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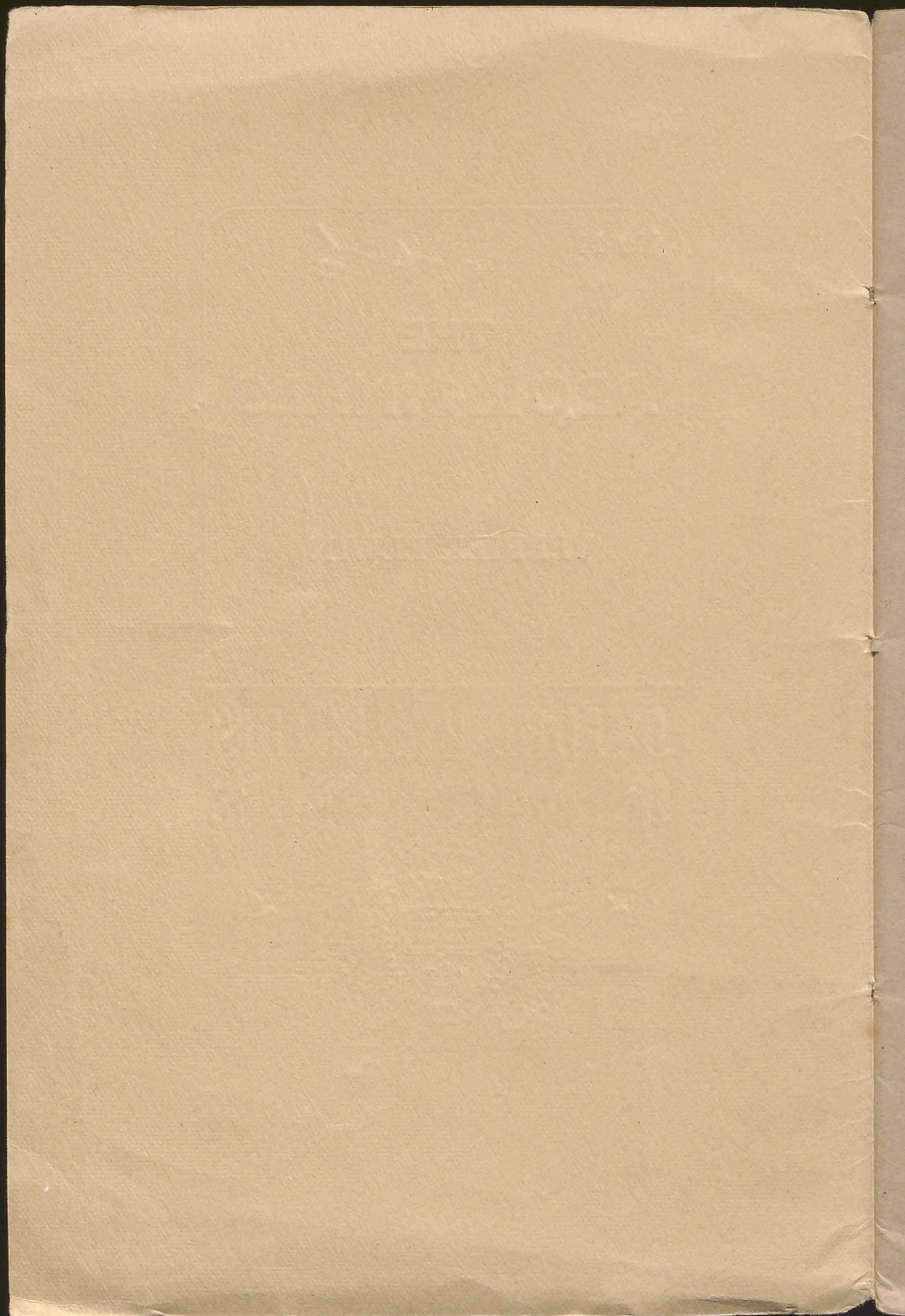

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THE ABORIGINALS

BY
VERRIER ELWIN

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THERE are more than 25 million aboriginals in India. The happy few who live in the remote hills have preserved their tribal customs unimpaired and need only to be protected from contact with our acquisitive society. A small number of the chiefs can be said to have won the battle of culture-contact, and to have assimilated the blessings of civilization, but the great majority of the 25 million are suffering from what the author calls 'loss of nerve'. Forbidden to hunt and cultivate in the forest, exploited in the villages, they have become 'servile, obsequious, timid, of poor physique'. The author discusses what might be done to improve the lot of these 'real swadeshi products of India' who 'were here first' and 'should come first in our regard'.

Verrier Elwin, M.A., D.Sc., of Merton College, Oxford, is remarkably well qualified to write on this subject. He is a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, which awarded him the Wellcome Medal in 1942, and of the National Institute of Sciences. More than ten years ago he settled down in an aboriginal village in the Central Provinces, and since that day he has only returned to our civilization for brief periods. Parts of his entertaining diary, entitled *Leaves from the Jungle*, were published in 1936: and his works include *The Baiga* (1939), *The Agaria* (1942), and *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* (1944). A monograph on *The Muria and their Ghotul* is in the press.

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THE ABORIGINALS

I WAS once introduced to a Colonel's wife somewhere in India as an anthropologist. The lady looked at me with horror and alarm, and a little later when we were comparatively alone she leant towards me and said in a confidential whisper, 'Tell me, Mr Elwin, is anthropology very prevalent in your district?'

I was able to assure her that 'anthropology' was prevalent not only in my district, but throughout the entire subcontinent of India. The anthropologist, of course, is concerned with the entire history of Man: he is not exclusively concerned with aboriginals; but in actual practice he is often regarded as someone who deals with primitive and simple folk.

Particularly in India the anthropologist has had to try to sort out the great medley of races and tribes into some sort of coherence, and it has to be admitted that so far it has been impossible to reach any very clear conclusions.

The old method of describing the races of India by linguistic terms like Kolarian and Dravidian has been superseded, though no other method of somatic classification can be said to have won general acceptance. Von Eickstedt divides the people of India into three groups:

Group	
I. Weddid group 1. Gondid race 2. Malid sub-race	*Ancient-Indians*
II. Melanid group 3. Melanid race 4. Kolid sub-race	*Black-Indians*
III. Indid group 5. Indid race 6. North-Indid sub-race	*New-Indians*

The Weddid group, named after the very primitive Veddas of Ceylon, comprises the bulk of the aboriginals, 'the real and genuine Ancient Indians', and stands in striking contrast to the light-coloured, more graceful Indid group. The Weddids are characterized by the infantile nature of their racial features, by a smooth, round, child-like face

with steep forehead, a child-like snub nose with wide nostrils, a soft, full and bent child-mouth, small retreating chin and the delicate child-like, somewhat stocky (thick-set) body, with small hands and feet. The very important Gondid sub-group (which includes the Uraons, Gonds and Khonds) is marked by a somewhat taller physique, longer faces and noses not so broad.

