bargain beforehand in each case for the payment which he is to receive for specified treatment; for example Re. 1 or Rs. 2 for the ordinary medicine with two or three visits in an obstinate case of malarious fever. In the event of a cure, the patient often testifies his gratitude by making a present to his doctor.

The astrologer too ought perhaps to be ranked in the professional class; and he will be found in nearly every principal village. He is an Acharjee (Lugu Acharjee), but of a somewhat low class of Brahman, whose business is to paint the *thakur* (idols) and the various traditional representations of the deities; also to tell fortunes and to interpret omens and signs of luck, or of interposition of providence; to prepare horoscopes, and so on Those who do not succeed sufficiently in these higher branches of their craft take to painting pictures in water colours for use, in the way of decorative purpose, on occasions of the great ceremonies which are performed in the richer families.

The Hindu artist does not appear to have obtained a knowledge of perspective, and in these pictures it is seldom that any attempt is apparent to realise its effects. But outline and colour are remarkably well depicted on the flat. These men can be got to work many together on a given subject for a monthly pay of Rs. 20 or Rs. 30 according to the efficiency of the painter. But most commonly each prepares his pictures at leisure in his own house and presents them when finished to some rich person in the generally well-founded expectation of receiving ample remuneration for his labour.

The worship of God which obtains among Muhammadans, may be designated congregational and personal, while that among Hindus is domestic and vicarious. With the former, the masjid, public preaching, united prayer and adoration offered by individuals collected in heterogeneous assemblages or congregations, are its characteristic features. With the latter, the

family idol (or representation of the deity), the daily service and worship of this idol performed by a priest for the family, and the periodic celebration of ceremonies in honour of that manifestation of the deity which the family adopts, as well as those for the benefit of deceased ancestors' souls, constitute its principal ingredients. Among wealthy Hindus the hereditary spiritual guide, the hereditary *purohit* and the service of the jewelled *thakur* form, so to speak, the keystone of the joint family structure: and the poor folks of a country village make the best shift they can to worship God under the like family system. Every respectable household that can afford the small expense has a rude *thakur*, or image of its patron deity placed in a separate hut of the homestead, and a Brahman comes daily to perform its worship and service. As might be supposed, it is not worth the while of any but the lower caste of, and imperfectly educated, Brahmans to pursue this vocation; so it generally happens that the

village *purohits* are an extremely ignorant set of men. In some districts they are mostly foreign to the village, coming there from a distance; they reside in it only for a few years, then return home for an interval, providing a substitute or vicar during the period of their absence. These ministers of religion get their remuneration in the shape of offerings and small fees, and manage on the whole to earn a tolerably good livelihood by serving several families at a time. With other Brahmans they also come in for a share of the gifts which are distributed by wealthy men on the occasions of family ceremonies and festivals. In great measure the office of *purohit* is hereditary, and indeed strictly so in the case of families of social distinction and importance, who, as a rule, have more than one spiritual guide exclusively to themselves. For there is the *guru* or spiritual instructor of the individual who gives him the *mantra*, and the higher class *purohit* who is the Acharjee and conducts the periodic *puja* festivals

of the family, in addition to the ordinary *purohit* who performs the daily service of the *thakur*. Over and above the regular service of the *thakur* performed by the priest, there is also among Brahmans a manifestation of personal devotion on the part of the individual members of the family. It is right in Brahman families that each individual should once or oftener in the day come before the image and say a Sanscrit prayer or recite a *mantra*.

The mass of the ryots who form the population of the village are too poor to have a family deity. They are forced to be content with the opportunities they have of forming part of the audience on the occasions of religious festivals celebrated by their richer neighbours, and the annual *pujas* performed at the village *mandap* on behalf of the community.

II.

ZAMINDAR AND MAHĀJAN.

MANY other members of the village society than those already mentioned deserve description, such as the carpenter, the potter, the weaver, the fisherman, and the like. It might be told, too, how a woman, or an old man incapable of laborious exertion, will venture a rupee in the purchase from the *jalkarwala* of a basket of fish, from the ryot of a bundle of chillies, &c., with the hope of earning a few pice by carrying this to the *hāt* and there selling in retail; how the pith-worker plies his occupation, or how the widow makes her mats. And the *mandal*, the *chaukidar*, the barber, the washerman will probably hereafter have their respective places

in the village economy pointed out. The general texture of the village material has, however, even thus far, been sufficiently represented, and to complete the outline of the little community it only remains to sketch in the two most influential of its constituents, namely, the *zamindar* and the *mahājan*.

Preliminary to describing the status of these persons a few words more as to externals are necessary. It has already been said that the site of the loose aggregate of homesteads which forms the Bengali village is somewhat elevated above the general level of the cultivated plain, and presents, when viewed from the outside, a more or less wooded appearance by reason of the pipal, mango, tamarind, and other forest trees which usually shut in the several dwellings. This wooded dwelling area, so to call it, is skirted by waste or common land of very irregular breadth, and beyond this again comes the cultivated land of the open plain (*māṭh*). Up to a certain boundary

line (of immemorial origin but ordinarily well ascertained) all the land both waste and cultivated, reckoned outwards from the village, belongs to the village in a sense which will be hereinafter explained. On the other side of the line the land in like manner belongs to some other village. In parts of Bengal where portions of the country are in a state of nature the limits of the village territory will include jungle and otherwise unappropriated land.

The village and its land (the entirety is termed a *mauzah*) in some respects affords considerable resemblance to an English parish, and possibly the two may have had a certain community of origin, but there are differences enough in their present respective conditions to render it impossible to pass by analogy from the one to the other. Of course, both in the English parish and in the Indian *mauzah* the principal business of the people is agriculture. But in England, now-a-days, the cultivation of the soil is not carried on

under parochial rights, or in any degree subject to communistic principles. Every portion of the cultivatable area of the parish is cultivated by some one who either owns it himself as his property in the same sense as all other subjects of property are owned, or who hires it for cultivation from such an owner. In India, on the other hand, the land of the *mauzah* is cultivated in small patches by the resident ryots (or cultivators) of the village on payments of dues, according to the nature of the soil, and the purpose of the cultivation, to a person who, relatively to the ryot, is termed the zamindar, viz., the landholder (not accurately landlord) of the *mauzah*. These dues are at this day universally denominated rent; but although they are most commonly variable and capable of adjustment from time to time, between the zamindar and the ryot, they do not correspond in all aspects to rent, and some confusion of idea is occasionally perceived to arise from careless use of this word.

To the English observer it is very remarkable at first to find that the land belonging to the village is, with extreme minuteness of discrimination, classified according to characters attached to it by custom, and having relation to data which are not all concrete in kind, such as the prevailing water-level of the rainy season, the nature of the rent payable for it, the purpose to which it is put, the class of persons who may by custom occupy it, and so on. Thus we meet with:—

Sali—land wholly submerged during the period of the rains—of different grades.

Suna—not so—also of different grades.

Nakdi—land for which rent is paid in cash per bigah.

Bhaoli—land for which rent is paid in kind—part of the produce.

———land for which rent is paid in cash per crop per bigah.

Bhiti—raised house-site land.

Khudkasht—land which the residents of the village are entitled to cultivate.

Pahikasht—land which outsiders may cultivate.

These characters or qualities adhere almost permanently to the same land, and there is for each village a recognised rate of rent (or *nirkh*) properly payable according to them. Also, when the occupation of the land is, as commonly happens with the Sunaland, on an *utbandi jama*, and the cultivation is by alternation of cropping and fallow, the ryot or cultivator only pays for so much of each sort of land as he actually tills for the year. It is apparent, then, that generally speaking, the precise amount of payment to be made by the ryot to the zamindar in each year is a matter of some complexity of calculation.

Perhaps it should be here remarked that in most villages by far the larger portion of the land is Khudkasht.

The ordinary state of things, then, is shortly

this:—The open lands of the village are divided up among the resident ryots in small allotments (so to speak), an allotment often consisting of several scattered pieces, and generally comprehending land of various qualities as above defined —it rarely exceeds ten acres in the whole and is often much less—and the payment of rent by each ryot to the zamindar is made on a shifting scale, depending upon more or less of the elements just mentioned. An abbreviated example of the year's account between the ryot and zamindar are given in the Appendix.[1]

Putting aside all questions of right on the part of the cultivator to occupy and till the land of the village, we have it as a matter of fact that the Bengal ryot is little disposed to move, and that for generation after generation, from father to son, the same plots of land (or approximately so) remain in the hands of the same family.

After this preface, part of it in some degree

[1] See note (B) in the Appendix.

repetition, we are in a situation to take a view of the zamindar, considered as a personage of the village. It will be convenient to speak as if there were but one such person for a whole village. This is not strictly true as regards the ryot, or rent payer, and will be qualified by explanation hereafter. But it is the simplest form of the actual case and the normal idea of a zamindar is best arrived at by conceiving that a *mauzah* is the smallest unit in his holding—that the zamindari is an aggregate of many entire *mauzahs*.

