

# INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

C. F. ANDREWS

## THE RACIAL PROBLEM

I can see what marvellous strides some Indians, who were under indenture themselves, (or whose father and mother were under indenture) have made. I can see also the Kaffirs and the Zulus making some what slower, but still perceptible progress. I can see also those, to whom my heart went out with deep affection—the 'coloured' people, as they are called,—the half castes,—so genuinely trying to "make good" and so obviously outstripping the European in many of the most sterling virtues of character and endurance. All these signs of a new day coming, when the "colonial born" Indians; the rapidly multiplying "coloured people"; the patient and long enduring Africans, will outnumber in the mass by perhaps tenfold the less rapidly multiplying Europeans, all these signs point forward to the prophetic saying that "the weak shall inherit the earth." No I can never despair of the racial problem in South Africa :

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## CHAPTER I.

### IN A WORSE FLIGHT THAN EVER BEFORE

THE full report of the Asiatic Enquiry Commission has been lying before me, but I have not been able to touch it for some days on account of the incessant occupation of every one of my own interests and emotions in the fate of the Chandpur refugees, who have come down from Assam. All that I have seen there at Chandpur seems only to represent to me another tragedy of emigration. It goes to swell the long catalogue of failure, so far as the United Provinces are concerned. Later on, it may possibly happen, that the gloom of what I have seen with my own eyes, at Chandpur, and Goalundo and Nainafi,—the unspeakable misery and destitution,—will be partly lightened, when I am able to go to

Assam and to investigate conditions on the spot. But certainly the misery I have been brought face to face with during the last five weeks (whatever might be the original cause of exodus) can only have one word written upon it, the word "disaster." For the real trouble is this, that, in these various emigrations from Northern India, there is always the greatest difficulty in coming back again to the old village life, after once the emigration has been effected. This is the lesson, that I am learning, by bitter experience, and it is a lesson that is very hard to learn, and still more hard to accept.

When I was in South Africa at the time of Sir Benjamin Robertson and Mr. G. L. Corbett's visit, working side by side with them, but independently of them, this same problem stared us all in the face. I had come to Natal a few weeks earlier than they had done themselves. It was some time before their landing that I had made my own investigations. I had been already to many places on the main route up the North Coast, where Indians were employed on the sugar plantations (a large number of whom were still

under indenture), and I had seen at close quarters and carefully inspected their condition of life, their "barracks," their general appearance, their physique; I had heard their prayers and petitions; my heart had been moved to its depth by their wretched condition, and I had made up my own mind, on the evidence, and had come to a definite conclusion. Afterwards, I had discussed this conclusion, with all the leading Indians in Durban, who had at heart the interests of their poorer fellow countrymen, and they gave their unanimous assent to it.

My own conclusion was this:—It would be far better for these poor wrecks of humanity to come back to India, if they could get a free passage and a little help to start life again, rather than that they should go on sinking lower and lower,—actually falling below the level of the Kaffirs, who were being imported from the bush to compete with them on the plantations. I found out, from the actual statistics of the province (which were very accurately and carefully kept by the special Government Department), that this deterioration in Indian wage earning

was universal in Natal; that the Zulu and Kaffir wages were both rising while the Indian wages were falling. I found still further that, even though indentured labour had been actually ended and the last of the old indentured labourers had been set free (about the year 1915 or 1916), yet in the subsequent years, Indians had gone on and on re-indenturing themselves into a fresh bondage, simply because they were compelled by the force of hunger and misery to do so. I shall never forget how, on one estate, a hovel was shown to me, (the habitation of a whole family), into which I had almost literally to bend down as if going into a kennel, and when I got inside, it was quite impossible to stand upright. The filth inside was beyond words, and the air was putrid. But what else could be expected, when human beings were treated in this manner by overseers, who were living in palatial buildings themselves? I remember one appalling contrast. The Indian barracks were hardly a stone's throw from the house of the Manager of the Estate. The Manager's house had all the perfect air and light arrangements of modern sanitary

science: the Indian quarters were so sanitarily neglected, that I could hardly bear to stay in them even for a few moments, the air was so foul and the drainage was so filthy.

This experience made me restless night and day. I did not know what to do. All my Indian friends wondered at the moodiness, which had come over me, and the gloom, which settled down more and more upon me. They had themselves grown used to these sights and these conditions. But, for myself, I had not seen anything so bad, even in Fiji. And this re-indenturing business roused in me almost furious indignation. I knew it was under terrible temptation, or under some irresistible compulsion, that re-indenture was acquiesced in by Indians themselves. Stories were told to me about the recruiting, which were every bit as bad as the *arkati* stories, that I had heard in India in the old evil days of indentured labour in the past. And, in Natal, there was a temptation, that was hardly known in the United Provinces, and that was quite impossible in Fiji,—the temptation of intoxicating drink. I found that, in a large number of instances, the Indians were made

drunk with the intoxicating liquor by the recruiters, in order to get them to affix their thumb mark to the new indenture. They were given £2-10-0 on signing, and this only too often went in "drink."

