THE ILLUSION OF THE CHARKA

I

A FEW PLAIN FACTS ABOUT KHADI

It is being persistently claimed on behalf of the Charka that wherever it has been introduced it has materially improved the condition of the poor people. But a perusal of the reports of the various Khaddar organisations in the country shows that the average income from spinning (including carding) is less than eight annas a month.

At the famous Gandhi Ashram at Pudupalayam in South India 2,402 spinners were
paid Rs. 69,681 only in the course of three years and three months. This amounts to less than twelve annas per head per month. The well-known Abhoya Ashram in Bengal paid Rs. 25,000 only as wages to 9,000 spinners in 1927. The average comes to less than four annas a month. Only persons who are under a hypnotic spell can say that the addition of four annas or even twelve annas to the monthly income of a person materially improves his economic condition.

Even this most insignificant income from spinning is possible only because Khaddar is being made to sell at a price exorbitantly higher than mill-cloth. Mahatma Gandhi has gone so far as to say that “Khaddar is cheap at any price”! An artificial market is being kept up for Khaddar at a tremendous cost of public energy and money.

By a persistent vigorous propaganda the patriotic and charitable feelings of the people are being exploited in favour of Khadi. The Congress is spending the best part of its constructive energy on Khaddar work. Municipalities, Corporations and other local bodies
under the control of the Congress are making compulsory purchase of Khaddar for their servants. All Congressmen are bound to wear Khadi and persons not doing so, have every chance of being hooted out of all political meetings and conferences. No one dares say anything publicly against Khadi. Mahatma Gandhi himself has declared: "To me it appears to be monstrous to see the slightest opposition to such an incredibly simple thing as the Khadi."

In spite of all this attempt for about eight years Khaddar has not come to stay. The Charka is practically nowhere plying on the independent cottage industry basis, people supplying their own need of cloth, which was the original ideal. The spinners depend on the various Khadi centres for the supply of their cotton as well as for the disposal of their products. These centres have to be run at a considerable cost depending on recurring public subscriptions for their very existence.

The present output of Khaddar is being maintained at a great expense. The public pay subscriptions for the speedy attainment of Swaraj and the real amelioration of the condi-
tion of the poor. This money is being diverted to Khaddar work. The All-India Spinners' Association had invested by the 30th September, 1927, Rs. 19,54,377 in spinning wheels. It has produced during the last year cloth of the value of Rs. 24 lakhs. At a rough estimate 84 lakhs of square yards of Khadi were sold during the year. This is a poor figure for an investment of 20 lakhs of rupees!

While the total of other sources is 50,860 lacs of yards the hand-spun Khaddar amounts to only 84 lacs of yards. This is the progress achieved in eight years in spite of the utmost efforts of a man like Mahatma Gandhi and of organisations like the Indian National Congress. Instead of throwing all the blame on the worthless shoulders of the Indian people, is it not high time now to consider whether the programme itself is at all worth the trouble that is being taken for it?

The Khaddar centres are working at a loss. The All-India Spinners' Association lost over a lakh of rupees last year. Thus to maintain even the present insignificant output of Khadi the generous public must regularly
replenish the vanishing funds of the Association. It is not surprising that the General Council of the Association has recently decided to make again an All-India tour to collect subscriptions for Khaddar work.

The simple reason why the Charka cannot establish itself is that it has absolutely no chance of ever standing in competition with the Mill. The mill-owners possessing a bigger purse buy cotton at a rate much cheaper than the home spinner can ever expect to get. Then the cost of production is beyond any comparison. The result is that the money that is required to buy cotton and pay the cost of weaving for a piece of Khadi is more than sufficient to buy a much better finished mill-cloth, thus leaving absolutely no margin for the spinner and the carder; and the argument that whatever is earned in leisure hours is a gain does not apply as there is no chance of earning anything at all.

It is for this quite obvious reason that the Charka has been given up everywhere. A charge is very commonly brought in our country against the British that they destroyed our Charka industry. But the Charka dis-
appeared from India almost at the same time as it disappeared from Great Britain itself and other parts of the world. The true charge that we can bring against British rule in this respect is that our cotton mills could not flourish on account of the unfair competition with Manchester.

The old ideal that the agriculturist should grow his own cotton and spin his cloth as he cooks his food, is not applicable to modern conditions. Apart from the fact that cotton cannot be grown everywhere and by everybody, cotton has now a world market and the cultivator comfortably makes more profit by selling his cotton and buying mill-cloth than by carding and spinning it at his leisure hour and paying wages to the weaver.

Actual facts show that people now do not spin for home consumption but to make some earning through the Khaddar centres. What they earn by spinning they spend in buying mill-cloth, mostly foreign cloth.

The fact that people are not wanting who are ready to spin even for the most insignificant earning shows only the deep
poverty of the masses but not the capacity of the Charka to remedy it.

