Fear of the court's action adds to the feeling of repulsion. Process of law can be made into a terrible instrument of torture, as in the case of the 20,000 rent suits in one village referred to before.

For criminal justice the avenues are through

tribunals of two classes—the magistrate's court and the police station. The only magistrates authorised to receive complaints are those in charge of sub-divisions of districts, so that there is only about one centre for every 750 square miles. Thus between the horizon of the villager and the magistrate's court there lies an unknown country, in crossing which many perils have to be faced, not the least of which is the tout, or quack lawyer.

Honorary magistrates are not numerous, and very few of them are entrusted with power to entertain complaints. The police stations, where information of certain classes only of offences can be received, though more numerous than magistrates' courts, are still far apart, being only one for every 150 square miles. It is often necessary for the informant to follow the officer in charge far beyond his station if he be out on business.

In case of a police inquiry before trial, there is often great delay before the officer arrives on the ground. Even if he is not, as many are, oppressive and greedy, there are many causes why he should be unpopular. He and his men have to be lodged and fed. He disturbs the village by arrests on suspicion, by taking people from their work, by taking up the time of the notables. For his own safety he has to browbeat and swagger.

Should the case come to trial, the parties must expect long journeys, frequent remands, troubles with witnesses — especially when there are long hours, sometimes days, of hanging about the court—trouble

at home—especially if the other side be influential—money running out all the time, and most likely a cross-accusation to meet. The result is generally a toss-up, and, even if it be favourable, brings to the injured person nearly as much punishment as satisfaction.

Thus the tribunals for the redress of injuries offered by Government to the people are not easy of access, and are not satisfactory when reached.

The tribunal, though difficult of access to the subjects, must have the means of reaching each individual among them, and for this purpose has an army of subordinates. These are of two classes—process-peons and police.

From the former class we will pass with the remark that they are numerous, and underpaid. Their work is done out of sight of their superiors, without proper supervision, and is of such a character that they are worth bribing.

The police are a centralised body, at the disposal of the Inspector-General, distributed over the forty-seven districts, each man transferable to any part of the province. For each district there is a chief of police called superintendent, working under the district officer. The part of the force which deals with crime is distributed in stations (including outposts), of which there is on an average 1 to 150 square miles, under sub-inspectors, who receive information of crime, and, with their subordinate sub-inspectors and head constables, supervised by inspectors, investigate crime. The rank and file are nearly all foreign to the

province. That they may do their duties, the police have to be vested with immense powers of annoyance —an arrest for a few hours only being a calamity which many men will pay great sums to avert. They are all underpaid, and, with the doubtful exception of the inspectors, are not trusted by the people. As remarked above, for their own safety they have to inspire fear and magnify their office. There are 25,000 Government police in the province. When the villager thinks of the Government, he thinks of the process-peon and the policeman.

The old constitutional police force of the villages are the village watchmen, to bring whom into the system of the Government, efforts have for many years been made, and are still being made. The village watchman was originally considered to be in the service of the landlord, when the landlord served as the principal peace officer under Government. As the landlord came to be ousted from that position, the question arose what share in the services of the watchman he should retain, and what remuneration the watchman should get for his public services. The present situation is that there exist for assessing and collecting the pay of the watchmen bodies of villagers known as punchayats. The watchman's wage is supposed to be the usual wage of a labourer. He has a uniform, and his whole time is supposed to be available for police duties. He is in constant communication with the Government police. His wage is fixed; he is appointed, punished, and dismissed, and his movements are regulated by the

District Officer or Police Superintendent. Except that he is not liable to transfer, he is practically detached from the village. It is the ambition, not yet gratified, of the Police Department to detach him completely from the village, and attach him to the Government police. How the Government police could assimilate the watchmen, I cannot see, for there are some 150,000 of them in the province, and they are without officers; while the Government have not enough of officers to manage their own men.

The prerogative of taxation, which belongs to the Crown, has by it been sometimes delegated to others, sometimes retained in its own hands. Taxes come under two main heads—direct and indirect. Octroi being practically unknown in the province, only direct taxes, viz., cesses, rates, and tolls, are delegated.

Cesses are a form of tax which has grown out of the land revenue system. The land revenue is not a tax, but the share of the produce of the land to which the Crown is entitled. A hundred years ago and more this share, for nearly the whole of Bengal, was made over, charged with a fixed permanent payment of land revenue for all time, to the then landlords. The State has since, save in the case of certain small areas, and of such land as the Crown itself possesses, gained directly no profit from the increased value of the land. The system of collecting and keeping trace of this land revenue is very complete and stringent. After the Orissa famine in 1866, it was thought necessary to compel the people to pay for their roads.

Instead of establishing local bodies for assessing and collecting the necessary sums, the Legislature provided for a single rating authority in each district (averaging 3000 square miles), and for the valuation (on the actual letting value of the land), assessment, and collection by itself of the demands from landlords and tenants through the landlords. This method of taxation has been adopted to supply funds for two purposes—first roads, and second public works of general utility and improvement. With the exception that this road fund has been nibbled at in order to provide for urgent sanitary wants, such as improvements in the supply of drinking-water, there is no public fund for the supply of any of those wants in the villages which in the towns are supplied by the municipal fund. As will be shown later, the road fund itself, though levied from the villagers, nominally for their benefit, is not available to supply their wants of this kind. For means to give him roads, sanitation, medical aid, water supply, conservancy, education, and such services in and about his village, the ordinary villager has no public fund to look to. Under the existing law there is no means provided for such a fund being raised or administered. Here is a distinct vacuum.

The second means of direct taxation is the rate. That is employed outside towns, for the exclusive purpose of maintaining the village police or watchmen. One or two temporary arrangements for the provision by rates of local funds for special works—chiefly water supply and drainage—have been made.

They are few and temporary, and scarcely form an exception. The village police rate is made to bear the whole cost of the village watch—that is, the men and their clothing. The fund is assessed and collected by local boards or punchayats, under the control of the Government local officers, who also control the spending of the money. The fund, to which the Government contributes nothing, cannot, under the existing law, be used for the payment of officers, nor does the Government supply officers beyond those necessary for its own Government police.

It may be mentioned that the use of the rate has been considerably enlarged for the towns under the Municipal Acts, which are further aided by being exempted from the cesses and from the cost of the village or town police, which is entirely borne by Government. But the people of the towns are only 5 per cent of the population, the rest of which has to bear these burdens, and has no means of providing for those of its wants which are similar to the wants the town rate funds are provided to meet.

For agricultural purposes there are, in a few parts of the country, irrigation canals supplied from great rivers. These are paid for by means of rates assessed on and levied from those using the water, and are not, properly speaking, taxes.

The third form of direct taxation is the toll. The toll in old days was employed as a means of collecting revenue, which might or might not be used for the benefit of those who paid it. It is still

levied under the law on all railways and tramways, on most navigable channels, on ferries, at landing-places and wharves and seaports, and in markets. It is also levied according to custom, and as a matter of private right by many owners of property.

The toll is used as a source of revenue still, but the tendency to employ it chiefly for the benefit of those who pay it by rendering them an appropriate and adequate service in return has greatly grown, and we see the services it renders in the railways, tramways, waterways, seaports, and other great institutions which, but for tolls, could not exist. Before the days of the road-cess the toll was employed for the improvement and maintenance of some main roads. Since that tax was introduced it has been the policy of the Government to abolish tolls on roads, and they are practically discontinued, except where an occasional bridge or ferry comes in the line of a road. Extensive as is its use for some purposes, the toll as a means of raising public funds for the supply of public roads is unknown in the rural parts of the province.

The reader will, I hope, have gathered from the above imperfect sketch some notion of the vacuum which has been forming between the Government and the people. Such a vacuum is inevitable with a Government, on the one hand, at once poor and ambitious of a high standard of work, and a people, on the other, left in what is little more than primitive anarchy.

Government officials, whose time is absorbed by

their daily work, find it less and less easy to keep up that familiar intercourse with the people by which their predecessors did much to bridge the gap, or to give consideration to any problems except those which the day's work forces on their attention.

CHAPTER VI

SEARCH FOR A MOTIVE POWER

It is not to be supposed that during all these years the Government has been ignorant of defects in the administration which have existed for so long, and has made no attempt to provide remedies. Its efforts at improving the administration began almost with its own rule, and are still being made with continued earnestness. Of the intention, I have nothing but good to say. The doubt is whether they have been made on the right principles. The principle most in favour throughout seems to have been the introduction into an Indian province of methods of government which were suited to England, instead of developing the province on its own natural lines. I confine my remarks to the subject of local government, on which alone I propose to offer suggestions.

We found in Bengal a despotic form of government. The Nawab had under him landed proprietors who held their estates subject to such payments of revenue as might from time to time be fixed, and were responsible for the peace of the country in their several estates. Under them were the villages,

occupied by peasant proprietors, who held similarly of them. There have been many controversies as to the extent of the rights of the parties. The fact seems to be that nobody had any clear rights, but all were organised on the principle, if it can be so called, of custom. The most prominent of all customs was the "squeeze." The Government squeezed the landlord, and the landlord the villagers. The "squeeze" was the great instrument both for getting revenue and for keeping discipline. It was indefinite. The demand might take the form of recognised revenue, cess, or fine. There was no fixed way of applying the "squeeze." The landlord was the Government on a small scale. The difference between a good and a bad ruler was in nothing so definite as the administration of the law, but in his discretion as to times, seasons, and methods, in the moderation of his desires, in his fatherly care for those under him, and the protection he gives them from evildoers, and in his efficiency as an aid to the Government in all its branches.

The natural laws which govern the affairs of men were there, but were applied on the Oriental principle of fatherly protection given by the ruler, not on the Western principle of the power of the subjects to resist oppression. The people did not want to govern themselves, and had no instinct for it.

On coming in contact with this state of things, the British Government had two courses open to it —either to study the existing methods and forces,

adapting them to its own purposes, and by making use of them to direct the ship into the course it thought best, or to develop new forces by removing or readjusting the sanctions under which the government was being carried on. The latter was the course chosen as an ideal. The first step was taken by Lord Cornwallis, who, by introducing the Permanent Land Settlement, endeavoured to turn the landlords of Bengal into noblemen and squires on the model of the country gentlemen of England. The intention being to put an end to the squeezing system, a beginning was made by Government, which restricted by this measure its own squeezing power. It was supposed that such a course would give free play to the better instincts of the landlords, and be imitated by them. They would spend the funds remitted by Government in improving their estates and their way of life, take an interest in their people, and generally assume the duties and functions which in those days were discharged by the country gentlemen of England.

The measure, from our present point of view at all events, did not meet with success. Of the many reasons which may be brought forward to account for this, the most obvious, and one of the most potent, is doubtless that the motive power was withdrawn. It was a mistake to suppose that the landlords had in them, ready for exercise, those qualities which impelled the gentry of England to give their mind and energy to public affairs. Possibly the qualities were there and latent. The motive of the

squeeze, however, was the only one then understood, and its removal, either premature or absolutely a mistake, was not well advised.

The next epoch in the history of local government in the province is the time—coinciding with that of the Indian Mutiny and the assumption by the Crown of the government of the country—when Bengal was given a Lieutenant-Governor and a Legislative Council of its own. Then began a series of efforts to organise and develop the province, whose progress is still being watched with great interest and much anxiety. The period from that to the present day I shall discuss more in detail: first, because in it most of the efforts of Government for the object of local government have been made; second, because the history of the period is modern history, and its policy and acts are still subjects for review and criticism; and third, because it coincides to a great extent with my own experience.

Up to the beginning of this period, not much had been attempted in the direction of organising local government. A start had been made in providing management for one or two of the large towns, whose sanitary condition urgently required that something should be done; and there were boards to spend the proceeds of tolls on roads and ferries in the improvement and maintenance of important roads. With these exceptions, new institutions were not provided, and old ones were not interfered with. The English system of law, however, which leaves every man to defend his own interests at his own expense, was

undermining the old customs as the principle of freedom of contract became more familiar to the people.

The first great step taken was an attempt in 1859 at defining the respective rights of landlord and tenant. This, with other legislation which followed twenty years later, had the broad result of forcing apart the landlords and the tenants, and disturbing the old traditional office of the former as deputy governors of their several estates. The next step was the resumption from the landlords by the Government of the management of the police. The paid staff the Government took exclusively into its own hands, centralising, maintaining, and managing it. The policy as regards the village watch was less clear, but the general result of repeated legislative acts has been that for their appointment, and for assessing, collecting, and issuing their pay, local bodies of villagers are spread in a network over the whole province, and act under the control of the Government magistrate. The duties of the village police are done under the direction and control of the magistrate's right-hand man in police matters — the District Superintendent of Police. The ambition of the Police Department is to sever the village watch from village interests, and attach them entirely to the centralised police. Though this policy has not yet been adopted by Government, the landlord's control of both central and local police has been, to all appearances, ousted. The only ostensible authority sharing that control with the Government officers is the punchayat or board which pays the village watch.

The municipal towns have been increased in number, and the appointment of the members of their managing committees has been transferred, as regards the majority of members, from the Government to the ratepayers. While nominally under the control of Government through its officers, these committees are, except in the case of heavy delinquencies, practically independent, as Government seldom proceeds beyond giving advice. The municipalities do not manage or pay for their own police, and there is nothing else which, save on rare occasions, Government thinks worth interfering with.

The Orissa famine in 1866 drew the attention of Government to the want of proper communications, the provision of which was another public duty left to but seldom discharged by the landlords. Cesses were imposed on the agricultural (*i.e.* non-municipal) communities—both landlords and tenants—first for the provision of roads, and later for important public works of improvement. For the spending of the road cess funds, District Committees were formed, a majority of whose members, as in the municipal committees, gradually came to be elected. They took over the duties of the ferry fund managers, and were vested by law with responsibility for providing out of their road cess fund all roads, from the largest trunk road to the smallest village street. The confidence of the authorities in the adequacy of the road cess fund for this purpose is shown by two main facts—the abandonment, with the approval of and under pressure from the Government, of one main

source of income to the ferry funds, viz., tolls on roads; and the diversion of part of the cess funds to purposes other than roads, such as sanitary works, dispensaries, and the provision of water supply. The District Boards have gradually been given duties in addition to the management of roads, the chief of which is primary education. They assess and collect no taxes, and have nothing to do with police.

One broad result of this policy has been to remove from the landlords and tenants all sense of responsibility for the provision of roads of all sorts, great and small. This, which had been their customary duty, ceased in their opinion to be such when they began to pay taxes for the same purpose.

The necessity for a general organisation of the people impressed itself on the authorities from time to time in connection with several administrative efforts, of which the following are the chief.

The first census was held in 1872, and was followed by others in 1881, 1891, and 1901. The machinery for taking the census simultaneously in one night had to be found, and managed.

The first systematic attempt at famine relief was made in 1874, and there have been several occasions for its employment since. On the experience of the various operations in Bengal and other parts of India has been built up an extensive and minute code, which is ready to be brought into action on the appearance of famine.

Of recent years, in order to cope with the plague, local organisation has been effected.