All these things, as I have said, weighed upon me, night and day, and, I kept brooding over them. I was ill at the time, and I began to wonder if I had become morbid through illness. It was not possible for me to go down the coast, southward ; but I received letters from Indians there, whose word could be relied on, that conditions in the South were exactly similar to conditions in the North. They also complained about the manner in which the Indian merchants in Durban had been profiteering in rice and thus making the lot of the Indian labourers still more miserable.

Then came Sir Benjamin Robertson, and Mr. G. L. Corbett, and Mr. Lolit Sen. At first, the Indian leaders were inclined to hold somewhat aloof. They had been bitterly disappointed at the refusal of the Hon. Srinivasa Sastri to accompany the Deputation. The position was taken up by some, that because Mr. Sastri had not been able to come, there-



must be something wrong somewhere ; and therefore the whole Deputation should be left on one side. There was at the same time, a section of the Indian community, who wished to boycott altogether the Asiatic Enquiry Commission and to have nothing to do with the Deputation from India on that account.

It was very difficult to come to a common agreement, and at first things seemed to go quite wrong at the time of Sir Benjamin Robertson's landing. I was in the country districts when the ship came in, and the news reached me by telegram, that the Deputation had actually landed. At once I hurried back to Durban, and saw Sir Benjamin Robertson and Mr. Corbett that night. There had been the usual difficulties about Mr. Lolit Sen's accommodation. Being an Indian, no Durban hotel was likely to take him in, on account of the acute racial prejudice. He was therefore still remaining on board ship. The same difficulty had been experienced in the case of Mr. Sarkar, on the former visit of Sir Benjamin Robertson ; and I had fully anticipated it. We at once offered hospitality among the Indian merchants in Durban, and the offer

was accepted ; but in the end, Mr. Corbett was able to obtain a room in the hotel itself, though even then it would not be possible for Mr. Lolit Sen to have meals except in his own room in the hotel. It is these indignities, which bring, like a sharp lash, to Indian minds the helplessness and the hopelessness of their racial position in certain particulars. Probably the sensitiveness about such things had a great deal to do with the Hon. Srinivasa Sastri's refusal to come out, and I can very well understand the feeling and share it. There were, I know, other extremely cogent causes besides ; but I believe I am not wrong in saying, that this question of racial treatment weighed heavily with him. The difficulties connected with the late Hon. G. K. Gokhale's visit in 1912, were overcome by Mahatma Gandhi's continual presence ; but, even in Mr. Gokhale's case, there was no other method of travelling by steamer to South Africa except by occupying a whole three berth cabin by himself alone. For no South African would travel with him. I know full well, how great the danger of racial intolerance would have been, if Mr. Sastri had

come out; but all the same I believe that it could have been surmounted, and I am sorry that he found himself unable to come, when the time drew near.

But, to return from this necessary digression (for this question of racial exclusiveness is the fundamental question in South Africa), on that same evening after our conversation it was as clear as possible to me, that, in Mr. G. L. Corbett, we had one of the truest friends of India in the Civil Service that this Service possessed. He would very rapidly overcome any shyness or aloofness from the Indian side. This anticipation was soon realised. In a very brief time, after he had come round to meet the Indian leaders at the house of Mr. Parsee Rustomjee, or Mr. Mian Khan, he won golden opinions from all. Thenceforward, there was no trouble whatever about the Deputation being cordially received by Indians, all over South Africa. I would like to bear personal testimony to the truly remarkable way in which Mr. Corbett mastered each Indian problem and recognised almost immediately the Indian point of view. I have since heard, both from East Africa and

Uganda how he showed the same capacity of rapid understanding there also.

After Sir Benjamin Robertson and Mr. Corbett and Mr. Sen had been in Natal for a few days, they went out to visit the Mount Edgcombe estate. This was by no means the worst estate that I had seen in Natal. I gave no hint as to my own opinion, but asked Mr. Corbett specially to consider the condition of the Indian labourers. He came back in a state of complete dejection about it. He told me, that he had no doubt whatever, that these Indian labourers would be much better off in India. The best thing would be to repatriate them; and if the Union Government were willing to do it, this would be the quickest way to solve an altogether intolerable situation.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE STORY OF A BLUNDER

I HAVE tried to show in my first chapter the main difficulty which met me in Natal. It is true, that the rights of Indian traders to hold trading licenses and property in South Africa kept my time continually engaged. I could understand their vital importance. With these matters, I hope to deal later. But, it must be remembered, that these rights had their relation to a very small body of Indians, compared with the great mass of poverty-stricken people, who form the Indian labouring classes in Natal. The proportion of these labourers to the trading classes would be very nearly that of ten to one.

