

Indian Opinion

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NOTES AND NEWS

BY the time this journal is in the hands of our readers the Asiatic Inquiry Commission will have finished its work so far as the taking of evidence in public is concerned. People who have not given evidence are invited by the Commission to send their suggestions in writing to the Secretary when they will receive consideration by the Commission.

There is a widespread feeling among the Indian Community that the abrupt closing of the public sittings of the Commission is unfair. We understand that a great many witnesses have not had an opportunity. The public were led to believe that the Commission would return to Durban after visiting Maritzburg and Dundee. The Chairman himself said, on the opening day in Durban, that they would do so if necessary.

We were therefore surprised to find that it had been suddenly decided to refuse further evidence after Saturday last in Durban. Mr. West fixed an appointment with the Secretary on Friday for him to be heard on Monday at 10 a. m. Then, it appears, a letter was posted, bearing Sunday's postmark, informing him that no further evidence would be heard but that a written statement could be put in.

This letter was not received by Mr. West before appearing at the Commission to give evidence. He therefore protested at the action of the Secretary and appealed to the Chairman, who also said the time for hearing evidence was closed. Mr. West declined to hand in his statement as suggested and passed for a hearing which was evidently granted.

Mr. Doull, on behalf of the Durban Committee of the South African National Indian Congress, asked that he might have the opportunity of addressing the Commission but his request was refused. Mr. Doull pointed out the unfairness of allowing Capt. Blackwell to occupy some hours in arguing the case for the South Africans' League that day in Durban. But the Commission said it did not want any more facts or arguments. Mr. Doull said that half of their witnesses had not yet given evidence but the Commission only replied that it was their fault for not coming in time.

In regard to the charge that witnesses were sluggish in making appointments, we are afraid, it is only too true. But it is human nature to delay, and the public were under the impression that the Commission would return to hear further evidence at Durban. There would have been no cause for complaint if the Commission had plainly stated at the opening session that the evidence must all be completed within a week.

The Islam Society (London) have passed a strongly worded resolution, (says *India*), protesting against the occupation by the Allies of the sacred seat of the Caliphate in defiance of Moslem religious feeling and the terms of the Armistice. The resolution further protests against the use of Moslem soldiers against their own Caliph, thereby degrading them. The re-

solution also denounces the dismissal and arrest of certain Turkish Ministers and an Imperial Ottoman prince "in defiance of all laws known to mankind."

ROBBING THE POOR

WE do not pretend to understand all the subtle intricacies of the gold and exchange questions, but our sense of what is right is outraged by what is happening at the Port of Durban. The artificial restriction of the exportation of gold coin is responsible for the springing up of a lucrative illicit business in which Indians as well as Europeans are said to be replicated. This will always happen where artificial barriers are set up. We do not wish to defend those engaged in this profitable though risky business. But whilst we unhesitatingly condemn all breaches of the law, we must say that the confiscation of gold ornaments worn by returning ex-indentured Indians is past the limit. The Protector of Indian Immigrants, in giving evidence before the Asiatic Inquiry Commission, gave the information, in reply to a question, that the customs officials went on board a ship just prior to sailing and confiscated the jewellery of the Indian women. Among them was a woman who was wearing two bracelets, valued at £150, and these were taken away from her. She proceeded to India, leaving what no doubt was her life's savings behind. Such action may be considered very smart work on the part of officials but we have no hesitation in saying that it is robbery pure and simple. The robbers are not the officials, who are merely carrying out instructions, but the Government. The law itself or the section dealing with the gold exportation—is a temporary measure which may be in force to-day and withdrawn to-morrow. At the worst, this woman had melted gold coin into jewellery so that she might take it away with her. In her ignorance she thought that she would surely be allowed to take away that which belonged to her. It was a reasonable desire on her part and morally she was fully entitled to take away her own gold. But the law knows nothing about human feeling and the Government apparently care not a rap that the poor half-starved people, after toiling to make others rich, should go back to India penniless. This crime—if crime it be—of taking that which rightly belongs to one is a modern invention. How can these very ignorant people understand such things when those who are educated do not? We would go so far as to say that the Cabinet themselves could not with one voice honestly say that this crime is really a crime or whether the prohibition of the export of gold has good or evil results. We have seen it stated on high authority that the best way to relieve the economic strain and financial embarrass-

ment, now existing throughout the world owing to the late war is to actually encourage the free export of gold to India. Who is right? What seems right now will most likely soon be proved wrong. In the meantime are the Government still going to fleece these poor people of their hard earnings? We think the time has come to make a protest. Let the Indian community inform the Government, by public resolutions, that, whilst condemning in the strongest possible terms the illicit exportation of gold for the purpose of gain, it deplores the heartlessness of depriving poor Indian Immigrants of gold which rightly belongs to them.

