

RURAL SCHOOLS

IN THE

CENTRAL PROVINCES.

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CALCUTTA:

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, GOVERNMENT PRINTING, INDIA

1903.

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME I.

THIS series of reports is intended as a means of making known, to those who are engaged in education in India, what is being attempted or achieved by all ranks of workers in the same field. It conveys no orders, and contains no declarations of Government policy. The writers alone are responsible for the opinions expressed; and the choice of a subject does not imply the intention to hold up for imitation the system of instruction described. India contains within her borders peoples who differ from one another in race, religion, history, languages, social usages, more widely than the nations of Europe; so that no certain conclusion can be drawn as to the probable effect in one Province of methods of instruction which have been found to succeed in another. But, in spite of the sharp contrasts of character and intelligence that underlie education in India, one Imperial policy controls the whole; and in virtue of this a common interest unites all who, whether in the service of Government or not, are striving to promote good teaching in schools or colleges. The range and variety of the problems with which we are concerned give scope for the free play of ideas on the subject, and justify a fuller treatment of the questions discussed than is possible under the conditions which govern the production of official reports. Opportunity may also be found in the series for comparison of foreign experience with that of India. The bulk of the population of India is engaged in agriculture. Viewed therefore in the light of the numbers directly affected, by far the greatest part of Indian education means the provision of good

rural primary schools for the sons of agriculturists. In the Central Provinces, Mr. Sharp writes, "the rural school, established out of nothing, and in the teeth of opposition, itself had to create the want that it was destined to fulfil." This is not true of all parts of India; consequently the system which Mr. Sharp describes may be regarded as the treatment of our most momentous problem in its most perplexing form. Those who are familiar with the movement in other countries towards making the course of instruction in rural schools more "practical", will recognise the similarity of the lines on which the rural school in the Central Provinces has been developed; the half-time school, so designed as to allow the children to work in the fields during the rest of the day; the modification of the curriculum to suit their requirements, and also to adjust the school to the needs of the minority who are not agriculturists; the school gardens, the lessons in village records, practically illustrated in the fields; the training of the teachers on a farm, and the lessons on "agriculture" given in the village school, with the limits within which such lessons can be useful. Valuable as farm training is for primary teachers, in order to turn their eyes on to the external world, and induce them to base their lessons in the village school upon common things familiar to the children, it does not pretend to aim at reforming agricultural practice. The object of the village school is to make the children "observers, thinkers, experimenters" in however humble a degree; it is not an agency for teaching the agricultural population how to conduct their business.

School Boards, School Committees, District Councils, Inspectors, examinations, standards, normal schools and certificated teachers; these things are English in origin; and

within the framework so constructed, we see, in the lively picture which Mr. Sharp has painted, the school at work; the *malguzar* and the *patwari*; the boys repeating their fractional tables according to immemorial custom, and solving arithmetical problems by the traditional *gurus*; learning their sacred poetry by methods which have a native technique and terminology of their own; chanting it to Indian music; writing the appropriate auspicious words or formal salutations in their sums and their letters; learning something of the intricacies of Indian land tenure, and drilled in the native system of physical exercises called *Deshi Kasrat*. We watching them, discuss the place of object lessons in such a scheme of instruction, the encouragement of *heimat-kund*, the application of the doctrines of Fröbel, and the rendering of "capillary attraction" into intelligible Hindi. The system followed in the Central Provinces has its distinguishing characteristics, and these may be worth study, without assuming that they are necessarily superior to other ways of dealing with the same questions, nor that they will certainly succeed in another soil. The half-time system has been tried elsewhere, but not hitherto with equally good results; the distinct rural curriculum is a feature not found in all provincial systems; the School Committee, which appears on the whole to succeed in giving the villagers an interest in their school without exciting them to undue interference, is worth the attention of those who are considering its extension; *Deshi Kasrat* is already attaining popularity in some of those other provinces which have not already their own varieties of physical exercises. The solidity and brightness of the school premises, often the best kept building in the village, are also a characteristic in which the Central Provinces differ from some others in which primary education is more widely diffused.

But in its intermixture of English and Native methods here an indigenous tradition utilised, there an English form superimposed, the system described in this volume is typical of primary schools, and indeed of the whole educational fabric, throughout India. It is an intermixture requiring great skill and care in its detailed adjustments, so as neither to perpetuate the native routine of antiquity, not to bewilder the simple countryman with demands for "Socratic and Pestalozzic methods", but to produce an adaptation which the villager can understand, and the Englishman approve. The highest powers of the educational officer are exercised in making effective in the elementary school the contact between Western ideals and native life.

On the one side, he has to winnow out the pedagogy which comes from Europe, until all that is merely formula, catchword or apparatus has been rejected, and only that which is essential remains.

On the other side, he needs the gift to enter completely into native modes of thought; an intimate knowledge of the language of the country, and a vivid sympathy with its people.

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in India.

Simla, November 1903.

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