

## LABOUR IN INDIA.

The masses of the people in countries maintain themselves by means of their own labour and from the proceeds of their own occupation taxes also are paid and administration carried on. Nothing, therefore, is of greater consequence to the people and to the Government alike than a steady supply for the population. The nation's working hands should be employed upon several trades and industries and the people ought to be free so far as the choice of labour is concerned, which from time to time may be most profitable. If for instance Indian workmen relied wholly upon agricultural work, their hands would remain idle if it pleased Providence to withhold the rains or if the crops should be destroyed by locusts or other visitations. It is therefore important that India should have some other resources besides cultivation of the soil. In a prosperous community there is always a change labour and also a constant division of labour. For this reason, experience shows that the folly of a Government lies in its framing rules which are deterrent to the freedom of labour and industry. Again labour must not be misapplied; or there will be waste of money, and poverty.

That agriculture forms the mainstay of Indian labour may appear from the census reports published by the Government every year. But since a great part of India is subjected to the risk of drought, locusts and other influences hostile to agriculture, the policy of the British government has been to open out to its labouring population new sources of industry, wealth and labour, thus relieving the pressure on the soil and enabling the working classes to pursue their occupations, although the crops may for a season may fail owing to want of rain.

We may cite a few of the measures by which this desirable end has been promoted. India possesses beneath the soil many of those mineral resources which have made foreign countries, specially India's ruling mistress, England, rich and prosperous, as well as industrious. Before the establishment of British rule there was no enterprise or capital available for meeting the heavy expenses of setting up the required machinery; moreover there was no skilled labour or experience in India capable of working the mines. So, India had to import from foreign countries all the coal to meet her demands. Now, she is able to supply all the demands for coal from her own coal-mines wherein are employed vast numbers of workmen who will never be interrupted in their labour by famine or drought. Their families are also to be included in the number. There is in store, a splendid future for Indian coal which is not only well able to supply all the growing demands of the country, but will gradually find a good market in other countries of Asia too.

India, possesses plenty of iron and with its own coal it is able to produce steel and iron for its railways, factories and buildings at a much cheaper cost. Then we have the gold mines of Mysore wherein large numbers of workmen are employed.

In 1820, some European planters settled in Mysore and in the Wynaad and they set to convert these hilly tracts into coffee-gardens. There are in the South of India about 310500 acres of land, otherwise unused, brought under cultivation, of tea and coffee. They employ altogether some 323,000 workmen and overseers who receive 187 lakhs of rupees as wages. In 1835, an attempt for the cultivation of tea and cinchona in Mysore and Madras, was made, but this attempt ended in failure. But in other parts of India the cultivation of tea is adding to the wealth of the country and in it are employed lakhs of persons, both of permanent and temporary employment.

The most striking benefit which British Capital and experience has conferred upon the labour of India is the establishment of cotton industry. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, beyond its agricultural produce India had few products. But now of late years, she has taken rank as a manufacturing country. It can boast of hundreds of cotton-mills wherein are employed hundreds thousands of hands, so rapidly has this single industry grown since 1851 when a mill was first introduced in this country. There are also jute-mills, rice cleaning mills, sawmills, paper-factories and tobacco-factories employing many thousands of labourers. An impulse has also been given to the silk industry and there is no direction in which British enterprise and capital are not pushing their way in order to extend the manufactures of India and thus to open up to its vast population new trades and industries.

In dealing with the occupations and careers open to the people of India, one can not wholly exclude the appointments which the Service of State affords. But they are insignificant by the side of the great professions and industries which not only employ large numbers of men but also pay them salaries much in excess of public salaries. It is obvious that a single industry like cotton can do more to find work and profit for the population of India than Government can do with the whole of its public patronage.

Thus we see that the industrial prosperity of the country depends upon freedom of labour and the ability of the workmen to enter upon new fields of labour. From the year 1843 when slavery was abolished in India the authorities have never faltered in their policy of maintaining peace and freedom of labour and attracting foreign capital so as to give the population means of livelihood other than those which the cultivation of the soil can afford.

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