Dissertation the Third.

The Prospects of Hindu Caste.

It has been said with some truth, that caste promotes cleanliness and order, and is, in a certain sense, a bond of union among all classes of the Hindu community. Yet surely these ends might have been attained in a simpler manner, and by a less antagonistic process. The invention of a project so wonderfully elaborate and intricate,—a project for bringing into absolute subjection two hundred millions of the human species by robbing them of their independence, and by imposing on them an intolerable burden of endless and meaningless ceremonies, for the regulation of themselves personally, of their families, and of their tribes,—a project for ruling them with a rod of iron, and for introducing among them an all-pervading despotism, from which there should be no appeal,—a project founded on unnatural principle, by which family should be pitted against family, and class against class, to the utter destruction of all mutual friendship and sympathy,—a project which should bring lasting honour and glory to one or two great tribes, and lasting dishonour, reproach, and contempt in varying degrees to all the rest,—the invention of a project like this, so prodigious and far reaching, was not needed to accomplish such useful and beneficent aims. That another and very different object was in view from the very first, is abundantly manifest. This object was neither more nor less than to exalt the Brahman, to feed his pride, and to minister to his self-will. It was by no means his purpose to do good to the subordinate castes; and if they have received any incidental benefit from caste, such benefit was foreign to his intention, and is as the small dust of the balance when weighed against its pernicious fruits.

Caste is sworn enemy to human happiness. Laws, customs, social compacts, and the sweet acts of self-denial so frequently practised between man and man, are intended to promote the welfare of mankind, to increase the sum of human joy, to make homes tranquil, and to strengthen all the ties by which one family is bound to another. Caste was instituted for a different purpose. It seeks to sever natural ties, to alienate friends, to harden the heart, to stifle sym-
pathy, to increase pride and self-esteem, to generate misanthropy, to repress the kindly affections, and to destroy mutual confidence and trust, without which society is beset with stings, and becomes a stranger to genuine comfort and peace.

Caste is opposed to intellectual freedom. It stereotypes thought. The rules of barbaric ages, of a nation in its infancy, are still enforced with unswerving rigour, though the nation has arrived at manhood ages since. Learned men, professors of colleges, leaders of public opinion, counsellors, judges, magistrates, editors of papers, and a multitude of other persons of talent and education, are bound, hand and foot, by the most childish and inane customs, from which, if they deviate by a hair's breadth, they are in danger of excommunication from the society in which they move, and of which they are ornaments, and of being utterly abandoned by their closest and dearest relatives, as well as by all professed friends. Moreover, unless they be of the same caste, they can hold no social intercourse of an intimate character with one another. Although they may be on terms of friendship with each other, yet they cannot intermarry, cannot partake of food together, cannot therefore meet at the festive board, and are in fact much more mutually estranged than if they belonged to separate nationalities, for this circumstance would admit of occasional inter-communion, of a nature not permitted by caste.

Caste sets its face sternly against progress. Social improvement, abandonment of old landmarks, advancement in civilization, reform of absurd and antiquated national habits, repression of follies, striking out new paths, searching after wisdom, and walking in her ways,—caste will have none of them. Caste abhors change, and compels the Hindu, under threat of its perpetual ban, to be a laughing stock to the whole world. That the thoughtful and educated men of India should so patiently endure its tyranny—a tyranny the most relentless, and at the same time the most senile and unreasonable, ever conceived by the human mind in its greatest corruptness, is a phenomenon unparalleled in the history of our race. That Englishmen, after having ruled over this vast country for upwards of a century, should, even in the persons of its most refined and accomplished representatives, rarely have been able to approach beyond the official presence of polished natives of rank and education,—should have held genuine social intercourse with only a very few of them,—should seldom have known the most friendly more than in a formal manner, and from a certain measured distance,—should never have felt, even with the most sympathetic, a perfect oneness of spirit, or have received from any one overtures of geniality, corresponding to their own, such as true friends cherish towards one another, and all because of
the reign of caste-terror and superstition, under which Hindus of every grade live, is a circumstance which proves the malicious potency and infinitely subtle and fatal fascination of this social syren.

Caste makes no compromises. The most ignorant Hindu is able to compel the obedience of the most intelligent. No shortcomings are suffered for an instant. After observing forty-nine silly punctilios, which have been handed down by a hundred generations, the omission of the fiftieth brings with it condign punishment. A man may break all the laws of the decalogue with impunity, but if he touches grease or tallow, or drinks water from the hands of a man of inferior grade to himself, he exposes himself to the condemnation of his brethren and to its attendant ills.

The ties of caste are stronger than those of religion. A man may be a bad Hindu, so far as the practice of his religious duties goes; but caste rules must be minutely observed or he will have to reap the consequences of his neglect. With many Hindus the highest form of religious observance is the complete fulfilment of the claims of caste; and most of them conceive of sin as a breach of caste discipline rather than of moral law. I have frequently remarked with much astonishment and pain, that a Hindu, in his daily life, places caste on a higher platform than religion, and pays much greater heed to the sanctions of the one than of the other. In fact, caste is his real religion, for the sacred feelings and sense of duty which religion should inspire, are inspired much more commonly by it. So that it is quite true, and I would add distressingly true, that caste is inseparable from religion, and is very often its chief and most conspicuous feature. I have repeatedly known a Hindu, when pressed not to perform some trivial caste duty, as it really was a matter of no consequence, and no one would know of his neglect, and the omission would certainly be to his immediate profit, make the reply, that although none of his friends would know of it, yet that God would, and this thought has restrained him from yielding to the temptation. This illustrates the moral influence of caste, and shows how it occupies in the Hindu's mind the place of religion, and oppresses his conscience with its pseudo moral and sacred obligations.

Caste is intensely selfish. The object of each separate caste is to seek the welfare of its own small and often insignificant community, without the least regard to the interest of all others in its neighbourhood. Every caste thinks only of itself, is an empire in itself, is dependent on, and associated with, no other caste, cares nothing for any other caste, seeks diligently its own prosperity, and is utterly unmoved by the adversity which may befall a hundred other
castes in its immediate vicinity. A Hindu does not live for himself, but for his caste. He will look upon men and women in the utmost distress with perfect callousness when he knows that they do not belong to his caste.