The Gondid has brown, sometimes even light-brown, skin; but the Malid sub-group found in southern India is marked by an almost black skin, thicker lips and very broad nose, such as are commonly found among the Paniyers.

The Melanid group also concerns our present study, for its sub-race is the Kolid which finds its purest representation among the Santals and Hos. Von Eickstedt classifies the Gadabas and the Panos as Kolid, and finds a Melanid element in the Yanadis and the Chenchus.

The Proto-Australoids

Dr B. S. Guha, who is today our most eminent Indian anthropologist, does not venture on so dogmatic—one might almost say so journalistic—a classification. In his work on the 1931 Census he distinguished seven racial elements in India which he modestly named by the letters of the alphabet. Since, however, we are dealing here only with the aboriginals, his more recent classification is more convenient. Dr Guha names the bulk of the 'Weddids' Proto-Australoid, for—as he says—if we compare many of the central and south Indian tribesmen 'with the Veddas of Ceylon and the aborigines of Australia we find that in the shape of the head and the face, the form of hair and skin colour, the three are essentially alike'. The Indians are the shortest and smallest of the three, and the Australians have more strongly marked brow ridges and profuser body hair. 'All the three belong essentially to the same stock, the Indian tribes retaining the more basic characters and the two extra-Indian groups having developed some of the features in a more marked manner.' Hence the name Proto-Australoid, which indicates the genetic relationships of the Indian tribes.

There is then another element (I prefer Dr Guha's earlier word 'element' to his later 'type'), a Negrito strain,

indicated by the shape of the skull and frizzly hair, marked among the Andamanese and in the interior of Malaya. This has now almost disappeared on the Indian mainland, but traces have been found in very remote areas, among the Angami Nagas, the Bagdis of the Rajmahal Hills and the Kadars of the south-west. Dr Guha thinks that the Negritos are the oldest of all and that the Proto-Australoids came later and, while driving them back into the mountains, absorbed a large amount of their blood.

The third element in the aboriginal population of India is the Mongoloid—in the main (as among the Miri, Bodo and Naga tribes), a rather modified Mongoloid with a dolichocephalic or long head, but with the typical flat nose, high cheek-bones and oblique slit-eyes. This element is almost confined to Assam and eastern Bengal, but Mongoloid features are sometimes found in central India, especially among the Gonds and Marias.

These three elements, relating the Indian aboriginal to the people of three great continents, have in the course of centuries divided up into a large number of tribes, all mutually exclusive, each what is called endogamous (marrying within the tribe), each generally again split into exogamous clans (forbidden to marry members of their own clan), many of them preserving their ancient totem names and customs to this day, a few continuing a megalithic cult of the dead.

The Tribes

They are now over twenty-five million in number and are distributed throughout India. In the mountains of Assam the splendid and warlike Naga tribes, although they have been heavily proselytized, still retain something of their ancient glories. Other important tribes are the Garo, Kachari, Khasi, Mikir and Lushai.

The chief tribe in Bihar is the Santal whose total population is above the million mark; their tragic story has been told by Dr Hutton in *Modern India and the West.* Like the Mundas and Uraons, the Santals are distributed over more than one province and are found also in Orissa. The beautiful Chota Nagpur plateau is the home of the great Uraon tribe, the Mundas, the Hos, some Santals, the

Kharias, and a number of smaller tribes, including the very ancient Asur iron-smelters. These people have been made known to the world by the works of Bodding and of Sarat Chandra Roy, their champion, friend and biographer.

Orissa and its States also has a high population of aboriginals; notable among them are the Bhuiyas and Bhumij, the Khonds (once notorious for human sacrifice), the Savaras (whose name occurs in ancient literature: a member of the tribe gave food to Ramachandra on his wanderings), the remarkably ornamented and attired Gadabas and Porojas. The very primitive Juangs live in the mountains to the south of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway and some of them still dress themselves in leaves.

The Central Provinces is occupied by over two million Gonds—a once royal tribe, from whom the ancient name of the area, 'Gondwana', was taken. Related to them are the romantic and poetically-minded Pardhan minstrels. In the wilder tracts live the Baigas, famous for their magic and their knowledge of the forest. In the Mahadeo Hills to the west are the Korkus. One of the neighbouring States, Bastar, where aboriginals form 75 per cent of the population, is a model of what can be done when anthropological principles are applied to the administration of a tribal area.

The Bhils are the great tribe of the Bombay province and the Rajputana States. Remarkable work for their advancement has been done by the Bhil Seva Mandal founded by Mr A. V. Thakkar. But there are also in western India other tribes less well known, such as the Dhodias, the Thakurs, the Varlis and the Katkaris.

Southern India is inhabited by what has been described as 'one of the most primitive kinds of men that it is possible still to find on the earth today'. From the Cardamom Hills to the Nilgiris, through the forests of eastern Mysore and over the Nallamallai Hills are to be found such tribes as the Kurumber, Kanikar, Irular and Yanadi.

Tribal Languages

Throughout the area the old languages still struggle for survival. Of these probably the most important is Gondi, still spoken by a million and a half people, which has been

described as intermediate between the Dravida and the Andhra tongues. It has several dialects. Kurukh is the language of the Uraons and is closely connected with ancient Tamil. Kandh or Kui is spoken by the Khonds of Orissa.

The agglutinative Munda languages are principally spoken in Chota Nagpur and the adjoining country. The most important of them, Kherwari, divides into dialects according to the tribe that speaks it—Santal, Bhumij, the Larka or 'fighting' Kol, Ho, Asur and Korwa. Each group interprets it in its own way. The dying Kharia language is now only found in restricted areas, as is the old language of the Juangs—members of the tribe now also speak Oriya. Akin to this are the special tongues of the Savaras and Gadabas. Korku, which is allied to Kherwari, is spoken by a people geographically remote from the other Munda-speaking tribes, the Korkus of Berar. For the languages of Assam (there are sixteen different languages apart from dialects in the Naga Hills) and the Andamans, reference may be had to the important monographs on their tribes, for they are too diverse and complicated to lend themselves to any summary.

A great many of the tribesmen are now bilingual and others have altogether lost their ancient form of speech. This has been a cause of aboriginal decline, for with the passing of the old languages there has gone a whole world of culture, and the tribesman, forced to deal in a speech not his own with officials, landlords and merchants, finds himself at a disadvantage which constantly results in his exploitation. There is a moral loss as well: a shrewd observer has pointed out that the Santals always speak the truth—as long as they speak their own language.

Four Kinds of Aboriginals

It is impossible in one small pamphlet to describe the religious and social customs of tribes distributed across a subcontinent, especially when these tribes stand on such varied levels of cultural development. Indeed no intelligent approach to the aboriginal problem is possible without recognizing that the tribesmen fall into at least four main cultural divisions, each of which demands distinct administrative treatment.

