

A Wanderer of the Ganges

in and out of the worshipping throng, as he followed the little footpath by the water's brink. He was of those who all the year long tread the bank of the Ganges, from her source in the mountains to her mouth among the forest swamps, and back again to her source in the mountains. On that day's walk he happened to be passing again through her most sacred city, but that seemed hardly to interrupt his contemplation of her holiness.

"Yours is the Order I should belong to by nature," I said, giving him a halfpenny, for which he had not asked.

"For you it would be easy and difficult," he answered, in good English, and led me up many steps and along galleries overhanging a cliff of ruinous masonry to a cool courtyard, where Brahmans are daily fed on boiled rice and salt, laid out upon a plate of stitched banana leaves.

"Obviously it would be easy for you as for any one," he went on as we climbed up, after his meal, to the top of the flat roof where a little shelter had been erected for shade and worship; "but for you it would be difficult also, because you hang upon the world, and your soul is entangled in illusions and desires. Like all your people, you call the unreal things realities, and for reality you have no name."

Having devoted himself for a while to prayer, he continued: "You see this low parapet? Many

A City of God

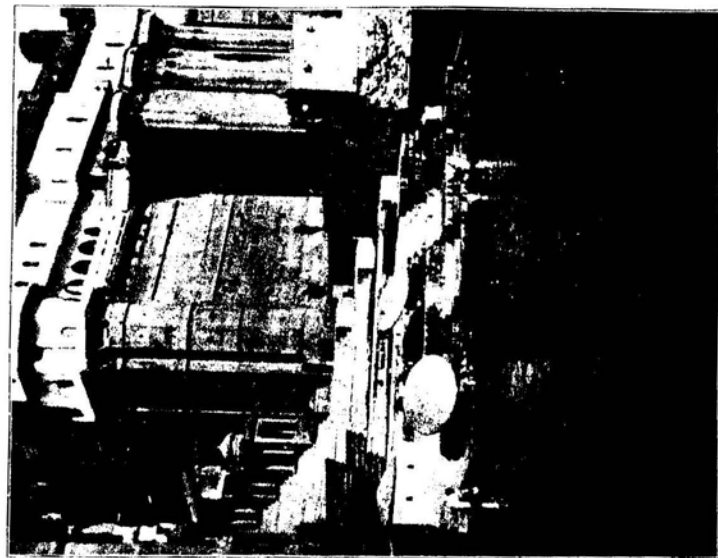
years ago a boy was seated upon it reading a Sanscrit book of wisdom, when, it is thought, a monkey, inspired by the god, pushed him, and he fell. Look over and you will see the projecting slab half way down which he broke as he fell. They gathered up his shattered body, and laid it, almost alive, in the Ganges. I cannot doubt that he attained at once to salvation, his soul returning to the universal consciousness, as the space inside a pot returns to universal space when the pot is broken. And in his salvation I may claim a share, for I was his father."

It was noon, and the sun blazed upon the roof. Green parrots flew screaming among the trees of a garden far below us. The hum of the city arose, pierced with loud cries, and over the far-off iron bridge across the Ganges a train was slowly passing with prolonged and shrieking whistle. But still the crowding pilgrims moved down the steps to the water's edge, and bathed and offered flowers, and stretched up their hands in silent adoration, or recited ancient and sacred words aloud.

"It is possible for you," I said, after a long time, "to desire escape from the danger of rebirth, and to speak of being merged in the universal consciousness as salvation. But how about these people who come in millions to the river? All their lives they struggle only to live. From day to day their thought is only to keep alight their little glimmer



THE EVENING PRAYER.



THE RIVER WALLS.

The Vow of Gentleness

of life, and hand it on to others who are their children. How is it to be supposed that they come to the river so wearied of existence as to pray only to be saved from being born again? I myself, who am one of them, would walk in the opposite direction if I thought the river was going to extinguish my life, and for choice I should rather be born a mouse than nothing."

"You remind me," he answered, "of those worshippers of Vishnu, who pray in great humility, 'Let me be born a cat or dog, if only I may love thee, O God.' It is a great prayer, and you may join in it, for, being a wanderer through the world, you can always hope to become a religious man, avoiding the many-sided degradation of which people tell me who have visited the West. I, too, was once engaged in common business, managing large estates in this very city, and I know the rich men in the streets, though they cannot now tell who passes them so close. But each day I gave much time to contemplation, and I took the vow of kindness to every living thing, just as you see those Jain monks there who are feeding ants with sugar, and would not wittingly kill a cholera germ; or like those wandering Sisters of the faith who wear a strip of white felt across their mouths lest they should breathe a midge to death, and carry soft brooms in their hands to sweep the place where they are about to sit, lest the weight of their frail

A City of God

bodies should crush an irrecoverable life. By such means, even in your present body, you may begin to penetrate the illusions of existence, and at rare moments may perceive some gleam from what one of your poets has called the white radiance of eternity.

"As for these pilgrims," he went on, "they are like a woman who lights her cow-dung fire at evening, not considering as she cooks that the flame is composed of ten divisions, each symbolic of a faculty of the soul. Or they are like a man who walks by the light of sun and moon, not considering that sun and moon are nothing but symbols of creative power, as are men and women, fire and water, heat and cold. Or they are like the nautch girls who have a separate song for every hour of the day and night, but do not know that their songs are only the pulses of eternity. In cooking, in light, and in song, each finds an ignorant joy, and in the same way these pilgrims have a dim sense of righteousness and purification in the outward symbols of truths that they will never learn in their present life. By such means, for a few hours together, they may free themselves from the illusions of existence, and in some cases even reach the state of those highly religious men who devour putrid cats, to prove that in their estimation all material things are alike, all being equally unimportant.



A PLACE OF PRAYER.

(Face p. 96B.)



The Example of Janaka

"But for people like you," he continued with pity, "what can one say? You are still ensnared by political anxieties, artistic interests, and the desires of personality. You have far to go before, by contemplation and hard discipline, you perceive how like happiness is to its opposite—how accurately the joy of existence may be compared to a fire-fly wandering in an unlimited vault of darkness, or to the inch of cool shadow thrown by a snake's head upon a burning desert. Till you can reach that supreme state when birth, and life, and death have no separate meaning, you have far to go. But there is always hope for one who will begin by overcoming earthly desire. For, as you may have heard, there has been one being and one alone who in this flesh attained to salvation without death, and he was Janaka, the father of Sita, Rama's wife. He sat still, you remember, with one hand in a blazing fire and the other upon a woman's breast, showing that to him the one was the same as the other, and both indifferent."

