

FROM FIELD TO FACTORY

*An Introductory Study of
the Indian Peasant turned Factory Hand*

BY

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STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

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FOREWORD

THIS book was originally intended as an answer to a multitude of questions put to me about industry in India by girls and women in the textile factories in one of the large manufacturing towns of Yorkshire. I am indebted to them for their clear questions, their quick insight into the relations between a worker's factory life and his home life, and to their demand that something might be written which they and their friends could buy and read, and so have a more intelligent understanding of their fellow workers in the factories of India.

The progress of Western industrialism in India is a matter of concern to all who are interested in the contact of East and West, whether from the point of view of relations within the Empire, or of commerce and industry, or of the meeting of our different cultures. Students in college continually ask, "Is it not a mistake to take Western industrialism to India?" This book is only an introduction to the big questions which are raised in it. It is hoped that readers will be led through it to study especially *Labour in Indian Industries* by Miss G. M. Broughton, now Lady Chatterji, and *Labour in India* by Miss Janet Kelman. My dependence

on both these books and on Mr Pillai's *Economic Conditions in India* is obvious throughout. Any first-hand knowledge I have had of facts and conditions, as will be seen in the text, is limited to North India, Bengal and Bombay, and is the result of observations due to a persistent interest in what I believe to be one of the most vital questions in India to-day.

If this book can make any contribution to the reality of the partnership of East and West in the sphere of labour and industry it will justify its appearance.

MARGARET READ.

June 1926.

CHAPTER I

EAST AND WEST IN CONFLICT

ROMANCE AND COMMERCE.

WHAT kind of a picture does the name "India" bring before us? Is it not palm-trees and naked babies playing in the sun, marble palaces and peacocks, gorgeous colours by day and romantic moonlight at night? Let a traveller enter India by the Port of Calcutta and what will be his first impressions? On either bank of the river for miles before reaching Calcutta he will see factories and mills and wharfs until he reaches the jumbled shipping and grey colourless docks of the Port. It is much more like the Pool of London than any pictured Eastern landing-stage. In the docks themselves, in the midst of a babel of shouting and noise from humans, engines and motors, panting coolies stagger under great bales, goods-trains shunt on sidings, motor-lorries lumber through the gates, Ford cars and bullock-carts bump and jerk over the uneven ground. Here is none of the imagined Eastern peace and leisure. Nor is it seen in the streets of the city where fast-driven motors and electric trams and bullock-carts jostle one another and cause tedious traffic blocks. The great city offices and the Stock

Exchange might be in Lombard Street, except that on the Exchange steps are men in white turbans, pink turbans, the stiff grey or black cap of the Parsi, an occasional peaked "Gandhi" cap, the sleek uncovered head of the Bengali and the sun-helmets of the "white men."

What has happened to overshadow Calcutta, formerly famous for the shrine of the goddess Kali, a place of pilgrimage and devotion, so that now the stranger sees only the bustle and the squalor and the highly organised business life? The "Curse of Midas" has fallen on the city, making it one of the greatest markets of the East. The opening up of the jute industry, which within the last seventy years has gradually developed in Calcutta, has turned it into a would-be Western industrial city. Concentrated also in Calcutta are big business offices which control tea gardens, coal mines, steel and iron works, railways, shipping. These offices employ a huge army of "citified" babus or clerks, dignified men in white clothes who travel to and from their work in the electric trams, and who look as though they should be going to expound sacred books under palm-trees rather than to pore over ledgers under an electric fan. Slaves also of this great city are the coolies in the docks and streets who look like driven animals, shuffling along at the shouts of the headman, only seeming really happy when they lie down at a sunny corner of the street in an off hour to sleep. The conflict between East and West is manifest in

appearance in every part of Calcutta, between beauty and ugliness, between leisure and haste, between struggle for private gain and the spirit that seeks to harm no man.

THE HEART OF INDIA.

If anyone would see the India of romance and legend he must go to the countryside, to the villages, where is to be found the real life of the country, not that which has been super-imposed by the commerce of the West. India is a land of villages, 73 per cent. of the population live by agriculture, and if we would see modern industry in India in the right place we must look at the village life which is behind all the recent innovations like factories and industrial towns. There are many parallels between the village communities of our own Anglo-Saxon ancestors and the village system of India which exists to-day as it has for hundreds of years. There are to some extent the same strengths and weaknesses—the strength of a communal feeling, the weakness of conservatism, the strength of a patriarchal system, the weakness of small holdings, the strength of self-sufficiency and the weakness of isolation. The mainstay of the villages are the cultivators who are for the most part owners of their land. Dependent on them for food while supplying their other needs are the craftsmen, the carpenters, the makers of household pottery and brass ware, the silversmiths. The *bania*, or village

shopkeeper, is the centre for exchange in the village and often also the chief money-lender. Outside the actual village area, in a little forlorn cluster of tumbledown huts, live the outcastes, the leather workers and sweepers who do the sanitary work of the village and other menial work which caste forbids to the cultivators and craftsmen. In former days in addition to cultivating the land each homestead spun, wove and dyed its own cotton cloth for household use. The surplus produce of the land, and any finely-wrought crafts made in the village could often find a market in the nearest town, which was usually gathered round a royal court or a fortress. Each village was therefore self-sufficient and many of them possessed in addition a market for surplus produce. Standards of life in the village were governed by communal ideas, and varied according to the harvests. Good harvests meant prosperity and money to spend on marriage feasts—bad harvests meant recourse to the money-lender. Exchange was in kind and not in cash. There was no looking beyond the borders of the village for better or for worse.

During the nineteenth century the effects of British rule and Western civilisation crept by degrees into the fastnesses of the villages with a subtly disturbing influence which has never been checked. Railways brought communication between one part of a province and another, which in former days had been quite separate. English traders and their accomplices introduced foreign

machine-made goods into the villages and worked hard to find new markets for their goods; exchange in cash slowly ousted the old form of barter in goods. This process of modernising was immensely hastened by the European war. Not only did many men from provinces such as the Punjab go abroad as soldiers, and return home with startling new ideas, becoming discontented with old methods and ways of living; the tide of war also reached India in the form of steadily rising prices which made it harder for the agriculturist to tide over bad seasons. While some grew rich fast and adopted more elaborate standards of living, others sank deeper into poverty, and so the contrasts between rich and poor became more marked.

It could well have been argued before the war that the village communities were well enough, and should never have been interfered with. It is difficult to see how the tide of changes due to the war could have been prevented from flowing into these countless inlets, or making new levels of living. The merits of isolation in village communities break down in the face of modern machine-made civilisation. The trader is determined to find markets for his wares and to force on the agricultural community new standards and new desires. The conflict is there *in intent*, and the people of the land however far removed in miles from seaports and commercial centres, are slowly being attacked in their content and isolation.

CHEAP LABOUR FOR CHEAP GOODS.

Soon after cheap foreign cloth and trashy trinkets had made their way into the villages and competed with homespun and the village silversmith's anklets and neckrings, the foreigner was setting up cotton factories in Bombay, and jute mills in Calcutta, and looking round for labour to work the machines. Throughout the East the establishment of factories on modern lines, with the consequent demand for labour, was accompanied by methods of exploitation in human labour which makes a very ugly chapter in the contact of East and West—and in many places that chapter is ugly still.

In the early days of industry in India the desire of each manufacturer to make money quickly had wide scope. Labour was cheap, and not hard to get, especially when a series of bad harvests causing poverty in the villages were on the side of the manufacturer. Any kind of defence or protest against bad working conditions was unknown there, and there was no parliament in which awkward questions could be asked to arouse public opinion. It was not only in India there was this rush to use cheap labour for profit. Japan and China began their period of industrialisation about the same time, and competition throughout the East was keen to produce silks and cottons at the lowest possible prices. Women and children provided the cheapest form of labour in textile factories and

were widely employed, and as at first there were no factory laws, there were no restrictions on the hours of labour. The first Indian Factory Act of 1881, which forbade the employment of children under seven, was the result of questions asked in the English Parliament by social reformers at home. The rapid growth of modern factories in India at the end of the nineteenth century has interesting parallels with our own Industrial Revolution of a century before. This "industrialisation" process is set out in Miss Broughton's book¹ and in Miss Kelman's book,² and should be carefully studied by all who want to know the causes of conditions as they are to-day.

A more modern impetus to exploitation under a new guise has come of recent years. Formerly exploitation was entirely in the interests of the manufacturer. Now the cry is, "Increase production for the sake of India's revenue and India's wealth." But what about the human element in industrial production? In India human labour is little thought of, human life is held of little account, and the slums and the infant death rate in the industrial areas of Bombay and Calcutta are the result. Here is conflict between East and West *in practice*, because mass production for individual gain is a Western importation and alien to Eastern thought and life.

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Chapter II.

² *Labour in India*, Chapter IV.

IS MODERN INDUSTRY A BLESSING TO INDIA ?