For all these works—census, famine relief, and fighting the plague—it has been necessary, especially for the census, which made a temporary heavy demand for the whole country at once, to organise the people, and this has been done repeatedly, for all these purposes, with success. The organisation was temporary, and in each case was dissolved when the immediate purpose was served. Every time organisation was effected made it easier the next time for the Government officers to find their local men and work with them.

It is to be noticed that the attempts of Government to establish local bodies—municipalities, village watch punchayats, and district boards—have been prompted by two main motives, one, the desire to relieve Government of work which ought to be done, and the other to give full play to a new motive power. It is the case of Lord Cornwallis's experiment over again, only in his day an Englishman looked to the landlords for the seat of motive power, while nowadays that necessary force is supposed to reside in the "ratepayers." As Lord Cornwallis expected that the landlords had only to be given security and independence, and they would take up their duties as managers of all local affairs, so in more modern days do the authorities entertain, or profess to entertain, hopes of the "ratepayers."

I doubt whether the "ratepayers" of Bengal will ever develop such a motive power in themselves as we see in England. In England we have so much of it that we have come to think it a natural quality in

all people. If it exists among the people of Bengal it is latent. Experience has shown that they will work, but not alone. They need leading, direction, inspiration, and example. In proportion as they have received these—and in such works as census, famine relief, and fighting the plague the Government gave help abundantly—the result was successful. The Government has attempted to withdraw help from the minor permanent institutions, and in proportion as help was withdrawn the institutions have failed to live. I have formed the clear opinion that any attempt to develop a motive power apart from the Government is contrary to the instincts of the people, and must fail. This is plainly the real inward opinion of Government, for it has created no authority for local government except such as it can watch and supervise closely. The municipalities, which alone have such authorities, contain only 5 per cent of the population, and are kept, in spite of their nominally independent position, under the closest supervision. The village watch board may assess and collect the police tax, but cannot spend it. The District Boards have official chairmen, and, while they are entrusted with the spending of funds, are not entrusted with the assessment or collection of taxes. Who can say that any of these bodies have any independent life in themselves? They were all created by Government, and if Government were to abolish them to-morrow, no one would particularly care. They depend on Government for their motive power, and in proportion as they are artificial they add to, instead

of reducing, the responsibilities of the Government.

But "What is the alternative?" it will be asked. They all fill places and do work—work that must be done. If not they, who is to do it? Yes, undoubtedly they do work, and the main cause of complaint is that the work they do is not sufficient, nor spontaneous, and not done well.

It is not sufficient. For 5 per cent of the population—those in the municipal towns—some attempt is made to provide local institutions for sanitation and other works of public convenience. For the rest of the province nothing of the kind is thought of. It is not spontaneous, as every official knows whose Sisyphus task has been to heave such bodies as do exist up the hill of progress; and it is not well done. Praise can only be given if the standard of merit is made very low.

The cause of these defects is not the interference of the Government, but the absence of life, of a wish to do the work, and of sympathy with its objects in the local bodies themselves.

While it is the fashion to note hopefully every sign of waking up and of interest in the work shown by any local body, and to pat it on the back and say, "Well done!" in hope of encouraging the rest, many of our best men are persuaded that little improvement is to be looked for.

Now, if ever it is to be sufficient, spontaneous, and done well, work for the people must be done by the people. It is out of the question, apart from the

matter of cost, that Government should maintain and look after so vast a body of subordinates as would be needed if the work were to be left in the hands of Government; and almost equally out of the question, in these days of light and knowledge, that the country should be much longer neglected as it is now.

I am one of those who feel that it is time to open our eyes and to look the facts full in the face. It has not, for as long as I have known the province, been the fashion to do so. We limit our vision to what we conceive to be the means of action, and will not fix our attention on the wants of the country, save in so far as we have available the means to supply them. The proper course is to reckon up the country's wants, and not rest till the means for supplying them are found. Our present system is a course of hypocrisy which is unworthy of a great and intelligent Government such as that of Bengal, and of its officers. We have to pretend that things are right when they are wrong, and that wants which we think we cannot supply do not exist. We have to snub and discourage in the people themselves that "divine discontent" which gives the best promise of progress, and throw back into their old barbaric lethargy such of the people as show signs of a wish to arouse themselves out of it.

For more than twenty years I have made it one main object of my ambition to know the wants of the people, and find means for supplying them. We should not rest satisfied with the maxim of Molière's doctor, that it is better to die under treatment according

to the rules, than to be cured by unorthodox treatment. No treatment can be looked on as satisfactory that fails to remedy the evil, and there can be no great harm in treatment, whether approved or not, which cures the patient.

As far as one can, who has to work with the permission and approval of official superiors, I have tested the various means of improvement which have from time to time seemed good. From watching their working, and the working of the steps in the same direction taken by Government, I have come to the conclusion that we have enormous untapped resources of energy and intelligence which can be used for the local service of the people; and that they are capable of being organised, developed, and utilised to the great advantage of the Government and the people. As this conclusion has not yet, so far as appears, been accepted by the highest authorities, some good may be done by indicating the reasons for its acceptance, and for acting on it.

CHAPTER VII

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS

FROM what has gone before, the reader will have gathered that the Government of India, as a civilised Government, has been in search of a motive power for getting local works and services done, but that for want of a satisfactory motive power, the works and services have been not sufficient, not spontaneous, and not well done. As a civilised Government it cannot abandon its efforts to give its subjects works and services which will increase the efficiency of their labour, protect their health, and make life pleasant to them.

The progress made so far in this direction has been slow, and seems incapable of further development, at least on its present lines, unless a satisfactory motive power is found. It has given us municipal institutions for 5 per cent of the population, while for the remaining 95 per cent there are no local institutions. Throughout this great mass of over seventy million people, all living in "villages" more than 38,000 of which have over 500 inhabitants each, and of these nearly 3000, according to the census, over 2000, there is no legal means for

raising a public fund by means of local taxation for making a bridge, road, well, or tank, or for cleaning and repairing them. There is no local authority who has legal power to preserve a right of way, or prevent a nuisance; not a scavenger or conservancy cart can be employed; not a street lamp set up or lighted; not a dispensary or school established or maintained by means of local taxation. This is not civilisation.

Inside the municipalities where authorities have been established, the constant complaint is that, in spite of every effort, the elected authorities, too faithfully representing their constituents, take little steady interest in anything but keeping down the rates.

Outside municipalities, the only really local bodies hitherto established (for I do not reckon the district and so-called local board as local) are the "Union Committees" provided for, I believe, in consequence of the experience of voluntary "Boards of Guardians" established and worked by me twenty years ago in Serampore. There are a few of these dragging out a lingering existence, but they have not, for whatever reason, been a success.

It will be seen that so far the efforts of Government, in the direction of getting the people to manage their local affairs, have been confined to the 5 per cent in municipal "towns." For them Act after Act has been passed, providing by means of laws and bye-laws most elaborate constitutions and powers. To them Government supplies town police free of

charge, while all the rest of the country has to pay for its own "village" police. From them Government exacts no road cess or public cess, though all others have to pay those taxes. All this favour has been shown to induce them to tax themselves for supplying themselves with such instruments of civilisation as were enumerated above — roads, water supply, conservancy, lighting, dispensaries, schools, and the rest.

To a zealous officer, the apathy shown by the town people towards all these advantages is a disappointment, and it discourages his hopes of progress for the country. If the labour of lifting out of this uncivilised state of mind only 5 per cent of the people be so great, how utterly hopeless, it is often thought and sometimes said, would be the task of lifting the whole mass!

Though the result of any effort at raising the whole mass cannot be foretold until the effort shall have been made, I am inclined to vary the inference. If the labour of lifting only 5 per cent of the people is so great, it shows how hard is the task of lifting that 5 per cent while leaving the rest of the people behind. If they are to come easily they must come together.

There is no such material difference between the people in the "towns" and those in the "villages" as to justify the great difference in the treatment of them by the Government.

The "Municipalities" as at present constituted owe their existence to the Legislature, and most of

them have come into being within the last half century. As defined in the law, a municipality may be established in an area whose population numbers 3000, has a density of 1000 to the square mile, and contains non-agriculturists in the proportion of not less than three-fourths. As a matter of fact, most of our municipalities consist, not of historic towns, but of aggregates of ordinary villages, with a core of bazaar. It is impossible to say of any of them, with the exception of a very few large towns, that it differs in character from the non-municipal "villages" by which it is surrounded. We learn from the census papers (1901), which may be taken as substantially correct, how shadowy is the distinction between "town" and "country."

Take first the population test. How little importance is attached to the limit figure of 3000 is shown by its not having been made a dividing point, the fourth group in Table III. (Part II.) covering from 2000 to 5000.

The following statement shows the distribution of single "villages" and "towns" between municipal and non-municipal areas (population shown in hundreds).

[TABLE

Number of Inhabitants.	Number of Villages and Towns.	Municipal.		Non-municipal.	
		Number.	Population.	Number.	Population.
Under 500	165,305	...	...	165,305	31,580,0
500–1000	25,888	3	1,8	25,885	17,764,3
1000–2000	9,399	3	5,3	9,396	12,761,5
2000–5000	2,743	22[1]	75,6	2,721	7,471,4
5000–10,000	205	58	433,6	147	931,6
10,000–20,000	79	65	924,9	14	172,3
Over 20,000	39	39	2,446,0	...	...
	203,658	190	3,887,2	103,468	70,691,1

[1] Three under 3000.

Thus, till we reach 5000, nearly all the "villages" are non-municipal, and even in the two next higher classes 70 and 18 per cent respectively are still non-municipal. Knowing as we do that most of the "towns" are nothing but groups of "villages" we must infer that, on the population test, many of the first class, with its 31½ millions, and most of the non-municipal "villages" of the next five classes, with their 38½ millions of inhabitants, have as much right to be classified as "town" as the greater part of the 151 towns having less than 20,000 inhabitants.

Again, as to density of population, there is one entire district the average density of whose *rural* population exceeds 1000 to the square mile. As there are nineteen districts in Bengal whose united area is over 45,000 square miles, and their rural population, dense and sparse together, averages over one to the acre, there must be vast masses of *rural*

population of a density greater than 1000 to the square mile.

As regards the third part of the definition it is purely artificial. It can make no practical difference to the needs of people who are living in a community with interests intermingled in what way they earn a living. Whether it is by agriculture, or by shop-keeping, or by weaving, the density and the close neighbourhood are the governing considerations. As a matter of fact, the agricultural population of most towns must be close on the limit of one-fourth, since that of all—including the real towns—is one-sixth. In the *rural* villages live 86½ per cent of the whole non-agricultural population, making three-tenths of the *rural* population. While, therefore, denying that the occupation test is anything but a useless and wholly artificial one, I allege that even by this test the character of the "town" population does not differ from that of the "village" populations. Both are mixtures, the proportions being different, but not very decidedly so.

Government is committed to the improvement of the people. It cannot afford to leave the mass of the population in its present disorganised and uncivilised state; nor can it, I think, hope to raise to a higher level the selected 5 per cent, leaving the remainder behind. All must be organised and rise together, if any are to rise permanently. If the people do not rise above their present level, that will be a reproach which the Indian Government and the British nation cannot afford to endure. We

have broken down their old constitution. We must give them either that modified or a new one which will work up to our ideal. This—the organisation of the people of Bengal—a work great and gradual, ought to be and can be done. The root principle on which it must be done, if it is not to fail, I know from my own experience, confirmed by that of Government, to be this: Without the people the Government can do nothing; without the Government the people will do nothing. For success there must be co-operation between Government and people, and with that, success may be looked for.

This principle involves two important changes of policy on the part of the Government, viz.: (1) that it revoke its abdication of some among its prerogatives, and resume its right to interfere and lead whenever necessary; and (2) that it substitute for the methods of the factory those of the garden.

The first change is necessary because, if the people are to be trained to manage their own affairs they must, for some time to come, do not what they choose, but what the Government and its officers, who do the training, think best. The second change is necessary because dead uniformity is inconsistent with life and growth, which love change and variety. Progress must begin from present conditions, which vary from place to place, and from time to time. For the development of life in the people, not mechanical methods but living and sympathetic intelligence must be employed.

We are to bear in mind that the object is to bring to pass a development and awakening of life in the people and a continual progress in the same. The life, the strength, the energy are there, though too often asleep, or sickly, or choked with weeds. That is a matter of faith not without confirmation from experience. The Government cannot create life if it does not exist, or materially alter the lines of its natural development. By taking an interest in it, by providing supervision, the living and sympathetic intelligence, and the necessary help, it can do much to awaken the life; to promote and preserve its health, to remove obstacles in the way of its growth and nourishment, and to guide it in the right way. That is the part which Government must take in the work.

In the case of living beings and plants the heaviest part of the work is at the beginning. As it goes on less help will be needed, and the time for bearing fruit will come.

CHAPTER VIII

CO-OPERATION—STARTING POINT

I HAVE undertaken to show that by co-operation between Government and people, a motive power whereby the local affairs of the people will be satisfactorily managed can be developed. The motive power to which I trust is life and living growth. This is to animate the people and make them grow. The union of Government and people is necessary, because in this Eastern country the people have no energetic working will—none of the will which moves to action—apart from Government. That which in England is called public opinion cannot in Bengal be developed unless Government give the lead and take an interest.

The question may be asked how we can be sure that even with a hand from Government success may be looked for. We can never be sure of anything, but all experience points that way. My own experience time after time during the last twenty-three years has thoroughly convinced me; and that of Government itself, in such great works as census, famine relief, and plague relief, is surely sufficient proof to convince most men. I do not know how to

account for the fact, unless it is that nothing save the influence of the Crown is strong enough to overcome the *vis inertiæ* of use and wont, but there the fact is.

Here, then, are two parts which are to be united so as to form one organic whole—the Government, or head, inspiring, directing, and aiding when aid is needed; and the people, or body, filled with that life and working will which the union is needed to develop and maintain.

Let us, as the first step towards solving our problem, examine both the parts which are to be united, and see (1) what progress has been made already towards the union; (2) what, if any, steps have been taken in the wrong direction and will have to be retraced.

We shall find most of our facts in those branches of local government on which the chief effort has been expended already—municipalities, justice, and roads. There are numerous other branches of work which are of first-rate importance. The methods found best for the branches already specified will, however, be found of equally great use for these.

Municipalities.—The people of each municipal area have been organised into a community, and brought into direct contact with Government. Local taxation for local wants has been provided in them and is in use; and arrangements, more or less satisfactory, are in force for the supply of local wants.

Certain distinctions, however, have been admitted which are inconsistent with the interests of the union

with Government and justice to the non-municipal population.

First, the law provides no appeal from assessments made by the men of influence in a municipality. In many—I may say in most—municipalities, the power of assessment is abused, sometimes grossly. Government knows this, and looks on helpless. The power of taxation comes from Government, and could not be exercised a day without its support. That power should therefore be made subject to the effective control of Government. Contact with Government should necessarily involve control by Government. If not, it involves chaos and anarchy.

Similarly, cases have occurred when it was desirable to remove land from a municipal area, but the law does not allow of that being done except with the consent of the men in power within the municipality affected. This is another unnecessary block to the discretion of Government, and therefore an obstacle to union.