We descended, and I went away in the rapid twilight, sorrowful because I was not in the least like Janaka. But as I went, I came to the courtyard of a temple to Shiva, the dissolver of existence, and there in the darkness I found a lonely woman walking round and round a sacred tree, driven by the blind desire to bear a child. So untameable among the unlearned is the passion for life.

CHAPTER XV

THE PATIENT EARTH

"COLD!" I said, just for something to say, as I came out of the dak-bungalow into the thin January air before sunrise, and met an educated Indian, who said "Good morning!"

"Yes, sir," he answered. "You'd have thought it cold if you had slept where I did." And he pointed to a dusty place, where he had evidently been lying in front of the house.

"Why on earth did you sleep there?" I asked; "there was plenty of room inside."

"I'm a Famine official, and I have been living inside for some nights past," he answered. "But when I got back at nine o'clock last night, I found you were reading in one room and your boy had gone to sleep in the other, so I stayed out here."

"My boy!" I said. "Why, he sleeps everywhere! On the floor of my room, at the door—anywhere! Why didn't you come in?"

"Well, you see," he answered, with hesitation, "I saw you were an Englishman, and I knew that

Meaning of Famine

if I had come in, you'd have kicked me out, and I didn't want to be kicked out. That's why."

As I had been three months in India, I was not surprised, but as a patriot I found it hard to reply, so I turned the conversation to Famine and Relief.

We were in the United Provinces, where that season's famine was particularly bad. Mr. Theodore Morison has explained that in India the word "famine" is now equivalent only to a "suspension of agricultural industry." * "Now that the relief of the unemployed is undertaken by Government," he says, "it is not a fact that any considerable proportion of the people die of hunger when the agricultural industry is interrupted." In the United Provinces, then, agricultural industry was suspended, and the cause of the suspension was obvious. For close on four and a half months not a drop of rain had fallen, and day after day the sun rose and set in a sky as clear and hard as steel. Rain ought to have lasted well into October, and in December to have begun again, and here was the second week in January without a drop since August. The December harvest was lost, and the ground so hard that scarcely a quarter of the usual crops had been sown for the greater harvest due in March. The horror of past famines

* "The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province," p. 241. The whole of that most interesting book on village life in the United Provinces might be read in connection with this chapter.

The Patient Earth

is easily obliterated in India, for what would you expect of a people to whom history is but a sleep and a forgetting? But men who had known the course of Indian famines since the seventies told me that unless rain came within a fortnight that year's famine would be worse than any that India had ever suffered.*

Coming twenty or thirty miles south of the Jumna from Allahabad, where the Jumna and Ganges join, I had passed through a country that became continually more desert. It was nearly flat, and rather thickly covered with isolated thorns and the heavy mango trees, which yield a fruit much sought after by the villagers, but now regarded as a chief cause of cholera in famine time. So far, the trees had not been stripped bare for fodder, as I afterwards saw them round Delhi, and the cattle were still kept from the unholy butcher's hands by a diet of chopped millet stalks, with linseed for the milkers. The land was divided into tiny fields, about the size of one to four tennis-courts, marked off by earthen banks, along the top of which there is a right of way. Round the mud villages, wherever the wells still held water, some of these fields were green with potatoes or young wheat, or a tall bushy pulse with

* Mr. Theodore Morison thinks there is no evidence that famines are more frequent now than in the past, and he gives a summary of the very meagre records that have come down to us of eighteenth-century famines: *ibid.* chap. x.



A BULLOCK WELL.

[Face p. 272.]

The Patient Earth

The effect of drought can be foreseen, and it is one of the Government's recognized functions to keep people alive in famine. Preparations for relief had begun in October, and at the head of the administration stood Sir John Hewett, the Lieutenant-Governor, in whom all Indians felt a peculiar confidence. But apart from his special influence, it is in famine time, as I have noticed before, that the zeal and sympathy of our officials are seen at their best. Men who in ordinary seasons would treat all Indians alike with habitual contumely, are perfectly willing to die for them in their distress, and once I travelled in a cabin with a high legal official in Allahabad, not connected in any way with relief, whose voyage out was made more and more miserable, because at every port came the news of continued drought in the province. Such sympathy from above is a memory of our old land-owning traditions, a relic of noblesse and its obligations, and, as long as our superiority is as undisputed as a captain's or a curate's, we are particularly successful in exercising this devoted patronage.

As no rain fell, "test works" were established in December. On test works heavy tasks like road-making are set, and no payment is given unless the work is done. Nothing but real poverty and hunger will drive people to work of this kind, and so, when two thousand men were found to be labouring at each of the test works, it was assumed that



GOING TO WORK.



RELIEF SHELTERS.

[P. 100 P. 174.]

Relief Wages

hunger was general, and "a state of famine" was officially proclaimed. A state of famine implies relief works on which the Government pays a fixed rate of wages to all workers, and assistance of some kind is given to every one—women, children, babies, and the old, as well as the able-bodied workers. The rate is decided by the Famine Commissioner according to his estimate of the price of grain. In this case he had calculated the price of grain for the time being at 18 lb. (9 seers) to the rupee (1s. 4d.). By the "Wages Table for Public Works," which is as easy to work with and as indisputable as a table of logarithms, this price gave the rate of wages at 2d. a day for diggers, whether men or women (but hardly any women consent to dig), 1½d. a day for carriers of earth (chiefly women), 1d. for children, and ½d. a day for babies.*

