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THE Rare section

Servants of India Society.

A Lecture delivered by

Mr. Gopal Krishna Devadhar, M. A.,

Member, Servants of India Society.

In the John Small Memorial Hall, Poona

on

Saturday, the 30th of August, 1913.

UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF

The Hon'ble Sir Richard Lamb, K. C. S. I.,

Senior Member, Executive Council, Bombay.

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Servants of India Society.

Mr. G. K. Devadhar, M. A., the Senior Member of the Bombay Branch of the Servants of India Society, delivered in Poona on Saturday the 30th of August, 1913, in a series of public lectures organised by the Rev. Dr. Macnicol, in the John Small Memorial Hall, an address on the "Servants of India Society". The Hon'ble Sir Richard Lamb K. C. S. I., Senior Member, Executive Council, Bombay, occupied the chair and the hall was fully crowded by students, ladies, and gentlemen.

The lecturer at the commencement of his speech thanked his friend Dr. Macnicol for having asked him to address the meeting on that particular subject, and specially the distinguished and popular member of the Bombay Government for the honour he did to the lecturer and his Society in presiding on that occasion. Mr Devadhar first referred to the special difficulty under which he lay in addressing a Poona audience on a subject so familiar to them at least by its name, if not by the nature and the scope of its work; and though to some he thought it might look that he was carrying coals to Newcastle, by speaking on that subject, still the speaker believed that his purpose would be fulfilled if he could excite intelligent interest in some of his hearers in the work of the Society and create sympathy in their minds with the aims and objects of that institution.

SURVEY OF PUBLIC LIFE.

Before coming to dwell on the various aspects of his subject the lecturer took a rapid survey of the growing stream of public spirit which was the dominant note of the present day Indian public life. It was the introduction of English education, Western ideas, and Western culture, he said, that implanted the seed of the modern idea of serving the public in the Indian soil, to which the impulse of self-sacrifice and renunciation was not in any way unfamiliar. But the novelty of the work needed its teachers and these were found in the early Christian Missionaries, who laboured arduously in the fields of education and

social service fired by their Christian zeal. Then came a race of able and high-minded Englishmen who worked strenuously in the domain of literature, legislature, and journalism and who by their disinterested efforts to promote the real good of India showed the earlier generations of English educated Indians the way of working for the regeneration of their own country in every direction. Their lead afforded the Indians a substantial education in public life and marked the first stage of its development. Then came on the scene a large galaxy of very eminent Indians, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mr. Dadabhai Navroji, the Grand Old Man of India, Mr. Justice Ranade, "the Maharshi of Maharashtra," Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekanand and others, who brought into existence a number of movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Parthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Congress, and the various Conferences and thus linked their generous motives to a policy of organised efforts and vigorous energy of action. Their endeavours which were carried on in the spheres of political, social, and religious advancement of the people of the land bore rich and ample fruit, quickened the national consciousness, and stimulated a healthy robust desire for sustained public activity. Thus, a stage was reached in the evolution of public life when people, by their habit of introspection, began to examine as to how much was due to them from others and how much was due to them from themselves in the work of national elevation, to appreciate the relative merits of mere criticism of Government measures as against their own constructive work, and to judge of the policy of justifying every thing that was old as against an honest endeavour to change with the spirit of the age. This process of self-examination built up a manly attitude of self-help and judicious correction on the part of some and left a strong conviction on their minds that if real progress was to be made all along the line for the nation's full and all-sided growth, in the midst of the present day struggle for existence, sustained and systematic work was the great need of the situation and that it was not possible to secure this by spasmodic efforts patriotically put forth by those whose energy and thought had other claims on them beside those of the country. This position was recognised in an increasing measure by most of the leaders of Indian public opinion and thus the great need for a body of workers who would devote all their training and energy to the service of the country like the Sanyasis of old, came to be realised.

THE ORIGIN, AIMS, AND CONSTITUTION OF THE SOCIETY.