When I had fully understood the greatness of this Indian labour problem, it was natural that my energies should become more and more concentrated upon it. For this reason, I felt

bound to alter my programme, and to spend the greater part of my time in Natal, dealing with this distress of the poor and devising immediate relief, while seeking on all sides eagerly for some ultimate solution. The situation itself was very greatly accentuated, while I was there, by the refusal of the Indian Government to send rice from India. In future, when an outcry is raised by national leaders against the export of foodstuffs from India, great care ought to be taken, that communities, such as this Indian labouring community in South Africa, do not suffer actual destitution in consequence. I have found this same problem of rice shortage in Ceylon, among the poorer Indian immigrants there also, who suffered acutely in 1919. There is a very real danger of a selfish nationalism arising in India, both with regard to exports and imports (due to ignorance and inexperience) and this refusal to send rice to these pitifully destitute labourers in Natal was a flagrant instance. Another thing which sickened me to the heart was to find, that Indian merchants themselves in Durban were actually holding up the rice, which they had in

stock, in order to make greater profits from it. At once, on hearing this, I summoned all the rice merchants who would come, and spoke very sternly about the iniquity of such profiteering. The result was, that one Indian merchant released his stock of rice at control rates the next morning. The moment the news of this got abroad, the rush was so great that famished Indian people formed a double line of waiting purchasers, which stretched right down a very long street. Only the smallest fraction of these obtained relief. The rest went empty away.

The remedy for this problem of the submerged Indian population, which at last I proposed, has not worked out well. It was that of repatriation. In the year 1914, Mahatma Gandhi had agreed, that if any Indian cared to accept a free passage home to India, at the price of forfeiting his right of domicile in Natal, he should be given a free passage by the South African Union Government. This free passage had somewhat fallen into abeyance during the war on account of lack of shipping and other reasons. The Natal planters were against it, because it would

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diminish their supply of cheap, sweated labour. I did not personally accept the solution of this free passage without reluctance, on account of the condition of loss of domicile attached. But in the midst of these famished and sweated people, who out of sheer misery were actually going once more under indenture and were sinking below the level of the Kaffir in their wages, continually ruining body and soul alike with intoxicating drink, —face to face with these glaring facts, repatriation to India seemed to be the only door of escape from an intolerable wrong. Indeed, there on the spot, I could see no alternative, and nearly every Natal Indian leader, with whom I talked over the matter, agreed with me about it. Mr. Corbett, whose active service in India had been mainly in the villages of the Central Provinces, very strongly agreed, and Sir Benjamin Robertson also. The fact is undoubted, that each one of us, and the Natal Indian leaders themselves looked at this matter purely and simply from the humanitarian standpoint. In my own case, there is one single rule of life, that I have invariably employed for the solution of all



such difficulties. The rule runs as follows:—  
“Whatsoever ye would wish that men should do unto you, even so do unto them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.” There could be no open question to me that, if I myself were in such a miserable plight in a foreign land, being dragged down lower and lower, I should intensely long to get back to my own village in India and to my own people. It seemed to me, that nothing could be clearer than this. Rightly or wrongly, therefore, I urged that voluntary repatriation should be encouraged; and I suggested that certain merciful actions on the part of the Natal Government should be asked for, if they were willing to show any consideration at all. A small sum should be granted to each person, in addition to the free passage, and the Gold Regulation, which prevented any gold leaving the country, should be modified slightly in their favour, so that any small saving, if in certain cases such had been obtained, and any women’s ornaments, should not be confiscated.

I have bitterly regretted, since then, the action which I took, for two reasons. In

the first place, the South African authorities, seized at once the opportunity thus presented for what could only be called an anti-Asiatic-propaganda. The Government official, who was placed in charge of this delicate operation of helping destitute Indians, began immediately to make his appeal to racial prejudice against the Indians. He even spoke about methods of driving Indians altogether out of the country. The voluntary character of the arrangement was thus compromised from the start. It became merely a new political weapon to drive the Indians bag and baggage out of the country.