THE ASIATIC COMMISSION

SITTINGS IN DURBAN

Wednesday 28th.

The Asiatic Commission resumed its session in the Native High Court, Durban, this morning, in the presence of a large gathering of Indians and other interested spectators.

Mr. P. S. Aiyar appeared as spokesman of a deputation representing the Indians of South Coast Junction, Malvern, Springfield and surrounding places, and the Indian Market Stallholders' and Squatters' Association. There was also a requisition signed by a number of representative Indians in Durban. The speaker put in a lengthy typewritten document.

Below are the main points of the statement:—

For a period of over half a century, Natal had received a large number of Indian immigrants who were induced to come in order to develop the country and to colonise and settle in the Province on the strength of a proclamation issued in 1843 by Her Majesty's Government, to the effect that: "There shall not be in the eye of the law any distinction or disqualification whatever founded upon mere distinction of colour, origin, language or creed, but that the protection of the law in letter and in substance shall be extended impartially to all alike." At the time when the introduction of Indian labour was decided upon, the country was at a standstill, for want of a steady labour supply. European settlers in Natal were face to face with impending ruin of their industries if no reliable labour supply was forthcoming. Therefore after mature consideration the Natal Government decided to invite Indian immigrants from India. The Europeans seeing the indispensable nature of the Indian and his descendants in the development of this country persuaded them to remain in the colony. The advent of Indians in Natal was not due to their own initiative but owing to repeated solicitations on the part of Europeans. Owing to objections raised at the large influx of Indians more than once Indian immigration was suspended. An experiment was made to utilise all available native labour, the result being that the scheme failed and crops rotted on the ground. Despite the acknowledged merit of the Indian as a worker and agriculturist as well as a pioneer in the development of the country, attempts were, time after time, made to lower the status of the Indian as well as to restrict his rights. Indian labour saved Natal from financial embarrassment and brought prosperity to Europeans.

The statement quoted from the statistical year book to show that prior to the advent of the Indian little was done in agriculture, commercial and industrial development of the country.

Many pages were devoted to the contention that the presence of Indians was beneficial to the country and had enriched the Europeans. One paragraph stated: "The bogey of Asiatic competition is more illusionary than real, and in truth it may be safely asserted that the alleged penetration of Asiatics is a plausible excuse for the exploitation of the meagre earnings of the

poor defenceless wage-earning class with a view to obtaining a monopoly of the whole trade into the hands of a cosmopolitan section of the community who have earned a unique reputation for profiteering in recent times, and it is therefore apparent that the whole affair is an artificial agitation bolstered up by some person."

It was trade jealousy on the part of a section of the European population combined with race antipathy that had culminated in the unceasing outcry against the Indian community.

In view of the services rendered by the Indian community for the development of Natal in many directions (including services during the war), the document concluded by asking that the present system of the acquisition of landed property be retained unaltered, and that the trading rights of the community be placed on a sound, just and equitable basis.

The chairman said the commission was much obliged for the statement, which was very clear and comprehensive, and required careful study. They did not want to ask questions upon it, beyond the one or two already put as they would have to go through it very carefully.

BOROUGH LICENSING OFFICER'S EVIDENCE

The next witness was Colonel G. Molyneux, Borough Licensing Officer, and he told the Commission that the Asiatic-owned property in Durban at March 31, 1920, was valued at £859,218, and that during the past two years, up to the same date, property to the value of £281,000 had been transferred from Europeans to Asiatics. Continuing, Colonel Molyneux said that several Indians had applied for trading licences in areas of the town which were regarded as European areas. Most of the Asiatic traders lived on or near their business premises, with the exception of wealthy traders, who had private residences, some outside the Borough and others in the Borough. There were indications that the Asiatic was gradually becoming dotted about amongst the European residents of the town. There were several instances of Asiatics having purchased Europeans' property on the Berea.

Answering Mr. Baxter, witness stated that applicants for licences to trade in the Borough all had to come before him, with the exception of agents' licences, which were applied for to the Magistrate.

Mr. Baxter: And it is in your discretion to grant a licence or not?

Witness: Hardly as completely as that. The law lays down that the Licensing Officer shall use his discretion in granting or refusing a licence, but there is an appeal to the Durban Town Council. The position is this: When Law 18 of 1897 was passed, certain provisions were put in. There was a clause (Section 7) under which it was required that an Indian must be able to keep books in the English language. As soon as this matter was brought before the Court, under a subsequent Act the Court laid it down that, and it is now an established law, a man need not be able to keep his own books, but that he need only employ a book-keeper. The whole tendency of the Courts has been to water down this Act. The purpose of the Act was to keep Indians out, but the Courts held that in this particular instance it was sufficient for an Indian to have his book kept, so that that section of the law has become inoperative, because a man need not be able to keep books himself. Then the appeal from my decision is to the Town Council, and with every wish to speak with due deference to the Town Council, and with every respect, they are not a good court of appeal, because they really do not understand the functions of the court of appeal. They practically re-try the case when it comes before them rather than dealing with the appeal in the ordinary way. Each individual councillor endeavours to imagine himself in my chair in the first instance, and whether he would or would not have come to the same decision, and if he thinks not, then he reverses my decision. They do not realise that the discretion is vested in me, and not in them.