Now when it is remembered how small is the quantity of land tilled by each ryot, that he pays for different portions of this at different rates, that the quantity of the land of each sort or the nature of the crop, according to which he pays, varies from year to year, and that the total year's rent is generally paid in three or four *kists*, or instalments, it will be seen, that the business of collecting the rents of a Bengal *mauzah* is a very different thing from the work which is done by a landlord's agent

in England, and that it can only be carried on through the means of an organized staff. This staff is commonly called, both individually and collectively, the zamindar's, or *zamindari amla*. It usually consists of a *Tehsildar*, *Patwari*, *Gumashta*, and *peons*, or similar officers under different names, varying with the district.

The *Tehsildar* is the collector of the rents, and if the *zamindari* is large, one *Tehsildar* will collect from three or four *mauzahs*.

There is generally a *Tehsildar's kachahri* in each *mauzah* or village—it is the office where the *zamindari* books and papers relative to the village collections are made up and kept; sometimes a verandah-shed or hut of mat and bamboo serves the purpose of the *kachahri*, sometimes it is a *pakka* house of brick with sufficient accommodation to enable even the zamindar to pass a few days there when he resides elsewhere than in the village and is minded to visit it. Book-keeping is an art, which Hindus seem to carry almost to an absurd

extent of detail, and it would be tedious to describe all the books which are kept in due course of the *kachahri* business. It will be sufficient to mention the principal among them; these are, first, three or four books bearing the denomination of the *chittha*, which amount in effect to a numbered register in various ways and in minute detail of all the small *dags*, or plots into which the village lands are divided, the measurement of each, its situation, the quality of the land, the ryot who cultivates it, and so on, the last of them being the *khatiyan*, or ledger, which gives under each man's name all the different portions of land held by him, with their respective characteristics. The *jama bandi* is a sort of assessment paper made up for each year, with the view of showing for every ryot, as against each portion of the land held by him, the rate at which it is held, according to quality or crop, and also to exhibiting the total amount which in this way becomes due from him, and the *kists* in which it is to be paid; and the *jama-*

wasil-baki is an account prepared after the expiration of the year, repeating the principal statements of the *jama bandi*, as to the amounts which had become due, and then giving the payments which had actually been made, together with the arrears.

A Bengali account book is formed by sewing together with a cord any number of very long narrow loose sheets at one of their ends, and when it is closed the free ends of the sheets are folded back upon the ends which are thus bound. When it is open the bound end rests upon the reader's arm, the upper leaves are thrown back and the writing then runs from the free end of one page down through the cincture, to the free end of the next. In this way a total page of portentous length is possible and some *jama bandis* take advantage of this property to the utmost.

The *Gumashta* and *Patwari*, or similar officers, by whatever name they may be called in the different districts, are charged with the duty of keeping up the *kachahri*-books according to the

varying circumstances of the ryots' holdings; and for this purpose have to keep a sharp eye throughout the year upon the ryots' doings. It will be seen at once that persons charged with the functions of these *zamindari amla* have much temptation to use the opportunities of their situation to their own advantage. As a rule they are of the same class as the village ryots, and are themselves cultivators. It is not therefore matter of surprise when it happens, as it often does, that the plots which are in their hands are the best in the village. Their proper work prevents them from actually labouring in the fields, and they are supposed to pay those of the other ryots who till the soil for them, but it is too frequently the case that they manage somehow to get this done gratis. And they are by no means ignorant of the art of obtaining the offer of gratifications when they require them. The office is in a sense hereditary, *viz.*, the son generally succeeds the father in it. But this is almost a necessity, for it is seldom the case that

more than one or two others in the village possess the small knowledge of reading, writing, and account-keeping, which is needed for the work.

Indeed the ryots are universally uneducated and ignorant, and in an extreme degree susceptible to the influence of authority. The relation between them and the zamindar is quasi-feudal in its character. He is their superior lord and they are his subjects (ryots), both by habit and by feeling "*adscripti glebæ*." They would be entirely at the mercy of the zamindar and his *amla* were it not for another most remarkable village institution, namely, the *mandal*[1]; this is the village head man, the mouthpiece and representative of the ryots of the village in all matters between them and the zamindar or his officers. The mandal is a cultivator like the rest of the ryots, and by no means necessarily the richest among them. He holds his position in some supposed manner dependent upon

[1] This is his most common designation. The name, however, varies with districts.

their suffrages, but the office in fact almost invariably passes from father to son, and so is hereditary for the same reason that all occupations and employments in India are hereditary. His qualifications are, sufficient knowledge of reading, writing, and *zamindari* accounts, and thorough acquaintance with the customary rights of the villagers. He receives no emolument directly, but the other ryots will generally from time to time help him gratuitously in his cultivation, and it is not unfrequently the case that he pays a less rate of rent for his land than the ordinary occupying ryot does. It is impossible thoroughly to describe the *mandal's* functions in a few sentences. He is so completely recognised as the spokesman of the ryots, one and all, on every occasion, that it is often exceedingly difficult to extract, in his absence, from an individual ryot information upon even the commonest and most indifferent matter. The *mandal* and a few of the elder men constitute the village *panchayat*, by whom most of the

ordinary disputes and quarrels are adjusted. In more obstinate cases the *mandal* and the parties go to the zamindar, or his representative the *naib* or *gumashta*, for discussion and arbitration. Thus very much of the administration of justice in the rural districts of Bengal is effected without the need of recourse to the formal and expensive machinery of the public courts.

When the village is one in which the zamindar resides, it will often be the case that the barber who shaves the members of his family, the *dhobi* who washes for them, the head *darwan* (or porter) and other principal servants all hereditary, hold their portion of the village land, at relatively low rents or even rent free, in consideration of their services. In addition to this the *dhobi* and the barber, for instance, have the right to be employed at customary rates of pay by all the ryots. Sometimes the carpenter and the blacksmith are in the like situation. There is also a hereditary village *chaukidar* (or watchman) who gets his land rent

free. And the Brahman priest, whether of the zamindar's family, or maintained for the village *pujas*, &c., is supported in the same mode.

We have thus before us, in the Bengal village community, a social structure which, for want of a better term, may in a certain qualified sense be called feudal. The principal features can be summed up as follows:—At the bottom is the great mass of hereditary cultivators of the village lands (ryots); at the top the superior lord entitled to rents and dues from these cultivators (zamindar); next to him, and connected with his interests, come those who constitute his fiscal organisation (*amla*) and his privileged servants; on the other side, again, are the representatives and officers of the village, and by the union of both elements, so to speak, is formed a court leet which when occasion requires disposes of any topics of internal friction by the authoritative declaration of custom and usage.

Outside this system, with no recognised place in in it, yet nevertheless the motive power by which

it is kept working, is the *mahājan*, or village capitalist. The Bengal ryot, except only a fraction of the whole class, has no accumulated wealth—no pecuniary means other than that which his own labour on the land can earn for him. He carries on a business, however, which from time to time and periodically, requires outlay of money. There is a hut of the homestead to be new built or repaired, a plough or other implement to be made, a pair of bullocks to be bought, seed for sowing to be procured, above all rice to be got for the food of himself and his family, and also several *kists* of his rent to be paid before all his crops can be secured and realised. Alone and unaided, he is almost invariably unable to meet all these current demands. In the western part of the Delta his savings are seldom sufficient to tide him wholly over the time which must elapse before the year's production comes in. To the *mahājan*, therefore, he is obliged to go for money and for *paddy* as he wants them. The commonest course of dealings between the parties is as

follows:—The *paddy* for sowing and for food, and also other seed, is provided upon the terms that it is to be returned together with a surplus of fifty per cent. in quantity at the time of harvest; and the money is advanced upon condition of being repaid, also at harvest time, with two per cent. per mensem interest either in the shape of an equivalent of *paddy*, reckoned at bazaar prices, or in cash at the option of the lender. As security for the due carrying out of this arrangement, the *mahājan* frequently takes an hypothecation of the ryot's future crop, and helps himself to the stipulated amount on the very threshing floor, in the open field.

The actual result of this state of things is, at least, curious to the eye of the European observer. The zamindar, who at first sight appears to fill the place of an English landlord, is merely a rent charger; the ryot, who seems to have a beneficial interest of a more or less permanent nature in his allotments, is scarcely more than a field labourer, living from hand to mouth; and the *mahājan*, who

in effect furnishes the farming capital, pays the labour and takes all the profits, is a stranger, having no proprietary interest in the land. He is a creditor only, whose sole object is to realise his money as advantageously as possible. After setting aside in his *golas*, as much of the produce come to his hands, as he is likely to need for his next year's business advances in kind, he deals with the rest simply as a cornfactor, sending it to the most remunerative market. A thriving *mahājan* may have a whole *mauzah*, or even more under his hand, and yet he has no legitimate proprietary status in the community, while those who have, namely, the ryot on one hand and the zamindar on the other, for different reasons are apparently powerless. The consequent unprogressive character of an agricultural village cannot be more graphically described than by the words of an intelligent young zamindar.[1]

"A husbandman of the present day is the

[1] Babu Peary Chund Mookerjee, *Beng. Soc. Sci. Trans.* vol. iv. sec. 4, p. 1.

primitive being he always has been. With a piece of rag round his loins for his clothing, bare feet, a miserable hut to live in, and a daily fare of the coarsest description, he lives a life which, however disturbed it may be by other causes, is unruffled by ambition. If he gets his two meals and plain clothing he is content with his lot, and if he can spare a few rupees for purchasing jewellery for his wife and children, and a few rupees more for religious ceremonies, he will consider himself as happy as he can wish to be. He is the greatest enemy of social reform, and never dreams of throwing off any of the trammels which time or superstition has spun around him. He will not send his son to school for fear of being deprived of his manual assistance in the field; he will not drink the water of a good tank because he has been accustomed to use the water of the one nearer his house; he will not sow a crop of potatoes or sugarcane because his forefathers never did it; he will allow himself to be unmercifully fleeced by his

hereditary priest to secure the hope of utter annihilation after death, but he will not listen to any proposal which would place within his reach a few of the conveniences or comforts of life. There are agricultural villages in which the existence of a school or of a dispensary, and the condition of the houses, roads, and tanks show a happier state of things, but it will be found that in almost all such cases the improvements have been made not by the ryots but by a rich trader, employer, or landholder, who resides in the village, or takes an interest in its welfare. The ryots themselves are too poor, too ignorant, too disunited among themselves to effect any such improvement."