The first two classes consist of the comparatively small block (probably not more than five million) of real primitives living in the hills. The word 'living' is properly applied to them; these Highlanders do not merely exist like so many ordinary villagers; they really *live*. Their religion is characteristic and alive; their tribal organization is unimpaired; their artistic and choreographic traditions are unbroken; their mythology still vitalizes the healthy organism of tribal life. Geographical conditions have largely protected them from the debasing contacts of the plains. It has been said that the hoot of the motor-horn would sound the knell of the aboriginal tribes as such; but now petrol rationing has stepped in to delay the funeral.

These wilder aboriginals have to be subdivided into two sections. The first class, in the most primitive and simple stage of all, is characterized by the following:

(i) *Its members live a largely communal life.* This is emphasized even by the lay-out of their villages; thus, the Hill Marias build their long houses round a common square; the Hill Baigas do the same. The Juangs build their houses all opening on to one another within a single enclosure. The common club or dormitory is often an important factor in social life.

(ii) *Economically they still share with one another.* In Hill Maria villages there are still to be found corporate granaries. In some Juang villages, everyone pays the same taxes, whether they be 'rich' or 'poor', in order to preserve village solidarity. In the Juang Pirh of Keonjhar taxes are paid by the village, not by the individual; stores are kept in the village clubs to meet the needs of the poorer members of the community. There is little or no property in land; the land belongs to the community and clearings for axe-cultivation are distributed by agreement. A man who has a poor crop one year is given the best clearing next time.

(iii) *Their life still centres round a peculiar form of agriculture*, the axe-cultivation that is the despair of every Forest Officer. By this, the *taungya* of Burma, the *jhum* of Assam, the *bewar* of the Baigas, the cultivator clears part of the forest, sets fire to the fallen trees and branches and sows his seed in the ashes. The more primitive do not break

the soil at all for the main crops, and only dibble with a digging-stick when planting beans and pulses. Other tribes turn over the soil and dig in the ashes with a hoe. The clearing is used for two or three years and is then deserted for a fresh patch of forest. To many of the tribesmen this is more than a form of agriculture; it is a way of life. They cannot visualize existence without it. It is established in the mythology of the tribes; it was taught to the Juangs by Boram Deo, to the Baigas by Nanga Baiga. A large part of their lives is spent in the clearings and little tree houses which they make for safety from wild animals.

(iv) *They are shy of strangers*, but among themselves honest, simple and innocent. Crime is rare and women virtuous. Domestic life is marked by fidelity and restraint. Adultery is punished by divine vengeance, and the adulterer is sometimes stripped naked and paraded through the village with a heavy stone tied to his genitalia. They wear few clothes and the women generally go with breasts uncovered, an innocent and natural practice. The aboriginals of this type are, for example, the Hill Marias of Bastar State, the Juangs of Keonjhar and Pal-Lahara, the Gadabas and Bondos of Orissa, the Baigas of Pandaria and Kawardha, many of the smaller communities and the more isolated villages even of comparatively sophisticated tribes.

The second class of aboriginals live in country equally remote and they are equally attached to their solitude and to their ancient traditions. But they have begun to change in many small and subtle ways. The difference can be seen very vividly in a comparison between the Hill Marias and the Bison-horn Marias of Bastar State, or between the Bhumia and the Binjhwar Baigas.

(i) *Their village life has become individualistic.* They no longer build their houses round a square or in a huddle within a single fence. Many of the Bhuiyas and Bison-horn Marias, for example, build their houses each in a separate compound and with a garden attached. But the Murias and many Bhuiyas and Uraons who belong to this class retain something of their older communal traditions through their admirable village dormitories.

(ii) *They no longer share things with one another.* The spirit of competition has entered. There are distinctions between rich and poor. Their forest clearings are still distributed by agreement, but other possessions are taken as personal.

(iii) *Axe-cultivation is more a habit than a part of their life.* It has only doubtful warrant in their mythology or religion. Its customs are no longer clear and mandatory. For example, many Bhuiyas think it correct to take fire to light their clearings from an ordinary dwelling-house, a thing which to Juang eyes would be certain to result in an invasion of wild elephants! There is no taboo on the use of the plough and indeed members of this class look down on the digging-stick as too elementary for them. Unlike most of the people of Class I they have a fair number of cattle and know how to use them in their clearings.

(iv) *They are more accustomed to outside life.* They are used to going down to the bazaars. They wear more clothes, often importing cheap shirts and jackets. They are generally less simple and honest than members of Class I.

The third class of aboriginals is the most numerous; it probably numbers twenty million, all those who under the influence of external contact have begun to lose their hold on tribal culture, religion and social organization. We will consider this in detail shortly.

A Triumph of Culture-Contact

Finally we have the fourth class, which consists of the old aristocracy of the country, probably dating very far back indeed—represented today by great Bhil and Naga chieftains, the Gond Rajas, a few Binjhwar and Bhuiya landlords, Korku noblemen, wealthy Santal and Uraon leaders and some highly cultured Mundas. These retain the old tribal name and their clan and totem rules and observe elements of tribal religion, though they generally adopt the full Hindu faith and live in modern and even in European style. Thus the Gond Raja of Sarangarh lives in a palace which is equipped with every modern comfort; his well-stocked library includes the works of Aldous Huxley, Bernard Shaw and Malinowski; he is a

brilliant cricketer and tennis-player. Yet he insists that he is a true Gond; his home is decorated with representations of his totem animal, the tortoise, and in the heart of the palace is a small thatched hut where the cult of the old tribal gods is maintained. Other members of this class are those aboriginals who by their own energy and enterprise have improved their economic position and their social standing. There was a Khasi woman in a recent Cabinet of the Government of Assam; another Minister was a Kachari. Many Uraons have become Christian clergymen. A Pardhan has become a Station Master. There is a Gond District Excise Officer in the Central Provinces, and an aboriginal Naib Tahsildar was murdered during the disturbances of 1942. It must be remembered, however, that such educated and progressive persons are not necessarily, simply because they are of aboriginal stock, the best qualified to represent their poorer brethren, of whose needs they often have only an elementary knowledge.

The members of the fourth class may be said to have won the battle of culture-contact—aristocratic tradition, economic stability or affluence, outside encouragement, a certain arrogance and self-confidence characteristic alike of ancient families and modern enterprise, have enabled them to assimilate the blessings of civilization without injury to themselves. It might be said that the whole aboriginal problem is how to enable the tribesmen of the first and second classes to advance direct into the fourth class without having to suffer the despair and degradation of the third.

