
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

long and ardently waited for the realization of the diaconate as an integral, permanent, living order in the Church of England, be not a dream, they will have every reason to be satisfied with the experiment, and we shall be appreciably nearer the time when the great towns and cities of our English land shall be won for Christ.

A. C. DOWNER.

ART V.—THE INDIAN FAMINE OF 1897.[1]

IT is strange that so little is known amongst the people of England about that vast empire which so properly gives the Imperial title to the Sovereign of this country. It is fortunate, indeed, that it is beyond the range of party politics, and that its administration is a notable example of high and pure government. It is a happy thing to feel sure that whichever way the vast and teeming electorate of the labouring classes in town and country at home should vote, that greatest dependency of our Crown would continue calm and undisturbed under the sway of an unchanging system of wise, strong and stable government. But we should have thought that the fact that it has fallen to the lot of the throne of Great Britain to rule 288,000,000 of human beings in the most famous and romantic of all empires, would have stimulated in a far greater degree the imagination and the interest of our fellow-countrymen. The empire of India, not including Baluchistan, has 1,600,000 square miles. From Gilgit, its most northern station, to Cape Comorin, in the south, the distance exceeds 2,000 miles. Hardly less is the breadth of those vast territories from Kurrachee, on the west, to Assam, on the east. Its mountains are the highest and most splendid in the world, clothed at their feet with tropical vegetation, and rising into peaks of dazzling glory, the snow-clad mothers of giant rivers, the inexhaustible source of the wealth of the mighty provinces below. Of its three greatest streams, the Indus is 1,800 miles long, the Ganges 1,600, the Bramapootra 1,500. Its magnificent primæval forests are rich with the most precious woods. Its wonderful crops are the pride of the vegetable kingdom. Its mines of jewels, gold and silver, are the proverb of the world. Its cities are amongst the largest and most beautiful that can invite the admiration of the

[1] "The Famine in India," by G. W. Forrest, Director of Records, Government of India. London: H. Cox, E. C.

traveller. Calcutta has 978,000 inhabitants, Bombay 821,000, Madras 452,000, Hyderabad 415,000, Lucknow 273,000, Benares 219,000. Its architecture is incomparably beautiful, its arts and manufactures unsurpassed in skill and delicacy by those of any other civilized nation whatever, the taste of its inhabitants unrivalled. It is the richest land on which the sun looks down, a land of romance and marvel.

Its history is no less strange. Two thousand years before the birth of our Lord a branch of the race of which we ourselves are an offshoot descended from the plains of Central Asia and settled in the Punjab. They were a pastoral and agricultural people; their form of government was patriarchal, and the offices of prince and priest were united in the same person. It was some centuries before they spread over the whole peninsula. From the Laws of Manu we obtain a picture of Indian society during the 800 years before Christ.[1] Although the primitive simplicity had disappeared, and religion had fallen into the hands of the priestly caste, the Brahmans, there was much quiet happiness in the life of the village communities. In the seventh century B.C. Sakya Muni preached his new philosophy of Buddhism, which in 300 years became the national religion, and for 1,000 years existed side by side with Brahmanism. Its followers in India are not now numerous, but it flourishes in Nepaul, Burma, Ceylon, China and Japan.

Then came those cruel and terrible waves of invasion which, until the peaceful dominion of the British Crown, have in succession devastated those fair provinces. First came Alexander the Great in 327 B.C. The accounts of Greek and Chinese writers of the period testify to the prosperous condition of the country before these weary irruptions, to the absence of slavery, and to the brave, sober, truthful, harmonious condition of the inhabitants. Next came the Scythians, between 126 B.C. and 544 A.D. The Arabian invasions began in 664 A.D., and during five centuries Mahometan Afghan kings had power in Hindustan. In 1206 they took Delhi. In 1294 they invaded the Deccan. Mogul or Mongolian hordes made the next irruption. In 1398 the famous Tamerlane burst into India at the head of a mighty host and seized the capital. The Mogul Empire was founded in 1526, and lasted 200 years. The famous emperors were Baber, Akbar, Shah Jehan, and Aurungzeb. The most terrible of all invaders came in 1738—Nadir, Shah of Persia,

[1] It was to the middle of this period that the mention of India in the Book of Esther belongs. Ahasuerus was the famous Xerxes, and we know from Herodotus that his one hundred and twenty provinces included some of the north-western territories of Hindustân.

who slew more than 100,000 of the inhabitants of Delhi, and carried off fifty millions sterling of treasure. The Mogul power was followed by that of the Mahrattas, a native race, who, with the Pindaris, a horde of freebooters who followed in their train, were a scourge to the country, and it was not till both Pindaris and Mahrattas were overthrown in 1818 by Lord Hastings that India at length knew the blessing of internal peace.