This extraordinary and anomalous institution sits as an incubus on the Hindu race. Their social blood has been poisoned, and their social life has been strangled, by the deadly sting and foul embraces of this serpent. It is impossible that there should be any true and widespread public opinion, or any strong united action, among Hindus, until this monstrous evil has been destroyed. Education, Christianity, and a thousand beneficial influences from the west, may be, as they are, affecting the minds of the people powerfully in every direction,—who may be, as they are, manifestly becoming more civilized and enlightened from year to year; but all these good influences with their gracious results are being constantly and resolutely thwarted by the operation of this pernicious and destructive agency.

Not merely in domestic, but also in moral and political matters, and, in short, in all the concerns of the Hindus connected with their progress in every possible way, the great and almost overwhelming obstacle is caste. It fosters jealousies, foments faction, prevents union, and thus represses the natural growth of the nation, and keeps it stunted and unfruitful. I would ask any thoughtful Hindu, whether he believes any practicable measures for the promotion of some general scheme of action whereby the interests of the entire community may be advanced, can be adopted so long as caste wields its present authority. The Hindus are without any mutual bond, are a mere rope of sand, while divided and subdivided in their plans and purposes by the incessantly clashing antagonisms of caste. They cannot trust one another,—they can have no faith in disinterested patriotism,—they cannot combine together on a large scale in any matter of national importance,—they can, in fact, do nothing extensive, either great, or good, or honorable, until they rid themselves of this social enemy and pest.

One important and very hopeful sign, as a presage of the coming reformation, is distinctly visible in the strongly expressed wishes of a large proportion of the educated and intelligent members of Native Society. The desire for a radical change, cherished by many of the leaders of Hindu thought, although their number in the aggregate may be comparatively few, is of incalculable value. Such desire is essential before any movement can take place, and this is the very class of people who can best of all awaken it in others, and can transmit it to the various grades above and below them.
But although the desire for a change is acknowledged by most persons of culture, yet it is necessary to add at once, that it is very differently evinced and acted upon. The desire, excellent as it is, and at the outset most urgently required, is not sufficient. And here national timidity, national hesitation, and national stagnation become formidable opponents. Many are afraid to talk on the subject, except to Englishmen and to other persons of the same views as themselves, lest they should beget suspicion in the minds of their strict Hindu relatives and friends. They very seldom, therefore, speak on the matter; and although convinced of the folly and evil of caste, are not in the slightest degree inclined to take any step, certainly no initial step, for its eradication. Moreover, they have been brought up to the habit of leaving things as they are, of allowing all subjects, good and bad, to look after themselves. They are accustomed to drift with the tide, and are quite contented with doing so.

Now it is plain that such persons are almost useless in any effort that may be made to counterwork and undermine such a well-fortified and exceedingly powerful institution as caste. They may in their hearts desire success to any skilful measures which may be devised for its overthrow; but it is too evident that they will hold themselves aloof from them, until success is being actually achieved. Such is clearly their intention. And yet these persons, whatever their age, and to whatever class of native society they may belong, must be told in the simplest language it is possible to use, that they are cowards, and cannot morally shirk the responsibility of their passive unconcern. That is the opinion which all who know them must and do form respecting them. Doubtless, men of their feeble calibre will care little for such a judgment on their conduct. Nevertheless, it is necessary they should know, that not to raise a finger for the welfare of their country, and though perceiving the gigantic ills and errors which oppress it, and convinced too, by the quickening influence and enlightening energy of the education which they have received, that it is their supreme duty to lift their voices against them, yet not to do so, but to be satisfied with calmly looking on and watching the current of events, implies a condition of meanness on the one hand, and incapacity on the other, and therefore of total unfitness to be ranked a whit higher in the scale of civilization than their uneducated, superstitious, and caste-loving neighbours.

But our hope, and comfort too, lie in the fact, that all are not so. While in India the educated class is continually increasing, there is good reason to believe that the active opponents of caste are increasing likewise. But progress is made in this respect in a greater ratio in some parts of the country
than in others. Bengalees occupy the van in this movement. To their honour, be it said, they have long been the leaders of public opinion in India. It is they who first formed it; it is they who chiefly sustain it. In them we perceive an amount of active patriotism and genuine earnestness not met with in any other Indian nationality except perhaps the Parsees. Sometimes their enthusiasm becomes excessive, and they are apt to indulge in statements respecting their rulers, and their relation to them, by no means honourable to their judgment, or to their sense of gratitude for the great liberty they enjoy under the British Government. But their inquisitiveness and outspokenness are infinitely preferable to a condition of lifelessness and dullness. And the buoyancy and zeal arising from the quickening influences of education on acute and intelligent minds, producing occasionally strange errors of opinion and singular hallucinations, if not to be admired, are nevertheless to be excused, for it is quite certain that time and fuller knowledge will correct them.

Many, perhaps I should say most, educated Bengalees have the courage of their convictions. Their thoughts wander rapidly over the broad fields of politics, religion, philosophy, and social economy, which subjects they discuss with keenness and ability, searching eagerly into the latest results of European investigation and criticism. With the same haste they have been ready to adopt and to practise the discoveries they have made. They have thrown overboard the theories and dogmas of their ancestors, and have bravely entered on new paths. To the amazement of rigid Hindus they have sternly refused to conform to old superstitions, because education and reflection have revealed to them their illusiveness and absurdity. They may have acted too suddenly before, it may be, they had sufficiently tested and weighed their new ideas. But, be that as it may, an intellectual and religious revolution has been effected during the last fifty years in the educated ranks of Bengalee society, the most striking feature of which has been the determination and resolution which Bengalees have shown in carrying out their new convictions.