The poverty of the Indian people can be cured only by removing foreign rule and foreign competition, placing the primitive agriculture of the country on a scientific basis, introducing big machinery and large-scale production, supplemented by suitable cottage industries with modern devices and methods, together with necessary improvements in banking, co-operation, tariff, facilities of transport and so forth. The economic depression in our country is too deep and complex a matter to be dealt with by "such an incredibly simple thing as the Khadi."

The proposal that our poor cultivators should work in their leisure hours on the Charka to add a few annas to their monthly income is inhuman. While all over the world attempts are being made to reduce the hours of work and the cost of production so that all people may get plenty of leisure and sufficient opportunity to fully develop their body, mind and spirit, our Khaddarites are trying to lead India in just the opposite direction!
One argument very commonly advanced in favour of the *Charka* as against the mill is that it avoids all the evils of industrialism. This argument, however, is useless as industrialism is already upon us and no one can prevent the introduction of big machinery. Even the *Charka* work that has been possible under modern conditions is being carried on more or less on the factory system. Then the *Khaddarites* only object to the cotton mills, while Mahatma Gandhi would go so far as to allow even cotton mills side by side with the *Charka* though we fail to see how the two can go together.

Big machinery is inevitable and the poverty of our people can be removed only by large-scale production. Big machinery does not necessarily imply all the evils of industrialism. The evils are bound to disappear. The different ideas and schemes that have been suggested in Europe show that people are trying to correct the defects. Unless one enters into it how can the evils be overcome? It is the tendency of the Indians towards poverty which is really responsible for the cry against machinery.
The *Charka* stands in the way of true constructive village work. Money raised for village reconstruction is being used for the organisation of *Khaddar* production. But the *Charka* has no power of creating life in the villages. To infuse life into the villagers means to stimulate them to change and improve their present wretched condition in all possible ways and to combine with one another for that purpose. The *Charka* gives no such incentive to them but tries to make their present miserable condition a little more tolerable; thus it serves rather as an opiate! Then there is no element of combination or co-operation in *Charka*. The spinners are merely wage-earners who work individually at home in their leisure hours and for their earning depend absolutely on the *Khaddar* centres.

Again *Khaddar* work has become synonymous with village construction and our patriotic young men feeling no enthusiasm at all for this barren lifeless programme of the *Charka*, turn away altogether from the prospect of village work. *Khaddar* production is being organised almost everywhere by paid
workers who earn their livelihood by this work. One Khadi Pratisthan alone in Bengal has employed seventy-seven paid workers.

Local bodies are wasting on Khadi much money which could have been used for real constructive work. Srijut Jamshed Mehta, who is the President of the Karachi Municipality, recently moved a resolution there to stop the compulsory purchase of Khadi for the menial staff. In moving that resolution he remarked that during the last three years the Corporation had spent no less than one lakh of rupees for encouraging this cottage industry. . . . The councillors were doing great injustice to themselves and to the rate-payers by spending such an enormous amount on Khadi. It was really a cruelty to ask the sweepers to wear the heavy cloth and go in the streets. Moreover, white Khadi become dirty soon and the poor peons had to spend lot of money for washing. The colour was tried but found useless. The President emphatically declared: “I tell you it is a real cruelty. We have spent nearly a lakh of rupees but Rs. 85,000 is really wasted. Our purpose has not been served.”
Khaddar has absolutely no political significance beyond the fact that it has been adopted as the uniform dress by the Congress. On the other hand the compulsory provision that every Congressman must habitually wear Khaddar stands in the way of many sincere and honest patriots joining the Congress.
II

REJOINER BY A KHADDARITE

"The Poverty of the Indian People" writes Mr. Anilbaran Ray in his article entitled "A few plain facts about Khadi", "can be cured only by removing foreign rule and foreign competition, placing the primitive agriculture of the country on a scientific basis, introducing big machinery and large-scale production, supplemented by suitable cottage industries with modern devices and methods, together with necessary improvements in banking, co-operation, tariff, facilities of transport and so forth." No doubt, this is the dream of all patriotic Indians. But this dream cannot be materialised for a long time to come. It requires a very bulky capital to put the "primitive agriculture of the country on a scientific basis," and also to introduce "big machinery for large-scale production,"
and too poor as we are, and as our steel industry is in its infancy, we will have to rely upon foreign capital, if this will be available at all, and we will have to import the whole machinery from foreign people, which will be indeed a colossal drain of India’s wealth. Perhaps these novel suggestions may be relished by imbecile theorists, but a man with a little bit of practical sense does not get enamoured of such noble dreams! Whether these things will benefit the masses at large in the long run, or they will only swell the purses of our capitalists need not be enquired into here. For the present purpose it suffices to recognise the above dreams, as “dreams,” inasmuch as the hunger of our agricultural population will not wait in patience and contentment till the dawning of such “golden” days. What is required is something useful to the “Now.” And, we Khaddarites are firmly convinced of the efficacy of Khaddar in ameliorating, in however small a manner, the present “body-killing and soul-killing” condition of our agriculturists. The bulk of India’s people is agricultural, and since they have work in the field only for about six
months, they can profitably harness the other six months for *Charka*-work, and as something is better than nothing, they will be only thankful for what little they can make out of *Charka*. When a patriotic demand for Khadi is created, they will have enough and more work to do, and consequently enough food to satisfy their hunger and also enough clothing for themselves. As in every other commodity, in *Khaddar* also, the commercial law of “supply and demand” has its sway. Of course, the *Khaddar* is a bit costly. It is coarse. It gets soiled soon. We do not deny these facts. But it should be borne in mind that with us *Khaddar* has not yet become a “profit-loss business”. It is yet in its infancy. It has got to compete with the Indian mills, Japan, and last but not the least Lancashire. Under the circumstances, we cannot but call upon the patriotism of the people, when they murmur about the coarseness and the high cost of *Khadi*. With all these handicaps, it has made vast progress, of which every *Khaddarite* is only too proud.