III.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

AND more than one cause occurs to limit the activity of zamindars in this matter to very few instances. It is sufficient for the moment to say that wealthy enterprising zamindars are very rare in the Mofussil. The Hindu gentleman of the Bengali village, the landed proprietor, so to speak, of the locality, may have an income of some Rs. 200 or Rs. 300 per annum at most. He may not always have even a *pakka* house. His property is probably a share of the village, or of several villages together, held on some tenure, the general nature of which will be hereafter described, and his net income is that which remains

of the collections made from the ryots after he has paid the *jama* of his tenure to the superior holder, or to the Government, as the case may be. His life is a very quiet one, unmarked by the characteristics of either a very active or a very refined form of civilization. His daily routine may be sufficiently described without much difficulty. He gets up before sunrise, and if he be an orthodox Hindu, as he sits upon his bed he utters, in the place of a formal prayer, the name of "Dúrga" several times in succession. Then he performs some slight ablutions. At this point the habits of Brahmans vary from those of other Hindus. The Brahman goes at once after these ablutions to bathe in the river, if there is one, near at hand; if not, to the tank attached to his house, or to the village tank. As he stands in the water, and when he comes out, he repeats, by way of prayer, Sanskrit *mantras* which he does not understand. In any village situated on the bank of a river may be seen, very early in the morning, men of the most respectable class and

position returning home after bathing and muttering these *mantras* as they go. Men of respectability (*bhadralog*), however, who are not Brahmans, do not think it necessary to bathe so early, or to say anything in the shape of prayer, beyond the utterance of the name of Dúrga two or three times on rising from bed.

It used to be the practice for pious Hindus, in addition to this, to write the name of Dúrga on a plaintain leaf as many as two hundred or three hundred times every morning after the first washing, but this old custom has died out, except in perhaps a few excessively conservative families of Eastern Bengal, and now-a-days, the ordinary village proprietor of the higher class, after his early ablutions, without further preliminary, takes his seat in his *baithakhana* upon the *takhtaposh* (if, as is usually the case, there is one), which is generally covered with a white *chadr*. There he receives all whom business, or desire for gossip, may bring to see him. His ryots who come sit at a little distance on the

floor, while visitors of the *bhadralog* sit on the *takhtaposh* with the master of the house. *Hukhas* for smoking are offered to each one in turn, and for this purpose two *hukhas* are generally kept ready, one for Brahmans, the other for kyasths, &c., that for the use of Brahmans being distinguished by a cowrie hanging pendent from it by a string. Not to give a visitor the offer of a smoke would be considered as very uncourteous and rude.

The Bengal village gentleman generally transacts all his business in the morning, sitting in the way just described in his *baithakhana*, while his wife is simultaneously engaged in the kitchen. He will not take food before bathing, for to do so would be considered very wrong. He remains in his *baithakhana* usually until 11 or about 11.30 A.M., sometimes even later. Then when all his visitants are gone he causes his servant to bring oil and this he rubs all over his body and head as a preliminary to going to bathe.

When he returns from bathing, which will

generally be about noon, he goes to the inner apartments (*andar mahāl*) of the house, *i.e.*, to the portion of the house or homestead which is allotted to the female members of the family, and which strangers and non-privileged males are not allowed to enter. There, if he is orthodox and has "taken the *mantra*" from his family priest, he first performs *puja*, and then has his breakfast brought. The servant of the house or the women of the family sweep the floor of the room or verandah where he usually takes his meals, and spread a square piece of carpet (*ashan*) or place a square wooden board for him to sit (cross-legged) upon. His food is served in a *thāl*[1] or on a stone platter by his wife, his children sit round him, and his mother comes and sits in front of him to see that everything is done as it should be; if the wife is young she seldom speaks to him in the presence of the mother, and if he has to ask for anything he does so generally through the mother. The breakfast

[1] A "thāl" is a metal plate or dish.

commonly consists of rice as a principal item and in considerable quantity, some kind of *dāl* (split pulse), a few vegetables separately prepared, one fish curry, sometimes also an acid curry taken after the ordinary curry, and lastly milk and sugar. The food is mostly conveyed from the platter to the mouth with the fingers of the right hand; the right hand alone can be used for this purpose, and no food may be touched with the left. Having finished eating, the master of the house washes his right hand and his mouth, receives a *pān* (betel leaf) prepared with spices by the women of the family for chewing, returns to his *baithakhana*, smokes his *hukka* and lies down to sleep for an hour or two during the hottest part of the day, namely, from about 1 P.M. to 3 P.M.

About 3 P.M. his siesta over, he does whatever work of the morning he may have left unfinished, or goes out to see his neighbours or his ryots, returning shortly after dusk, when he takes some refreshment (*tiffin*) or lunch in the shape of sweet-

meats. For the rest of the evening he sits in his *baithakkhana* conversing with friends and neighbours who may have come in, or plays games with cards or dice, or plays chess. In this manner he amuses himself and passes his time till dinner, or the last meal of the day is announced about 10 P.M.: a female servant comes and says "rice is ready," and he goes for his dinner to the same place where he took his breakfast, and eats it in the same fashion. In fact, there is scarcely any difference between the morning meal, either in regard to the food or to any other particular. The second is essentially a repetition of the first.

The women of the house always take their meals after the men have finished theirs; and all the members of the family retire to their sleeping quarters immediately after the night meal.

The foregoing is a brief outline of the every-day life of a Bengali village proprietor belonging to the gentleman class who lives on an income of say from Rs. 200 to Rs. 500 a year derived from land.

It should be added that the women of the family do a great deal of domestic work, such as cooking, pounding rice, fetching water, &c. Early in the morning they sprinkle water over the *uthan*, and proceed to clean the *thāls* and the cups used the previous evening. Of such a family as that just described, the female members are not so secluded as the women of a similar family would be in a large town. In a Bengali village all the neighbours are allowed to see and speak with the women of the family (except the newly-married *baus*, not belonging to the village) unless they are prevented by village relationship.

Domestic life in a cultivator's family is, of course, very different from that of the *bhadralog* just described. The exigencies of field labour, cattle tending, and poverty introduce very considerable disturbing causes. Still there are generic features of resemblance between the two. The women prepare the meals for the men, and these are eaten in the more private part of the homestead which

answers to the inner apartments of the gentlemen's *bāri*, also the women take their meals after the men have eaten. The food is almost exclusively rice, *dāl* and vegetable curries. Now and then fish is an ingredient in it, and occasionally milk. The front verandah of the principal hut of the homestead is the ryot's *baithakkana*, and there, after his day's work is done, he will spread a mat for his neighbour and share with him his hubble-bubble. Or a village group will form under a convenient *pīpal* tree, and gossip and smoke away the affairs of the *mauzah*.

It is the universal habit in Bengal prevalent in all classes for the members of a family to live joint and to enjoy the profits of property jointly. What this amounts to is by no means easy to describe in few sentences. To take the instance of a ryot's family, it grows joint somewhat in this fashion; namely, on the death of the father, his sons, who before were dependent members of the family living in the same homestead and assisting him in the

cultivation of his *jot*, henceforward continue still in the same homestead, cultivating the same *jot*, but now in the capacity of owners. Sometimes they get their own names collectively substituted for that of their father in the books of the zamindar's *kachahri*; and sometimes the dead man's name is allowed to remain there unaltered. While thus situated each brother with his wife and children, if possible, occupies a separate hut in the homestead, and as often as is necessary for this purpose, or when it can be afforded, an additional hut is added to the group.

Also in this state of things, the brothers are by law entitled to equal shares by inheritance in the whole of any heritable property which they have thus taken in common from their deceased father, and each has a right at any time to compel a partition. In the event of one of the brothers dying, his sons, if he has any, if not, his widow, step into his place and represent him in all respects.

This sort of process carried on for several

generations obviously would bring about a very complex distribution of undivided shares; but in the case of ryots it very speedily comes to an end by reason of the smallness of the original subject rendering the aliquot parts insignificant. Before that stage is reached the younger members of the family give up or sell their shares to the others and find occupation elsewhere as best they can. When the *jot* is inheritable in its nature the members of the family while living in the same homestead will actually divide the land among themselves according to their shares and cultivate separately. In this way the land in some villages has come to be subdivided into absurdly small plots, and this evil has a natural tendency to increase rather than diminish.