I have given this rough and rapid sketch of Indian history in order to recall the fact that our rule has, at any rate, obtained for these great peoples the incalculable advantage of security at home and abroad which they had. I am not going to trace the growth of the East India Company from its small and almost accidental beginning in the reign of Queen Elizabeth to the present mighty and beneficent empire. I have not space to speak of the inevitable circumstances which led successively to the conquests of Clive, Warren Hastings, Lord Cornwallis, the Marquis Wellesley, the Marquis of Hastings, Lord Ellenborough, Lord Hardinge, Lord Dalhousie, and Lord Dufferin. Step by step we were led by the march of events, the jealousies and internal feuds of incompatible native races, to assume the sovereign power. Peace such as was never known before has been established amongst those warring nations, and by British enterprise, energy, invention, and skill, the available wealth of the country and the population have both been enormously increased. The most unswerving justice has taken the place of oppression and bribery; government according to the most enlightened principles of law has succeeded to a capricious despotism; instead of contented acquiescence in ancient evils, there has come a widespread desire for progress and for the continuous improvement of the condition of the people. By the universal introduction of a high standard of systematic education, and from contact with the self-restraint, the equity, the high principle, the intelligence and learning of the West, the elevation of the customs, habits and thought of India has been incalculably great. Whatever mistakes we may have made, and whether all the steps in the advance of the consolidation of our empire were justified or not, there can be no question now of the gratitude and loyalty of the princes and peoples of India for the peaceful and benignant dominion of the English Imperial Crown.

A mighty famine has arisen in extensive and populous provinces of our Indian Empire,[1] and we are once more

[1] "The Famine in India," by G. W. Forrest, Director of Records, Government of India.

reminded of the liability of that vast and various continent to a recurrence of the greatest of all the calamities which visit and waylay the life of man. Mr. Forrest gives us a catalogue, awful in its simple brevity. Since the commencement of our rule there have been no less than eighteen famines, and fourteen during the present century. Regarding those which occurred before our advent, we have not sufficient data to construct an accurate list, for the records of them are misty and indefinite. They tell, however, of vast mortality, of tracts of great extent left without inhabitants, of destructive pestilence following in the wake of famine.

In 1770 an extremely severe famine afflicted Lower Bengal and Behar. The pressure of this visitation was felt in all the northern districts of Bengal as early as November, 1769. Large numbers of people, after vainly endeavouring to obtain subsistence from leaves and the bark of trees, perished miserably of starvation, and the fields and highways were strewn with dead bodies. We read of "many hundreds of villages entirely depopulated," and it was officially computed at the time that about one-third of the population, or ten millions of people, perished. In many cases the starving objects sustained themselves with the flesh of forbidden and abhorred animals, and there were instances in which the child fed on its dead parents and the mother on her child.

Thirteen years after, another great famine ravaged Hindostan from the Punjab to Bengal. That it proved terribly severe is apparent from its historical importance in the annals of India. A new era and a new population seem to reckon from that date — the native year of Sambut, 1840. Of the desolation caused by it in Bengal, Warren Hastings was an eye-witness. "From Buxar," he wrote, "to the opposite boundary, I have seen nothing but traces of complete devastation in every village."

In 1803 a famine struck so severe a blow at the prosperity of certain districts of the Bombay Presidency that sixty years later the traces of its ravages were still visible in the ruins of deserted villages and districts lying waste.