I have no wish or patience to analyse the idle arguments of Mr. Ray advanced against
Khaddar, because they are the stock arguments of anti-Khaddarites; and I will only invite him and them to peruse the recently-published work on Khadi, "Economics of Khaddar," by Richard B. Gregg. This gentleman, born and bred up in Henry Ford's country, came to India and studied this subject from all standpoints, and he has given the result of his researches in the above work in a very simple, but forcible and convincing manner.

Let me close this letter by quoting Mr. Edye, Census Officer for the United Provinces. (I have taken this quotation from Mr. Gregg's work referred to above). Speaking of cottage industry as ancillary to agriculture, Mr. Edye writes:

"The bulk of the population is agricultural, and agriculture here means ordinarily the growing, harvesting and disposal of two crops in the year, and not the mixed farming familiar in England. Agriculture of this kind involves very hard work for certain short periods—generally two sowings, two harvests, and occasional weeding in the rains, and three waterings in the cold weather—and almost complete inactivity for the rest of the year. In precarious tracts inactivity may be unavoidable for a whole season, or even for a whole year. These periods of inactivity are, in the great majority of cases, spent in idleness. Where the cultivator pursues some craft
which will employ him and his family at times when they are not required in the fields—a craft in which continuity of employment is not essential—the proceeds of that craft are a saving from waste, and therefore a clear gain. The most typical of such crafts, . . . . and the one which is most widely pursued, is the production of home-spun* cloth."

Now that the sceptics and scoffers have got the testimony of a Government official, they may perhaps begin to think independently. Some people take lightly the words of our simple Mahatma Gandhi. While certain others even consider him eccentric. But, generally all unsophisticated persons have understood the import of his teachings.

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*I think here by home-spun cloth Mr. Pidye refers to home-woven cloth and not to Khaddar. Handloom weaving is widely pursued but not certainly the Charka.

A. R.
III

REJOINDER BY BABU RAJENDRA PRASAD

Mr. Ánil Baran Ray in an article in the "Bombay Chronicle" of the 17th November has tried to show that the Khadi movement is not only useless but harmful to the country. Now the case for Khadi has been stated so clearly and on so many occasions that it is really surprising that Mr. Ray should so completely misunderstand it. It is proposed to take the points one by one as raised in his article. He says: "the Charka can at best give about eight annas a month to a spinner."

This average he has arrived at by dividing the amount of money said to have been distributed by the number of spinners and months in the period during which it was distributed. There is an obvious fallacy in striking an average in this way. It assumes that all the Charkas were plying every day throughout
the period, whereas the fact is that the very nature of the occupation of the spinners makes their work at the Chartha irregular. They do not spin a given number of hours each day of the month. The hours in the day as also the number of days in the month and even the months in the year are determined by other agricultural work—more time being given to Chartha in the off season and less in the agricultural sowing or reaping season. As against the imaginary average figure of earning per Chartha we have the actual figures of some spinners taken at random from the spinners’ register at Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengodu—the very centre whose average Mr. Ray quotes—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spinners’ Regd. No.</th>
<th>July 1927</th>
<th>Aug. 1927</th>
<th>Sep. 1927</th>
<th>Total for 3 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>799</td>
<td>Rs. A. P.</td>
<td>Rs. A. P.</td>
<td>Rs. A. P.</td>
<td>Rs. A. P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 3 0</td>
<td>4 7 0</td>
<td>3 15 0</td>
<td>12 9 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>6 5 0</td>
<td>3 5 0</td>
<td>3 4 0</td>
<td>12 14 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304</td>
<td>4 8 0</td>
<td>2 8 0</td>
<td>2 10 0</td>
<td>9 10 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>488</td>
<td>4 6 0</td>
<td>3 1 0</td>
<td>1 6 0</td>
<td>8 13 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1416</td>
<td>2 7 0</td>
<td>2 0 0</td>
<td>2 4 0</td>
<td>6 11 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>565</td>
<td>4 8 0</td>
<td>2 7 0</td>
<td>2 12 0</td>
<td>9 11 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is the uniform experience of all Khadi centres that a spinner gets about an anna and a half a day for about 6 hours’ spinning. This earning is small undoubtedly, if taken by itself, but is not inconsiderable when we remember that the average income of an Indian has been calculated to be about one anna and seven pies a day. And let it not be forgotten that for this paltry six pice there are thousands who are willing to spin; there can be no question of depriving them of this means of earning without suggesting a better alternative and none has been so far suggested.

