

**HINDU MANNERS, CUSTOMS
AND CEREMONIES**

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HINDU
MANNERS, CUSTOMS
AND
CEREMONIES

BY THE
ABBE J. A. DUBOIS

TRANSLATED FROM THE AUTHOR'S LATER FRENCH MS. AND
EDITED WITH NOTES, CORRECTIONS, AND BIOGRAPHY

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WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY THE RIGHT HON. F. MAX MÜLLER
AND A PORTRAIT

THIRD EDITION

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EDITOR'S PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

THE fact that a third reprint of this complete edition of the Abbé Dubois' *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies* has been called for within a period of a few years is sufficient proof of the high value which is still attached to the Abbé's observations and of the wide popularity which his work still enjoys. It was stated in my Preface to the first edition :—' The impression may be felt in many minds that a book written so long ago can be of little practical use at present ; but the fact is that the Abbé's work, composed as it was in the midst of the people themselves, is of a unique character, for it combines, as no other work on the Hindus combines, a recital of the broad facts of Hindu religion and Hindu sociology with many masterly descriptions, at once comprehensive and minute, of the *vie intime* of the people among whom he lived for so many years. With any other people than the Hindus such a work would soon grow out of date ; but with them the same ancestral traditions and customs are followed nowadays that were followed hundreds of years ago, at least by the vast majority of the population.'

Not only in India but also in the United Kingdom and the Colonies, as well as in several countries of Europe and in the United States of America, reviews and notices of the work have appeared, bearing invariable testimony to the conspicuous merits of the Abbé's work. I may add that it formed the subject of the annual address of a learned President of the Royal Historical Society, and of the Presidential Address at an annual meeting of the Hindu Social

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Conference by the late Mr. Justice Ranade, the famous Mahratta Brahmin leader of Bombay ; and it also furnished a text for some observations in an important speech delivered in Bombay by the late Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Curzon.

What may be regarded as still more satisfactory, perhaps, is that by the Indians themselves the work has been received with universal approval and eulogy. The general accuracy of the Abbé's observations has nowhere been impugned ; and every Indian critic of the work has paid a warm tribute to the Abbé's industry, zeal, and impartiality. Perhaps I may quote in conclusion here the opinion expressed by one of the leading Indian newspapers, *The Hindu*, which in the course of a long review of the book, remarked : ' It is impossible to run through the immense variety of topics touched in this exceedingly interesting book ; but we entirely agree with Mr. Beauchamp in his opinion that the book is as valuable to-day as it ever was. It contains a valuable collection of information on a variety of subjects, including ceremonies and observances which might pass as trifles in the eye of many an ordinary person. The Abbé's description might be compared with the experience of the modern Hindu, who will find that while the influence of English education is effecting a quiet and profound change and driving the intellectual and physical faculties of the people into fresh grooves, the bulk of the people, whom that influence has not reached, have remained substantially unaltered since the time of the French Missionary.'

H. K. B.

MADRAS, *October*, 1905.

PREFATORY NOTE

BY THE RIGHT HON. F. MAX MÜLLER

It is difficult to believe that the Abbé Dubois, the author of *Mœurs, Institutions et Cérémonies des Peuples de l'Inde*, died only in 1848. By his position as a scholar and as a student of Indian subjects, he really belongs to a period previous to the revival of Sanskrit studies in India, as inaugurated by Wilkins, Sir William Jones, and Colebrooke. I had no idea, when in 1846 I was attending in Paris the lectures of Eugène Burnouf at the *Collège de France*, that the old Abbé was still living and in full activity as *Directeur des Missions Étrangères*, and I doubt whether even Burnouf himself was aware of his existence in Paris. The Abbé belongs really to the eighteenth century, but as there is much to be learnt even from such men as Roberto de' Nobili, who went to India in 1606, from H. Roth, who was much consulted by Kircher in his *China Illustrata* (1667), and others, so again the eighteenth century was by no means devoid of eminent students of Sanskrit, of Indian religion, and Indian subjects in general. It is true that in our days their observations and researches possess chiefly a historical interest, but they are by no means to be neglected. They make us see how the acquaintance of European scholars with India began, and under what circumstances the first steps were taken by these pioneers, chiefly missionaries, towards acquiring a knowledge of the ancient language of India, Sanskrit, and through it, towards gaining an acquaintance with one of the most interesting peoples and one of the richest and most original literatures of the world. The reports sent from India by the Père Cœurdoux (1767), and published by Barthélemy in the *Memoirs of the French Academy*, the letters of the Père