Sitting one moonlight night on the roof of the guest house at Santiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore discoursed on this question. He referred to the importing of machinery into all kinds of processes, instancing the oil mills of the neighbouring town of Bolpur. The chunking hiccoughing sounds of the engine-driven mills in their night-shift could be heard miles across the quiet fields, and the town was drawing round it an industrial population to work the mills. The poet pointed in the opposite direction to the open country where the Santal tribes live, saying : " I hope this school of mine, this abode of peace, will always stand between these poor tribesmen and those abominations of the towns."

This is an example of a school of Indian thought, whose chief exponent has been Mahatma Gandhi, which deplors the 'introduction of modern industry, and, according to certain enthusiasts, would have India return to the days of hand industries. No one with the seeing eye, like the poet Tagore or Mahatma Gandhi, can see the slums of cities like Calcutta and Bombay, and not hate the industrialism which has caused them. No one too who has seen the Indian bred in the open air, living and working and sleeping in it, a child of the sun, can contemplate with ease the necessity which shuts him for hours in a day in the midst of whirring machinery, or cutting at a coal seam in the dark

underground of a mine. It is small wonder that there is a widespread revolt against this monster of industrialism which the West has thrust on India.

There is another school of Indian thought, much more urban and "modern," which would encourage industry by every possible means, both for economic and political reasons. They see in industry the solution for India's extreme poverty, a source of wealth founded in her own resources which will relieve the intense pressure on the land, and make her able to meet the growing demands for state expenditure. In their desire for complete independence they see in Indian industries a source of power for the country which will make her great in the way that other nations have shown greatness—by material wealth. They have studied Japan's rise to power and believe that Japan's industrialisation is the keynote of her strength. There are economists and politicians who would say otherwise, but they cannot belittle the immense influence which Japan has in the destinies of the East. The increasing number of mills and factories, especially cotton, owned financed and managed entirely by Indians, goes far to emphasise the truth of this view-point.

Among the English in India the larger number are in favour of increasing industrialisation, especially among the commercial section, partly from their conviction that modern industry is beneficial to India, partly owing to their con-

siderable financial interests, and partly to the fact that they see in Indian industry vast fields for the investment of capital ahead. Already English manufacturers are getting round the Indian tariff walls by building factories in India and putting their capital into them, rather than forcing on India their English-made goods. Another section of English opinion hopes, with some Indians, that industry may help to solve the acute agricultural difficulties, by removing from the land some of the surplus population, and by generally increasing wealth. Anyone who has studied the economics of Indian agriculture, and watched the rising census figures of the population, will give serious consideration to this claim for Indian industrialism.

The real answer to this question is however that modern industry has come and means to stay—the important question is how to make the best of it. There is no denying that rural India is infinitely more attractive than industrial India—modern industry is very ugly in the East. There is moreover a legitimate claim that India should take her place as a manufacturing country, and so to some extent stabilise her revenue. In the world as it is now constituted, it does not appear possible for any one country either to dissociate itself economically from the rest and live in happy self-sufficiency, or to exist permanently as a producer of raw materials only and a receiver of manufactured ones. The introduction of modern industrialism is estab-

lished as part of the evolution of a country to-day. We of the West have in the past forced this conflict on India, primarily for our own gain, and now in part she has claimed it for her own gain. Are the lessons of the West in the last fifty years going to be used for the benefit of India, or are we going to stand aside and see India disfigured with slums and rent with struggles between capital and labour? We cannot evade giving an answer to this for we in the beginning created the problem.

CHAPTER II

PROSPECTS IN THE VILLAGES

VILLAGES IN MODERN TIMES.

A SIGHT which the traveller in India never forgets is that seen at dawn from the windows of a north-bound train in the United Provinces or the Punjab. The brown plains stretch on either hand to seemingly limitless horizons. Against this vastness, with outlines sharpened by the rising sun, goes the solitary ploughman with his two bullocks and his bent wood plough to work with the first light in the scattered strips of land which are his among the village holdings. The train flashes by, the ploughman is passed, and the village appears, a group of mud-built huts thatched with straw. Thousands and thousands of such villages are dotted over the plains of North India. Some may be distinguished by one or more brick-built houses, showing the presence of a man of wealth and property. All will have some religious centre of the village life. It may be the rounded white roof of a mosque showing their Mohammedan population. Hindu villages will have a sacred tree with rags tied to it or stones heaped up at its foot, as silent prayers for a man child or for prosperity in the harvest, or for protection

for the bullocks. In every village there will be a shrine of some kind, perhaps a small temple painted a crude pink, within which is some image garlanded with marigolds; or a painted black stone with a few flowers before it; or even the mouth of an ancient cannon, long bedded in the soil, daubed with red paint, and worshipped as an unknown power. If one would understand Indian life it is essential to get some sympathetic and vivid pictures of the villages, such as Miss Kelman gives in her book¹ in Chapter III, and such as can be found in the surveys of special districts which have been made by Government servants, and also in much missionary literature.

Life in the village is a fixed round of work, depending on seasons, varied by the visit of some fakir or holy man bringing with him news and fable, gladly entertained and fed by the village during his stay, or the arrival of some wandering pedlar whose supply of cheap buttons, gaudy cottons, soaps, matches, glass bangles, collar-studs, excite envy and desire in the hearts of the village folk. Such goods are worth far more in their eyes than the coarse cotton cloth woven on the hand looms by the women in between seasons, or than the brass vessels for household use made by the brass-worker of this or a neighbouring village. The Western tide of trade has left more solid marks in the villages than collar-studs and cheap

¹ *Labour in India*, Kelman, Chapter III.

cottons. Almost every village tailor now has a sewing-machine, whose tick-ticking makes a strangely alien sound in the street where the thick dust muffles all sound of footsteps, human or animal. In the shoe-shop ugly square-toed laced shoes lie beside the red and green country shoes with their curved points and gay stitching. The ubiquitous Standard Oil tin has many uses, whole as a water-pot (alas for the picturesque brass water-pots!); and when melted down as tin mugs and vegetable scrapers. Practical Western ugliness invades the villages and gradually ousts the time-old wares of the craftsman.

THE GOLDEN AGE AND GANDHI'S ADVICE.

This slow spoiling of the villages is not æsthetic and there is much sympathy for, if not agreement with, the Indian economists and writers who lament the Golden Age of Indian industries. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the flourishing days of the Moghul Emperors their large and wealthy courts created a market for the best of Indian indigenous industries.

After supplying the needs of his immediate neighbourhood the skilled artisan, if he produced goods of high value, could generally find a market for them in some not distant court or camp. With the decay of Moghul civilisation and the long period of unrest and internal strife which followed, the artisan's markets declined. They received a still further blow when, with the

introduction of systematic trade with Britain, cheap British-made goods were introduced into the country. The greater number of the artisans could find no employment and were thrown back on the soil, thus increasing the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The once famous industries still survive now in certain localities. In Moghul Sarai station, a big junction in the United Provinces where trains always wait some time, rows of vendors on the platform display trays of brown pottery and brass ware and painted wooden toys. It is easy to realise that here was once a considerable industry, patronised by the great of the land, and not as now hawked to visitors and tourists. The carpets of Mirzapore, the muslins of Dacca, the silver of Lucknow, the silks of Berhampore, the inlaid marble of Agra, the jewelry of Delhi, the silver and gun-metal work of Azimgarh, are all survivals of India's former pride in beautiful hand-made products. Of recent years one or two definite attempts have been made to encourage these industries, and to emphasise the artistic value of the products rather than their commercial value. It is easy for the Indian brass worker to turn out hundreds of cheap brass knick-knacks to catch the eyes of tourists. It is also easy for Birmingham and Japan to compete with him in that, and the machine-made imported goods win the day. No one however can compete with the artist who can do delicate enamel work on brass

with designs handed down from generations of artists, unspoilt by hasty finishing and the hurry to sell quickly. The Central School of Arts and Crafts at Lucknow makes it known in the district that they will buy any really good artistic piece of work that is brought in, and their showrooms and museum are a proof that indigenous talent is flourishing still. The Bengal Home Industries Association in the same way buys artistic goods from the village workers in Bengal and sells them in the cities. More experiments of this kind are needed and an extension of a co-operative marketing system to encourage local industries. The Indian pavilion at Wembley in 1924 was for the most part an example of how commerce debases art. To those who had seen true Indian artistic work, many of the exhibits there were deplorable. In one of the most famous lacquer works in Kyoto, the old Japanese manager pointing out a lacquered tray that had taken three years to make, said, "That kind we keep in our country, we do not sell it to foreigners." It is to be hoped that the revived Indian hand industries will at any rate produce for their own country true artistic work, and will not allow their art to be commercialised.

It is partly with this in mind, partly as an expression of his gospel of simplicity, that Mahatma Gandhi made the *charkar*, or hand-spinning wheel, the symbol of his teaching. It was evident in 1920 and 1921 when he pressed home-spinning and home-weaving in all his

public speeches, and allowed the boycott and even destruction of foreign-made cloth, that he was thinking of the days of the self-sufficient villages, the self-sufficient India, and believing that along that road lay her dignity, her self-respect and her freedom. The campaign for the wearing of *khaddar*, or homespun and home-woven cloth, caught hold of the popular imagination, and an educated Indian woman, who in the course of her work had to travel much, used to say that her *khaddar sari* always evoked nods of approval wherever she went. Except for the temporary revival in the campaign of the *charkar*, home-spinning has been almost crushed out by the competition with machine-spun yarn, both Indian and British. In the case of home-weaving it is different, for the hand-loom workers still make goods which are not turned out so well by the factories. Both the very fine goods, muslins or silks, and the very coarse woollens and cottons are still the province of the hand-weavers, and Indian economists think it unlikely that this trade will decrease, especially if modern co-operative methods of buying and selling can be made available for the hand-weaver, so that he will not be crushed out by the middleman on the one hand and the rising cost of living on the other.