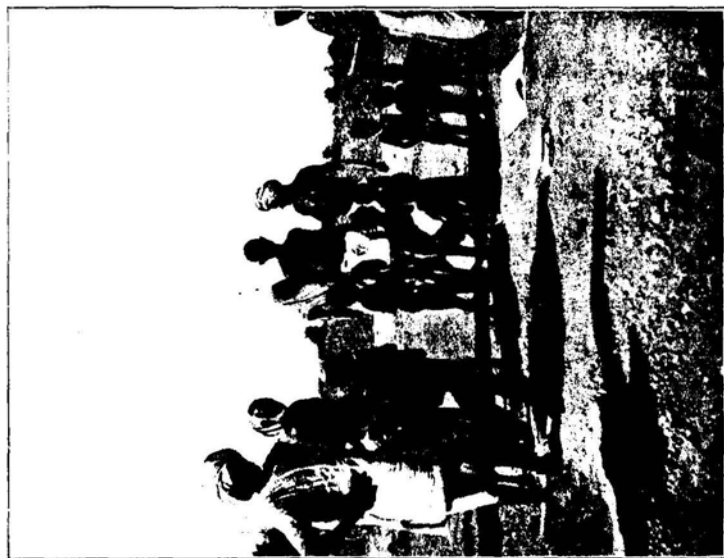
A few exceptional cases are specially treated. Any woman, for instance, who presents the works with a new baby is rewarded with a special donation of 1s. 4d. down. The wages were paid out of a guarded treasure tent every afternoon, and the people bought their own food from local merchants, who generally conveyed the grain on the backs of bullocks from Allahabad. The women ground it themselves, and made it into a sticky paste with a little salt, and that was what the families lived upon.

* If paid in grain the ration is 2 lb. 4 oz. for a man, 1 lb. 12 oz. for a woman, 1 lb. 4 oz. for a child.

The Patient Earth

Drinking water was served from kerosene tins by Brahmans so that none might be defiled.

Villagers in want of the wage looked round the plain at sunrise for a red flag hoisted on a long pole. That showed the "recruiting station," and there the families congregated in long rows, waiting to be allotted to gangers chosen from their own number. If any were already too starved for labour, they were fed up to working point ; but there were none of the brown skeletons here that I saw in Orissa, because, as the disaster was not sudden, the relief had begun while the people were still in good condition. When the gangs were arranged, they were led out to some allotted portion of the works, the fellow-villagers remaining together for the stimulus of public opinion. In other districts the relief works took the form of new roads, but where I was the engineers had designed two great bunds or dams to catch the monsoon rains over a large and gently sloping area. For a few months each year shallow tanks would thus be formed, which could be tapped as required for the fields at a lower level, and, when dry, would leave a surface enriched with silt and moisture. The dams were called Garhaiya Kalan and Telghana from neighbouring villages, and one was seven miles long, the other a mile and a half. If these were not sufficient for the winter's relief work, many more might be constructed, and the Government could always hope to



ON THE RELIEF WORKS.

Making a Dam

recover part of the outlay by the increased value of the land, for which the landowners (zemindars) would as usual have to pay about half their income as revenue. And as I thought of it, I sighed for the orgy of battleships and old age pensions which we should enjoy if only our Government at home could scoop up the unearned increment like that !

The process of constructing the dams was simple. Engineers had fixed the required levels and breadths by upright poles with strings stretched between them, and all that the workers had to do was to pile up earth till the strings were just covered and disappeared from sight. The earth was cut from both sides of the dam, and each digger's daily task, with the help of a woman carrier, was to clear a plot of earth 13 ft. by 8 ft., and 1 ft. deep. A pick and hoe were supplied by Government, but the natives refused the new English-made tools, not from any Swadeshi prejudice, but because they were rotten and would not cut. Women carried the earth in baskets made in the gaols and threw it on the dam. Weaker women, cripples and children broke up the clods, patting them rather gently with wooden implements till the surface was fairly smooth and solid. That was all the work. If the allotted task fell short, the payment of the whole gang of fellow-villagers was reduced, so that each worker had an interest in keeping all his friends up to the mark, and I did not hear any complaints about reductions.

The Patient Earth

What I did hear were the common complaints of humanity that bellies were not full, that dealers gave short weight, and that some parts of the ground were harder to dig than others. By that time there were twenty thousand workers on relief in this small district alone, and the numbers were daily increasing. When people have to be saved by averages of thousands together, how can you stop to give complete satisfaction? It is not so that heaven is filled.

The hope was that, as the famine had been taken in time, the cholera, which comes in the rearward of famine, might be avoided; and it was. The only definite disease I noticed was a very common paralysis of the knees, which crippled both men and women, but was not directly due to famine. The people themselves attributed it to a kind of pea they eat, and the pea had lately been forbidden to be sold on Government works. I had seen the same kind of paralysis in the stone quarries at Les Baux in Provence, where it was attributed to the dust; but it seems hard to connect the two cases. Otherwise, the people were as healthy as one can be on an average of $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ a day. Most of them went back to their own villages in the evening. For those who lived too far away tiny huts or coverts of bamboo frames thatched with straw were provided. When the dams were finished, they were to be "departmentally watched and maintained."

When I saw Sir John Hewett a short time

Loss by Famine

afterwards at Agra, he told me he had over 150,000 workers on the relief works, and over 310,000 receiving relief of one kind or another. Owing to the famine the yield of grain in his province was 3,500,000 tons below the normal; rice yielded only a quarter of the average; and £4,000,000 had been lost on the sugar and cotton crops combined. To meet the scarcity, Government had already suspended 120 lakhs (£800,000) of land revenue, a large part of which would be permanently remitted, and had advanced about £1,000,000 for relief, the purchase of seed, and sinking of temporary wells. Speaking at Lucknow a few days later (January 25, 1908) Sir John Hewett said :—

“These measures have given heart to the people, provided occupation in the villages at remunerative rates of wages, and prevented the occurrence of crime. The people themselves have met the crisis in the most commendable spirit. Never was there a famine in which the people and the Government and its officers showed a more united front than the present one. The ryots have toiled early and late to prepare and sow their fields for the spring harvest, and they have not toiled in vain.”