It was at this juncture that the Servants of India Society came to be established in Poona and with the formation of such institutions began the third stage of public life in India. The unique distinction of giving a shape to this idea was reserved for the Hon'ble Mr. Gokhale. During his public career of unceasing service of our motherland he felt very keenly that with the march of new ideas and the rapidly changing environments, conditions of public work became more strenuous and exacting to fulfil which it was absolutely necessary that a number of young men educated at the Universities and imbued with the spirit of true charity and patriotism should be ready to consecrate their lives at the altar of their country. Mr. Gokhale built up such a sanctuary and made it possible for some young men to offer their lives for such loving service, in a truly "missionary and religious spirit," by starting the Servants of India Society in June 1905 in Poona. It was definitely stated in the "objects" that the institution would train "national missionaries" for the service of India and thus help in promoting, by all constitutional means, the true interests of the Indian people." There were a few basic principles. First was the "acceptance of the British connection as ordained in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence for India's good;" their goal was self-Government within the British Empire allowing fair opportunities to the children of the soil for their legitimate growth to the full height of their manhood. The second was the recognition of the fact that the full growth of national life which must touch all its sides was thus bound to be slow as all organic changes were; for the society believed in building up the character and capacity of the average man as the necessary condition of sound progress. And the third principle of conduct of the Society was that its work would be severely non-sectional and non-sectarian. The membership of the Society was open to all who recognised the service of their country as their supreme end in life and who were prepared to take vows which required them to "regard all Indians as brothers and to work for their advancement without distinction of caste or creed" and also enjoyed that no part of their energy would be devoted to earning money for themselves and to taking sides in sectional matters; moreover, members must be content with such provision for themselves and for their families as the Society might be in a position to make. The Society was made up of three component parts

(1) The First Member, (2) the Ordinary Members, and (3) the Members under training, all having voice in its affairs. For administrative purposes there was provision for a Council of three elected ordinary members by the whole body of members of the Society to assist the First Member. The present membership was twenty-five including four Permanent Assistants. They came from most of the provinces like Bengal, United Provinces, Madras, Bombay, and Behar, and belonged to different castes among the Hindus and one of them was a Mahomedan. Eighteen were University Graduates, and a majority of them were either men of double degrees or of long-standing experience of public work. The headquarters of the society were located in Poona and its grounds covered an area of 20 acres in the midst of inspiring surroundings of hills and other institutions such as the Fergusson College and Sporting Clubs. The situation commanded a full panoramic view of that distant Singhar fort, the Parvati, and the camp and the city of Poona. The superstructure of the buildings though simple was solid, having a large garden around it built up in a bare rock. There was attached to the members' quarters a splendid library containing a choice collection of books on all important subjects which members studied and the stock of Blue books and Parliamentary publications was a special feature of this library. Members as a rule were required, during the first period of five years' training, to spend four months in a year in going through a certain course of reading which was supplemented by debates on papers written by members and Mr. Gokhale and the Senior Members lectured on the subjects of their study. In addition to the general course of reading there was a specialised study which formed the basis of their work. The main idea of this study was to equip members with the knowledge of facts and figure for the work assigned to them. Members were given opportunities for touring all over the country to acquire information on the spot about men and measures, and it was contemplated in the scheme of the early preparation to send some of them to foreign countries. Accordingly, one member who was now in charge of the Northern India Branch had been to England for one year. Thus trained and equipped by means of books, travels and first-hand knowledge about conditions in the country the members of the Society cherishing warm affections for their countrymen and holding liberal opinions on all questions affecting the vital interests of the country were expected to go forth to begin their