PROSPERITY AND DEBT. .

So far this chapter has been mainly concerned with only one side of village life, that of its

craftsmen and artisans who were and still are important members of the village community. They are dependent however for their existence on the cultivators, and it is these who form the mainstay of the villages and of India herself. It has just been announced¹ by the Government of India that a thorough investigation is going to be made of rural conditions in India. Such an investigation will no doubt bring together the excellent research work into rural conditions which has been done in certain areas of recent years.² Any of us who know and care for rural England are conscious both of a certain pleasure and a certain irritation when we think of the conditions in the rural areas we know. The pleasure is mostly for the greater simplicity and freedom of life in villages as compared with that in towns. The irritation is often because that very simplicity and freedom seem to lead to stagnation rather than to progress. The Indian peasant, like peasants the world over, is innately conservative, and has, in many parts of the country, cultivated the land and ordered his life in the same way as did his forefathers in the days of the Mohammedan invasions, 700 years ago.

The poverty of India, by which is meant the poverty of the cultivator and the labourer and their families, is often mentioned in the West but probably not realised. Granted that standards of life are and should be different in India and England, nevertheless judged by an Indian

¹ December 1925.

² See Bibliography on p. 79.

standpoint there are an immense number of people living in that country on the verge of starvation and in the perpetual clutches of debt. This poverty is due to cumulative causes which recent times have aggravated. First of all there is the one already mentioned, that of peasant conservatism, which neither welcomes nor invites new agricultural methods which alone can maintain the fertility of the land. Added to this is the great insecurity of harvests and dependence on the fickle seasons for the returns on the year's labours. In England we speak of uncertain weather conditions and their effect on harvests, but we know so little of what that means when it involves the complete failure of the monsoon, the absence of any rain, and the consequent perishing of all the crops and most of the cattle, and the loss of the entire food supply of the countryside. Two or three bad harvests in succession will reduce a district to such poverty that many good harvests will hardly avail to right. A further cause of poverty is the division of the village lands into small holdings which undergo a perpetual subdivision as the families increase, until the strips belonging to one family are not only uneconomically small, but also not even adjacent, as each family must share in the good land and the bad land equally. Such arrangements recall the village communities of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, and may be possible in an economic sense in a new land, but in one that has been cultivated thus for genera-

tions it means nothing but increasing agricultural poverty.

We must add yet one more cause of poverty, and that perhaps the most underlying of them all, and that is the effect of the religious viewpoint of the people. Hinduism bids men turn their back on all material advantages, bids them not seek for gain, not lay up for bad times, take no thought for the morrow. The combination of this religious thought with the inherent Eastern fatalism means that self-initiated effort is rare, and that struggle against reverses and misfortunes has little place in the minds of the people.

Mention has already been made of the fact that many artisans were thrown back on the land after the decay of village industries in the last century, and with this extra weight to bear the land could not support the increasing population. It is evident also from census and harvest returns that good agricultural years always entail increased population, which leads in turn to further overpressure on the land. "In India every advantage of nature is sooner or later neutralised by an increase of population."¹

What is the answer to this riddle? Debt—which is in itself an immensely bigger riddle. The cultivator must have seed to sow, he must have bullocks for his plough, he and his family must live until the harvest. For all these he must borrow. For marriages and funerals he must spend, according to his status, a propor-

¹ *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, Darling.

tionate amount which seems to us amazingly extravagant, but which to the Indian cultivator seems as essential as we consider money spent on education. As the prosperity of a district increases so its burden of debt rises, for after a good harvest a man's standing is higher and he can therefore afford more extravagant expenditure on marriages. One marriage may absorb at least a full year's income, and will certainly entail heavy debts.

When a man is faced after a bad harvest with the necessity for supporting his family until the next one, the money-lender first appears as a friend in need. By his readily advanced loan he can make life possible, and who, on receiving a large sum of ready-money, thinks of the comparatively small interest to be paid later? Money is not, however, lent at low rates in India; on the contrary the rates are very high and reckoned at compound interest. The seemingly small sum soon becomes a burden, and with the necessity year by year, for further borrowing, the loans and their accumulating interest become a millstone round the neck of the village cultivator from which he can see no escape. The indebtedness of the Indian villages is emphasised in every rural survey and is regarded by agricultural experts as one of the chief evils of the land.¹

¹ See Bibliography.

THE RETURNED SOLDIER.

Two small but significant efforts towards reform are being made which may stem the downfall of the villages. One originates with the people themselves and only applies to certain districts, notably in North India: that is the effect of the return from abroad of the men who served as soldiers during the Great War. The other comes largely from Government—the co-operative movement. Peasant proprietors and cultivators who went from North Indian villages to France saw there village life that was prosperous and independent. They came back to their villages, in the Punjab half a million of men, and the villages since then are stirring with a new spirit. Conversations at the village gate turn to more distant topics than crops and the affairs of neighbours. An ex-Gurkha in his hill village far into the Himalayas said in his picturesque Hindustani, "How can I stand the isolation of this life? These people know nothing of the great world and care for nothing but themselves." He was only one in his village, but where there were two or three or a dozen such men they have influenced the village life and village interests, and now there are visible signs of their effect on the villages. Gardens for fruit and vegetables make a valuable by-employment for the agricultural family and a secondary source of food-supplies. Rugs are used on the beds; bright coloured close-woven

cotton mats, "durries," take the place of dirty matting on the floor. Travel is becoming more usual, and peasant families go to see the sights of Agra and Delhi or the valleys of Kashmir. Tea-drinking has been introduced by the returned soldiers, meat is much more common (among Mohammedans only), machine-made cloth and finer materials generally are worn, and going bare-footed in many villages is a sign of extreme poverty.¹ All these are signs of increasing "wants," of a lack of content with things as they are, which though it may seem to lead to a more complicated way of living is nevertheless significant of a new spirit—a spirit of progress.

The growth of the co-operative movement has found a ready ally in this new spirit. Co-operative banks and credit societies offered to the peasant cultivator the only escape from the money-lender. They also appealed to the true spirit of the village community—that of mutual self-help and independence. Government officials and public-spirited leading men in the rural areas united to establish co-operative banks in the villages, which lent sums at reasonable rates of interest and secured repayment by the pressure of public opinion. The effect of these village co-operative banks in the Punjab and in other Provinces shows that indebtedness is being gradually reduced. In addition to the reduction of debt, the co-operative societies have a valuable moral and educational value. Some co-operative

¹ *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, Darling.

societies in villages round Lahore have prohibited extravagant expenditure on marriages, and fine their members who get drunk. The desire for education among the adults of a village is awakened, and night classes are formed for reading, writing and elementary account-keeping. Mutual trust and helpfulness grow beside the material advantages, and insure that they lead to good and enduring results. "We shall do well to remember the deep spiritual forces underlying Indian mental conceptions, and if possible to infuse into the idea of progress something that will lift it above the mere satisfaction of physical needs. . . . However purely material any form of progress may be, in the West as soon as it becomes part of general life it is vivified by the less material forces with which our age abounds. . . . In India things are different . . . there is real danger that what has enriched and invigorated the West (i.e., material progress) may have a contrary effect in the East, and that unless it is illuminated by some reflection of 'the good, the beautiful, and the true,' it may be rejected by the wise and only accepted by the few who wish to get rich."¹

THE THREE SPECTRES.

Meantime through the vast majority of villages in North and Central India stalk three spectres—black in the hot sunlight and grim against the surface gaiety—Poverty, Ignorance, Disease.

¹ *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, Darling.

Poverty we have already seen is grinding on the people, and increasing every year with the burden of debt and over-population. Ignorance works against progress, and education makes little headway yet. Disease, joined with ignorance, claims its victims all the time; not only plague, fevers, smallpox and cholera, but venereal disease too is rampant in the villages. Medical aid is scarce, and quack doctors and ancient methods prevail.

Into some of these debt-ridden villages in days past came the labour contractor from Bombay or Calcutta, seeking workers to sign on for the factories, with wonderful tales of good pay, regular food, "pukka" houses to live in, and all the glamour of city streets. They were tales of a rosy future, and town life seen from the standpoint of a village had many attractions. Was it much wonder that the labour contractors in the early days found labour easily?