When the family is well off and has considerable possessions as well, it may be, in the way of trade as in the shape of zamindaries and other landed tenures, the state of "jointhood" commonly long remains. The whole property is managed by one member of the family who is called the "karta"

and who is usually the eldest individual of the eldest branch. He is theoretically responsible in a certain vague way to the entire body of joint co-sharers, each of whom can, if he likes, see the family books of accounts and papers which are regularly kept in a sort of office (or *daftarkhāna*) by the family servants; but as a matter of fact it is seldom that any one interferes until some occasion of quarrel arises and is fought out with acrimony, a partition effected and accounts insisted upon. Events of this kind happen from time to time, with ultimate wholesome effect, but as a rule the co-sharers are only too willing to let well alone, content to be supported in the family house, out of the family funds, without asking any questions, each getting, as he wants, sufficient small sums of money for ordinary personal expenses. This constitutes the enjoyment of the joint family property by a joint family. Whatever money is saved, after the disbursement of the general family and proprietary expenses, is invested by the *karta* in the purchase of some

addition to the joint property; and whatever money is required for the performance of extraordinary family ceremonies or religious performances is commonly raised by the *karta* in the form of a loan charged on the joint property. The family proprietary body is thus a sort of corporation the ostensible head of which is the *karta*, and in which the individual members have acquired no proprietary rights as distinct from those of the whole body, except the right on the part of each co-sharer to separate at any moment and have his aliquot share of the common property divided off and given to him.

The domestic community which in this system of living grows up under, so to speak, the same roof-tree is curiously heterogeneous and sometimes very numerous. There are first the co-sharers; these are brothers, nephews, and male cousins whose fathers' shares have devolved upon them and the widows or daughters of co-sharers, who have died without leaving sons or grandsons; and

secondly, there is the mixed class of dependent members made up of the wives and children of existing co-sharers, the wives and daughters of former co-sharers (whose shares went to sons) and individuals labouring under any such infirmity as disqualifies them from inheriting. Instances occur in Calcutta and even in the Mofussil, of families comprehending as many as 300 or 400 individuals including servants living in one house; and it is probably usual for a family to amount to something between 50 and 100.

The Bengali's house is everywhere, whether in town or in the country village, and whether large or small, of one typical form, especially adapted to the needs of joint family life; its principal elements are apparent even in the homestead of the smallest ryot. That of an old family may be described as follows:—The building is of brick, and two-storied, that is, it has a ground floor and a first floor; the term "upper-roomed house" always designates a house which ranks above the ordinary run of respectability. The front is generally long, exhibiting

a pillared verandah or a row of French casement and jillmilled windows on the first floor. The entrance is by an archway, or large square-headed door in the centre of the front; and in the entrance passage, often on both sides of it, is a raised floor with one or two open cells in which the *darwans* (or door-keepers) sit, lie, and sleep—in fact dwell. This is the *deorhi* and answers to the *conciergerie* of French houses. The entrance passage on the inside opens upon a quadrangle which may or may not be complete. On the quadrangle side the house is generally faced all round by a two-storied pillared verandah which serves as a passage or corridor for each floor, and gives access to the different rooms; the upper verandah is reached from the lower by a narrow winding staircase of steep brick-built steps usually situated at the corners and very closely resembling turret stairs of an English country church. From outside to inside the breadth of the house is always very narrow, and as the rooms are less than the full width by the width of the verandah, they are also

necessarily narrow; sometimes, however, they are found of considerable length. On one side of the quadrangle is the *puja dalan*. This may be described to be the verandah of the other sides very much enlarged and deepened. It is approached from the central area by a flight of steps, which in its breadth occupies nearly the whole length of the side, and its lofty ceiling is supported by inner pillars additional to those which stand in the place of the ordinary verandah pillars. Its chief purpose is to serve as a stage for the performance of religious and domestic ceremonies on special occasions, the quadrangular area then affording convenient space for the general audience of dependents and invited guests; and the women of the house, themselves unseen, finding gazing places in the upper windows and verandah. At these times the quadrangle is commonly covered in by a *shamiana* stretched across the top from side to side. In this manner a magnificent reception hall or theatre can be constructed in almost every native gentleman's house at the shortest notice.

Besides this first quadrangle, there is often in large houses a second or a third quadrangle, and even more, the one behind or annexed to the other, much as is the case in our colleges at Oxford or Cambridge. Then, too, there is the *thakurbāri* or chamber, where the figure of the family deity resides and where the daily service or worship of the *thakur* is performed by the inferior family priest. Among Brahmans, and also *kulin kaists*, who are now-a-days privileged to receive the *mantra*, the father and mother of any branch of the family may for some purposes each have his or her private personal *thakur* quite apart from the family *thakur*. But neither a *kaist* nor even a Brahman woman can themselves worship the family idol or any visible *thakur*, except the clay figure of Siva which is made for every-day worship. They must make their daily *puja* and utter *mantras* apart from any idol.[1]

[1] The Shastras forbid to women and Sudras all knowledge and use of sacred texts.

It is by no means easy to describe the mode in which a large family distributes itself over a house such as that just now sketched. If the stage which the family has reached is three or four generations removed from the common ancestor there will be several heads of branches; and these branches will settle themselves per stirpes, so to speak, in separate parts of the house under their own heads, more or less separate from the rest. Sometimes this separation is so complete that the portion of the house allotted to each branch is parted off from the remainder of the house by such blocking up of doors as may be necessary for the purpose and by the opening of a separate entrance. Each group as a rule messes by itself, and every adult member of it has a room to himself in which he lives, all the female members together finding accommodation of some sort in the *inner apartments, i.e.* the portion of the dwelling house which is allotted to the females, and commonly among Europeans called the zenana. All the branches usually keep joint with regard to the worship of

the family deity. And even when the different branches have gone so far as to sever in everything, *i.e.* in food, worship, and estate, as the phrase is, the same family deity is commonly retained by all, and the worship of it conducted by the different separated branches in turn, each turn proportionate in duration to the owner's share in the joint property. For instance, if the family in its divided state is represented by four heads, namely, two brothers and their two nephews, sons of a third brother deceased, the turns or pallas of worship would be respectively four months, four months, two months, and two months or equimultiples of these.

It is, of course, only in Calcutta or other very large towns that the family swarm continues in the family hive at such dimensions as those just mentioned. But in the few country villages, where the zamindar's family has been fortunate enough to maintain itself for many generations, much about the same thing occurs. There will be the brick-built, quadrangled house with imposing front,

sheltering under one connected roof many families of cousins who bear to each other varying degrees of relationship and constitute in the whole a joint family, all the adult independent members of which have their own joint (but separable) coparcenary interest in the property of the family whatever that be. The *karta* of this family (generally by the nature of the case the senior member) is in most respects the ostensible head, and although in the village all of the others are "the babus," yet he is especially "*the* babu" to whose activity such good work, when it is done, as the maintenance of a dispensary, the support of the *mandir* and its priest, and the keeping the *mandap* in good condition, is to be attributed.

IV.

GRAVE AND GAY.

AMUSEMENTS do not appear to occupy any great space of life in a Bengali village. Although the circumstances of agricultural labour are such as to leave the ryot in comparative idleness for the larger part of the year, the truth seems to be that, for generations, the rural population has been a pauper, under-fed class, and does not possess the vigour and excess vitality, which, in the case of the Burmese, overflows in vivacious games and athletic sports. Bright, hearty, healthy play of a boisterous character is seldom or never to be met with among the children. Gymnastics, however, of undoubted indigenous origin, is, in some places, a great favourite

and very successfully pursued, and there are parts of Bengal in which the boys have even laid hold of cricket. Nevertheless, all Bengalis are possessed with an inordinate love of spectacles and shows of every kind. The Hindus flock as readily to the public religious processions and displays of the Muhammadans as to their own, and *vice versâ*. The Muhammadans find occasions for these at the Muharram and some other periodic commemorations of events in the lives of the Prophet and his chief apostles. And the Hindus have their village *pújas*, which are celebrated with more or less show and magnificence according to the wealth and public spiritedness of the local zamindar. Then there are from time to time family festivals and ceremonies already spoken of at the houses of the better-to-do folks, such as marriages, shraddas, readings of the Rāmāyana, &c.

The Bengali ryot is not often in a hurry. He dearly loves an opportunity for a bit of gossip: and the hubble-bubble, and the evening groups under

the *pīpal* tree are usually the wholesome substitutes for the *tarí* shop. Drinking does, however, obtain to a considerable extent among the lower castes and is said to be increasing. Native writers are fond of attributing the introduction of this vice or, at any rate, its encouragement in some way to the English, but there can be no real doubt that it is a natural product of the country itself.[1] In a portion of the Veds the delights of intoxication are dwelt upon, and some of the *tantric* writings are devoted to the encouragement of drink. The habit of drinking appears to have been so mischievously prevalent in the best days of the Muhammadan rule as to have called for repeated prohibitive legislation. And, indeed, the spirit which is everywhere drunk, namely *tarí*, is evidently of purely home origin, and is made largely in every village by crude native methods from many sorts of saccharine juices, especially from the juice of the *tarí* palm.

Gambling has great charms to the Bengali of all

[1] *Journal of Asiatic Society* for 1873, Part I. No. 1.

ranks, and some very amusing modes of applying the element of chance are in vogue. But gambling with cards and dice is the common form prevalent with the middle classes.

