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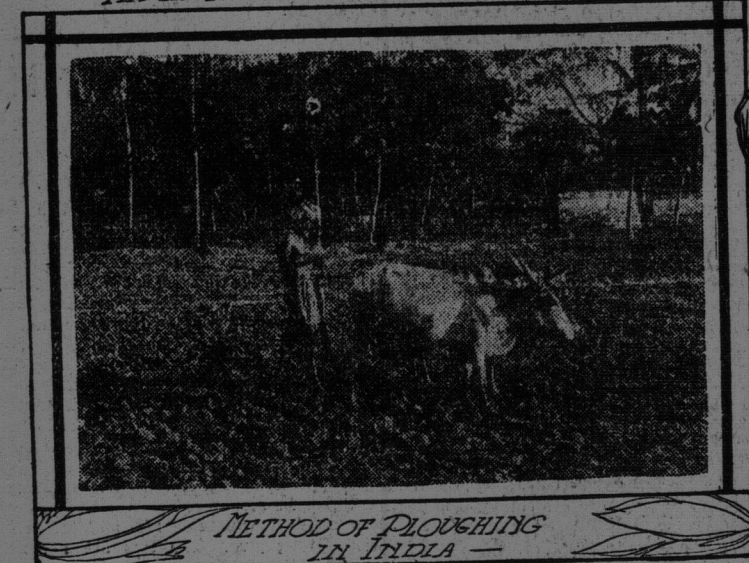