CHAPTER III

THE FACTORY SYSTEM AND THE INDIVIDUALS WHO WORK IT

I. THE PEASANT TURNED FACTORY HAND.

A FEW minutes conversation with a mill-worker in Calcutta or Bombay will bring out some reference to "my country." The phrase, which is a familiar one among almost all classes in the big cities from coolies to bank clerks, means the part of India where the ancestral home is, where the man owns a small plot of land, or at any rate shares in a family holding, where in fact he feels that he belongs and is a person, and the constant use of the phrase marks the strong feeling of temporary sojourn in a big city. In fact it is proof that the Indian mill-worker does not belong to an urban industrial population as yet; he and his family, if they have come with him from the village, are classed as "imported labour," and this imported labour makes up the large majority of factory workers in Calcutta and Bombay. It is true to a lesser extent in places like Nagpur and Cawnpore. All these men with their families are agriculturists at heart; they have, as one writer expressed it, one foot in the town and the other in their own village, but it is in the village where their heart is. They are working in

the cities, driven there by various causes, largely economic, but they are working in order that they may return to their village eventually. If they are able to save money it is back to the village that they send it; if they become ill they crawl back home to the village somehow; and the most terrible fear of all is that of dying anywhere but in their village. Talk to a factory worker who is lethargic and heavy, doing monotonous work among noisy machinery, of his village and his face lights up, and though there is sadness and the look of an exile in his face, it is obvious where his heart and most of his thoughts are. It is easy to get an impression of caged wild animals when looking round at the workers in a factory shed.

One result of this half-agricultural, half-industrial population is a constant instability in the supply of labour, which creates much difficulty for the employer. The agriculturist brings with him his country habits of working when he pleases, and resting when he pleases. This he cannot do within the mill walls because of the vigilance of the foreman. So he arrives late at times and is exasperatingly unpunctual, and at other times he absents himself for no other cause than that he does not want to work that day. Harvest time in his village will take him home for anything from one to several weeks, and perhaps he will not return. Regulations cannot regulate his habits, and not even the loss of wages and fines have power to hold him

to regular hours, for he is probably in debt already, and what is the consequence of a small debt if he is able to maintain his life's habits? It is true that with the slow growth of an urban industrial population, and with improved working conditions and shorter hours, regularity of work and a slightly more constant labour supply is becoming more possible. There are other reasons however which encourage the factory worker to cling to his village habits of working. He soon discovers that the grand tales he heard before coming to the city about city life and work in a factory have no basis. He is appalled at the cost of living and of rents. He has no friends or friendly neighbours, his fellow-workmen speak half a dozen different languages, his wages which sounded so magnificent go nowhere, and probably his wife is forced to work in the factory too in order to eke out the family wages. Add to this the monotonous regular work, the terrifying noise of machinery all day, the none too kindly supervision of the foremen or overseers—all these causes plant in the heart of the factory worker deeper than ever the conviction that he is not a mill-hand and that he is a village man.

2. MILLS GOOD AND BAD.

It is to be expected in a land where the factory system is so comparatively new as in India that the mills and factories should differ very much

both in actual buildings and in the conditions within the walls. They vary from the model buildings which were shown in the Indian exhibit at Wembley, with their sports grounds, mill lines, as the workmen's dwellings are called, school for half-timers, and infant welfare centre, to "boxes built round a crowded heap of machinery," which is an apt description of some of the smaller mills, as a rule other than textile, which are to be found in the outskirts of the cities. Into some of these model buildings have been put the best of Western industrial experience; the grounds have been well planned out, the buildings specially adapted for the best results in temperature, ventilation and lighting, and the general air of neatness and ordered efficiency about these buildings, with care even of small details, like hanging flowering plants from the girders of the roof, is something positively good which they have brought. It is encouraging, in thinking out the puzzling question of industry in the Orient, to see places like the Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur, the Empress Cotton Mills at Nagpur, the cotton and woollen mills and leather works of the British India Trust at Cawnpore, some of the jute mills in Calcutta—to mention only a few of the many excellent leading mills—and to find the employers forestalling government and international standards for labour by thinking out how best to make bearable and educative the industrial life of their employees. Generally speaking

the textile factories tend towards better conditions because of the high standard set by some of the better ones, though there are small textile mills where the conditions are still very bad. It is, however, in rice mills, and oil mills and others of a similar kind where the machinery is old and the buildings look as if they could not support the machinery, and small groups of workers work in unhealthy surroundings, that the standards are lowest.

There are certain big questions which affect alike all types of factories, such as temperature, ventilation, sanitation, and the general health of workers. In a climate such as India the question of the temperature of the buildings is an acute one, and very closely related to the efficiency of the workers. Some mills have corrugated iron roofs, and the heat in them during midday when the sun is vertical is impossible for us to realise in this country. In the early days mills were not built with regard to the sun's rays. Nowadays they are built as much as possible with windows facing north and south, as the midday sun does not reach the windows, and this assures some hours at least with no sunlight coming into the rooms. The jute mills are mostly one-storey buildings, with consequently all the roofs directly exposed to the sun. In the cotton and woollen mills at Cawnpore the buildings are two and three stories, which means that the ground-floor rooms are cooler. Ventilation is a particularly difficult

thing to install satisfactorily except at great cost, as there is generally no breeze through the day in India, and the wind which at certain times of the year in North India does blow in the mornings is hot and dust-laden. Another aspect of ventilation is concerned with the removal of fluff in the cotton and jute mills. A glance at the workers in the rooms shows the fluff settled on hair and clothes and even eyelashes, and much more must be swallowed by the workers, who suffer very often from throat and chest complaints. Sanitation in mill compounds and in the congested mill areas is one of the crying problems of the day. It is closely bound up with caste habits and restrictions, and modern methods of plumbing and draining are as yet used on only a very small scale. Here again the worker clings to his habits of the village, where there is little overcrowding in the houses and plenty of space beyond. To teach village people to use a modern drainage system and keep it in decent working order is in itself a Herculean task, and though progressive mill owners provide the most approved methods of sanitation in their mill areas it does not follow that the premises will be kept clean. Insanitary premises mean of course, sooner or later, disease, and typhoid and cholera, two of India's worst diseases, are directly due to insanitary conditions. In very few mills however are there records kept of the health of the workers which are of any real help to medical officers or

to employers who desire to make further improvements. The frequent changing of the labour supply is all against careful record keeping, because it looks like so much time spent for nothing. Also when an Indian is ill he does not as a rule set out to find a doctor or a hospital, but creeps away somewhere, if possible back to his own village, there to let his complaint run its course or to die. When therefore questions are asked about the effect of industrial work on the health of the Indians there is very little definite data to go upon. Inquiries were set on foot four years ago in Bombay, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam, by the respective Governments, into the health of women workers in those areas, especially women workers of the child-bearing ages, with a view to collecting material about possible maternity benefits. These inquiries showed how difficult it was to collect data about the health of the workers—even the death-rate figures were unreliable, for all very ill people tried to get home to die, and only the accident figures were scheduled.

Nothing has been said as yet about the factory laws which govern to some extent the conditions of the workers in the mills. It will suffice to say here that India has adopted the Washington Conference regulations and that her Factory Laws are in line with them, subject to the special conditions for Eastern countries, with the exception of the Mines Act. In the good mills these labour standards are observed, and,

as is the case in the best mills in the West, labour conditions are in advance of the minimum standard required. But it is one thing for a Government to have good factory laws, and another to have them carried out, especially when there is little or no public opinion in favour of their observance, and no trade union organisation to stand behind them. The factory inspecting staff is far too small, the distances are immense, and many factories cannot be visited even once a year. What is more, news travels fast and far in India, and when a factory inspector is on his way to a place it will be known hours ahead, and all will be in order and in compliance with the law when he arrives. A factory inspector in North India made a night surprise visit to a cotton mill to see if any children under nine¹ were being employed at night. His wife was stationed at one side exit, myself at another, and he went in the main door. As soon as he was recognised by a foreman a whistle blew and a crowd of small boys dashed out of the side doors, some to be caught and held. The inspector then found many more hidden away under bales of cotton. The foremen took it as a matter of course. The manager, a European, was fetched from his house, and when confronted with the catch scratched his head and said, "Caught this time." Half a dozen of the smallest youngsters were taken off to the

¹ This was before the new Factory Act of 1922 raising the age to fifteen.

city to wait till morning when a doctor could see them. Having no birth certificates they had to be certified by the doctor as being under age before any case for prosecution could be made out. This instance is somewhat typical of the constant evasions of the law which go on, bringing despair to the factory inspectorate, and earning the title of exploiters for the factory owners. A recent visit from Dundee Trade Unionists to the jute mills furnished instances of evasions of the Acts of just this kind.

3. WAGES AND HOURS.

In these days of an International Labour Office with its annual conference when workers' representatives from the West meet workers' representatives from the East, questions of wages and hours in Western and Eastern countries are coming to the fore, and it is evident that there is a feeling towards international standards which were only hinted at even in the Washington Conference of 1919. Formerly, it had been taken for granted that the Easterner would always work longer hours and receive lower wages than the Western workman. Owing partly to the growth of an "international labour conscience," partly to the now realised competition between East and West which seriously affects Western business, questions are asked and public opinion is beginning to stir on this question. A Commission appointed by the International Labour Conference of 1925 to "inquire into the condi-

tions of work in mills and factories in Oriental countries" is already at work collecting data, and this represents not the efforts of a small group of progressives, but the declared conscience of the labour world.