To describe fully the religious aspect of a Bengal village community would be a very long and difficult task—a task, indeed, which a foreigner could hardly carry through with success. A few of its more conspicuous features may, however, be pointed out without much risk of error. The Muhammadans exhibit two very distinct sects in Bengal, namely, the Sunnís and the Shias. Both seem to be a good deal given to observances and practices of Hinduism; and it is pretty clear that the Bengali Musalman is nothing but a roughly converted Hindu. He is quite undistinguishable from the ordinary Hindu in all race characteristics, and retains very marked caste notions and habits. In the best and most fertile parts of the delta the Muhammadan element exceeds 60 per cent. of the population, and in the rest of Bengal Proper it rises

as high as 30 or 40 per cent. In some districts the agricultural villages are either wholly Muhammadan or wholly Hindu, but more commonly each village has its Muhammadan quarter and its Hindu quarter.

Hinduism also has its sects quite apart from its castes, though a marked distinction of sect is apt in the end to become synonymous with distinction of caste. The peculiarity of Hinduism, which has been already spoken of, namely, its want of the congregational element, seems to favour the growth of sects. At any rate, no one appears to care much what particular form of faith his neighbour professes, as long as it is not of an aggressive character. It may look like making an exception to say that Christians are a good deal objected to in an agricultural village; but this is mainly for two reasons, *i.e.*—1*st*, because it is generally supposed to be of the essence of Christianity to work actively towards the subversion of Hinduism; 2*ndly*, because Christian ryots backed by

the support (by no means always judiciously given) which they obtain from European missionaries are apt to be a very contumacious, unaccommodating set of people.

We find pretty universally in the rural villages, Boistobs, Saktas, Sivas, Ganapatyas, &c. Of Boistobs there are an immense number of varieties or sub-divisions. Their chief distinguishing tenet seems to be that Vishnu is the Brahma: he existed before all worlds, and was the cause and creator of all. They endue him with the highest moral attributes, and they believe that, besides his more exalted form as creator of all things, he has at different times and for the benefit of his creatures assumed particular forms and appearances. The best known and most celebrated of these is Krishna; whose bright and frolicsome, and, indeed, somewhat sensual career of adventure on earth is a very fascinating topic of contemplation to his votaries.[1]

[1] It is perhaps noteworthy that a great many educated Bengalis have the notion that our Christ is none other than their Krishna.

The chief development of the Boistobs originated with Chaitanya, who preached purity, meditation, and the equality of all men, without distinction of sect or caste, before God. He threw aside all ceremonies and outward symbols. And a certain freedom from caste trammels and disregard of religious observances, with an appreciation of the importance of conduct, still seem to characterise the sect. The Boistobs have been, and even now are being, recruited from all castes, but taken together in all their varieties they are commonly reckoned as a sort of caste by themselves. Their especially ascetic members go by the designation of Bairagi (amongst others), and live a life of mendicancy and freedom which, as has been already mentioned, is not always altogether reputable.

The Saktas, perhaps, constitute the majority of the inhabitants of the villages. They have come to be, in a great degree, united with the Saivas. These latter look upon Siva (the destroyer) as the primary

and more exalted form of Brahma, and the Saktas especially contemplate and worship the divine nature in its activity, in other words, the female forms of the supreme deity, as Durga or Kali. The Sivaite and Sakta worship is in a marked degree a worship of dogma, of gorgeous ceremony, and bloody sacrifices. The Sakta consider themselves conservative of the purer and Puranic type of religion. Like the Pharisees of Judea, they are strict in small observances with regard to food, meals, &c., perhaps even to the neglect of the larger precepts of the law. It was against this system and its abuses that Chaitanya lifted up his voice, and that the Boistobs are the protestants; but the older faith still appeals the most successfully to the passions of men, and with its vicarious helps to acceptance with God still holds sway with the masses of the people.

The Ganapatyas hardly, perhaps, deserve to be called a distinct sect. They particularly seek the protection of Ganesa, and devote themselves to his

worship, but apart from this they may belong to almost any sect of Hinduism.

The mention of these different sects of Hinduism leads naturally up to a description of a very remarkable institution, which although it does not by any means find illustration in every village of Bengal, yet is very common in certain parts of the presidency. In most of the sects there is (as it may be termed) a clerical class, which is itself separated into two orders, namely, to use European designations, the monastic (or ascetic) and the secular. The monastic order is celibate and, in a great degree erratic and mendicant, but has anchorage places and headquarters in the *maths*. The original meaning of the word *math* seems to be cell or chamber, as of a hermit.[1] Now-a-days the typical *math* consists of an endowed temple or shrine, with a dwelling-place for a superior (the Mohant) and his disciples (*chelas*). The endowment of a *math* is either the result of private dedication, or it is the subject of a grant

[1] For the root of the word see Thomas's *Jainism*, note, p. 3.

made by an already existing wealthy *math*. In the latter case the new institution becomes an off-shoot of the old, and remains allied with it in some sort of subordination. The extent or amount of the property is not generally very large; though in exceptional cases it is so, and in some *maths* the Mohants, either by decline from the strict path of sanctity originally marked out for them, or even in prosecution of the founder's purpose, make the acquirement of wealth by trade their great object. Instances of this are most plentiful in the north-western parts of the Bengal presidency, where numerous trader Mohants of great wealth and influence are to be found.

As a rule, the Mohant, when he devoted himself to the ascetic form of religious life, *ipso facto*, severed himself from all such worldly possessions as he might otherwise have been entitled to as an ordinary member of society. He became theoretically dead to the world, and incapable of holding or inheriting property generally. But with regard to the pro-

perty of the *math* or Mohantship it is different. The Hindu law recognises a special devolution of the property belonging to a *math* upon the occurrence of the death of the Mohant. A certain precept[1] in the writings of the sages to the effect that the virtuous pupil takes the property, is the foundation of the different rules observed in different cases. The variation is in the manner in which the virtuous pupil is ascertained. There are instances of *maths* in which the Mohantship descends to a personal heir of the deceased; and others in which the existing Mohant appoints his successor. But the ordinary rule is, that the *maths* of the same sect in a district are associated together, the Mohants of these acknowledging one of their number, who is for some cause pre-eminent, as their head; and on the occasion of the death of one, the others of the associated body assemble to elect a successor out of the *chelas* (or disciples) of the deceased, if possible; or, if there be none of them qualified,

[1] *Mitak.* chap. 2, sec. 8, sl. 1—6.

then from the *chelas* of another Mohant. After the election the chosen disciple is installed on the *gaddi* of his predecessor with much ceremony. Sometimes most unseemly struggles for the succession take place. It has happened that two rivals, each backed by a section of neighbouring Mohants and other partizans, though neither, perhaps, very regularly, a *chela* of the deceased, have started up to make title to the vacant Mohantship. Both accompanied the dead body a long distance to the sacred river and put fire into the mouth, as the corpse was launched into the Ganges. Both returned to be formally elected by their respective adherents in two separate *majlis* held within the same compound of the *math*. Both were carried in a grand procession with elephants and horses and flags and drums and a crowd of followers round the village; and, finally, both came into a court of law to establish, by prolonged litigation reaching even to the Privy Council, rights which probably neither of them was strictly entitled to.

The *mandir* (or temple) of the *math*, if there is one in the village, is generally a conspicuous object. It has usually only one chamber, in which the *thakur* or image of the deity resides, and its ground section is a square of no great dimensions; but it is often carried up to a considerable height, and terminates in various, more or less, conoidal forms. In some districts it is acutely pointed, and presents very much the appearance of an English church-spire, as it is seen from a distance piercing the village mass of foliage.

There are also very frequently to be seen, in or about a village, *mandirs* which do not belong to any *math*; these commonly owe their origin to private dedication. There is seldom, however, any endowment attached to them, or, perhaps, just sufficient lakheraj land to maintain the attendant Brahman who performs the daily worship and keeps the place in order. More often the Brahman gets his living out of the offerings made to the *thakur* and the contribution of the orthodox, or is supported by the zamindar.

A shrine (*dargah*) or tomb of some holy Muhammadan *fakir* is often to be met with on the wayside, with the hut or homestead of its keeper near at hand. Passers-by of all creeds and denominations throw in their cowries and pice. And if the sanctity of the deceased be much out of the common, the tomb may even be a valuable source of revenue. In that case it is treated as a subject of property which passes by inheritance from owner to owner, and the keeper is paid by salary from the person entitled to it. Generally, however, the keeper of the place alone is interested in it, and transmits his humble effects to his heirs.

In a large village there will be a *mandap, i.e.* a spacious open-sided covered-in room, in a sense, a vestry-room, where the village *púja* festivals are celebrated and other village gatherings occur. Sometimes the *mandap* is a *pakka* structure, the roof being supported on brick-built pillars. But more often it is of bamboo and thatch. It is usually kept up by the zamindar.

V.

RURAL CRIME.