Again, every time a municipality is formed, its ratepayers are exempted from the payment of three taxes—the village police tax, the road cess, and the public works cess. Unless Government is prepared to make a free gift all round to the villages of their local watch, it seems unfair that those presumably best able to bear the cost should alone be relieved of it. So long as they are only 5 per cent of its population, Government can afford the cost; but only so long, and there is no sign that a large extension of the gift is intended.

With regard to road cess and public works cess, it will be shown that these are expended on works from which the inhabitant of the village, who has to pay them, gets no more practical benefit than the inhabitant of the town. It comes to this, that the Government, in its anxiety to promote the progress of the 5 per cent, has been concentrating for their benefit an unfairly large part of resources derived from the whole country, and it is impossible to make the distribution fair without taking back some of what has been given.

As has already been shown, the municipalities are mostly artificial. They are not historical, and are living, in the ways indicated above and in other ways, on resources not their own by right. In so far as their progress is due to this, it is false and fictitious, and an obstacle to the progress of the remaining 95 per cent—the really important part of the population.

As, however, the population of the municipalities is only 5 per cent of that of the province, we can leave on one side for separate treatment their whole system of management. That system cannot, for the reasons given, be extended generally to the remaining 95 per cent.

Justice.—The system of administering justice now in force has been described in Chapter V., and the following broad facts may be gathered.

The tribunals to which the people are required to resort are few, remote, and difficult of access. Their proceedings are costly, slow, and harassing, and their

action uncertain. They can be employed as instruments of torture.

Those through whom the Government is known best to the villagers are the process-peons and the police, who, being numerous, untrustworthy, underpaid, and impossible to supervise, and having large powers of annoyance, are odious to the people.

The great army of the village watch is in a state of transition. The men have been detached from the landlord and from the village, and are not yet attached definitely to any other local authority. They are without officers of their own, and the regular officers of police have too much work in managing their own men to manage the village watch besides. The punchayats have no legal authority over the village watch. Whatever authority they do in practice exert is jealously resented by the departmental police, who desire to attach the village watch to themselves.

Lastly, the people themselves have no place in the system. We have Government-paid officials and subordinates, jealously kept apart from all local interests; and village watchmen who are in process of being also detached from their villages, but no paid or unpaid local officials having recognised duties to do in connection with the administration of justice. The functions of honorary magistrates are confined to the trial of petty cases; those of the punchayat to paying the watchman's wages. The villagers have to look on at the work of the Government and its staff, unless they are to work under the orders of

the subordinate police as informal helpers, which they will not do.

We will pass from the question of the courts of justice, merely pointing out that the villager has, in connection with them, many difficulties, some of which seem capable of being removed or diminished, and proceed to consider those parts of the administration of justice which lie outside the courts.

We need more avenues to the tribunals, and therefore more centres for receiving complaints and information.

We want to reduce as much as possible the need for employing men like the police and process-peons, and we need to improve the police that are still maintained.

The village watch need officers and organisation.

A place must be found for the people in the system of justice.

And as the country is not rich, improvements must not cost too much.

Roads.—Roads are a necessity of civilisation. This truism the Government has accepted in theory, and failed to give effect to in practice.

On the municipal towns, indeed, which it has exempted from payment of the police tax and cesses paid by their neighbouring villages, it brings pressure to bear, and as a result they do something for their streets. That something is constantly being pronounced unsatisfactory, the sum spent being never more than five annas, and more frequently two, one or less per head of population yearly. An anna is a penny.

Outside the municipal "towns" it has introduced a system, on paper, for providing roads of all kinds, from main roads to village streets, for the non-municipal population (66 millions) of the forty-two districts where cess is collected. On paper that system is quite advanced, the sole fund depended on being a rate, as in England, and such old-fashioned expedients as statute labour and tolls on roads being strictly avoided. On paper, the system of rating is fairly complete, searching out every landlord and every tenant. It has been a triumph, on paper, of administration, as the two cesses together bring in upwards of 9 millions of rupees yearly, collected from about 15 million ratepayers, at no very extravagant cost to Government. The sum is substantial, and looks large. It enables the District Boards, to whom Government has delegated the spending of the road cess (4½ million rupees), to make and maintain so many thousands of miles of roads, of which thousands figure in the returns as metalled, bridged, and so on. This affords material for official congratulation which accordingly we find, with an occasional doubt thrown in as to whether some improvement is not yet possible, in the yearly resolutions.

I do not share in the complacency which Government professes to feel on the working of this system in practice.

By the imposition of the road cess, the Government has transferred to itself, or its delegate the District Board, from the landlords and tenants, responsibility for the roads of the country. The road

cess — the means by which it has undertaken to discharge that responsibility—has the following faults. It is harassing, costly to collect, inelastic, wholly inadequate, unadaptable, and not properly localised. I will make a few short remarks on each of these points.

It is harassing and costly to collect. There are in all some 15 million ratepayers, and the cess (public works and road cess being collected together) is payable in some 40 million items—this involving the making up of 80 million accounts (two for each item, one by the payer and one by the receiver). This joint cess is, I believe, the only direct tax in Bengal that is not collected in the usual way—direct from the payers. The Government collects it from the registered proprietors of estates, and makes them responsible for recovering it from their tenants. This has the double effect of relieving the Government of a great part of the cost and trouble of collection, which is accordingly ignored by it, and of forcing the landlords to recover the tax from their tenants or from one another by civil suits. Each item being a fraction of an item of rent itself generally small, I reckon that, taking into account lawsuits, collection and keeping of accounts, the cost of collection, most of which falls on the people, is not less than the gross proceeds of the tax.

The cess is inelastic. It is a rate on rental of land, which the law has made sure will not be materially enhanced. Where the rental is enhanced, only about 2 per cent of the enhancement will be got as

road cess. The process of revaluation is costly. In 1901 the increase in cess for all Bengal was 65,000 rupees, or about 8 annas to the square mile, a rise on which I believe the Government congratulated itself, but which I cannot regard as of the least importance.

The cess is wholly inadequate. In taking over the responsibility for the roads, the Government no doubt formed an estimate of the costs to be incurred, and compared it with the means provided. I believe it was thinking at the time rather of original work than of maintenance, and more of famine relief than of the service of traffic. Be that as it may, the action taken has had the effect of saddling the road cess with the whole cost of making and maintaining roads of all kinds everywhere outside municipalities. When I pronounce the cess fund inadequate, the first point to establish is what we may call adequate. The English reader must, in considering this, bear in mind that public roads have imposed on them in Bengal heavier duties than in England, in the following respects :—

(1) The denser rural population, not having municipal institutions.

(2) Through traffic still uses roads with long leads.

(3) There are in Bengal, owing to intermixture of interests, few private roads.

(4) In England towns, factories, and mines, which provide the bulk of the traffic, send most of it by rail or water without touching the country roads.

(5) England has, outside the towns, each of which has its own streets, about 2 miles of road, nearly all

bridged and metalled, for every square mile of country, and about an equal length of private road besides. She has about a mile of railway for every 6 square miles, and numerous canals and waterways besides. Her coasts are studded with harbours.

I draw attention to these points because, when anything is said about the road cess being unsuited to the country, England and her rates is dragged in as a knock-down argument. It is not easy to tell what people will say when pushed into a corner. I have even heard it said that roads are a luxury which the Bengal villager does not need, or at least cannot afford. I will not take up time by arguing the question, but will merely point out that the absence of a road, or a bad road instead of a good one, means that traffic must go on men's heads, or on pack bullocks, or on lightly laden carts, instead of on well-laden wheeled carts, and this, roughly speaking, doubles the cost of transport. In a country where traffic is mostly in bulky articles, and has to go long distances by road, good roads are a necessity which the country cannot afford to do without. The poorer the country the less can it afford to do without them.

To make a programme of road expenditure for a country is impossible. Its roads have to serve its traffic and convenience, and the programme must expand with the demand. As a provisional programme, however, I suggest the following, which the reader will, I hope, consider not excessively ambitious.

Village Streets.—It has been shown that the villagers do not, in their circumstances, differ

materially from the townspeople. The provision of roads costs more per head in a sparsely than in a densely peopled area, since a greater length has to be provided for each person. I therefore suggest an expenditure per head in the villages equal to that in the towns.

District Roads.—A mile for each square mile, and a mile of this for every 6 square miles (the proportion of railways in England) to be metalled.

The cost of carrying out this scheme of district roads cannot be calculated, since it must vary according to local conditions of soil, rainfall, material, labour, and wages, and according to the use made of the road.

Present expenditure is not a safe guide, because that is often cut down for want of funds. As a provisional guide, it may be accepted. I take the figures for original work and repairs together, trusting, as the former is not important and the latter often short, the averages will bring a result substantially right, or at least not excessive. Owing to differences of conditions, I take the figures for each district separately.

[TABLE.

Metalled Roads.		Unmetalled Roads.	
Cost Rupees per Mile.	Districts.	Cost Rupees per Mile.	Districts.
under 100 .	4	under 20 .	1
100 „ 300 .	13	20 „ 40 .	7
300 „ 600 .	17	40 „ 60 .	11
600 „ 1000 .	5	60 „ 100 .	15
over 1000 .	3	over 100 .	8
	42		42

Many of the roads contributing to these averages are unbridged, and few have feeders. Of the metalled roads most of the cheap ones would be more properly described as gravel than as metalled roads.

Now, coming to the fund for expenditure, I give a short statement of that. All expenditure is included except that on establishment, whose cost has also been excluded from the estimate of cost.

By Area.		By Population.	
Rupees spent per Square Mile.	Districts.	Inhabitants per Rupee.	Districts.
over 50 .	3	under 10 .	2
20 and under 50 .	19	10 and under 20 .	12
10 „ „ 20 .	12	20 „ „ 40 .	18
„ 10 .	8	over 40 .	10

Not to weary the reader, I will just glance at the main inferences from the figures which I have summarised above.

There are only ten districts in which the pro-

portion per head of the whole road fund to the expenditure on roads in towns per head is as much as 1 to 2, while in eleven it is less than 1 to 5.

To maintain a mile of road the entire road cess is required as follows :—

For Metalled Roads.		For Unmetalled Roads.	
Square Miles whose Fund is required.	Districts.	Square Miles whose Fund is required.	Districts.
under 10	11	1	1
10 „ 20	16	1 under 2	12
20 „ 30	9	2 „ 4	17
30 „ 50	4	4 „ 6	5
over 50	2	6 „ 10	3
		over 10	5

Thus, leaving out of account the immense original expenditure that would be needed for acquisition of land, earthwork, bridging, etc., the entire road fund is not adequate to carry out the maintenance fully of any of the three parts of the work separately if used for that part alone, neglecting the other two; much less is it adequate for the whole work it is supposed to do. The cess is levied at the maximum legal rate everywhere.

The next point is, that the road cess as a rate is unadaptable. Raised as the fund is with the Land Revenue, the rate cannot be raised or lowered for smaller areas than that of a whole land revenue district; that is, some thousands of square miles.

Lastly, with regard to localisation. For the convenience of collection, the road cess area was

made to coincide with the land revenue district, but there is nothing to show that the cess was not meant to be used like other rates, and, in particular, like the municipal rate, for the direct benefit of those who paid it.

To enable important works to be done, a system of concentration of funds was introduced, on the understanding that a neighbourhood passed over in one year should get its turn in another.

Then the metalling of important main roads was undertaken as a policy in some districts, in forgetfulness, apparently, of the fact that the cost must be a recurring one.

As programmes were gradually carried out, and the roads already constructed came to be used by the traffic which the facilities they gave brought into being, the renewal of wear and tear demanded an ever-increasing share of the fund. At the present day, roads have not been provided all round. Some neighbourhoods enjoy good roads, paying no more, while others, paying no less, are without them.

Not half the districts have a mile of district road for every 6 square miles, and there are seven that have not a mile for every 12 square miles. This means, not that there is always a mile of road in each block of 6 or 12 square miles, but that there are blocks of a hundred or more square miles absolutely without roads, though they pay the rate, while their money is concentrated in other blocks remote from them. This policy of concentration is pushed to an extreme in the case of metalled roads.

Government has created for its Boards an obligation to maintain free, for the use of traffic, all public district roads. The scale on which, in order to discharge this obligation, the Boards have to spend the funds entrusted to them, is so high, that the length of road they maintain has to be strictly limited. The ratepayers of neglected neighbourhoods have to experience a second edition of that policy of "concentration of funds" which was carried out at their expense in favour of the "municipal towns."

The district and metalled roads on which the Government congratulates the country in its Annual Resolutions, are to a great extent made possible by what I must call a fraud on the neglected areas. This fraud is being continued, because it is thought undesirable to disturb the vested interests which have grown up in consequence.

Even at the cost of interference with the vested interest of one neighbourhood to enjoy without having to pay for it the fund of another, and deprive the other of its use, this wrong system should be discontinued.

The question may be asked whether I propose to abolish the road cess entirely, and, if so, how I would meet the difficulties such a course would give rise to. The difficulties are, in the main, two. The first is, that the machinery for the assessment and collection of the cess is in working order, and the people are accustomed to it. The second is that we could not abolish the road cess without abolishing with it the public works cess, which is collected with it. This

would involve a loss of 4½ million rupees (£300,000) of revenue to the Bengal Government.

Taking the second point, it is a consideration that the public works cess was imposed professedly to strengthen the revenue against famine expenditure. The fund it yields is not allotted or spent locally, and there is no special budget for it that I know of. Its being imposed has always been represented as a grievance of the landlords, being, in their opinion, a breach of the Permanent Settlement, by which the land revenue was fixed for ever.

It seems to me most unfortunate that taxes like the cesses were ever imposed. One insuperable objection to them is the harassment and loss involved in their collection. I see no way of getting rid of that. The other objections, from a road rate point of view, seem also inseparable from the nature of the tax. So long as these taxes exist, there will be a temptation to extend the system. Already it has been proposed to double the road cess, and there was also under consideration some years ago a suggestion to impose an education cess. It cannot be beyond the ingenuity of the advisers of Government to find some means of raising revenue which will replace the public works cess without such harassment and cost. Why not, for instance, withdraw the exemption of agriculture from income tax, or put something on the customs?

As regards the road cess, there is a simple substitute for that. It can be collected with the village watch rate, which yields already much more than

the road cess, and is a real local rate. No doubt adjustments of incidence would have to be made; but, as the taxes are paid by the same people, the substitution of one collecting machinery for two would be a benefit outweighing all possible objections. There would be no difficulty in adding the public works cess also, except that, unless it were imposed on special areas for special works benefiting those areas, as drainage and embankment rates are now imposed, I am not clear whether Government would not be ashamed to take it from the villagers—a strong argument, if there is anything in it, against the tax as it stands.

As regards the first point, the machinery, if existing, is cumbrous and costly to work, and should be scrapped. The people are used to it, but have never been reconciled to it; and it stands as a block to all progress in rating reform. Yes. The cesses should be abolished, and a fresh start made in local rating on other lines—the existing village watch rate being taken as a starting point.