That speech was made, ~~however, after~~ blessed rain had fallen. When I was at Agra, one inch of rain suddenly fell in one night, and I shall not forget the joyful change upon the faces of the officials. It must be remembered also that, excellent as the administration of the famine relief was, and fully as

The Patient Earth

the Lieutenant-Governor deserves his popularity, the United Provinces is probably a district all the easier to govern just because it is comparatively backward, and out of its population of nearly 50,000,000 about 70 per cent. are directly dependent upon agriculture for their living.*

In his Financial Statement to the Viceroy's Council (March 20, 1908), Mr. E. N. Baker, now Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, calculated that the famine of the year had affected an area with a population of about 49 millions. It had raised the price of wheat so high that the export from India had almost wholly stopped, while the Burma rice crop had been diverted to India to take the place of what was lost. He estimated the amount of takāvi advances, or village loans for wells, seed, etc., for the preceding and present years together at 4 crores of rupees (about £2,650,000), and the amount of revenue suspended for the two years at nearly 360 lakhs (nearly £2,400,000), of which a large proportion must be permanently remitted. The total loss to the State by loss of revenue and increase of expenditure combined he estimated at 985 lakhs (about £6,633,000) for the two years. He added the significant comment :—

“The distress caused by high prices has undoubtedly affected all classes, and has pressed with great severity on

* For the figures at the last census and the division of occupations, see “The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province,” chap. i.

Rise in Prices

the urban populations, and on all who are dependent on small fixed incomes. But the more painful conditions which we associate with widespread famine in India—the emaciation, the aimless wandering, the disruption of social ties, and the increase of crime—are as yet so rare and exceptional as to be scarcely noticeable. The energy and determination with which the people have themselves faced the calamity have been observed on all hands, and we may reasonably hope that if the coming season is favourable the progress of the country will resume its normal course, without any such check as a famine on a similar scale would have caused in bygone times.”*

That sounds fairly simple, and, of course, its hopefulness was justified; but the whole question of the famine brought one up short against problems that may be common to all countries, but are perhaps more difficult in India, because under our rule the economic stages are becoming mixed together. What Mr. Baker, for instance, says about the pressure upon urban populations and small fixed incomes owing to the famine is true; but then the pressure appears to be permanent, famine or no famine. The rise in price of ordinary provisions seems to be continuous and general. I heard the same complaint in the Deccan, in Eastern Bengal, Calcutta, Benares, Allahabad, Delhi, and Lahore. Within twenty years wages may have doubled, but the cost of common food has quadrupled. In Bengal, for example, Mr. Chunder Nath Bose,

* Indian Financial Statement, 1908-9, p. 4.

The Patient Earth

Fellow of the Calcutta University, who knew the prices as a boy, says they have gone up fourfold or even tenfold for the staples of Bengal diet, such as rice, wheat, potatoes, brinjal, dal, fish, and, what is worst, for milk and ghi (clarified butter).* Many explanations were given me by English and Indian alike—the export of grain, the growth of jute, the fixing of the rupee, the increased circulation of rupees before 1893, and the transition from payment in kind to payment in cash. Some of these explanations are contradictory, and all of them have been vehemently contradicted. But as to the result, there appeared to be no doubt: life is becoming harder for all working people, especially for all workers on fixed incomes, and the only people who do not notice the increasing burden are the few with “rapidly expanding business” and those who could not possibly eat up to their incomes if they tried.

It was still more difficult to discover the real condition of the peasants and labourers in the country compared to the workpeople in the towns. In villages near the relief works, the cultivators (~~ryots~~) told me they paid sometimes one and sometimes ten rupees a bigha (rather over half an acre) to the zemindar, but their average rent appeared to

* “England’s Administration of India” (1907); the author, besides describing minutely the growing poverty of small officials, etc., with fixed incomes, dwells on the dyspepsia and ill-health from overstrain and unwholesome hours introduced by English habits, but especially on the increasing devastation of malaria.

Saving and Borrowing

be about two rupees a bigha (say 5s. 6d. an acre). Some said they thought they made or saved ten or even twenty rupees a year for marriages, births, funerals, ceremonies, and pilgrimages. But nearly all of them said they saved nothing. They admitted, however, that for a daughter's marriage a ryot would sometimes spend as much as two hundred rupees, borrowed from the zemindar or banya (money-lender), and when I asked one of them what he borrowed on if he had no savings, he replied that he borrowed on his "respectability," which is, I suppose, what most people borrow on. At the back of the borrower's mind, I think, is the continual hope for a "bumper" crop that will start him free again, but as the rate of interest without solid security was anything from 25 to 36 per cent. both here and in the Punjab, the ryot often became little more than a labourer in the employment of the money-lender, who advanced him seed and stock and took the crop. In a village outside Lahore I found the cultivators had agreed among themselves not to spend money on marriages in future, though these village festivals had been their only joy, and now, unless a juggler or reciter came round, they had nothing whatever to break the monotony of toil upon the land—not even a school. Neither were there any schools in the villages I visited near Allahabad, nor in those near Delhi.

But though in many cases the ryot had become

The Patient Earth

little better than a labourer in the employment of a landowner or money-lender, there was still a recognized class of landless labourers below him. In the villages near the relief works the labourer (who is always paid in kind) got $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. of grain for a day's work from dawn to dark with two hours off, and he could count on work most of the year if the rains were good. He also received one pair of shoes, one cloth, and ground for his hut, which he built himself. Some of the labourers told me of a further gift of three rupees a year (4s.) which seemed to be a kind of Christmas-box. If the wife worked she got $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of grain a day. Turned into money, at the village price of grain, the labourer's wage would thus be about 2d. a day, apart from his wife's earnings (say 1d.) and the extras I have mentioned.*

Beside the money-lender, the landowner, the cultivator, and the labourer, I found in every village one or two artisans, though the division of industry was not exact, and some of the artisans did a little agriculture as well. Nearly all villages seem to have a barber, a potter, a carpenter, "sweepers" or scavengers, and one or two priestly families to perform the common rites that mankind wants, to bless the harvest, foretell the weather, and control

* For the condition of the landless class, see "The Industrial Organization, etc.," p. 191, where Mr. Morison, commenting on Mr. Crooke's Report of 1888, also comes to the conclusion that the average value of a labourer's wage is now about 2 annas (2d.).



SWADESHI WEAVERS, RAMELAY MILLS.



SWADESHI WEAVERS, MADRAS HANDLOOMS.

[Face p. 234.]

