

A World in Distress: The Remedy As Seen by the Theosophist

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THE INDIAN CONDITIONS

FRIENDS,

The general title of the Convention Lectures of this year is, as you know, a "World in Distress; the Remedies as Seen by the Theosophist". When Mr. C. Jinarajadasa asked me whether I would be one of the speakers, he suggested that I might limit myself to India and the way out of the economic and other difficulties here, seen from the Theosophist's standpoint. He was also good enough to add that I can claim some experience regarding the difficulties of Village Life, and that I should have some suggestions of applicability to Indian conditions of distress, which is a topic vitally important to Indian members. I gathered that in the opinion of Mr. C. Jinarajadasa, as of other thinkers, who have given attention to the subject, India along with the rest of the world is [Page 2] passing through grave and difficult conditions; and Theosophy is or ought to be able to indicate a way out of the present troubles everywhere; and so, Theosophists all the world over should devote themselves wholeheartedly to the solution of the problems confronting them in their respective countries and spheres of life.

It is obvious to all who have been and are following the course of events in the world that there is hardly a country where do not exist "Conditions of distress". But the exact causes of distress may vary in their variety and intensity from country to country. So also, the remedies, not only because of the difference in conditions between one country and another, but also because of the difference in outlook, temperament and knowledge of the students who bring their minds to bear on the problems of their respective countries. However, a study, from whatever point of view, of the ills one country may be suffering from, of their causes and the measures by which those sufferings may be alleviated, will not, I think, be found altogether uninteresting or unprofitable to other students of the same or of other countries, more or less similarly afflicted. In fact, Mr. Sydney Webb thinks that "Indian conditions present a field of study which is likely to be of real use not only to India; but, indeed, to the world". Further, when one is dealing with almost a continent like India with a population of nearly one-fifth of that of [Page 3] the whole world, any betterment of the conditions in it is to that extent at least a material contribution to the improvement of the world and brings about a corresponding reduction in the erstwhile chaos of the world.

With these preliminary observations I shall proceed to sketch briefly what appear to me to be some of the most disturbing conditions in India; to indicate the remedies that suggest themselves to an humble student of Theosophy; and to examine, in the light of available data, whether these remedies are natural and suited to the genius of the Indian Nation, and likely to yield the beneficial results expected of them.

I have said above that the Indian population is nearly one-fifth of the whole world. The last census of 1931 puts the figure at 353 millions. This vast population lives mostly in villages; not in towns, as in Great Britain. According to *India in 1930-31*, "Even if villages that contain over 4,000 inhabitants are classed as towns, the number of townspeople in India cannot by any ingenuity of calculation be computed at more than 33 millions". So more than 90 per cent of the total population is purely rural, whereas the corresponding figure in England is 20 per cent. This huge population is scattered over nearly 700,000 villages between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin and the eastern and the western seas. It is thus clear that the prosperity or [Page 4] otherwise of the rural population possesses an importance in India which it may not have in other countries whose population is mostly urban.

We shall next examine the condition of this large rural population which for all practical purposes constitutes the entire population of India.

I]. As regards the sufficiency of food, over 260,000,000 people depend for their livelihood on agriculture; and, cultivation is proving more and more an unremunerative proposition. The reasons for this are many.

(1) When land is abundant and the pressure of population in it comparatively light, the people choose the most fertile land for cultivation and the return may, in these circumstances, be sufficient for the needs of the family. But, as population increases, additional land of less and less fertility is brought under cultivation, whose average yield naturally falls far short of that of the better land already under occupation. In other words, the average return from land to those dependent on it gets considerably reduced.

(2) The increasing pressure on land is not due solely to the natural increase in the agricultural population. Speaking in London in 1924, I observed that in the past, India was not only an agricultural but a manufacturing and industrial country as well. But that did not suit British interests and the Indian manufactures were therefore put down with a strong hand. Lecky, in his [Page 5] *History of England in the 18th Century* has the following on the doubtful methods adopted by the rulers of the day. "At the end of the 17th century, great quantities of cheap and graceful Indian calicoes, muslins and chintzes were imported into England and they found such favour that the woollen and silk manufacturers were seriously alarmed. Acts of Parliament were accordingly passed in 1700 and 1721, absolutely prohibiting with a very few specified exceptions the employment of printed and dyed goods of which cotton formed any part". Acts like these coupled with heavy import duties were enough in the words of Mr. Henry St. George Tucker, a director of the East India Company in 1823, to reduce India from the state of a manufacturing to an agricultural country.

The iron industry of the country died a similar death. Captain Townsend of the Ordinance Department has left it on record that India is more richly endowed than any other country in iron ore. This is confirmed by the observations in one of the statistical atlases published under the authority of the Government of India. When the Government decided to establish a system of Railways, they might have simultaneously attempted to manufacture the necessary iron out of the ore available in India and had it at a less cost than they paid to get it from England. This would have, according to [Page 6] Mr. Ball, Deputy Superintendent of the Geological Survey, kept vast sums of money in circulation in India and given employment to large numbers of people who for lack of it were obliged to swell the ranks of those already dependent on land for their livelihood to the inconvenience of themselves and others.