There are eighteen councillors; we rarely get a full meeting, and the councillors are constantly changing, and they do not understand the law. Even the lawyers practising in the Courts who appeared before the Council on these appeals, added Colonel Molyneux, never knew which way the cat would jump, and although the Council is composed of an extremely honourable body of gentlemen, they are simply not competent to sit as a court of appeal. The law also laid down that the premises sought to be licensed must be sanitary, and if they were not, and the applicant could not keep the books, then he could not get a licence; no premises that were unfit could be licensed and in such a case it was not in his (witness's) discretion at all. Witness went on to explain that only in cases of refusals to renew a licence were appeals taken to the Supreme Court. When he gave his decision on an application, he decided to the best of his ability whether the applicant ought to have a licence; whether the premises were fit and the locality suitable. He thought only in two cases had the Supreme Court interfered with the decision of the Durban Licensing Officer in regard to appeals on renewals.

Mr. Baxter: In practice, do you use your discretion as to whether an Asiatic should trade in a certain street or area, or not?

Witness: Oh, certainly. There is another law dealing with this, Ordinance 11, of 1911, which requires that the Licensing Officer shall be satisfied as to the situation of the premises generally.

Are Asiatics refused licences merely because they are Asiatics?—No, I do not go so far as that. I do all I can to restrict Asiatic licences, and if they are valid reasons they are refused. I should not grant an Asiatic licence in West Street, to give an extreme instance, so readily as in Grey Street or Commercial Road.

Do you take into consideration whether there are sufficient licences?—No, I am not allowed to according to the law.

The Chairman (Sir Johannes Lange): Would you refuse a licence in West Street to an Asiatic?—Yes, because of the situation and because it is entirely European.

And because it is not a suitable quarter for an Asiatic licence?—Yes.

Mr. Baxter: Has that ever been appealed against in the Supreme Court?—We have had very few appeals in the Supreme Court.

Answering Mr. Hofmeyr, witness said there was no such thing as a transfer of a business from a person to another person; that would be a new application. A transfer was only in regard to movement from one place to another place; there would not be an appeal in the Courts except where licences had once existed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chairman: Have you any recommendations for the alteration of the law?—Yes. I think myself that in place of the present Town Council dealing with appeals the Council should be given power to delegate its legal function to a board in the same way that the liquor licences are dealt with. The Liquor Licensing Board consists of three gentlemen appointed by the Council, not necessarily Councillors, although on the present Licensing Board there are two Councillors. These gentlemen would become specialised in the work, and would at least be a far more satisfactory Court of appeal to all concerned.

Mr. Baxter: Would you suggest that the less municipalities have to do with licensing the better?—I do not say that. Were that my opinion, I should keep it to myself. Witness went on to state that he thought the Licensing Court should be appointed by the Town Council in the same way as the Liquor Licensing Board.

Answering Colonel Wylie, witness said that anyone who wished could object to applications for new licences which had to be advertised, but so far as his

experience had gone it was Asiatics who mainly opposed other Asiatic applications, probably out of a sense of commercial rivalry.

In the second place, witness suggested as a remedy for the present position the repeal of Act 22 of 1909 (the Appeal Law). If they established a good Board they could do away with the appeal to the Court. He would make the matter purely administrative and not legal; at the present time it was quasi-legal, and no one knew where he was.

The Chairman: Could you refuse a licence because you thought it undesirable on the ground that the applicant was an Asiatic?—No, you would have to find some better than that.

But you say you would not grant a licence to an Asiatic in West Street, because he was an Indian.

Witness: I should not say that exactly. I should cover it up to a certain extent. The law required that he should give his reasons.