A Loss of Nerve

The aboriginals of the third class are in a sad and almost desperate plight. The difference between them and the wilder people of the first two classes is a commonplace of anthropology and has been noted by everyone who has travelled or lived among the tribesmen. Generally speaking, the rapid opening-up of communications results more in conflict than in useful contact, not necessarily a conflict of arms but of culture and material interest. 'Attempts to develop minerals,' says Dr Hutton, 'forests or land for

intensive cultivation can only be made at the expense of the tribe whose isolation is thus invaded; tribal customs which regulate the ownership, usufruct or transfer of land are normally superseded by a code in the application of which the tribe is deprived of its property, generally in the name of law, either by alienation to foreigners or by transferring the trusteeship of a tribal chief into absolute ownership of a kind quite foreign to the customs of a tribe. This has befallen both the Mundas and the hill tribes of Chittagong, while even in Rajputana a somewhat similar process has been at work. A similar application of alien law also usually disturbs the tribal customs of debt. The criminal law of a civilized community is often at variance with what is felt to be just and proper by tribal custom. The complicated system of administration of justice has tended to impair the natural truthfulness and honesty of the people and social solidarity of the tribes and has weakened the authority of the social heads and the respect they formerly commanded.'

Another writer describes the devastation that has been wrought by external culture-contact among the Nagas of Assam. 'All Nagas assert that since their country was taken over illness has increased. Not only have specific diseases, such as venereal disease and tuberculosis, been introduced but epidemics spread more quickly. The opening of the cart road to Manipur has led to an increase in prostitution. Education of the type which is given has been on the whole an evil rather than a good. Foreign dress is spreading and the custom is bad in every way. It encourages dirt since no Naga can afford the change he ought to have. It spreads disease in two main ways. Adults become more liable to chills and phthisis since they do not change their wet clothes, and children who are carried against "wet shirt waists" instead of against their mothers' warm backs suffer as a result. To substitute spoiled and poor quality Western clothes or a caricature of them for the picturesque Naga dress is an aesthetic crime. Foreign houses are a blot on the landscape and are expensive and stuffy.'

This is equally true of the people of other parts of India. It is an instructive experience to go from a jungle community

of Baigas in the hills to a village of the same people by the roadside. In the former, tribal life and organization still retain their old vitality; as you enter the village you can almost feel the stir and throb of communal energy; tribal life is an integrated whole, it makes sense, there are no gaps in it, it has no insulated spots, everything is related and functions in its proper place. The people are vigorous, independent, happy. But go to a semi-civilized Baiga village on one of the main trade-routes. The people might belong to another race. Servile, obsequious, timid, of poor physique, their tribal life is all to pieces. Part of it, like the right to hunt and practise axe-cultivation, has been torn up by the roots. The old myths are being forgotten, the old gods neglected. Many of the traditional dances are being abandoned. The souls of the people are soiled and grimy with the dust of passing motor-buses. The village has ceased to be a living community; it is now an aggregate of isolated units. The long houses round a common square, so typical of Baiga as of Hill Maria culture, have disappeared and the people separated into scattered, suspicious and often litigious families. Tribal life and tradition have begun to appear slightly ludicrous, even to the tribesmen themselves.

The Causes of Decay

What is the reason for this remarkable difference between the two types of aboriginals? Is it that there is something infectious about civilized folk so that their very contact destroys the grace and beauty of simple people, as the Earthlings infected Utopia in H. G. Wells' romance *Men Like Gods*? I do not think that the answer is a simple one; a dozen factors combine to break the nerve and shatter the confidence of the tribesmen.

The aboriginals were faced with a serious crisis when British administrators insisted on the cessation of such obviously evil practices as human sacrifice, head-hunting, and murder for witchcraft. Unfortunately, at the same time many of the tribes suffered so serious a loss of their independence that Dr Hutton (himself a former Government official) can write, 'Far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive

tribes, the establishment of British rule in India did most of them much more harm than good'. Another crisis came later when the Christian missionaries attempted to interfere even more drastically with tribal life. The activities of the Baptist Mission among the Nagas have demoralized the people, destroyed tribal solidarity and forbidden the joys and feasting, the decorations and romance of communal life. The Andaman Home policy of winning the savage to loyalty through evangelization and education has proved the door of death for the Andamanese. But Christianity has made little headway among the real aboriginals. It is a curious fact that it is 'Hinduization' that has generally proved a preparation for the Gospel, for it is mainly those tribes that have lost their tribal solidarity in face of Hindu infiltration that have become Christian in any large numbers.

False

But both official and foreign missionary interference were of an external kind and did not greatly affect the inner spirit of the tribes. Far more serious today is the great wave of semi-civilized influences that is sweeping across tribal country. Let us make a brief summary of the things that have broken the nerve and depressed the spirit of the once happy and free tribesmen. First and foremost is the loss of land. The indolent and pleasure-loving temperament of the tribesmen has always rendered them an easy prey to the educated cunning and intelligence of the men of the plains. It is a deplorable fact that it has been actually proposed as a measure of social uplift to bring the hillmen down to the plains and thus expose them to these adventurers. Those more or less nomadic tribes who had lived by shifting cultivation lost all rights over the forests where they once freely roamed, and many of them today are landless coolies.

The establishment of Forest Departments to protect the forest, in many respects inevitable, proved another serious blow to tribesmen who lived by axe-cultivation, digging for roots and hunting. In spite of vigorous protests by such enlightened administrators as Sir Bampfylde Fuller that it was 'much more important that a tribe of people should live in peace and comfort than that a certain area of land should grow trees of one sort or another or indeed grow trees at all', the rights

of the aboriginals in the great forest areas have steadily been curtailed.

The disappearance of the ritual hunt, which in many tribes preceded their major festivals, the cancellation of fishing rights and the suppression of the home distillery suggested to the aboriginals that civilization was hostile to their most cherished traditions. Liquor, for example, is a necessary ingredient in all forms of aboriginal worship and social ceremonies. The Congress has here shown a liberal spirit and has declared that it will not apply the prohibition laws to the tribesmen. But, as usual, puritan reformers are trying to force their hand. Everyone will wish to see habits of temperance extended, but to prohibit liquor-drinking altogether will be to deprive the hillmen of a valuable tonic and stimulant and will drive them to the far more injurious use of opium and other drugs.

Aboriginals and Education

The effect of literary education on people who can never afford a book to read or a piece of paper to write on has generally been deplorable. Primary education in the tribal areas is in the hands of the District Councils, bodies composed of landlords, lawyers and business men who have often risen to power by exploiting the aboriginals and whose interests are directly opposed to theirs. Schools, totally divorced from the life of the people, staffed by the most inferior type of teacher, which teach the tribesmen to despise their own culture, to abandon their natural and simple dress, dancing and other recreations, are opened in the remotest areas and there is a desire on the part of some politicians—although Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress have condemned this type of education in the most emphatic terms—to introduce it on a compulsory basis wherever they can. The opening of workshops in which carpentry, agriculture and any other means of teaching the people to make useful and beautiful things would, of course, be invaluable. But the miserable little schools for introducing an unwanted literacy are worse than useless. The trouble is that the present unregulated system of education, far from preserving or developing aboriginal culture, destroys it. The schools

are generally situated in centres of the non-aboriginal population and the jungle child grows up among those who regard him and his way of life with scorn. Even where this is not so, the teachers are usually urban-minded, regard themselves and their civilization as infinitely superior to the 'savages' among whom they have to live, and either ignore or condemn their institutions. Hindu, Muslim and Christian, but not aboriginal, festivals are marked by holidays. The children learn to chant in a nasal sing-song and pray to alien gods, but never to the old gods of the soil to whose worship their parents are deeply attached. They study in what is to them a foreign language. They read the lives of Indian Liberal leaders or English Viceroys, but hear nothing of their own cult-heroes or leaders. How many Gond schoolboys could recite the beautiful legend of Lingo, the mythical founder of their tribe, or say how many Gond Rajas there were in India? The aesthetic effect of education is disastrous. How beautiful is a Muria or Uraon boy fresh from the forest, with his long curly locks, his bright necklaces, the feathers and flowers in his hair! But the schoolmaster plucks the feathers from his hair, shaves his elfin locks, derides his ornaments; a small round cap replaces the becoming turban, and soon filthy khaki shorts and a dirty little coat cover 'the eternally dressed nakedness of the brown skin'.