The same fate as befell the cotton manufactures overtook the once thriving ship-building industry of India. Mr. Taylor in his *History of India* says as follows: "The arrival in the port of London of Indian produce in Indian-built ships created sensation among the monopolists which could not have been exceeded if a hostile fleet had appeared in the Thames. The ship-builders of the port of London took the lead in raising the cry of alarm; they declared that their business was on the point of ruin and that the families of all the shipwrights were certain to be reduced to starvation". Then the Government saw to it that this ship-building industry in India was extinguished.

Some sympathetic strangers may urge that serious attempts might be made now to revive these and other industries in India. But it is one thing to develop an already flourishing industry and quite another to re-establish it on old ruins, after allowing other countries to steal a very long march over India. Further, we are still without the power to organise our industries as we like and you will see that there still lingers the old [Page 7] unhealthy spirit of former directors of the East India Company which cared not what havoc their policy caused among other people, if, thereby, they could add unto themselves a few more good things of the world. One could trace it to the British statesmen of today in their discussions over the safeguards at the Third Round Table Conference in London.

This process of transfer of people hitherto engaged in manufactures and industrial pursuits to an already overburdened land still continues. The following extracts from the Government census reports tell their own tale: Mr. Gait observed in his report on the 1911 census that, "as compared with 1901, there has been a decrease of 6.1 per cent in the number of persons supported by textile industries and that the fall is due mainly to the almost complete extinction of cotton-spinning by hand". The 1921 census report mentioned a further decline of 6 per cent in the number of those supported by Industry. The figures of 1931 census are not yet to hand and will in all probability show a still further decline. When it is remembered that over a tenth of the population depend for their maintenance on such industries as textiles, and that there are no other industries worth mentioning to absorb the large percentages of population thrown out of employment in the textile branch, we shall grasp the full significance of this successive addition of a fifth [Page 8] of a million every year to the ranks of those dependent on land already taxed beyond its capacity.

(3) The fertility of the soil also is steadily decreasing year by year and the cultivators are experiencing difficulty to find sufficient manure for their fields. Even the droppings of their cattle are not all used by the ryot for replenishing the fertility of the soil. For owing to the insufficiency of leaf manure on waste lands and the restrictions of the Forest Department in regard to their reserves, scarcity of fuel is felt in many places, specially in the black soil areas, and part of the droppings of the cattle is dried and used as fuel.

(4) Nor has the ryot "enough capital either for extending cultivation beyond his present limits or for procuring improved appliances".

(5) The damage to crops by wild animals, specially where the fields are close to the Government forests which practically serve as a shelter to the wild animals during the day is not inconsiderable. The ryots cannot, owing to departmental restrictions, enter the forests to hunt and destroy the wild animals in them, nor are they freely given permission to obtain the necessary fire-arms with which to shoot down the animals when they attack the crops.

(6) The unconscionably high rate at which land is taxed, and the extremely inopportune time at [Page 9] which the Government collect land revenue from the cultivators (on pain of being subjected to the public indignity of distraint and sale of their property), add to the further impoverishment of the ryot. The tax is demanded when the crop is still in the field. The ryot has no ready money to meet the demand, and therefore borrows what is required at usurious rates of interest. The creditor insists on repayment of his loan as soon as the crops are harvested and the grain is gathered, with the result that the borrower is obliged to sell a good part of the grain he needs for himself and his family at a time when prices are comparatively low. The produce of his fields is never sufficient to satisfy his requirements all the year round, and so the sale of a part of his produce, to repay the loan previously borrowed, reduces his stock still further. When he finds that his stock of grain is exhausted and that he has yet to face four to six months before he can have his next crop, he borrows again, at the usual high rates of interest, only with this difference now, that he wants the money to purchase grain and not to pay the Government dues. At this time of the year, the prices are generally high and the unfortunate ryot is forced to buy the grain he needs at a much higher rate than that at which he parted with his own grain earlier in the year.

(7) The above are the difficulties a ryot experiences even in years of normal rainfall. In tracts, [Page 10] and they are many, where rainfall is precarious, scarcities and famines intervene during which the ryots and their cattle suffer indescribable hardships.