And what shall be said of their treatment of caste? Confessedly this is the strongest foe they have had to encounter, and is one which has put their principles and courage to the test. The other enemies were chiefly theoretical and speculative, this was thoroughly practical; those assailed the mind, especially the imaginative faculty; these had a living reality, almost like that of material objects. Some who grappled with the first set of adversaries, quailed before this, or compromised themselves by a partial surrender, or entered on a course of duplicity, resenting caste assumptions in secret, while publicly
professing their complete submission to its claims. Yet, notwithstanding the hesitations of these persons, there remains a noble band of earnest and valiant men, who have broken away entirely from the bondage of caste, and have gallantly hidden defiance to its utmost resentment. Their number is still small, but they are individually possessed of great energy,—are fearless,—are of high education and superior ability,—are consciously representative men,—are resolutely bent on carrying out their new found principles—and are already too important and influential a community to be frowned upon and spurned, or treated with contumely. Rigid Hindus feel that it is a serious business to break a lance with them, and prefer to leave them alone. The trimmers, however, who take both sides, come in for hard knocks and many bruises; and, persecuted and in constant terror of excommunication, suppress their sentiments, and conform, though with a bad grace, to all the punctilious demands which members of their offended castes are prompt to impose on them.

Some of the caste-emancipated Bengalees have a character for adopting European usages. In our judgment, it is far better for natives of India to adhere to their own customs than to adopt those of foreigners. Nevertheless, they are surely at liberty to do as they please. If any class have strength of intellect and will sufficient to abandon caste at any and all risk, we may rest assured it will have enough of the same qualities for its future guidance. A spirit of eclecticism having been produced among the members of that class they will not be satisfied with the mere renunciation of foolish customs and exploded opinions, but will speedily form other habits in accordance with their new ideas. In carrying out their purpose we must not be surprised that their minds take a wide range, and that they adopt views derived from observation on a multitude of heterogeneous objects. In this manner, Bengalees, who have released themselves from caste, in seeking to establish for themselves new forms of social life, are not to be blamed, that I see, for taking as their models the most civilized, intellectual, and advanced people with whom they are acquainted. Nor is it a matter of astonishment, though it is of regret, that they should be prone to copy their bad qualities and habits, as well as their good.

Did we not possess the example of these progressive Bengalees, we might have been inclined to pay some attention to the manifest opinion of Hindus of the old school, that while they might abandon their religion they would never surrender their caste. But an important commencement has been made, and that by the most enlightened and best educated portion of the native community. And it is satisfactory to know, that the work of reformation is
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proceeding steadily among the ranks of students in all the numerous colleges and schools of Bengal. Many of them may not be in a position to follow out their principles to their practical conclusion; but the seeds of a great social change are already sown in their minds, which are destined in after years to spring up and bring forth abundant fruit.

Moreover, this readiness of the Bengalee to follow his convictions in a practical manner, has caused his mind to react upon itself very singularly. Purposes, whether for good or for evil, if accomplished, frequently give birth to others. And the human understanding no sooner finds itself successful in its projects, than it instinctively conceives others; and so the original stimulus being continually increased produces an ever-augmenting series of results. Thus it has been with the Bengalee. The very effort to deliver himself from his social captivity has had a healthy effect upon his mind. The effort itself was the product of previous thought, which had been awakened by education acting on an inquisitive and busy intellect. Excited by western ideas derived from reading and study, he has endeavoured to put in practice the new conceptions he has formed on many matters, and thereby a fresh excitement has been imparted to him. Or his condition may perhaps be represented as one of intellectual excitement, which, having once been generated, and having been nourished by its achievements, has gone on continually increasing. Unquestionably, at the present time, the educated classes of Bengal, especially those persons who having imbibed the true spirit of knowledge have been anxious faithfully to follow its leadings, are in a state of extraordinary mental excitement and restlessness. Englishmen looking on are very apt to suppose that much of this mental state of the Bengalee arises from, and indicates, presumptuousness and conceit. Hence he is commonly spoken against and misjudged, his faults are exaggerated, his motives are distorted, and the very efforts he is making to improve himself are held up to ridicule. Now all this is most unfair and reprehensible. Considering the entire revolution which he is undergoing, intellectually and socially, it would be a miracle if the Bengalee did not make many mistakes, and did not often place himself in a ludicrous position in the opinion of hyper-critical and fault-finding Englishmen. The whole circle of European learning has been suddenly opened out to him,—he has been called upon to alter or abandon his former notions on many important topics in the wide range of human knowledge which he has studied, in the new aspects in which they have been presented to him with all the intensity of his most active mind,—he has found himself transformed into another being, utterly discontented with the
stagnation of most of his fellow-countrymen; and is it at all remarkable that many of his ideas should be crude, and that, for the most part, he should fail to master his situation, and that his situation should master him? All his shortcomings are remediable. Knowledge, like strong food, is slow of digestion; but give it time, and the process will be accomplished. The Bengalee has a glorious future before him—a future in which, if I mistake not, he will shine conspicuously as the leader of public opinion and of intellectual and social progress among all the varied nationalities of the Indian Empire. When he attains to the full stature of himself,—when his mind has become thoroughly matured,—when he perceives the true bearings of the knowledge he has acquired, and in his person and life exhibits that advanced civilization, which he only now hears about, and reads about, but which has not yet, except to a very meagre extent, passed into his being,—when he has thus been refined in the crucible of wisdom, and has become a genuine lover of virtue, and a sturdy champion of the truth, then he will occupy that exalted position in India, as a counsellor and guide to its teeming inhabitants, which his talents already indicate to be that which he ought to fill.