Perhaps the most harmful result of education is its effect on singing and dancing. Many boys, once they can read and write, think themselves superior to tribal recreations. In their place they adopt the harmful amusements of the towns. Gambling takes the place of dancing; the obscenities of Holi replace the beautiful and innocent Relo; I have seen men and women, who scorn the delightful melodies of the Dadaria songs as below them, indulge in *tamasha* in which they imitate the whole human process from copulation to parturition.

William Morris once spoke of the danger 'that the present course of civilization would destroy the beauty of life'. Among Indian aboriginals this is not only a danger but a fact. Mr S. C. Roy has spoken of a 'loss of interest in life' among the Birhors and Korwas, Dr Hutton of physical apathy and physical decline in the Andamans, Mr Mills of

the 'awful monotony of village life' and its 'unspeakable drabness' in Christianized Assam. Sometimes this destruction is caused by outsiders, by well-meaning but rather unintelligent 'uplifters' and social reformers; sometimes, the evil comes from within.

India is all too full of people like Mr Pumblechook who, it will be remembered, could not see a small boy without trying to benefit him by setting him problems in mental arithmetic. The Pumblechooks of India try very hard to make the aboriginal good: they only succeed in making him dull. It is hard to convince the missionary and reformer of whatever religion that the romance and gaiety of tribal life is necessary for its preservation. But it is true. 'The tribe that dances does not die.'

Things of Value in Tribal Life

But are we to regret the rapid decay of customs and superstitions that can have no place in a modern world? Certainly not, if those superstitions and customs are replaced by something better. Unfortunately the almost inevitable result of unregulated cultural change is not real improvement, but decay. Moreover, in spite of certain admitted evils in aboriginal life (and it should be remembered that these evils are not worse than those which may be found in other parts of India and of the world) there are many elements that are well worth preservation; elements in which the tribesmen may not indeed be superior to the finest flower of Oriental or European civilization, but in which they have a great deal to teach their supposedly more civilized neighbours.

The aboriginals have to a very high degree developed the art of recreation, an art which is lamentably absent from the ordinary Indian village. We may note the magnificent dances of the Nagas and of the Bison-horn Marias, the mimetic ballet of the Juangs, the haunting music of the Baiga Karma. Throughout tribal India there are songs of rare beauty and deep simplicity. Children's games are highly developed among certain tribes; for example, over fifty, some of them most exciting and amusing, have been recorded among the Muria.

The tendance of the dead, devotion to the soil, the power to stage a magnificent and colourful tribal festival, the discipline of tribal law, are things which modern village religion should not willingly let die. In the spirit of economic fellowship and the tradition of communal living, some primitive villages are a hundred years ahead of the modern world. This communal life of the wilder people, in which almost everything is shared and in which the joy or sorrow of one is the joy and sorrow of the whole community, is a beautiful thing to witness, and it too perishes immediately before the chill breath of education and advancement. Equally perishable are the aboriginal virtues of simplicity and honesty, frankness and humour.

The unspoilt aboriginal is notable for the purity of his taste, and the beauty of such simple artistic creations as the materials available to him make possible. He is an expert in the art of personal ornamentation, in the decoration of his house (when he has a house), in the carving of masks, combs, snuff-boxes, in the use of cowries and beads. It is a tragedy that weaving is generally taboo to him; similarly pottery in which he might express himself is the monopoly of a minor Hindu caste. But still more tragic is the way in which the aboriginal's instinct for beautiful and artistic creation disappears directly he is educated.

Domestic fidelity is another virtue in which the real primitives might stand as an object-lesson to the whole world. When I recently conducted a survey of domestic life among the Murias of Bastar State, I found that out of 2,000 marriages examined all but 43 husbands were living with their own original wives. Adultery was almost unknown, and divorce exceptional. Here the contrast with the more sophisticated aboriginal of Class III is very striking. In a similar inquiry conducted in the Mandla District, I found that the divorce rate was as high as 56 per cent. But in no area is tribal life degraded by prostitution or unnatural vice.

For in most tribal societies woman holds a high and honourable place. She goes proudly free about the countryside. In field and forest she labours in happy companionship with her husband. She is not subjected to early child-bearing: she is married when she is mature, and if her

marriage is a failure (which it seldom is) she has the right of divorce. The lamentable restrictions of widowhood do not await her: should her husband die, she is allowed, even enjoined, to remarry; and in many tribes she may inherit property. Her free and open life fills her mind with poetry and sharpens her tongue with wit. As a companion, she is humorous and interesting; as a wife, devoted; as a mother, heroic in the service of her children. Her brave, laborious, faithful life is an inspiration.

Many of the aboriginal communities have a system of training and disciplining tribal youth in the village club or dormitory. The *dhumkuria* of the Uraons, the *giti-ora* or the *manda-ghar* of Orissa, the *ghotul* of Bastar, the *morung* of the Nagas serve the admirable purpose of training the boys and girls in social and civic duties, in teaching them the traditions of the tribe and in organizing and disciplining their more intimate relationships.

That aboriginal life is marked by crude superstitions and other evils no one will deny. For example, some of the Nagas enjoy (along with the most advanced nations of Europe) the custom of head-hunting and the practice of human sacrifice. The only difference is that the poor aboriginal sacrifices only one or two human beings in the name of his gods, while the great nations offer up millions in the name of empire and enlightenment. The belief in witchcraft also sometimes leads the aboriginals (like their educated neighbours) into excess, and they have many superstitions which like the superstitions of advanced Indian society and the capitals of Europe are to be regretted and if possible cured. But after ten years of life in closest and most realistic contact with the aboriginals, I can say that though I have found 'evils' I have found none that do not exist in a more virulent form in 'civilized' society. The idea that there is something inherently vicious in primitive life must be abandoned.

A Simple and Natural Existence

The life of the true aboriginals is simple and happy, enriched by natural pleasures. For all their poverty, their days are spent in the beauty of the hills. A woman carrying a load to a hill-top pauses a moment to survey the scene

below her. It is 'the sweet forest', the 'forest of joy and sandal' in which they live. The life of their children in the village dormitory is described as 'beautiful as a bison's horns, lovely as a horse's throat'.