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

IN the Library of the Madras Literary Society and Auxiliary of the Royal Asiatic Society may be seen, in a conspicuous position above one of the doorways, a striking portrait in oil-colours. This portrait at a distance one takes to be that of some Hindu, clothed in white, wearing a white turban, and holding in one hand the bamboo staff that tradition assigns to a Hindu pilgrim. A closer inspection, however, shows that in reality it is the portrait of a European, albeit the face is so tanned, and so furrowed with the lines of age and thought, that the first impression that one receives of it is not easily dispelled. It is a face that literally speaks to you from the canvas. The broad forehead, the well-shaped but somewhat prominent nose, the firm but kindly mouth, and above all the marvellously intelligent eyes, all bespeak a man of no common mould. Whoever the artist was (and I have not been able to discover his name or the circumstances which led to his executing the work), there can be no doubt that he has succeeded in depicting a countenance that is full of character; while as a background to his picture he has painted a low range of bare, rugged hills that seem to be in thorough keeping with his subject, and to suggest, as a kind of inspiration, the hard, self-denying, but solid life-work of him whose features he has handed down.

This portrait is that of the Abbé J. A. Dubois, a Christian Missionary who laboured for some thirty-one years in India, striving to fulfil the task which his sense of religious duty imposed upon him. Merely in this respect one can claim

for him no special merit, for the annals of Christian Missions in India are full of the names of those who spent themselves and were spent in the service of their Master. His special claim to recognition will be found elsewhere, namely, in the wonderful record which he compiled of the manners, customs, institutions, and ceremonies of the people among whom he lived and moved and had his being for so great a portion of his life. He seems to have recognized from the very first day of his arrival in India that Christian Mission work meant something more than the mere preaching and expounding of the Gospel; that it included among its chief essentials to success a long and thorough study of the innermost life and character of the people amidst whom it was to be carried on. In his day, it must be remarked, there were no royal roads to such knowledge. There were no text-books to prepare the way by their critical analyses of the sacred Hindu writings. Such knowledge had to be gained at first hand, and by the more laborious (though, it must be confessed, more sure) method of personal inquiry *in situ*. 'I had no sooner arrived amongst the natives of India,' the Abbé himself tells us, 'than I recognized the absolute necessity of gaining their confidence. Accordingly I made it my constant rule to live as they did. I adopted their style of clothing, and I studied their customs and methods of life in order to be exactly like them. I even went so far as to avoid any display of repugnance to the majority of their peculiar prejudices. By such circumspect conduct I was able to ensure a free and hearty welcome from people of all castes and conditions, and was often favoured of their own accord with the most curious and interesting particulars about themselves.'

Unfortunately such details concerning the Abbé's personal history as we possess are extremely meagre. His

modesty is so extreme that he rarely appears in his own person throughout his work, and those particulars that I have been able to obtain have been culled from various other sources—chiefly from the Madras Government Secretariat, from the British Museum, and from the Missions Étrangères. The absolute retirement of the Abbé from European society for a long series of years after his arrival in India, though it qualified him, as was said when his work first appeared, ‘for penetrating into the dark and unexplored recesses of the Hindu character,’ also veiled him in an equal degree from the curiosity of his readers. Major Mark Wilks, the accomplished historian of Mysore, who in those days was British Resident in that province, in introducing the Abbé’s work to the notice of the Government of Fort St. George, remarked: ‘Of the history and character of the author, I only know that he escaped from one of the fusillades of the French Revolution and has since lived amongst the Hindus as one of themselves: and of the respect which his irreproachable conduct inspires, it may be sufficient to state that when travelling, on his approach to a village, the house of a Brahmin is uniformly cleared for his reception, without interference, and generally without communication to the officers of Government, as a spontaneous mark of deference and respect.’ Subsequently, however, Major Wilks became much more intimate with the Abbé, and the latter speaks of him years afterwards in terms of great affection as his patron and friend. With regard to the circumstance mentioned above as having induced him to leave France and come to India, the Abbé remarked afterwards: ‘It is quite true that I fled from the horrors of the Revolution, and had I remained I should in all probability have fallen a victim, as did so many of my friends who held the same religious and political opinions as myself; but the truth

is I embarked for India some two years before the fusillades referred to took place.'