INDIAN FAMINES

By
Forbes
Lindsay



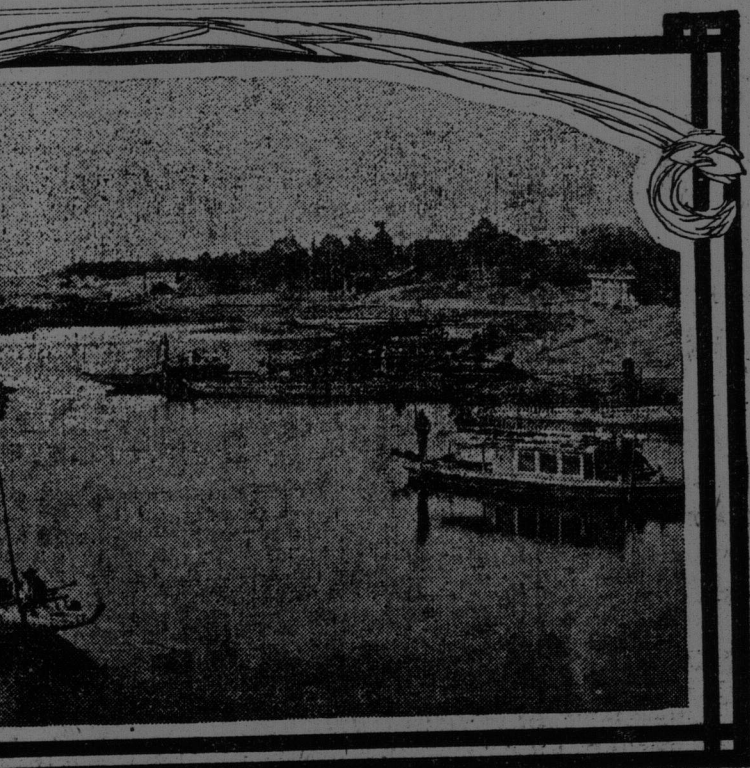
INDIA Famine Sufferers



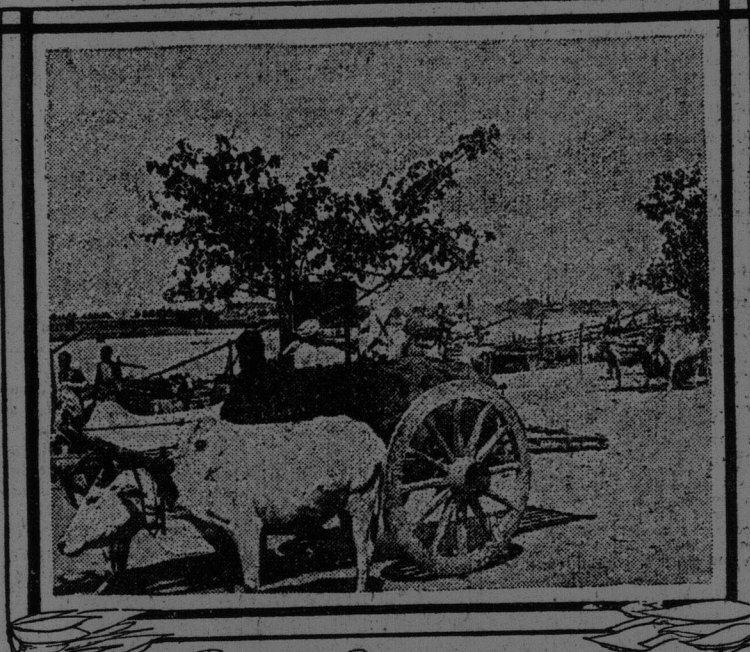
METHOD OF DRAINING IN INDIA



A High Caste Hindu



RELIEF BOATS ON THE BUCKINGHAM CANAL



PRIMITIVE TRANSFER OF WATER

INDIA MADRAS - SACRED TANK AND ISLAND TANKS

It is not possible through the medium of figures to form anything like an adequate idea of the stupendous task involved in the government of the vast Indian Empire of Great Britain. The problems and difficulties are not due to the mere fact that the area under control is 1,500,000 square miles in extent nor that the population included in it is 300,000,000, but that this area embraces the most diversified climates and physical conditions, and that this population is made up of many distinct races speaking nearly thirty different languages. It is not practicable to apply one code of laws to the whole country, nor one system of policy. Land tenure in India is entirely different from what it is in Gujarat or Mysore, and different again in the two latter sections of the country. Taxation as practised in the Punjab would not be adapted to Kashmir or Hyderabad. Nevertheless, it is a common thing to find writers with only the vaguest conception of conditions in Hindustan discussing fanciful theories which are pleased to label "Indian Questions" or "Indian Problem." The men who have to contend with the situation out there will tell you that there are a thousand "Indian questions" demanding attention all the time and that they are as changeable as the quicksands in the Humber. The problems that confronted Wellesley or Cornwallis are very different from those with which Lord Curzon wrestled. India has slumbered through centuries but now her people are awakening in company with the other nations of the Orient and exhibiting a restlessness that causes their rulers sleepless nights and endless trouble. Great Britain has been at large expense and much pains to educate the people of Hindustan. The ultimate result will be widespread blessing doubtless but the present product of the schools is a crop of babu agitators, cold-blooded, mendacious and utterly selfish, whose educational advantages are employed to overreach their poorer and more ignorant countrymen. From this class come the ghouls who corner grain in a famine district and fatten on the life blood of their fellows.

THE WATER SUPPLY.

Let us take a cursory view of the country preparatory to considering the factors that influence the food supply. Along the north stretch the eternal ramparts of the Himalayas dividing India from the central plateau of Asia. The higher elevations of the huge range are perpetually snow-clad and from them run never failing streams that go to feed the large rivers which water the Great North Indian

Plain. This is extensively cultivated and is capable of dependable irrigation but even in this region is the Thar Desert—a large uninhabitable stretch of sand. The peninsula proper is composed mainly of the tableland of the Deccan. This is the region most liable to famine. It depends upon the southwest monsoons which at the close of the hot season blow rain across the Western Ghats to the interior. The valleys of the Ghats—the ancient home of the Marathas—never lack a sufficient supply of moisture but it frequently happens that the amount carried inland is short of the normal and in such case famine more or less severe and more or less widespread ensues. A glance at the map of India will show that it contains no large lake and very few of any size. This fact places a severe limitation on irrigation. Rivers have to be relied upon for this purpose but they are extremely difficult to handle. An Indian river is at one time a huge dry ditch and at another—the transformation being worked with incredible suddenness—a raging torrent overflowing its banks. And floods—though not so common as scarcity of water—are among the causes of famine. In the south of India live many large "tanks," as they are called. These are artificial lakes, sometimes several square miles in area. They are memorials of the benevolence of one or another ruler or wealthy citizen and are usually "sacred," being connected with a temple and dedicated to one of the numerous gods in the Hindu Pantheon. The association with religion ensures immunity from destruction and the presence of the temple ensures a fund for the care and preservation of the valuable public utility. In the Great Plains wells can generally be dug with success, but there are many parts of the country—as Bikanir for instance—where water can not be reached short of a depth of 200 feet and by no means all ways at that.

