



The Sikhs in Canada

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An Appeal

Reprinted from the Gwalior Journal

① By Mrs. Anna Ross

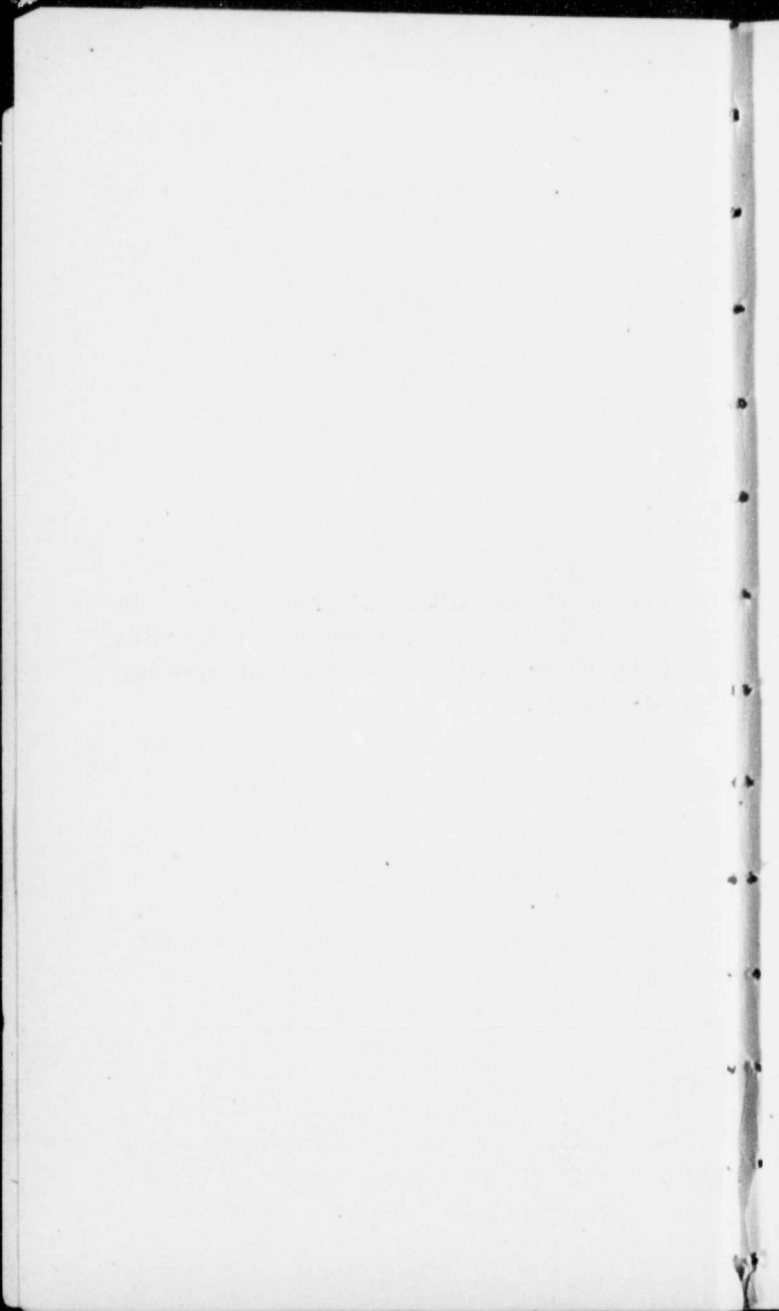
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Copies of this little pamphlet can be obtained from Mrs. Anna Ross, Annette, Calif., U.S.A., to be used in this work of arousing public opinion.



The Sikhs in Canada.

(John Eliot's motto, prayer and pains will do anything.)

Written first for the Gwalior Journal.

The whole question of Oriental immigration is up in Ottawa, and our future conduct toward the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Sikhs of Northern India, will shortly be settled, right or wrong. I would earnestly bring before you one-third of this question, the treatment that has been given, and that is yet to be given, to our loyal fellow-subjects, the Sikhs of Northern India. I am doing it with a set purpose. If our rulers are to be strengthened to do right to these strangers, it must be by the awakening of an intelligent public opinion to back them against the strong and bitter influences that are pushing them the other way.

But public opinion is formed by facts. In this paper I want to press home two facts.

