

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

EXPERIENCES OF AN ITINERATING MISSIONARY IN INDIA.

By Rev. A. G. McGaw.

There is much of repetition in the work of visiting little groups of believers in scattered villages, and yet variety sufficient to prevent monotony. May I give you an account of one of the unusual days?

After a light breakfast, three workers start off on a special mission to a village six miles distant, while I and a young teacher start for a round in the opposite direction. After a walk of a mile or more, we reach a village in which about one hundred sweepers live. The "Mass Movement" of that caste all about them has failed to bring into our ranks. They have been visited by teachers, preachers, and by some of the more earnest of their Christian neighbors. Some were ready to accept the new religion, but the chief man among them and others have withstood. They seem to have got the idea that it would be of some advantage financially to the worker to secure their baptism and have asked for a share themselves.

In a number of years of experience in this "Mass Movement" work, I have seldom gone to people except those who either were Christians or were wanting to be. These lived on the road and we stopped on our way. I asked if there were any poverty-stricken ones among them; that I had been told they wanted money, and if they were in need I would help them. Of course no one was in such need, and they scorned the idea of being made subjects of charity. Then I told them their spirit of covetousness was entirely out of place—it was to save from such a state that Christ came and left them with an invitation to come to us if they decided to accept Christ. Of course, through their Christian neighbors we shall hear if their minds change, and we shall then be glad to go again.

Next we went to a village where are two families of Christians. The young men were all absent. A decrepit old woman, a young woman, and two small children were there at first, but soon after an old man came. These, with a crowd of ten or fifteen non-Christian neighbors, constituted our audience. A few questions revealed the state of knowledge attained by the Christians. To strengthen that and to lead them on, we went over the story of man's sinful state and of God's wonderful provision. For the sake of the non-Christians who stood at such a distance as to preserve the sanctity of their caste we had a few words regarding the oneness of humanity, and also, in response to their question, tried to show that the man is superior to all other living things. They doubtless still believe in the transmigration of souls and hence the sacredness of animal life.

At the next place, one large family of the sweeper caste were said by the teacher to be inquirers. We stopped and soon found that two of the men had been baptized years before by another mission, but had not been cared for. Now they were anxious for all of the family to receive baptism and for us to undertake to shepherd them. By the time we had reached this stage of acquaintanceship the non-Christians had begun to assemble, being careful not to be defiled by coming in contact with any of our little company. As our host did not introduce us, they demanded an introduction. When told that I was a "padri sahib" and had come to tell them about God, one man scornfully remarked, "What does the padri sahib know about God? We all know God." I spoke up and said, "Yes, that pile of stones, some the Brahman's feet, others the sun, and others

the Ganges river, and so on indefinitely—some consider that pipal tree to be divine and worship it, others worship it."

Well, they didn't want any of our doctrine in their village. The crowd increased. Others had to be told who we were. Then a six-foot farmer came forward and with forceful gesticulations told the sweepers to send us away, if they became Christians they would be turned out of the village.

I got up then and inquired who was the headman of the village appointed by government. This big man blustered out that he was, but from others I learned that that man lived in another village. The crowd increased further, and many talked with loud voices and some were angry. I called on a respectable-looking man to tell me what we had done to anger them—that we had come on a peaceful mission, to teach these poor despised people about the way of salvation, but not to interfere at all with the work they ordinarily did in the village—that of scavengers. He said that the people were suspecting that we would spread plague. So here was that old lying suspicion and misunderstanding again which ignorant men were quite ready to believe. I tried to explain and calm them, for a number had picked up clods from the field where they stood. My explanations were listened to for a very few seconds only. The men and boys became numerous, noisy and angry. A few clods were thrown and for a moment my hair stood up, but I stepped forward and began to explain to one man (it was useless to try to reach all). He had clods in both hands, but put them behind him and listened, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the clods fall to the ground; but the big man came up and ordered him to stop listening to me and for us to go. Those we came specially to see were thoroughly scared and asked us to go. At first I told the crowd that we would not be driven away so long as these wished to hear, but now that there was no reason for staying, except the reluctance to yield at all, we prepared to leave. They gave orders to go out through the field and not through the village. We skirted the village in an opposite direction and were thankful not to have had any worse treatment. Now, can you tell what Christ would do about reporting such treatment to government officers, inasmuch as there is unrest in India? If you know I wish you would tell me.