There are certain outstanding difficulties in connection with the wages question in factories which necessitate some understanding of Indian customs. These are admirably set out in Miss Kelman's book,¹ and it is worth while to study them carefully in the light of the contention that wages of labour should approximate the world over. It is extremely difficult to ascertain the minimum living wage in India. An attempt was made to do this in the cotton mills in Bombay, and has been published by the Labour Office in Bombay.² Certainly there is need for more study on the relation of wages to cost of living. So far it is probably true to say that the only relation of wages has been to cost of production. Methods of payment, fines and bonuses are all peculiar to India and repay careful study.

As regards the hours of labour the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1924 gives the following figures. In men's work 29·12 per cent. of the factories work under 48 hours a week, 59 per cent. over 54; in women's work 34·12 per cent. work under 48 hours, 54 per cent. over 54. The Indian Factory Act of 1922 allowed a maximum rate of 60 hours a week, and forbade night-work for women and for children

¹ *Labour in India*, Chapter X. ² *Working-Class Budgets*, Shirras.

under fifteen. Here again the irregularity of Indian factory labour must be taken into account when estimating the weekly total of hours worked. The Indian factory worker has not yet learned to be part of a system of production.¹

4. BABIES AND CHILDREN.

A very progressive director taking some visitors round a model jute mill near Calcutta said with a wave of his hand: "You know we are not supposed to have children in this place, and we don't want them here, but the mothers refuse to leave them in a crèche, and they will not come here without them." There were babies in baskets by the piles of jute which the women were sorting, babies on the piles of fluff under the machinery, babies in empty reel-boxes, small children hanging on to their mothers' skirts and saris, others trotting about and getting in the way, all cheerful and friendly and smiling, but wholly out of place in that noisy, dusty, hot shed. The women were wanted for work; that was obvious. It was also true that in the majority of cases the husband's wages did not cover the cost of the family budget with city prices for food and rent. There was no grandmother or elderly relative with whom the children could be left, as when in the villages the women went to work in the fields. They could not be left unwatched in the huts or mill lines, where the home was, and any children who

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, Chapter V.

were old enough to mind them were also old enough to do half-time work in a mill and so add to the family income. The alternative to bringing them into the mills, where all day long they breathe fluff and dust, and if they can walk or crawl are with difficulty kept away from the machinery, is to leave them in the huts doped, so that they will remain quiet and not cry for food. Special sized "baby opium pills" are made, which factory women can buy and so solve one of their problems. Infant welfare work in Bombay especially has shown a widespread use of these opium pills, with all the resultant ills of physical and mental degeneration and under-development.

Why do the mothers nearly always avoid the crèches where such are provided? It is part of the general distrust bred by the new kind of life which a village woman finds in a factory city. It is hard enough for her to get accustomed to the factory work and to the difficult new ways of managing her home. To have to give up her children to strangers for the greater part of the day is asking too much of her. She would rather have them by her in the mill, risking accidents from the machinery and coughing in the fluff, than put them in healthy surroundings where she could not see or know what was happening to them. There are one or two successful factory crèches, and that is where the confidence of the women has been won. But the Indian woman believes that her children are

better with her whatever she is doing and wherever she is, and it will take more than well-intentioned welfare work to persuade her otherwise.

Many of the model factories have set up schools for the children of their employees, and these are gradually gaining popularity. This will at least insure that the older children can be out of the factory for part of the day, until they are old enough to become "half-timers." Children of twelve to fifteen are allowed to work half-time, i.e., six hours a day, in the mills. They work in gangs, changing the bobbins, and seem to the visitor cheerful and incredibly nimble. But there is a note in the overseer's voice as he gives them their orders which suggests harshness, and the feverish speed at which they work may be created not only by their enthusiasm. The "half-timers" question is a difficult one for employers and for social reformers. Owing to the absence of registration of births there is nothing to prove a child's age but a varying medical standard. The children are keen to work, the parents want their money, and consequently, at the earliest possible age at which they can pass for twelve, they begin to work. It is easy too for youngsters in an area where there are many mills to get two half-time jobs in the day at different mills, giving different names when they register. This seems almost impossible to check, and is very common, especially in the jute mills in the Calcutta area. It means that these children of twelve do a full

day's work of twelve hours, with the additional journey from one mill to the other, and probably very inadequate food all through the day.

5. THE UNDERGROUND WORKERS.

The most vexed industrial question of the moment, round which controversy is raging, is that of the underground workers, particularly in the coal mines. As the industries of India develop, so her own coal resources become of greater and greater importance, and she looks to their development rather than to increased coal imports. Ninety per cent. of the coal in India is raised in the coal-fields of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and the labour supply is largely drawn from the aboriginal tribes who live in the neighbourhood of the coal-fields.* The same question as exists in the factories, namely that of a labour supply which is half agricultural, half industrial, arises in the coal-mining areas. It applies with greater force here, because the people are nearer their villages and frequently work a few days in the mines and a few days at home each week, causing an irregularity in the supply of labour which is extremely difficult to cope with. The provision of housing facilities near the mines on a generous scale, giving ground for cultivation as in the villages, is progressing, and will be the best way of ensuring a stable labour supply. These aboriginal tribes are of fine physique and powerful workmen, but it is

doubtful if they can maintain their strength if they have to work long hours underground, when for generations they have depended on the sunshine and fresh air for their health.

Until the Mines Act of 1923 came into force, going into the coal-mines was a family concern, that is, men women and children all worked together, whether underground or on the surface. It should be noted here that some of the mines in the Bengal coal-field are what are known as surface mines, where the conditions are different from and less arduous than those in deep shaft mines. These surface seams are not however very widespread, and will eventually be worked out, whereas the deeper coal is both better and to be found in much larger quantities. The Mines Act of 1923 forbade children under thirteen to enter the underground part of the mine, and their employment either underground or on the surface. It did not, however, forbid the employment of women underground, which was forbidden in England in 1842. In the Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines for 1923 it was stated that the proposal to prohibit the employment of women underground was strenuously opposed in certain quarters, chiefly on the grounds that the supply of labour was not sufficient to work the mines without the women. Also much was made of the different type of work in the surface mines. In his Report for 1924 the Chief Inspector stated that the opposition was becoming weaker. "Recently a pro-

minent general manager of coal-mines who knows much of Indian labour conditions, addressed to the Indian Mining Association a letter in which he said 'that the time is now ripe for the withdrawal of women workers from Indian mines.' Mining labour is now plentiful and it would probably be easier now to replace women than at any time for many years." At present 41,616 women are employed underground in coal-mines out of a total of underground workers of 167,719.

In the larger coal-mines the hours are two ten-hour shifts in the twenty-four, 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. and 8 P.M. to 6 A.M. If it is difficult for men to keep their health working underground, it is far more serious for women, the majority of whom are of the child-bearing age. Their work consists mostly of carrying the coal in baskets from the seams to the tubs, and it is often very heavy work. The arrangements for ventilating the mines are not yet very advanced, and the dangers from bad air, defective roofing, and fire-damp explosions are far greater than in Western mines. In the 1924 Report it is stated that of a total mining force of 258,217 there were 233 fatal accidents, causing the death of 281 persons, 247 men and 34 women, and serious accidents causing injury to 420 persons. It is stated further that fatal accidents generally occur from a wilful disregard of orders given by managers and foremen, and that there is need for education and a greater sense of responsibility

among the workers. First-aid classes are held in some centres as part of the work of the Mines Board of Health.

Undoubtedly the question of women's work in mines is a difficult and complicated one. The withdrawal of women's labour from the mines would involve a costly and troublesome re-organisation of labour, and would force mine-owners to extend the use of labour-saving devices and machine-cutting appliances. The experience of other countries shows that this always leads to increased output. Moreover, as the *National Christian Council Review* states (Sept. 1925): "Apart from humanitarian considerations, it appears to be reasonably clear that the removal of women from mines is, along with housing, the principal necessity if the standard of life of the mining community is to be raised. It surely needs no argument to prove that the standard of life of a community, where the women spend their days down the mine with the men, must be low, and that family life in any true sense of the term must be non-existent." This vexed question is the subject for constant debate and discussion in Government and social reform circles in India, but there is a looking towards England all the time for help in achieving this reform. Indian social reformers say that English public opinion can force the issue if it will. Who in England cares enough to take up this challenge?

CHAPTER IV

PROSPECTS IN THE CITIES

1. NEW KINDS OF HOMES.

IT is verily an upheaval of his universe for the Indian peasant of the Northern plains to leave his occupation of following the buffalo and the wooden plough over the dry soil under the open sky, and substitute for that tending to a clanking machine in a hot and crowded shed. Yet even that upheaval is not so great as the change from a village home to a so-called home in an industrial city. There is something utterly alien to Indian life in crowded insanitary slums in a great city, and yet these are the homes in which an increasing number of India's young population are growing up, thanks to the demands of the industrial system for more and yet more workers. Overcrowding in a village is rare and unnecessary, for mud is always at hand for a new hut and there are endless open spaces around for the children to grow up in. The sun in the open country is a great consumer and disinfectant of human waste, and for twelve hours of every day acts like a reliable sanitary cleanser of the soil. The great rains in the monsoon wash away surface impurities, and do

some good, as well as causing some trouble, in destroying old huts, making new and clean ones a necessity. In the city slums there is neither space nor sun between the buildings, nor the same cleansing effect of great rains. Bombay and Calcutta, the former especially, stand out as hideous examples of one of the fruits of India's industrial revolution. When India proudly takes her place in the International Labour Conference as one of the eight leading industrial nations of the world, there is a price to pay. That price is the infantile death-rate of certain parts of Bombay—660 per 1000 under one year old—more than ten times the infant death-rate of a typical English industrial city.