Be this as it may, I have ascertained that the Abbé was ordained in the diocese of Viviers in 1792, at the age of twenty-seven, and left France in the same year. He entered on his Mission work under the guidance of the Missions Étrangères. On reaching India he was attached to the Pondicherry Mission ; and for the first few years he seems to have laboured in what are now the Southern Districts of the Madras Presidency. He must have quickly made for himself a name, for on the fall of Seringapatam he was specially invited, on the recommendation, it is said, of Colonel Wellesley, afterwards Duke of Wellington, to visit the capital of Mysore in order to reconvert and reorganize the Christian community which had been forcibly perverted to Mahomedanism by Tippu Sultan. *En passant*, I may mention that, through the influence of the Abbé in Mysore, not a single priest of the Missions Étrangères was persecuted by Tippu. For these apostates, we learn, he pleaded eloquently before Mgr. Champenois, the Bishop, and with such good effect that he once more gathered the lost sheep, of whom there were 1,800 in Seringapatam alone, into the Christian fold, and established on a permanent basis the Roman Catholic Church in the province of Mysore. Of the practical farsightedness which guided him in his work, we may judge by two incidents that have been incidentally recorded of him. He met the problem of the poverty of the people committed to his care by founding agricultural colonies on the lines that have during these past few years been advocated by the Salvation Army and others, his principal colony being at Sathalli, near Hassan ; and he used his influence to such good effect in preventing epidemics of small-pox by promoting vaccination (then, be it remembered, a comparatively novel

idea) that he was afterwards granted a special pension by the East Indian Company. 'The literary reputation which M. Dubois has acquired in this country,' wrote one of his colleagues, M. Mottet, in 1823, 'is the least of his merits. He has honoured and served the mission in every way, and perhaps more than any one of us. The Indians had the greatest attachment, confidence and respect for him.' M. Launay, in his recently published *Histoire des Missions de l'Inde*, remarks: 'Among other benefits which he conferred upon his flock, may be mentioned his zeal in establishing agricultural colonies, and also introducing vaccination to stay the ravages of small-pox; in which, in spite of the extraordinary tenacity of native prejudice, he succeeded so fully that in 1803-4 a total of 25,432 natives were vaccinated and registered; in memory of which the natives still remember him by the title of "Doddhaswâmiayavaru," or "Great Lord."' M. Launay adds that in some parts, especially at Karumattampatty, he is spoken of to this day as 'the prince's son, the noblest of Europeans.'

For the moment let us return to the great descriptive work which he compiled during his hours of leisure. That the Abbé was from the first a close observer of the people among whom he lived and a keen student of their religious and social institutions is perfectly apparent. But the idea of putting the results of his investigations into writing originated, as he tells us, 'in consequence of notices in the public papers calling for authentic documents regarding these people for the use of the historiographers of the Honourable Company engaged in writing the history of India.' The idea once formed, he set to work with characteristic thoroughness, though with too much modesty he remarks: 'I aim not at the rank of an author, which is suited neither to my talents nor to the secluded state in

which my profession confines me amongst the natives of the country.' He remarks further, however: 'During my long sojourn in India I never let slip any opportunity of collecting materials and particulars of all sorts. My information has been drawn partly from the books which are held in highest estimation amongst the people of India and partly from such scattered records as fell by chance into my hands and contained facts upon which I could thoroughly rely. But in regard to the majority of the materials which I now offer to the public I am chiefly dependent on my own researches, having lived in close and familiar intercourse with persons of every caste and condition of life. Probably many Europeans settled in India would have been more capable than myself of performing the same task; but I may be permitted to doubt whether there has been any person more favourably situated for gleanings information or more zealous in his pursuit of knowledge.'

At the same time he disclaims for his work any general applicability to the whole of India. His observations extend, broadly speaking, to the India that lies south of the Vindyan Range; and even within those limits he is careful to remark that local differences are so many and so marked that 'there is no class or sect or community of Hindus that has not, in addition to the general rules of Hindu society, some domestic usages peculiar to itself.' So that, as he says, it is impossible to generalize with complete accuracy on any subject connected with them.

But though the Abbé with characteristic modesty leaves to 'the many learned Europeans residing in the country' the task of compiling from authentic documents 'a more methodical and comprehensive history of the Hindus,' his own work possesses special merits of its own and is far superior to any that could be compiled from books of

reference and literary investigations, for, as Major Wilks said of it, 'it was meditated and composed in the midst of the people whom it describes, and in writing it the author followed the only path that has ever yet led to a true delineation of national character, namely, the path of original research and personal observation.'

