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An Incident in Camp in India.

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WHILE in camp last winter on a missionary tour among the villages in the Doab, we found much difficulty at one time in getting needed supplies for the table. Such every day necessities as fowls, eggs, milk and wood were sometimes almost impossible to procure, although there was no lack of these in the rich agricultural district in which we were. I had made in those days the acquaintance of a Mohammedan *talsildar*, a worthy man, who appeared more than usually ready to consider the claims of the Gospel, and who in many ways showed us a very decided friendliness. When talking with him, on one occasion we happened incidentally to allude to this difficulty of procuring the necessaries for daily consumption; when he said he was exceedingly sorry that in his jurisdiction we should have had any such trouble; and that he would henceforth place one of his *chaprasi*s at our command, who, since he was well known through his district, would have no trouble in getting us whatever we needed. This kind offer was thankfully accepted and the *chaprasi* entered on his duties. From that time supplies came in as needed, in abundance, and all was going as smoothly as possible, when a rumor reached my ears that this man was taking from the villagers by force, under threats, whatever I happened to require, declaring that it was "*sarkar ka hukm*," the government order from the *sahib* in the camp. On investigating, I found that it was even so; that this worthy, in league with my *khansaman*, had been taking from the villagers hither and thither whatever the latter happened to require for our daily meals, by force, never paying them a cowrie for my supplies; while meanwhile my *khansaman* was presenting me daily big bills for these, assuring me that things were much dearer than in the city, and he and the *talsildar's* *chaprasi* were dividing the money I meekly paid for my supplies between themselves! It is needless to say that I at once informed that *chaprasi* that I had no further occasion for his services; and delivered my soul to my *khansaman* concerning the eighth commandment and the crime of oppressing the poor, in a way that at least did my soul good, whatever its effect on him; and informed him though we should go without the most ordinary articles of food, or send his little son into Allahabad thirty miles daily for everything we ate, there should be no more of this robbery; and further directed that in every case where he bought anything from a villager, the poor men or women who brought the things should be brought before me, that I might pay them the money due with my own hand.

The incident is suggestive and instructive. If I mistake not, there is much more deep-rooted disaffection and hatred of British rule among the poor masses of India than men like our late Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, like to believe: at least, I have heard enough of it in every direction in this year that I have now been again in India. For this there are no doubt some causes which are grounded in good reason. The relation of the government to the liquor traffic, and its infamous sanction of and provision for licentiousness in the army, are enough of themselves to make it an offense in the nostrils even of a decent heathen: and, I fear, with such go far to neutralize what might be the good effect of its impartial administration of justice and truly beneficent care for the poor, especially in times of famine and pestilence. But the incident related enables one to

see how there are wide-spread grounds of discontent and hatred of the foreigner among the ignorant and impoverished masses which seem beyond the power of any government to prevent or remove. For what occurred with me in a small way occurs throughout India continually on a large scale. Every cold season regiments are in march all over the country, in transfer from station to station; and, as I have been repeatedly assured on authority I could not doubt, whenever a regiment pitches a camp, supplies of every kind, grass, grain, wood, etc., are taken from the helpless villager under threats of vengeance if they refuse, either often without pay, or with but a fraction of what they ought to receive. Yet this cannot justly be laid to the British officer in command, who is always made to pay well for all that the regiment may require. For supplies cannot be collected except through the agency of natives, and all around who are engaged in this are in league together to cover up the facts and save each other at all risks.

Is it any wonder that the country villagers, so poor, groaning under a taxation which amounts in toto to from fifty-five to sixty-five per cent. of their fields, and as ignorant as they are poor, when they are thus robbed, and are told when they remonstrate that this is by the order of the colonel or the government, and that they will find themselves in trouble if they hold back—become year by year more sore and bitter, and often think and say that almost anything that would put an end to British rule would be welcome; since whether the Russians or any other power succeed, things could scarcely be worse: while with the chance meanwhile of plunder there might be, to some, some short relief?

Nor is it hard to see the bearing of this on missionary work. I little wonder that multitudes, densely ignorant and abjectly poor, ascribing all their wrongs and spoliation to their foreign rulers, and identifying the missionary in general with these rulers, should wish to hear nothing of the religion which he presents; and often suggest, as they do, that we would do well first to teach our own people not to oppress them, before we ask them to accept the conqueror's religion?

Let any one imagine, for instance, my own position last winter, in preaching to villagers who, through their own countrymen, unknown to me, were being daily robbed to supply my table, and were assured that it was *my order* to take these things, and give no pay! Is it not clear that, so far as this was believed, the missionary's influence would be about on a par with that of a home pastor, who, with or without reason, was believed to be supplying his own table off his neighbours' hen roosts?

That, despite such things, many a village receives the missionary with evident kindness, and that hundreds each year come out for Christ, is all the more wonderful and cheering. It shows that as the years go by the people are coming more and more to understand our real character and intentions. And it will easily be understood that in many a village last winter I found the relation of the experience given in this letter, and the expression of my intense indignation at the unrighteousness practiced by their own countrymen in my name, an excellent passport to a ready hearing; and a good foundation for a plea alike for the Gospel of Christ, the poor man's friend, and—what is greatly needed here in these days—a plea for a better judgment as to the justice and righteousness of their ruler, who could not well be held responsible for robberies by their Hindoo and Mohammedan underlings, which, practically, it would seem that they were almost or quite powerless to prevent,