Asked for further suggestions for the present position, Col. Molyneux said he would refuse to issue any new licence to trade, but would deal fairly with existing licences. To his mind, if they were to limit the licences to existing people they would eventually eliminate further trouble. The only way to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion was to adopt this procedure. He would allow present licences to continue so long as the trader wanted to trade, and he would provide that in case of death or insolvency the licence lapsed. At least, if new licences were to be granted, he would not allow insolvents to take out a new licence for a period of at least five years. He did not think that a man should be allowed to get such a vested interest that he could go on indefinitely. There were a number of so-called Arab traders in Durban who were not British subjects; they came from Zanzibar and the East Coast, and he would not give these men the same rights as British Indians. He would give the British Indian preference just in the same way as he would give a Britisher preference over a Frenchman or German. The best way to deal with the question of licences were to be granted was to have Asiatic areas, and if the Asiatic continued his objection to locations they should create European locations; he, for one, would go into it. They should recognise the existing rights of the Asiatics and proclaim certain parts of the Berea exclusively European. He also suggested that they should proclaim special areas for European trade as well as for residential purposes. By this means they would gradually eliminate the Asiatic; it would not be in our time, but it would come. The Asiatic was undesirable

HE WAS UNDESIRABLE.

in trade, and because the civilisation of the Europeans and the Asiatic could not exist side by side. He considered the Wages Boards should apply equally to the Asiatics as to Europeans in regard to wages, and that inducement should be held out to the Asiatic to go back to India. If that were done he was sure that a large number of Indians would return. They should be given free passage and monetary inducement and criminals and indigent Asiatics should be sent back. The Colonial-born Indian did not belong to this country any more than the Indian-born Indian; they were both as much represented by Sir Benjamin Robertson, and when the Colonial Indian had any grievances he ran to India with it. He did not think compulsory repatriation was feasible, and he did not think segregation was possible owing to their vast numbers; but he would segregate the European. He maintained that he had done what he could to curtail Asiatic licences in Durban, and that the Indians knew perfectly well his attitude. He had always been perfectly frank with them on this matter and also regarding his policy.

The Chairman: They do it in other places, but they do not say it.

Col Molyneux: I say it.

Witness was asked several questions by Mr. Doull,

and in the course of his answers he added that the same laws and requirements applied to European and Asiatic. Provided premises and conditions were suitable, a European was seldom refused a licence; it was granted as a matter of course, whereas Indians were refused as a matter of course, if the application were a new one. If a limited liability company consisting of Indians were to apply, his policy would be to refuse the application.

Mr. Doull: On the ground that the shareholders were Asiatics.

Witness: I should have to some other ground than that. If there were no grounds it would have to be granted, but it would be my policy to refuse it if any reasonable ground could be found.

Thursday 29th.

PRINCIPAL IMMIGRATION OFFICER'S
EVIDENCE.

Owing to the non-appearance of an important witness in the forenoon, the sitting of the Commission took place in the afternoon.

Mr. Godfrey W. Dick, Principal Immigration Restriction Officer, was the first witness in the afternoon, and put a tabulated statement giving returns of Indians who had arrived at this port from 1906 to 1919, exclusive of indentured Indians, who came under the supervision of the Protector of Indian Immigrants. Witness said that these returns were complete to the best of his Department's knowledge and belief, so far as the port of Durban was concerned, but there was a certain amount of leakage from other directions into Natal—for instance, from Delagoa Bay over the Natal border. In spite of the vigilance of the officials on the Natal border, there was an influx of from 20 to 50 Indians annually which came to his Department's knowledge from the fact that they had subsequently to repatriate them, but there were probably several more cases of which they had no knowledge.

The Chairman: Can you suggest anything with a view to remedy this state of affairs?—Not unless you can bring the Portuguese authorities into line. I do not suppose the Portuguese want them there.

The Chairman: On the contrary, we have had evidence that the Portuguese welcome them there.

Sir Benjamin Robertson: They welcome the merchants.

Col. Wylie: I think there was a man in Beira or Delagoa Bay who was educating the Indians up to the extent of being able to sign their names in order to get them over the Transvaal border.—No, the Transvaal Registration Law protects them against anything of that sort. They make for Natal rather. They are principally Indians of the hawker class.

Witness was questioned by the Commission in regard to the state of the past and present law as regards Indians landing in South Africa, and the qualifications necessary.

The Chairman: Is it a fact, as we have heard, that Indians are "pouring into" the Transvaal?—I do not think that is correct, unless at some of the larger centres, and in any case they do not come via Natal. We have a check here upon every Indian who tries to enter South Africa at this port. Witness went on to say that many of the Colonial-born Indians went overseas for a trip to India, but they always came back to South Africa, and in his opinion few Indians who left South Africa did so with the intention of remaining away permanently, only in cases where death supervened and prevented them from returning.

Witness, in response to a request by the chairman, offered to furnish the Commission with some further statistics and information which might be of use, but, being unprepared to give evidence, and not having gone into the matter carefully, he declined to give expression to any personal opinion on other aspects of the Indian problem.

Friday 1st.