The French MS. of the work which the Abbé compiled under the circumstances and according to the design above described has a somewhat remarkable history. In its original form it was placed in the hands of Major Wilks in the year 1806, when the Abbé had been some fourteen years in the country. Major Wilks appears to have kept it by him and studied it for more than a year, and then to have forwarded it to the Government of Fort St. George with a letter of warm recommendation, in which he remarked: 'So far as my previous information and subsequent inquiry have enabled me to judge, it contains the most correct, comprehensive, and minute account extant in any European language of the customs and manners of the Hindus.' This judgement was heartily endorsed by Sir James Mackintosh, to whom Major Wilks would appear to have sent it for his opinion, and also by Mr. W. Erskine, of Bombay, a man of distinguished talents and an acknowledged authority in everything connected with the mythology, literature, customs, and institutions of the people of India. Fortified in his own opinion of its high merits by the concurrence of these two eminent men, Major Wilks had no difficulty in persuading Lord William Bentinck, who was then at Madras, to purchase the MS. on behalf of the East India Company, the sum eventually agreed upon being 2,000 star pagodas (i.e. in the present currency some 8,000 rupees). In accordance with the Abbé's request this sum was invested in Government paper and the interest paid to him regularly afterwards

—a modest sum, no doubt, judged by latter-day standards of literary remuneration; but, then, the Abbé's wants were modest. According to Major Wilks all that he hoped for was 'a recompense sufficient to shield his future life from those miseries of extreme want which he had once already encountered.'

In summing up his own opinion of the Abbé's work Lord William Bentinck remarked with characteristic candour and good sense:—

'The result of my own observation during my residence in India is that the Europeans generally know little or nothing of the customs and manners of the Hindus. We are all acquainted with some prominent marks and facts, which all who run may read; but their manner of thinking, their domestic habits and ceremonies, in which circumstances a knowledge of the people consists, is, I fear, in great part wanting to us. We understand very imperfectly their language. They perhaps know more of ours; but their knowledge is by no means sufficiently extensive to give a description of subjects not easily represented by the insulated words in daily use. We do not, we cannot, associate with the natives. We cannot see them in their houses and with their families. We are necessarily very much confined to our houses by the heat; all our wants and business which would create a greater intercourse with the natives is done for us, and we are in fact strangers in the land. I have personally found the want of a work to which reference could be made for a just description of the native opinions and manners. I am of opinion that, in a political point of view, the information which the work of the Abbé Dubois has to impart might be of the greatest benefit in aiding the servants of the Government in conducting themselves more in unison with the customs and prejudices of the natives.'

The purchase of the MS. was reported by the Madras Government to the Board of Directors in 1807 as 'an arrangement . . . of great public importance'; and the MS. itself was transmitted to London at the same time for

translation and publication. It was not until 1816, however, that the English translation was actually published, with the sanction of the East India Company and under the personal supervision of Major Wilks. Meanwhile a copy of the MS. in the records of Fort St. George had in 1815 attracted the attention of Mr. A. D. Campbell, Superintendent of the Local Board of Examiners, who, in apparent ignorance of the fact that the original copy had been sent to England for publication, proposed to publish an annotated edition of it in Madras. Accordingly he commenced the task; but almost immediately he reported to the Local Government as follows:—

‘I soon found enough to satisfy me that it would be unfair to proceed further in this pursuit without first affording the author an opportunity of revising his work, being convinced that the increased experience of the Abbé Dubois and his further acquaintance with the customs and habits of the Hindus would enable him to correct many parts of the MS., and to add new information on the very curious and interesting subjects on which it treats. I have now the honour of submitting to the Board the reply of the Abbé Dubois to a reference which I made to him on this subject, and it will thence be perceived that, notwithstanding the very favourable manner in which the accuracy of the facts stated in the MS. has been mentioned by Colonel Wilks, the author admits that the work requires “considerable alterations” and “many additions,” and that “there are chapters which ought to be entirely made again.”’

It is from this point that the history of the MS. becomes most interesting. It appears from a careful examination which I have made of the records in the Madras Government Secretariat (which records include several letters in the Abbé’s own handwriting) that the MS. was sent back to the Abbé for his additions, excisions, and corrections, and that these were very considerable. Indeed the MS.

was completely altered, recast and enlarged, until it bore hardly more resemblance to the original work than a rough outline sketch does to a finished picture.

And yet this rough sketch, so to speak, has up to this day been all that English readers have had presented to them of the Abbé's work. I do not for one moment desire to detract from the artistic and literary value of that sketch, admirable as it is, and as it has been acknowledged to be by the authorities quoted above. But what I do mean to say is that the sketch is only an extremely poor representation of what the Abbé's great work really was.