Mr. Ray thinks that in spite of persistent propaganda and the exorbitant price paid for Khaddar, Charka does not ply independently anywhere on cottage industry basis. Here, again, Mr. Ray’s conclusion is based on a wrong assumption. He assumes that all the Khadi that is produced and all the yarn that is spun on the Charka is produced and spun under the auspices of the All-India Spinners’ Association. The fact, however, is that the A.I.S.A. publishes statistics of only what is produced by it and has no means of collecting the figures of whole and half
Khaddar and the huge quantity of yarn spun and disposed of by the producers independently of the A.I.S.A. It is a well-known fact that in the Punjab, Rajputana, Bihar, Andhra, U. P., and Bengal large quantities of whole or half Khaddar are produced and consumed independently without any effort on anybody's part; and this has continued in spite of the competition with mills—Indian and foreign. The reason is that the cloth has been found to be suitable, durable and on the whole cheap by the consumers. Gandhiji's efforts have been directed towards creating a healthy reaction in favour of handspun as against the flimsy and tawdry fabric imported from abroad, which first came into fashion in towns and has permeated villages also now.

Mr. Ray thinks that it is futile to try to stem the tide of industrialism and Charka cannot compete with mills. Mr. Anil Baran Ray admits, however, the fundamental fact of the deep and grinding poverty of the masses and the further undeniable fact remains that millions and millions are unemployed for a great part of their time. The Charka gives employment to such unemployed who on ac-
count of their agricultural occupation which can give them only intermittent work near their homes and cannot permit migration to long distances or absence for any long duration are unable to find work for their off seasons. That it has succeeded in supplementing the income of such agriculturists by enabling them to utilise their off hours is proved by the following facts gathered at one of the centres:—(1) Names of village, (2) Number of wheels, (3) Annual earnings from spinning in rupees, (4) Annual agricultural and other incomes of spinning families in rupees, (5) percentage of 3 to 4.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pudupalayam area:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Uppupalayam</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>3360</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sembampalayam</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>3065</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Puliayampatti</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>2650</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chithalandur</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>2150</td>
<td>17 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pudupalayam</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>2398</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kanoor area:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Komarapalayam</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1398</td>
<td>9009</td>
<td>15 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chellamapalayam</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>2190</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uttukkul area:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Velampalayam</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>28 1/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Papampalayam</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1205</td>
<td>5220</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sembampalayam</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>2672</td>
<td>14</td>
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The above shows an addition of 11 to 28 per cent in income as a result of spinning over the other income of the families concerned taken as a whole. In individual families the results were even more striking. Sometimes the increase was as much as 50 per cent.

There can be no manner of doubt that although the earning from the Charka considered independently is by no means considerable, taken in relation to the other income of the families it represents a substantial increase. Considered from this point of view, viz., of finding work for the unemployed, no question of competing with mills arises.

Mr. Ray, however, makes the curious complaint that the proposal that our cultivators should work in their unemployed hours on the Charka is inhuman while all over the world attempts are being made to reduce the hours of work. I confess I am not aware that there is anywhere in the world a proposal to reduce the working hours of the unemployed. On the other hand, the problem of finding work for them is a pressing problem all the world over. In India no attempt has been made to take a census of the unemployed, and
the reason for this omission is obvious, *viz.*, that it will disclose countless millions as unemployed, and the task is too stupendous to be undertaken.

Mr. Ray complains that such a large sum as nearly 20 lacs is invested in *Charka* work and can produce but about 25 lacs worth of *Khaddar*. Mr. Ray forgets again that this sum of 20 lacs is invested not only in producing *Khaddar* but also in marketing it, and if statistics of mills are taken, it will be found that the return for the investment in production and marketing of *Khaddar* can stand fair comparison with similar investments in the mills.

Mr. Ray complains that sums collected for Congress and national work are devoted to *Khaddar*. The charge, in fact, is not true, because nothing that was collected for any other purpose has been diverted. But assuming that money collected for national purposes is used for *Khaddar*, to those who look upon national work in the terms of the masses of the people, nothing is more urgent than an attempt to ameliorate their economic condi-
tion, and Khaddar claims to do that as the figures given above testify.

The yearly loss incurred by the Charka Sangh is incidental to the reorganisation of an industry which is very nearly dead and which requires to be revived. It is covered mostly by expenses on organisers and experts and office expenses, all of which items may and will disappear when once the industry is reorganised.