Village Artisans

the local ghosts. In some villages I also found the handloom weaver, and in a Mohammedan village near Lahore the weaver told me he could make ten yards a day, which he valued at five annas, his wife spinning the yarn by walking to and fro as on a rope-walk. In the same village the carpenter was specially employed on making water-wheels. But the village artisans, as a rule, are not paid by the job but are allowed a fairly regular income by the village, each family contributing so many measures of grain at each of the two harvests for their support. For instance, the village priest gets about 5 lb. of grain per plough at harvest, but the potter gets 20 lb. per plough and the carpenter 50 lb.*

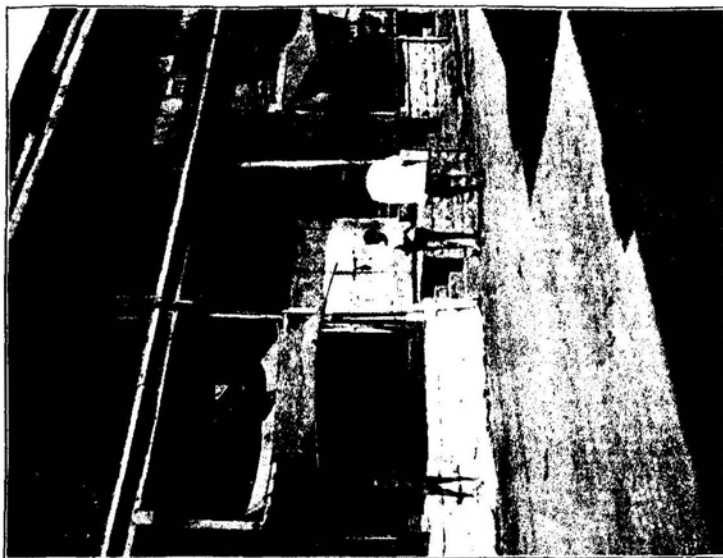
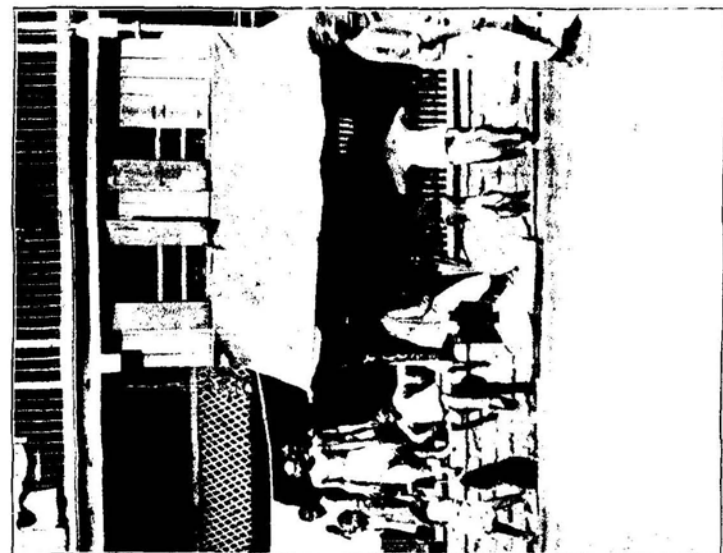
As far as mere money-value goes, it is not very hard to compare the earnings of village labourers and artisans with the earnings of workpeople in the towns. In the eighty or ninety cotton mills of Bombay, for instance, the average man's wages are 18 rupees a month, or a little over 10*d.* a day; a woman's highest wage is a fraction under 7*d.* a day, and half-time children, nominally over nine years old and under fourteen, get 2½*d.* a day, which is more than the average labourer's wage in the village. At a mill in Delhi I found the wages were less—12 rupees a month instead of 18 for men, and 6

* William Crooke's "Enquiry into the Economic Condition of the Agricultural and Labouring Classes in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh," 1888 : quoted by Mr. Morison, *ibid.*, p. 179.

The Patient Earth

rupees instead of 8 for boys ; but the hours of labour were twelve with one hour off instead of thirteen with (nominally) only half an hour off. In reality, I think it would be quite impossible to get Indians to do what Lancashire people would call work for twelve or thirteen hours at a stretch, with only those little breaks. At all events, it is not done.

By the measure of money, then, the Bombay mill-hand would seem to be about five times better off than the village labourer of the United Provinces. In so far as most people enjoy living in swarms rather than in isolation, he is better off ; but otherwise the lot of both is perhaps almost equally unenviable. The hours in a Bombay mill are spent in monotonous labour, among hideous noise, and in a fluffy atmosphere, where there are no fans to decrease the dust, the heat, or the smell. All round the factories, workmen's dwellings, or "chawls," have sprung up, usually in galleries of single rooms along the first floor above a row of open shops. The average rent is one rupee (1s. 4d.) a week for a room, and the whole family lives in one room, in which, as a rule, there is no window but the door. Most families are saved a lot of dusting and breakages by having no furniture except a metal cooking-pot for the rice and dal—a sort of split pea. These are cooked in cocoanut oil, and form the almost invariable food, though in one black hole I



WORKMEN'S DWELLINGS, BOMBAY.

City Workers

did see a woman cooking something that smelt like the ghost of a fish, and sometimes a family launched out into a maize pancake. In one or two rooms there were real decorations—portraits of Rama, of Krishna, or the King—and for a week every doorway was hung with a string of dry leaves, ears of rice, and little crimson flowers like knapweed, in memory, I suppose, of some old village festival. All night long, under a waning moon, the mill hands sat in the verandahs of these wretched homes, beating drums, and chanting their barbaric scales—"praising God," as they said when we asked them; but what form of God, or for what reason they praised Him, they could not explain.

Villagers, of course, retained the usual advantages of country life—fresh air, purer food, and greater bodily freedom and variety in labour. But the inner conditions of life were otherwise much the same. In furniture, even the fairly well-to-do cultivators seldom went beyond a fireplace (usually outside), a grain store, a plank bed, some rags, some brass pots and dishes, and in rare cases a few silver ornaments on the legs and arms of the women as the most convenient bank. All necessary architecture, even in mud hovels, is beautiful, and so are all implements for human use, but I never saw any attempt at decoration or conscious beauty. It would be absurd to call the Indian peasants ignorant, for

The Patient Earth

they understand their own business quite as well as we understand ours, and in their own knowledge they have little to learn. But in most villages the isolation and absence of schools make them unnecessarily superstitious and apprehensive of unreal dangers. Almost within sight of Lahore, the women rushed away to the flat roof-tops with their children for fear I should blight their souls, and the men could not imagine what I might be, except a revenue collector, a pill doctor, or an official come to poison the wells with plague. Near Delhi the women turned their faces sharply to the wall at my shadow, and lived in perpetual terror of "soldiers," though for no definite reason. At the foot of the Himalaya up from Hardwar, no one in the village had heard of the Viceroy, or of the Congress, or of Lajpat Rai, though it was little more than twenty-four hours' journey from Lahore. Only one man knew what a newspaper was, or had ever seen one, and neither he nor any one else could have read a word of it. One old man said he knew they were governed by England, but he had no notion what sort of a thing England was. Another old man in a village within ten miles of Delhi told me that, although he knew nothing about England, he was grateful to the English because when he was a boy his grandfather used to tell him of horrible murders and lootings, but there were hardly any of such terrors now. And as that was one of the few nice



BABY MILL-HANDS.



