

INDIA: ITS PEOPLES AND RELIGIONS.*

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(Condensed from February Record.)

It is almost impossible for anyone who has not come into personal contact with the Orientals to appreciate the almost total dissimilarity of character and custom which forms a great gulf between them and us, brought about by centuries of training in different directions. For centuries India has lived an exclusive, self-centred, and self-absorbed life, proudly and blindly satisfied that her ancient social, religious, and philosophical systems were the highest and noblest in the world, and cut off from enlightening intercourse with other nations by their rigid caste system. Even yet a man's caste is broken if he dares to make a trip to England. The influence of English government has done much to break down these ideas and they are beginning to shake, but have not yet fallen.

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The population of India, which is divided into many nations, each having its own language, customs, etc., numbers nearly three hundred millions, or about one-fifth of the whole human race. There are said to be over a hundred languages and a much larger number of dialects, but the language most widely known is Hindi, just as the Hindus are the most important people numerically, and Hindus the religion of widest extent.

Hindi is spoken by about one hundred millions of people, about one-third of the population, and can be understood by many tribes having distinct dialects of their own. Urdu, or Hindustani, a mixture of Hindi and Persian, has been the Court language of India ever since the Mohammedan invasion and conquest, 1000 A.D., and is the consequent mixture of the languages of conquerors and conquered. It is understood by educated natives in all the large towns and cities of India.

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Some of the outstanding rules governing the castes are, that they can not intermarry, must not eat together, and that each caste must keep to its own occupation. To come in contact with even the shadow of a Sudra is pollution. The Code of Manu, in its section on the Law of Caste, lays down a set of rules governing all the details of individual, family and social life, which have no parallel in the world, and the restraints of which often seem so childish, trivial, and hap-hazard, that it is difficult to realize that for a Hindu to violate them is to lose his social position.

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Caste has its effect upon mission work in India, and it is on account of it that educational methods are used so much more largely than in other countries. House to house visitation cannot be attempted without special permission and invitation. Half an hour or an hour spent in listening to street preaching fails to undermine the proud philosophy of the educated upper classes, especially as the theological terms which a preacher must perforce use in speaking their language, convey not the Christian ideas which they signify to the mind of the speaker, but the Hindu ideas which cling to them in the mind of the hearer.

All classes, however, high or low, will, for the sake of the education given, send their children to mission schools and colleges even though they know Christianity will be taught there. And in these the missionary has great opportunities for patient and systematic teaching of the Message which he was sent to bring. And then from the schools come invitations to the homes.

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The principal religions found today in India are, in order of numerical importance, Hinduism, Mohammedanism, Demon-worship, Buddhism (almost wholly confined to Burma), Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Parsees, and Jews. Besides these, there are what are known as eclectic sects, the Brahma-Somaj, Parthna-Somaj,

and Arya-Somaj, a series of reformed brahmanical faiths, which adopt much of the Christian moral code, but reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

It is of Hinduism that one chiefly thinks in speaking of India's religion, the other faiths are all small sects compared with it. The thing to be considered is its growth during the centuries, from the simple nature worship of the Aryans to the gigantic system of mingled philosophy and idolatry which exists at the present day. It has been said—"Hinduism is a social league and a religious alliance. As a social league, it rests upon caste, and has its roots deep down in the race-elements of the Indians. As a religious alliance, it represents the union of the Vedic faith of the Brahmins with Buddhism on the one hand, and with the ruler rites of the non-Aryans on the other hand."

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The other religions in India should be mentioned. Buddhism sprang up about 250 B.C., as a revolt against the priestly and caste systems of Brahmanism, and reigned in India about one thousand years.

It preached the brotherhood of man, and at first was atheistical, casting aside, with the priests of Brahmanism, all their gods. It held to the doctrine of transmigration, teaching salvation through lives of merit in many births, but its heaven was extinction, and not absorption into any deity. There were originally no temples or idols, but only monasteries, which were seats of learning. The new doctrine made mighty advances, and for centuries Brahmanism went down before it.

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The Mohammedans invaded India about 1000 A.D., and ruled there upwards of seven hundred years. They are responsible for the seclusion and much of the degraded position of women among the Hindus. Their own women were secluded and the Hindus soon found that they must seclude theirs too if they would protect them from the conquerors. Afterwards the Hindus adopted the Mohammedan idea, that women must be secluded on account of their lack of so many virtues, and their proneness to vice.