I have dwelt upon the character of the Bengalee in order to show, that being at the head of the party of progress in India he has set an example of independent thought which it would be to the interest and honour of the other nationalities to follow. In Benares and other cities are many men of intelligence and education, who are capable of being leaders of their fellow-countrymen in the abandonment of superstitions and the adoption of new ideas and habits, conformable to the education they have received, and the enlightenment their minds have experienced. Like the Bengalees, of whom I have been speaking, they have knowledge, but strange to say, unlike them, they have little or no conviction, no strength of character, no resolution, no clear perception, and no consciousness that increased knowledge implies increased responsibility. With all their weight of learning, the possession of which enables them to carry off University degrees and honors, they are perfectly content to mingle among the most superstitious and ignorant Hindus, to do as they do, to obey their foolish dictum as law, and to have no other aim in life than to conform to the most rigid usages of their ancestors. I would say to all such persons, that education is thrown away upon them, and that they continue to perform with apparent heartiness the most senseless and preposterous customs of the most degraded of their fellow-countrymen,—customs which were originated in the infancy and imbecility of their race; they deserve, so long as they continue such
abject cowards, to be ranked among that dishonoured class. Let them not misunderstand me however, for I speak as their sincere friend, not as their enemy. Personally, as I know from long experience, many of them are estimable persons, worthy of all respect and admiration. But so far as their influence extends, as far as they undertake any practical measures for elevating either themselves or their fellow-countrymen in the scale of civilization, and for delivering them from the debasing prejudices and customs of former generations, am I not correct in designating them as mere ciphers, as ornamental, and yet useless, members of the great Hindu society in which they move, and of which they form so important a part?

The question has often been put in England, as well as in India, what has been the real result on the Hindu mind of all the influences which, during the last hundred years, have been playing upon it, derived from English education, English rule and laws, the material improvements introduced into the country, liberty, and above all, Christianity? Have they, to any great extent, remodelled the Hindu? Have they taken the place of the bad influences which wrought his ruin in the past? Has he yielded himself to them, to be recast in their mould? Or has he remained supremely indifferent, his mind and soul hard as adamant in resistance to them? Or has he partly submitted to them, and partly held himself back, determined not in reality, but only nominally, and in words merely, to alter his habits and ways? Great expectations have been formed by Christians, philanthropists, and advanced thinkers of every school. Some have hoped for the rapid conversion of the Hindus to Christianity; others who cared little for this result, have looked forward to the spread of civilization among them and to their increased general enlightenment; while others still have eagerly anticipated that education would work wonders, and that all who were well educated would be filled with wisdom, and would display in their lives the fruit of sound knowledge. These well-wishers, to whatever class they belonged, have been, for the most part, grievously disappointed. While a considerable number of Hindus have embraced Christianity, and the ratio of conversions is becoming greater every year, yet they have been chiefly drawn from the lower castes, the outcasts, and the aboriginal tribes, and only a small, though a very influential proportion, from the educated classes. But the Christian results are superior in kind and in extent to all others. Vast and fundamental changes are, no doubt, visible throughout all classes of the Hindu community, and a spirit of inquiry on every conceivable subject has been awakened in all directions. The people are painfully conscious that the reasons
for observing the superstitions and the semi-barbarous customs of the past, are being, one by one, exploded. They are in a state of dissatisfaction with themselves. They feel that their knowledge is better and truer than that of their predecessors, and acknowledge that they are subject to its demands and claims. Yet what is their actual condition? The truth is, practically they are only in the initial stage of great national changes of any kind. By training and habit they love their surroundings, no matter how anomalous and absurd they may appear to foreigners, who, they know, having been taught differently, have no sympathy with them. And as for the educated classes, who ought to be promoters of progress to their fellow-countrymen, and guides to them on the road they should traverse, they are of all classes the most disappointing. They have acquired an enormous amount of knowledge, and there are thousands and tens of thousands of Hindus who may justly be regarded as well-educated men. Yet how little have they assimilated the knowledge they have stored up in their minds! There it lies in heaps, as corn in a granary; but it continues, for the most part, in its original crudeness. It should be received into both mind and heart in such a manner as to change and become a part of their very nature, just as food entering the stomach nourishes the entire body, and becomes indissolubly associated with the living organism, sustaining and strengthening every one of its numerous functions. The brain of the Hindu is wonderfully receptive, and only slightly assimilative. He has little idea of putting in practice the learning which has excited his intellect so powerfully. He is learned without being instructed; he knows much without being wise; he understands the meaning of what he reads without feeling its force—without realizing its living and transforming influence. He is thus a strange paradox, and exhibits the phenomenon of one who has been taught, but who has failed to be instructed in the highest sense. Hence his civilization is on a lower level than that of many less educated men in England and on the Continent of Europe, who have not a whit more knowledge in their heads, yet who strive to turn to practical use that which they possess.

The reason of this laggardness on the part of educated Hindus, with of course some bright exceptions chiefly found in Bengal, to whom reference has ready been made, is chiefly two-fold—old habits and timidity. It must be extremely hard for persons brought up from infancy to customs and ways of a repressive character, altogether opposed to the manners of other countries, while surrounded by relatives and friends who insist on strict conformity to them, to adopt a totally different course. And the difficulty is increased ten-
fold by the natural hesitation to appear singular, by the dread of offending those whom they esteem and venerate, and by the apprehension of being made to suffer socially for the maintenance of new principles. It strikes me very strongly, that Englishmen do not rightly understand or sufficiently appreciate the position of the educated Hindu in regard to these matters. We are too apt to imagine, that it is an easy thing for a man to abandon the time-worn paths so familiar to him, and roughly insist on his braving all the consequences of an honest and thorough avowal of his change of principles. The Hindu is encompassed by the most tremendous barriers. Moreover, he has no will of his own, is not an individual in the French and English sense,—is not his own master in any sense at all. He is a slave to custom, caste, antiquity, and a thousand strange ceremonies established in the primitive simplicity and ignorance of his race.

With everything, however, that can be said in favour of educated Hindus, it nevertheless remains true that, for the most part, they lack honesty of purpose in the pursuit of knowledge, and are devoid of that conscientiousness, that willingness to make use of what they study, without which learning becomes vanity and delusion. They shrink from the responsibilities of knowledge, and strive to regard it as of no intrinsic value, but as means of obtaining good situations and of promoting their worldly aggrandizement. It is no wonder, therefore, that with such false aims a very large number of educated natives in this country are imbued with a cursed spirit of perfunctoriness, and have little heart for anything really noble and good.