Secondly, I had the disconcerting fact to face, that, even when these destitute Indians from Natal reached their own country, they were not well received. The poverty in India is so vast, and so increasingly extending, on account of the continuous growth of population, that, when these immigrants reached home at last, with eager expectations, having forfeited their domicile in Natal, they found themselves again most grievously disappointed in their own homeland itself. My friend, Mr. Naidu, from Pietermaritzburg, who came to India six

months after my own visit to Natal, took me to task most severely and most rightly, on account of the advice I had given. He challenged me in the Indian public press, and pointed out to me, that among the emigrants who had been repatriated to Madras, only a very small proportion had been successfully domiciled in India. The rest were destitute. I have had the painful experience of finding the same thing in Calcutta. The number who return to the Upper Provinces from Natal is very small; yet out of that number, I have found that some have drifted back to the Calcutta Depot, penniless and helpless. I have expressed my own regret in the newspapers at the part I played in urging this repatriation. Since then I have stated my growing conviction, that even with regard to such places as Fiji, where Indians have felt their lot almost intolerable, repatriation is no remedy. In the last few months, I have had one of the greatest disappointments of all in a long life of disappointments concerning the amelioration of the poor. For the Indians, who thronged round me every day in Fiji, and fell at my feet imploring

me to find them ships to get them home have come back in many hundreds to the Calcutta Depot and have clung to my feet there also, begging and imploring me once more, in the same pitiable tones, to find ships to get them back to Fiji.

## CHAPTER III

### REPATRIATION—NO REMEDY

I HAVE explained, in my last chapter, how bitterly afterwards I regretted the day, when I put my hand to paper and advised repatriation from South Africa with forfeiture of domicile. It only shows how terribly complicated all these questions become, and how very dangerous are all schemes of a sweeping character, which attempt to undo recognised evils. I owe it to my friend, Mr. K. Natarajan, of the *Indian Social Reformer*, that the warning as to the result of my action came to me almost immediately and I was able in a certain measure to prevent further mischief. His own very long experience in social questions had put him on his guard, where I myself was ready to run risks. His argument was that of the extreme difficulty of social moŕth. To put it in my own language, he

told me, that poor people who had become already weakened in character by their very poverty could not be transplanted about from place to place and be expected to take root again and again. Their one hope really was, that they should "make good" in the soil in which they had been transplanted. A second and a third transplantation would only lead to greater and greater weakening of stamina. After all, it was not merely the amount of wages to be earned, but the inner character of the wage-earner, which was the vital factor.

I would certainly apply this principle to-day to Fiji, as well as to Natal and elsewhere. If I may venture to say so, the proposal of repatriation, which was unanimously passed without any discussion, at the last Indian National Congress, at Nagpur, was a hasty and an immature proposal. I feel certain, that, if every one of the delegates present had received the training and discipline in these matters, which I have been obliged to receive, there would not have been any such resolution unanimously passed, on a question which literally involves the life and death of numberless poor and helpless people.

No! In Fiji itself, as well as in Natal, in spite of all the wretchedness and immorality of the past, the problem still waits its solution there on the spot,—the problem how the Indians, who have gone out, can “make good” in Fiji. Repatriation is no remedy. For a proof of this, we have only to witness the many hundreds in the Calcutta Depot at the present time, who are only clamouring for one single object,—namely, to return to Fiji.

I would go further still. Personally, whatever evils might have existed, in the Assam tea gardens, both moral and economical, (and, I would add in a parenthesis, that I have felt the moral evils worst of all, though I have said little about them for want of sufficiently accurate information) it would have been utterly repugnant to me to have allowed anyone, if I could possibly help it, to call out the workmen without any care or forethought, urging them to make an exodus to the plains. If such things were actually done by political agents, I have no hesitation in saying, that they were done unwisely. When I first started for Assam, my intention was not to stop at Chandpur at all, but to go on immediately to

Karimganj and to the Chargola Valley, in order to try to stop the exodus, until further enquiry had been made and everything had been attempted to improve conditions on the spot. But I was confronted at Chandpur with a situation calling for immediate remedy. There was no possibility then of retracing steps already taken. Wild horses could never have dragged those famished, cholera-stricken refugees in Chandpur back to the tea gardens. They would have thrown themselves into the river, if such a forced return to Assam had been attempted. The only assault they ever made, was upon Mr. McPherson, of the Tea Planters' Association, who tried to turn them back to the tea gardens and prevent them going forward. Personally, after my experience of Fiji returned emigrants, I had no illusions about the labour conditions in the United Provinces, to which they were going. These were bad enough, in all conscience, and I knew it. But nothing could be worse; nothing could be more inhumane, than to allow them to die of cholera and pneumonia at Chandpur. My one serious mistake was, that I did not realise that some-our or five hundred refugees were going into



the Central provinces. I made no preparations beforehand for them: and many of these grievously suffered, as Swami Darshananda pointed out. But the great bulk of the refugees, who went to the United Provinces, were prepared for beforehand and on the whole well looked after. In a very strange way, this Chandpur problem was almost exactly parallel to the principal problems of Natal and Fiji. For though repatriation had been tried in this Assam instance also (and nothing could prevent it, after the exodus had been actually made as far as Chandpur), nevertheless, those who had had these earlier experiences knew that, in itself, it was no solution. Indeed our fears have already in a certain measure begun to come true. For there is news to hand that some of the very same refugees, who could not possibly have been held at Chandpur, are now actually returning to the tea gardens after finding out for themselves the truth, which I have so reluctantly and slowly found out, concerning Fiji and Natal,—that repatriation is no remedy.