Mohammedanism, as a religion, is strictly non-idolatrous, and its worship in contrast to the disgusting rites of Hindu temples, seems almost wholly spiritual. But their hearts are untouched and their lives unpurified by their religion, their heaven is but a sensual paradise where all earthly desires will be gratified, and their hell, a place in which they can view from paradise their enemies in torment.

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The divinity of Jesus Christ they fiercely deny; they accept Him as a prophet, but inferior to Mohammed. The Mohammedans are most difficult to reach with the Gospel message, because once they overthrow what they considered an idolatrous form of Christian worship when they overthrew the Greek and Roman Churches of the East with their pictures and images of Mary and the saints. They still connect this form of worship with all forms of Christianity, and as they abhor idolatry, they despise Christianity as they conceive of it. To recognize even the Trinity seems to them blasphemous. "There is one God," they say, "and Mohammed is his prophet." The direct descendants of the Arab invaders of India are the most fanatical among this sect; the converts made from Hinduism are less so.

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The Christian religion occupies a prominent place in the eyes of all India today. Educated natives are aware that every reform in the crimes of Hinduism has been made at the instance of Christian missionaries, from the days of Carey to the present time. Everywhere Christian missionaries have led the way and the government has followed. Missionaries began medical work among women, and instituted schools for girls. Missionaries agitated for the abolition of suttee and infanticide. Missionaries helped to put

an end to government management of Hindu temples and their rites, and to the attendance of government officials on heathen festivals in order to add to their dignity. Not long ago converts to Christianity lost their civil rights. Missionaries agitated, and a law was passed that a change of faith did not involve the loss of civil liberty.

The story of missions in India is only the process of love at work. The power is mighty which it wields, it is that of the only true God; and Hinduism will surely fall in the end.

Hollow through and through the day of its downfall must come and cannot tarry.

THE FALLING DARK.

By Margaret E. Sangster.

"Come in 'tis late!" The mother calls,
And boy and girl must leave their play,
Since home is best for children, when
They reach the far end of the day.
The lamp alights, the table spread,
The little things that must be done,
The hearth-glow on each curly head,
How dear they are, at set of sun.
"Come in, 'tis late!" A call like this
In tender accents, mother-mild,
Shall summon us to leave our tasks,
Or leave our roaming in the wild.
Oh, blithe we'll hear that homing call,
And swift we'll haste to reach the door,
That leads into the lighted hall
Where darkness entereth never more.

SPARKS FROM OTHER ANVILS.

Christian Guardian: All the gold in the world, or the lack of it, cannot win or influence the man that is settled fast in principles of honesty.

Presbyterian Witness: Girls going to cities in Canada or the United States would find to their advantage to take letters of introduction to a minister, and to the Women's Christian Association. The tie that binds Christian people to one another is strong, and it would be much stronger if more frequently put to the test.

Michigan Presbyterian: No matter how great a Christian's progress may be in faith, or love or patience or hope, if he abide not in Christ "he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." However fair and charming and helpful a Christian's life may be, apart from Christ he can only be a dead branch.

Lutheran Observer: What we need for strong, victorious Christian character is not change of outward circumstances, but the purpose to "abide with God" in whatever lot the providential ordering of life may place us. Certainly the servants in the parable were not made rulers over many things until they had shown themselves faithful over few.

Herald and Presbyterian: The aggregate amount of Christian duties may be reduced to three things—faith, obedience and patience; and the vital principle which animates them all is submission. Faith is a submission to the oracles of God; obedience is a submission to the commanding will of God. Patience is a submission to the chastisements with which God may see fit to visit us.

Sunday School Times: There is a time to be arbitrary and autocratic; and every one of us ought to satisfy his natural inclination to be so by recognizing this. "The passion for dominion is divine," says a prominent English preacher; "it is proof of our kinship to God." Well, then, let us prove our divine kinship by exercising autocratic rule over the one whom God has placed absolutely under our own control. That one is self. We have unlimited authority direct from heaven to rule self, to put self under, without explaining, without consideration for self's feelings, without reference to self's rights. Here is a real safety valve for the prompting in every breast to wield the power of an absolute monarch. To exercise this control is even better than taking a city.

*Y.P.S. Special Topic for February.