Pride of caste, the prime evil which has existed from the very formation of Hindu society, is at the bottom of all the mischief of which I am now speaking. Education tends to destroy the unnatural social distinctions which caste fosters! and consequently many educated persons, knowing this tendency, fight against it, just because it is so sweet to a man absorbed in his own selfishness to feel that he is superior by caste-position to a multitude of acquaintances around him, belonging to twenty different castes. Indeed, most men of the Brahmanical order, and of other high castes, adopt their peculiar caste-title, and use them as honorific surnames, by which they prefer to be designated.

On the whole of this subject I would venture to make the following observations:—Firstly, so long as educated Hindus are fascinated by caste notions and customs, their minds will remain stunted and stiff, and will reap very little of the most precious fruit that education yields. Caste paralyses the intellect, stifles the soul's generous inspirations, trains the inner eye to gaze on self and
nothing else, and perverts the noble end of human knowledge. This is fully acknowledged by advanced Bengalees, who angrily spurn from them with a kind of loathing the noxious thing, which has narrowed their understandings, and, like a worm, has eaten away their heart’s sympathies and patriotism. Educated Hindus, and all other Hindus who are anxious for their own and their country’s progress, will have to make their choice in this matter, either to retain caste and with it all the prejudices pride, barrenness, and mental impotence, through which India has been blighted during the dark ages of the past, or to hurl it from them, and, cultivating brotherly love towards all men, to regard Hindus of every grade as forming one family, or to aim at the elevation and enlightenment of high and low, rich and poor, to cherish earnest thoughts for the improvement of the debased and miserable outcasts, so long neglected and despised as an integral portion of the Hindu family, and, thus to feel the glow of hope for their country’s freedom, and for a complete deliverance from all the social evils which now oppress it, burning in their breasts.

Secondly, already a struggle between the castes has commenced, and is plainly manifest to lookers on. Knowledge, at all events, is no respecter of persons, and if imparted to all who seek it, the question comes, who will win? In former times knowledge, meaning Sanskrit literature, was restricted to the Brahmanical caste; yet that was not the fault of knowledge, but of the Brahmanas. And now that in this later age knowledge is wider, and at the same time perfectly free, it offers its blessings to whomsoever will accept them. The Brahman, therefore, or any other caste, has no special privileges. All are equal runners in the race; and victory will be to them, not whose lineage is derived from the gods, not who by birth are nobles, princes, and warriors, not whose wealth gives them undue influence and authority, but who run the best. The start began some fifty years ago when the Rev. Dr. Duff laid the foundations of a correct system of education in the establishment of the Free Church Institution in Calcutta. But a fresh and very powerful impetus was imparted to the runners in the year 1854, when the famous Despatch on education reached this country, and was speedily followed by the creation of the three Universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, the establishment of important colleges in the three Presidencies, and the offer of liberal pecuniary assistance to non-Government colleges and schools. Since then the race has become keen, and a great many castes have entered into competition. What the final results will be, is not at present clear. Yet it is very palpable even now, that the Brahmans will not have it all their own way, as they once had, when they kept the entire com-
munity of Hindus ignorant except themselves. To single out only one caste, the Kayasths, or writer caste,—although other castes might receive very honorable mention likewise,—in intelligence, earnestness, perseverance, love of knowledge, and ardour in its pursuit, the Kayasths stand at least on an equality with the Brahmans. Indeed, in some places, they have surpassed the latter, and the results which they have achieved, owing not to their superior intellect, but to the greater persistency and heartiness with which they have entered on their studies.

Thirdly, one of the most hopeful and encouraging signs of the times in India, is the indisputable fact that the principal castes are awakening to life. Hitherto the Brahmans alone have been distinguished for intelligence. But now, under the multitudinous exciting influences affecting the people generally, unknown before the British occupation of the country, they are being powerfully moved, and the latent intelligence of a hundred castes is beginning to pierce through the thick mists of dullness which had settled upon them, and to shine forth conspicuously. This welling-up, this intellectual revival, this spirit of inquiry visible on all sides, is the chief characteristic of the Hindus of our time. It is a most healthy sign. I cannot imagine one more so. I can pass over a great many follies committed through partial knowledge, and can forgive numerous indiscretions, the result of zeal unwisely directed, because I know that they are themselves indications of a vital energy, which was before non-existent, and that they will in the course of time vanish away, and be succeeded by just and well-matured thoughts generated by accurate knowledge. The desire for this knowledge, now becoming so universal among all grades of Hindus, will not—indeed cannot—remain merely such. It must of necessity enter on another stage. The information acquired on many topics, although, through the strong obstinacy and opposition of the Hindu mind in its undeveloped state, badly digested, or hardly digested at all, is nevertheless not impotent, nor received in vain. It is slowly yet surely changing the Hindu, is revolutionizing all his thoughts on every subject of human interest. In his eagerness to know, he commits egregious and ludicrous mistakes. He is handling every subject, sacred and profane; and a spirit of criticism has been evoked which, in the opinion of strict Hindus of the old school, he is exhibiting in a very dangerous manner. Yet this, in truth, is the first step to perfect freedom of the understanding—a step which not a few Hindus of very different castes have already taken.

The question of all questions, most important at this time, is—what will be
the result of this general mental awakening in India? Let the Brahman interest himself in the answer to be given, for it will be very momentous in its relation to him. Herefore he has won easily in every intellectual race, but he must now look to his spurs, for in future he will have many competitors and rivals. And he may regard it as certain, that none of his dogmas and theories, which, in previous ages his predecessors imposed on Hindus of all grades for their guidance, will go unchallenged. They must submit themselves to the closest scrutiny, of which the mind of India is capable. That mind has become sceptical, and dares to doubt. It has entered on the initial and most necessary stage of reformation, that of doubting. To onlookers it seems in a condition of chaotic confusion. But it is not so. It has simply released itself from its old moorings, and knows not the direction in which it is drifting. It wishes to believe, but knows not what. It has become secretly conscious of having been long under the bondage of illusion and deception, and while not yet sufficiently strong to effect its complete emancipation, is filled with suspicion both of its former teachers and its new ones. The Hindu is gradually gaining courage, but his courage is still far behind his convictions, and hence he hesitates. This is the chief and prominent reason why many Hindus do not embrace Christianity, although convinced of its truth—do not altogether abandon superstition, although conscious of its hollowness—do not give up caste, although satisfied of its inhumanity and disastrous results—and do not step out from the crowd to begin life anew. Every educated Hindu I meet is at heart a reformer—a reformer in the widest sense; but he is afraid to act, and so tremulous is he, that, in most cases, he will only secretly avow his sentiments, and that too in an undertone of anxiety. Yet this is a natural state of feeling. If his condition were that of a bravado, and of instant readiness to carry out his new ideas to their extremest consequences, it would show that his convictions were wanting in depth, and might become fickle. But the very secrecy and timidity with which he cherishes them prove their genuineness. While still weak, their strength is cumulative—is growing from year to year, and from day to day. We see now the great body of educated Hindus in their feebleness; but what will they be in their strength?

