

**PRISONERS RELEASED**

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*The Isles of the Western Sea.*

*The story of Methodist Missions in the West Indies and Central America. By the Rev. Amos Burnet.*

*Out of the Miry Clay.*

*The story of the Haidarabad Mission to the Outcastes. By the Rev. F. Colyer Sackett.*

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**Worth Saving ?**

A Dom girl with waterpots

# PRISONERS RELEASED

THE REDEMPTION OF A CRIMINAL TRIBE

BY THE REV.

C. PHILLIPS CAPE

For some years Missionary to the Doms of Benares.  
Author of "Benares."

WITH FOREWORD

BY

ROBERT F. HORTON, D.D

LONDON

WESLEYAN METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY  
24 BISHOPSGATE, E.C.4, & 7 CARLISLE AVENUE, E.C.3

To my Wife

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*Wyman & Sons, Ltd., Printers, London, Reading and Fakenham.*

## PREFACE

I GAVE about ten years of my life to the Doms.<sup>1</sup> I think the work took more than ten years from my life. The service rendered was exacting, but a sense of humour, the prayers of many friends and the whole-hearted co-operation of colleagues, both Indian and European, helped me. I liked the Doms. Considering their disabilities they are wonderfully good.

Many have helped to win these people, but I must make mention of the Rev. Istefán Saadat-Ullah and the Rev. James Rathbone Hudson. I thank my God upon every remembrance of these brethren who are still ministering to the Doms of Benares.

Hinduism has done nothing for the outcastes but despise, degrade and despoil them. Jesus has shown Himself their dying, their undying Friend.

It is proper that I should acknowledge my indebtedness to Lord Meston for his deep interest in our mission to the Doms and for the encouragement he gave us when Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces. India owes much to Christian civilians and soldiers.

I am deeply indebted to Mr. F. Deaville Walker, editor of the *Foreign Field*, for writing several chapters and for valued help in some others.

C. PHILLIPS CAPE.

Birkenhead.

1924.

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced "Domes."

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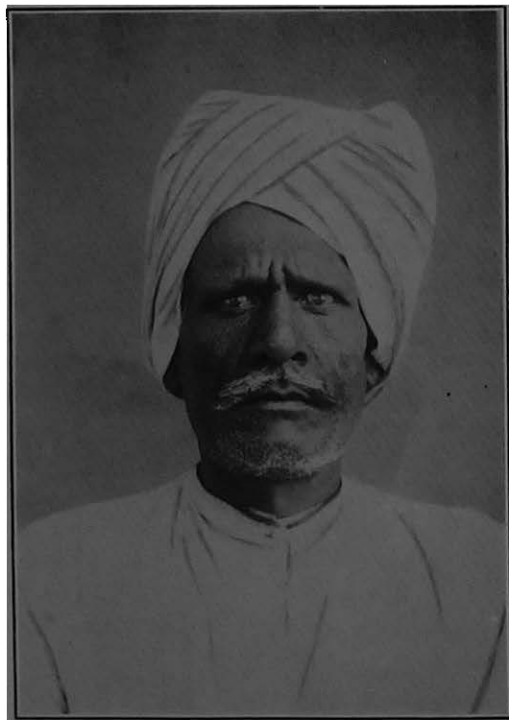
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# FOREWORD

BY

DR. ROBERT F. HORTON

THERE is no memory which stands out more vividly, of things I saw in India, than that of my visit to the Doms. I see the neglected and squalid quarter of the city in which they herd. I see the hovel of the public executioner with the text over the door, the bedstead brought out for us to sit upon, the little throng of these outcastes gathered around us. I hear still the hymns and texts which those unaccustomed lips uttered, and answers to questions put by my missionary guides. But clearest of all is the picture of the Evangelist, who stood there in touch with these untouchables, a Brahman, with the clear-cut features, the refinement and culture, of the highest Caste. That was the miracle—the Doms the outcastes of the outcastes—and that Brahman representing India's scorn of the outcastes—standing together, united by our Lord Jesus Christ. It seemed to me then, and seems now, the most marvellous manifestation of Christ that I saw in India, Christ who came to seek and to save that which is lost, Christ who is our peace, breaking down the middle wall of partition. Christ knocks unheard at the portals of those Hindu temples in Benares; He is unheeded by the Fakirs and the Sadhus and the Mystics who crowd the bathing ghats, and stand in the sacred waters of the Ganges; but He enters in at the door of the Doms, and is welcomed there: THIS MAN RECEIVETH SINNERS.



**A Typical Dom**



**A "Gipsy" Domin**

## APPENDIX

### NOTE AS TO THE ORIGIN OF THE DOMS

Who are the Doms? Is anything known as to their origin and history? The subject is shrouded in mystery and there is a great deal of uncertainty. Certain indications, however, must be noted; though it would be unsafe to build any very definite conclusions upon them until we have more knowledge than we at present possess.