Waterworks that would extend immunity to the whole country are beyond the bounds of financial feasibility and even physical possibility. There are not a few regions in which nothing short of the full monsoon fall with yearly regularity will suffice to stave off periodical starvation. These are places in which no man should live in reliance upon the soil for the sole means of subsistence but hundreds of thousands persist in doing so and the government can not forcibly deport them.

ANCIENT FAMILIES

To reach a just conception of what the British have done towards the reduction and alleviation of famine one must go back through a few centuries in the history of the country. He will learn that the famines of latter days—ghastly as their story is—are incomparable to the terrible havoc wrought by the failure of crops in olden times. Then thousands died where ten died today. It was not that the rules were callous to the sufferings of their subjects but that the means of relief were so much less effective than now. They had in the old days to rely upon internal supplies. There were no steamship cargoes to alleviate their distress. Indeed the outer world knew nothing about it. Hundreds of thousands disappeared from the face of the earth without any trace. Large sections of territory were depopulated and their former inhabitants speedily forgotten. When the crops of a province failed it might—by payment—secure relief from its neighbors if they were in a better position, but if the shortage was widespread only the edges of the stricken area might hope for

GOVERNMENT WORK.

It may be said that since 1859 or thereabout the efforts of the government to combat famine have been really effective and increasingly so. The chief factors in the success achieved have been the railway and irrigation works. In 1859-64 the famine in Bihar was fought vigorously. The government spent \$35,000,000 besides importing one million tons of rice. The loss of a single life by starvation. This established a record which still stands, but Bihar had a railroad running through it and is traversed by a navigable river. Few famine districts are so fortunate. In most cases there are tens of thousands of sufferers who can only be reached by the slow moving bullock cart and though the government should exhaust the treasury it could do no more for the poor wretches than is done.

Carrying out a conception of Lord Bunsford, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India at the famous Delhi Durbar—probably the most gorgeous gathering the world has ever seen—on the first day of January, 1877. The remembrance of that scene of splendor seemed to accentuate to those who witnessed those terrible pictures of starvation and disease which were to be seen all over the south of India in the two years following. What is generally known as the Great Famine of 1877-78 really extended over a greater period and was probably the most widespread that India has ever known. The drought commenced in Mysore with a failure of the monsoon of 1875, and in the Northwestern Provinces normal conditions did not return until 1879. The greatest distress was felt in Southern India. In two successive years—1876 and 1877—the rainfall failed and the harvest of the latter year was not worth the gathering. Then the entire country from the Vindhya to Cape Comorin fell into the grasp of famine. The government made every effort possible to minimize the effects and the story of that struggle is one of splendid achievement. White men, not a few of them—sacrificed health or gave their lives in the cause. The government expended \$35,000,000 in those two years, not to mention the loss of revenue due to the remission of taxes and other government dues. Nevertheless five and a half million beings died from starvation and resultant disease.

It must not be supposed that the Indian Government restricts itself to relieving existing famine. As a matter of fact it is constantly engaged in the conflict against the dread enemy. Millions are spent every year in anticipatory relief work. The magnificent irrigation system is in course of extension all the time and roads are continually under construction. In this way the efforts to alleviate the effects of drought are ever meeting with greater success. There has been no great famine in India during the past thirty years. The present distress is the worst that has occurred since 1878. The mortality is reported to have reached 80,000 in a week, but it is safe to say that the government

CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLE.

Whilst the physical conditions are important factors in the creation of scarcity the chief causes lie in the customs and habits of the people. India has few large cities and no manufacturing towns to attract the population. Whilst in England more than half the total population is to be found in centers of 20,000 or over, in India less than five per cent live in the 225 towns of that size. Practically the entire population is therefore rural and dependent upon agriculture. But it is not a rural population such as we are accustomed to thinking of in connection with the farming districts of this country. The people are densely settled upon the land. In very many districts the husbandmen are vast tracts of fertile soil lying uncultivated. Here or almost anywhere else such a condition could not prevail. The surplus population of the crowded districts would move to more favorable localities. Not so in India however. It is almost impossible to induce the Hindu peasant to leave the hereditary homestead. He will rather starve in the overtaxed fields of his ancestors than go to a strange place. Migration from one district to another is virtually unknown in India. The returns of the last census showed that ninety per cent of the inhabitants of the country taken as a whole lived in the district or state in which they were born and six per cent of the exceptions had come no farther than from the adjacent territories.