STATEMENT OF DURBAN INDIANS

The main evidence given to-day before the Commission was that of the Durban Committee of the South African National Indian Congress. Mr. Doull who acted on behalf of the Committee read a statement which opened with the following observation:—

That so long as the Indian was satisfied to remain a labourer, toiling in the cane fields, he was welcomed as a colonist and looked upon as an asset to the country. He has, in effect, been frequently referred to as the "saviour of Natal," but when, having faithfully carried out the terms of his indenture, he aspired to something greater for his children than a life of virtual slavery such as his had been, when, having toiled and saved out of his meagre earnings sufficient to purchase a small plot of land, and in some cases to give his children a mere elementary education, and they then sought employment in other spheres affecting what is known as "working class"—then this utility vanished and he was proclaimed a grave public danger. It would appear that the hostility against Asiatics to-day is chiefly directed against Indian traders. A very large percentage of the licences applied for by Indians has been refused, and the sole reason for such refusal is that the applicant was an Asiatic. There have been various applications and appeals to the Supreme Court against decisions refusing licences, which to some extent illustrate the method of administration of the Act. After quoting cases, the statement proceeded: While we freely admit that licensing authorities should have some power to refuse the issue of licences, we think that the grounds of refusal should be specially laid down, and in such a manner that there can be no differentiation in administration between different sections of the community. It has been said that our right to trade is ousting the European storekeeper, and the reasons alleged are our mode of living, the low wages we pay, and our consequent ability to under-sell European merchants. To deal with this complaint it is necessary first of all to explain the position of affairs so far as they relate to the labouring classes (Coloured, Indian and Native). The overwhelming bulk of these classes of labourers are in the employ of Europeans, who exploit them to the utmost, and who pay them more than is sufficient to provide them with a bare existence, even when they are able to purchase in the lowest possible market. The labourers are not fully organised into unions, and consequently are unable to protect themselves against exploitation. In the country districts and in certain portions of Durban practically all the customers of Indian traders are labourers. Many thousands of them are living on the verge of starvation, and we venture to assert that were it not for Indian traders, many of these labourers would be unable to obtain even the necessities of life. In some parts of Durban there are Indian traders who carry on business principally with Europeans. To these traders the allegation of low wages to servants and low mode of living has no foundation. We would point out that it is only within very recent times that a minimum standard of wages was fixed for European assistants, and we venture to assert that prior thereto Indian shop assistants were equally as well paid as European, and the difference in the present rate of pay between Europeans and Indians is not sufficient to show a very material difference in the working costs, and does not account for the European dealing with these traders. The real reason is that the Indian trader is satisfied with a reasonable margin of profit, whilst the European trader is not. (When referring to Indian shop assistants' pay, we include board, lodging, washing, etc., which are provided in addition to actual wages.) So far as those traders are concerned who deal with the labouring classes, the European storekeeper is generally inclined to treat these people with contempt, whilst the Indian traders treat them as customers, and show them that they desire to retain

custom. This is one of the principal reasons why Natives prefer to deal with the Indian trader, and it is not surprising that they prefer to go where they receive civility and attention. As to our mode of living, it is true we do not all eat the same food, but on an average it will be found that the cost of our food is as much if not more than European food; but, even assuming it were cheaper, we cannot conceive that the fact can be seriously urged as a reason for taking away our means of earning a livelihood. Attention has been drawn to the squalid nature of the building, etc., in which a portion of the Indian community live in the district of Mayville, and Asiatics are charged with having sold these properties to the poorer class of Indians. The records in the Deeds Office will prove that this allegation is untrue, and that these lands formerly belonged to Europeans, who disposed of same to Indians at very high prices. Many of those residing in houses described as "squalid" are free Indians, who have completed their indentures, and have commenced market gardening with only sufficient capital to enable them to purchase the small plot of land on which their farming operations are carried on. The accommodation provided for these men during their indentures was equally as squalid as that now occupied by them, but in the one case they were so housed by Europeans, who were in a position to put up suitable dwellings, whilst on their own land these Indians have not had sufficient capital with which to do so. Having, however, become accustomed to the dwellings supplied by their former employers, they have been accustomed to that class of dwelling, and in many cases, owing to their poverty, cannot help themselves.