[Face p. 222.]

The Land's Burdens

things I heard about ourselves in India, I will conclude with it.

But the central problems remain untouched—the problems of the famines, the rise in prices, and of the poverty, which is probably increasing. Is the rainfall permanently growing less, and, if so, have the alterations in the Nile anything to do with it? Is the distress more terrible because the cultivators sell their grain, largely for export, instead of hoarding some proportion of it? Or is it true that they ever hoarded it? Is it want of money rather than want of grain that is bringing ruin on the people? All these things are said.* But I would point out one simple and obvious thing about the famine district that I visited in the United Provinces. The land there by its direct and immediate yield was expected to support, in the first place, the Government, with its expensive army and civil service; in the second place, the landowners (zemindars) who usually did the same kind of work as our landowners at home—collecting rents; in the third place, the farmers (ryots), who sold the crops, paid the rent, and worked themselves when poverty compelled them; in the fourth place, the labourers, who worked in good years and starved in bad; in the fifth place, the artisans, who worked for civilization and decency;

* Sir William Wedderburn has discussed these and similar problems in his "Note on Sir Antony MacDonnell's Famine Report of 1901," and in many other pamphlets.

The Patient Earth

in the sixth place, the priests, who worked for religion and the soul; and in the seventh place, the money-lenders, who scooped up an interest of about 30 per cent. when they could get it. Patient as this old earth is, it seems to me that in parts of India her patience is a little overburdened.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ARYA SAMAJ

It was evening service, at the hour when sunset is still bright, but if you stare into the sky, you suddenly see the stars. A few score of boys and young men were gathered round a small square pit, in which a fire of dry sticks was burning with a yellow flame. They were dressed in long cotton cloths of yellow or white, and, sitting in rows, they chanted the ancient Vedic hymns in praise of God, with the peculiar intervals and nasal quaverings of the East. In their midst, by the edge of the pit, sat their Guru, or teacher, and from time to time he ladled clarified butter into the fire, while youths from each of the other sides of the square threw in handfuls of rice and fragrant woods or herbs. Meantime the chanting never ceased, but with a concentrated vehemence all raised to the air the eternal Sanscrit words, revealed to the Aryan race before recorded history, so that they might never be devoid of the holiest wisdom, but bear it with them across mountains of ice and over sunburnt plains to the furthest world. At the end, all stood up for the

The Arya Samaj

final evening hymn, and then dispersed, leaving the fire burning as a symbol of man's soul, and of the divine power, and of the transfiguration of the spirit by flame and purity.

That form of worship is celebrated every morning and evening by all Vedic believers, whether assembled or alone. But I saw it first at one of the students' homes in Lahore, where a branch of the Arya Samaj, or Aryan Society, has a school and an "Anglo-Vedic College," numbering about 1800 members together. Lala Lajpat Rai sat next me, for it was to this branch that he had devoted all his labours for social and religious reform, till injustice drove him to turn aside into politics from the true objects of the Samaj. I speak of a branch because, like most vital movements, the Samaj is divided into parties, one holding its services inside the crowded old city itself, the other just outside the ancient walls. As usually happens, the two parties in the religion have split on unessential points, for which they are prepared to die, though not to kill. But both claim to follow the doctrines of their founder, Dayananda Saraswati, who quitted this stage of existence at Ajmere in 1883, after a wandering life of holy poverty given up entirely to the denunciation of idols, caste restrictions, animal sacrifices, licentious rites, the multiplicity of deities, and other accretions with which frail humanity has surrounded the stern purity of the Vedic revelation.

The Founder

Leaving his home as an outcast rather than submit to the carnal marriage tie, Dayananda spent sixteen years of youth and early manhood in walking from one holy place of Northern India to another. Sometimes he passed into Kashmir, thrice he crossed the snow mountains into Thibet, and, hungry for wisdom, he sought everywhere for the teacher at whose feet he might enjoy it. At last he found wisdom near at hand, in those very scriptures on which he had meditated day and night, and full of reforming zeal he turned to Benares and other seats of religious learning where he might confute the Pundits, whose obscure minds darkened the hard radiance of God's Sanscrit word. In city after city public debates were held before immense audiences, Dayananda in solitary knowledge opposing the priestly hostility of all the teachers combined, while as a rule, the local representative of the British Empire was invited to take the chair and see fair play, or award the prize in subtleties of theological controversy. The latter was a task for which our public-school education does not specially adapt us, but as a rule the British representative was spared the difficulty of metaphysical decision by the Pundits themselves, who violently broke up the meeting under consciousness of defeat. Perhaps unhappily for his cause, Dayananda did not confine himself to the purgation of Hindu superstitions and social abuses, but was equally vehement in his attacks

The Arya Samaj

upon the unworthy additions and compromises that have gathered round Christianity and Islam ; and to his success in interrupting the process of conversion among Hindus we may trace the marked hostility with which Christian and Mohammedan missionaries have always regarded the Samaj.*

The first branch of the society was established in Bombay by Dayananda himself in 1875, but its real strength now lies in the Punjab and United Provinces, in both of which together it numbers about 250,000 members. The two parties into which the Samaj in Lahore is to some extent divided, as I said, both unite in rejecting idols, and in condemning the seclusion or "purdah" of women, the dangerous prerogatives of the priesthood, and all restrictions of caste, except such rights and obligations as are the due of character or intellect. Both unite in maintaining the unity of God, the eternal trinity of God, Soul, and Matter, and the universal wisdom revealed for all races in the Vedas. The differences that divide them are, perhaps, rather of temperament than of doctrine. The party that worships in the city claims to be more democratic in its appeal, to be stricter in life and discipline, but at the same time freer from "purdah" ; and, indeed, its women are allowed to attend divine service in a gallery unveiled, while the women of the other party

* "Life and Teachings of Dayananda Saraswati," by Bawa Chaju Singh (Lahore, 1909).