There are many parts of India where land is so plentiful that it may be had rent free and good virgin soil at that—needing only to be cleared of jungle. If the government could induce the peasant to the congested districts to move into the thinly populated areas it would do more than anything else to prevent famines. The comparative conditions of the agricultural populations of the crowded and the open districts is shown in the statistics of birth. In tracts where the persons to the square mile are fewer than 400 or more to the square mile is about fourteen per cent and no more than seven per cent where the population is 400 or more to the square mile.

Another very important point is that the Hindu people are practically vegetarians. When the grain crop fails their sole source of food supply is gone. As Brahmans they hold the cow sacred and starve to death with meat at hand. It is not merely a question of supplying food to a famine district. It must be food of a certain kind and not merely any sort of grain either. In one part of the country the people are accustomed to rice; in another to dal; in another to bajra or jowar; and so on. It is of no use shipping paddy to a place where the people are

PRIMITIVE FARMING.

The method of tillage in India is of the most primitive character but it is probably the best adapted to the conditions that prevail. There are no extensive cultivators and labor is so cheap that even large tracts could be as economically worked by hand as by machinery. In some parts a hoe is the only instrument applied to the earth, but generally tillage is effected by means of a wooden plow, such as was used two thousand years ago. It is drawn by bullocks or by the water buffalo. The irrigation of individual farms is usually laborious and slow. Little ditches are run over the patch from a well or tank at which is rigged up a bamboo structure on the see-saw order. From each end of the cross-piece depends a rope. At the end of one of these is a man; at the end of the other a bucket made of skin. This is lowered, filled and raised, then tipped over into a ditch by a second man. It would be a little difficult for the American farmer to even conceive of the irrigation of a farm by means of a single bucket but the Indian peasant would probably decline to employ a more expeditious device if it were provided for him. The intense conservatism of the people in all matters makes it exceedingly hard to help them.

Irrigation in various forms has been practiced by the natives since time immemorial but it remained for the British to establish a scientific system. The hill people ingeniously lay the slopes out in terraces and divert the streams to great distances by successive parallel channels along the mountain side. They also utilize their water-power for mill purposes. The use of the cog-wheel for converting the vertical movement of the water-wheel into the horizontal movement required in the grindstone is unknown in many districts

habituated to sorghum. They will not know what to do with it and it would not agree with them in any case. The necessity of providing starving men with precisely the kind of food to which they have been accustomed of course creates great difficulties sometimes and at others renders effective relief well-nigh impossible. Then again there are babies—hosts of babies and half grown children to deal with. That is often the hardest part of the problem. If a milk and flour famine should occur in this country, we might have abundance of other food, but our little ones would die by the hundreds of thousands. The Hindu mother is faithful unto death. She feeds her suckling to the last and denials herself to fear older children. The only hope for the woman often lies in parting her baby, but the famine workers always find this a difficult thing to accomplish.

Religion and caste are also factors obstructive to relief measures. It could not be expected that a Mohammedan would extend aid to a Brahmin for whom he entertains a contemptuous hatred; nor could the Hindu sympathize with the Moslem in distress. But this is only a small part of the matter. The Hindu population is divided into several castes (the members of which will have no inter-course with one another). The poorest people, upon whom famine falls with the heaviest hand, are casteless pariahs for whom their fellows have no regard whatsoever. They may not look for help from their wealthy countrymen. Such of these as concern themselves at all about a famine are interested only in the opportunities afforded by it for speculation in food stuffs.

In recent years the government has dealt drastically with these traffickers in human life. Their stores are seized unceremoniously and regardless of common law and statutory rights and the compensation allowed is not based upon famine prices so that the enterprising manipulator often suffers a loss and a well-deserved one. Of course these operations are restricted to small areas—usually those threatened with famine. A short crop portends a famine in case it is followed by another shortage in the next season. A few bunnies, or capitalists get together and buy up the grain they can get. Then they wait for the time when the 'stuff' becomes worth its weight in gold. In former times—and occasionally it is so in those—that was commonly the lot of the poor. Silver bangles and gold earrings went into one scale and grain into the other.

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