We would, in this connection, respectfully point out that, even assuming the poorer class of Indians live, as has been stated, in squalor and filth, the remedy is, or should be, in the hands of the authorities. If their dwellings be so insanitary or unhealthy as have been stated, we suggest, with all submission, that the authorities are more blameworthy than the individuals. We would also point out that the respectable Indian has as much antipathy to a dirty individual, be he white or black, as any European has, and any attempt to force us, as a class, to live in camps or locations would not be acceptable to any self-respecting Indian. With regard to the ownership of land, having full rights in Natal, Indians have no cause of complaint. As, however, it has been suggested that we, as Indians, should be precluded from acquiring land in freehold, we would, with all submission, draw attention, as British subjects, to Ordinance 7 of 1858, Natal, under which provision is made giving to aliens the right to acquire and dispose of fixed property in the same manner as any British subject has the right to do. We accept no blame for the position of affairs. Many of us were invited to come here, and many were given every facility to earn their livelihood here. We will candidly and quite openly say coercion can only end in disaster. We have the right to be here; we have the right to be engaged in any lawful occupation we may choose, and we have the right to own land if we pay for it. These rights are allowed to aliens, and "a fortiori" should be allowed to us. We recognise the conflict of interests involved and the difficulty of finding a solution. We do not think it is possible immediately to solve the problem, but respectfully suggest that the following proposal will at least tend in that direction: (1) Standard wages to all labourers, irrespective of race or colour, and subsequent improvement in conditions of life; (2) legislation providing for a minimum standard of wages to shop assistants and all other ranks of labour on an equitable basis; (3) amendment of the licensing laws on the lines of the Transvaal Ordinance, No. 9 of 1912, and providing that licences can only be refused on the specific grounds contained in that Ordinance, with the following amendments thereto: (a) Three convictions within, say, the last two years on any criminal charge other than that of contravening a trading law or by-law; (b) that the

words "in the opinion of the Council" be deleted, and the reason why the applicant is not deemed desirable to be stated by the authority refusing the licence. (4) That there be a right to appeal to the Court in all licensing matters, whether the application is for a new licence or for a transfer or removal or renewal. (5) That the laws affecting land and licences be made applicable to the whole of Natal, which includes the Northern Districts of Natal and Zululand.

THE ASIATIC QUESTION

ANALYSIS OF VITAL PROBLEM

(By C. F. ANDREWS)

III.

I feel very strongly indeed that, in working out such a scheme of voluntary repatriation as I have outlined in my last article, the chief difficulty would come from the estates themselves. Just as these estates were the cause of bringing many thousands of indentured Indians into the country, so, in the same way, there will be great opposition on their part to Indians of the labouring classes leaving the country, and thus reducing the number of agricultural labourers in Natal.

INDIANS PREVENTED FROM LEAVING SOUTH AFRICA

When I was in South Africa in the year 1914, I made enquiries concerning what was happening in connection with the Indian labourers who definitely wished to return to India. I discovered how frequently they were frustrated in that desire by those who made a profit for themselves out of the recruitment of labour for the estates. The professional recruiter would, by some means or other, get the illiterate and ignorant Indian into his power at the very time that he was eager to obtain a passage to India; and the result would be that the Indian would be induced to sign on for a further period of indenture instead of getting home. Such cases of recruiting as I have outlined must have been very numerous indeed in the past years, and temptations to drink are at the back of perhaps nine out of ten of them.

THE INDIANS RELIEF ACT

When the whole Indian position was being debated upon in the year 1914, I submitted to the South African Union Government, on the ground of this experience, a statement that many Indians were being kept in South Africa against their own desire, because of the action of the recruiters. I also suggested—with the consent of Mr. M. K. Gandhi, the Indian leader, that, if the Union Government were willing to offer a free passage to India for those Indians who desired to leave South Africa, and were ready to forfeit their return to Natal, the people of India would not object to such voluntary repatriation, but, on the contrary, would warmly approve of Union Government's action.

This point was taken up by the Union Government, and a clause, embodying such a principle of voluntary repatriation, was inserted in the Relief Act itself at the time that it was passed into law. Since then, a very large number of Indians had made use of this privilege of a free passage. I have noted with satisfaction, and shall gladly report in India, that the Union Government have interpreted this free passage to include also the railway journey to India to their destination. I know what a boon this must have been to many Indians who have gone back with very little money indeed, and would have been put to many hardships without this added concession. I was interested to find that the number thus repatriated, under the Relief Act, had already run into many thousands. I am certain that it has been better for themselves, better for India, and better for South Africa.

INDIANS ENTICED TO REMAIN

Yet, inspite of this relief that has been so generously offered by the Union Government, I am quite certain that there are still, to-day, as in the year 1914, a great many Indians who desire intensely to go back to India, by accepting the Government free passage, but have been induced not to do so. Again and again, during my present visit, I have been assured by responsible persons in Natal, whose word I can trust, that Indians, who have come into Durban for the purpose of embarkation, have been enticed, by all kinds of clever practices, to sign on, for a fresh period of indenture, when their one true wish was to return to India and leave Natal for good.