RURAL crime does not assume any very varied forms. One of the commonest is dacoity (*dakaiti*), *i.e.* gang robbery. The *badmashes* or bad characters of two or three adjoining villages are, to a certain extent, associated together. They are ostensibly ryots, or sons of ryots, and like everyone else about them are more or less dependent upon agricultural labour for their livelihood. Though it generally happens that they become to their neighbours the objects of a somewhat undefined suspicion, still, as a rule, they manage to maintain their social position whatever that may be. Their method of operation is very simple. Some one whose

reputation for accumulated wealth makes him worth attacking is selected. A dark or stormy night is taken for the purpose, and then the band assembles under a *pīpal* tree, or at some other convenient place of assignation. Each man wears a mask or is in some other manner disguised, and carries some weapon: *lāttees* are the most common, but sometimes quaint old swords of an almost forgotten shape make their appearance; and instruments specially contrived for cutting open mat walls and probing thatch are brought out. From the place of assembling the gang proceeds to the victim's homestead, and surrounds it; next, at a signal, when all is ready, the more daring rush forward and break into the homestead by cutting through the matting, or forcing down a door, or climbing over the roof. The males who may be sleeping in the outside verandah are immediately seized and bound. Those who are inside are not always so easily disposed of, because they will probably have been aroused by the uproar before their assailants reach them. In a very few

seconds, however, as the attacking party is invariably greatly superior in force, and by no means scrupulous in the use of their weapons, these too succumb and are bound hand and foot or are otherwise secured.

Then commences the looting, which must be effected very hurriedly, for a little delay might suffice to bring the whole village down upon the robbers. A torch or two is lighted, *pitaras* forced open, every likely corner is searched. The floor of the huts is hastily probed or is dug up to discover the buried pot, which is a favourite form of safe for the custody of jewels or of spare cash when it happens that the ryot has any. Or perhaps the owner of the homestead is compelled by torture to reveal the place of his valuables: for instance he is rolled naked backwards and forwards over hot ashes, or a burning torch is held under his armpits, &c. All the booty which can in these modes be laid hold of is promptly carried off, each man loading himself with what he succeeds in putting his hands

upon. If there is a probability of immediate pursuit, everyone will go his own way, and take care of himself, and all will meet again subsequently in some previously determined spot to divide the spoil. If there is no such danger, the *dakaits* will at once go to a place of meeting (in a jungle if possible) and settle each man's share of the stolen property.

The police are almost entirely powerless to prevent these outrages, and they cannot always be said to be successful in detecting the perpetrators of them. There can be no doubt that in some parts of Bengal the profession of a *dákait* is sufficiently lucrative to tempt idle men to brave its risks. If somewhat irregular measures were not taken to suppress it, probably it would attain unendurable dimensions. Accordingly, the police may sometimes be found waging a warfare against *dákaiti* which is very characteristic. When information of a *dákaiti* having been committed reaches the thannah, a Darogah with a few *chaukidars* goes at once to the spot. He satisfies himself by inquiries as to who

are the reputed *badmashes* of the neighbourhood, and then immediately arrests some one, two, or three of them, such as he thinks will be most likely, under the circumstances of the case, to serve his purposes. Having thus got these unfortunate men into their hands, the police, by promises of pardon coupled with material inducements, which, in most cases, amount to a refined system of torture, procure them to make confessions and to implicate a great many others of the previously ascertained *badmashes*. The next step, of course, is to arrest all these, and to search their houses. At this stage of matters the complainant is in a position such as to render him a ready tool of the police. He will have a nest of hornets about his ears for some years to come, unless he succeeds in bringing a conviction home to each of the arrested men. So he seldom finds much difficulty in recognising in the searched houses articles which had been stolen from him. If, however, for any cause he cannot at first do this, the police have recourse to a very simple expedient for the purpose

of assisting him. They obtain from the bazar, or elsewhere, articles similar to those which the complainant says he has lost; and, under colour of watching the prisoners' houses, manage to get these articles secreted in or about the premises according as opportunity may offer itself. About this time the Sub-Inspector or other officer charged, as it is termed, with the investigation of the case, comes upon the ground. Also the prisoners, who have all of them been separately and constantly worked upon by the police, have generally become pliable enough to confess in accordance with the story marked out for them, and sometimes even are persuaded to point out (under the guidance, of course, of the *chaukidars*) the very places where the imported articles have been concealed! These places are generally, for obvious reasons, more often outside the accused persons' homestead than inside, such as in tanks, trunks of trees, under the soil of the *khēt*, &c. But sometimes opportunity serves for placing the articles inside the very huts of the dwelling.

The Inspector on his arrival thus finds his case complete; he takes it before the Magistrate; the evidence of the witnesses is written down; the articles are produced and sworn to. It seems that they have all been found in the prisoners' possession in consequence of information or clues afforded by the prisoners themselves, and the case of the prosecution is overwhelming. But even the very last nail is riveted by the prisoners, or most of them, confessing in the most satisfactory manner possible. Thereupon they are all committed to take their trial at the Sessions in due course. On entering the prison walls the state of things changes very much. The committed prisoners are relieved from the immediate personal supervision and control of the police. They converse freely with one another and with other prisoners waiting trial; they also communicate with Mookhtars or law agents, concerning their defence. They find that whether innocent or guilty, they have made great fools of themselves by confessing at the police dictation;

and the upshot of it is, that when the trial in the Sessions Court comes on they all plead not guilty, and say that their former confessions were forced from them by the police. This, however, avails them but little. Their recorded confessions are put in against them, and the Court with the remark that prisoners always do retract when they get into jail, holds that the confessions are supported by the discovery of the articles, convicts the prisoners, and sentences them to long terms of imprisonment or transportation.

When a case of this character occurs the Sessions Judge is not usually quite unconscious of the police practices in these matters, but he is almost invariably, in the particular case before him (and often rightly), so convinced of the guilt of the persons whom he is trying that he is astute enough to find out reasons why the confessions produced in evidence were made voluntarily, and why the alleged finding of the stolen articles may be depended upon. On a comparatively recent occasion of this kind the Judge said that he could not help seeing that the police

had behaved very cruelly to the prisoners, and had made them illegal promises of pardon in order to extort confessions; but still he thought that the discovery of the articles on the premises of the different prisoners (effected, by the way, in a more than ordinarily suspicious manner) entirely corroborated and rendered trustworthy the confessions which were made.[1]

[1] The mode of action on the part of the police, which is above illustrated, is a survival from former times, and is from its nature very difficult of riddance. The tendency of the Bengal policeman seems to be to force out truth rather than to find out truth. He is not apt at building up a case with independent and circumstantial materials drawn from various sources, and would certainly never willingly venture to present to the court, which has to try the case, merely the constituent materials, leaving the court itself to put them together. He feels it necessary to take care that some, if not all, of the witnesses should narrate the whole case from beginning to end. There is also extreme readiness in the lower classes of Bengalis, when under coercion or pressure, as in all whose civilization is of a servile order, to say anything even to the extent of accusing themselves, which they may be led to think will smooth their way out of immediately impending danger; and this is coupled with extraordinary quickness at perceiving the existing state of matters, comprehending what will be agreeable to those who care for their information, and making their statement consistent therewith. The police are, therefore, naturally under

Little hesitation is felt even at this day in vindicating family honour by taking life. Sometimes this is done in a most savage and brutal manner. A story constructed from the facts, slightly altered, of a case which actually occurred not long ago will serve as an illustration. An enterprising young Muhammadan, who had been in the habit of finding employment in some district remote from his native village, and who may be called Abdool, returned home on one occasion for a few weeks as he had several times done before; and while at home he stayed in his family homestead, where his mother, a brother, a

great temptation to avail themselves of a means of evidence which lies so near to their hands, and is so entirely adapted to their purpose. But bad as confessions of prisoners, evidence of accomplices, declarations of dying men, who have played a part in criminal occurrences, generally are in Europe, they are for the cause just mentioned greatly worse in Bengal. They cannot safely be relied upon even as against the speakers themselves, except as a sort of estoppel, unless they be corroborated. As against others they are hardly of any value at all. If the circumstances of native society were not such that suspicion commonly directs the police to the real offenders, convictions on a basis such as that exemplified in the text could not be tolerated.

cousin, and others resided. He visited his old friends and, amongst others, he seems to have been received with especial cordiality by the members of a Hindu family who may be designated as the family of one Kissori Mohun. Almost every evening he used to go to their homestead, and played cards or dice with them in the *baithakkhana* up to a late hour of the night. One night, however, just as his home visit was drawing to a close, he had not done so and he was sleeping in the outside verandah of the family *bari* in company with his brother, the other members of the family being inside the huts; about midnight some stranger came up to the verandah, aroused him, spoke to him, and then the two went away together; the brother who was lying asleep near him was partially awakened by the voices, saw the two men go off in the dull light of the night, but troubled himself no more about the matter, and went to sleep again. In the morning Abdool was nowhere in the *bari*, and in fact was never after seen again. Still the members of his family did not fee

any anxiety about him. They supposed that he had for some reason gone back to the place of his employment without giving them notice of his intentions, for he had on a former occasion acted precisely in this manner.