The true history was this. When the MS. was returned to him in 1815, the Abbé put into it all the additions and corrections suggested by many years of additional study and investigation ; and when he sent it back to the Government of Madras, it was, practically speaking, a different work altogether. On receipt of the revised MS. the Government of Madras decided that the only course open to them was to send it to the Court of Directors in England, as the original MS. had been. Unfortunately, however, before the revised MS. could reach England the original draft had been translated and published ; and it is this edition which has been sold ever since, and upon which the Abbé's reputation has rested.

It is true that a so-called ' revised ' edition was published some thirty odd years ago, but it was merely a reprint (and unfortunately a very considerably curtailed reprint) of the original English edition. The only sign that I have been able to discover of the revised MS. in the Fort having been consulted, is the inclusion of a dedicatory page that had been added by the Abbé when he sent his finally corrected copy to the Madras Government before leaving India. As far as I can ascertain the chief effect of this new edition was a demand for a *verbatim* reprint of the original edition

which had been so arbitrarily cut down ; and this was almost immediately supplied by the publishers.

The Abbé, the Local Government, and Mr. Campbell, it may be remarked, were all in hopes that a second revised edition would be published containing the corrections and additions that had subsequently been made ; but for some reason or another this has never hitherto been done.

The view which the Abbé took of the edition, as it appeared, is expressed in a letter in English (of which he had a good knowledge) addressed to the Madras Government, dated Seringapatam, February 20, 1818, with which letter he submitted still further revisions. The Abbé remarked therein :—

‘ Since I wrote my last additions and corrections, a gentleman in the place having favoured me for my perusal with a copy of the English translation of the work, I was sorry to observe that, owing perhaps to some oversight on the part of the copyists of my original MS., or other accidents, many interesting, authentic, and quite unexceptionable paragraphs, and in some instances whole pages, had been passed over, which circumstance occasions chasms in the narrative and otherwise renders the descriptions very imperfect, and in a few instances contradictory. These differences are pointed out and corrected in the accompanying sheets ; and the other inaccuracies to be found in the original MS. and the translation were fully corrected and the work considerably enlarged in the additions sent before to Government. I therefore request that the accompanying accounts may be sent without delay to the Hon’ble the Court of Directors to be added to the former ones, in order that if the work goes through a second edition it may be made as interesting and curious as it lies in my power to do.’

Nor were these the last corrections made in the text of his work by the good Abbé, for three years later, and a short time before he left India for good and all, he sent a fair copy of his ‘ finally corrected ’ work to the Madras Government,

which, like the two former MSS., was sent to England and is now in the India Office Library. One copy of this, I may mention, was taken by the Abbé to France, and was published in the original French. The number issued was however small, and copies of it are now almost unprocurable. And another copy of the MS. was left in the records of Fort St. George. This last-named copy I have carefully compared with the English translation which has hitherto been available to the public, and the comparison has shown me how vastly superior in every way (I might say every page) is the Abbé's later and unpublished work as contrasted with his first draft, composed sixteen years earlier, which despite its imperfections has enjoyed so much popularity amongst English students of Hinduism.

It is certainly very strange that all the facts which I have detailed above have never before attracted attention, and that although copies of the Abbé's finally completed work are to be found in the records of the India Office and of the Government of Madras, it has never before been discovered that the published English edition is not in reality a complete or true representation of the Abbé's long labours in the field of original research. For all that, however, this edition has been largely drawn upon by English writers, chief amongst whom we may mention Mill, the historian of India, while Oriental students like Professor Wilson have acknowledged the assistance it afforded them, and in the British Museum there is a copy of it containing a manuscript note by Coleridge which shows that the poet had gone to it for inspiration. 'This is the honestest book of the kind,' Coleridge pronounced, 'as written by a Frenchman, that I have ever read.'

Now, if this faulty English edition has been so widely consulted and so frequently extolled, an English edition of the Abbé's revised work ought to be infinitely more

valuable. This was the thought which presented itself to me when I discovered, almost accidentally, while looking through the French MS. in the Madras Government's records, that the good Abbé had never had justice done to him. Accordingly, with the permission and with the aid of the Madras Government, I have made a verbatim translation of the work in its complete form which I here present to the public, together with such notes and observations as seem necessary to put the text into line with later developments and research.