Aboriginals get up very early: 'the tiger must roar from the hill', the 'music of the pestle' must be heard by cock-crow. They drink cold gruel left from yesterday. They wash with water from a gourd held under one arm—the younger people at least are very clean. Then everybody goes to work. The aged get busy on mats and baskets, clean the grain and spread dry fruit and vegetable in the sun. Men and women go to their clearings, the men to cut and hoe, the women to gather leaves for cups and plates, to dig for roots, or gather wild fruit and vegetable. The more adventurous go to search for honey: others shin up trees to get nests of red ants to be made into a tasty chutney or to be used as a febrifuge. Children graze the goats or hunt field-mice and little birds. Soon the sweet music of the flute is heard and the songs of lovers calling to one another among the trees.

The people take two meals—if there is enough food—in the day; one in the middle of the morning, the other about sunset. They eat anything they can. The small millets and the upland rice that grows freely on the rough hillsides is their staple food; it is helped out by a wide variety of roots and tubers, pulses, maize, and chutneys of mahua and tamarind. The Game Laws and the gradual extermination of the larger animals have driven them to depend for meat on hares, squirrels, bats. The Baigas distinguish twenty-one varieties of rat. There are few taboos: the flesh of the monkey and, of course, beef is eagerly taken by starving people.

In the evening, when the sun is 'a bamboo's length above the horizon', the villagers return home. Where there are sago or toddy palms, the men go up them 'like a pack of monkeys' for the refreshing juice. They drink it with savoury titbits such as roasted crab or prawn, fried frogs' legs and mahua paste. After supper, the village quickly goes to rest and the silence is broken only by the laughter of the children in the village dormitory and the muttered talk of old people round their fires.

This routine is continually being broken. There are hunt-

ing expeditions (where these are permitted), beats for fish, encounters with wild elephants and tigers. All the year round life is enlivened by festivals, marriages, dancing excursions. Boys and girls, gay with ornaments and flowers in their hair, gather to dance while their elders are busy at the more serious business of propitiating heaven. Marriages are delightful picnics: there is open house for guests, and hundreds of people gather to feast and dance in the woods. It is astonishing how much pleasure and excitement can be got for a handful of rupees. At other times, the unmarried youths go on dancing expeditions from place to place in search of wives. Sometimes the girls, too, go out to seek for husbands.

This free life is happy and it is happy in proportion as it is free. Yet it is deeply marked by suffering and deprivation. The tribesmen have their own war to fight, a war against disease and fear. Every night, more deadly than the Messerschmidt, comes the mosquito with its deadly load. The villages have been 'blacked-out' for centuries, for they cannot afford oil for their lamps. They are always rationed, for there is insufficient food for everyone. Their liberties are restricted by alien laws. In a few minutes, the steep sky's commotion may ruin the crops and destroy the work of months. Less catastrophically, but no less certainly than in war, life is cut short by disaster or disease.

The Political Solution

There have been many attempts to solve the vast and complicated problem presented by India's twenty-five million aboriginals; indeed had the quantity of action corresponded to the amount of controversy and discussion, the aboriginals' lot would be happier today. Let us first consider the political solution. That British politicians attached great importance to this is shown by their attempt to give protection to the aboriginals in the Government of India Act of 1935. Sections 52 and 92 of that Act provide for the reservation of certain predominantly aboriginal areas (to be known as 'Excluded' or 'Partially Excluded') from the operations of the Provincial Legislatures. 'The executive authority of a Province extends to excluded and partially excluded areas therein', but the

administration of excluded areas is under the Governor at his discretion, and partially excluded areas are administered by the Ministers subject to the special responsibility for their peace and good government imposed on the Governor by Section 52 (e) of the Act. On the other hand, in the matter of legislation, the protection given to excluded and partially excluded areas is the same. Thus the Governor is given power to control the application of legislation, whether of the Federal or Provincial Legislature, and to make regulations for both these areas.

This actually means that though the Ministers have no responsibility for the administration of excluded areas, they are intended to bring the partially excluded areas, as far as local conditions make it desirable, into the normal administrative life of a province subject to the individual judgement of the Governor, which enables him, when necessary, to control their actions.

It was obvious, of course, that no Governor would have time or opportunity to keep himself informed of the affairs of tribesmen so difficult of access and so obscure, and the Secretary of State's letter to the Government of India ordering an inquiry into the condition of 'backward tribes' by Provincial Governments refers to the 'considerable uneasiness' felt in the House of Commons as to the means which would be available to the Governor of securing that knowledge upon which the due discharge of his special responsibilities must depend, and continues, 'the uneasiness would be greatly allayed if it were found possible to appoint in any Province, where they are sufficiently extensive to justify such an appointment, a selected officer as an adviser in regard to these areas with the special duty of keeping Government and the Governor fully informed of their needs'.

This suggestion, so vital, so essential to the welfare of the tribesmen, was not accepted with any great enthusiasm by the Provincial Governments. Assam, which for many years has generously subsidized anthropological publications, decided that it could not afford a special officer, but appointed the well-known writer on the Naga tribes, Mr J. P. Mills, Honorary Ethnographer to Government. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the United Provinces did not consider a special

officer necessary 'because in the ordinary course of administration special attention was given to aboriginal needs'.

The Madras Government suggested that its Labour Commissioner might add the care of the tribesmen to his other interests. In Bombay, where there was already a Backward Class Officer, Mr D. Symington was appointed as Special Officer for a few months in 1937 and produced a Report on the Hill Tribes of the province. Travancore now has a Protector of Backward Classes. The Congress Ministers of the Central Provinces were considering the establishment of a special department for the 'uplift' of untouchables and aboriginals (their use of the word 'uplift' and the combination of untouchables and aboriginals, to the great indignation of the latter, was not altogether happy) when they resigned office. Mr W. V. Grigson was appointed Inquiry Officer and his invaluable report has recently been published.

Unfortunately, the reservation of aboriginal areas caused the worst possible impression in India. At a meeting of the Indian National Congress held at Faizpur in 1936 the policy was denounced as 'yet another attempt to divide the people of India into different groups, with unjustifiable and discriminatory treatment, to obstruct the growth of uniform democratic institutions in the country'. Two years later, at Haripura, the Congress passed another resolution in substantially similar terms.

An unfortunate remark by Mr Winston Churchill that he 'should not have objected to the entire scope of the great Indian peninsula under the excluded areas' still further exacerbated Nationalist opinion. An Excluded Areas Association was founded in southern India. In 1938 the Bombay Legislative Assembly, after a debate in which scorn was poured on anthropologists and the policy of protection derided, unanimously passed a resolution condemning the reservation of any areas at all. Similar debates were held in other Legislatures, and even in the Central Legislature at New Delhi otherwise intelligent persons declared that the excluded areas were a trick of the anthropologists to preserve the aboriginals as museum specimens for the exercise of 'their blessed science'.