It is very difficult for those who have not seen an Eastern industrial city to picture what the conditions are, and without some such mental picture facts about overcrowding and infant mortality often fail to make their mark. An attempt will be made therefore to describe three types of Indian industrial dwellings, the chawls of Bombay, the mill lines of Calcutta and the industrial village of Cawnpore, all from the point of view of the Westerner who has some eye to social conditions. After that we can perhaps see what is their effect on the Indian families who inhabit them.

The chawls of Bombay correspond, externally at any rate, to some extent to workmen's tenements in England. They are three to five storeys high, built sometimes round three

sides of a small courtyard, but more often without any planning of the surrounding space, and so close to one another that they are only reached by narrow lanes from the larger roads. For the most part they consist of one-room tenements, occupied as a rule by one family. But in the 1921 census there were no less than 135 instances in which a single room was occupied by six families or more. In the same census of 1921 a comparison was made with London, in which the statistics showed that 66 per cent. of the Bombay population live in one-room tenements, with an average number of four persons in each, whereas in London only 6 per cent. of the population live in one-room tenements, with the average of 1.92 occupants.¹ Actual overcrowding in numbers is not the only evil. Many of the rooms look on to small courtyards or narrow lanes or even inside passages and are so dark that artificial light is needed and the sun never enters them. There are no built-in fireplaces, and the fire for cooking is made on three bricks on the floor, and the smoke finds its exit where and how it can. Such a room is described by Dr Barnes of the Women's Medical Service during an inquiry which she made

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, p. 118.

Comparisons made with industrial towns in northern England and Scotland show less startling contrasts in the housing of the population. Where contrast in statistics is less striking it is to be remembered that climatic conditions in a tropical city make overcrowding far more dangerous and intolerable even than in our own northern cities.

under the Government of Bombay into the conditions of women's employment in Bombay city. "A room 15 ft. by 12 ft. was the home of six families. No less than thirty persons occupied the room and three of the women were expecting to be delivered. Delivery would take place in a small space of 3 ft. by 4 ft. screened off for the purpose. Each family had its own cooking place, a small brick erection made with three bricks placed at right angles to each other and without chimneys."¹ Further descriptions of the Bombay chawls are to be found in Miss Kelman's *Labour in India*, Chapter XII.² To the evils of overcrowding and darkness and lack of air are added a complete breakdown in the system of sanitation. Some parts of the Bombay chawls are equipped with Western sanitary plumbing, others still depend on the Indian method of sweepers who remove the night-soil and cart it away to septic tanks. The Social Service League of Bombay instituted a Sanitation Board under which a number of the members made inspection of the chawls. The results of these visits were published in 1922 in a pamphlet called *Slumland of Bombay*, which for ghastly reading is, one hopes, unequalled. The following extracts from the pamphlet give some idea of what is revealed there: "Many chawls were found where sanitation seemed to be extinct and unknown. All gutters outside and inside were

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, p. 120.

² *Labour in India*, Kelman, pp. 138-166.

choked up, all the water-closets had become so dirty that the tenants ceased to make use of them for months together. There were two washing places in working order for the use of about 500 people and those too were always full of dirty water two feet deep." "There is only one water-closet and one washing place in working order for the use of the tenants occupying about forty rooms. The other nine water-closets which are out of use for months together are so full of foul matter as to make it intolerable to stand there even for a moment." Mr P. G. Kanekar, a prominent member of the Social Service League of Bombay, who went on one of these rounds, writes: "I am myself a resident of Parel (part of Bombay) and know something of the slums of that district. I prided myself on my knowledge of the conditions in which the labouring classes live, move, and have their being, but my complacent pride received a rude shock when I was brought face to face with the actual conditions in which the poor labouring classes in some of the worst slums passed their lives. The jail can have no terrors for those who have lived in these slums. . . . I would myself prefer six years in jail to a single day in a typical Bombay slum." The same Mr P. G. Kanekar writing in the *National Christian Council Review* for November 1925 says: "The slums are generally neglected by the municipalities in respect of water-supply, lighting, etc., and the drainage is defective. No

wonder that squalor, drink, disease, immorality and crime prevail there. . . . The housing problem has been yet nowhere in India seriously tackled. Whatever efforts have been made are sporadic and unsatisfactory. Those who have made a study of the housing conditions in the different industrial cities in India declare that Ahmedabad, Nagpur and other cities are no better than Bombay in this respect." Beside this statement should be set Miss Broughton's judgment that "the chawls built by the Improvement Trust of Bombay are generally a great improvement on others built before the Trust came into operation."¹

The worst has been said of housing in Bombay in order that the depths of the evil may be realised. Chapter V will attempt to do justice to the various efforts which are being made to cope with this gigantic evil. In this chapter the picture is simply being painted without comment.

The other two industrial cities which have been chosen to illustrate the living conditions of the workers in factories, Calcutta and Cawnpore, both differ from Bombay in one important respect, and that is that they have far more space in their mill areas, and enlightened employers have therefore been able to make extensive housing schemes for some of their employees. In Calcutta an inquiry, parallel to that of Dr Barnes in Bombay, was made by Dr Curjel under the Bengal Government, into the con-

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, p. 120.

ditions under which women factory workers lived and worked. The following is her view of the mill lines in the jute mills: "Much of the housing which had been erected by mill authorities was not satisfactory from the sanitary standpoint. Some mills are continuing to erect lines of a bad and insanitary type, rooms being placed in a line back to back, and with no proper arrangements for ventilation, the worst features being evident in houses which are double storied. In many of the brick-walled rooms provided there is no adequate provision for ventilation, and the placing of horizontal roofs on a very narrow verandah does not permit of any relief being gained through shade. . . . In many of the one-roomed houses provided for workers there is no outer yard or compound, thus there is no provision for privacy unless the window of the room is blocked up, and in them, from the point of view of a respectable woman, protection is often inadequate."¹ Attached to several of the most up-to-date jute mills are several of these model "lines," very straight and bare and uniform, with adequate washing places and latrine accommodation. An enthusiastic manager in one of these compounds showed us row after row of lines with much pride and then said: "It's such a pity that the people will cover in their verandahs with bits of sacking and old clothes. It makes them look so untidy." Then he led us to the edge of the

¹ *Women's Labour in Bengal Industries*, Curjel, p. 15.

mill compound where there was some waste land and a few mud huts on it by the side of a dirty scum-covered ditch, very crowded and messy and smelly. He told us: "These busties (huts) are always full, and are much more popular than our lines; the people really enjoy living here." Dr Curjel in her report makes what is a pungent comment on the manager's remarks: "Where there is evidence of a real family life among the workers, usually the home was situated outside the mill in a bazaar or busty. Such houses were of the Bengali type, with bamboo and clay walls, and an overhanging thatched roof sheltering an outer platform or verandah. Through ventilation of a dwelling is ensured by a space being left between the wall and the thatch. Women living in such homes obtain the necessary amount of privacy."¹ The manager had not realised that the untidy rags hung on verandahs in the otherwise neat lines were an attempt on the part of the women to get a little privacy and to preserve their reputation.

In Cawnpore the idea of the mill lines has been extended into two mill villages, where the workers are housed in an area on the edge of the city, not only in "lines" but in some semblance of a village. Trees have been planted down the main lanes of the village, an open space for a playground is kept, and a school for children and a dispensary set up. Most of the houses

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

have a small courtyard at the back, where the women can be entirely private and go about their household duties undisturbed. These two villages are in charge of a welfare worker and his wife—who are “father and mother,” of the village, collect the rents, keep the village committee or *panchayat* going, watch the school and dispensary and take what chances there are of educational work among the adults. Days spent in Allenganj or M’Robertganj leave one with an altogether different impression from the slums of Calcutta or Bombay. Here is industry which is attempting to take note of the basic habits of life of the factory workers. The workers themselves in the villages have not the haunted, caged look of the city dwellers and chat in a friendly way to the visitor instead of slinking away into a corner. In an evening lecture on “Malaria,” lantern slides were thrown on a big screen out of doors, and the men watched it from one side and the women from the other, oblivious of each others’ presence and chattering their comments all through. There was some feeling of a big family with the welfare worker and his wife at the head. This was not true of all Cawnpore, for in the city itself were slums and over-crowding which were mainly caused by the industrial population. In such surroundings the noise and dust and burning dry heat of the United Provinces’ summer intensified the overcrowding, and the contrast with the space and comparative quiet of the mill village was striking.