1st. The Chinese have been admitted in multitudes on the payment of a poll-tax. A "gentleman's agreement" with Japan provides for the free admission of 500 Japs each year. But the Sikhs, our fellow-subjects, and notably our most loyal fellow-subjects in India, for it was they who stood for England in the great Mutiny, and turned the tide of the struggle in her favor, these Sikhs have for

years been simply barred out of the land. This has been done, not by respectful, straight legislation, adopted after a careful consideration of the case, but by a most irrelevant and vexatious regulation, that only those should be admitted who came by one continuous route from India to Canada. As there has been no continuous route between India and Canada, our door has been effectually shut in their faces.

It is time that Canadian public opinion should be stirred that, in the final settlement now pending in Ottawa, these loyal fellow-subjects shall be dealt with fairly and frankly, and accorded at least as much courtesy when knocking at our doors as the Chinese or the Japs. Otherwise the same influences that have led to the past treatment of the Sikhs will mould the coming legislation.

But unless there is immediate and strenuous work on the part of those who love justice, public opinion will not move to check this crooked work against the Sikhs. May I ask earnestly the readers of this paper, whose hearts are stirred up to take hold, to do three things. Find some other Christian who believes in the God that heareth prayer, and together take hold of the power of God. We have a promise, Matt. 18: 19, 20. Next, get this little paper copied into any newspaper you can influence to give it space. Then write a short letter to your member of Par-

liament, asking him to consider this matter, and to stand behind the Government in resisting the influences that have hitherto refused to our fellow-subjects the privileges accorded to alien Orientals. Claim for the Sikhs at least equality with the others.

But there is another fact, the thought of which tinges a Canadian's cheek with shame. The 4,000 East Indians now domiciled in B.C., have hitherto been persistently refused permission to bring in their wives and families. The Japs are allowed the privilege; under certain restrictions, so are the Chinese, but not the Sikhs. This is not on account of polygamous practices, for the Sikhs are the husbands of only one wife. All of the 4,000 do not ask the privilege, but about 40 per cent. of them have done so. They have asked, have sent petitions, have sent strong delegations, have received promises, and then again been refused, until they wonder what Christian morality or truthfulness can mean. Is it not time that Canadian public opinion should claim from our Government some carefully framed regulations that would protect against any abuse of the privilege, and yet freely and heartily grant it to those men who know so well how to deny themselves in order to build up the little home they so much desire? It is this power they possess of self-denial, this contentment with frugal living and temperate habits that has made them so unacceptable to a certain influential class in B. C. But it

surely should make them peculiarly acceptable to the country at large, as men to be respected and relied upon. It is not men who clamor for their own homes that are the men to be feared. It is rather those who spend all their earnings on the foolish pleasures of the day, and never ask nor prepare for a home of their own. These are always a menace to society.

Dear reader, will you take this matter also very especially before our God in prayer, that the power of God may go out to do His own work, "setting these solitary men in families" in the broad and beautiful land in which they have been made strangers indeed. Prayer and pains will do anything.

THE SIKHS IN CANADA. WHO ARE THEY?

Of the East Indians now resident in British Columbia, more than 90 per cent are Sikhs from the North of India. Who are these Sikhs?

They are **Sikhs**, and that word means Disciples. They are not to be confounded with the ordinary Hindus.

We had a Reformation in the 16th Century, and those who have embraced it have been called Protestants. India had a Reformation in the 15th Century, and those who embraced it were called Sikhs or Disciples. They have had ten great teachers, the last, Guru Govind Singh, worthy son of a martyred father, the greatest of them all.

These teachers taught strange doctrines for Indian ears. They taught that there is one God, and that idol-worship is folly. The Sikhs are their disciples. They taught that there is no caste, but that all are equal in the sight of God. The Sikhs are their disciples. They taught that there is no essential difference between the men and the women, but that they are equal in God's sight. The Sikhs are their disciples. And for centuries now they have been practising this equality, "in the home, in the temple, and in the community, both sexes having equal voice in spiritual and temporal affairs." According to those words, written by one of themselves, these Sikhs have for centuries been ahead of us Anglo-Saxons on the subject of the position of women.

But these are all heresies of the deepest dye in the eyes of the orthodox Hindu. And these Indian Protestants have had to suffer persecution to the death on account of their faith. Persecution that perhaps went beyond any that our own Protestant forefathers endured, for it even went sometimes to the flaying alive of the little children. Yet they have stood, and are Sikhs, or Disciples still.

What are these Sikhs physically? They are not the puny offspring of child marriages. They are the stalwart offspring of homes more nearly like Christian homes than perhaps any other in Asia. I have seen them while travelling through California. Long before I

knew their history, I admired their physique and their bearing. They look like heroes. Some of them walk like kings. In spite of their dark color, they have reminded me of a group of Highland elders, giving such an impression of manliness and of individual weight.