Then we went to another village. Again a group of Christians. That old woman sitting there is still sad at the loss, last year, of a son whose praise, like that given Timothy in Acts, I had heard from the teacher; and yet she recognizes God's goodness. That middle-aged man who has the little tuft of hair such as Hindus wear. Yes, he is a Christian in name, but in reality has not given up his sorcery, such as he practised before. The missionary tries to comfort one and severely rebukes the second, while instructing all.

We reach the tent at ten o'clock. A meal, a little rest, a letter from another home paper, and then another trip including two villages. In one a boy of thirteen years rejoices our hearts exceedingly by his knowledge of the facts and meaning of Christ's life. His enthusiasm will cheer more than one in this weary old world.

We get back at dark, eat, write another letter, have prayers with the little bands of Christian workers, including two village watchmen. By a little urging one prays, in his own way to be sure, but he has asked for some of the most essential blessings of God. The other is more backward. I remember that little group of boys in the pastor's parlor twenty-five years ago and the lump in my throat; so I have him repeat a simple prayer after me—and our day is over.

SUICIDE.

By W. Robertson Nicoll, D.D.

The subject of suicide is dark and gloomy, but too often it compels our thoughts. Men are more merciful to suicides than they were wont to be. Once they were buried by torchlight, without funeral rites, at the crossroads, and a stake was driven through the poor body, while all goods and chattels were forfeited. Now the fact of suicide moves us to a great compassion. We think of what tortures the spirit must have passed through—the last desperate venture was made. We think of the possible overthrow of the reason, and we are well content to leave the dead in the hands of the Master and the Judge of souls. But suicide is none the less terrible and fearful—the saddest and beyond comparison to any life, and one which overclouds the most brilliant and lasting achievement.

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It is much to be feared that suicide is increasing, and that there is a tendency to its increasing still further. The reasons are not very easy to indicate, but some probable causes may be mentioned.

Of these, the first is the steady acceleration of the pace of life. The brain is like an anvil beaten on by a thousand hammers. The tense and agitated fibres are being continually struck. The air is full of tidings, and they fall upon minds that can profitably grasp or use only a little part of them. We are all limited, and only able to bear a certain defined amount of stimulation. But the stimulants are continuous, and it seems impossible to escape from them. They goad us to exertions of which they are intrinsically incapable. After a time the reserve powers are exhausted, and then comes that period of collapse which is infinitely the most perilous of all. It is not so often that men commit suicide when they are in the full pace and drive of life. It is when they retreat for a time and fall out of the ranks in quest of a cure. Then the mind is apt to turn upon itself. Brooding melancholy sets in, thoughts of coming calamity crowd the brain. Perhaps the most fatal is the thought of the duties to which one must return, and to which one feels miserably unequal. To the distempered imagination the prospect of the unknown seems at least better than any prospect of the known that it can by much searching discern.

So we lose nerve. Nerve is the quality by which we are able to marshal our forces for the labour and endurance which sooner or later are required of all of us. It is a form of courage, the courage that faces difficulties, and sees through them and beyond them. It is the quality by which we concentrate ourselves for the appointed task—not scattering our forces to meet difficulties which we shall never encounter, but bending them with intensity on the present duty.

The overstrain of the present day often prompts a recourse to relief in the form of stimulants and narcotics. It has been said by scientific observers that of all causes for suicide the most deadly are hard drinking and gambling. It is probably no paradox to say that though the use of alcohol has happily greatly decreased, the danger of it is greater than ever. In the eighteenth century, when hard drinking was almost universal, there were perhaps fewer victims of the habit than there are at present. For nowadays a drunkard is generally prompted by a genuine dipsomania. He is attracted by the poison. In these circumstances the poison does its utmost harm, and the habit gains till the nervous system breaks down, and physical and moral collapse ensue. Gambling is also a refuge often sought