In 1833 a most severe famine afflicted the Madras Presidency. The total population severely affected was about five millions, and the area about 38,000 square miles. The Government seems to have been taken by surprise, and the most fatal of all blunders made; the severity of the calamity was not recognised till too late. Very little was done to relieve distress except by the distribution of gratuitous food in the towns to which these sufferers from starvation flocked. It was estimated that in the Guntur district alone 200,000

persons died out of a population of 500,000. Hence the famine is known as the Gantur famine.

In the frightful famine of 1837 in the North-Western Provinces, it was held to be the duty of the Government to offer employment to those who could work, but that the relief of the helpless and infirm members of the population was the business of the charitable public. Private charity has, however, not the organization for providing relief for every class of a famine-stricken population. The pangs of hunger compelled mothers to sell their children, and crowds of persons, the picture of misery and despair, crawled about the towns begging for a morsel to eat.

In the year 1861 the North-West was again sorely smitten by famine, and it is calculated that 800,000 people died from want and the great epidemics which almost invariably come in the train of famine. The following few plain words describe the state of the population: "They were one and all starving, and the majority were skeletons from atrophy." This famine is the first of which any clear official narrative has been preserved, and Colonel Baird Smith's report on it is a State paper of great value.

In the year 1866 a disastrous famine swept over the province of Orissa, and the management of that calamity is a grave blot on our administration. Timely measures were not taken to meet the evil when the famine threatened the country, nor, indeed, when it deepened in intensity. A third of the population were allowed to whiten the fields with their bones. Nearly a million persons perished. The horrors of the Orissa famine touched the heart and roused the conscience of the English people, and the principle was laid down that human beings must not be allowed to perish for lack of food.

The famine of Behar, in Southern India, in 1876-78, both in respect of the area and population affected, and the duration and intensity of the distress, proved to be the most grievous experienced on British soil since the beginning of the century. How grievous it is difficult for the mind to grasp. The Famine Commissioners state in their report that the mortality exceeded $5\frac{1}{2}$ millions. The late Sir James Caird, one of the Commissioners, wrote: "The people of England can hardly realize the loss by death in the last Indian famine. Upwards of 5,000,000 of human beings, more in number than the population of Ireland, perished at that miserable time. If the people of this vast Metropolis, with the millions in its neighbourhood, were all melted away by a lingering death, even this would not exceed in numbers the loss of India. A result so fearful in extent, and so heart-rending in its details, was brought about by want of timely

preparation to meet a calamity which, though irregular in its arrival, is periodical and inevitable."

Once more the periodic and inevitable scourge has smitten the land. According to the latest official information, says Mr. Forrest, famine was felt or expected over districts inhabited by about 37,000,000 people, while more or less distress was feared over other tracts containing 44,000,000. The whole area affected by the failure of the crop is 285,700 square miles, and the population amounts to 81,419,000. The area of the whole German Empire is 211,168 square miles, and the population 49,428,470. Therefore, if we can conceive that every person in Germany and nearly every person in France was suffering from want of food, we can form some conception of the calamity which has stricken our Indian Empire. In the Punjab, the area affected by the failure of the crop is 46,900 square miles, and the population amounts to more than 10½ millions. The martial qualities of one section of the population, the Sikhs, has given rise to the erroneous idea that they form the bulk of the inhabitants of this province. But in the Punjab, in round numbers there are 11½ millions of Mahommedans, 7½ millions of Hindus, and less than 1½ million Sikhs. In the North-Western Provinces the affected area is 76,800 square miles, and the population amounts to more than 37,000,000, or about 1,000,000 less than the whole population of France. The population chiefly consist of industrious cultivators, and are a peasantry whom any Government might be proud to reckon among its subjects. In the Central Provinces, which include the greater portion of the table-land of India, the area affected is 73,400 square miles, and the population amounts to more than 8,000,000. The larger distressed districts of the Bombay Presidency contain a total area of 52,300 square miles, and a population of more than 9,000,000, mainly consisting of hardy, intelligent, Mahratta peasants. In Madras the area affected is 8,500 square miles, and the population, chiefly composed of Tamil and Telugu ryots, amounts to a little more than 1,000,000. In Bengal the area affected is 16,600 square miles, and the population amounts to about 13½ millions. From the Punjab to Bengal, from the North-Western Provinces to Bombay and Madras, sterility and indigence overspread the face of once flourishing provinces. The vocation of the peasantry is gone for a time. There is no working or tending wanted for the withered crops. There is no harvesting to be done. The fields cannot be tilled for lack of moisture. The plough is unemployed, and the oxen, mere masses of bone, are straying in quest of fodder.