2. THE LOSS OF A COMMUNITY.

The individualism which our modern civilisation has developed in the West hardly exists in India at all, and hence it is that the most serious loss which the villager turned factory hand has to suffer is the loss of a community. In his village he was a member of a caste and had a definite place in it, and his caste had a defined place in the village life and customs. Surrounding him were the near and far members of his family with the mutual claims of a family for support, moral and material. Family festivals, such as marriages or funerals, and religious festivals observed in common with other members of the family were the landmarks of his life. Where are all these in the city slum? Gone—with everything that was familiar in his old life. The clanging trams, the raucous horns of the crazily-driven motor-lorries, the yells of the drivers of the zigzagging bullock carts, these all add to the bewilderment of being jostled in the narrow streets by men of other languages and religions and castes. The same meaningless crowd pursues him to the mill when he gets work, and at night when work is over there are the streets again or the misery of a slum dwelling. No wonder that the new factory worker looks hunted, for the foundations of his life have been knocked away. If he has brought his wife and children with him to the city there is added anxiety for them, as to where they can live, how

he can feed them, what will happen to them during the long hours when he is in the mill. If he has come by himself and left his family behind in the village, his plight is worse. For the slums of the city abound in lures to make men forget their wretchedness, and gambling dens and drink shops and brothels are looking out for him, and how can he be expected to resist them? He has lost everything that maintained his social ethics, and all the forces round him are busy destroying his former way of living.

3. THE THREE SPECTRES AGAIN.

Suppose that a man with his family has come to the city for work, driven thereto by hard times in the village, by the spectres of poverty and ignorance and disease. What kind of a refuge do they find it from these grim figures? They heard tales in the village of high wages to be won in the mills, and had thoughts of living more comfortably, with not quite such a struggle. The wages may be higher in figures than a man could get as a labourer, but no one told him that the price of food was alarmingly high in the cities, and the rent of a room or even part of a room took up a large amount of the monthly wage. No one told him either that it was customary in most mills to pay wages a month or even six weeks in arrears, in order to keep some kind of check on the shifting labour population. No one told him moreover that during that

time, being strangers in the place, they could get no credit, and for payment for their food and rent to whom could they turn? The moneylender is there, waiting to lend, at monstrous interest, with not even the veneer of the village moneylender's friend-in-need attitude. And who are those swaggering, kilted, ruffianly-looking men with great six-foot poles walking round the slums? They are the moneylender's bodyguard, who with their leaded sticks apply forcible pressure to the wretched men who are deep in debt and cannot pay the interest.

The spectre of ignorance is larger and more fearful than before. All about the factory are large notice-boards with meaningless scrawls on them which the villager cannot read, but which are there for his instruction. The foreman interprets them to him, thereby getting the workman entirely under his control, and exacting for this and sundry other services rendered, a good share of the monthly wage. Ignorance prevents him from finding a decent place to live, except at a price. His knowledge of the fields and the seasons is quite useless, he cannot communicate with his family and former friends, he falls deeper every day into the slough of despair.

If poverty is more grinding, and ignorance more fearful, then the spectre of disease is far more gaunt than in the villages. Slums such as have been described are breeding-grounds for every kind of disease. The lack of sunlight both

in home and mill lowers every day the resistance-power of the ex-villager, and babies are born only to die. Here and there a village woman may find her way to an infant welfare centre where a sympathetic woman doctor can do much for her. But hundreds of others do not know of these centres, and in the mills where only men doctors are employed the women workers will not go for advice or treatment.

4. WESTERN STANDARDS AND EASTERN HABITS.

Industrialisation brings with it an inevitable standardisation of life which is alien to the Indian way of living. The happier life in the busties compared with that in the trim mill lines is characteristic. The mere change of occupation from agriculture to industry will not in a generation change the habits of living of the workers, which are age-long and sanctified by religion, and are the one familiar thing to which they hold in the midst of all that is new and strange. Schools may be provided by the mill for those under twelve, but the mothers will prefer to leave the children with an old neighbour or take them into the mill to play beside them. Crèches may be provided for small babies, but the mothers feel they are safer lying in the fluff under the machine. A woman cannot work and live alone in India, and so in a factory she must be attached to some man, and the irregularities

to which Dr Curjel¹ refers are founded on custom. There are no independent women workers in Indian factories, except the seasonal drafts of women who come into the ginning factories,² and so if a woman worker is left a widow, or if the man she is attached to leaves the mill, she must find another with whom to live and share her earnings. There is nothing comparable to the dormitory system for women in Japan or the independent mill girls of England, and perhaps nothing else so proves the ineradicable habits of the people.

¹ *Women's Labour in Bengal Industries*, p. 7.

² *Labour in India*, Kelman, Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

EAST AND WEST IN PARTNERSHIP

I. GOVERNMENT ACTION.

TWENTY years after the first founding of textile industries in India on factory lines, questions asked in the English Parliament about the welfare of the workers in India led to a Commission to inquire into the need of legislation to protect the workers. The first Indian Factory Act of 1881 was the result of this Commission, and it was, like the earliest English Factory Acts, designed to protect the child workers. By this Act children under seven years of age were not allowed to work in factories, and until they were twelve they were not allowed to work for more than nine hours a day. They were to be given one hour's rest, exclusive of the nine hours' work, and four holidays in the month. "This in itself is a sufficient commentary on the state of affairs that prevailed before this Act was passed."¹ Ten years later this Act was extended to cover all establishments where power was used and where not less than fifty persons were employed (the former had only regulated those employing 100 or more).

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, p. 155.

Children under nine were forbidden to work in factories, and until the age of fourteen could not work more than seven hours, and not during the night. Women also could not be employed before 5 A.M. or after 8 P.M. except on certain shift systems, and their hours of work were limited to eleven.

The further progress of labour legislation in India is set out briefly in Miss Broughton's¹ and Miss Kelman's books,² and at greater length in the two authoritative accounts of factory legislation in India by A. G. Clow³ and J. C. Kydd.⁴ The interest in the fuller accounts lies in the forerunning of the Acts by questions and commissions, and the gradual assumption of State authority to check exploitation and protect the worker. Undoubtedly the greatest impulse to protective legislation in India came from the international end, when as a member of the Washington Conference of 1919 India was called on to ratify the Conventions passed there, with certain modifications in view of her stage of industrial progress and her position as a tropical country. The Factory Act of 1922, which was the outcome of this, limited the hours of work to sixty per week and eleven in any one day; prohibited the employment of women at night in any factories, and the employment of children

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, Chapter VI.

² *Labour in India*, Kelman, Chapter XV.

³ *Indian Factory Law Administration*, A. G. Clow.

⁴ *Indian Factory Legislation*, J. C. Kydd.

under twelve altogether; between the ages of twelve and fifteen children might only work six hours a day; provided a rest interval after four hours' work; and extended the scope of the Act to power-factories where twenty persons were employed, with the option of extending it to places where ten persons were employed, whether power was used or not.

The Washington Conference further recommended that maternity benefits should be given to women working in industries, and that a definite period of rest before and after childbirth should be arranged by law. This led to two Commissions being appointed, one in Bombay undertaken by Dr Barnes, and one in Bengal by Dr Curjel, to which references have already been made. A bill providing for maternity benefits was brought in to the Legislative Assembly in 1924 by Mr N. M. Joshi, the Indian workers' delegate to the International Labour Conference. But public opinion was not ready for the measure, and it was easy to crush it on the score of unpractical proposals. It did however stimulate public opinion, and it is hoped that the next bill which is now¹ being drafted will meet with success.

Legislation for those in the mining industry has already been referred to in Chapter III, and the Mines Act of 1923, the most important of the Mines Acts, has been examined in some detail.

¹ 1926.

The Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923 provides the workman with a sure means of getting compensation for fatal and for major accidents, a very important necessity where modern industry and a large measure of ignorance on the part of the workers go side by side as in India. The Reports of the Chief Inspectors of Factories and of Mines give carelessness and ignorance, and the ensuing disregard of orders as the main reasons for the majority of the serious accidents.

On the trend of future factory legislation Miss Broughton has much to say that is interesting.¹ Perhaps the most salient feature of Indian factory legislation which strikes the Westerner is its paternal character. In India in modern times the Government leads in setting humane standards for industry, it does not wait until conditions demand regulation by law. But, as Mr P. O. Philip in a recent article in the *National Christian Council Review*² points out: "A public opinion, alive to the wrongs which the modern industrial system is capable of doing to human beings, is a necessary condition for any effective labour legislation. Such a public opinion, if it exists at all in India, is still feeble and unorganised." The central and local governments, through their inspectors, are continually insisting on a higher standard in factories than private gain or the public conscience demand.

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, Chapter VI.

² *National Christian Council Review*, December 1925.

There is no kind of recognition as yet of the "wrongs" to which Mr Philips refers; and until the public conscience is aroused wrongs will go on which an army of factory inspectors cannot cope with.

In addition to legislation on factory conditions, mention should be made of the efforts of the municipalities to improve housing conditions in factory areas. The City Improvement Trusts of Bombay, Calcutta and Cawnpore for example are taking in hand the congestion of the factory districts in these cities, and endeavouring to cope with it by better buildings, wider roads and improved sanitation. It is a Herculean task to which they have set their hand, and the worst enemy they have to fight is not the ignorance of the slum dwellers, but the private interests of the owners of slum properties. This sense of responsibility on the part of the municipalities for the housing of work-people is admirable, but without the support of public opinion they are helpless in not being able to take over from the owners the worst slums and rebuild them.