work. They were at present divided into four groups each representing a Branch of the Society. There were four Branches of the Society located in Bombay, Madras, Allahabad, and Nagpur, that carried on different activities in their respective provinces suited to local conditions but controlled by the First Member and Council. The Bombay Branch now claimed a splendid new home as its own built on an Improvement Trust plot situated on the Sandhurst Road, Girgaum, at a total cost of Rs. 70,000. The whole of this amount would be raised as debentures from friends of the Society, more than one-third having been already collected. It must be gratefully recognised that this building owed its existence to the initiative taken by some of the best friends of the Society in Bombay such as Mr. Ratan J. Tata, Sir Vithaldas D. Thackersy, the Hon'ble Mr. Lalubhai Samaldas, Mr. Narottam Morarjee, Mr. Jehangir Petit, Sir Bhalchandra Krishna and others. In Madras, a building had been purchased for Rs. 13,000 and the amount had been raised by public contributions. The ideas of work were becoming clearer with growing experience, and the range over which the Society's activities were spread was a very wide one according to local conditions and members' inclinations. The work of the Society was briefly summarised by Mr. Devadhar under several heads.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY.

The present activities of the Society closely followed the outline of work that was laid down in its statement of objects, under six different heads. But broadly speaking, they resolved into two main planks of the platform. First was the work of political education and the second was the work of social, moral, and educational up-building. Here the speaker left the work which Mr. Gokhale was doing out of account as it needed no mention at his hands. The Society, during the last three or four years, after the first batch of ordinary members was out, engaged itself in some of the present day political activities. (1) Members of the Society had travelled all over the country in helping the British Congress Committee to build up the circulation of their organ in England called *India*. (2) They carried on a campaign of educating the public opinion on the principles involved in Mr. Gokhale's Elementary Education Bill for the "better provision for the extension of elementary education in the country," throughout India, addressing public

meetings and exhorting Local and Municipal bodies to formulate their views on the vital points of the Bill. (3) Elementary Education Leagues had been formed in Madras and Allahabad with the help of the members of the Servants of India Society and similar work would be undertaken elsewhere. (4) Members of the Society took a leading part in the organisation of the Indian public opinion on the question of "the treatment of Indians in South Africa" when Mr. Polak travelled all over the country and collected subscriptions for the relief of the distressed. (5) The Society had systematically lent the services of its members to help the arrangements for Congress Sessions and to start District Congress Committees. (6) Some of them had charge of newspapers and (7) Mr. V. S. Shrinivas Shastri the Senior Member of the Madras Branch who was nominated to the Local Council by the Madras Government was assisting the non-official members by his work. (8) One of the members was nominated to the District Local Board in Berars (9) On special occasions members studied public questions, such as Finance and the Public Services, addressed public meetings and drafted memorials to Government. Side by side with this branch of their activity the members of the Society had devoted so far a major portion of their energy to the social side of their programme of work. This broad division of work included movements started with a view to promote female education, agricultural improvement, co-operative undertakings, village sanitation, social reform, social service, and relief to those that fell victims to dire calamities. They were never slow to interest themselves in activities that aimed at the amelioration of the condition of the backward classes by spreading literacy among them and that of the so-called Depressed Classes by freely advocating on public platform the speedy removal of the barrier of untouchableness that separated them from the rest of the Hindu world. (1) In the matter of the education of Indian women the members of the Society had been largely instrumental and helpful to the distinguished Indian lady Mrs. Ramabai Ranade in starting and in conducting the Poona Branch of the Seva Sadan which had, by its four-fold work of continuation classes, industrial classes, the training of lady workers, midwives and teachers and the training of nurses who would be useful on occasions of famine, plague, and fire, earned a proud distinction, of being a unique institution in the Deccan, the lecturer of the even-