Every possible effort should be made, and expedient adopted, suited to the circumstances of the country, to facilitate the introduction into the business of transport by road of capital, for the want of which the commerce of the country is being strangled and its civilisation retarded. The pedantry that prevents the raising by tolls of revenue for the maintenance of costly roads in Bengal, where the value of land and consequent out-turn of rates are low, where there are few railways, and where the

development of the road system is all to do, because in England, with her high value of land, Government subsidies, and network of railways and canals, they are not now needed, should be put away. We should cease to attach undue importance to means, neglecting ends, and look at ends alone. We should be satisfied with nothing short of wiping away the reproach to the administration caused by the roadless condition of the interior of the province, a condition that inflicts on it a yearly loss to which the whole proceeds of the public works cess are but a trifle.

CHAPTER IX

MACHINERY

We have then the conditions of the problem. The Crown, or central Government, and its 70 millions of subjects are to co-operate, and from this co-operation is to come the motive power which will develop the local government of the people.

Let us recall what was said at the end of Chapter VII. as to the part of the Government in the work. The Government cannot create life, or materially alter the lines of its natural development. By taking an interest in it; by providing supervision—the living, sympathetic intelligence, and the necessary help, the Government can do much to awaken life; to promote and preserve its health; to remove obstacles in the way of its growth and nourishment, and to guide it in the right way.

The Government is to resume those functions of a master which it has abdicated; take its full share, and exercise its full authority in the management of local affairs. For this purpose it must provide a sufficient staff of trusted officers to attend to those affairs everywhere; ensure that they have time for this duty, not loading them up, as is done now, with other duties;

and trust them. The staff exists in the shape of the district officers and their subordinates,—it can at any time be modified, strengthened, and adapted to its duties. This staff of trusted officers should be in direct touch with the people. The clerks, peons, police, and cheap lawyers, through whom touch is now being kept, should be as far as possible removed from between the parties—people and Government.

This principle of direct touch was recommended to, and accepted by the Government of India, half a century ago, before the Indian Mutiny; before the accession of the Crown to the government of the country, as the main principle for governing the people of one of its Bengal districts which was established under the name of the Sonthal Pargannahs. The adoption of the principle was in the circumstances a remarkable act of faith, and deserves to be contemplated. There had been a bloody insurrection of the Sonthal tribes in that part of the country, which was accompanied by murder and outrage, and had to be put down by armed force. Very severe measures were recommended by some advisers of the Government. The conclusions which found favour with the Government, however, were that the people had been exasperated by the petty oppressions of its own subordinates, and that the case called not for severity but for the removal of the irritating cause. The people were to be managed by their own chiefs under the supervision of trusted Government officers, and all the numerous hosts of police, peons, and clerks whom Government officers

had thought necessary for keeping touch with and control over the people were swept away, root and branch.

The departments at headquarters have placed great difficulties in the way of the operation of this principle by ignoring the particular duty its working involves; by withdrawing the officers who ought to do it for other work; by bringing in again the forms, methods, and fringes of subordinates which had not been discarded in the rest of the province. It has been the declared policy of those in authority to bring back this one district under the bondage which has been thought good enough for its neighbours. But one great fact, to the power of which I, who have held charge of the district for nearly fourteen years, am a witness, has prevented this, and that is the spirit which has been evoked by the principle of direct touch. I testify to the mighty influence it exercises, even with so much fighting against it, over both officers and people. We have known from experience to what an extent it enables us to do without that unmanageable and irritating swarm of subordinates which seems essential under the ordinary system; and how much it has enabled us to do that is, under the ordinary system, out of reach—it has brought within the vision, not of myself alone, prospects of things to be accomplished which otherwise would seem impossible. When, therefore, I advocate this principle, I advocate it not as a matter of theory or of mere faith, but as one of well-tried experience.

It has been argued that this may be all very well for the Sonthal Pargannahs, and for the Sonthals, a backward and simple people, but it would not answer for the more complicated condition of things in the more advanced districts.

To this I reply :—

First, Why should it not answer? It was employed for the Sonthals not because they were easier to manage, but because they were more difficult. In the Sonthal Pargannahs the Sonthals are only one-third of the inhabitants. It has been employed with success for the other inhabitants also. True, it is simple; but the best opinion is that we advance from complexity to simplicity. The great things are all simple. What does the advance they talk of amount to? An oppressive weight of work; and a standstill. The advance has been in the wrong direction.

Again, before I heard of the Sonthal Pargannahs, I felt the need of this principle and introduced it experimentally in the most advanced part of the province, the sub-division of Serampore. It was a new idea there, and I remember being warned by my superior officer that I was running a risk. The result was reported to the Government of the day, and by it accepted as a success. The principle which I recommend for adoption, therefore, comes with good credentials. It has many enemies—all the numerous classes whose interest it is to separate the Crown from its people, and make thereby profitable business for themselves.

The people on their side need to be brought into

groups, in order that the trusted officers of Government may be able to deal with them direct, and not through untrustworthy subordinates. The creation of appropriate groups will provide a good answer to those who say (and it has been said) that the principle cannot be worked without an unduly large staff of officers. In the original rules issued for the Sonthal Pargannahs, the arrangement of large groups was indicated as part of the plan, but no advance was made in that direction by Government until just as I was leaving, when a regulation was framed (since passed) which recognised and confirmed officers for groups of villages. In actual practice I went a good way beyond the prescribed rules in the direction of grouping, with good results. Proposals were more than once made to Government for a further development than that sanctioned. Though they secured a certain amount of benevolent notice from Government, they could not prevail against the dead weight of routine. Their form was also against them. Whatever was proposed had to be proposed for the one district. It is against etiquette for the officer in charge of one district to put forward proposals for other districts. The Sonthal Pargannahs had at headquarters an odious name for being peculiar, and the tendency at headquarters is towards uniformity. It is my hope, which I am free to express now, though I could not then, that the peculiarity—so far as concerns this principle—will in time disappear, not by the suppression of the principle in one district, but through its extension to all.

The scheme which follows has been founded largely on my experience in the Sonthal Pargannahs. I do not expect—it would be unnatural to suppose—that the principle can be applied to all districts in the same way. I have tried my best to keep out of it distinctions of race, caste, and religion, and make it as far as possible broadly human. In so far as I have been successful, I think it is pretty sure to work well.

The first group, after the household, which we will assume as the ultimate unit, is determined by the horizon. In the Sonthal Rules it was the village. When the Village Watch Act was being framed, the authors recognised that the village is sometimes too small—as indeed it sometimes is, consisting occasionally of only a single household—and provided for groups of villages. I take a given area, and fix as a standard a circle with a radius of a mile—an area of three square miles. This gives an average population of 1500—a considerable community having, we may presume, interests closely bound together. The Sonthal Rules stopped here, but, as explained already, a further grouping was found necessary, and the standard chosen was a circle with a radius of from 3 to 3½ miles—an area of 33 square miles containing about eleven of these unit groups and an average population of 16,500. Even these larger groups would be too numerous to manage without an undue multiplication of officers, so I grouped them in circles having a radius of from 5 to 6 miles—with an area of 100 square miles, and a population of 50,000. The three classes of groups—small, middle-sized, and

larger—I called unions, circles, and wards. The circle was to be made up of complete unions and the ward of complete circles. In special circumstances a populous place might be constituted into a separate circle or ward, or, if of great importance and otherwise provided for, excluded from the system.

The groups were formed on a principle provided by Nature—the length of a man's legs. In the union, it would not take half an hour to get from any point to any other, while even in the ward the longest time occupied would not exceed a couple of hours. These groups are, therefore, local in the proper sense of the word, and not, like the present district and "Local Boards," only by comparison with the province.

Each group is to have an officer in charge—I named the officer for the union mondle, or headman; for the circle, sirdar or chief, and for the ward, chief sirdar. The name of mondle I took from the Sonthal Rules, and that of sirdar from the lately passed Village Police Regulation. When that was being prepared, this name was selected as the best for describing all the variously named persons at the time discharging the duties.

The village officers are to be selected without regard to race, and they are to be over all villagers alike without distinction of race. This provision also is taken from the Sonthal Rules, which expressly exclude distinction of race. I mention the fact particularly, as an impression seems to have existed that we worked the Rules for and through the Sonthals

only. This was not so. They were worked just the same for whoever happened to be in the villages, Sonthal, Hindoo, Mahomedan, or Christian. Among our 11,000 village headmen we had men of all religions and races. We found that the magic of the Crown inspired the village officers with a sense of responsibility and a conscience that extended beyond their own race and caste.

The mondle is not paid. He is a resident of the union, and the honour of being first citizen in a community of 1500 souls (or indeed of 15 souls) is sufficient to attract the best men as candidates for the post. He should have a punchayat (lit. Council of five) of village elders to support, advise, and control him. This is a village principle well understood. It is adopted from the Village Watch Acts, which recognised it.

The sirdar must be paid, as more of his time is taken up than in the case of the mondle. He also, being a resident, living in his own home, and being only occasionally occupied with his public duties, is to be paid for part of his time only. To enable him to come and go freely on his own business without the formality of asking leave and getting a substitute appointed, he was provided in the recent Village Police Regulation with a "naib" or deputy, also paid, who should take his place in his absence. This was a restriction of existing practice, by which any relative carried on the duty in absence. The sirdar's pay was to be from 12 to 15 rupees monthly, and that of the naib about 8 or 10 rupees.

The chief sirdar, for the ward, should get double the sirdar's pay, and have a good "naib" on 12 rupees.

The ward sirdars and the three circle sirdars should form a punchayat or board, meeting periodically at the headquarters of the ward, to which should be added as honorary sirdars any three leading residents. Each average union would have three or four village watchmen. This is the machinery which I propose should be provided by the villages to be managed by the intelligent and sympathetic officers whom Government is to supply, and to perform in co-operation with Government the business of the people. Let me summarise it. Each ward is to have in charge of it a ward punchayat, consisting of the ward and three circle sirdars, and three honorary sirdars. Its village officials, besides these, will be four "naibs," 33 mondles, and 114 village watchmen. Its population is 50,000. The figures here given are not hard and fast. They are given for brevity and clearness, but, of course, may be varied. In the case of a densely populated area, which would be considered to qualify under the present Municipal Act as a municipality with the omission of the occupation test, something more advanced than the union might be provided and called a township, composed of complete unions, and ruled by a "punchayat," with a president or "pradhan" over it. This "president" would take his place with the chiefs or sirdars in the ward punchayat.

It may be noted that in an average Revenue

District of 3000 square miles there would be thirty wards. This is considerably more than the corresponding number of police stations, even if we reckon in outposts.

It would not be right in making this enumeration of local officials to omit mention of the oldest of them—the village watchman. It has already been noticed that the policy of Government has for some time past been to transform his position. Formerly the village watchmen served the landlord and the villagers. From the landlord they received their wage in the shape of money, but more frequently in land, which was generally, though not always, the consolidated reward of service to the landlord in his double capacity of landlord and of police officer. From the villagers the watchman usually got customary contributions in cash or in kind. In order to make the watchman wholly a public servant, owing no service to the landlord, it was thought necessary to sever his connection with the land, which was made over to the landlord on payment of a rent supposed to be the proportion of its value equivalent to that of his public services to his whole duties. Instead of the land and the customary village dues, he was to have a monthly wage, calculated on the rate of labourers' wages, and was supposed for this to give his entire time to the service of the public. To make up the amount of this wage provision was made for the assessment and collection by a punchayat of a rate from the villagers.

This policy of abolishing the remuneration of the

village watch by means of land was never unanimously approved of by the officers of Government, and by many, among whom I was one, strongly disapproved. It has, however, been very completely carried out, so that of all the many thousands of acres which were held in this way within the last five-and-twenty years, very little is left.

So far as I can gather, the result has not been satisfactory. The men themselves are discontented, and the wage, though pronounced for the most part insufficient, is felt by the villagers to be a heavy burden. Its proceeds are, in most districts, more, and in no districts much less, than those of the road and public works cesses together. In some districts, where the transfer of land has been of late years extensive, it has been considerably increased, and people are not yet reconciled to it.

The effect on the men has been that instead of living on their pay as they did on their land, they have either taken leases of the same or other land, or hired themselves out as day labourers. This effect has been no doubt strengthened by the recent heavy rise in the rate of wages, which has been such that in some districts the maximum wage allowed by the law is less than the ordinary wage an unskilled labourer can earn.

Putting together the action of the Government with the known policy of the police department, I think it fair to infer from their natural consequences that their aim is to detach the watchman from the village, to give him a complete standing apart from

it, and to attach him as an addition to the force of the Government police, making him into a sort of constable.

That this aim has not yet been attained may be attributed to several causes which probably act on one another. The first is that the supreme Government has not yet agreed to allow the detachment of the village watchman from the service of the village; and the second that, owing to the difficulty felt in providing funds—a difficulty enhanced by the recent rise in wages—it has not yet been found practicable to pay for the watchman's whole time at market rates. It is a fiction to suppose, as some seem to suppose, that the watchman gives his whole time to the public service. He usually employs part of it in earning a living by other means. In the case of most village watchmen—of all except a few in the big towns or bazaars—the whole of their time is not wanted for public duty. It is reasonable, and would be economical for the village, if this, which is the prevailing practice, were accepted as a principle—payment being made for such part of the watchman's time only as is needed for the public service. He could then, as a matter of course, be allowed to utilise the rest of his time in earning a living instead of loafing. If it were accepted, the hope of detaching him from the village would have to be definitely abandoned, and the present policy of retaining him as a village official adhered to. The principal argument against remuneration by means of service lands would also fall to the ground. Of

all forms of remuneration to a rural watchman, an adequate holding of land is the most acceptable to himself and the most economical to the village. I shall not take up space by discussing the arguments for and against at length, but the reader will perhaps accept in place of discussion the fact, that when a proposal to abolish this in the Sonthal Pargannahs as a legal form of remuneration for the village watch seemed on the point of being accepted, I was given by the Lieutenant-Governor of the day (Sir J. Woodburn) an opportunity of personally pleading its cause, and it was retained. My own practice was, when a suitable opportunity occurred, to give the watchman a good holding whose rent was paid by the village instead of his wage. It cost the village less, and was valued more by the watchman, who was found to do his work more zealously for this than for a money wage. For many reasons any economy in this direction is of the greatest importance from the point of view of local government. What the Government thinks about that is shown by its taking over the whole cost of the town police to set free funds for sanitary works. From the police point of view it is hardly less important, as it enables us to have more men with light duties in sparsely-peopled areas, and this brings the watchman nearer the residents of his beat—a most important thing when criminal work is concerned.

CHAPTER X

ORGANISATION

I WISH now, having indicated the framework of the scheme, to discuss shortly the questions connected with the appointment, discipline, and proceedings of the village officials—the chief and other sirdars, naibs, mondles, and watchmen.

The first point to consider is that they are joint officials of the village and the Crown. They must be men who are trusted by the villagers, and with whom the Crown officers can work. There are thus two parties to be consulted in making every appointment —the Crown and the people concerned. It is more desirable that the right man should be found than that the place should be filled up. Therefore until a satisfactory man is available the place should be kept vacant, temporary arrangements being made for getting necessary work done. I lay great stress on this point, for the men appointed must, if they are to be efficient, be entrusted with considerable powers of annoyance, and with that most precious thing, the prestige of the Crown. It is most desirable, therefore, that none but fit persons who have the confidence of both people and Crown should be let in. I have

kept places vacant for years on this account. There must be a consultation over the appointment between the parties—Crown and people. For the Crown, one of its confidential officers must act; for the people, those will be consulted who are most concerned. The wishes of the people cannot be ascertained through the English form of an election by votes, for three reasons. One is that we have not got in the villages the requisite voting power in the shape of a free and independent body of electors; the second, that we cannot provide suitable machinery for holding elections so frequently as such a system demands; and the third, that changes, before circumstances make them necessary, in the persons holding office are not desired by the people, and would only unsettle their minds. Their instinct is to accept the man in possession, and even his heir, should he die. I have had experience of many hundreds of consultations in the selection of village officials, and lay it down as a maxim that in a Bengal village the vote is no guarantee against an undesirable man being admitted to office, or for his being turned out of it when in, even if obviously unfit.