There was one further point, that I had partly overlooked in surveying mentally the

different problems of the depressed Natal Indians. I did not take sufficient notice of the very important social fact, that the educational facilities which were being given in Natal to Indian children were in reality much greater than could be offered at the present time in India itself. India is a poverty stricken country, through and through, from top to bottom. Natal is not. Its soil is wonderfully fertile: its rainfall is good: it has large and important coal deposits, and it forms one of the main exits for the mineral wealth of the Transvaal. There would, therefore, always be the prospect, in such a financially flourishing country, (provided the administration was liberal in its educational policy), that opportunities for the education of our Natal-born Indian children would increase instead of diminish. Indeed, if pressure could be applied along this line of direction from the Indian side, then all the instincts of modern statesmanship (which had reached a high level under General Smuts) would respond to such a pressure.

But what parallel hope was there for these poor people's children in the congested agricultural districts of India, from whence

they originally came? Might it not be said, at least, that the second and third generations of Natal-born Indians would have more educational chance and would make more educational progress in Natal than in India? Even if it were argued that the new national impetus in India would change all that, still this was not a certainty in the immediate future; on the other hand, the Natal prospects appeared to be very nearly certain.

This aspect of education, I had by no means left out of account during my visit to Natal in 1920. Indeed, I had carefully studied its possibilities and had done what I could to press forward Indian claims with regard to it. But, all the same, my own mind works very slowly, and I had not at that time got clearly into my own mental vision the picture of its cumulative beneficial effect upon future generations. Strangely enough, I had not thought of it as the one remedy for the submerged condition of the poorer classes in Natal, instead of repatriation.

The one last factor, that I had not, at that time, taken sufficiently into account, was the question of climate. Like the Fiji climate

the climate of Natal is non-malarial. It is a healthy and bracing climate for the Tamih population, which had originally come from the excessive heat of Madras. Even with those who had been born in Madras and not in Natal, I found that the climatic change to a cooler atmosphere had already had its effect. Those who returned to their homes in India were uneasy and uncomfortable because of the heat. With the Natal-born Indians, acclimatisation in India is far more difficult. Indeed, it is often one continuous physical strain, that is enervating and exhausting. They pine for the cooler climate of Natal and cannot settle down in India itself.

If, therefore, it were possible thoroughly to work out all the educational possibilities for Indian children in Natal; if, on account of the advantages of education in after life, some progress upward from the present submerged state could be attained; if the bright intellects of the little Indian children could be afforded scope for development, then it would surely be better to explore this way of escape from the morass of agricultural destitution in Natal rather than run the risk of repatriation.

It will be easily gathered from this narrative how slowly and almost painfully my mind has accommodated itself to the full situation and its remedy. If I am now accused, not only with a good deal of blame but also with a good deal of truth, for continually altering my mind and shifting my position, I must plead guilty. Looking back, it is indeed a surprise to me to find out how badly I was mistaken and how obsessed I was by the "short-cut" idea of repatriation. But the problems to be faced were by no means easy of solution, and it was somewhat like a traveller exploring a new country and taking the wrong turning again and again before taking the right one. I feel now that the right turning is for us to concentrate on the children of our Indian emigrants and to offer in that direction every help we can to the Governments of the different countries where they are settled.

In another matter, the mistake I made was less serious and more excusable. For I had strangely misjudged the inevitable bias and trend of the Asiatic Enquiry Commission itself. From all that I had heard concerning

the members selected, I had felt assured that they would be able to rise above the racial prejudices around them, and to treat this one question at least, of the submerged and depressed Natal Indians, as a humanitarian question pure and simple. I did not think that they would make this at once a political issue. But the unseemly haste and eagerness, with which they pressed forward in the direction of repatriation, when once an opening was given to them, and the zeal with which they published their Interim Report dealing with this question, disillusioned me. I could see, that the humanitarian aspect had little interest to them, and that these poor Indian people were merely being made a pawn in the great political game. My disillusionment was complete, when Mr. Cole was appointed by the Union Government to take up the question. For he immediately launched out upon a violently abusive anti-Asiatic campaign, explaining to the Europeans how they could get rid, not merely of the poor Indian labourers, but also of the wealthy Indian traders. After that episode, I had very little hope from the Asiatic Commission. But

even then, I had no conception that such men as Mr. Hofmeyer and Sir John Lange could recommend the things that they did. Finally recommend. The summing up of their Report has been a final blow.

## CHAPTER IV

### RACIAL ARROGANCE

IT will be naturally objected to, by those who have read my previous chapters, that they have dealt rather with my own personal impressions and judgments about the Indian labourers rather than with the whole Indian problem itself. This criticism is a true one, and I must confess that I have rather used the title of this book as a peg to hang some miscellaneous things on, which have been burdening my mind, than attempted to analyse the whole Indian situation.