A large percentage of them have been small farmers at home, each owning his little farm of from one to three acres. Are not those exactly the circumstances that produce independence, frugality, and enterprise? And those three are found highly developed among the Sikhs.

At first the Sikhs, valiant foemen as they were, set their faces against the English in India, and fought them. "But the righteousness and piety of the Christian brothers Lawrence, helped to win the hearts of these people for England, and regiment after regiment of Sikhs was raised to help the British in India, and it was they who scaled the walls of Delhi and won that day." Is it to be the injustice and insolence of the people of Canada that is to alienate this noble people, and to kill the loyalty that has burned so bright?

The question of Oriental immigration is up at Ottawa, and will shortly be settled right or wrong. Dear reader, will you use your utmost influence to secure that, in the final settlement, these Sikhs, these Indian Protestants, these loyal fellow-subjects, shall be given privileges at least as great as those

allowed to either of the alien races, the Chinese or the Japs? Less than that is an insult as well as an injustice.

The Sikhs to whom home means much more than it does to those who degrade their women, has hitherto been refused permission to bring in his wife and family, while the Jap can bring in his without restraint, and the Chinaman, with some restriction, can do the same. Will you make your influence felt that this wrong also shall be righted, and that promptly?

Don't say it can't be done. "Prayer and pains will do anything." Take hold of the power of God in prevailing prayer. Push this little paper and other such information into any newspaper you can influence to give them space. Write to your member of parliament briefly but strongly on the subject, and influence others to do the same.

THE SIKHS IN CANADA. WHAT SORT OF MEN ARE THEY?

(Most of the matter in this article is from Mrs. Broad's pamphlet, "An Appeal for Fair Play.")

What sort of laborers have these Sikhs proved themselves to be?

Mr. W. W. Baer writes in the Victorian Times, "I could print hundreds of letters telling me of the faithfulness of the Hindu in his service to his employer; the reliance that may

be safely placed upon him in his work, and his unshrinking application of his strength to his varied tasks. Altogether, my opinion is, that of the several racial types that have crossed the Pacific Ocean to participate in our great toil of reducing this Western Province to its final productive power, the Hindu is the most desirable, and I cannot truly say that he is in any sense undesirable."

Another friend from the United States writes:—"For a number of months I have been visiting most of the Hindu camps in Southern California, and I must confess that as a class of laborers they have no peer in the labor market. There is only one opinion expressed by the Americans who have employed them, and that is,—'The Hindus are good workmen, superior to any other class of laborers that I have ever employed.'"

My own son testifies:—"California employers cannot say too much of them as efficient laborers. They have made good as teamsters, dairy hands, saw-mill workers, and have proved invaluable in clearing scrub and stone from fruit land. They undoubtedly possess the power of general and intelligent adaptability.

"I have myself seen them at Claremont clearing orange land of thousands of cords of stone, the hardest kind of hard work. I interviewed their employer on the spot, and found that he set them ahead of any other class of laborer he could find, for their mag-

nificent physique, and their right good will to do their work.”

What of their cleanliness, morality and personal habits?

Dr. Lawson, who frankly admits that at the first he was strongly prejudiced against them, writes in the Daily Colonist, Victoria:—

“There is one phase of the Hindu question concerning which the majority of the public seem to hold most erroneous opinions. I refer to his personal habits, re cleanliness, use of alcoholic liquors, etc.

“As ship surgeon on the C. P. R. SS. Mont-eagle, and later on the Tartar, at the time of the greatest influx of Hindus, the majority of these people passed under my close observation.

“It was my duty to make a thorough physical examination of each emigrant at Hong Kong, and, although I was at first strongly prejudiced against them, I lost this prejudice after thousands of them had passed through my hands, and I had compared them with the white steerage passengers I had seen on the Atlantic.

“I refer particularly to the Sikhs, and I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that they were 100 per cent. cleaner in their habits, and freer from disease, than the European steerage passengers I had come in contact with. The Sikhs impressed me as a clean, manly, honest race. My recent experience as surgeon in mining camps among

thousands of white men, where immorality is rife, has increased my respect for the Sikhs.

“I have read your paper carefully for some time, and have not yet seen one good reason why they should not be permitted to bring their families in as freely as the European immigrants. Justice, humanity, and morality all cry for the removal of the restrictions which prevent the Sikh's enjoyment of home life.”

(Signed) E. H. Lawson, M.D., C.M.

Highland, Alta., September 15th, 1913.

What about their ability to deal with their own social problems? Have they any self-governing power?