2. EMPLOYERS AND THEIR PROBLEMS.

The partnership of East and West in the Government in seeking to improve industrial conditions has its parallel in the efforts made by some of the employers to bring the best of Western knowledge into their factories and into the homes for their workers. Mention has

already been made of certain mills and factories where the conditions of work within the mills are as admirable as Western science can devise. This does not however necessarily produce a stable or a contented labour supply. As we have seen the real crux of the question is the housing difficulty. And even where that is to some extent met there is another factor still missing which in East and West alike is the key to the situation, and that is the personal relationship. In the West some employers have sought to meet this by the appointment of welfare workers who, though they have definite organisation work to do as well, are in the factory primarily as a person among people. This element, which to the Indian is everything, is hardly ever present in an Indian factory. The industrial process tends to dehumanise the worker, and his way of trying to remain a human person is to escape from it, and go back to his village if he can. The success of the mill villages at Cawnpore are proof of the value of human relations in industry as far as extra-mural welfare work can go. And anyone who knows Indian workers knows that within a factory the personal element when introduced would go a long way towards coping with the present inefficiency of Indian labour.

Employers in India have not been blind to this aspect of the labour question. It is not so long ago that a proposal by one employer in a "ring" of factories to set up an infant welfare

centre in his compound met with such determined opposition from his colleagues on the grounds of trade interest and "pampering labour" that he was forced to abandon it temporarily. The welfare clinic is now established and has been the forerunner of others and other forms of welfare work. The employers who care most for good conditions for their work-people have at heart also the necessity for getting some kind of stable labour supply, which is really their most vital difficulty. They see in welfare work the best means of doing this, and Western experience says that they are right. On the other hand, they are obliged to take into account the solidarity of their own trade interests, whether Indian or Western, and the outcry that certain colleagues make on the grounds of raising the cost of production by what are bound to be expensive welfare improvements.

It must be borne in mind too that there are a number of employers, mostly in the smaller firms, on whom the pressure of competition is always most keen, who are frankly out to make profit, and who are not scrupulous about the conditions under which their profit is made. They evade legislation when possible, trusting to due notice of the visit of the overworked factory inspector, and find labour of a sort ready to hand because of the inherent poverty of the people.

"Under the present era of competition the smaller among the large-scale producers in particular finds it almost necessary for self-preserva-

tion to exploit his labour to the utmost and adopt doubtful methods of carrying on business in general. The big man can afford to be humane, nay he may even find it a good business proposition to make his employees feel that their employer treats them as human beings and not as mere 'hands.' . . . But enlightened self-interest is not a stable enough foundation to erect a humane structure of economic organisation upon. . . . Legislation of course can do a great deal to insist upon a certain minimum of humanity in the relations between master and man. But apart from the fact that such legislation itself is more often than not the outcome of the untiring selfless work of an Owen or a Place or a Shaftesbury, the legislation only succeeds when in its wake efforts are made to bring about a real change of heart, a change of the angle of vision."¹

Something much more fundamental than factory legislation is needed to cope with these conditions, and that is the reform of the agricultural system of the country. The promised Commission on Agriculture in India, the spread of the co-operative movement in the villages, and rural education, are the three best armies in the field against this particular kind of exploitation.

The chapters on welfare work in India by Miss

¹ Professor R. M. Joshi at the Bombay International Fellowship, 1924.

Kelman¹ and Miss Broughton² should be read to give due weight to the efforts at present being made. One of the big needs is for more trained workers for welfare work, and in particular more women, who will think out the relation between the home and factory life of the workers, and what improvements will make them both approximate to the best Indian style of living.

3. LABOUR ITSELF.

“The Trade Union movement is obviously in its infancy in India, but in spite of this there are signs recognisable in all the provinces of the awakening of labour. Gradually the feeling is growing in strength that labour must be given its just dues. The position is fraught with danger for, while combination is difficult because of the ignorance and illiteracy of the workers, their very ignorance is a menace when there is a rupture and peace has to be secured. It is almost impossible to argue or reason with vast crowds of ignorant people whose feelings have been stirred up by treatment which they consider unjust.”³ Enough has been said in the previous pages of the state of mind of most of the industrial workers and the effect of factory life on them to bear out this statement of Miss

¹ *Labour in India*, Kelman, Chapter XI.

² *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, Chapter VI

³ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, pp. 191-2.

Broughton's. A new kind of herd spirit possesses them in the factories, far less balanced and reasonable than their old village community spirit, and it is ripe for the stirrings of agitators. Reading through record after record of the strikes in recent years is dismal reading, for it shows only too clearly how exploiting of human labour on one side in industry leads to exploiting of human feeling on the other, and both play into each other's hands. The organising of Trade Unions in India is a long and patient job. Up to now the majority of them have been little more than strike organisations, and none of them have built up funds for unemployment, sickness or other benefits.¹ Where Trade Unions have shown any power to meet difficult situations it has always been among partially educated and skilled workmen, such as engineers and railway employees. After reading books on Indian Trade Unionism the general impression left is that of a wanton transplanting of a western method on to an eastern situation. It is really doubtful whether trade unionism as it is understood in the West will help Indian labour to-day. "The leaders of the Indian movement should seriously consider whether, in the particular circumstances of India, it would not conduce to the strength of the organisation, if, instead of slavishly following the Western model of a trade basis, labour were organised on the basis of industrial centres and establishments. Many of the difficulties

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, p. 189.

arising from diversity of language, trade customs, and habits of life are likely to be minimised thereby." ¹ Above all, education is what is needed. The question of adult education in India is a gigantic one, and yet no one can think seriously about Trade Union organisation without facing it.

4. MY BROTHER'S FACE.

The deepest lines of partnership between East and West run along those of voluntary societies, whose aim is the redemption of human society. In India the Hindu family tradition with its far-reaching connections has minimised until recent years the need for relief societies and voluntary aid. Modern urban conditions however, and still more, modern industrial conditions, have shown the need for voluntary societies such as in the West have been the forerunner of Government action, but in India to-day are needed as its handmaid. The Servants of India Society and others like it have embodied in them the strongest Indian traditions of unstinting service and the western practical experience of social welfare. The Servants of India Society, and its sister society for women, the *Sera Sadan*, have paid special attention to the industrial workers in the big cities of the Bombay Presidency. Adult education, medical relief, and the encouragement of co-operative movements

¹ *Labour in Indian Industries*, Broughton, p. 192

are among the chief activities. They put the training of workers on a high level, and get from their members devoted service for not more than a bare living salary. It is the spirit of such societies as these, joined with the expert training that the West can give, that brings much hope into the situation. The spread of the Child Welfare League with its clinics and its women doctors and nurses has great importance for the industrial workers, among whom infant mortality is one of the most serious results of the change from agricultural to industrial life. This League has the support of many of the educated Indian women in the big cities, and shows signs of developing into a really indigenous form of social service. Training for social service is now possible in the Sociology Department of Bombay University, and the beginning of a Settlement by the United Free Church of Scotland Mission in Bombay provides training of a very valuable character.¹ It is in these different forms of voluntary social service that India needs the best the West can give in partnership. The West is the home of many experiments. Not all are suitable for Indian conditions, but with the fullest co-operation of India and the West it should be possible to adapt the knowledge gained and make it of real use. Indians with a keen social conscience and

¹ In the work done by the Y.M.C.A. at Nagpur and Bombay, interesting experiments in extramural welfare work are being tried in which Indians and Westerners are working together.

knowledge of their own city conditions, can do an immense amount if to this they add a year or two of social study in the West.

5. A CHRISTIAN CONCERN.

Is there such a thing as a Christian point of view about labour questions? The West has not yet made up its mind about this after many years and many conferences. In spite of "Copec" the Church of the West has not yet spoken with an authoritative voice about industrial conditions. China has taken the lead here, for the Industrial Committee of the National Christian Council in China is proclaiming with no uncertain voice what are certain minimum standards required in industry which can claim to be Christian. India, in its National Christian Council, is facing the same issue to-day, and considering whether the Churches can lead in the establishment of a better order in industry. The articles during 1925 in the *National Christian Council Review*, already quoted from, are intended to arouse a Christian public opinion about things as they are. Further steps by the National Christian Council are contemplated which will make available more detailed knowledge of conditions. There is less dramatic contrast in India than there is in China between things as they are in factories and conditions which a Christian society can tolerate. There is need however in India for the awakening of a dormant

public conscience to the conditions under which factory workers live in cities, to the effect of factory work on women and children, and other evils inherent in a factory system. Indian thinking too needs to link up her tradition of the pre-eminent value of character above riches with modern capitalism, and see what she can work out there. And what of the Christian emphasis on the supreme value of each individual? It is no good in the end thinking of mills or slums or mines in the abstract. It is what they do to the man or the woman or the child who lives and works in them that matters. Systems and schemes and legislation may all pass by the individual, but what will the Christian Church in India say? It is a challenge to West and East alike, and in meeting it together perhaps we shall find our truest partnership.

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