The fact is, the fate of those very poor people in Natal, who had come chiefly from Madras and were so pathetically helpless, obsessed me night and day. They had been so neglected, not only by us in India, but, what was far more painful to think of, by their own fellow-countrymen in Natal,—with



a few very noble exceptions. At the time of my visit, they were in acute distress owing to the rice shortage and the general depression. So I became almost absent-minded concerning other things, compared with their fate. It touched me more deeply than I can possibly describe in words.

I would finish the story of what happened concerning them, before going on to discuss other subjects. Fortunately, the mistaken advice which I had given with regard to repatriation has had but little practical result. The great bulk of them have preferred to remain, and their choice to remain has been a wise one. The Union Government has been again and again approached by the Government of India with a view to prevent any unfair pressure in the direction of repatriation. After this, General Smuts has checked the compromising actions of his official representative, Mr. Cole, and then has relapsed into indifference on the subject. Certainly no pressure of any kind is being exercised to-day (as far as my own information goes) to compel Indians to repatriate. This indifference is due, in a great measure,

to the storm of indignation among the Natal sugar planters, when their Indian supply of cheap labour was put in danger by the Union Government's action in encouraging repatriation. It is to be hoped that these employers, who have thus become thoroughly frightened, will now look after their labour better than before. But, in any case, any danger of a very large exodus is now over; and the chief problem of Natal remains the Education Problem. Without any delay, an Education Committee should be sent over from India to consult with the Natal Government concerning the improvement of Indian Education in Natal. Perhaps a single commissioner would be sufficient. He should be an Indian of high standing.

With regard to the further problems dealt with by the Asiatic Enquiry Commission, it may be said, in general, that the whole body of evidence given in the Report, and the conclusions of the Commission based thereon, both go to prove that any fear of such a rapid growth of the Asiatic population in South Africa, that it would become the dominant factor and oust the European from

the land, is altogether without basis. It is a mere panic fear, sedulously propagated by commercially interested and racially biased Europeans. The Indian community must clearly be a diminishing feature of the population in South Africa. It cannot possibly increase proportionally with the European because of the simple fact that immigration has been finally prohibited to Indians, while it has been made more and more open and accessible for all Europeans. The census, which is being taken this year for the whole of South Africa, will, in all probability, finally dispose of a very large number of the false statements on which the anti-Asiatic propaganda has hitherto relied for its support.

In all this preliminary matter, the Asiatic Commission Report just published is, on the whole satisfactory, though it has not appreciated the perpetual indignities which the Indian population has had to suffer, both in Natal and in the Transvaal. It has not also drawn definitely enough the conclusion, that one of the chief reasons, why there were practically no grievances and very little pronounced race bitterness in the Cape Province,

was because, in that Province, and in that Province alone, Indians had exercised the franchise since (if I am not mistaken) the year 1875. It would have been a great service done by the Commission, if this supremely important fact could have been made prominent by them.

But it is in their final recommendations, that the Asiatic Commissioners completely break down. Here there is very little indeed that favours the Indian. The Gold Law of 1885, in the Transvaal, which has been at the root of nearly all the mischief in that Province, is to remain, in all its racial ugliness, just as it stands to-day. This original penalising law of the old Boer regime has been only bearable for Indians hitherto, because it was far too drastic and severe to be put into practice literally and directly. From its very earliest promulgation, sundry devices were found to circumvent it. These were carried into effect with the connivance and even with the open co-operation of the Boer Government itself. Life in the Transvaal, as an Indian trader, was only possible because these circumventions of the Gold Law of 1885

grew into long established customs. Since the Boer regime, further attempts have been made by the Transvaal Indians, not without some success, to find a loophole in the Law itself, by which to secure property and trading rights. It must be distinctly understood, however, that the Gold Law of 1885 is fundamentally racial and anti-social. As long as it remains on the Statute Book, the bar-sinister is against the Indian.

It was the hope of everyone, who favoured fair dealing with the Indian settlers, that the Commissioners would realise all this and would recommend the repeal of this antiquated racial law. But they have given no relief whatever. As far as the Transvaal is concerned, it would now appear as though every avenue of escape from these ancient restrictions would be closed for Indians in future generations, and that this closure will have the sanction of the Asiatic Commission behind it.

In respect to the licensing laws in Natal, the recommendations of the Asiatic commission are not open to the charge of direct racial bias. With regard to the proposal of consolidation and

uniformity of all licensing laws throughout the different provinces of South Africa, there would be no objection, so long as this distinctly implies a levelling up and not a levelling down. This point must be carefully watched, when it is proposed to put the principle into practice.