The Two Sections

have a service to themselves, with a woman preacher, whose sermons I was, unhappily, unable to attend. The city party has been called the Culture Section, in which name, I think, there lies a covert sneer. But it briskly retaliated by calling the suburban party the Vulture Section, in which the sneer is not covert at all, but palpably due to a backsliding from vegetarianism.

Not that the extra-mural party itself dreams of backsliding. It only aims at progress and increasing freedom in social life ; for, like other great movements of religious reform, it maintains that the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink. The differences, in fact, have never been serious, though a few years ago there was the same tender hostility as used to prevail between Newton Hall and Lamb's Conduit Street, when Positivists turned their criticism from Christians to each other. But of late persecution, which makes all its victims friends, has brought them together again, and few of the outside world are now aware of any division. It was the deportation of Lajpat Rai that gave the final touch to reconciliation. That a man of austere and generous life, one who had given up great worldly success for the service of the poor and unlearned, should be spirited away without warning and without trial for venturing to criticize official injustice—that was the touch to kindle the indignant fire which welds men into one.

The Arya Samaj

Lajpat Rai was one of those men into whose soul the wrongs of their people enter. By nature averse from politics, he devoted himself to those deeper questions which lie beyond the touch of governments good or bad, and it was not till he was forty that the decisive change came. It is true that he joined the Congress movement in 1888, within two or three years of its beginning; but no one has more severely criticized the Congress and its methods—its unwieldy size, its holiday aspect, its failure to touch the poverty and ignorance of India, and its mistaken confidence in the power of speeches and resolutions for the redress of political wrongs.*

It was significant of his strength of character and indifference to popularity, that after the breach in the Surat Congress, he gave his immense influence to the Moderate party, and declared he would fight under the old banner, as I have described. But it was still more characteristic that, when the Congress had vanished, he remained in Surat for the Social and Swadeshi Conferences, and organized a famine-relief fund there, just as if nothing had happened.

Deeper things than can be reached by Government or speeches have occupied his life. Born at Jaguran, in the district of Ludhiana, where his father taught Persian and Urdu, he became a student at the Government College in Lahore, and a Pleader

Speech at Lahore before the meeting of the Calcutta Congress, 1906.



LALA LAJPAT RAI.

Photo by P. Girdhar Roy & Sons, Lahore.

[Face p. 96.]

Lajpat Rai

in the Courts there just at the time when the Arya Samaj was engaged in its earliest struggle for religious and social reform.

Under the influence of Hans Raj, now the Principal of the Anglo-Vedic College, a direct and silent man of similar austerity and devotion of life, he joined the Samaj and threw himself into its conflict against idol-worship, child-marriage, girl-widowhood, caste subdivisions, and the other abuses of orthodox Hinduism. Poverty, ignorance, and famine appeared to him the chief outward and visible evils of his country, and for many years, in the intervals of heavy professional work, he lived the life of what one would call a philanthropist, if the word had not gathered round it the inhuman associations of charity. He directed orphanages, superintended education, helped to found Swadeshi banks and mills long before Swadeshi became a political weapon ; he administered famine funds—with a side-glance at the unhappy "famine Christians," the Samajists say he rescued thousands of souls from famine and conversion—and one of his great achievements was the relief of the destitute in the Kangra valley after the terrible earthquake of 1905.

But I think that year marked a change. So far, beyond attending the Congress and publishing two vernacular pamphlets on Mazzini and Garibaldi—dangerous themes, I admit, for a member of any

The Arya Samaj

subject race—his action had not been political. In that year he went to England, like Mr. Gokhale, to represent the cause of Indian reform, and he also visited America. It so happened that he found England on the verge of the greatest Liberal revival. She appeared to have awakened from the ten years' incubus of reaction and Imperialistic misgovernment. Hopes of reform went hand in hand with hatred of oppression. He noticed the movements of the unemployed, the devotion of passive resisters, the sympathies with oppressed nationalities, the rapid recovery from the fever of the Boer war. He noticed that even on such a question as bringing the trams across the bridges the Lords were threatened with a revolution in the ordering of the State.* The same spirit of freedom appeared to be at work in other parts of the world—in Ireland, Japan, Egypt, Persia, and especially in Russia. It was natural that the ideal of winning for his own people a true share in the government of their country should be strengthened.

Unhappily, Lajpat Rai also observed in England that the people were too much occupied with the overwhelming problems confronting themselves to pay close attention to a subject so distant and abstruse as Indian reform. He observed that in

* "Our Struggle for Freedom: How to Carry it on"; see "Lala Lajpat Rai, the Man in his Word" (Madras, Ganesha and Co., 1907), p. 134-145.

Observation in England

English politics the cause of justice had no chance unless it were made a party question, and the Liberal Party refused to make Indian reform a party question, because, while it did not move the people at large, it touched too many important interests. As to the upper classes, he found, as Ruskin had found long before, that "every mutiny, every danger, every crime occurring under our Indian legislation arose directly out of our native desire to live on the loot of India." Only from the Irish and Labour Parties did his mission receive any real encouragement, and, owing to the executive weakness of those two parties, he concluded—one may still hope too hastily—that any appeal to the justice and benevolence of Great Britain as represented by her Parliament was vain :—

"You can at times," he wrote, "successfully appeal to the humanity and benevolence of individuals, but to hope for justice and benevolence from a nation is hoping against hope. The rule of a foreign democracy is, in this respect the most dangerous. The democracy is swayed by so many diverse interests that it is impossible to expect anything like unanimity or even a preponderance of opinion in dealing justly with a subject race, because justice to a subject race often clashes with the interest of some class of the ruling democracy. Whenever an attempt is made to do justice to the subject race, that class rises up, raises a storm, and prevents the Government from doing the right thing. Look at the history of the cotton duties in India, and every one will see the truth of this. How many times has the Government of India been overruled in the matter, simply because

The Arya Samaj

the Home Government cannot afford to risk the opposition of Lancashire and incur its displeasure ! " *

He returned to India convinced that the political as well as the social salvation of the country rested only with the Indian peoples themselves. As to means, he looked to anything that would promote political knowledge, courage, and self-reliance. At one time he seems to have contemplated a kind of Teaching Order, something like Mr. Gokhale's "Servants of India."

