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In answering advertisements mention Canadian Courier

"THE BURNT OFFERING."

(By Mrs. Cotes)

MARJORY MACMURCHY

TO her readers in Canada—which is still home to the author of "The Burnt Offering"—Mrs. Cotes' East Indian types stand out against the moving show of multitudinous human life in India with the distinctness of figures which cross a plain and are outlined against the sky. Mrs. Cotes seems no longer inclined to write a novel which has no political significance. Like "The Imperialist" for Canada, and "Set in Authority" for India, "The Burnt Offering" is an eager venture to find out the meaning of current history. What is it that the people dream in reality, for if the dream belongs to all the people it will certainly come true. Something like this must have been the question which Mrs. Cotes meant to answer. "The Burnt Offering," as far as can be judged at this distance from India, is an unusually well-informed presentation of the present meaning of British rule in India. It is equally a fair and well-informed showing of nationalist aspirations on the part of one section of native life. To show the various outstanding native types, with their thought of India, and to deal with types of British people, and what they mean to do, is a great subject for one novel. Possibly the story is too exact and precise in its outline to stir the imagination with the immensity of the field to be covered. But it is a clever, workmanlike novel, far above the average in current fiction, and touched here and there with the light which is given to an author when she sees life beautiful and has been able to make that beauty shine in her book. One passage at least, when the Swami speaks to Janaki and her father, Sir Kristodas Mukerji, is, perhaps, the clearest and most touching interpretation of India that a Westerner can understand which has yet been written in a novel. This must have been at least part of what Mrs. Cotes meant to do when she began her book. It is a deserved compliment to say that anyone in this country who wants to know India better than he does at present ought to read "The Burnt Offering."

Plot of the Story.

Vulcan Mills, member for Further Angus in the Imperial Parliament and leader of the Socialist wing of the Labour Party, visits India. He is accompanied by his daughter, Joan, who has been at Girton and as a Suffragette has been honoured twice with imprisonment. They mean to save India from her oppressors, but consider themselves unprejudiced, naturally, since the Mills' temperament is of this description. Joan at once encounters Bepin Behari Dey, who is being oppressed by two young Britishers. They object to his presence in the same railway carriage with themselves, and Joan invites Bepin to share the section occupied by her father and herself. It is Joan's introduction to India. The author of "The Burnt Offering" is by no means on the side of the British rulers.

She writes one incisive sentence, brief but sufficiently pointed to the effect that possibly the ruling people have been so absorbed in their own virtues as to be oblivious of virtues belonging to anyone else. On the other hand, Joan and her father see no virtues in the English. Bepin Behari Dey, Ganendra Thakore, Jotindra Pal, and the other members of the little group of plotting nationalists, are to them wholly admirable, heroic and advanced, almost as far advanced as the Mills themselves.

Joan is guided entirely by theory. She has cured herself of ordinary affection. She is above being influenced by her Girton friend, Mrs. Michael Foley, who is married and living in Calcutta. When John Game falls in love with her, the circumstances is of no consequence. Her father has given her to India and she is more than willing to be given. She can give herself best apparently by marrying a Hindoo, and so she becomes engaged to Bepin Behari. But at least John Game is able to prevent her marriage with Bepin. Ganendra Thakore, who is the leader of the nationalist party, is exiled as a dangerous agitator. Bepin throws the bomb which was to make such a change in India politics. Bepin is killed, and John Game, slightly wounded dies later from blood poisoning. Vulcan Mills had been sent home somewhat peremptorily by the Indian Government and Joan is sent after him, since Bepin's womenkind consider that they will be safer and more comfortable with the young woman out of the way.

Some of the Characters.

The most interesting and beautiful characters in the book are Janaki, widowed daughter of Sir Kristodas, who has been sent to England to be educated and who loves John Game, and the Swami Yadavi, spiritual adviser to her father's house. With Sir Kristodas, these two make the soul of India stand present and everlasting like a luminous shadow which may be so perceived by the Western readers of their story. From the lips of the Swami the author gives her clearest thought of India and India's destiny.

"When the fruit is ripe," he said, watching them booth, "It drops to the ground. The British in India are ripe. Perhaps the climate," he added, with a smile, "has forced them a little. But violence is folly—violence is folly."

The Judge shook his head affirmatively, and Janaki lowered her eyes with an air of humility. The priest looked gravely at her.

"God has the emancipation of India in His hand," he said, and it cannot be taken from Him by force, or by fraud, or in any evil way."

"What excellent words," murmured Sir Kristodas in Bengali; but Janaki kept her retreat in silence.

"The emancipation we call it, perhaps the Supreme calls it the punishment," went on the priest nimbly. "He holds it in His hand and turns it and looks at it both ways. And perhaps He laughs."

Father and daughter waited with submission. Yadavi's glance, free as a bird's, fell on a ray of sunlight that came through the shuttered window, and he smiled at it as if it spoke to him and brought him another thought.

"God is the old friend of India. The English are friends of two hundred years, but God came with the dawn. The English by their administration have given her justice, railways, political ideas. God, by my ancestors gave her a soul. The English will leave their gifts and go, but the God of India and the soul of India—he paused—"will remain with her. We have that for our comfort."

This does not mean that the Swami is planning for the English to leave India within the next few hundred years. He thinks that the Viceroy will become a president. But his detachment from the temporary has been exquisitely expressed by the author in her book.



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