It has been suggested, e.g. by Dr. Caldwell, that the Doms and other low tribes of the Peninsular are the surviving representatives of an older, ruder, and blacker race who preceded the Dravidians in India. Some of these were driven by the Dravidian invasion to take refuge in mountain fastnesses and pestilential jungles, while others were reduced to perpetual servitude. Sir H. H. Risley states that :

“ The fact that for centuries past they have been condemned to the most menial duties and have served as the helots of the entire Hindu community, would of itself be sufficient to break down whatever tribal spirit they may once have possessed, and to obliterate all structural trace of their true origin.”

On the other hand, the Doms of Benares have a vague tradition that their ancestors were rajas, but they can furnish no details of their departed glories. They tell me that they became degraded because their great ancestor, Supach Bhagat, arriving late at a feast, devoured the fragments left by the other guests. In the “ Indian Antiquary,” Vol. XI, 1882, p. 10, there is a reference to an ancient Dom king, who was



powerful in cavalry. This was in the Haidarabad State.

According to the late Sir Henry M. Elliot :

" Tradition fixes their residence to the north of the Gogra River, touching the Bhars on the east, in the vicinity of Rohini. Several old forts testify to their former importance, and still retain the names of their founders, as, for instance, Domdiha and Doman-garh. Rámgarh and Sahankot, on the Rohini, are also Dom forts."

Writing in Hastings' " Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics," Mr. W. Crooke, a careful writer on these subjects, says :

" The Doms seem to be of diverse origin. They certainly belong to a large extent to one of the non-Aryan races ; but in many places they may be the descendants of the mixed race of serfs or slaves of the early conquerors. The Maghaiya Doms [including the Doms of Benares] take their name from the ancient kingdom of Magadha, or South Bihár. The Doms of North India may be divided into three territorial groups, the ethnological connection of which can only be a matter of speculation : (1) The Eastern branch in the plains districts east of the United Provinces and in Bihár ; (2) The Doms of the Himálayas ; (3) The Doms or Dom Mirásis of the Punjab."

The Police Commission Report (1891) affirms that :

" The Doms are a tribe of low mental type, aboriginal to Gorakhpur and the neighbouring districts of Bengal, with some traditions of descent from a race not altogether savage."

We must now consider a very attractive suggestion, made, e.g. by Sir George A. Grierson, that the Doms are the ancestors of the European gipsies, and that Rom, or Romany, is nothing more than a variant of Dom. (See Sir Herbert Risley's " People of India.") Leyland, too, in his " English Gipsies," says : " I would call particular attention to my suggestion that the Dom of India is the true parent of the Rom."

It is now generally accepted that the European gipsies are of Indian origin. Mr. W. Simson, in his " History of the Gipsies," has pointed out that in

searching for an Indian tribe from whom they might possibly have descended, it is necessary to give considerable weight to the instinct for thieving, not only in practice, but also from principle, which seems to be a deeply ingrained national propensity of the gipsies. Simson adds :

" I am convinced that this general propensity to plunder has been the chief cause of the gipsies concealing their origin, language, customs, and religious observances, at the time they entered the territories of civilized nations, and up to this time. The intelligent old gipsy, whose acquaintance I made at St. Boswell's, distinctly told me that his tribe were originally a nation of thieves and robbers ; and it is quite natural to suppose that, when they found theft and robbery punished with much severity in civilized society, everything relating to them would be kept a profound secret."

It may be only a coincidence, but Sanscrit literature discloses the fact that Doms have been thieves for many long centuries. The Dom is also a wanderer, and it is not difficult to believe that in the Middle Ages he may have strolled from India, through Afghánistán or Persia, into Europe. The dialect of some nomad gipsies of Europe has been found to contain a large proportion (39 per cent.) of words of Indian origin. (See a valuable paper on " The Indian Origin of the Gypsies in Europe," by Mr. A. C. Woolner, of Lahore University, in the Journal of the Punjab Historical Society, Vol. II, No. 2, pp. 97-184.)

Those who reject this " gipsy theory " affirm that the physiognomy of the typical Dom differs entirely from that of the gipsy of the West. The question requires the careful study of anthropologists, and the present writer is unable to dogmatise ; but it is certain that some of the peripatetic Doms who have visited Benares have the typical gipsy face.

\* The Doms are not the only Indian tribe that has been suggested as the possible ancestors of the European

gipsies. Simson selects the Nuts, or Bazegurs; others have supported the claims of the Changars, the Kanjars, the Mangs, the Mahars, or the Dheds. Crooke says: "These tribes practise the usual gipsy industries—mat and basket-making, knife grinding, and the like. The facility of their occupation makes it an easy cloak for more nefarious practices, as is the case with the European gipsy."

But the discovery by Professor R. A. Stewart Macalister of a nomadic race in Palestine, called Nawar, or Zutt, by strangers, but calling themselves Doms, has, with other evidence, satisfied many competent scholars that the Dom is the ancestor of the European gipsy.

Sir George A. Grierson, perhaps the most reliable authority, prefers to connect the gipsies of Europe with the Doms of the North-West of India, not with those of the East.