ing being its General Secretary. Besides this work the speaker was a member of the Gentlemen's Council of the Bombay Seva Sadan and the Chairman of the Gujarati Ladies' Classes in Kalkadevi, started by the generosity of Saet Narottam Morarji Goculdas. Moreover, at Yeotmal in Berars, Mr. Kaikini was helpful in infusing life and educational activity in the local ladies' Samaj. (2) In the matter of work for the agriculturists the members of the Society toured in villages lecturing to them about agricultural improvements and the speaker Mr. Devadhar was instrumental in starting and in conducting as one of its editors an agricultural magazine which had a circulation of 5000. (3) A large number of members in Bombay, Berars, and Madras had made a special study of the movement of co-operation and in Bombay alone more than half a dozen co-operative societies owed their origin and prosperity to the work and the inspection of these members. Some of these societies were organized for labouring classes like the poor compositors, the mill-hands and the sweepers and the scavengers in Bombay. The members of Bombay Branch had joined in the deliberations at the Divisional and Provincial Co-operative Conferences and had contributed notes for discussion the speaker himself having contributed half a dozen notes on different Co-operative topics. A scheme for the redemption of Dheds in Bombay had been launched and a programme of spreading co-operation among the mill-hands in Bombay had received the support of the leading mill-owners there and outside in the presidency. Besides, the members of the O. P. Branch were instrumental in starting four or five co-operative societies; and in Madras similar work would soon be undertaken. (4) To help the villagers a committee had been appointed in Bombay called the Miss Nightingale Village Sanitation Committee which adopted a scheme prepared by the lecturer for their work and which had been put into operation for over a year. (5) The members of the Bombay Branch were largely helpful in conducting in Bombay a movement called the Holika Sammelan which aimed at purging the abuses and the indecent practices prevalent during the Shimga holidays and thus by means of organised efforts at more than 35 different centres had been successful in influencing about 25,000 people by providing a well-planned scheme of healthy entertainments for three. This day's work had grown considerably during the past three years. Besides this phase of Social Reform activity, the members of the Society were called upon to take an active part in helping to carry on a

vigorous propaganda in Bombay and to organise demonstrations in connection with the Basu Bill agitation and the Anti-Caste Conference. One of the members of the Society in Bombay was on the Managing Committee of the Social Reform Association and the speaker was the Asstt. Secretary of the National Social Conference. (6) In the direction of pure social service, the work of the Society had been very distinct. As a result of the Holika Sammlan campaign a body of volunteers came to be formed into a separate organization called the Social Service League, Bombay, and had become a great factor of educational and Social up-lifting of the masses under the guidance of the Bombay leaders. The special features of this work were the Travelling Libraries about 90 in number, lantern lectures and classes for men and women who are taught the elements of hygiene, sanitation and Home Nursing and First Aid. All the members of the Bombay Branch were interested in its work which was located in their own Home in Bombay and two of them were among the Secretaries of the League, one of whom Mr. N. M. Joshi having the special charge of this work. The members of the Madras Branch had already started work of pure social service among the quarters of the poor in the city of Madras. (7) Then, came the work which the members of the Society did in organising relief on occasions of Plague, Famine, and Fire. After the terrible visitations of plague in Poona, the Members of the Society organised a Plague Relief Committee in Poona in 1907 with Mr. Gokhale as its President and the lecturer as the organizing Secretary and the work of giving relief to plague-affected people had since been carried whenever there had been a visitation of plague in the city. The plague preventive measure of inoculation was given extensive trial and the Committee was largely successful in removing the fearful dread which the people shared in that matter. The results of the Committee's first year's work were published by Government in their Gazette and a pamphlet issued by the Secretary on the results of inoculation was translated in three languages and circulated all over the presidency by Government at their own cost. The members of the society had started the relief work this year again as there was plague in Poona and it was very cheerful to note as the most distinct feature of this year's visitation that people were voluntarily resorting to inoculation there being more such inoculations this year than in the preceding year.

The Servants of India Society sent three members to the U. P.