I have not got the Report of the Commission before me, and must quote from memory. One of the things asked for, namely, that the grounds for refusing a license should be laid down for the guidance of the Licensing Board has been accepted. The refusal of a license to an Indian because he is an Indian, and the refusal of a license without stating any reason at all,—these things will be no longer possible, if the Commissioners' proposals are accepted. This clearing up of the racial situation is all to the good.

But on the other hand, the one ultimate safeguard in Natal, namely, an appeal to the Supreme Court, is to be taken away, and the appeal is to be finally settled by a Board of three independent persons appointed by the Administrator for that special purpose. I do not at all trust such a new departure. It is possible to have confidence in the High Court;

for it is a responsible body. But a Board of three independent persons, appointed by the Administrator, is really an unknown quantity. Such a Board, in some peculiar time of excitement of public feeling, might be utterly impossible. The most painfully astonishing proposal of the Commission is the clause concerning land-tenure in Natal. Here, the Commissioners have actually gone out of their way to suggest a direct breach of the original contract with the Government of India, and a direct curtailment of Indian rights in Natal, which have been exercised for over thirty years. It is proposed to restrict the Indian tenure of land to a strip measuring thirty miles from the coast. This would leave all the more healthy and bracing country entirely in the hands of the Europeans. It is a relief to find that one Commissioner, Mr. Duncan Baxter, objected strongly to this breach of contract. I understand that the Government of India have sent the strongest possible protest against this proposal of the Commissioners.

A word only needs to be said concerning the ugly racial proposals, which are thinly veiled under the name of "voluntary segregation". The

only *voluntary* segregation is that which exists at present, whereby the Indian naturally congregates with his fellow-countryman, and the European congregates with his fellow-countryman. To go beyond this natural and instinctive drawing together of those of the same race, is at once to bring in artificial pressure and something bordering on compulsion. To induce "voluntary" segregation by means of local and municipal votes, in which Indians are certain to be outvoted, is merely to cloak and disguise the objectionable word "compulsion."



## CHAPTER V.

### THE STRUGGLE AND INDIA'S DUTY

THE one key principle, which will unlock very nearly every Indian problem in South Africa, is this. With such a politically defenceless community, the only chance of safety lies in the right of appeal *away from the local authority*. Almost invariably the local authority, such as the municipal board, etc., will vote against the Indian. Had it not been for the continual possibility of appeal against the local authority to the Supreme Court, or to the Union Parliament, or to the Governor-General, or to the Secretary of State, every single right which is now possessed by Indians in South Africa, would probably long ago have been taken away. At the present moment, for instance, an attempt is being made to deprive the Indians, residing in townships in Natal, of their municipal franchise.

The Bill was introduced into the provincial Parliament by a private member, named Mr. Huelett. So strong was the support given by almost every member of the House, that it rapidly passed through its three readings. It now only awaits the signature of the Governor-General before being made law.\* In such a matter the local authority has always been predominantly hostile. The situation is almost parallel to that of the Jews in European cities, in the Middle Ages. Without the protection of the King, they were utterly defenceless against local attacks on their liberties.

It is this fact, which makes the whole situation in South Africa so apparently hopeless. There is an endless expense involved in these constant appeals to High Courts. The very smallest right has to be fought for, amid all the interminable intricacies of law and justice, from one court to another, from one assembly to another, from one Commission to another. The enemy is always on the spot, in almost overwhelming numbers, ready to take advantage of the slightest loop-

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\* The Governor-General has since refused his assent to this measure.—C.F.A.

hole. Any weakening on the part of the Indian community is immediately taken advantage of. It is one long unending struggle.

To take one further example, the whole instinct of the European population is against any European travelling in any kind of conveyance side by side with Indians. It is extraordinary to find, what lengths this anti-social prejudice has reached. It is now applied almost universally to Indians in South Africa. On the other hand, I have often watched the Japanese. They unhesitatingly take, as a matter of course, every right which is claimed by a European. They travel in European carriages, dine as a matter of right in European dining cars, etc. No one interferes with them; but no one sits with them. It was interesting to notice, on my long journeys up and down Africa, how the Japanese were treated. There was the utmost respect on the one hand, almost amounting to fear. On the other hand, there was aloofness. On every possible occasion, if I was travelling alone, I would go and sit at table with Japanese in the dining cars. But I never once

saw any other European doing this and I asked from the Japanese, when on one occasion we had had a long conversation, as to their treatment. They described to me just what I had witnessed with my own eyes. No one interfered with them: but no one mixed with them. They smiled as they told me what their treatment had been, but it was a forced and somewhat bitter smile which carried a lot of world-trouble behind it.

