

Our Work Abroad

INDIA'S PROBLEM

By Ida Newcomb Gulison

The problems of India may be classified as Political, Religious, and Social, but so closely interwoven are they, that they cannot easily be considered separately. For instance, the British Government does not interfere with things religious, and yet the custom of burning the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband, the sacrifice of children to the Ganges and other practices involving human sacrifice, have been legislated against by Government, though not strictly belonging to the political realm.

No sane, well informed person would think of questioning the benefits of British rule in India, but the very advantages given by a benign Government have created in the educated Indians aspirations which at present culminate in a desire and determination for self-government. Possibly the glamour of independence has largely blinded them to the responsibility involved, but the aspirations exist and how to satisfy them and at the same time safeguard the interests of the people as a whole, is the most serious problem of the present day. The extreme nationalist leaders demand the political status of a Dominion-self-government, complete, and at once. The English government on the other hand, firmly convinced that India is not yet competent to govern itself independent of outside aid, insists on her gradually assuming the responsibilities of swaraj (self-government) and is accordingly, handing over to the Indians by instalments various departments of the government known as transferred subjects, adding to these from time to time, as the Indians prove themselves competent and worthy, until the English official becomes no longer a necessity.

The spirit of anarchy and fanaticism exist and intensify the problem. Caste with its scale of social standing, its inexorable laws that divide society into many distinct divisions having no social intercourse, that condemn millions to the opprobrium of outcaste, makes any real union in India impossible. Hindus and Mohammedans are as distinct as two sep-

arate nations and each covets the ascendancy, which makes civil war more than a mere probability, in the event of self-government being granted.

Illiteracy adds to the problem, for, despite all efforts of Government, only a small proportion of the millions of India can read or write and therefore they are an easy prey to the agitator.

Caste has already been mentioned as affecting the political situation; it, as well, constitutes the great social problem of the country. Not only does it prevent any real union, but it creates a social scale based wholly upon birth—one cannot rise higher than the caste in which he was born. It retards advancement. It is strongly entrenched, but the influence of decades of missionary effort and the impact of the West, have combined to open the eyes of the more advanced, and to-day we find the Indian social reformers agitating against caste and its allied evils.

Child marriage and enforced Widowhood have added their baneful influence to the social life of India and how to counteract and correct these evils is a social problem, easy of theoretical solution but baffling the most ardent efforts to put theory into practice. Accordingly we find the Social Reformer giving strong and stirring orations against these evils and then making active preparations for the marriage of his little daughter ere the expiration of the time prescribed by his caste, or changing the time of his departure on a journey because the evil omen of a widow's shadow crossed his pathway.

The Christian missionary must lend his influence to any reform, whether social or political, which will in any way ameliorate the condition of India's millions; even though he must zealously concentrate upon distinctively evangelistic work, yet, so closely allied are the social and political movements, that his influence must, at least indirectly, affect the latter. For example, illiteracy is a pertinent problem to the missionary as so many of the converts come from the unlettered classes that the situation demands that efforts be made to educate our Christian community. The industrial problem also taxes the thought and time