Aye, what will they be in their strength? When they have gained complete mastery over themselves,—when they have thoroughly thought out the great problems which are now filling their minds, with interest and concern,—when they are delivered from the slavery of fear, and can avow their sentiments with manly intrepidity, determining to uphold them, and to carry them out,
in spite of consequences,—when they have attained both mental and moral robustness, and are ashamed of nothing, except vice and error,—when they search after knowledge for its own sake,—when their judgments are formed without bias and prejudice, and their wills are moved to do that which, under the influence of the highest motives and of the purest candour seems to them best to be done,—when they have thus risen to manhood, then we may look for the universal triumph of truth throughout the land, the general abandonment of superstitious ceremonies and rituals, the exchange of idolatry and all fetish worship for a spiritual religion, the worship of one God in Christ, the transformation of society, the abolition of caste, the drawing together of all Hindus of every denomination, and blending into one common brotherhood. They will then be fit for political rule on the broadest scale. Their minds, quickened and energized by a new inspiration, will not merely be powerfully receptive, but will be equally strong in invention; and Hindus will take their legitimate rank among the first thinkers, most careful and painstaking explorers, most critical philosophers, and most acute and brilliant investigators in every department of human knowledge, the world has ever seen. One already catches glimpses occasionally of this latent power, glimpses which glitter through the cloud of obscurity investing the Hindu mind. Sparkling thoughts are sometimes emitted from that mind,—thoughts transcendent in their glow and beauty, proving incontestably the native energy within, and affording a sufficient sign and presage of its effulgent glory when the cloud shall have passed away, and it shall shine forth in its own proper and original strength.

Fourthly, in anticipation of this consummation, which will be hastened or delayed according as Hindus prepare themselves for it, let them first of all believe in their destiny, and next determine to remove out of their path whatever interferes with its fulfilment. They have not had an inglorious career; but its brightness has long since faded away. Let them be fully convinced that hope is not lost, and that in their own persons they possess the elements of greatness, which need only a fitting opportunity, and the surmounting of opposing influences, to be developed to their fullest extent. Let them resolve to avail themselves of all the branches of knowledge placed within their reach, and to submit themselves unreservedly and fearlessly to its plastic and transforming energy. To be puffed up by pride, or to imagine that they have no great alterations to make, or that it is possible to acquire all the varied knowledge of the West, and yet to continue as they are, will be fatal to progress. Knowledge is useless if it be not an active principle in the breast of him who
has it. With many Hindus knowledge is mere lumber, encumbering their understandings, and causing them distress instead of exquisite joy and satisfaction. Whatever is sound and true in the knowledge Hindus may acquire, let them have the moral courage honestly to put in practice. They must brace themselves up to the thought that changes will come, and that to effect them is one of the great objects of genuine knowledge. Let them reflect, that the Western world has forsaken its ancient barbarism, and has become what it is seen to be at the present day by the omnipotence of that knowledge—the divine and the human so intimately blended as to form one—which has been shed upon it. If they receive and digest the same knowledge they will display similar results, differing it may be so as to be conformable to their altered requirements and circumstances. Yet just as the nations of the West, under the supreme influence of this many-sided knowledge, abandoned their degrading customs—their foolish superstitions—their coarse and vulgar habits—and their inhuman and filthy practices—so must Hindus be ready to surrender every custom, superstition, habit, and practice at variance with the elevated moral tone and spirit of the divine and human wisdom which has come to them from the West, and which they all welcome and pronounce to be very good.

Fifthly, as caste is a social distinction dependant on the assumption of an essential and natural difference among men,—a difference by virtue of which one class is accounted pure and another vile, one blessed another cursed, one from head to foot inherently and necessarily good, in every imaginable sense, without blemish or stain of any sort, and another utterly abominable, and incorrigibly bad,—should such a vain assumption continue to be maintained in the face of the intellectual and moral growth of Hindus of all grades, it will infallibly produce fierce strife and animosity among them. Can it be supposed for an instant, that young men of inferior and degraded castes, who by their acquisitions and talents leave all competitors behind them, and under the authority of a liberal and impartial Government, vault into commanding positions of trust and honour, will be content to live subject to a social ban, despised and loathed by a proud class of their fellow-countrymen—to the brightest and best of whom in capacity, education, virtue, and energy they have shown themselves to be fully equal? Already such men—of such abilities—and of such grades—are coming to the front. The democratic system of education pursued throughout the country, but with more thoroughness and impartiality in Mission than in Government colleges and schools, is training thousands of youths of Sudra castes, and of numerous castes inferior to them; and is at the same time pro-
ducing in their minds a sense of injustice and wrong. The heavy gloom of conscious inferiority is passing from their faces, which are becoming bright and cheerful like those of youths of the higher castes; and they are fast losing the hang-dog expression, the shadow of social slavery which the lower castes almost invariably bear on their countenances. It is idle to affirm that, as the castes have for many ages maintained a loyal confidence in one another, so that those in a subordinate position have never murmured at those in a higher, and all have been in a measure contented and satisfied, this loyalty of subjection will be displayed by the inferior castes even when they are as well educated, and exhibit as much ability, as some of the superior. They who reason in this way forget that of knowledge is power. They forget that one of the many results of knowledge is to inspire the mind with a sense of personal dignity and self-importance. Nothing is more certain than the lower castes, when raised intellectually, and when fully awake to the fact of their political equality with the upper castes, will rebel against the cruel caste laws by which they are forcibly kept in a mean and depressed condition. If the Brahmans, and the upper castes generally, determine at any cost to continue their reserve, and make no approaches towards the lower castes, notwithstanding their great improvement in intelligence and knowledge,—if they insist on preserving fully and without abatement those social distinctions which were enforced in the dark ages, when nearly all Hindus except the Brahmans were sunk in ignorance and barbarism, it requires no prophet to foretell that a social rebellion,—a caste convulsion—is at hand. It is demonstrable, that just as the tyranny of a monarch must fall before the growing liberty of a people, so must caste fall before the increasing enlightenment and progressive civilization of the Hindus.