Concerning the undesirables that formed a certain proportion of the first companies that landed in B.C., Mr. W. W. Baer again writes: “The Hindus recognized the elements which had constituted their mistakes, and the unsuccessful ones among them were removed in a space of time that made us wonder how it had been effected. The immigration was immediately checked, the ill-conditioned ones sent home, and since then only such as were fully equipped to make their way in the conditions prevailing here have been allowed to come. None of our immigration problems here in the West has righted itself so completely, so quickly, and so wholly from within itself.”

Is it not very extraordinary that these men, of all Orientals, have been chosen for ex-

elusion and humiliation? In the year 1911, there were 11,932 Chinese admitted into Canada, and 2,986 Japanese, and of these 1,037 were women. During that same period, one Hindu was allowed to land. Why this discrimination against our fellow-subjects, who are superior in physique, and who are characterized by Dr. Lawson, at first strongly prejudiced against them, as "a clean, manly, honest race?" Why is British Columbia so bitter against these Sikhs, away beyond her bitterness toward other Orientals?

There is some reason. Will anyone plainly tell us what it is?

One possible reason I would suggest. Can proper authorities assure the public that this possible reason is not after all the real reason?

Is it the very superiority of these men that makes them unacceptable to certain influential interests in B.C.? They are frugal and temperate, and put their money ahead to build up a little home somewhere. Is that the reason they are not wanted?

The first time such a thought ever entered my mind was about twenty years ago. I was at Mt. Clemens, at the baths there. A Chicago hotel-keeper's wife was staying at the same hotel. She was talking one day of a lot of foreign laborers who had come into the city, Italians I think, but am not sure. She said with animation, "We have no use for these men. When they have a dollar, they never

come and spend it with us, they just go and put it in the savings bank.”

Is it possible that that is really the secret of British Columbia's deep objection to the Sikhs? Is it their superiority that is their real disqualification for Canada?

H. E. Irwin of Toronto, has drawn attention to the great need of the present situation being righted. He declares that “public opinion must be focussed” upon the subject. These present papers are an earnest effort to help to do this,—to “focus public opinion” on the subject at this present, pivotal time. Who will help in the undertaking? “Prayer and pains will do anything.” Prayer and pains will do this.

THE SIKHS IN CANADA. WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Since writing the last paper, and since the sailing of the Komagata Maru from Vancouver, I have received the following, written from Victoria:—

“You will see a statement from Sir R. Borden, which I think must mean that the Sikhs could ask for a certain number to be admitted yearly. If this were granted, and permission given for the wives and families of those here to come, we would be satisfied.”

The following is from Dr. Sunder Singh himself:—“I think a ‘gentleman's agreement’ with India would work well, just like the one they have with Japan. But this

stigma of a Hindu being debarred simply and solely because he is a Hindu, and a little shade darker in skin,—that must be done away with.’’

This is evidently the solution of the difficulty which is now in the mind of Sir Robert Borden. This is the solution which would go far to appease those proud Sikhs who have received such unjust and discourteous treatment at our hands. But this is exactly the arrangement that will be opposed by a certain class in B.C. with the bitterest determination. The frugality, temperance, and general superiority of these Sikhs make the proposal to admit 500 of them in one year a red rag to a certain class in B.C. They will be incessant in opposing such a ‘‘gentleman’s agreement.’’ Unless those who want a fair and just settlement are as active as they are, they may win. Who will go to work with a will and with a set purpose to strengthen Sir Robert’s hands to do the thing he wants to do—to do the thing that is right and fair—to treat these our noble and loyal fellow-subjects with as much hospitality as we extend to the Japanese?

Dear reader, one tremendous power you have, turn the eyes of the living God upon the situation. But do not stop at praying. God works out His gracious purposes by His people’s pains as well as by their prayers. Unless they are ready to bend their backs to service, it is a question whether they shall be

able to get the real grip upon God in prayer.

Here is another tremendous power you hold, though perhaps you hardly know it. Get down your pen and ink, and write a short, personal letter to Sir Robert Borden telling him you earnestly desire that Canada should make with India an agreement similar to the one now existing with Japan, admitting a limited, definite number of Hindus every year, with their wives and families. Then write another letter to your member of Parliament, asking him to use his influence in the same direction.

If a few hundred letters were to reach Ottawa from all parts of Canada without delay asking these things, they would do much in determining what the final settlement would be.

Two things more you can do. Take a little real trouble to induce your friends to write these letters also, and take a little more real trouble to get any newspapers you can influence to give space to any good papers on the subject that you may send to them. Public opinion needs to be informed and moved on this subject, and that quickly. Where are the willing-hearted to do this hard work? "Prayer and pains will do anything."

