Foreword

This year India enters into a new phase of her long career. Though there were certain democratic institutions in the dim past, never before has she tried democracy on the Western pattern with all the machinery of the ballot box, the party system, and government by the people. Never before has the idea of a federated India, in which all component parts share, come so near to realization. There were those who prophesied disaster—culminating in blood, internecine strife, and possibly chaos. It is a view which no educated Indian shares. But there were also those who thought that she would gradually slip back into ancient ways, reviving or perpetuating customs which are rooted in the traditions of a bygone age.

Mr. Stanley Rice's book does not touch politics directly, but in attempting to explain some of our customs and how they arose, he does throw light upon the problems of to-day. For customs, even those which are unsuited to modern conditions, must have seemed good to those who lived at the time of their birth, and no one should hastily judge them who has not at least an intelligent idea of their object. The theme of the book is highly controversial. No one can adduce exact proof, for many of our customs have arisen silently and there is no record of their inception or early growth. Mr. Rice cannot therefore expect everyone to agree with him or to accept all his conclusions. But he has served under me for a period in a position of responsibility. I know him to be a conscientious worker with much sympathy for all things Indian, and he has always been interested in the subjects of which he writes.

It has long been my endeavour to do away with the restrictions which caste imposes upon social intercourse and I am happy to think that my efforts have not been unsuccessful. The idea that men cannot enjoy the pleasure of conversation while partaking of food and drink lest they should incur some kind of pollution, has long ceased to have any usefulness, if ever it had any. In Baroda the educated classes,
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for the most part, have no scruples in this respect. Restrictions on marriage present a difficult problem, for they are so very deeply rooted that compulsion is not to be thought of. My own feeling is that the wisest solution is to open the way by legislation removing restrictions and preventing victimization, and then to allow education to bring about a gradual improvement. Child marriage is another custom which is gradually becoming modified by the force of modern circumstances and in the light of modern knowledge. Indeed, the position of women, in which the Maharani and I are deeply interested, is rapidly changing, and with the change the estimation in which women are held.

Untouchability is generally allowed to be a stain on our record of progress. But here again it is exceedingly difficult to eradicate the habits of centuries. It is at least a plausible conjecture that the custom arose from early religious ideas of pollution carried to extremes. The extent of its survival even in these modern days is, however, remarkable. I am doing what I can for these unfortunates, but unhappily it has to be admitted that progress in the villages, all over India, though perceptible, is disappointingly slow. To this and to other aspects of social legislation I have given much attention of late, but there are limits to what a ruler can do. It certainly cannot be laid to his charge when the people do not freely respond to what is intended for their good. But it does emphasize how important is the growth of education in the development of a broader outlook.

I am myself a Hindu, possibly because I was born one, but I hold that the same fundamental truths are inherent in all religions. Provided a man brings those truths to bear upon his relationships with his fellow men, I care not what religion or creed he professes. There is, however, much misconception about the nature of the Hindu religion. As it is, it is never taught to the people and they pick it up by hearsay or tradition. It would be a very good thing if they could be taught the history of their religion and enabled to compare it with other religions. This would broaden the minds of the people, lead to greater liberalism of thought, and stimulate progress. Mr. Rice has tried in this book to
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explain the leading tenets of Hinduism which, contrary to a popular belief in the West, have nothing whatever to do with idolatry. He has done so in simple language, and has wisely not confused the issues by entering into complexities. What is needed by readers such as those for whom Mr. Rice has written, is an understanding of fundamentals, for no one who is ignorant of them can judge Hinduism.

SAYAJI RAO GAEKWAR

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