The complaint that the Charka Sangh is acting like any other capitalist getting Khaddar made and selling it and not trying to make spinning for oneself popular is also based on ignorance of facts. As a matter of fact an attempt has been made in this direction and the result achieved at Bijolia where nearly 5000 people have become self-sufficient in respect of their clothing requirements is very encouraging. The work is necessarily slow and requires not only technical skill on the part of the workers but also organising and persuasive powers in the workers engaged.

The greatest shortcoming in Mr. Ray's indictment is the absence of any feasible and practicable alternative plan for immediate
amelioration in however small a degree, of the economic condition of the masses. The general statement regarding improvement in agriculture and the establishment of large scale production factories betrays a confusion of thought. No one objects to improvement in agriculture. *Charka* is not suggested as an alternative but only as a supplementary occupation to agriculture. The establishment of large factories, apart from the great difficulty of finding the necessary capital and the obvious objection on account of the necessity of a great drain on the resources of the country as the price of machinery to be imported and the recurring charges for replacement of parts, repairs, etc., is not likely to solve the problem of unemployment. It is calculated on the other hand, in a country like India which has no outlet for its surplus goods, to intensify the problem of unemployment.

Thus, therefore, if the fundamental facts of poverty and unemployment are admitted, as they cannot but be, and there is no alternative suggested for filling the unemployed hours, *Charka* must hold the field. The nation has paid crores for propping up some
industry or other where the number of the labourers employed and their share in the profits are after all small. Why should we grudge a bounty the whole of which goes straight into the pocket of a most deserving class of people—viz., those who are willing to work and earn but who cannot do so because they have no work.

It is not necessary to consider here the political effect of Khaddar as Mr. Ray admits that it has at least some value in that direction.

The most surprising statement, however, is that Khaddar stands in the way of village reconstruction. Mr. Ray again speaks without experience and without knowledge. It is common knowledge that Khaddar has verily proved to be the centre of many kinds of activities. It has helped the solution of the knotty problem of untouchability; it has served to help anti-drink campaign. It has enabled village education in a small scale to be undertaken. The results may not be very large, but the work itself has not been very intensive as yet; and it has been in more or less an experimental stage. But it has been sufficient to show its possibilities and poten-
tialities, and that is all that the A. I. S. A. can aim at with its limited resources. Given the necessary capital and technical skill and even a fraction of the talent now employed in mills and in improving machinery, one can make bold to claim that Charka may hold its own one day even as regards prices of its cloth as it does even to-day to some extent as regards its durability and, to some, even in beauty.
IV

REPLY TO A KHADDARITE

A Khaddarite has called me an imbecile theorist and a dreamer because I ventured to suggest that the poverty of the Indian people can be cured only by removing foreign rule and foreign exploitation, and, what would inevitably and speedily follow the removal of foreign rule, the application of science to agriculture, the organisation of large-scale production and so forth. Thus Swaraj to a Khaddarite is a dream which "cannot be materialised for a long time to come"! The foreign rule and foreign exploitation will continue, our agriculture will continue to be crude and primitive, we shall suffer all disadvantages as regards banking, exchange, tariff, transport, yet by the magic wand of the Charka our poor people will be relieved immediately! This
is the practical sense of our Khaddarites. And they have given positive proof of "immediate" help to the poor by annually producing 84 lacs of yards of cloth only by the investment of 20 lacs of rupees after a superhuman effort of eight years!

Immediate relief to the poor can be given only by charitable relief work and Khaddar is really proceeding on that basis and not on economic or business lines. To remove the poverty of the people you must add to the production of wealth and stop the drainage, there is no other way. And if this cannot be accomplished immediately, we can immediately start on these lines. Our objection to Khaddar is that it is not only giving no real help to the people—a monthly increase of eight annas in the income is no real help—but it is doing positive harm by diverting the attention of our national workers from true constructive work and causing enormous waste of public energy and money.

The plain facts I marshalled against Khaddar have been brushed aside by one phrase that they are the stock arguments of anti-Khaddarites. And Mr. Khaddarite of
course has proceeded to bring forward quite fresh facts and arguments in favour of his fetish! Thus he says that the bulk of India’s people is agricultural and they have to work in the field only for about six months, etc. This argument repeated *ad nauseum* is fallacious to the core. In the first place, it is not everywhere in India that the agriculturists have to pass some months in idleness. Then it is only because agriculture is not fully developed that agriculturists do not get full work. Instead of throwing upon them a new work, they should be helped to do their own work well. By adopting simple devices and simple improvements—selection of seeds, selection of bulls, preservation of manure, forming co-operative organisations for sale and purchase,—the agriculturists can make much more profit than they can ever hope to make from spinning and they can be taught and organised to make these improvements by the same effort as is being devoted to the absolutely futile programme of the Charka.