EXPERIENCES OF LABOUR RECRUITERS

My own experience of labour recruiting on a large scale, by professional recruiters, in India and elsewhere, has been so bad as to make me believe that almost anything is possible on the part of the paid recruiter. In India itself, I have known specific instances of drugging with "datura," and other abominations. And, though I have never had any such outrageous instances as this brought to my notice in South Africa, and I feel certain that they do not occur, yet the evidence to me has become overwhelmingly strong that, here in Natal, as in India, the Indian labourer of this ignorant type is not fit to be left entirely to himself in these matters. In a very large number of cases, this will only mean that he is left to the mercy of the recruiter. It is a case of cleverness trading upon ignorance.

• AN INDIAN STORY

A personal narrative will, perhaps, illustrate more clearly how helpless such Indian villagers are. When I was carrying through a series of investigations in the North of India concerning the methods of recruiting, I paid a surprise-visit to the six depots in Muttra in which villagers were placed who had been recruited for indentured labour. They were the same class of Indians as those who are now working in the estates in Natal. At one of these depots, I noticed that a door had been purposely kept fastened, and I gave the order for it to be unlocked. A villager was brought forward, who stated, in answer to my question, in front of the professional recruiter, that he wished to be sent out by ship to Fiji. He told me that he was quite willing to go, but I noticed a look of fear in his face while he said the words, and I ordered the recruiter to go into the next room. When he had done so, the villager flung himself at my feet and implored my protection. I explained to him that he had only to say out boldly that he wished to go away with me, and I would set him free at once. His face became more hopeful. I called back the professional recruiter, and asked the villager, in his presence, if he wished to go away with me or to be sent out to Fiji. In a moment his fear had returned, and he said, once more, under the impulse of fear, that he wished to stay with the recruiter and be sent to Fiji. I spoke very sternly to the recruiter, who was using all the while some kind of mesmeric influence, and told him not to frighten the man; and then, at last, the villager managed to pluck up enough courage to say, finally and clearly, that he wished to come with me. Later on, when he had fully regained his liberty, his joy was quite unbounded, and he told me, before we parted, how he had been terrorised by this recruiter, and what a power he had over him, and how he had not been able to resist him whenever he looked towards him.

This is only a single story out of a very large number of first-hand experiences I have had of this kind. They have gone to convince me that these illiterate and ignorant Indian people (who are absurdly credulous and gullible) need the utmost care and protection. They are as weak in intellect as children.

A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION

If I might be permitted to make a very obvious suggestion, I would urge that the Union Government

should guard with the strictest possible care, the embarkation depots, and that they should keep away from these depots, by stringent regulations, all recruiters of labour, and all who may be employed by recruiters. They should see to it, also, that there is no tampering with the subordinate members of the staff. I would urge, also, that the privilege of returning to India with a free passage, already offered by the Union Government, should be made much more widely known on the sugar estates, mines and elsewhere. Lastly, I would suggest that there should be some means devised of getting into touch with the indentured Indian labourers, at the time when they are on the point of finishing their indentures. At that critical moment, it might be quite possible to protect them and to keep their money for them, instead of allowing them to squander it in drink, in company with some professional recruiter, who is always at hand waiting his chance to get them to sign on for another term of years.

If there is a real desire in Natal to undo some of the harm that has been done by the indenture system in the past; if there is now a very natural desire to encourage those Indians to go back to India, who are ready to do so voluntarily, and thus reduce the disproportion in Natal between the Indians and the Europeans, then I can imagine no more valuable method than that of a careful sifting out of individual cases, wherein a little personal help (not necessarily of a monetary character) would make possible the departure of those labourers and their families, who wished to go back to India, but did not know fully how to attain their object.

(To be Continued)

THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS

MR. GANDHI'S LETTER TO THE INDIAN PRESS

Mr. Gandhi writes to the Indian Press as follows:

The Khilafat question has now become a question of questions. It has become an imperial question of the first magnitude.

The great Prelates of England and the Mahomedan leaders combined have brought the question to the fore. The Prelates threw down the challenge. The Muslim leaders have taken it up.

I trust that the Hindus will realize that the Khilafat question overshadows the Reforms and everything else.

If the Muslim claim was unjust apart from the Muslim scriptures, one might hesitate to support it merely on scriptural authority. But when a just claim is supported by scriptures, it becomes irresistible.

Briefly put the claim is that the Turks should retain European Turkey subject to full guarantees for the protection of non-Muslim races under the Turkish Empire and that the Sultan should control the Holy Places of Islam and should have suzerainty over Jazirat-ul-arab i. e. Arabia as defined by Muslim Savants subject to self governing rights being given to Arabs if they so desire. This was what was promised by Mr. Lloyd George and this was what Lord Hardinge had contemplated. The Mahomedan soldiers would not have fought to deprive Turkey of her possessions. To deprive the Khalif of the suzerainty of Arabia is to reduce the Khilafat to a nullity.