As to the intrinsic value of the Abbé's work, I have no hesitation in saying that it is as valuable to-day as ever it was, even more valuable in some respects. It is true that a mass of learned literature on the religious and civil life of the Hindus has accumulated since the Abbé's days, and it is still accumulating; and the impression may be felt in many minds that a book written so long ago can be of little practical use at present; but the fact is that the Abbé's work, composed as it was in the midst of the people themselves, is of a unique character, for it combines, as no other work on the Hindus combines, a recital of the broad facts of Hindu religion and Hindu sociology with many masterly descriptions, at once comprehensive and minute, of the *vie intime* of the people among whom he lived for so many years. With any other people than the Hindus such a work would soon grow out of date; but with them the same ancestral traditions and customs are followed nowadays that were followed hundreds of years ago, at least by the vast majority of the population. I do not deny that some of the Abbé's statements require to be modified in the light of changes that have taken place amongst the educated classes since the introduction of Western learning, but such necessary modifications, which, as remarked above, I have introduced in the form of notes, are surprisingly few. Enumerated

separately by themselves, no doubt these changes might furnish material for a substantial volume, for no person would now be so foolish as to repeat the assertion so long maintained unchallenged that the Hindu nation is completely apathetic, unchanging, and non-progressive in the modern sense. But in editing the Abbé's work I have confined myself to modifying such statements as seemed to require modification, and have avoided as far as possible any digressions that were not suggested by the text itself.

Petty local differences in civil and religious affairs are a marked feature of Hinduism, just as almost innumerable subdivisions and sub-sections and sub-sub-sections are a marked feature of the caste system. Hence it is that much which is perfectly true of one locality is false of another; and accordingly it is impossible to describe the many details of Hindu life and character without mental reservations as to possible exceptions. Nevertheless, there are certain broad, fundamental principles underlying these many differences and inequalities; and it is upon these that the Abbé rears the fabric of his extraordinary work. Moreover, the Abbé appears to me to avoid the many pitfalls of this uneven field of investigation with peculiar skill. It would be wrong to say that all his observations are generally applicable or perfectly just, but, taken as a whole, they are remarkably true and unprejudiced.

I am here tempted to quote at some length the observations concerning the Abbé and his researches made by a prominent Hindu, the Honourable Dewan Bahadur Srīnāśa Rāghava Iyengar, C.I.E., at a meeting of the Madras Presidency College Literary Society in May, 1896. This gentleman is well fitted to express an opinion on a subject of the kind, for not only has he been for some years past Inspector-General of Registration in Madras, a department of the public service which in its dealings is in closer touch

than any other with the material and social conditions of the people themselves, but he is himself the author of a most authoritative work on the moral and material progress of Southern India under British rule. At the meeting referred to he observed :—

‘ The Abbé was a most remarkable character, and a study of his life cannot fail to be of profit to us all. It has been said, and said truly, that one half of the nation does not know how the other half lives. The difficulties which a foreigner has of understanding the inner life and modes of thought of a people to which he does not belong may indeed be said to be immense. The Abbé surmounted these difficulties by devoting thirty years of his life to his subject. To effect his purpose he adopted the garb, the manners, and, as he says, even the prejudices of the people among whom his lot was cast ; won their respect and confidence ; and was held by them in quite as much reverence as one of their *yogis* or *gurus*. The quotations from his work show his shrewd common sense, clear-sightedness, and perfect candour. Any account given by such a man of the manners and customs of the people amongst whom he lived must in any case be instructive, and I for one look forward with great interest to the forthcoming revised edition of the Abbé’s work.’

In many respects the Abbé displays a truly wonderful insight into things. For instance, in his finally corrected work there is a passage (evidently a late interpolation) in which he sums up in a few brief sentences his opinion of British dominion in India, and which is all the more remarkable as coming from a Frenchman. In that passage he remarks :—

‘ The European Power which is now established in India is, properly speaking, supported neither by physical force nor by moral influence. It is a piece of huge, complicated machinery, moved by springs which have been arbitrarily adapted to it. Under the supremacy of the Brahmins the people of India hated their government, while they cherished and respected their rulers ; under the supremacy of Europeans they hate and despise their rulers from the bottom of

their hearts, while they cherish and respect their government. And here I would remark that the rule of all the Hindu princes, and often that of the Mahomedans, was, properly speaking, Brahminical rule, since all posts of confidence were held by Brahmins.