"Where are the political thinkers of the country," he cried, "whose sole thought by day and night, sleeping or waking, would be how to initiate and carry on the struggle for freedom? Where are the political Sanyasis (wandering friars) whose sole work in life would be the preaching of the gospel of freedom? Where are the Vaishyas of the movement who will make money only for the struggle: who will live poorly and modestly and save every farthing for the sacred cause? . . . Where are the people who will raise agitation for political rights and liberty to the dignity of a Church and will live and die for the same?" †

He believed that the only way to win the consideration of England for reforms was to prove the determination and self-reliance of the Indians themselves.

* *Ibid.*, p. 197, "Indian Patriotism towards the Empire," being an answer to a circular order from the Director of Public Instruction in the Punjab (May, 1906) requiring all schools to celebrate Empire Day in a certain manner.

† *Ibid.*, p. 141, "Our Struggle for Freedom."

Need of Self-reliance

"The British are not a spiritual people," he said. "They are either a fighting race or a commercial nation. It would be throwing pearls before swine to appeal to them in the name of the higher morality or justice or on ethical grounds. They are a self-reliant, haughty people, who can appreciate self-respect and self-reliance even in their opponents."*

In a yielding disposition, a false prudence, a distrust of enthusiasm and energy, he found the real dangers of the Indian temperament.

"Our whole life from top to bottom smacks of fear," he wrote, "deadly fear of losing in the estimation of those whom we in our heart of hearts believe to be only usurpers; fear of losing the sunshine of the smile of those whom we believe to be day and night engaged in the exploitation of our country and the spoliation of our people, fear of offending the false gods that have by fraud or force taken possessions of our bodies and souls, fear of being shut up in a dungeon or prison house, as if the freedom that we enjoy were not by its own nature one to be abhorred."†

He was soon in his own person to prove the sincerity of his creed. The condition of the Punjab during 1907 was particularly deplorable. For thirteen years scarcity had prevailed almost without intermission in the south of the province, and the increasing poverty was only relieved by the hideous mortality of the plague. Just before Lajpat Rai's deportation, the official record of deaths from plague in the Punjab alone rose to nearly 65,000 in one

Ibid., p. 184, "The Swadeshi Movement."

† *Ibid.*, p. 209, "The National Outlook."

The Arya Samaj

week, and the real number was almost certainly higher. On the top of hunger and plague, which we piously call the visitations of God, came the visitations of the Government in a largely increased revenue assessment, increased irrigation rates, the Colonization Bill threatening to break a solemn promise made by Government to the Chenab settlers fifteen years before, and the refusal of the Lieutenant-Governor to take any steps against the leading Anglo-Indian paper of Lahore for a series of abusive articles against Indians, whilst Indian papers were prosecuted and condemned for articles containing certainly no greater incitement to racial animosity.* The feeling in the Punjab became intensely embittered. Local riots occurred at Lahore and Rawal Pindi. Anglo-Indian journalists remembered that it was the fiftieth anniversary of the Mutiny. Strange precautions were taken. English people took refuge in the forts. In the haggard element of fear anything may assume a terrifying shape, and without trial or charge or warning, the most prominent member of the Arya Samaj was seized, and sent to Mandalay. †

It was all a little ironic, this treatment of a sad, retiring, clear-minded man, seeking neither advantage nor fame—one who had freely given up his

* See Introduction, p. 17 ff.

† For a full account of these events, see "The Story of My Deportation," By Lajpat Rai (The Punjabi Press, Lahore, 1908).

Government Suspicions

possessions, and worked for many years unknown at the humblest duties. When I was at Peshawar, I ventured to ask one in authority why a man of such high reputation as Lajpat Rai should have been selected for attack, and in defence of the Punjab Government, he said : "You see, it was just because he was so good that they fired him. If he had been a rotter, they could have left him alone." I think it was as fine a compliment as any political offender could hope for.

But it was not entirely for his personal excellence that the Punjab Government struck at Lajpat Rai, nor for the wide influence of his decisive eloquence. It was because they hoped to strike the Arya Samaj at the same time. The authorities in Northern India, always timid and suspicious owing to the neighbourhood of the Frontier and the more war-like character of the peoples, had long regarded the Samaj with special enmity. I have known a soldier, with papers of the highest character, turned out of a Sikh regiment admittedly for belonging to the Samaj. Much of this suspicion arises from false information, such as is always supplied to officials who remain isolated from the surrounding people. The editor of the *Hindustan*, for instance, who had recently been sentenced to two years' imprisonment, was described as a graduate of the Anglo-Vedic College, though he had hardly been there a month, and owed the rest of his training to a Christian Mission School.

The Arya Samaj

In the same way young Ajit Singh, who was deported on suspicion of tampering with the native troops, was described as a prominent Samajist, though he had never belonged to the Samaj at all. Some members of the Society have turned to politics, because for the moment the attraction is irresistible for many generous minds, and at such a time, as Disraeli said in "Sybil," "to be young and to be indifferent are no longer synonymous." But the Samaj as such has no concern with politics.

It is a religious body—a Universal Church—bent only on religious purification and the training of youth in accordance with Vedic rules. One can understand the opposition of orthodox Hindus, Mohammedans, and Christian missionaries, for in its religious propaganda the Samaj is distinctly militant and gathers in many converts. But the Indian Government is mistaken in regarding it as a centre of sedition. The leaders of both sections—such men as Hans Raj, Principal of the Anglo-Vedic College in Lahore, and Lala Munshi Rama, Governor of the Gurukula, near Hardwar—have steadily set their faces against political work of any sort, and they discourage political discussion among the students as strictly as the Risley Circular. It is useless, they say, to look for the political regeneration of India while the character and intellect of the people are unregenerate. I do not agree with them, believing, as I do, that political freedom is essential



AN ARYA SAMAJ TEACHER.

[Face p. 504.]