Four or five days after this disappearance of Abdool two boys who were tending cattle grazing in the *māth*, found a skull lying in a short sward of *arhar* not very far from the bank of the Ganges. The skull was entirely denuded of flesh, but was stained with recent blood, and had the teeth in the jaw. The news of the discovery soon reached the village, and Abdool's mother and brother immediately went to the spot. They suspected at once that the skull was Abdool's, and afterwards became satisfied that it was so by reason of some peculiarities in the teeth. Information was sent to the nearest police thannah. The usual kind of investigation took place. Several arrests were made and confessions obtained. Two of these could be depended upon, so far as the confessing persons

were concerned, though not further; and corroborating evidence manufactured by the police was of an unusually despicable character. From these confessions it appeared that what had happened was as follows: Kissori Mohun's people had formed the notion that Abdool had become too intimate with a young married girl of their family, and they determined, before he left the village, to put him out of the way. So on the eve (so to speak) of his departure, a dependent of Kissori Mohun's was sent at night to invite him to play as usual; the attraction was great and he went. On his arrival at the *bari* he was surrounded in the darkness by half a dozen members of Kissori Mohun's family, who were prepared for the task; a cloth was twisted round his neck by which he was dragged into the *baithakkhana*, all present fell upon him, and killed him by pounding him with their elbows. They then carried the body towards the Ganges, and in order to secure its rapid disappearance without identification, they stopped half way in the *māth*,

hacked it into small pieces with a *dao* which they had brought with them, put the pieces into a sack so carried them to the bank of the river, and there shot them out into the swift flowing current. But, unluckily for them, in the hurry, and the darkness, without noticing the fact, they left the skull in the *māth*; jackals and vultures speedily bared the bone and removed the features of the face, but enough remained to furnish the clue, which led to the discovery of the savage deed.[1]

But there is a class of purely agrarian outrage, which is, perhaps, more common than any other form of rural crime. Its root lies in the complex relations which connect the tillers of the soil with one another, and with the rent-receiver. A strong sense of vested right unprotected by the arm of the law leads in India as elsewhere to the endeavour at vindicating it by violence. Very often a ryot, taking advantage of a dispute between the zamindar and

[1] This was the case of the prosecution; and it was only established against one out of several persons accused.

his neighbour, will get the plots of the latter, or a portion of them (probably on higher terms) transferred to him at the *kachahri*, but will be obliged to resort to force in order to obtain or keep the actual possession of them. Or one of several co-sharers, cultivators, will pay the entire rent of a holding, and failing to obtain from one of the others the quota due from him, will forcibly prevent him from tilling his plot till he pays—a very effective mode of coercion when it can be exercised, for the sowing period of the year may be limited, and not to till then means starvation. The following true narrative is an example :—

Fakir Baksh, Somed Ali, Sabid Ali, and others, were co-sharers of a certain *jot*, or holding of land, as representing the different branches of what was originally one family. There had been a great deal of disputing about the shares, and when Fakir Baksh was about to prepare his allotment for sowing, Sabid Ali, who had paid up the full rent, or at any rate more than his share, and felt aggrieved at

Fakir Baksh's refusal to recoup him, determined to prevent him from cultivating his land until he did so. In this state of things, at sunrise one morning, Fakir Baksh and his three kinsmen, Somed Ali, Sharaf Ali, and Imdaz Ali, began ploughing with four yoke of bullocks, and almost immediately afterwards, while they were so engaged and unarmed Sabid Ali came upon them with eight or nine men at his back and attacked them with the intention of driving them off the ground. The members of Sabid's Ali's party were all armed with *lattees*, except one Taribullah, who had a gun, and they therefore expected to meet with an easy victory. Somed Ali, however, and Sharaf, who were both unusually powerful young men, left their ploughs, and boldly facing the enemy actually managed to wrench a *lattee* each from the hands of their opponents. With these they laid about them so lustily and with so much skill that Sabid Ali and his men were forced to retreat. Close in their rear was a shallow *khal* somewhat awkward

to cross, and Taribullah, in desperation, raised his gun, which was loaded with small shot, fired and hit the advancing Somed Ali full in the chest, killing him on the spot. By the same discharge Sharaf Ali was seriously wounded. On the happening of this catastrophe the affray ended. Sabid Ali's party, thoroughly frightened at the results of the expedition, dispersed as best they could without having attained their object.

A story of much the same kind may be told wherein the zamindar's people figure as the aggressors. A *mauzah*, or village, had been sold in execution of a decree, and a stranger had purchased it. This new zamindar very soon took measures for enhancing the rents of his ryots. He was successful in obtaining *kabulyats* at increased rates from several ryots, but the headman of the village (*mandal*), whose example was most influential, sturdily held out and led the opposition. It was resolved that he should be coerced; so at day-break, one morning, a party of the zamindar's peons and adherents, armed

with *lattees* and guns, started from the *kachahri* for the *mandal's* homestead, with the view of capturing him and carrying him off. This homestead fortunately was a substantial one, and the different huts were connected by pretty strong bamboo fencing. Thus the *bari* admitted of being defended by a relatively small force. In the *mandal's* family were four or five grown-up men, besides the women and children, and in addition to these, as it happened, two friends come from a distance had passed the previous night under their host's roof. No one had left the *bari* when the zamindar's party arrived. The latter, very largely out-numbering the men of the homestead, with threats of an abominable kind called upon the *mandal* to surrender, but these threats only nerved the *mandal* and his friends to resistance in defence of the female apartment. For a time the attacking party seemed unable to do anything, until taunted by their leader they at last made a rush, broke down the fence at one corner of the homestead, and fired a gun at the men inside, of whom

two fell. The immediate effect, however, was not that which might have been anticipated, for one of the remaining defenders promptly seizing the gun which had just been fired, knocked down its owner; two of his companions laid hold each of an opponent, and the zamindar's party forthwith decamped, leaving three of their number prisoners in the hands of the *mandal* and his kinsmen. The cost of the victory was severe, for it was found that one of the two men who had been shot was dead.

In another case the *mandal* of a village had, as the ryots thought, been taking too much the side of the zamindar in certain matters, and it was therefore resolved in "committee" that he should be punished and warned. A certain number of the ryots were charged with the duty of giving him a beating at the first convenient opportunity, and the whole assembly undertook to hold them harmless as far as money might afterwards serve to do so. A few days after this, one evening, when it was dusk,

these commissioned ryots managed to meet the *mandal* as he was alone driving two or three small cows home from the *khet*. They succeeded in getting into an altercation with him, and beat him, leaving him on the ground, from which he never again rose alive.

A last instance of rural crime may be given in the shape of a faction fight. As frequently happens in some parts of Bengal, the ryots and tenure-holders of a certain village and its neighbourhood were divided into two parties, the one consisting of the partizans and adherents of the Rajah, ten-anna shareholder of the *zamindari* or ten-anna zamindar, as he was termed, and the other of those of the Ghoses, the six-anna zamindars. One Asan and his brother Mānick, who lived in one homestead and held land under the Ghoses, had had a quarrel with one Kalidas, a substantial ryot on the Rajah's side, relative to the common boundary between their respective plots of ground; and some effort had been made by the Rajah's people to make Asan give up

his jote to Kalidas or to enter into *zimma* relations with the Rajah. Nothing, however, came of this for many months, until one morning early four or five *lathials* of the Rajah's party came to Asan's homestead on some vaguely explained errand. Most of Asan's neighbours were like himself, adherents of the Ghoses, but one or two and among these a man called Kafi Mahomed, whose *bari* was only two or three hundred yards distant from that of Asan, belonged to the Rajah's faction. The *lathials* apparently, not succeeding at once in their mission to Asan, retired for a time to the *bari* of their friend Kafi Mahomed, sending meanwhile a message to the Rajah's *kachahri*. Two or three hours passed. Asan and his brother Mānick, having taken their mid-day meal, were resting in their *bari*, when suddenly an uproar occurred—four or five men rushed in to seize Asan and Mānick, who then found some 100 or 150 men had come up to the assistance of the *lathials* of the morning, and were approaching in force from the south side to the attack of the

bari. The brothers attempted to escape, and Mānick was fortunate enough to get away on the north; but Asan was laid hold of by the men and was carried off in triumph to the main body of the assailants, who were collected on a *banga*, running east and west on the south side of the *bari*. Mānick then came up with some of the Ghosé party, whom he had hurriedly collected, and, seeing his brother a prisoner in the hands of the enemy, rushed forward to save him. He was, however, almost immediately speared by two men in succession. On this Asan got free and laid hold of one of these men, but was beaten off, receiving himself a slight spear wound in his hand. On Mānick's falling, the cry was raised that a man had been killed, and as is not unusual on such occasions, the attacking party immediately fled. Mānick died a few minutes after he was stabbed, and thus ended the conflict, as suddenly as it had begun.

VI.

ADMINISTRATION AND LAND LAW.

Of course doings such in kind as those which have been lately narrated (generally, though not always), come sooner or later under the cognizance of the police and their English superior officers. But the general peace of the village is, as a rule, preserved by the influence of the zamindar and the *panchayat*. The English official is personally seldom seen in the remoter country village. The reason for this is very plain. A zillah district in Bengal, which is sometimes roughly compared with an English county, comprises an area of from two to three thousand square miles, and has a population of say from one to two million souls, while the

county of Suffolk, to take an example, has only an area of 1,454 square miles and a population of some 360,000. Now all the European officers in a whole zillah, will be one magistrate and collector, with three or four joint, assistant, and deputy magistrates, one district and sessions judge, one additional judge, one small cause court, or subordinate judge, one superintendent of police, one assistant superintendent of police, and one medical officer, say eleven or twelve in number, of whom about one-half are kept by their duties at the zillah station.

