

## BENGAL

THE province of Bengal is one of the richest portions, not only of India, but of the whole surface of the earth. Endowed with a soil of great fertility, and a wonderful natural system of irrigation, Bengal supports a teeming population in comfort and prosperity. So great indeed is the fecundity of the Patna district, where the famed Patna rice comes from, that it supports a population of over 900 persons to the square mile, a record surpassed by few, if any, of the most densely peopled regions of China itself.

The province, as at present constituted, embraces the land bounded by Eastern Bengal and Assam on the east; by Nepal and Sikkim on the north; by the Central and United Provinces of India on the west; and by Madras and the Bay of Bengal on the south. The total area is something like 141,600 square miles, the population being about 54,000,000.

Formerly there was included under the jurisdiction of the Bengal government a huge section of territory to the east, but the development of the land led to unwieldiness for administrative purposes, and at the suggestion of Viceroy Lord Curzon the partition of Bengal was consummated in 1905 by the erection of Eastern Bengal and Assam into a separate province.

In the Bengal of to-day there is, as one might expect from its extent, a good deal of variation of climate and physical features. In the north and west the country is of a more or less mountainous character, but even among the hills the agricultural production is considerable.

Along the banks of the great rivers, the mighty and sacred Ganges in particular, lies land of great fertility, from which magnificent crops of all kinds are gathered. To add to the advantages derived from the splendid river system, British engineers have constructed in Bengal and indeed throughout India a system of irrigation that ranks with the best in the world.

Where a number of great rivers merge and diverge in a huge delta before their waters enter the Bay of Bengal is found perhaps the most fertile region in the world. Year by year the mighty streams have been carrying down great quantities of silt from the inland regions. Nearing the sea, each stream becomes sluggish and deposits this silt. Thus, in the course of countless ages, have been built up hundreds upon hundreds of square miles of magnificent alluvial soil, free even from

any substance as coarse as gravel. At certain seasons of the year these lands are submerged and a fresh deposit of silt gives a top-dressing of fine new soil, so that fertilization and careful cultivation are unnecessary.

It would be tedious to enumerate all the agricultural products of Bengal, but we mention tea, turmeric, opium poppy, rice, wheat, cotton, indigo, mulberry and ginger as indicating the wide range of crops.

There is also an extensive timber industry, while the province is quite wealthy in minerals. Bengal possesses the greatest coal deposits in India.

It would be impossible to give any adequate idea of the history of Bengal in this brief article. European merchants early established trading posts in the region. In 1686 the English merchants at Hugly on the river of the same name, pressed by Moghal forces aided by the French, who were established at Chandernagore, moved down-stream and, under the leadership of Job Charnock, at first temporarily, but later permanently established themselves where Calcutta stands to-day. In 1696 the East India Company constructed Fort William to guard the settlement and later purchased the site of the growing town from Prince Azim.

Things went on favorably till 1757, when a Mohammedan army under the Viceroy Siraj-ud-Daula appeared before the city and Governor Drake fled down the river with most of the officials and the European soldiery. John Zephania Holwell and a handful of Englishmen made a heroic but vain defence. The Mohammedan forces swarmed into the fort and took possession. Siraj-ud-Daula's officers thrust 146 of their prisoners into a small lock-up measuring eighteen feet by fourteen by ten, with only two small windows—the "Black Hole of Calcutta." In the morning 23, including Holwell, were taken out alive—123 had died of suffocation during that awful night. The bodies of the dead were thrown into the Fort ditch and later there was raised upon the burial-place the "Holwell Memorial," of brick and mortar, which soon disappeared. Mr. E. F. Sandys, the local Resident Secretary of the Sun Life of Canada at Calcutta, discovered an original engraving of the structure some years ago, and from this Lord Curzon, then Viceroy, erected at his own expense the marble replica shown in this issue of SUNSHINE.