

SONS OF THE SOIL

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Studies of the Indian Cultivator

EDITED BY

W. BURNS, C.I.E., D.Sc.,

Agricultural Commissioner with the Government of India



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INTRODUCTION

THE quick-travelling business man, looking from the windows of a railway carriage, sees the Indian cultivator ploughing or drawing water from his well, or perhaps like the Scots peasant in Burns' 'Cotter's Saturday Night', collecting 'his spades, his mattocks and his hoes', and wearily bending his course homeward. He is India outside of the towns.

He is mentioned in speeches, leaders, lectures and poems usually more as a type than a person. The object of the following sketches is to give some clear outlines in place of this vagueness, and especially to show the variety of individuals and classes who cultivate the soil of this great country.

India's immensity and diversity are only known to those who have travelled over it. One man's India is not another man's India. It is no uncommon thing to hear some one say of a particular area: 'This is not India', meaning simply that it differs markedly from that part in which he has hitherto passed his life. Hence the folly of generalization. At the same time, there is a family resemblance between these cultivator types, a resemblance that grows as one reads the life-story and daily routine of one son of the soil after another.

There is the same plainness of life, the same wrestling with uncertainties of climate (except in favoured areas), the same love of simple games, sport and songs, the same religious background, the same neighbourly helpfulness, and the same financial indebtedness.

It is these and similar characteristics which it has been the object of this series of articles to portray. The

inspiration for them was Edmund Candler's admirable book, *The Sepoy*, in which he dealt with the various types which formed the Indian Army when he wrote, about the end of the last war. With the idea of putting together a similar description of types of the Indian cultivator, Directors of Agriculture of the various provinces in India were addressed and asked to arrange for the writing of these articles by competent people who knew the cultivators intimately, and particularly to endeavour to get really good photographs, with as much character in them as possible. It is believed that the gallery of portraits now presented is the first of its kind. Naturally they vary in quality and representativeness, but one or two are outstanding both as pictures and as character studies. Without in any way making invidious comparisons, one would draw attention to the portraits of the Lingayat of Bombay, the Jat of the United Provinces, the Gavara cultivator of Madras, and the Hindu cultivator of Bengal, the last-named having a quality reminiscent of Rodin.

There is an article on the cultivator of Burma, so long a part of the Indian Empire. It has not been possible in the time or space available to add articles on the cultivators from the Indian States, though there are among these many equally interesting types.

For those who desire rows of figures or discussions of rural economics there are many publications. These sketches attempt no competition with such books but aim at giving an idea of the cultivator as a man, and not as an economic unit. It is hoped that they may be of use in many ways and perhaps, not least, in letting one half of India know how the other half lives.

I am greatly indebted to Mr F. M. de Mello, B.A., B.Sc. (Econ.), Editor of the publications of the Imperial

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