The actual result, therefore, of this admirably intentioned

move for the protection of the tribesmen has probably been to destroy any real chance of protecting them at all.

The Missionary Solution

Another means of dealing with the problem is by what we may call the missionary solution. This term may be applied to any attempt to deal with aboriginals not by solving their own problems from inside and on the basis of their own life and culture, but by changing them or assimilating them entirely into a new community. This does not so much solve the problem as substitute another problem for it. Instead of the poor aboriginal we now have the poor convert. If the aboriginal becomes a Christian, he generally finds himself deprived of the moral and social sanctions under which he has grown up, of the free and natural recreations to which he is accustomed, and in many cases he sinks into moral and economic degradation.

The religion of the aboriginals, at least of peninsular India, should be regarded as a religion of the Hindu family, with a special relation to the exciting, dangerous, catastrophic Shaivite type, but as having a distinct existence of its own. For purposes of the Census, all aboriginals (except, perhaps, some of those in Assam, about whom I am not competent to give an opinion) should be classed as Hindus by religion, but separate returns of their numbers by race should be provided.

Yet aboriginal religion (with its cow-sacrifice, its worship of daemonic beings, its ceremonial use of blood and liquor), although it belongs theologically to the Hindu family and although politically the aboriginals should be classed with the Hindu community, is a thing distinct and apart; and where there have been attempts to assimilate the tribesmen too rapidly into conventional village Hinduism (a thing very different from the lofty Hinduism of history) harm has often been done. To the tribesmen Hinduism often means little more than the adoption of those very social evils that the best Hindus are today trying to abolish. Here again we have no solution of the aboriginal problem. We merely have a new problem substituted for the old one.

This is specially the case where aboriginal communities which have Hinduized themselves in order to obtain a lift in

the social scale have found themselves actually placed on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

The Gandas and Pankas are aboriginals who have lost their identity; they are now regarded as untouchable in many areas. So are the Kōlis, who have become 'Hindus'. The Government of Cochin put the Kadars into the 'Depressed' category. In the west of the Central Provinces the Hinduized Pardhans, Ojhas and Nagarchis (sub-tribes of Gond) are treated as impure. On the other hand, there is every reason to hope that, especially when Indians begin to manage their own affairs, this injustice will be repaired. The aboriginal who retains his independence claims to be a Kshattri (a member of the warrior caste). The Meithei have even been admitted as such into the Hindu fold. The Gond Rajas too have succeeded in establishing their claim to recognition. But at present the poorer folk are unable to do this. There is no central tribunal which can hear their case. Their neighbours at once doom them to inferiority. 'Some of the Weddids', says von Eickstedt (whom I quote because he cannot possibly be suspected of having any axe to grind in this matter), 'have already been completely assimilated into the caste-system of the Indids. In this way they become low-caste, the dregs of humanity. The contrast with the free jungle tribes is very characteristic. With the surrender of their weapons and the freedom of the forests, and just in the degree to which they give way to the attractions of a foreign and "higher" civilization, they sink to the very bottom of the social scale.' Yet where true religion is introduced, and education and reform conducted on sympathetic and scientific principles, good often results, especially if economic improvement has preceded spiritual change.

The Geographical Solution

The least satisfactory of the various solutions offered is the geographical solution—a policy of bringing the tribesmen down to the plains. This is the most destructive and cruel of all the ways of dealing with the problem. Economic collapse, moral decadence and psychic despair inevitably follow when Highlanders are forced away from their beloved mountains to the plains. The policy has nothing to commend

it and there is reason to suppose that it is only advocated in the interests of certain great industrialists who hope that later on the mineral and forest rights of the hills will be available to them without tiresome dispute about the human rights of poor and inconvenient people.

Apart even from the rights of the aboriginals, the policy of stripping the hills of their inhabitants is a bad one, for these wild and lonely tracts may well become a Dark Continent, the breeding-ground of ferocious animals and the refuge of dacoits. There are already signs of land-starvation everywhere and to give good and sufficient land to lakhs of new settlers would only seriously disturb the existing arrangements. Even the Forest Officer, so anxious to preserve his forest from the axes of the tribesmen, recognizes that these are the only people who, being inured to loneliness, hardship and disease, will ever be available to provide the labour necessary for his work.

The Scientific Solution

Finally, we have the scientific solution. In a sense our knowledge of the tribes is not yet sufficiently precise for us to have a scientific solution. Yet I think that the scientists are justified in claiming that their voice should be heard more often than it is in the administration of tribal areas. On matters of public health, they point out, the doctor is consulted; for road-making or mining the engineer is employed; so too in the very delicate and risky matter of cultural change those who have spent their lives studying it ought not to be ignored.

Unfortunately, anthropologists are associated in the Indian mind with two political policies with which actually as scientists they have nothing whatever to do—the policy of the Partially Excluded Areas and the attempt to separate the aboriginals from the Hindu community at the Census. Anthropology has further suffered in Indian esteem by being regarded, quite wrongly, as something foreign: it has been associated with the many travel books that are often little more than collections of sensationally interesting, but often somewhat discreditable, superstitions and customs. The idea naturally arose that the cause of India abroad would suffer as

a result of researches that exposed so much of the nakedness of the land.

This fear may have been justified in the case of certain inferior anthropological writings. It is entirely unmerited for the work of the modern anthropologist whose task is not to collect museum pieces, but to reveal in coherent and logical beauty the entire cultural organism of a people. It is not the loving care and sympathy of the scientists, who are the greatest champions of the tribesmen, that has lowered the cause of India in the world; it is rather the writings of casual travellers and tourists or of hired propagandists. Nor indeed do I believe that the fact that India has an aboriginal population is ever misunderstood. I have often asked American visitors to India what they think about this, and their reply is invariably along these lines: 'We too have an aboriginal population, the Red Indians, and we can well understand how primitive and highly civilized peoples can exist side by side. We have now learned to admire our aboriginals, and all that we have read about yours leads us to admire them also for their simplicity, their childlikeness and their courage. Indeed it will only increase our respect for India if we learn that Indian politicians are able to solve a problem that we ourselves so badly managed. We interfered in the life of the Red Indians and almost destroyed them. We trust you won't do the same thing in India.'

Another puerile complaint is that the anthropologists want to put the aboriginals in a zoo, a criticism that can only have been made by people who have never met an anthropologist or visited a zoo. Many anthropologists do, as a matter of fact, desire to see a considerable measure of protection given to the aboriginals, and some would like to have established National Parks or Reserves where they could live their own lives in unhampered liberty. But this is a very different thing from wishing to keep people as specimens for study in a zoo. It is desired so that these simple children of nature may be protected from those who invariably exploit them, and may continue to live in the freedom and happiness that is their birthright.