THE SIKHS IN CANADA—THE "KOMAGATA MARU."

These letters would not be complete without reference to the part these Sikhs are now playing in the present terrible war, contrasting their generous action with the treatment

meted out to the 350 Sikhs who reached Vancouver on the "Komagata Maru" in May, and left in July, after innumerable indignities, without even having been allowed to set foot on our land.

The Sikh Maharajahs have been among the first to offer troops. They were the first of the overseas support to join the British army in France. They arrived there to the number of sixty thousand at a tremendously important time. They were the "unknown factor" Lord Kitchener referred to so significantly in connection with the future operations of the British forces. What the arrival of their magnificently trained cavalry alone has meant to the war we do not yet know, but no one doubts that they are being most effective. Though Canada has counted the Sikh worthy only of contempt and injustice, he is now winning to himself the grateful respect and admiration of the whole British Empire, and he has done it before.

The story of the "Komagata Maru" and her passengers must be very briefly given. The bar that has for several years excluded Hindus from Canada has been the rule that only those could be admitted to our shores who came by one continuous route. As there was no continuous route the Hindus were kept out. But last spring 350 of these Sikhs clubbed together and made a continuous passage by chartering a ship for themselves, and last May they entered Vancouver harbor, expect-

ing, as they had conformed to the Canadian rule, they would be admitted at least for inspection, and that those who were found eligible would be passed.

One would think that the decent way for the authorities to act toward these men who had so accommodated themselves to the Canadian rule, would be to receive them politely, and to deal with each case fairly and squarely according to law, passing those eligible, and rejecting non-eligibles. Then, if the will of the Canadian people was still for shutting the door, to do so by straight statute,—“No Hindu need apply.” After that there would at least be no misunderstanding or disappointments.

But these men who had accommodated themselves to the Canadian rule, who at a cost to themselves of nearly \$57,000.00 had come by one continuous route, who now politely asked admission as British subjects and expected it, received instead indignity after indignity. It is almost inconceivable the lengths to which official insolence went in the treatment of these strong, proud, independent men. They were not allowed to set foot on shore at all. They were not allowed to communicate with the Sikhs on shore at all. They were not allowed to communicate with their own lawyer. Even when their case for admission was in court, their lawyer, Mr. Bird, was not allowed a personal interview with any of them, so that he was conducting

their case in the dark. After the case was decided under these circumstances against them, Mr. Bird was allowed to visit them, and discovered that very important elements in the case he had not understood at all, and had not presented. If this is Canadian justice, it is not British justice.

When the case had been decided against them, they expressed their willingness to leave, only requesting that they should be supplied with provisions for the return voyage. The immigration authorities refused provisions, but tried to compel the captain of the ship to sail at once. Though they had been unnecessarily delayed by the authorities for six weeks, these officials endeavored to force them to commence their long voyage without provisions. This roused the man and the soldier in these Sikhs, and they prevented the captain from obeying. 175 policemen and the stream from a fire-hose only roused them the more. They beat back the policemen with fire-bricks and lumps of coal. Then in the dignity of her might, Canada ordered the cruiser "Rainbow" to proceed alongside the "Komagata Maru" and compel submission. By this time the inhuman attempt to send 350 men across the Pacific starving had been abandoned, and offers of abundant provisions were made. But by this time the fighting blood of the Sikhs was up. They knew they had been barbarously treated by representatives of the Canadian Government, and they

were resolved to put no trust in any offers now made to them, but just to fight and die, if need be.

That was the position Canada found herself in July 22nd. The guns of the "Rainbow" were trained on the little "Komagata Maru." The Sikhs on board her had used timber to construct barricades; and the blacksmiths among them were working at fever heat making swords and pikes. The Government then in extremity sought the good offices of the Sikhs on shore, and though they had refused to allow them intercourse with the men on the "Komagata Maru" before, they were now glad to have a deputation of shore Sikhs endeavor to convince them that the Government this time was really acting in good faith, to accept the offers of provisions, and leave. They were finally successful, and the little ship sailed away.

It is a sad story. It is a shameful story. They could at least have been treated courteously and given a chance to plead their own cause fairly, even if the law had refused them admission in the end. But most Canadians know little about these things. It is for those who do understand to rise in their might and so to take hold upon God and man that our Government shall be impelled and compelled to do the thing that is right to these tall, dark strangers, who can readily be counted brothers indeed by those who know a man when they see him.