Sixthly, if these statements be true, admitting of no dispute, as I believe them to be, how important it is that the higher castes should thoroughly understand this great social question, and in a spirit of magnanimity make the first approaches towards the lower castes. In Bengal the remarriage of widows has been sanctioned by a very respectable class of the community, showing that if there be common agreement, a most stringent custom, coming down from ancient times, may be abolished. Moreover, some of the most advanced and highminded Bengalees have consented to intermarriages among the castes, that is, virtually to their suppression. In Upper India, where caste is very strong, and its regulations are rigidly carried out, obstacles to intercommunion among the castes may be more powerful than in Bengal. Yet it is necessary even there to take note of the growing influence of what may be termed the Middle
Class of native society, consisting of the Vadyas, the Kayasths, and the higher grades of Sudras. These are incontestably the most energetic—most pushing—and most successful of all the castes in that part of India. Intelligent, intensely active, and of immense force of character, some of their members having been educated to the highest pitch of learning which the colleges there are capable of imparting, should they choose to make demands of the castes above them, and those demands should be resisted, they have sufficient strength to drive those castes to extremities, and not only so, but by a close combination among themselves, to subject them to abject humiliation. At present they evidently have no such feeling or desire, because perhaps they have no real consciousness of the enormous power they possess. But let them suddenly arrive at that consciousness—let them suddenly awake to the thought that they are as well educated, as able, as intelligent as the Brahmans—are much more successful in their secular schemes—and exert a much deeper and a far better influence over Hindu Society at large; and they can, if they be so inclined, destroy Brahmanism, root and branch—can utterly annihilate it.

Seventhly, if the superior castes are wise as well as politic, they will lose no time in holding out the right hand of fellowship to the lower. Such a step would, by its magnanimity, secure to them much of the respect and honour which they at present enjoy. The Brahman would not lose his position of eminence as the time-honoured leader and instructor of the Hindu race. He would be primus inter pares, would still be first among his fellow-countrymen, though no longer of a different order. All Hindus would be proud of him, as the noblest and most finished specimen of their nation's intellect; and he would continue to be looked up to as the most subtle thinker and most astute counsellor the country possessed. But let him bear well in mind, that his fate in the future depends upon himself and the movements he intends to make. The first overtures must come from him, for the inferior castes will naturally feel their powerlessness to make any overtures at all. Let him beware of that passive unconcern—that recklessness of indolence—that supercilious indifference to the sentiments of others—which in bygone ages have proved so frequently fatal to the Hindu race. The fear is, that he will totally disregard these warnings, or will consider them as inopportune, or will say, "there is plenty of time yet," or will determine blindly to pursue his own way, and face the consequences. He may even, as doubtless many of his class will, deride these statements and these exhortations to reformation, as the maudlings of a foreigner, unable to appreciate the social beauty and fitness of Indian caste.
Be it so. He will at least give the writer credit for being a friend, and not an enemy. For more than a quarter of a century has he associated with Hindus of all castes, and striven to become acquainted with their habits, thoughts, sorrows, burdens, hopes, and fears. Much in their character he admires—some of their customs he highly approves—many of their sentiments he believes would do honour to the most civilized countries in the world. He has always spoken in their praise so far as truth would admit. He seeks nothing from them, neither wealth, nor rank, nor even honour. He has no motive but their welfare. Having studied the nature and the workings of caste much more perhaps than they have themselves, he has come to the conclusion, that it is the most baneful, hard-hearted, and cruel social system that could possibly be invented for damning the human race. Furthermore, by patient reflection he has come to the conviction, that if the superior castes do not presently invent some scheme for its eventual suppression, the inferior caste, when sufficiently educated, and thoroughly awakened, will rise up in furious and unappeasable indignation, and peaceably, though none the less surely, brand them with an indelible stigma of shame.