The need for protection is probably regarded by all scientists as the most important thing in the solution of the

aboriginal problem. They would also urge the application of certain general principles. They would say that we must be prepared to learn the lessons of history and the experience of other parts of the world. In Australia and the Pacific, in America and Africa, wide experience has been gained, generally at disastrous cost to the aboriginals themselves. This experience is available for study, and it is vital that the future of the Indian aboriginals should not be left either to ignorant politicians or to self-willed administrators who are not prepared to learn from what has happened in other lands. Scientists generally condemn both the missionary and geographical solutions of our problem, and they all insist that change must be extremely gradual if it is not to be disastrous; and that nothing (not even a bad thing) should be taken away from primitive people unless something else is ready to be put in its place.

The application of study to the problem may be illustrated by the situation that has so often arisen with regard to the prohibition of axe-cultivation. I have already pointed out that for the first class of aboriginals this form of cultivation is a necessity, whereas for the second class, although they are attached to it, it is no longer a living religious or social need. When in the Central Provinces fifty years ago axe-cultivation was prohibited, the Gonds who belonged to the second and third classes actually benefited, and many of them settled down as substantial farmers. But the Baigas who belonged to Class I were nearly destroyed, and still remain miserable and discontented because of the shattering blow that the prevention of something so near to their religious and social life had dealt them. In one of the Orissa States I found Bhuiyas belonging to Class II allowed to practise this form of cultivation, and Juangs of Class I prevented from it. The Juangs had sunk into the most pitiable condition of poverty and cultural decline, and the Bhuiyas who did not really need to use their axes, since they had plenty of cattle and the knowledge of ploughing, were merely destroying the forests without benefit to themselves.

Every tribe and every district has to be considered as a problem in itself. This means expenditure, a thing which

all Governments have shown themselves reluctant to incur with regard to aboriginals. Caution is absolutely necessary. Nothing must be done suddenly. Everything must be gradual. Knowledge must always precede reform.

The Need of Anthropology

The need for anthropological studies is most apparent when we consider the enormous attention that is now being paid to other branches of science. The study of man's material needs is out of all proportion to the attention paid to his psychological, moral and spiritual necessities. To study a people is to learn to love them, and to publish your studies is to make them widely loved. The ignorant and patronizing scorn with which all but the very best officials, politicians and members of the public regard the tribesman is seen in the use of the words 'uplift' and 'backward classes' (abominable expressions that should be banished from our vocabulary) and the very common belief that the tribesman is a sort of animal incapable of the higher love or spiritual perception.

Gradually modern methods and ideas are influencing India's study of this subject. The great need now is for a larger number of Indian scholars who will be ready to endure the tedious and exacting labours of research in the field. A whole phase of Indian culture will disappear from history unless means are speedily forthcoming to record it by pen and camera.

Conclusion

My own plan for the aboriginals has no claim to scientific authority. It is a simple practical scheme that has been impressed upon me by the actual realities of life during twelve years in a Gond village. It is based on my division of the aboriginals into different classes. The twenty million, who are already in contact with some sort of 'civilization' and are likely in the next few decades to be overwhelmed by it, do not ultimately present a problem very different from that of other peasants throughout India. The aboriginal problem cannot be considered apart from the general village problem. The great majority of Indian villagers are still

illiterate; they are still attached to antiquated and economically injurious social, religious and agricultural habits; they have little medical assistance, meagre educational facilities, bad communications; they are exploited and oppressed just as the aboriginals are. Wiser heads than mine will plan and great political and economic movements will determine the fate of these multitudes. The twenty million semi-civilized aboriginals will have to take their chance with the rest of the population. It is evident that there is little possibility of protecting them, although locally it may often be possible to ameliorate their lot by special treatment. It would, however, be deplorable if yet another minority community, which would clamour for special representation, weightage and a percentage of Government posts, were to be created. The twenty million aboriginals need what all village India needs—freedom, prosperity, peace, good education, medicine, a new system of agriculture and a fair deal under industrialization.

It is the remaining five millions who present a problem that may well tax our brains and patience. The difficulty here is that not only are there no workers available to solve the problem, but that many people in India refuse to admit that any problem exists. They are ignorant of or have forgotten the appalling consequences of a too rapid acculturation in other parts of the world. They have a pathetic faith in the 'march of progress' to solve every human problem. There is a great deal of glib talk in the cities about 'uplift' and the most ready with their opinions are those who have never seen the aboriginals and who themselves have never moved a finger to help them.

It is little use to say that we should give the blessings of civilization to the remotest aboriginals when we cannot give it to the workers in our great cities or to the peasants in accessible areas in the plains.

I suggest, therefore, that until the social sciences have come to more definite conclusions about the safeguards necessary for primitive people advancing into civilized life, until there are properly trained workers and teachers of integrity and enterprise, until there is sufficient money to do the job of civilizing properly, the five million wilder aboriginals should be left alone and should be given the

strictest protection that our Governments can afford. This is, I admit, a desperate measure and one that is easily misunderstood and still more easily misrepresented. It is a purely practical measure. It is based on no philosophic principle. Least of all does it suggest that the aboriginals are to be kept for ever primitive. I only urge that unless we can civilize them properly it is better not to interfere with the small minority of the most primitive hillmen at all. Casual benefits only destroy and degrade; it needs a lifetime of love and toil to achieve permanent advance.

This view is hotly contested by people who know nothing of the realities of the problem. I have heard very little criticism from those who have actually lived among and studied these aboriginals. The man in the city cannot believe that they can be happy without the radio and the cinema, that they can have a good physique without penicillin, that they can be honourable and decent without going to church, that they have a life that is good, peaceful and free. They feel that the very suggestion is a sort of criticism of their own advancement. I do not suggest that the primitive hillman is better than the finest flower of modern culture, but my experience, which is now extensive, is that these tribes in the freedom and glory of their mountains are infinitely better and better off than the semi-civilized and decadent clerks or coolies which is all that we seem able to produce by our present methods of uplift and reform.

For the great majority of the aboriginals, however, we should press forward with the best schemes of rural reconstruction and education that our wisest brains can devise. For the small minority, who in any case can scarcely be reached, there should be a temporary scheme of protection and isolation. Even for this minority, protection does not mean that nothing is to be done. For them, as for the other aboriginals, there is much that all men and women of good-will may do immediately.

We may fight for the three freedoms—freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from interference. We may see that the aboriginals get a square deal economically. We may see that they are freed from cheats and impostors, from oppressive landlords and moneylenders, from corrupt and rapacious

officials. We may see that they get medical aid from doctors with some sense of professional integrity. If there must be schools, we may see that these teach useful crafts like carpentry and agriculture, and not a useless literacy. We may work to raise the prestige and the honour of the aboriginals in the eyes of their neighbours. We may guard them against adventurers who would rob them of their songs, their dances, their festivals, their laughter.

The essential thing is not to 'uplift' them into a social and economic sphere to which they cannot adapt themselves, but to restore to them the liberties of their own countryside.

But whatever is done, and I would be the last to lay down a general programme, it must be done with caution and above all with love and reverence. The aboriginals are the real swadeshi products of India, in whose presence everyone is foreign. These are the ancient people with moral claims and rights thousands of years old. They were here first: they should come first in our regard.

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