To restore to Turkey subject to necessary guarantees what was hers before war is a Christian solution. To wrest any of her possessions from her for the sake of punishing her is a gun powder solution. The Allies or England in the hour of triumph must be scrupulously just. To reduce the Turks to impotence would be not only unjust. It would be a breach of solemn declarations and promises. It is to be wished that the Viceroy will take the courage in both his hands and place himself at the head of the Khilafat agitation as Lord Hardinge did at the time of the South African "passive-resistance" struggle and thus like his pre-

decessor give a clear and emphatic direction to an agitation which under impulsive or faulty leadership may lead to disastrous consequences.

But the situation rests more with us Hindus and Mahomedans than with the Viceroy and still more with Muslim leaders than with the Hindus or the Viceroy.

There are signs already of impatience on the part of Muslim friends and impatience may any day be reduced to madness and the latter must inevitably lead to violence. And I wish I could persuade everyone to see that violence is suicide.

Supposing the Muslim demands are not granted by the allies or say England! I see nothing but hope in Mr. Montagu's brave defence of the Muslim position and Mr. Lloyd George's interpretation of his own declaration. True, the latter is halting but he can secure full justice under it. But we must suppose the worst and expect and strive for the best. How to strive is the question.

What we may not do is clear enough.

(1) There should be no violence in thought, speech or deed.

(2) Therefore there should be no boycott of British goods, by way of revenge or punishment. Boycott in my opinion, is a form of violence. Moreover even if it were desirable, it is totally impracticable.

(3) There should be no rest till the minimum is achieved.

(4) There should be no mixing up of other questions with the Khilafat e. g. the Egyptian question.

Let us see what must be done:

(1) The cessation of business on the 19th instant and expression of the minimum demands by means of one single resolution is a necessary first step provided that the Hartal is absolutely voluntary and the employees are not asked to leave their work unless they receive permission from their employers. I would strongly urge that the mill-hands should be left untouched. The further proviso is that there should be no violence accompanying the Hartal. I have been often told that the C. I. D. sometimes promote violence. I do not believe in it as a general charge. But even if it be true, our discipline makes it impossible. Our success depends solely on our ability to control, guide and discipline the masses.

Now a word as to what may be done if the demands are not granted. The barbarous method is warfare, open or secret. This must be ruled out if only because it is impracticable. If I could but persuade everyone that it is always bad, we should gain all lawful ends much quicker. The power that an individual or a nation forswearing violence generates is a power that is irresistible. But my argument to-day against violence is based upon pure expedience i. e. its utter futility.

Non-co-operation is therefore the only remedy left open to us. It is the cleanest remedy as it is the most effective, when it is absolutely free from all violence. It becomes a duty when co-operation means degradation or humiliation or an injury to one's cherished religious sentiment. England cannot accept a meek submission by us to an unjust usurpation of rights which to Mussalmans mean matter of life and death. We may therefore begin at the top as also at the bottom. Those who are holding offices of honour or emolument ought to give them up. Those who belong to the menial services under Government should do likewise. Non-co-operation does not apply to services under private individuals. I cannot approve of the threat ostracism against those who do not adopt the remedy of non-co-operation. It is only a voluntary withdrawal which is effective. For voluntary withdrawal alone is a test of popular feeling and dissatisfaction. Advice to the soldiers to refuse to serve is premature. It is the last, not the first step. We should be entitled to take that step when the Viceroy, the Secretary of State, and the Premier leave us. Moreover, every step in withdrawing co-operation has to be taken with the greatest deliberation. We must proceed

slowly so as to ensure retention of self-control under the fiercest heat.

Many look upon the Calcutta resolutions with the deepest alarm. They scent in it a preparation for violence. I do not look upon them in that light, though I do not approve of the tone of some of them. I have already mentioned those whose subject matter I wholly dislike.

"Can Hindus accept all the resolutions,"? is the question addressed by some. I can only speak for myself. I will co-operate whole-heartedly with Muslim friends in the prosecution of their just demands so long as they act with sufficient restraint and so long as I feel sure that they do not wish to resort to or countenance violence. I should cease to co-operate and advise every Hindu and for that matter everyone else to cease to cooperate, the moment there was violence actually done, advised or countenanced. I would therefore urge upon all speakers the exercise of the greatest restraint under the gravest provocation. There is certainty of victory if firmness is combined with gentleness. The cause is doomed if anger, hatred, ill-will, recklessness and finally violence are to reign supreme. I shall resist them with my life even if I should stand alone. My goal is friendship with the world and I can combine the greatest love with the greatest opposition to wrong.

બેધએ છે

એક અનુભવી ગુજરાતી કૃષિજીવન પચાર લાચરી
મુખ્ય આપવામાં આવશે.

લખો યા મળે,
૩૨૬ પોષ્ટ-૨ રોડ, ડરબન.

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