Eighthly, what is the attitude which non-Hindus, dwelling in India and interested in its prosperity, should take in regard to this question of caste? Let them avoid the profound and pernicious mistake committed by the Mahomedan population. Many of these are converts from Hinduism to the faith of Islam, who have been permitted to retain numerous caste usages, and in doing so have indoctrinated with their sentiments the Mahomedans whose ancestors in former times entered the country; the consequence being, that Mussulmans in India, with exceedingly few exceptions, have become semi-Hindus, practising caste in a modified manner, while, what is much worse, many of them, especially among the lower ranks, conform to some extent to the idolatrous customs of the heathen. It is remarkable how easily and imperceptibly strangers in India fall into the ways and habits of its Hindu inhabitants, by reason of their immense multitude and the all-pervasiveness of their peculiar institutions. And thus it comes to pass that Englishmen and other foreigners, although on their first arrival in the country setting their faces strongly against superstition, caste, and other evil influences, yet, gradually becoming familiar with them, cease to oppose them strenuously, and, after a time, even begin to speak of them approvingly. In no other way can I account for the favour often shown to caste by Government officials; Brahmans, Rajputs, and other members of the superior castes being constantly
preferred to members of lower castes. In regard to not a few situations of importance under the Government, the question is at once asked of candidates, 'To what caste do you belong?' Official notices commonly state the castes of Government servants; and thus those of low caste, although holding, it may be, as good positions as those of higher castes, are held up to obloquy and contempt. I believe this is altogether unintentional on the part of the Government. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute, that caste is invigorated and honoured by the public attention which is thus paid to it. Moreover, Hindus of good caste naturally feel that they stand in favour with the Government by virtue of their caste, and in proportion to its rank, to the disadvantage of Hindus of lower castes, who, on the other hand, are painfully conscious of the comparative dishonour with which they are regarded and treated on account of caste inferiority. So inveterate is the habit, in some Government departments, of stating in official documents the castes of Hindu employees, that even when a Hindu becomes a Christian he is still compelled to state his caste, which in his case is the Christian caste. This recognition of caste by the British Government in India is a custom which it most likely inherited when it took possession of the country, and which it has unwittingly observed to the present time, for it would be unjust, as well as absurd, to imagine that the Government, which has so determinately severed itself from all connexion with Hindu idolatry, would knowingly lend its influence to the propping up of Hindu caste. Still it has done so. Henceforward, however, its connexion with it should cease. It should not recognize the institution in any way whatever. Its official documents, its monthly forms, pay-bills, and other papers containing descriptions of its servants, should make no allusion to it. Specially, should the question never be asked of a candidate for a post under Government, what is your caste? The candidate's suitability for a post should be decided by his qualifications, altogether apart from the subject of caste. In short, the Government should carefully abstain by fitting regulations from sanctioning such an obnoxious and terrible social evil.

Ninthly, the managers of Indian railways, and of the Indian telegraph, European merchants, bankers, planters, and others have also been occasionally guilty of fostering caste in the selection of their clerks and servants. Some have paid little regard to the matter, but not all; and there are those who on no consideration would allow one of the outcast tribes to hold any situation in their gift. Caste prejudice thus creeps into the minds of Europeans, who nevertheless profess to be inimical to the system. This no doubt has arisen
from the fact, that until recently the persons best qualified for situations in merchants' offices, on the railways, or in other similar posts were drawn from the better castes. And many heads of offices are strangely unaware that of late years education has made immense progress among the people generally, so that multitudes of men of the lower castes are as well fitted for the posts formerly exclusively occupied by members of respectable castes as these members themselves. European gentlemen holding important positions unconnected with the Government, in which they have native clerks under them, cannot be too forcibly and emphatically counselled on the subject. Probably they little think that by their conduct they may be powerfully sustaining or repressing a great national adversary. By thoughtlessness — by an undue preference for high caste men — by cherishing a distaste for change — they may be lending the weight of their authority towards an institution which, theoretically, they denounce. They should know that on them rests a heavy responsibility. They may do much, if they will, to bring caste into disrepute, as much indeed as the Government itself with all its English officials. If they will have nothing to do with it in any shape or form, but will in future select their men totally irrespective of caste, and will continually frown on it whenever and wherever they have the opportunity, they may administer to it a severe, if not irreparable, blow.

Thirdly, hitherto little or nothing has been said of the direct and indirect influences of Christianity in eradicating this great social evil from the homes of India. All Christian people, and all Christian Missions, in this land are not equally affected with a sense of its perniciousness. Some, as for example, Roman Catholics, regard it favourably, and permit it among their converts. Even a few Protestants are not enthusiastic for its destruction and give it their partial sanction. Both these instances of support rendered to caste have, I believe, the same reason, namely, the hard difficulty of obliterating it. Hence a kind of compromise has been effected. Moreover, it is undoubted that many Protestant Missions in Southern India, in their earlier history, adopted this system and allowed it among their native Christians. They have, however, to their honour, long since repudiated all connexion with it, although having once sanctioned the evil, it was no easy task to get rid of it. But it was effected, however, very bravely and resolutely. Still in many parts of the country, notwithstanding the utmost vigilance of Missionaries, it occasionally crops up, and destroys the peace of a community for a time. Wherever it appears in a Mission it produces immense mischief. Pride, discord, self-will, selfishness, separate interests, disrespect, anger, and heart-burning are some of
the vices which it infallibly engenders. The serpent is apt to lurk in the most unlikely places, and its poison sometimes corrupts the minds of earnest God-fearing men. Speaking generally, Protestant Missions in India are nowadays very slightly affected by caste, inasmuch as in the Missions of nearly all the Societies a sleepless watchfulness prevails, so that its slightest manifestation is detected and forthwith suppressed. Not only are forty-nine out of every fifty Protestant Missionaries determinately opposed to it, but the same proportion of Protestant native Christians are so likewise. So that, with a small number of abatements only, the consentient voice of the Protestant community attached to the Missions of India is directly and strongly antagonistic to the institution. Indeed, it is not stating too much to affirm, that this community is its direct and most pertinacious foe. It is this community which perceives more powerfully than any other the viciousness of its nature, and the social disorder and misery it entails; and is most anxious for its overthrow.

Impelled by the peace-loving principles of the Gospel—by the earnest desire to promote in every way the happiness of mankind—by a love of order and harmony—by a hatred of dissension and strife—and by that larger hearted benevolence and kindness which characterised the Great Teacher in all His dealings with men—Christian ministers, Christian laymen, Christians of every race and colour in this land, by their counsel and conversation, and by their influence, should steadily oppose this monstrous and most corrupt system of social life; and in their intercourse with Hindus, especially those of education, should ceaselessly strive to counterwork and thwart the intricate and subtle power by which it charms and subdues them. They may accomplish great results by pursuing such a course. It should be remembered that Hindus are a very imitative people; and it is because they are so that they have followed in the footsteps of their predecessors so long and so ignorantly. Nevertheless, when once they begin to move in another direction, it is likely they will do so in crowds, especially if they have wise and popular leaders. The initiatory step in a thorough social reform is manifestly the most difficult to take, and the difficulty is a hundredfold greater in a country like India, where the people are wedded to old customs, which they still cling to, and relinquish most reluctantly even when convinced of their criminality and folly. This first step has already been taken, as before intimated, by some of the foremost thinkers and actors in Bengalce society, and a great change for the better has commenced.