It would be impossible, in a few lines, to convey any very accurate idea of the functions of the magistrate and of the rest of the executive officers. Nor is it needful to attempt to do so here. Their administrative powers are very considerable. The magistrate and collector especially is to the people almost a king in his district. His name and authority travel into the remotest corners, though he himself in his cold weather tours can only visit comparatively few spots of it in the year. And, generally, the awe in

which a magistrate or European official of any grade is held by the people is very great. It must, however, in truth be said, that the feeling of the ordinary village ryot towards these officials has not much affection in it; and this is by no means matter for surprise. It is a very exceptional thing for one of them to possess a real command of the colloquial vernacular. To acquire it in any case, many years are, as we all know, requisite under the most favourable circumstances of intercourse between the foreigner and the people; and these do not exist for many civilians. Scarcely any one thus is able to converse easily with the ordinary ranks of the people. The Englishman, moreover, is awkward, cold, reserved; his bearing becomes, in the eyes of the native, at any rate, abrupt and peremptory. He knows really next to nothing of the habits, standpoints, and modes of thought of the mass of the people, though his position and circumstances too often lead him to entertain the opposite opinion. Want of consideration flows from want of intimacy.

In ways of life and in associations which govern his conduct and opinions he is separated by an impassable gulf from the people of the country. He stands upon a platform apart and looks down upon them. Whenever he makes a movement of approach it is with a feeling of superiority which cannot be concealed. In most cases he does not care to conceal it. He is self-reliant. All persons around him have to give way to his will in the arrangements which he makes either for business or pastime. Too often, in small matters, their feelings and wishes are needlessly disregarded simply because they are misapprehended or not suspected. On the other hand, his probity and uprightness are next to never impugned. But the result is that he is certainly not loved. Rather it may be said that, to the eyes of the native, the English official is an incomprehensible being, inaccessible, selfish, overbearing, and irresistible.

However, for the causes already mentioned, the great bulk of the people in the country villages have no personal relations with the European officer of

any kind. The small zamindar, who has been before described, or the naib of a larger man, is commonly the person of ruling local importance. And there are no taxgatherers even:[1] all the taxation of the country takes the form of land-revenue, stamps, customs, and excise, for the assessed taxes, on the whole, are insignificant, and certainly never reach the mofussil villages. The excise tends to make the *tari* somewhat dearer to the ryot than it otherwise would be, a result which is hardly a grievance, but it also increases the price of salt, a prime necessary of life, and this is a serious misfortune. The customs scarcely touch the ryot. Stamps, for special reasons, he has very little objection to, and the revenue is inseparable from his rent, so that, on the whole, with the agricultural population, the incidence of taxation is chiefly felt in three modes: in the payment of *rent*, in the price of *salt*, and in the *stamps*, needed for every proceeding in a court of justice or public office, or for a copy of any paper

[1] This was written before the imposition of the license tax.

filed in any court or office, or document of agreement, or receipt, &c.

Omitting the latter as being in some degree of a voluntary character, the two others remain as the two great burdens upon the ryot. It has been explained, in the foregoing pages, how extremely poor the ordinary ryot is, and how he depends upon the *mahajan* system for the means even of paying his rent. It seems impossible, then, at first sight, to devise any method by which the public revenue of the country can be increased by contributions from this class of the community. Lately an attempt has been made in this direction by the imposition of a road cess. The cess may be roughly described as a small rateable addition to the rent of each ryot which he has to pay to his rent-receiver through whom it is eventually transmitted to Government, together with a further small addition to be paid by the rent-receiver himself. There are many very grave objections to this form of increased taxation intrinsically, but the fatal objection to it is that it is

capriciously unequal; it exacts more from the ryot who is already highly taxed by his rent than from him who is less so. And it is not possible, by any general rules of exception, to bring about even approximate equality in this respect.

If the amount of taxation must needs be increased, it can only be done so equitably by a contrivance which shall have the effect of apportioning the tax to the means of the payer. While the general body of ryots are miserably poor and can hardly bear the existing taxation, there are no doubt many among them who are comparatively well off, some of them being rent-receivers, in some manner or another, as well as cultivating ryots; and there are besides, in every village, well-to-do persons, petty dealers, and others, of more or less accumulated means. These all have a margin of means which may be said to be at present untaxed relative to their neighbours, the ryots, and which will fairly enough admit of being taxed if some equitable plan of making the levy could be discovered.

It might, perhaps, be imagined that something in the nature of an income-tax would answer this purpose. But the fact is that an income-tax must fail in India, even if it be only for the reason that the necessary machinery for assessing and collecting it is inevitably corrupt and oppressive. But probably the difficulty might be overcome by making an assessing body out of the village *panchayat*, who should be charged with the duty of assessing the means of every resident of the village above a certain minimum amount; and by then allotting to each village certain local burdens of a public character, which should be discharged out of rates to be levied from the persons assessed under the superintendence of local officers. In this way some of the work now done at the cost of Government for local objects out of the national funds might be better carried out than it is at present, and even additional work done by the village itself, and so the money in the hands of Government would in effect be correspondingly increased. This machinery would in particular be

singularly appropriate for meeting the emergency of famines.[1]

Another very useful end would possibly be served by the creation of something in the nature of parochial administration. The general tendency to engage in litigation might be in some measure damped by providing occupation of this sort; if it be the case, as many well-informed persons believe, that the unquestionable prevalence of litigation is due to the idleness in which the ryot spends the larger portion of the year.

There are, however, much more potent causes of litigation existing in Bengal than the leisure of the ryots; and as one of them, namely, the nature of the land tenure, very greatly affects the different phases of village life, some account of it will not be out of place here.

In the foregoing pages[2] the designation "zamindar"

[1] This suggestion was expanded by the writer in a paper read before the East India Association in 1877.

[2] Much of the matter in the immediately following paragraphs appeared in a paper which was read at a meeting of the Social Science Association of Bengal at Calcutta in 1873.

has been given to the person who collects rents from ryots by virtue of any sort of right to enjoy the rents, and it will be presently seen that such a right may be of various kinds and denominations. The system throughout all India is, that a portion of the rent, which every cultivator of the soil pays for his plot, goes to Government as land revenue. In the whole, the Government of India receives about 20½ millions sterling per annum in the shape of land revenue. Three very different modes of collecting this prevail in, and are characteristic of the three great Presidencies respectively. In Bengal the amount of this revenue and the method of collecting it formed the subject of the famous Permanent Settlement of 1793. Previously to the assumption of the Government of the country by the English, a land revenue, more or less defined in its characters —often spoken of as a share in the produce of the land—had from time immemorial been paid to the established Government of the day, Hindu or Muhammadan, as the case might be. The

collection of the revenue and its payment to Government was effected by officers who, in later days were, in Bengal, generally called zamindars, each being responsible only for the revenue of the *zamindari*, *taluq*, or otherwise named district, of which he was certainly the fiscal head. Whether he was anything more than this, whether he was regarded by the people as the proprietor, in any degree, of the *zamindari*, or whether he himself looked upon the land of the *zamindari* as belonging to him personally, are questions which, perhaps, cannot now be satisfactorily answered. As a matter of fact the son, on the death of his father, usually succeeded to his father's functions, and it was avowedly the principal object of the legislation effected in 1793 to turn all these persons into hereditary landed proprietors, whether they were so before or not. Under the Permanent Settlement an engagement was entered into by the Government with each existing zamindar by the terms of which, on the one hand, the zamindar became bound to pay a certain *jama*, or fixed

amount of money, assessed upon his *zamindari* as land revenue; and, on the other, the Government recognised him as hereditary proprietor of the land, and undertook never to alter his *jama*. At the same time the Government required the zamindar to respect the rights of the cultivator of the soil.

The results of this new arrangement will be pursued presently. For the moment it may be asserted positively that the zamindar never did before the Permanent Settlement (and that he does not to this day) stand towards the ryot in the position which the English landlord occupies relative to his tenant. The area of his *zamindari* covered large districts of country, and was reckoned not in *bighas* (the unit of land measure = one-third of an acre) but in communities of men, *mauzahs*. The money proceeds of the *zamindari* were not spoken of as rent, but as the *jamas* (collections) of the included villages. The assets of a *zamindari* made up of the *jamas* of sub-tenures, and the collections of the villages, scarcely, if at all, resembled the

rental of an English estate. The zamindar himself was a superior lord enjoying personal privileges, and through officers, exercising some powers of local administration. The populations of the villages in his *zamindari* were his subjects (ryots), and it is not until you get within the *mauzah* itself that you find any one concerned with the actual land. Some comparison might be made between the feudal lord, his vassals, and serfs, on the one side, and the zamindar, his gantidars and ryots, on the other; but how little the two cases of zamindar and landlord ever have been parallel may be perceived at once from a simple illustration. When an English landed proprietor speaks of a *fine estate* he mentally refers to the extent of the acreage, the fertility of the soil, the beauty of the landscape, and so on; not at all to the tenants, the labourers, or the dwelling-houses which may be upon the land; whereas, if a Bengali zamindar makes a like remark, he has in his mind the number and importance of the villages which form the zamindari and their