

MISSION FIELD.

THE CHURCH IN INDIA.

BY THE REV. R. R. WINTER, OF
DELHI.

At a time when men's thoughts are a good deal turned towards Christianity in India, and how so to present it to the people that it may with God's help come home to their consciences, I desire to write to the Society, so far as my observation and experience can be of any use, on the subject of the Church, and making it, as the visible expression of Christian truth, the leading means of laying that truth before the people of India; and I would base, so far as sentiment goes, on St. Peter's words, "Love the brotherhood," and on St. Paul's to Timothy, "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

I have urged this subject in many Mission sermons and speeches in England on my hearers, and rejoice to see that Sir William Hunter in his lecture this year before the Society of Arts had the same opinion. I venture to think that if we would lay our plans aright for the conversion of a country or a race, we must look at them historically, and endeavour to find their characteristics, for good or evil, as shown by the facts of their history, and thus learn to utilize the good in the service of God, and see how best to counteract the evil; for, till our aim is clear, how can we tell how to deal with a people, or how to differentiate between the wants and capabilities of a Chinaman and an African, or a Japanese and an Indian? "The historical institutions of India," says Sir W. Hunter, "afford a basis for a great Christian community as firmly united by internal discipline and mutual help as was the early Church. I believe it is reserved for Christianity to develop the highest uses of Indian caste: but it will be Indian caste harmonized by a new life." If there is one thing more prominent than another in the daily life of the people of India, it is the strong hold which the idea of brotherhood, within certain strongly marked limits, has upon them. "Each caste is in some measure a trade-guild and a mutual assurance society, and the members are dominated by the two ideas of communal life and ceremonial purity." This life of brotherhood, including men, women and children, is to them as much all in all as the corporate side of Christianity was to St. Paul when he told the Corinthians that all the faithful form the body of Christ, and are members one of another. Here, then, in an embryo and distorted condition, do we not find the idea of the Christian society? And to a people afraid to stand alone, and looking round to the support of corporate life, we should present Christianity not too exclusively in its individual and subjective side, as we, as Englishmen, might be tempted to do,—nay, to far too great an extent have already done,—but also in the common life of the Christian Church.



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Here, then, we find that truth in them which we should utilize, and this at the same time points out to us one of the most characteristic and fundamental errors against which we have to struggle; for the distortion of truth is the fruitful parent of evil, and "noblest things have vilest using," and so this beautiful idea of brotherhood, becoming centred in self interest, ends in disunion. The very extent to which it is upheld within the caste, to-day seems to intensify the separation of one caste from the other. The brotherhood is so sharply demarcated off from the rest as to point back to the ancient life of separate tribes; to eat, drink, smoke and intermarry with those of another brotherhood creates ceremonial impurity, and such a man becomes outcast from the only commonwealth he has ever recognized. Thus the idea of common humanity is obliterated, and man is not cared for as man but only as a caste fellow. Further, this intensified adhesion weakens the individual, and the very strength of corporate life dwarfs the growth of each member of the body. These are certain prominent facts of Indian life, and do they not teach us that we must show them the reality of which they have only the shadow, and that if there be unity, sympathy, and self-sacrifice in the Church of Christ, they will there find the embodiment of that ideal human society of which their limited brotherhoods are but fragments or distorted reflections? [To be continued.]

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