The appointment should be made after consultation with the villagers concerned by a trusted officer. He can see more in their looks, manner, and hints than they would ever show in a formal and open way. The headman is to be a guardian of the people's welfare. The office will be sought from improper as well as from proper motives, and by persons whom the villagers, if left to themselves, dare not refuse to

accept. Why then, it will be asked, run the risk? Would it not be better to make no appointment? But to take this negative course is abdication of its duty by the Crown, and the abandonment of the villagers to their oppressors. It must not be imagined that those who are evilly disposed wait for a warrant from the Crown before they execute their will. It is enough for them if no one is there to stop them. The Crown in Bengal is the champion who stands for righteousness, and *must* act. It cannot, as many advise, leave the people alone to manage without its interference. This would be to remove the chief influence for order, progress, and right. Therefore the risk must be taken, with all reasonable precautions.

In the selection of a mondle the heads of households are to be consulted. The choice is not a very wide one, as there must be certain qualifications which few possess. The nominee must be a substantial resident, of good repute, reasonable intelligence, and considerable influence with the villagers. A man without influence is useless, and will not as a rule desire to be nominated. I generally found it safer to make the proceedings leisurely—a consultation, a report for confirmation to the district officer, a second inquiry, or third if thought necessary—and the proceedings were not closed till a satisfactory conclusion was reached, even if it took years. This method of selection is only possible when it takes place not frequently or periodically, but only on rare occasions. As it is, for the present at least, the only safe method, the holder of an office once appointed

should continue to hold it until he becomes incapable of discharging its duties satisfactorily. This was our principle, and worked well. Unless the law or custom makes it so, however, an office should not be allowed to become hereditary. An appointment would therefore have to be made on the death of the incumbent, or on his dismissal.

Dismissal should be at the discretion of the district officer. To avoid all suspicion of caprice it should be for cause, and the causes for which a man is liable to dismissal should be defined. The following will be found to cover the chief causes: bodily or mental incapacity; misconduct, which includes crime and defiance or insubordination; neglect of duty; loss of influence in the union. This provides a substitute for the periodical election as a means of keeping touch between office-holder and constituency. Dismissal must be kept in the hands of the district officer: first, by reason of the Crown's prerogative; second, to make the village officers reasonably independent of the people over whom they are set; and, third, to keep an effectual and easily worked check upon any tendency on the part of the incumbents to abuse their powers. The power of dismissal is such a check. The knowledge that it can be exercised is enough in most cases to save the necessity for using it. Dismissal should be avoided as much as possible, both as disturbing the influence and destroying the attractiveness of the office, and because the number of those fitted for holding it being limited, the list can soon be exhausted.

With the headman should be appointed a consultative punchayat, or "body of five." Their function would be both to help the headman in the management of his union, and to represent the villagers in case of dissatisfaction with his conduct. The private householder will, as a rule, shrink from making himself conspicuous by complaint, and the villagers need an official voice to express their feelings. Things will in this way be brought to notice before they go far wrong, and errors be dealt with before the stage of mobs and desperation is reached. The appointment of the punchayat may be left to the confidential officer, who may change the members from time to time as may seem convenient.

The method of selecting the mondle may also be employed in the selection of the sirdar. As a rule, the sirdar should be selected in consultation with the mondles from among their number. As he is to be a resident in the circle he need not quit his home, nor need he give up the mondleship of his union. Some discretion should be left in this to the district officer, though it should be rarely exercised. For instance, I had once occasion to dismiss a Hindoo sirdar who was leader of a gang of dacoits, or robbers, and so strong was his local influence that the only way I could take for getting a successor independent of it was to bring in a Mahomedan from a distance. This was some fifteen years ago, and the plan succeeded. Such cases, though exceptional, must be provided for.

The ward sirdar should ordinarily be selected from

among the sirdars. He should have, and occupy, an official residence at the headquarters of the ward. Each sirdar should at his discretion appoint and dismiss his own naib, or deputy, whose office ends with his own.

The appointment and removal of honorary sirdars should rest with the district officer.

Punishments ought not to be frequent, but some punishment short of dismissal is useful as a warning. This should take the form of a fine. Fines should go into a "reward" fund which should be separate for each ward. The alternative to a fine is suspension, which should be used as rarely as possible, because of the unsettling effect on the villagers, both of a new man coming in, and of the man who has been suspended coming back after an interval. If the delinquent gives trouble after being fined, he should generally be removed for good.

As an alternative to money payment many sirdars are paid in land. A good holding of land, especially in the rural areas, is looked upon as giving a status which no money payment would give, and the wish to get and keep it is a powerful stimulus to zeal in the public service. While it would not be a bad thing in the case of all sirdars, it would be a particularly appropriate form of remuneration to the chief sirdar of the ward. He is to live at the ward's headquarters, and a compact, fertile, and sufficient area of land could be secured, lying convenient to his headquarters for a sum not exceeding the capitalised value of his money pay.

I have already discussed the question of the status and remuneration of the village watch. That of their appointment and discipline will be dealt with later.

For the purpose of this scheme it is necessary that they should remain local, and that all idea of detaching them from their several villages and joining them to the central police force be given up. The local officials described are to be their officers.

Let us recall, now, the various local administrative areas and their officers, as provided in the scheme.

The union—area, 3 square miles; population, 1500; officers, 3 to 4 village watchmen, and a mondle, with a punchayat to help him.

The circle—area, 33 square miles; population, 16,500; officers, 40 village watchmen, 11 mondles with punchayats, a sirdar and naib.

The ward—area, 100 square miles; population, 50,000; officers, 120 watchmen, 33 mondles and punchayats; 3 paid sirdars and naibs, a chief sirdar and naib, and three honorary sirdars.

The unions and circles are to be treated as the limbs, and the ward as the body. The ward is to have a headquarters station, where the chief sirdar and his naib are to reside. Here will be the ward's office and meeting-place, and this is the point of contact between the Government and the people of the ward. There should be a ward parade once a week, to be attended by the watchmen and sirdars, and as many mondles as care to be present.

The executive authority is the ward punchayat, consisting of the three paid and the three honorary

sirdars, and presided over by the chief sirdar. The parade day being fixed, the parade can also be attended with or without notice by the Government confidential officers, who can on such days rely on coming into touch with the people of the ward.

I do not wish here to go into details, but will remark that both the Government and the people must rely on the parades, and verbal consultation at them, for getting business done. Written records and correspondence should be reduced to the smallest possible dimensions. What would be the clerical staff needed can only be ascertained after a trial, but I see no reason why more than one clerk should be wanted. There should be a journal for the entry of all proceedings, and a diary with particulars of all written documents received from or sent to Government or ward officers.

The clerk should be the servant of, and appointed by, the ward punchayat, and work under the orders of the chief sirdar. He should record in his journal, besides the proceedings at parade, anything he may be desired to record by a sirdar. All entries in the journal should be attested by the chief sirdar for the parade punchayat, or by the individual sirdar who directs the entry. The clerk should make no entries on his own responsibility.

I have been somewhat particular on the matter of clerical work, as there is a tendency, which must be guarded against, when clerks or writers are employed, for the power to fall into their hands. I think the tendency is sufficiently guarded against, first, by the

status of the sirdars, and second, by depriving the clerk of all initiative. He should never appear to the public except as the ministerial aid of a sirdar. We can generally in these days get for sirdars men who can read and write.

A copy of the journal and of the diary should be sent weekly to the Government officer appointed for the purpose, who will thus, besides what he learns at parade meetings, and in conversation as he goes about, be kept up to date in his knowledge of the doings of each ward.

In the ward punchayat we have an authority to which we can transfer much of the work now done by the centralised staff of the Government; by the district and so-called local boards, and their paid staff; and by local bodies such as the village watch punchayats, and union committees. Besides this a good deal of work will no doubt be done that cannot now be undertaken.

Before proceeding to discuss the various branches of all this work, I wish to remind the reader that the ward punchayat is not yet in existence. I have certainly worked experimentally with bodies which may be called ward punchayats in embryo, and was satisfied from the results that the idea is a sound one and would probably work in practice. It is, however, only a general idea, which must necessarily, when it takes shape in the midst of circumstances varying so widely as they do in Bengal, develop in various ways. Accordingly, one essential point in the general idea of my scheme is its

adaptability. The root principle is that it is to be worked on the part of the people by large numbers of persons, none of whom gives more to it than a part of his time, and each of whom attends at the same time to his own private business.

There is nothing in the principle, in case the work becomes too heavy for the village officials to do without neglecting their own, to prevent the reduction of the ward area, or the formation of subordinate centres, or an increase in the number of officials. The figures and numbers given in the scheme are simply a starting point, adapted, so far as I know, to present conditions. If the bodies have life in them they will grow and develop, to what extent or on what lines it is impossible now to say. There is also nothing to prevent a further development in the shape of groups of wards, which would take the place of the present district and local boards. We may, however, leave the consideration of development, both in the direction of more minute sub-division and in that of combination into larger groups, for the future, contenting ourselves in the meantime with giving the system a start.

CHAPTER XI

TAXATION

HERE, then, are our village officials. What are they to do?

We have to bear in mind that what they do is only one part of the benefit they bring to the villagers and to the Government. To the former, they are keepers of the house, giving privacy to the inmates. The latter is relieved by them of the cost and anxiety of maintaining, and the trouble of looking after, that fringe of inefficient and mischievous lower subordinates through whom it has now to keep touch with its subjects. Moreover, the chief part of the work they will, if they develop, have to do, is in the shape of services to the people, which will have to wait till the desire for them springs up. The services required by the Government should, for two reasons, be restricted within the narrowest possible limits. First, the system requires that time be left for every village official to attend to his own affairs as well as to those of the public and of the Government. The second is that the comfort of the people demands a single set of officials in direct contact with them, and these men will accordingly have to deal with matters

connected with many departments of the public service. It is necessary and desirable, for the efficiency of the public service, that the threads of the cable which connects Government and its subjects should separate into various strands, according to the various forms of work. It is equally necessary and desirable that the same threads, so far as they affect the individual subject, be drawn together into one before they reach him. The village officials are intended to be the means of drawing the threads together. Now, to the cobbler there is nothing like leather, and each head of a department would like to keep everybody busy all the time at his own particular class of work. It is therefore the duty of Government and its district officers, under whom the village officials are to work, to see that due consideration is given to the whole of their duties and responsibilities, and that, so far as the Government and its departments are concerned, the programme is rigidly restricted. Any expansion of the programme beyond urgent necessity should be effected, either by the Government acting separately, or by the spontaneous action of the villagers concerned.

What, then, is to be considered as urgent necessity?

The prime necessity, if the local officials are to exist, is to provide the means for their support. Thus taxation is the first subject we will have to consider.

At present the taxes raised are three, viz., the village watch rate, the road cess, and the public

works cess, the last two of which are assessed and collected together. The former is assessed on the means of the villagers; the latter are on the annual value of land.

The faults of the road and public works cesses as a means of collecting revenue have been already described in Chapter VIII. It is desirable that a form of tax with such faults, some of which seem to be inherent and not capable of removal, should be abolished. While the Government cannot reasonably be expected to abolish that which exists, and serves a purpose in the present condition of things, before a substitute has been found, tried, and duly approved, the faulty tax ought not to be made use of in the new system which we are establishing. I would choose, in preference, as a model method of raising the necessary revenue, the village watch rate. It is free from the organic defects of the cesses, and such defects as it has can be removed, or diminished sufficiently to make it a good working method.

The method of taxation selected must be capable of being employed to raise funds for all local purposes. The villagers must not be harassed by having to pay more rates than one. At present they pay two, viz., the village watch rate and the cess. I look forward to the time when the cesses will be abolished, and all rates consolidated in an adaptation of the village watch rate. Let us examine what that rate needs in order to make it suitable for its purpose.

First, what is its foundation? The theory of the

rate is that it is money contributed for a common purpose by the members of a community in proportion to their ability to pay. Ability to pay is calculated by a comparison of resources. In the case of cesses, and of the rates in some municipalities, the resources compared are the annual values of land and houses possessed or occupied by the members of the community. In the case of the village police rate, and of rates in other municipalities, they are the means of the members, without distinction. This latter is the foundation I propose to select. The first step, then, is to prepare a statement of means or a valuation roll. Such a roll, which is prepared for the cesses and the municipal rate on property, was omitted, for reasons which no longer apply, from the scheme of the village watch rate.

A glance at the history of that scheme will suffice to show what a transformation it has undergone. For each village, or, if a single village was not large enough, union of hamlets, a punchayat, or council of elders, was formed, who were to distribute as a charge rateably over their neighbours the sum needed for the watchman's pay, with 15 per cent added for bad debts and money out of pocket. The punchayat was usually to have charge of the beats of one or two watchmen. The sum to be collected was usually some fifty rupees, and the percentage about seven. They were supposed to be intimately acquainted with all their neighbours, and could be trusted to distribute the charge fairly. The member who made the collection got the percentage for his trouble. It was a

rough and ready, loose way of doing business, which was suitable enough to the circumstances of the case, and everything was left to the discretion of the punchayat. Whether or not the scheme ever worked as it was intended, it did not give satisfaction. By the introduction of a definition into the law its whole character was altered. The village was defined as any area declared by the district officer to be a village. The use made of this definition has been such that the ordinary "village" now consists of the beats of ten watchmen, and has a population of some 4000 souls or 800 families.

There is for this area a single punchayat, none of whose members can be personally acquainted with more than a small fraction of its population, and a single "collecting member," whose duties by the increase, both in the sum to be collected and the number of items, have become a business sufficient to occupy a man's whole time, and to yield a considerable profit. The commission of to-day exceeds the whole tax of former times. The collecting member of the present day is a contractor, and commonly arrogates to himself all the functions of the punchayat, including that of assessment.

There is a double reason for not continuing to the punchayat the discretion given them in the past, viz., that they cannot assess fairly in this way the members of a large community, most of whom are strangers to them, and that the collecting member of the present day is not a proper person to exercise discretion. If we are to use this form of rate, as I

propose, for all purposes, and in some cases over a wider area still, this is an additional reason. The valuation roll is necessary.

It should be prepared on a common basis, but for small units of area. The common basis is needed that a rate may be spread over a large area when necessary; the small unit, that where so desired a rate may be levied for a purely local purpose without affecting other areas not concerned. The area I would fix on as a unit is the "union"; the common basis I suggest is the wage of the labouring man, which is practically the same throughout any one ward. To the possible objection that it is difficult to make a valuation of the means of every householder, the following answers may be given:—

1st. It is no more than the punchayats are required and supposed to do now. Ascertain the means of any one villager, and if the assessment is fair, you know the means of all. To make a fair assessment the punchayat must have known the means of every villager, and all the additional work required is to put that knowledge on record.