The Government of India, warned by former failures and fortified with accumulated experience, has been for many years increasing the means of transport between one part of

India and another by railways and canals, so that one province with abundant produce can supply the markets of districts affected by want. It has also been promoting irrigation, so that larger amounts of grain can be raised.

I cannot describe the rules and codes established for combating famines, the order for mobilization of the whole scheme in October last, the suspension of the land revenue, the large relief-works at great centres, the small relief-works for those at home, the relief in their own homes given to women, the system of medical inspection, the famine camp, hospitals, poorhouses, kitchens, and provision for the children. The preparations of the Indian Government seem to have been most complete.

But there is the utmost need, Mr. Forrest reminds us, and the most ample scope for the operation of private charity outside the definite task of saving people from starvation which Government, and Government alone, must perform. As guardian of the public purse, and in view of the magnitude of the calamity, Government is obliged to limit its assistance to what is absolutely necessary for the preservation of life, and the contributions of individuals can be well employed in supplementing the subsistence ration of the State. It can dispense small comforts, whether of food or of clothing, to hospital patients, the young, the aged, and the infirm. The feeling of the sacredness of domestic privacy is intensely strong in India, and private charity can be of the greatest service in relieving the numerous poor but respectable persons who will endure almost any privation rather than apply for Government relief. Again, every famine leaves behind it a number of waifs who have lost or become separated from those who should be responsible for them, and private charity can provide for the future maintenance of the fatherless and the orphan. Private charity can be of the greatest use in supplying, after the famine has come to an end, capital for a fresh start in life to those who have lost their all in the struggle. The effect of a season of famine in India is not merely to entail on its population a terrible amount of loss of life or temporary suffering, but to thrust back prosperity for an indefinite number of years. Multitudes of well-to-do men, in addition to all their misery and loss of health, will be oppressed with a load of debts from which they may never recover. From the position of men of substance they have sunk into that of beggars, from free men they have been degraded into the slaves of the money-lender, the worst form of slavery in the world.

The money, Mr. Forrest assures us, will be most carefully distributed. A complete scheme has been issued by the

Government for the organization of patriotic and enlightened committees in every part affected; to secure that the help of the generous public shall reach its proper aim without the subtraction of even the least sum.

And now, as the Viceroy remarked in a recent speech, "a charitable movement can be prosecuted in India and England, or elsewhere, for a common cause in which all can co-operate." A meeting was held in Bombay under the presidency of the Governor, and the natives of the Western capital, threatened with ruin in its worst form, have given a fresh proof of their great generosity. A meeting was held in Calcutta under the presidency of the Viceroy, and has been followed by a meeting in London. And the time has come for the whole British nation to do what the whole British nation has done before: give freely to mitigate the sufferings of their fellow-subjects. Though there are some gleams of hope for the future, the misery and want are intense. "It is," to use the words of Burke, "a people in beggary; it is a nation which stretches out its hand for food." Those who reside in opulent England can have but a faint idea of the suffering caused by famine. The word has almost lost its original meaning in highly civilized countries, but it has all its old import in India. Sore now is the famishment in the land, and the call upon us is authoritative. It is a matter which concerns our public interest and our national reputation. Whoever subscribes towards the relief of our fellow-citizens in India, smitten with the plague of hunger, furnishes a proof to the world that we deserve the superintendence of our great Eastern Dominion.

We thank Mr. Forrest for the careful and impressive statistics of his timely pamphlet, which we have reproduced in the latter part of this article.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

ERRATA.—By a rare oversight, which we much regret, Mr. Hathaway did not receive a proof copy of his paper that appeared in our last issue. For accuracy's sake, he begs us to state that the Rev. John Tucker was not a member of Christ Church, Oxford (p. 292), but Fellow of Corpus Christi College; and that Canon Jackson was Incumbent of St. James', Leeds (p. 294). For "*Karpachi*" (p. 297) "Karachi" should, of course, be read.