Mr. Khaddarite has referred to “Economics of Khaddar” by Richard B. Gregg, which within a year of its appearance has
been raised to the dignity of the Vedas by Khaddarites all over India! I can assure Mr. Khaddarite that this is not the first time that I am hearing of that valuable book. But I would at any time depend on my "plain facts" which no Khaddarite has dared to deny rather than on Mr. Gregg's researches on the solar energy and the similarity of the human body to a machinery. As a drowning man catches at a straw, so our Khaddarites would catch hold of anything that seems to support their pet theory. Thus the testimonial of a Government official, Mr. Edye has been produced in favour of home spun cloth. If our Khaddarites find the testimony and advice of Government official so reliable I refer them to the report of the Agricultural Commission and to find out for themselves what place has been given to the Charka in that "precious" report.
V

REPLY TO BABU RAJENDRA PRASAD

In his rejoinder to my article Babu Rajendra Prasad has mostly tried to explain the facts produced by me against Khadi but not to deny or contradict them. I leave it to the readers to judge for themselves how far he has succeeded in explaining my "plain facts" so as to defend the cause of Khadi.

Babu Rajendra Prasad quotes me thus: He says, "the Charka can at best give about eight annas a month to a spinner." These words, however, are not mine but have been put into my mouth by him to suit his own convenience! The Charka may 'at best' give more than eight annas but in actual fact in general it has not given so much. From a perusal of the reports of the various Khaddar organisations in the country I said, "the average income from spinning is less than
eight annas per month.’’ Rajendra Prasad explains that in some months the earning is larger and in some months it is smaller. But that does not alter the average! If you give full meals to a person for three months that does not compensate for his starving for the rest of the year. Herein lies the necessity of computing the actual average monthly income taking the year as a whole. It is strange that Babu Rajendra Prasad does not see this simple truth.

In order to counteract the impression that the actual earning from the Charka is most miserably low Rajendra Prasad has quoted certain curious figures. Thus he gives figures of the income only for those months when the earning is the highest. In another place he has given figures not on the basis of the number of spinners but the number of wheels. Now it is well-known that one wheel is often run by a whole family and the earning by one wheel is not the same as the earning by one person. My average stands on the basis of reports published by the Khaddar organisations themselves (including Babu Rajendra Prasad’s own branch of the
A. I. S. A. in Bihar) and there is no way of escaping out of it. However in order to make my case still stronger I shall take Babu Rajendra Prasad at his word.

He admits in his rejoinder that a spinner gets about an anna and a half a day for about 6 hours of spinning. Thus by working 6 hours a day he earns less than 3 rupees a month! In another article Babu Rajendra Prasad has said that by working whole time on the Charka a person can earn Rs. 5 per month. This is an admitted fact which we must carefully consider in judging the cause of Khadi. One must also remember that even this income from spinning is possible only because Khaddar is being made to sell at a price much higher than mill-cloth. Whatever improvement you may make in spinning by technical skill and talent in organisation the mills will always produce cloth cheaper and at the same time better in quality than Khadi. But let us assume for the sake of argument (though to me this seems to be an impossible assumption) that people will always consent to buy Khaddar in preference to cheaper and better mill-cloth. Then the
monthly income from spinning to a whole-
time spinner will be between five and six
rupees. Can a person decently live on this
income? I put this plain question to my
readers. It is only when bare squalid poverty
is put up as the highest ideal of life that one can
seriously make such a proposal. This is the
mentality underlying Khaddar and Mahatma
Gandhi has expressed it times without number.
Babu Rajendra Prasad stated in an article on
Khaddar that when a person bought a rupee’s
worth of Khadi he should remember that he
was providing for the meals of a poor unknown
sister at least for four or five days. Now
when a rupee’s worth of Khaddar is sold, only
four annas go to the spinner (this is a fact
admitted by expert Khaddar workers and
organisers). Thus in Babu Rajendra Prasad’s
estimation four annas is sufficient to give a
poor unknown sister her meals at least for
four or five days!

It is this tendency of the Indians towards
poverty which is responsible for many of their
evils and the Khaddar movement is emphasis-
ing and feeding this wrong mentality.
Eminent specialists have come to the conclu-
sion that for the proper feeding of a person it is necessary to spend from five to six annas per day. This means at least Rs. 10 per month for food only. Then one must have a sanitary dwelling place, sufficient clothing, treatment in case of disease, provision for the future, recreation, education for children and all such things are absolutely necessary. Can the Charka programme ever hope to ameliorate the condition of the poor according to this decent human standard?

It is no use arguing that the Charka is only a supplementary industry and people are not expected to depend solely on the Charka. If a person earns 5 rupees a month by working whole time on the Charka he cannot earn more than a rupee by working on it as a supplementary occupation and actual facts give even a much lower average. In what way will this insignificant addition to his income improve his economic condition?