2nd. It does not matter much whether the valuation is absolutely correct or not, so long as it is comparatively so. The principal thing to get is a common basis, and the rest is all a matter of comparison. Between neighbours a comparison is easy. It may not be easy for a Government officer from a distance to tell whether A or B is the richer, and by how much, but in the village all this is well known.

3rd. There is no need to make a minute valuation.

Any valuation, however rough and ready, will do that is substantially fair. Let it be settled without too much argument and with decision what each man is to be valued at, and that will, as a rule, be accepted. It is astonishing how much unnecessary hair-splitting in the name of justice can be seen side by side with glaring and great inequalities. Let us have substantial justice and no hair-splitting.

An instance of inequality is to be found in the maximum tax fixed by law as payable by a single assessee in a "village." It was a rupee a month at the beginning, and is so now, though the size of the village is so much greater. Thus, to take an extreme case, a great landlord who was liable in a given area to pay ten rupees a month may now only have to pay one. As the pay of the watchmen has risen, this means that at a time when the burden of the village has been increased, 90 per cent of the landlord's former burden has been transferred to the shoulders of the villagers. Yet the same critics who have swallowed this whole would be unable to accept a system of assessment which might result in a villager having to pay a penny or two more or less than in strict justice he ought to, a matter of comparatively no importance.

Let me remark, when on this subject, that we are a great deal too fond of being exact in the wrong places. I have seen the few rupees of revenue payable on a small estate sub-divided into fractions whose denominators were millions, not capable of expression in the smallest coin of the realm. In assessing rents, we continually find fractions used for the sake of

exactness, which it would be a saving to all parties to eliminate. In fixing the means of persons, therefore, which at best must be a matter of speculation, we should place the persons in classes, with a view to the rates yielding even sums, and be satisfied with rough justice. It saves immense trouble to all parties when the time comes for collection, and facilitates the work of assessment. The elimination of fractions is not my own invention. It was introduced by Sir Charles Elliott into rules for the settlement of rents which I had to work, and no one objected to it in practice. In matters which concern multitudes simplification is great gain.

The question is, Who shall frame the valuation roll? Taxation is the prerogative of the Government. Whether the tax is imposed and collected by Government or is delegated to others, the work is an exertion of the power of Government, and the prestige of Government is involved. This is recognised in all but one of the forms of taxation allowed by law. The cesses are assessed and collected by Government itself; the village watch assessment lists are liable to revision by the magistrate. Only the municipal tax has been abandoned to the discretion of the municipal commissioners, and the use they too often make of their discretion is not encouraging to any further experiment of the kind. The final responsibility for the valuation roll should be laid on a Government officer, and its preparation should be carried out by him jointly with the local authorities. At the beginning especially, if the work is to be

cheaply and quickly done, there must be a good deal of rough and ready guess-work. The village watch assessment rolls give materials ready to hand for its preparation. If the means of the assessee within the unit area alone be reckoned, the maximum limit may be dispensed with. A roll once prepared may be revised for any union separately, or for all together, with comparative ease, with much less labour and expense than are now needed for revising the cess valuation roll. Its existence will enable demand lists of taxes to be prepared for any area from the unit upwards, without any further exercise of discretion by any one—mechanically, in fact. This will be a great relief, not only to ratepayers, but to conscientious assessing authorities.

With the valuation roll before us, we can tell at a glance the assessable value of each union, circle, or ward, and how much a given rate is likely to produce.

The manner of fixing rates will be dealt with later on, but before leaving the general subject, we should notice what a valuable check this roll provides against harshness in imposing taxation. I have in my own experience found great harshness shown towards a poor village by the making of unreasonably high demands, especially for the pay of the village watch—demands which would never have been made by any one face to face with a correct statement of the means of those from whom they were made. Values vary from time to time. There are counties in Scotland whose annual value has risen within the last

two hundred years as much as seventy-fold. Persons also wax and wane in importance; come and go. Therefore it is necessary from time to time to revise the valuation rolls. The revision need not be frequent, and will be much better and more cheaply done if not simultaneous everywhere, but gradual, union by union, at intervals of, say, ten years. A comparatively modest staff could thus overtake the work, doing one-tenth yearly, and I anticipate that most of it would soon come to be done by the local authorities themselves. If the principle of the supreme control of Government be retained in the system, it will, I think, come to be left dormant, to be revived only for special occasions.

The framing of the valuation roll must necessarily precede the introduction of our new system. While that is being done, the old system, whatever it may be, will remain in force. Though the new system has not been introduced, the parties are the same under both, and so preparations for it can go on. When the valuation roll is ready, the first step in co-operation will have been taken. It is obvious that, while the new system is being introduced, the main burden of the work will necessarily fall on the Government and its officers. Looked at as a whole, this at first sight seems overwhelming, just as every duty to be done for so vast a population seems. There is no need of haste, however, nor need the whole of the work, as in the case of a census or a famine, be done at once. The work will rather be in the nature of a settlement of rents, rights, and

duties, a business familiar to all, which, though in the aggregate the labour and cost are very great, is got through without distress by taking it area by area in succession. The settlement of local government arrangements can similarly be effected ward by ward. To avoid any sudden wrench in the progress of public business, the cesses may be continued until the settlement is done and the local authorities are in working order. The question of the cesses is big enough, and far enough apart from this question, to need, and be capable of, separate treatment. We will then suppose that the confidential Government officer has been appointed, and is to take up the settlement of a ward. The valuation roll has been prepared, and he proceeds to some central point within the ward, whose area has been already defined. He calls the people together and they appear.

The first step he takes will be to call up the people of each union (whose boundaries have necessarily been defined, as the union is the unit area for valuation) and select the mondles and punchayats, whose appointments are duly sent up to the district officer for confirmation. It is understood that the existing village watch punchayats and union committees are to cease to exist. As far as seems reasonably possible, and consistent with the wishes of the villagers, for the sake of continuity, and to remove jealousy, the new men should be selected from among the old.

The mondles having been selected, the sirdars

should next be chosen, including the chief sirdar, and required to nominate their deputies. The honorary sirdars should also be appointed. There should then be held a meeting of the officials of the ward so appointed, and the pay of the stipendiaries among them fixed. It is understood that the various acts of the Government officer are to be done under the control of the permanent representative of Government—the district officer. It will be well to lay clearly down at the start the rule that the various officials are appointed and liable to be dismissed by him at will, and for the first five years of the new system they should all be dealt with as on approval, to be dismissed at any time if he thinks it right. This provision, besides impressing on the people and the officials themselves that fact without which the people will have no confidence in the system, viz., that the Government is making itself responsible for the control of the officials' conduct, will prevent much squabbling and litigation, and save precious time.

The headquarters of the ward should next be selected, in consultation with its residents, and the necessary buildings settled. Towards the cost of erecting these Government might contribute, either by presenting to the ward any buildings it has to spare, or by a money grant. They need not at first be elaborate, but, as a symbol of the corporate existence of the ward, they ought from the first to be substantial and look well.

A special meeting of all the residents of the ward

should then be held, and the budget framed. The charges to be provided for in the budget are the compulsory charges and the voluntary charges. The former should be as few as possible. Those that I can think of at present are the cost of the ward officials, offices and administration, and the pay of the village watch. We are assuming that the road cess is in the meantime being continued. Should it be abolished, a road rate may be added to the compulsory list.

It will be well at the first introduction, till the system is well established, not to allow the levy of any voluntary rate, though it should be explained to the people that the means of levying such a rate now exists. This abstention at the start will disarm suspicion, and possibly in some places arouse a wish to employ the means. We naturally long for that which is withheld. It is impossible to load too lightly a system on its trial. At the start few changes in existing facts should be made, and therefore the village watch should be taken over as it stands—numbers, pay, and all. It is desirable also that, at the start, the burden of the villagers should not be materially increased. The change of system should not, in fact, be accompanied by any considerable change of circumstances.

The pay of sirdars, naibs, and clerk, and the cost of buildings and administration, come to about 1700 rupees a year for the ward, and are new charges. The pay of duffadars, which, as will be afterwards explained, is saved, comes to about 900. The

balance of additional charges to be met is thus 800 rupees, or 9 per cent of the present proceeds of the village watch rate for the ward. On whom should this fall?

I think much more than this will be ultimately saved if the suggestions made for providing the rural watchmen with service land be carried out. That, however, is a reform for the future, and no credit can be taken except for immediate savings.

For reasons which will be given in their proper place, I shall propose that the rate area for the police rate be the whole ward. This will enable a saving to be made in the cost of collection,—that is, part of the 15 per cent now allotted for that purpose.

Again, it is proposed to remove the maximum limit of tax, and replace on the landlord his proper share of the tax.

But, independently of all this, it is desirable and fair, as I hope to show later, that, as the Government in England pays about one-third, and in the Bengal municipalities the whole, of the cost of local police, the Government in Bengal should make a contribution to the cost of the village police, which can hardly be less than 10 per cent of the whole.

What with the Government contribution, the adjustment of incidence, more economical collection and possible savings in the pay of the watch, there seems no chance of the new system being, even at the start, more of a burden than the old.

To finish the subject of taxation, it will be the duty of the Government officer and the ward officials, in consultation with as many householders as care to come, every year to frame a budget. After the compulsory charges have been provided for by a rate, any other objects, such as roads, bridges, wells, tanks, schools, sanitary works or the like, for which there is a local demand, will be considered, and, if approved, provided for by an appropriate rate to be assessed on the area benefited. The attitude of the Government officer towards such voluntary taxes should be one of opposition, which can only be overcome by the obvious general desire of the community for the improvement and the tax. Even if there is such a desire, he must guard the ratepayers from themselves and from one another by keeping down the programme, and giving full consideration to the objections of even a small minority. A different attitude would probably weaken his influence, and weaken the desire of the people themselves for the improvement asked for, if they thought it was being forced on them.

The taxes having been fixed, a demand list should be prepared separately for each union—the rates, compulsory and voluntary, being consolidated for the purpose of collection into one sum.

It is neither possible nor necessary to put forward a detailed scheme for collection. There will be no difficulty in settling that when the time comes. I may, however, here describe shortly a method which I proposed years ago, and which still commends

itself to me as likely to avoid the chief difficulty of collecting numerous small items in cash.

We know that in Bengal there cannot be a case, among the smaller people, of one receiving and another paying money, without the danger arising of the receiver trying to make something out of it. This danger is especially present when it is the business of the receiver to collect many small sums whose payment can be enforced by stringent procedure, like the rates. There is a recognised charge for giving a receipt, and frequent difficulties occur about the change and about the quality of the coin. It occurred to me that, as we now take all our court fees in stamps, to the great comfort of all concerned, the tax might also be collected by stamps. Let a Local Tax Stamp be made, different from all others, in different colours for different values. Let the demand list be issued in sheets or bound books, with the names of assessors and the amounts due, and a space opposite each name where the necessary stamps may be affixed. The collecting authority can then issue these to the union mondles, who, with the punchayats, can get their people to affix their stamps, which have been bought when and where the villagers choose. The lists can then be returned at the end of a fixed time, defaulters' lists made out, and compulsory collection of the unpaid balance proceed as usual. The stamps can be sent up arranged in batches union by union, and credit given to the local funds for their equivalent in money. The labour of adjusting the accounts need not be heavy,

and a suitable deduction can be made to cover vendors' commission, and all other expenses. The control of this should be retained by Government in the hands of an officer of its own, at least for the present. There is the idea, for what it may be worth.

CHAPTER XII

POLICE

We are now to consider in succession the various branches of public business in which Government and the people are to co-operate. The first branch is the police.

In Chapter VIII. the situation has been summarised as follows, as regards the police :—

"We want to reduce as much as possible the need for employing men like the police and process-peons, and we need to improve the police that are still maintained.

"The village watch need officers and organisation.

"A place must be found for the people in the system of justice, and, as the country is not rich, improvements must not cost too much."

The first point to be considered is how to make a satisfactory arrangement for the village watchman. He is at present the only legally constituted local police official, and is in many cases far from satisfactory. The question of remuneration is a difficult one to go fully into without being tedious. We must be content here with considering one or two general points. The first is how much of the

watchman's time is needed for his duties. Under the present system, in rural villages, only a part, and that not a great part, of his time is wanted. The most anxious season for the rural villager is just before harvest, and the thief he has to guard against is the crop thief. But at that season the whole village is out watching crops. It is quite enough if part of the watchman's time only is paid for. Most of them are occupying their time with other work —some hiring themselves out as labourers; some renting land and cultivating it. From our point of view by far the most suitable arrangement is that the rural watchman should have a suitable holding of land rent free. He has then something to occupy him and his family; it makes him independent of landlords; and as it makes him too proud to go out as a labourer, which means gadding about, it keeps him in the village, where he is wanted. It is also cheaper for the village, since a remuneration of which the watchman would despise the money value is appreciated in this shape. The policy of discouraging this form of remuneration which Government has of late years followed so hotly should be given up.

A great difficulty in the way of providing a good body of watchmen has also been in the varying circumstances of the villages. The villages of a poor tract cannot afford, and do not want, watchmen so good, and therefore so expensive, as the richer villages. Thus the latter, however well provided within their own boundaries, are exposed more than is

right to the attacks of thieves from outside. This evil has been partially met by the extension of the definition of the word "village," and by the appointment of an extra watchman, called "duffadar," which may be translated corporal, or lance-watchman, who looks after ten watchmen, having no beat of his own. I propose to expand the rate area to that of the ward, giving the ward punchayat, subject to the control of the Government officers, power of appointment, punishment, reward, and dismissal over the ward watchmen, and of assessing, collecting, and paying their remuneration. The paid sirdars are to be their officers, aided by the mondles.

The question whether this arrangement would provide enough of officers is one of detail. The principle is that officers are to be provided, and their number can be fixed or altered as is found necessary. At present there are no officers, for a "duffadar," who is rated and paid as a private, and whose employment is a straining of the law, cannot be reckoned as an officer. He is simply a watchman without a beat.

It will be impossible to go into the details of police work. That has been done, and there is on record a printed note with full details of all the duties now done by the police, and proposals as to how they are to be distributed under the new system. This note was shown to the Police Commission when it visited Calcutta. We shall here consider a few of the general conditions and methods of work.

I propose that the police stations as at present constituted shall go. They will not be needed, and

can be done without. This means a saving to Government of the pay, clothing, and house accommodation and other expenses of a certain number of sub-inspectors, head constables and constables, and of the stationery, correspondence, and time of officers and clerks needed for their supervision. The saving can be utilised as follows:—First, a part of it can be paid as the contribution to the village watch fund, suggested in Chapter XI. The remainder can be used in providing the necessary officers for doing the Government's share of the joint work. Those are, a larger number of inspectors, to aid in the supervision and instruction of the village authorities, and to collect and distribute such information and orders as are needed for the efficient conduct of the Government's work; a strong staff of really good investigating officers and detectives to be distributed at convenient points to take up promptly and investigate thoroughly all cases of heinous and professional crime; a good staff of public prosecutors; a sufficient staff of clerks and orderlies for the above; and a reserve force for coming to the aid of local authorities in case of serious breach of the peace. I believe the savings effected by the abolition of the police stations will enable all this to be provided without additional cost. At all events, the additional cost, if any, will not be beyond the means of Government to provide, and improvements will be made which have been long wished for, but whose cost has hitherto been considered prohibitive.