‘ If it be possible to ameliorate the condition of the people of India I am convinced that this desirable result will be attained under the new *régime*, whatever may be said by detractors who are ready to find fault with everything. Whatever truth indeed there may be in the prejudiced charges, engendered by ignorance and interested motives, which are brought against the new order of things, and which are perhaps inseparable from every great administration, I for one cannot believe that a nation so eminently distinguished for its beneficent and humane principles of government at home, and above all for its impartial justice to all classes alike—I for one cannot believe that this nation will ever be blind enough to compromise its own noble character by refusing participation in these benefits to a subject people which is content to live peaceably under its sway.

‘ At the same time I venture to predict that it will attempt in vain to effect any very considerable changes in the social condition of the people of India, whose character, principles, customs, and ineradicable conservatism will always present insurmountable obstacles. To make a people happy, it is essential that they themselves should desire to be made happy and should co-operate with those who are working for their happiness. Now, the people of India, it appears to me, neither possess this desire nor are anxious to co-operate to this end. Every reform which is obviously devised for their well-being they obstinately push aside if it is likely in the least degree to disturb their manner of living, their most absurd prejudice, or their most puerile custom.

‘ Nevertheless the justice and prudence which the present rulers display in endeavouring to make these people less unhappy than they have been hitherto; the anxiety they manifest in increasing their material comfort; above all, the inviolable respect which they constantly show for the customs and religious beliefs of the country; and, lastly, the protection they afford to the weak as well as to the strong, to the Brahmin as to the Pariah, to the Christian, to the

Mahomedan, and to the Pagan : all these have contributed more to the consolidation of their power than even their victories and conquests. . . .

' It has been asserted that any great power based neither on a display of force nor on the affection and esteem of subject races is bound sooner or later to topple under its own weight. I am far from sharing this opinion altogether. The present Government is in a position in which it has little or nothing to fear from extraneous disturbance. True it is that like all empires it is subject to possible chances of internal dissension, military revolt, and general insurrection. But I firmly believe that nothing of this sort will happen to it so long as it maintains amongst its troops the perfect discipline and the sense of comfort which at present exist, and so long as it does all in its power to make its yoke scarcely perceptible by permitting its subjects every freedom in the exercise of their social and religious practices.

' It is the poverty of the country which in my opinion gives most cause for apprehension—a poverty which is accompanied by the most extraordinary supineness on the part of the people themselves. The question is, will a Government which is rightly determined to be neither unjust nor oppressive be able always to find within the borders of this immense empire means sufficient to enable it to meet the heavy expenses of its administration ? But, after all, God alone can foretell the destiny of Governments !'

Time has but proved incontestably the truth of these far-seeing criticisms. Even the Mutiny is therein anticipated and its chief cause accurately foretold, while nobody will deny the justice, even at the present day, of the Abbé's observations on the attitude of the natives of India towards the British Government and on the difficulties with which that Government has to contend in administering its vast Eastern empire, according to Western notions of civilization and progress, with the resources that it yields for that purpose.

There is one other matter which I feel bound to refer to before concluding this brief notice of the Abbé's sojourn and work in India, and that is the impression he derived

after three decades of Mission labour as to the possibility of converting India to Christianity. I have no wish to renew the bitter controversy which ensued on the publication of his *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* soon after his return to France ; but no notice of the Abbé's career would be complete without some reference to it. The purport of those *Letters*, as I understand them, was to assert that, under existing circumstances, there is no human possibility of converting the Hindus as a nation to any sect of Christianity ; or in the Abbé's own words, ' Let the Christian religion be presented to these people under every possible light, . . . the time of conversion has passed away, and under existing circumstances there remains no human possibility of bringing it back.' It would require a reproduction of the whole text of these *Letters* to explain fully the grounds upon which the Abbé based a decision so humiliating to himself and to his fellow-Christian workers, but the chief cause undoubtedly was the invincible barrier of what we may call nowadays intellectual Hinduism, but which the Abbé called Brahminical prejudice. He refers regretfully to the collapse of the Church, with its hundreds of thousands of converts, many of them of high caste, established by the Jesuits Beschi and de Nobili in Madura ; but at the same time he made no concealment of the real causes of their failure. ' The Hindus soon found that those missionaries whom their colour, their talents, and other qualities had induced them to regard as such extraordinary beings, as men coming from another world, were in fact nothing else but disguised Feringhis (Europeans), and that their country, their religion, and original education were the same as those of the evil, the contemptible Feringhis who had of late invaded their country. This event proved the last blow to the interests of the Christian religion. No more conversions were made. Apostasy became almost general in several

quarters, and Christianity became more and more an object of contempt and aversion in proportion as European manners became better known to the Hindus.'