to organise measures for non-official famine relief during the U. P. famine of 1907-8. They worked in the most severely affected district of Mirzapur in the province, and by starting four centres of work gave relief to about 3,000 persons, with the help of the local people, the funds being mostly supplied by Lala Lajpatrai who took the lead in collecting money and in organizing the relief work. The Government of the United Provinces praised the work of the members by its special mention in their resolution on the administration of famine operations. During the recent famine of Gujarat and Kathiawar about 16 gentlemen worked from the commencement of the famine to its end. The work they did was five-fold: (1) of collecting information, (2) of collecting funds (3) of purchasing cheap grass from all over the U. P., and C. I., (4) of transporting it to Gujarat and Kathiawar, and (5) helping local Committees after forming them in the distribution of human relief and cattle relief. The Trustees of the Wadia Charities who generously came forth to spend a lac of rupees on famine relief used their agency and the Central Famine Relief Committee was organised by them, the speaker being one of the Secretaries of the Committee. During the recently closed famine in Ahmednager District, the members of the Society interested themselves in the work of non-official famine relief. They did the work on the same lines as those of the last year and started in Bombay a Committee for collecting funds to be spent through local Committees that were started in the District. A sum of nearly Rs. 65 000 was collected and more than 2,500 cattle were saved. Besides, systematic human relief was organised including that for the weavers and the services of the Seva Sadan ladies were also availed of. But the distinctive contribution of this work to famine relief was the adoption of a very useful scheme of valedictory dole which proved very successful. The speaker was one of the secretaries of the Bombay Committee and Mr. Joshi was joint secretary with Mr. Chitale of the Ahmadnagar Committee. On the occasion of the terrible holocaust at Salumbra, near Poona, in 1911 the members of the Servants of India Society were asked by a Committee in Bombay to proceed to the scene of the disaster. They toured round the villages, found out the sufferers and the survivors of the deceased, numbering about 400 and after collecting complete information prepared a well-planned scheme of relief to be given for five years to over 100 people. The speaker was the Secretary of the Fund and another member was the Asst. Secretary. Moreover, the members of the Northern India Branch were collecting

subscriptions for the relief of those that were rendered destitute by the recent terrible floods in Bengal and Behar.

Besides, these purely philanthropic activities, the members of the Society were usually called upon to participate in the work of organisation of other civic movements such as "the Children's Day" organized by the Lord Hardinge Birthday Celebration Committee in Bombay. The speaker, who was one of the Secretaries of the Committee, was entrusted with the work of organisation and had to arrange the details for the Celebration in 500 schools and for the entertainment of nearly 70,000 children of all sections of the community in that city. That was the grandest and most useful work and was truly educational in its character. From this narration it would be clear how the members of the Society were variously engaged, how their services were requisitioned to help several movements, and how they readily obeyed the call that was made on their energies.

THE METHODS OF WORK.

At this stage Mr. Devadhar spoke about the methods that were adopted in carrying on the work of the Society. The Members usually went about preaching the results of their study by means of lectures, issued useful pamphlets and wrote in newspapers to create an enlightened public opinion on the questions they handled. Then in order to illustrate what was meant by these ideas they started institutions and worked them up to a degree of efficiency. In doing this they never worked singly, but always made it a point to enlist the sympathies and the support of all those that were likely to help them, formed committees of men and women and worked either as instruments or office-bearers of such committees. They also aimed at creating intelligent interest and stirring up missionary enthusiasm among their co-workers for whom the special activity was meant and thus tried to develop the average capacity for work on the part of the workers. In their work, they were always ready to co-operate with other agencies that worked in a particular field. In this way they were able to secure the best of co-operation from the Government officials, missionary bodies, and other people engaged in similar work. The smallness of their number, the inadequacy of their present financial resources, the principle of co-operation which they had definitely accepted and also the need for doing their work on the lines of extension and intension naturally prevented the members

of the Servants of India Society from undertaking any larger responsibilities of building up institutions of their own like other organizations in India.