The number of inspectors should be especially

strong at the start, when the local authorities are as yet not well acquainted with the work.

It will here be possible to do no more than illustrate the duties to be done.

The bulk of them will come under the following branches :—

Normal—Administration.
Statistics.
Correspondence.
Prevention.

Abnormal—Dealing with crime.

The pivot of the whole local system is the ward headquarters, and the chief function is the weekly ward parade referred to in Chapter X.

Let us picture to ourselves an ordinary meeting in the ward hall. The members of the punchayat, or enough of them to form a quorum, are seated, and around them, looking on, are as many of the mondles as care to attend. Beyond these again are an outside ring of villagers. Seated in front of them are the village watchmen. The clerk sits beside the punchayat, with his journal and his diary. The first business is to read the journal of last meeting, and such entries as have been made on the instructions of sirdars since. This record is duly confirmed or corrected, and passed.

The diary is kept ready to be looked at when desired. It contains a note of all correspondence issued and received—reports to the inspector, orders from him issued to sirdars, and the like.

Next the village watchmen are interviewed and

allowed to go back to duty. There are 114 of these. A weekly parade is now taken at police stations. I need only note here that the interviewing of the watchmen need not be so elaborate as at the police station, since they have now officers. The chief matters for which their presence is needed are questions of discipline and instruction.

Pay will be issued, punishments awarded, fines levied, and rewards distributed at parade.

After the watchmen have been disposed of, the punchayat will consider any matters of interest from a police point of view, and order notes of them to be entered in the journal. Such are any crimes reported during the week, investigations in progress; accidents, epidemics, floods, or fires; the movements of gangs and of bad characters—disputes likely to lead to a breach of the peace, etc. The information on these matters can usually be furnished by the sirdars each for his own circle, and any mondles interested.

Other necessary business of the punchayat is also disposed of. What that will be it is hard to anticipate, since business will develop as time goes on. As an instance, I paid a visit to a place in my old district where a parade centre had been informally established, and found that the villagers resorted to the sirdars for the arbitration of their petty disputes. These were being settled at the rate of twenty or thirty a month. A record was kept showing the parties, subject of dispute, award, and sums paid. Every case seemed to have been satisfactorily settled, and payment made as directed. There seems no

reason why the punchayat and mondles should not take over the service and return of processes; the attachment, custody, and sale of property and other works now entrusted to process-peons, enabling the courts to dispense with that objectionable class of persons. The parade would be a good occasion for selling property at reasonable prices, and the work suggested, like the police work, when distributed among the sirdars and mondles would be light. The work would go on during the week, and the parade would keep up the tone of the workers. The parade would be frequently visited by the district officer, his confidential subordinates, and the local inspector. If occasion demanded, meetings of several ward punchayats might be called for the consideration of special matters.

Each sirdar in his own ward would carry on, when necessary, correspondence with the inspector, reporting on matters which it is not desirable to keep waiting for the parade meeting. The sirdar's report should be deposited with the clerk, whose duty it would be to send it on by post to the inspector. The inspector's replies or orders should be taken back by the messenger. For constant communication each sirdar should send a daily messenger to the parade centre. The sirdars will be in frequent personal communication with the inspector, chief sirdar, and one another—so that intelligence should be much better than it is now. It is to be remembered that the sirdar lives in his circle, which is a small one, and has in that circle his naib, eleven

mondles, some fifty members of punchayats, and thirty-eight watchmen, besides private householders, most of whom he probably sees several times a week, to supply him with information. With such help he ought to be able to keep trace of all the bad characters in his circle, and to pounce on them when they misbehave.

Of the statistics required by Government, the most important are vital statistics—births and deaths. Most of the time of station officers at parade is now taken up with recording them in registers. There seems to be no reason for troubling the parade with this tedious routine work. We have a weakness for taking up the time and energy of officials for such purposes. I may suggest the plan I put forward before for doing the work at less expense of time and trouble. Each watchman has a little book in which are entered all births and deaths, with particulars necessary for filling up the statistical tables. The sirdar will keep a sheet of a form corresponding with each statistical table, in which will be noted monthly for each watchman separately an abstract of the entries in the little books of all the watchmen. As often as is required by Government (once a year would, I think, be enough—they are now required once a month), abstracts for the ward of the sirdar's sheets should be prepared and sent up to the Government officers. If any Goverment officer wants to see whether the work is going on well, all he has to do is to call for and examine on the spot the watchman's book, or the sirdar's abstract, and he can discuss with

them, or at parade with the ward punchayat, any matters deserving of notice in connection with the figures.

The chief object of this machinery from a police point of view is dealing with crime,—that is, its prevention if possible, and its detection and punishment when it breaks out.

In Chapter V. the difficulties of a villager who wants to obtain the aid of justice are described. Leaving the distinction between crime cognisable by the police and that not cognisable as it stands, for future revision if necessary, we will assume that the village police can take cognisance of all offences which are now cognisable by the station police. Crimes should be divided into two classes—heinous crime and crime not heinous. There are two parties to a crime—the criminal and the victim—and there are two lines of investigation if crime is to be successfully detected—one starting from the occurrence, the other following the movements of the criminal. It is in order that this latter line may be utilised that attempts are made to follow the movements of suspicious characters. At present the intelligence of the station police is at fault on both the lines, because information received is seldom either in time or full enough, and the investigation does not begin till long after the occurrence. To show the meaning of this I will quote figures. I had a list made out of the heinous crimes only, specially reported, in the Burdwan division for about a year. There were 211 cases, of which 60 were murders, 92 gang robberies,

7 robberies, 8 cases of drugging, 25 heavy thefts and burglaries, and the rest also were all serious crimes. All were occurrences for the sake of which an officer would be bound to drop whatever he was doing and hasten to the spot at once on hearing of them. Yet of the 193 for which information was available, there was a police officer on the spot within twelve hours of the occurrence in 75 cases only, while in 68 there was no officer present till over twenty-four hours after. A start of five hours is enough for a criminal to get clear away, but officers were on the spot within five hours in only 39 cases. These are the exceptionally important cases, and are not one-fiftieth of the cases the police have to attend to. What must then be the fate of the less important —what may be called normal crimes!

Contrast with this the working of our Sonthal village officers, imperfectly organised as they were. One occurrence in particular I well remember. One night some bad characters went off together—it was not known where. The village watchman told the sirdar, who called together some people, lay in wait for them, and caught them returning in the small hours with plunder. They gave up the names of their accomplices, who lived in another circle. The sirdar called on the sirdar of that circle, and they searched and found others with their plunder, and sent the whole in to headquarters. There had been a gang robbery in a third circle, and the victim, when he went to lay an information at headquarters, found two cartloads of his property lying there, waiting

for identification, long before, under the ordinary system, the police would have begun to move.

I have suggested the division of crime into two classes—heinous and normal. For dealing with the latter, the village police are quite capable without assistance. The petty thief—the most frequent disturber of the peace—when caught can be marched straight to headquarters with witnesses and proofs, as I have often seen done by the village mondle and watchman. Powers of arrest and search, and of an investigating police officer, should be given to every mondle, paid sirdar, and naib. We have then always on the spot some one who can take up an investigation at once, whatever the nature of the crime, and can carry it on until help comes. If the case is serious when an occurrence takes place, word can be sent to the neighbouring mondles, the sirdar, and neighbouring sirdars, to the Government investigating officer, and the inspector. We shall have more and better Government investigating officers, and their time will not be taken up with routine duties and inquiries into petty crime. The country will be up, and there will be a real working chance of catching the offenders.

With proper instruction from the inspector, the sirdars ought to become quite as good investigators as the present police sub-inspector. They have the untold advantage over him of beginning in time, and having plenty of assistance from the start. The sirdar has this additional advantage that, as he has only in his small circle an occasional investigation,

and is not, like the present sub-inspector, obliged to hurry from case to case continually, he is not likely to get stale, and is more likely to take an interest in, and do justice to, such work as he gets to do.

I hope I have given the reader a fair idea of the kind of system proposed. As to all things human, so also to this, objections are sure to be raised, and the two that occur to me are that it may break down and that the sirdars may oppress. The danger of a breakdown has been provided for sufficiently. There are in the ward five paid officials, the four sirdars and the clerk, besides naibs, all of whom are likely to value, and do their best to keep, their appointments. They are under close supervision. Should the staff of a ward be unable to manage its work, it can be set aside, and their remuneration used for employing a staff of paid Government servants, who can carry on the work till a satisfactory local arrangement can be made.

Oppression by the sirdars is not more likely than oppression by Government police, landlords, and local men of influence, on all of which the sirdars are a check. There are three special checks on the sirdar :—

First, he is, and must remain, among his neighbours, whose opinion he must respect.

Second, he is one of a punchayat.

Third, if he is caught in misconduct he is liable to lose his post and power.

The security seems sufficient.

The devil's advocate may object that the whole

system is founded on the assumption of a general harmony between the wishes of Government and those of the people. But the whole community may be lawless; and he may ask, "What then?"

To this I reply that I am entitled to assume, when the great mass of the people earn a living by honest labour, that they are, broadly speaking, in favour of justice and right. That is their normal and healthy condition. Here and there are to be found communities in a condition which can only be described as abnormal and unhealthy. As sick individuals, so sick communities are in need of special attention and nursing. These the Government will be in a much better position to provide when it has ceased to supply, as it is supposed to supply now, a nursing staff for all the communities in the land, sick or well.

This ends what I have to say about the police.

CHAPTER XIII

ROADS

In Chapter VIII. the state of the roads is discussed, and the conclusion has been come to that the present means of raising road revenue, viz., the road cess, is for many reasons inadequate and should be abolished. That is, no doubt, a big question to raise. Even if the abolition be carried out, it will probably be a work of years. Following the principle of making a start from existing circumstances, we must consider whether it is not possible to fit the road cess, at least temporarily, into our system.

It was remarked that the roads, which are supposed to be provided out of the system, are of three classes village streets, unmetalled district roads, and metalled district roads.

Of these classes, the first and third are not provided generally. The second class, partly because of the diversion of the funds to those two classes, and partly because they are insufficient even if not diverted, are not adequately provided.

The first thing to do, therefore, is to curtail the too ambitious programme, and limit the application of the road cess fund to unmetalled district roads.

These are the only roads that can be made serviceable to the whole ratepaying population, with due regard to the means at the disposal of the authorities.

It may be asked what, assuming that this policy is correct, is to be done about the existing metalled and village roads now being supported from the fund. As regards the village roads, a great many would probably be classed as district roads. In more than half the districts the average length of the so-called "village" roads is two miles or more. The balance of the roads—the village streets—are a very minute portion of the whole of the village streets. As I found on inquiry, many of those on the schedule are never repaired; most are only occasionally done up, and the few that get regular grants get them by favouritism. The allotment of road cess money for village roads should cease at once.

The question of metalled roads is more difficult. Clearly, however, the road cess fund is not the proper means for supporting them. Another means should be found. To make the transfer easier, the following procedure should be adopted.

Any extension of the metalled roads for which this fund is responsible should be prohibited at once. Expenditure on the maintenance of existing metalled roads should be allowed for a fixed period, say ten years, at the end of which it should be prohibited. By that time—it is to be hoped long before it—more appropriate means will have been found for supporting the metalled roads that are needed, and the

transfer of the charge will have been made naturally and easily.

The second step for fitting the road cess to our system is to distribute it among the wards as nearly as possible according as it is raised—to each ward its own tax. In order to justify the "concentration of funds" on metalled roads, objections have been made that this is impossible. There is nothing impossible about it. It has been done in the Hooghly district, where the Howrah fund has been separated off, and, if we will but be content with substantial, rough and ready justice, it can be done for the wards with very little trouble. The real difficulty is not the trouble of making the allotment, but the vested interests that will be disturbed thereby. But justice must be done. The road cess must be dealt with as a rate and localised. If it be decided to abolish the road cess, there are two ways in which it can make its exit. The rate can be gradually reduced from year to year, until the proceeds are insignificant, or it can be chopped off at once by sudden death. The latter method would be the more economical, and the better for the ratepayers, since it would at once put an end to the harassing and expensive business of collection. But it might not be fully understood by the ratepayers. The former method would have the advantage of introducing the new system more gradually. The ward road fund would now be a concrete sum, which could be compared with the valuation roll, and replaced as it grew less by a rate. If the cess were continued, the local ratepayers would

be in a position to supplement it by a local rate, as they frequently do now by subscriptions. Unwillingness to pay for roads is not always due to greed, but often to one or both of two causes—a sense of unfairness in having to pay over again for what should have been provided out of the rates already paid, and ignorance, which produces an exaggerated notion of what the rates amount to.

As regards the District and Local Boards, the question of their retention or abolition naturally arises. There seems no reason for getting rid of the District Board. It has a place which the wards cannot fill, and each can perform functions useful to the other. The organisations of the wards can be utilised as an improved election machinery for members of the Board. "Local" boards, so called, are, in my opinion, of little use. Any duties which they are supposed to do can be done better by the ward punchayats. They should be abolished. All existing "unions" will be absorbed into the wards.

The ward punchayat would, in consultation with the Government officer, have the power to fix rates for collecting funds supplementary to or instead of the road cess for making and maintaining the ward roads. Under the new, elastic system, the rate might be general over the whole ward, or for a particular union or group of unions which might desire better roads than their proper share of the ward fund gives them. Any such additional sum would go, of course, to the area contributing it. These matters would be decided at the annual budget meeting. As shown

above, special rates should not be consented to on the part of Government unless they are clearly and reasonably desired by a large majority of the community affected. The works which are to be in charge of the District Board and ward punchayat are, it will be remembered, main roads, district roads, village streets and the bridges, causeways and culverts, rest-houses, wells and trees on them. Each ward would have an officer (more than one if needed) to look after the works in its charge, under the supervision of the Board's officers. The division of the work between District Board and punchayats is a matter for arrangement from time to time. The principle would be that the Board should retain charge of works requiring more skill, and of more general usefulness, while the punchayats would retain the minor works, needing close attention rather than special skill.

The distribution of funds between Board and punchayat would also be a matter for local arrangement, and would naturally vary with circumstances. The umpire, in case of difference of opinion, would be the Government officer.

For metalling important roads, and maintaining them under metal, some means other than those at present employed must be devised. If we adhere to the principle that when a work is needed, means to do it must be found, this work cannot be left undone. Given a certain volume of traffic, a metalled way must pay, and the want of it must consequently cause avoidable loss. The network of roads which, with the advent of more funds, we may expect to come into

being, is likely to demand improved main roads for its through traffic, and every addition to, or improvement in that local system, will increase the strength of that demand. Take a concrete instance.