But the stock argument of the Khaddarites is that as the average income of an Indian is one anna and seven pies per day an increment of six pies or even three pies is not negligible. Rajendra Prasad has quoted figures to show
that in many cases the income of a family has been raised 11 per cent. or even 28 per cent. When the monthly income of a person is only Rs. 3 or Rs. 4 it is certainly better to make it Rs. 5 or Rs. 6. But should that be our ideal? Should we move heaven and earth only for this? What does it matter that the increment is 50 per cent. or even 100 per cent. as long as the actual total income remains within Rs. 5 or Rs. 6? Instead of defending the meagre earning from the Charka by comparing it with the average low income of our people our aim should be to increase that average so that they may live like human beings and herein comes the necessity of improving our agriculture on scientific lines and introducing large-scale production through machinery. By adding a rupee to the monthly income of our miserable agriculturists we do not ameliorate their condition but only prolong their misery and consign them to slow death and sure dehumanisation.

Babu Rajendra Prasad shows a great confusion of thought when he mentions the Charka as a boon to the stupendous number of the unemployed in our country. He him-
self has admitted that "Charka is not suggested as an alternative but only as a supplementary occupation to agriculture." Thus the Charka according to its own votaries is not meant for the unemployed but for those who have already an occupation in agriculture. But neither as a sole industry nor as a supplementary occupation do we find any efficacy of the Charka.

But the greatest shortcoming in my indictment, says Rajendra Prasad, is "the absence of any feasible and practicable alternative plan for immediate amelioration in however small a degree." My article was expressly written to show only that the Charka brought no immediate amelioration and I think I have sufficiently established my point and Babu Rajendra Prasad himself seems to feel it in the heart of his heart. If he would throw away the hypnotic spell of the Charka which is blinding his vision he will easily find out "feasible and practicable alternative plans for immediate amelioration." Thus instead of trying to thrust the Charka on the agriculturists we should see first what possibilities and scope agriculture itself affords for imme-
diate improvement. Rajendra Prasad does not object to improvement in agriculture, but why does he not try first in that direction leaving aside the fetish of the *Charka*? It is certainly not possible immediately to make our agriculture wholly scientific and up-to-date, but we can immediately begin on that line and that will bring immediate amelioration to a degree not possible by the *Charka*. Apart from such simple improvements as the selection of seeds, the selection of bulls, the prevention of the enormous thoughtless waste of manure and its proper use, the agriculturists may be induced to form themselves into co-operative irrigation societies, co-operative credit societies, co-operative sale and purchase societies and so forth. In this way the villagers will be truly roused and organised. The energy and the money that is now being spent on the *Charka* and the propagation of *Khaddar*, if applied to the organisation of the agriculturists and their training in simple devices and improved methods, will immediately bring much greater profits than they can ever expect from spinning.
If supplementary work is to be given to the agriculturists one should look to such allied occupations as cattle breeding, dairy farming, poultry farming, fish culture, flower culture, fruit culture, sericulture and similar other industries that may be found suitable to local conditions. All this is not absolutely unknown to our agriculturists but a deadly inertia and helplessness has come upon them and they have lost the ancient art and the ancient vigour. These should be revived and modern devices and knowledge applied—on this way lies the true amelioration of the wretched condition of our people.

Side by side with this improvement in agriculture if big factories are gradually started to manufacture various articles of use which we are now importing from other lands, many persons who now depend on agricultural work will go to the factories, and the remaining agriculturists will get more lands and consequently more work. Money will flow from the factories to the villages and improve them, the agricultural products will have a better market and agriculture itself will be improved by the help of machinery. The
agriculturists will get better price for their raw materials and will be able to buy their necessary articles cheaper from the factories.

Rajendra Prasad raises certain objections to large scale production through machinery. The first is the difficulty of finding the necessary capital. But why does he forget that Khaddar work also requires a big capital? It has been necessary to invest 20 lacs of rupees to produce 24 lacs of rupees worth of Khaddar annually! Another objection is that the buying of machinery will involve a great drain on the resources of the country. But what we shall spend on the machinery will stop the drain of crores of rupees that we are spending annually to import mill-made things from other lands—thus it is a gain and not a loss to the country. Gradually machinery also will be manufactured in our own country. Rajendra Prasad’s own province contains sufficient iron and coal to provide all the machinery we need and also to export to our hearts’ content. As regards textile machinery opinion has been expressed by some that the cotton mills that now exist in the country can double their production by
working full time thus supplying almost all the cloth that we now import from foreign lands and at the same time giving employment to twice the number that is now employed in the mills. The last objection raised against big machinery is that India has no outlet for her manufactured goods. But India herself possesses a market which attracts the greed of all the industrial nations of the world. This is the unique advantage of India that she possesses inexhaustible raw materials and natural resources and an almost unlimited market within her own borders. It is really surprising that our eminent men like Babu Rajendra Prasad cannot appreciate these simple facts of our economic life.