The speaker then referred to some criticism that was occasionally heard in certain quarters. It was said that having regard to the growth of public spirit in the country the institution was a little too premature. But Mr. Devadhar thought that considering the way in which the public had helped and sympathised with the movement all over the country and looking to the frequency of the call for the services of the Society and the measure of co-operation the members were able to secure in their work from the public he was inclined to take a more optimistic view though he thought that it was still in an experimental stage. The lecturer said that caution was necessary but it should only come after action had been decided upon. Some feared that it would be another official agency for work. But the speaker explained away this criticism by characterizing it as a gross misrepresentation of their policy of working in conjunction with the officials of Government when the common end in view had been the service of the people and when it was convenient to do so with due regard to their independence, self-respect and needs of public usefulness. He was sure, however, that there were not many who shared that view. Sometimes, it was heard as to why the Servants of India should engage themselves in so many activities. But the story of their work would clearly point out the fact that on many occasions they were called upon to actively participate in movements with which some of their best friends were associated and whose co-operation was of supreme importance to them. (Besides, the members of the Society had pledged themselves to be useful whenever an opportunity was afforded them to advance the real interests of the Indian people.) In bringing his address to a close, Mr. Devadhar dwelt on the members' overwhelming consciousness of their shortcomings and upon the experimental character of their work. The Society did not claim to produce Gokhales because such eminent men were ever the rare productions of Nature and were beyond the scope of such societies. It did not pretend to create intellectual giants; but its simple aim was to produce humble and true lovers of India pledged to serve the country for life and to find peace and contentment in this service; looking to the immensity of the task and the magnitude of the difficulties that beset the path of national work he said their

great need was larger membership so that the Society might some day realise its aspiration of having one member in each of the 270 districts in British India; and though the country was poor its public spirit was growing richer every day and it should not be difficult for the country to support such a body of men if they were forthcoming. The history of Western nations in organised public life was full of valuable instruction to all those that wanted to learn and profit by it; and its right study would exercise a very elevating influence upon younger minds who were best interpreters to the people of all that was noblest and best in the East and West. If they, therefore, made an effective use of their powers and talents, the tendency which was catching the imagination of the younger generation would be a powerful force to be utilised for India's good and Mr. Devadhar said that his object that evening was to show how the seed of that tendency had flowered into an institution—the Servants of India Society.

THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS.

The Hon'ble Sir Richard Lamb thanked the lecturer for his very lucid treatment of the work of the Servants of India Society. He specially mentioned the fact of the members' accepting the British connection for India's permanent good, and said that that should be the thesis of any institution that undertook work of promoting the welfare of the country. He repeated what he had said at Hadapasar a week ago that Government were considered by the people as m'ab'ap, *i. e.* father and mother. There were several forms of marriages, and the union of India and Britain must be considered a kind of marriage, and they must work with that feeling. As Mr. Devadhar had lightly passed over the political side of the work of the Society Sir Richard Lamb said he would also do the same. Mr. Gokhale, the founder of the Society, took a leading part in the political affairs of the country, and he was described by some papers as the leader of the Opposition. He (the President) did not look upon any members of Council who differed from Government as in any way hostile to it so long as they met in striving to find out the way to promote the good of the country. They were all friendly. Dealing with the social side of the work of the Servants of India Society and particularly their famine work, Sir Richard Lamb expressed frankly on behalf of Government how the services of the members of the Society were regarded by Government with great appreciation, and in affording the assistance which was needed

from the non-officials during the last two famines, the value of these services could hardly be exaggerated. He also thanked the ladies of the Seva Sadan for their self-sacrificing and arduous work during the famine time. He further recognized the services rendered by the Society in helping the masses such as agriculturists by means of co-operation. He said that the co-operative work which the members of the Society had started among the mill-hands in Bombay was bound to prove very useful as in these days of industrialism the life of the industrial and artisan classes needed to be organised so as to prevent them from becoming mere machines, and to enable them to employ their wages in the best way possible for their own benefit. It was a matter for great congratulation, therefore, that the Society had moved as pioneers among the mill-hands and the Dheds of Bombay. Co-operation was the leading idea of the day, and was the most powerful and useful movement. In many other respects the Servants of India had done good work, which could not be undertaken by Government, and in the matter of social reform it was absolutely impossible for Government to do any thing, as they were pledged to a policy of non-interference; and in these directions it was such bodies that ought to move and bring about reform. He was glad to see a large number of young men among the audience, and he exhorted them to cherish the ideas which Mr. Devadhar had put before them, and he thought, in the words of the Bhagwat-Gita, that those who worked and assisted the workers loved and served the country.

With a vote of thanks by Dr. Macnicol to Sir Richard Lamb and the lecturer, the meeting was brought to a close.