We will assume that the metalling of a road enables each cart passing over it to carry with the same labour a load four maunds heavier than if the road remains unmetalled. The freight of a maund[1] at an anna for 10 miles is four annas for the 40 miles. The road is used by 100 carts a day. The metalling of the road then saves to the community a rupee for each cart, or 36,500 rupees a year. Its not being metalled causes to the community a loss of that amount. It is worth while, therefore, to spend up to that amount yearly to save that loss. So far I have no fault to find with the reasoning of the authorities who use these arguments or others to the same effect in justification of the concentration of funds on certain metalled roads. I find, however, two faults, viz.: (*a*) that Paul enjoys the profits while Peter pays the cost, which makes Paul reckless and Peter discontented; (*b*) as the funds will not go round, much preventible loss is not prevented.

I have heard the scandal of neglected areas, referred to in Chapter VIII., defended by even high officials with some talk of indirect benefit, which I doubt if they themselves accept, and am pretty sure no one else is likely to be impressed by. I have also heard used the comfortable but hollow argument that where metalled roads do not exist, they are not needed.

[1] 80 lbs.

Such are the straits to which honourable men are reduced when they try to cure evils with the wrong remedies. There are two things which ought to be done. The first is to take the burden off the wrong shoulders, which is the object of the changes I have already proposed. The second is to find and appropriate the means for preventing preventible loss. I have turned my attention to this problem for the last twenty-three years, and have come to my own conclusions.

The yearly preventible loss, if we consider the size of the country, its vast population, and the neglected state of its road system, must be enormous. As the Government seems so far to have been unable to find a means of preventing this loss, I propound my remedy—the turnpike toll.

I have not been its advocate for over twenty years without finding out that, among those in authority at least, there is a strong prejudice against it—so strong that, although the law provides for its use, the Government of India refused the request of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal for permission to give it a trial. To what is this prejudice owing?

Not to the principle, which is that the traffic pays hire for the use of the road, receiving value for its payment. It was never proposed to make charges for *permission* to pass, but only for help in passing. The money to pay comes out of the profit made or loss saved, whichever way we put it, by means of that help, so that the transaction "blesseth him that gives and him that takes." A strange principle to ban!

The prejudice against the use of tolls on roads is stranger still when we reflect what enormous revenues are raised and benefits provided by tolls on works of other kinds. But for tolls we should have no railways, tramways, canals, or harbours; and fewer ferries, bridges, or markets. To tolls England owes her whole system of good roads. At the beginning of the 19th century she had over 100,000 miles of road supported by means of tolls. England has ceased to collect tolls for the maintenance of her roads, but that is for three sound reasons: *First*, the through traffic has left the roads for the railways and canals. The tolls have followed the through traffic. *Second*, the value of the districts has become so high that the roads necessary for local traffic can be maintained out of the rates. *Third*, as a consolidated hire on behalf of what through traffic remains, Government makes yearly grants to local authorities.

England has her system of roads and bridges complete—two miles of metalled and bridged roads for every square mile, besides private roads and town streets. She has not had to give up a yard of this for want of tolls.

When Bengal's circumstances resemble those of England, then and not till then should she be called on to follow England's example.

The toll can consistently be employed side by side with the rate for different classes of road. The fact that the rate funds have been used, though unjustifiably, to maintain some metalled roads, has no doubt

encouraged the contrary opinion. That is why I have proposed that the maintenance of metalled roads out of the rate funds be absolutely forbidden for the present. There is nothing wrong in principle about their maintenance in this way. As a practical matter, however, considering the present yield of the rates and the objects they are needed for, the rate funds cannot afford it.

Bengal cannot afford to keep up metalled roads out of the rates; a metalled road, by making savings in the cost of transport, is profitable to the country wherever the volume of traffic is such that the aggregate savings are greater than the cost of the road. It seems to follow that to take the cost direct from the traffic on which the savings are made is the simplest way of making the road accommodation keep pace with the need for it.

So much for the principle. As regards the practice, I know at least one Lieutenant-Governor who declared his prejudice against the toll to be invincible because of the oppression that the toll collectors would exercise. He had actually given me permission to make a trial, and then drew back, because he could not get over his prejudice.

It is not to be denied that as the toll-collectors would be natives of the country placed in a position to interfere with others, they would be inclined to use their position for the sake of personal profit. To anyone who knows the people of the country, however, it would not appear that the risk of their doing so is greater than in the case of others so situated.

We must recognise the general truth of what was said by Mr. James Munro, C.B., in his evidence before the Police Commission, that the same practices go on universally throughout the country. We cannot stop them in our own courts, on the railways, or among the police. There are, in fact, circumstances that reduce the risk in the case of the toll-collector below the average of risk that is accepted as a matter of course in all departments. I shall not, however, discuss the question further, because I do not think Government is the proper judge. The question whether the risk of abuse or the loss caused by the absence of the road is the greater evil, ought to be left for the decision of the people affected. It is an unnecessary and unwise assumption of responsibility on the part of the members of the Government, themselves well provided with every facility of road or rail, by withholding from the people the liberty of making a choice to condemn them to certain loss and inconvenience. The veto of Government should be withdrawn, and the people left to choose in each case whether they will have the road with a toll, or do without it.

After what I have said it seems hardly necessary to explain, and yet I will explain, that the object is not the establishment of turnpikes, but the provision of good roads. For that purpose funds are wanted, and it is important that those who benefit by the roads should provide the funds. The toll seems an appropriate, and at present the only available method of raising the funds.

There may be better methods which can be adopted when found. Let there be no delay, however, in setting to work with the means lying ready to our hand, for the yearly preventible loss is very great, and should be stopped as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XIV

POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS

HAVING explained how this new joint agency of Crown and people are to manage the works of taxation, police, and roads, I am now entitled to stop, since the time for any further development can only come after this stage has been reached, and that will not be all at once.

One is tempted, however, to speculate on possible future developments of the system.

It is to be remembered that the parade meeting is once a week, and is within easy reach of all homes in the ward. I hope that most of the mondles, at least, will attend regularly, and that there will be a large assembly to help the sirdars through with their business. I shall endeavour to indicate, purely as a matter of speculation, what are the various branches of business to which they may profitably turn their attention.

The first branch that naturally occurs to the mind is the executive work of justice, which comes in connection with the work of police. This consists of the service of all processes, civil and criminal; the attachment, custody, and sale of property by order

of the Court, and the arrest of persons under warrant. If the punchayat could take over these duties the Court would be saved the necessity of entertaining that body of subordinates most difficult, almost impossible, to manage—the process-peons. I see no reason why the punchayat, if remunerated with part, or even the whole of the fees now paid to process-peons, should not be able and willing to execute and return the processes of courts. I am not well acquainted with the way in which this work is done in England, but have a general impression that what is not done by private persons, such as lawyers' clerks, is done by local persons vested with powers for the purpose, much as village officials would be.

There seems to be hope also that in time some of the judicial functions of justice will be taken over by a bench at the headquarters of each ward, which will be able to dispose of petty criminal and civil disputes. This would be done partly by formal proceedings, partly by means of arbitration, in which the bench would no doubt have the services of the mondles and others in attendance. We used to get a good deal of useful work of this sort done in the Sonthal Pargannahs when on tour, distributing sometimes half a dozen cases at a time among as many different groups of arbitrators, who would retire with their parties each under its own tree, and in due course bring up the result. When I paid recently a visit to a corner of my old district, at a place thirty miles from headquarters, I found the experimental punchayat of sirdars were disposing at the weekly

parade of twenty or thirty cases a month, sending on important cases to headquarters. The system was popular and working well, to the relief of Government officers, whose valuable time was economised; and of the parties, who were saved much trouble, time, and expense. The establishment of local benches of this kind would involve the transfer to them of the settlement of cases not so much from the Government courts, as from the informal tribunals, to which the inaccessibility and cost of the Government courts compel the people to resort. Thus cheap and easily accessible courts would be provided for the people. I do not claim that this method of settling disputes would be acceptable to all suitors, or equally popular in all parts of the country. If it worked well, however, it would tend to become popular, since it would save suitors the most irritating and costly part of litigation—long journeys and long absence from home. Small fees should be charged and given as remuneration to the bench. The Court fee is the smallest part of the costs of a case; and even a very small remuneration, though it does not nearly amount to the value of a man's time, has a good effect in that it stimulates his interest, and gives to the proceedings a formality they would otherwise lack. It is usual for all informal tribunals to take a fee for their trouble, and this custom is accepted by the people.

Another semi-judicial duty is the management of the pound. There might be one or more pounds in each ward, and the proceeds, as in municipalities,

handed over to the ward fund. The ward punchayat would be able to watch its working, and manage it better than the district board can now do. I have found that, owing to the distance of the managing authorities, abuses have been frequent in connection with pounds, and it has even been found necessary in some places to appoint highly paid inspectors to check them. There may be cases where for a season, or owing to special circumstances, the ward punchayat cannot be entrusted with the management of the pound. In such circumstances the district board or magistrate can take it over. If the revenue is at the same time withdrawn, I expect means will soon be found for removing the difficulty.

Again, there is the sanitary group of works. At the head of this group come works connected with water, which overshadows in importance all other single elements of the village life.

Though something has been done for irrigation, and for village water-supply, there is needed—and the proposed organisation of the villages brings it within reach—a systematic, general, and detailed regulation of the whole water-supply of the country. I can do no more here than indicate the idea which I hope will some day become a reality.

The two chief evils which we suffer from water are floods, or excess, and drought, or deficiency of water. The way to correct these evils economically is, if possible, to cure one by the other.

We all know the process by which the water-supply

of the country is kept up. Water falls in the shape of rain on every part of the country, and finds its way by gravitation through streams and rivers direct —or by absorption in the soil, through springs—to the sea, and some of it is evaporated in the air. When the rain falls faster and in greater quantities than can be disposed of by these various means, we have floods. The only way in which we can dispose of these at present is generally to get them off to the sea as soon as we can—downhill. That which has once gone down cannot at reasonable expense be brought back again.

The water of the greatest river, though it be miles broad, has fallen drop by drop; has trickled together in tiny rills, gathered in brooks and streams; and finally, by the combination of all these drops from an enormous area, has become the great river which seems beyond all power of management.

The special idea I want to bring out is that wherever any of these drops fell, there is a source of the stream. We are used to talking of the source of a stream as the point on it farthest from the place where it is merged in a river or the sea. That is, no doubt, *a* source; but it has sources innumerable all over its basin—some in its own bed, the greater part on dry land. Every village is full of sources.

Possibly my long experience of an undulating country has brought home to me the peculiar importance of mastering the water at its sources, where it can be mastered with comparative ease. In such a country the heavy rainfall, if allowed to gather and

discharge itself, collects quickly, travels fast, and soon becomes a raging torrent. After heavy rain in such a country we see streams, at other times puny and insignificant, which convey the drainage of only a few square miles, swell up into a surging volume which will sweep away any ordinary dam, embankment, or bridge, scour away the soil, and carry it down as mud and silt, denuding the higher areas of their soil. In the same area, a month or two later, there will be a cry for water from a parched land.

The villager looks at water in two aspects—as a fertiliser, and as a devastator; and according to the aspect, he wants to keep or obtain it, or to pass it on. When one village wants water, other villages generally want it too; and when one village does not want it, neither do others. It depends on the fluctuations of the rainfall whether we find all the villagers eager to assert or to deny the right or duty of their neighbours on a higher level to retain or to discharge their water. Every villager has thus two absolutely opposite attitudes, one or other of which it may suit him to take at any time, according to the season.

This circumstance, as may be imagined, gives rise to much dispute, litigation, and ill-feeling. It indicates also great possible profits to be made and losses to be saved, and the importance of regulating the movements of water from its source, instead of leaving them to chance.

I propose nothing heroic or difficult, but, on the principle adopted throughout of starting from existing facts, I think something might be done like this.

Take a village union, with its area of three square miles. Its water drains off on definite courses. Some comes from the rain falling locally, some from a distance. The latter I would, for the present, leave alone. At favourable spots, by means of small dams and ridges, I would put regulators on the water-courses, or on the land which they drain, with outlets calculated to discharge not more than a maximum quantity of water in a given time, and would compel the union to keep within its boundaries any water in excess of this that may fall, until it can be disposed of within the maximum. The villagers within the union would have to make corresponding arrangements in greater detail, so as to keep pressure off the outlet. This imposes a duty, which all will admit is a fair and reasonable one.

There is no reason to lay down rules against the retention of water, since we may assume that a village has a right to the use of its own rainfall. But that right gives it a corresponding responsibility for not disposing of it to the annoyance and loss of others. A word has been coming into use of late which expresses what I mean—dumping. The dumping of excess water should be stopped. What has to be discharged should be discharged in a gradual and measured way. The duty of enforcing any such regulation would be one for the village officials. I am tempted to follow out this subject, and discuss the numerous objections that may be made; the numerous advantages that will follow success in dealing with it. I must be content, however, with

remarking that, as the rainfall of each union can be dealt with independently, even large streams can be gradually brought under control through their many sources, without touching the bed at all.

The regulation of the village discharge makes it cheaper and easier to impound the water for irrigation and other purposes. A favourite project of mine was to gather the water of an area into a series of reservoirs, by means of numerous small ridges and embankments; to construct distributories from the reservoir, and sell the water. I could never get permission to try it. The village officials would be able to manage such a business as this.

The re-afforestation of the country is very urgently needed in many parts. That too is a work in which the co-operation of the village authorities would be of the utmost value.

At the ward headquarters there should be a dispensary, towards the cost of which the ward should contribute, and each ward, circle, or union should have it in its power, subject to the check of the Government officer, to construct works and maintain establishments for the drainage and cleansing of the villages, and to put down nuisances. The ward punchayat should also have the supervision of the primary schools in the ward, and power to raise a rate, if generally approved, for their maintenance.

They would also be available, possibly to manage, and at all events to help in the supervision of, any form of agricultural or village bank which may be successfully evolved from the experiments now being

tried in that direction, and to look after experimental farms, bulls for the improvement of cattle, experiments in agriculture and stock, and in sanitation; the distribution of useful medicines and instruments, and the like.

They will also furnish the machinery periodically required for taking the census, or fighting famine, plague, and epidemic.

The reader must by this time have begun to feel sympathy for the local officials, who are expected to discharge such a number and variety of duties. If only they are not required to supply returns, reports, accounts, explanations, and information, I think they will be able, without great strain, to do most of the duties. For audit and supervision, the local visits of inspecting officers should be depended on, and the appetite for all such luxuries as statistics and reports, which grows by what it feeds on, should be severely checked. Too high a standard should not be required. It is to be remembered that every human being is liable to diseases, though only a limited few can get the aid of the highest skill for treatment. When a man meets illness or misfortune, he has to meet it with such means as are within his reach, and cannot wait doing nothing merely because there is somewhere out of reach some better means. By encouraging people to tackle their evils, we adopt the best means of effecting, it may be through many mistakes and failures, progress and improvement. Their own experience, the example of their neighbours, the encouragement and inspiration of Government officers will, I believe,

gradually raise the most backward communities in the scale of civilisation, and cause them to move of their own free will, or, as we would say in England, under the strong influence of public opinion. That greatest of all forces in human affairs may in such circumstances be born, grow up, and enter on its duties as the motive power for which, since the time of Lord Cornwallis, the Government of India has been vainly searching. What it may do, how it may develop, we cannot now foresee.

THE END

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