It is necessary to remark that the Abbé's *Letters* were vehemently answered by the Protestant missionaries, Hough and Townley; but we need not enter into the details of the controversy. In another place the Abbé remarked: 'Should the intercourse between individuals of both nations, by becoming more intimate and more friendly, produce a change in the religion and usages of the country, it will not be to turn Christians that they will forsake their own religion, but rather (what in my opinion is a thousand times worse than idolatry) to become mere atheists, and if they renounce their present customs it will not be to embrace those of Europeans, but rather to become what are now called Pariahs.'

In a word, the Abbé completely despaired of the higher castes ever becoming Christians, though he was ready to acknowledge that there was a harvest-field among the low castes and outcastes. Of his own attempts to convert the Hindus he remarks: 'For my part I cannot boast of my successes in this sacred career during the period that I have laboured to promote the interests of the Christian religion. The restraints and privations under which I have lived, by conforming myself to the usages of the country; embracing, in many respects, the prejudices of the natives; living like them, and becoming all but a Hindu myself; in short, by being made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some—all these have proved of no avail to me to make proselytes. During the long period I have lived in India in the capacity of a missionary, I have made, with the assistance of a native missionary, in all between two and three hundred converts of both sexes. Of this number two-thirds were Pariahs or beggars; and the rest were

composed of Sudras, vagrants, and outcastes of several tribes, who, being without resource, turned Christians in order to form connexions, chiefly for the purpose of marriage, or with some other interested views.'

These various quotations from the Abbé's *Letters* are likely to inspire indignation among Christian missionaries, but his general conclusions certainly find a remarkable echo in the following extract on Christianity in Mr. Baines's General Report on the Census of 1891 :—

' Its greatest development is found where the Brahmanic caste system is in force in its fullest vigour, in the south and west of the Peninsula, and amongst the Hill tribes of Bengal. In such localities it is naturally attractive to a class of the population whose position is hereditarily and permanently degraded by their own religion, as Islam has proved in Eastern Bengal, and amongst the lowest class of the inhabitants of the Panjab. We have seen that in the early days of Portuguese missionary enterprise, it was found necessary to continue the breach that Brahmanic custom had placed between certain grades of society and those above them ; but in later times, and in foreign missions of the Reformed Church, the tendency has been to absorb all caste distinctions into the general commission of the Christianity of that form. The new faith has thus affected the lower classes more directly than the upper, who have more to lose socially, and less to gain.' . . .

It may be mentioned that in the agricultural settlement of reconverted Christians at Sathalli in Mysore, previously alluded to, the inhabitants retained their Hindu caste distinctions ; and the following observations in Mr. V. N. Narasimiyengar's Mysore Census Report (1891) are noteworthy :—

' Roman Catholicism is able to prevail among the Hindus more rapidly and easily, by reason of its policy of tolerating among its converts the customs of caste and social observances, which constitute so material a part of the Indian social fabric. In the course of the investigations engendered by the census, several Roman Christian communities

have been met with, which continue undisturbed in the rites and usages which had guided them in their pre-conversion existence. They still pay worship to the *Kalasam* at marriages and festivals, call in the Brahmin astrologer and *purohita*, use the Hindu religious marks, and conform to various other amenities, which have the advantage of minimizing friction in their daily intercourse with their Hindu fellow-caste brethren.'

And yet the Christian native is nowadays but in the ratio of seven in a thousand of the whole population. The remark accordingly made by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Agra to Jacquemont is as applicable now as it was when it was uttered in 1828: 'La caldalja é molto grande, ma la carne é molto poca.'

The last years of the Abbé's life were spent at the headquarters of the Missions Étrangères at Paris. He left India, never to return, on January 15, 1823, his passage having been paid by the East India Company and a special pension settled upon him for life in recognition of the many services which he had rendered in India. On his return to Paris he was at once made Director of the Missions Étrangères, and from 1836 to 1839 he filled the post of Superior. During his leisure he found time to translate into French the whole of the *Pancha-tantra*, the famous book of Hindu fables, and also a work which he entitled *The Exploits of the Guru Paramarta*. He lived for no less than a quarter of a century after returning to Europe, and died in 1848 at the patriarchal age of eighty-three.

In conclusion I desire to acknowledge the kind assistance and advice which I have received from many Hindu friends and others while editing the Abbé's work : especially do I desire to acknowledge the help rendered to me by Mr. C. V. Munisawmy Iyer, a Brahmin gentleman, who associated himself with me in the revision of the proofs.

H. K. B.

MADRAS, September, 1897.

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