For Indians, there is no such respect in South Africa. If they assert themselves, there is the immediate danger of an insult. On more than one occasion, I have had to stop a blow that was being struck simply because, out of kindness to myself, an Indian friend had ventured, as it were, into the European sacred area. In order to avoid such insults, I had determined, from the very first, always to travel in the Indian compartment and never to stay anywhere at all where Indians would not be freely welcomed. But even here, difficulties arose. Again and again, the European conductor on the train would come along and insist on my vacating the Indian compartment, in spite of the protest of my

Indian friends against my ejection. I have had to cling to my seat and tell the guard, that, if he decided to turn me out he would have to do it by force. This persistence alone enabled me to keep my seat.

I do not mean, of course, that, at every time and on every occasion, these things occur. There is a good deal of politeness, a certain amount of cordiality, a rough good humour, and what I may call "give and take." But an unpleasant contretemps is always a possibility even in the case of Indians who are in every way respectably and neatly clad and whose manners are unexceptionable. An incident of discourtesy is also much more likely, if an Indian cap or an Indian dress is worn. Even, (I am sorry to have to write this,) Indian ladies are not exempt from this ill-treatment and this rudeness of manners in Natal and in the Transvaal.

Capetown, on the other hand, is quite different. Life, all round, is more urbane; and the people are far more liberal-minded. I have seen delightfully refreshing instances of inter-racial courtesy and kindly feeling. This

is due to an old tradition, which has been handed down for many generation. I do not mean to say, that there is anything like racial equality. To judge from the Christian Churches, that is still far distant. For the strictest racial cleavage still exists in what is called the House of God. It is almost a blasphemy to write down such a title,—“House of God,”—but what I say is true.

It has been one of the greatest benefits to the non-European races, that, when the South African Union was formed, the centre of its Parliamentary life was fixed at Capetown, and not at Pretoria. It was an intense relief to me, in the year 1914, to come down from Pretoria, with its Indian “locations” and its Kaffir “locations,” to the comparatively free life of the Cape Peninsula. Parliament had just begun its sessions, and I could at once feel the atmosphere less closely and narrowly confined within racial walls than in Pretoria. Even the back-veldt Boers feel the change when they reach Capetown.

There is only one danger that I foresee. Many of the older Capetown residents, who had kept their more liberal traditions, told

me that the epidemic of crude racialism from the Northern States had begun to infect Capetown itself. If this is the fact, and if Capetown becomes infected with the poison of race hatred, then I am afraid that the hope of victory for humane traditions will be eclipsed for a time.

I would not, however, end this series of articles on this pessimistic note. Indeed, in spite of all that I have tried truthfully and faithfully to relate, I have still a hope that the race problem in South Africa will not be finally insoluble. I return again and again in my mind, as I ask myself what is the ground of my hope, not, I am afraid, as things stand, to the Christian Churches; for they to a great degree have betrayed their trust. They have succumbed, for the most part, to the race evil. I write this with the utmost sadness, as one who am myself a Christian and would share the blame with all my fellow-Christians. I do not accuse; I rather make a confession of the evil. No, the more I analyse what is happening at the present time, the more I turn in my thoughts to the levelling effects of the spread of education.

I can see what marvellous strides some Indians, who were under indenture themselves, (or whose father and mother were under indenture) have made. I can see also the Kaffirs and the Zulus making somewhat slower, but still perceptible progress. I can see also those, to whom my heart went out with deep affection—the ‘coloured’ people, as they are called,—the half-castes,—so genuinely trying to “make good” and so obviously outstripping the European in many of the most sterling virtues of character and endurance. All these signs of a new day coming, when the “colonial born” Indians; the rapidly multiplying “colored people”; the patient and long enduring Africans, will outnumber in the mass by perhaps tenfold the less rapidly multiplying Europeans,—all these signs point forward to the prophetic saying that “the meek shall inherit the earth.” No, I can never despair of the racial problem in South Africa. There is a sense of justice abroad, in spite of all shortcomings, and the right hand of education has never been finally withheld from any race in the South African Union. Before we judge the South African



Europeans, let us remember carefully this one fact.

I would venture to urge in India again and again,—as I write these final words,—that there is a very pressing and immediate need to encourage and promote to the utmost of our power the education of our own Indian children in South Africa, especially in Natal. I would add that the same is true about East Africa.

It is not money, that is required from India, for the help of South African Indians. It is not even teachers. It is rather the help of those, who would be willing to go across the sea in order to give advice and guidance in educational matters to Indians who are domiciled in South Africa. Many obstructions and racial restrictions will have to be broken down; many new educational ventures will have to be tried; many untouched districts must be opened up; higher education has still to be built up almost from the ground; a new enthusiasm for education needs to be encouraged and fostered in the Indian community itself. All this must be done.

There are few things that I should have desired more to do than to help forward this work of Indian education in South and East Africa. I have felt often in the past the solitude of the task in which I have been engaged. But I feel quite certain that, with the new spirit of sacrifice and devotion abroad in this country, which can be seen on every hand, workers will never be wanting for such a service of humanity.

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