He ends his rejoinder by repeating a personal attack on me that I speak without experience and without knowledge. Begging humbly to be excused for this personal reference I must say in self-defence that in the matter of experience and knowledge of Khaddar work, I yield to none. For six great years of my life I did my utmost for Khaddar. Even while undergoing imprison-
ment under the Bengal Ordinance I religiously devoted one hour daily to spinning to see for myself what power the Charka actually possessed. Yes, I tried the Charka in every possible way and at last found it wanting. It is not a novice, not an idle critic that speaks here. I was the one man in India who carried the loin-cloth even to the citadel of the bureaucracy. Covering my loin only with a rough piece of Khadi I appeared before the Governor in the Bengal Council though I had been warned by the President that His Excellency would take it as a direct insult to him. But on that day the whole of India was behind me. Now I know that the better part of political India is against me in the matter of Khaddar, still I do not recoil in the least as I feel that truth is on my side. As long as the people of India will continue to give me a hearing I will warn them with all the force and emphasis I can command that the Khaddar movement is not only useless, it is positively harmful, it truly stands in the way of the political, economical and spiritual progress of India.
VI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

It is said that I hold in contempt an addition of an anna or so to the villagers income through spinning. There people misunderstand me. I do not grudge the addition of even a single pie by spinning provided it is practicable and provided that by the same amount of energy and money we spend for this we cannot give them a much larger addition. I have proved by facts and figures that those two conditions are not satisfied. It is admitted that the earning by the Charka is miserable. Apart from this important and vital aspect of the question I have shown that even this miserable earning is possible only because certain people consent to buy Khaddar leaving aside much cheaper and better mill-cloth. This however is practicable only within very narrow limits and for a limited period.
This is a most important aspect of the question to which due attention is not paid by the advocates of Khaddar. They continually harp on the deep poverty and the enforced idleness of our people, on the ease with which the Charka can be adopted and learned by every body, on the convenience of working it at any time and at any place. All this is granted. But of what avail is all this facility of the Charka if you cannot sell the Charka-made yarn? This is the difficulty which with the advent of mills made the immemorial Charka a relic of the past. Readers of Young India will find there an interesting account of the attempt that is being made in Mysore to revive the Charka industry. There the spinning of yarn had died out less than 20 years ago "because there was no demand for the yarn." Some of the spinners were willing to re-start working the Charka 'if raw cotton was advanced to them and an undertaking was given that the yarn would be purchased.' The All-India Spinners' Association had to give that undertaking before the work could start there. This is the condition everywhere. If you
undertake to dispose of the yarn, if the people of India consent to buy *Khaddar* ‘at any price’ as suggested by Mahatma Gandhi then of course our poor people can earn something, however miserable, by spinning. But is this practicable? Some men for some time may consent to do this, but the sheer force of economic pressure will compel the *Charka* yarn to recede before the rising tide of mill-yarn and mill-cloth. If by an Aladdin’s lamp you can stop the mills not only in India but all over the world, only then the *Charka* will supply a universal want and again stand on its own legs and come to stay.

Some people raise the political question of the boycott of British cloth and observe that *Khaddar* is necessary to complete the boycott. They admit that ‘with propaganda and enterprise’ the Indian mills can supply three-fourths of our requirements. But do they really believe that *Khaddar* will be able to supply the rest in the near future? One fourth of our need means roughly about 45 crores of rupees’ worth of cloth. And after an almost superhuman effort of eight years by our national workers and organisations the
country has been able to produce annually not certainly more than thirty lakhs of rupees' worth of Khaddar. That is certainly not a practical proposition to complete the cloth boycott with the help of the Charka. If we are in earnest we can immediately complete the boycott by helping and stimulating our mills to produce their utmost and by supplementing the deficit with imports from countries other than Britain; only this is a politically practical proposition. With sufficient backing by the people and the Government of the country the Indian mills, I believe, can very soon supply all the cloth we need. But our alien Government is more concerned with the interests of Manchester and it is all the more necessary that the people of India should stand by the mills at this critical time when by the step-motherly treatment of the Government they have been placed in a very dangerous predicament.

But what is the lead our National Congress is going to give to the country in this vital matter? When I wrote in the Chronicle that Khaddar stood in the way of our economical progress I did not know that another positive
proof of it would be forthcoming so soon. The authorities of the Calcutta Congress Exhibition have refunded the money advanced by the various Indian mills to hire stalls in the exhibition. This they have done not because they were convinced that mill-cloth should be excluded and they expressly said so, but because they wanted to placate the Khaddarites for political reasons! The Khaddarites know at heart that Khaddar cannot stand before mill cloth; they have succeeded in excluding their formidable rival from the exhibition grounds, but will they be similarly successful in excluding foreign cloth from the country? Certainly not. The Indian National Congress may help to paralyse the Indian cotton mills by declaring Non-co-operation with them at a time when they most need its co-operation, but their place will be immediately taken up, not certainly by the Charka, but by foreign mills, especially those of Lancashire.

Not by reason, not by moral persuasion but by the sheer threat of boycott at this critical political juncture the Khaddarites have coerced the authorities of the Calcutta
Exhibition against their express will to exclude mill-yarn and even mill-cloth made of Indian yarn from their show. The *Khaddarites* may have thus scored an apparent victory, but in reality they have suffered a moral defeat and that is always the beginning of the end.