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INDIA

J. Keiv Hardie.

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Rare section

INDIA,

IMPRESSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

BY

J. KEIR HARDIE, M.P.



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DEDICATED

TO THE MEMOIR OF THE LATE

RAI BAHADUR SURJA KANTA ACHARYA,

MAHARAJA OF MUMBAI,

A WISE COUNSELLOR, AND A PATRIOTIC LOVER

OF THE

MOTHERLAND,

TO THE TRADITION OF WHOSE GREAT PAST HIS

LIFE ADDED A FRESH LUSTRE.

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If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India.

MAX MÜLLER.

PREFACE.

WHILST travelling in India in 1907, I contributed a series of letters to the *Labour Leader*, and these form the basis of the following chapters. That this method of writing has its drawbacks I know, but there are also some compensating advantages. Impressions recorded while they are warm are more virile than when laboriously compiled out of stale memories.

India and its affairs are now exciting a great deal of interest, and it is owing to that fact that this little volume sees the light. I have neither claim nor desire to pose as an authority on India and its affairs, but two months spent in the country during which every minute was occupied either in travelling or in interviewing officials or representative men of all stations in life and of all creeds, castes, and classes, led me to certain conclusions. These, with the reasons which led to their being formed, will be found set forth in what follows.

Much controversy has arisen over the question as to whether the condition of the people of India, especially the peasantry, has improved or deteriorated during the past one hundred and fifty years. Many contradictory statements of missionaries, traders, travellers, and officials have been quoted

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for and against. One quotation from an official document dated 1833 which I have seen given as an evidence of the benefits which British rule has brought is curious, and worth reproducing here as showing how progress and improvement presents itself to certain minds:—

“Labourers,” wrote the official who compiled the report, “whom nothing would have induced to work more than six hours in twenty-four (under native rule), and who often declined to work at all on a cloudy day, were willing to toil from sunrise to sunset” (under British rule).

This would be amusing were it not that it is seriously advanced as a proof of the blessings which our rule has brought to the peasants of India.

Whether for ultimate good or ill, we have entirely changed the conditions under which the people of India had lived for at least twenty-five hundred years prior to European occupation. Take, for example, the method of holding the land and the method of raising the revenue. The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in its article on India, says that Akbar, the great and wise Mohammedan ruler, fixed the revenue from land at one-third the total produce. It was paid in kind, and here is how it was collected:—

The land was not held by private owners, but by occupiers under the petty corporation (village panchayet). The revenue was not due from individuals, but from the community represented by its headman. The aggregate harvest of the village fields was thrown into a common fund, and before the general

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distribution the headman was bound to set aside the share of the state. No other system could be theoretically more just or in practice less obnoxious to the people.

That method at least has disappeared, and now each individual cultivator of land has to pay his revenue direct, not as a collective part of the harvest yield, but as an individual rent for the particular piece of land he himself cultivates, and this has to be paid in coin and not in grain as formerly. This is a revolutionary change and one which I believe is playing havoc with the people.

The term "famine in India" is a misnomer. There are times and seasons when famine is spread over great areas affecting many millions of people, but at the same time in other parts of the country sufficient grain is being exported to feed all who are hungry if only it did not pay better to send it abroad. Thus, according to the Famine Commissioners' Report upon the great famine of 1877-8, when scores of millions of people in Southern India were starving and five millions two hundred and twenty thousand (5,220,000) actually died of hunger, over sixteen million hundredweights (16,000,000 cwts.) of rice were exported from Calcutta to foreign lands. This illustrates what happens in connection with every so-called famine in India.

That there is discontent in India is not to be denied. What is denied by the officials and the army of ex-officials and hangers-on in London is that there is any legitimate grievance to justify

agitation. To these I commend the opinion of Lord Cromer, who, addressing his fellow-peers in the House of Lords on a recent occasion, said :—

The position of India at the present time is almost unique. It is, so far as I know, the only important country in the world where education has considerably advanced, which is governed in all essential particulars by non-resident foreigners. It is also the only country where the Civil Service in all its higher administrative branches is in the hands of aliens appointed by a foreign country under stringent educational tests.

Those who are so prone to denounce all Indian reformers as seditious malcontents may find food for reflection in Lord Cromer's words.

In 1858, at the close of the great mutiny, the late Queen Victoria, in the healing manifesto which she issued to the people of India, said :—

It is our will that, so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be fully and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability, and integrity duly to discharge.

The pages which follow will give some idea how this solemn pledge was kept. Then in 1908, fifty years after, King Edward, in the jubilee proclamation, used almost identical language :—

Steps are being continually taken towards obliterating distinctions of race as the test for access to posts of public authority and power. In this path I confidently expect and intend the progress henceforward to be steadfast and sure, as education spreads, experience ripens, and the lessons of responsibility are well-learned by the keen intelligence and apt capabilities of India.

If the pledge of Queen Victoria had been carried out the language of the second proclamation would

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not have been that of repetition of a promise but that of credit for the fulfilment of a royal undertaking given fifty years before. What sincerity lies behind the second pledge *tirae* will show.

The difficulty in the way of introducing political reforms is alleged to be in the main due to difference of race, caste, and creed. These difficulties are more imaginary than real, and I have shown how they have been and are being overcome in the more progressive of the native states. The two main divisions of population are Hindus and Mohammedans. Out of a population of say 300,000,000 the Mohammedans muster about 60,000,000, of whom only some hundreds of thousands are Mughals or Pathans, who came in as invaders and conquerors. Most of the rest of the Mussulman population are Hindus who have been converted to Mohammedanism, many of them in the olden days at the point of the sword. The Mussulmans predominate in the north, but when the Punjab is left behind it is rarely that a Mughal is seen, though when he is there is no mistaking him because of his superior physique and proud, erect bearing. Among the peasantry, Hindu and Mohammedan, belonging as they do to the same race, mingle freely, attend each other's religious festivals and social functions, and when left alone behave as good neighbours should. The policy now being pursued by the Government is to show special favour to the Mohammedans, and it looks with a complacent eye upon, even if it does nothing to foster, outbursts of fanatical

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strife between the two sections of religious belief. Great Britain may one day have to pay a long price for this folly. The Mussulmans are a warlike people come of a conquering race. They are united by ties of religion rather than nationality, and as there are two hundred millions of them in the world they may one day take it into their heads to try once again to win supreme power for Allah in the East.

I am fully conscious of the many imperfections which the following pages contain. That the book will excite criticism goes without saying. That I shall welcome. Everything which serves to call attention to the condition of India and its peoples must be of advantage to the patient toilers and thinkers of that far-off land, for the well-being of whose suffering millions the democracy of Great Britain are now responsible.

J. K. H.

May, 1909.