2]. As if these handicaps were not enough, the Government have been pursuing a very wrong policy in regard to their excise administration which adds materially to the poverty of the ryot and involves his moral degradation. Neither Hinduism nor Muhammadanism, the religions of the two most important sections of the Indian population, countenance drink. A Muhammadan ruler, Tippu Sultan, had prohibited drink altogether. You will have seen from the prayers of all religions offered in the Headquarters Hall each morning how Buddhism lays a special injunction on its votaries that they should abstain from *Surapanam* or use of intoxicating liquors. But an unimaginative Government have managed to make drink one of their two most important sources of revenue. The official publications show that "the excise revenue derived from intoxicating liquors, hemp drugs, and opium, consumed in the country and levied in the form of duty on manufacture and fees for sale licenses, was in 1860-61 but 1.18 crore of RS. [A crore is 10,000,000] In 1900-01 it stood at 5.91 crores. In 1911 it grew to 11 crores and in 1921 to 20 crores and the latest statistical abstract puts the revenue from this source in 1929-30 at 23.5 crores. The important [Page 11] thing to remember about this revenue is that the consumers who ultimately pay this revenue are notoriously poor; and it is out of the money exacted from them that not only the Government revenues specified above are found, but also all expenses of the renter, namely, owner's fees for trees tapped, the wages of the watchman and of the tappers, transport charges, pay of the salesman, rent for the premises, the illegal exactions by all sorts of officials and the renter's own profit. One might safely say that if the Government realise a revenue of Rs. 25, a hundred rupees worth of toddy has been consumed by the victims of drink.

3]. Irrigation, a matter of vital importance to a population mostly agricultural, did not, for a long time, receive even as much attention as the railways did, though as a matter of fact railways hardly paid their way but irrigation brought in a handsome return. Up to 1920-21 the Government had spent on railways 658 crores as against 78 crores on irrigation. This unreasonable preference of railways up to very recent times is perhaps due to the policy laid down by Lord Dalhousie. His biographer, Sir William Hunter, has indicated that policy in the following words: "This was Lord Dalhousie's masterly idea — not only would he consolidate the newly annexed territories of India by his railways, and immensely increase the striking

power of his military forces at every point of the Empire, but he would use a railway [Page 12] construction as a bait to bring British capital and enterprise to India on a scale which had never entered the imagination of any previous Governor-General". Lord Dalhousie never paused to enquire if even a simultaneous expansion of irrigation facilities would not convert the losses inevitable on his railways into profits as has been since proved in the case of the North-western Railway by the opening up of irrigation facilities in the Punjab and Sind.

It is said that the Government have generally "recognised that a system of well kept and well constructed roads was essential for the country's economic progress and that those which existed left much to be desired". However, the fact remains, that the little attention that has so far been bestowed relates mostly to communications connecting bigger towns or places of official importance, and that village communications have been comparatively neglected. The total length of all roads metalled and unmetalled — maintained by the Government and the local authorities in British India, was in 1929-30, 1,83,456 miles for an area of 10,94,300 square miles. This works out to a mile of road for every 6 square miles. It may interest some of you to know that in Great Britain, which is extremely well served by railways and waterways, they have two miles of road for every square mile, in other words, twelve times the mileage for the same area in India. [Page 13]

As regards housing accommodation, and its suitability for healthy living in villages, you will find it admitted even in the Government publications that "the village house is still often ill-ventilated and overpopulated; the village site dirty, crowded with cattle, choked with rank vegetation and poisoned with stagnant pools, and the village tanks polluted and used indiscriminately for bathing, cooking and drinking".

Dr. Hatch, Directing Rural Demonstrator of Travancore and Cochin districts, says in his book *Up from Poverty* (to which, by the way, His Excellency the Earl of Willingdon has written a foreword), that a large percentage of the people have not the means to secure the needed clothing.

No wonder therefore that in view of all these handicaps the expectancy of life among the Indian people is the lowest in the world, *i.e.*, less than 25 years as compared with 45 to 55 in western countries. In his preface to *Village Government in British India*, Sydney Webb says that Europe is accustomed "to take as a rough test of the social administration of any nation the changes in its annual death-rate: or rather, in the average expectation of life of the whole population. The first and most important business of a Government is after all, to contrive that its people should live and not die! In the long run, in the judgment of history, it is by this test that Governments will be judged". If this test is applied it is [Page 14] obvious that the Indian Government must be deemed to have failed very badly.

What I have been describing so far is supported not merely by the statements of Indian leaders and writers but by official publications and writings of non-Indians who cannot be charged with any prejudice against the British Government. I pass by the statements of persons like Sir Charles Elliot, first a settlement officer and later a Lieutenant-Governor, who said that "half the agricultural population do not know from one year's end to another what it is to have a full meal"; and of Sir William Hunter who wrote that "forty millions of the people never have a full meal"; and content myself with a reference to a most recent publication of the Government. In accordance with the requirements of Section 26 of the Government of India Act, a statement is prepared every year under the direction of the Imperial

Government for presentation to Parliament. The latest statement relates to India in 1930-31. I have quoted already extracts from it and, as relevant to the present subject, I extract the following few remarks: "The most striking characteristic of the inhabitants of these villages is their poverty. Though the psychological consequences of poverty are on the whole less painful than in the West, there is no question that the material condition of the Indian masses is deplorable". After referring to some of the attempts in [Page 15] the past to estimate the average income from all India the statement concludes that "the main fact to be emphasised is that the vast majority of the rural population of India lives perpetually on the very margin of subsistence". Recent writers on the population question in India such as Wattal and Ranadive argue that "the population of India is already living permanently on the verge of scarcity".

Further, taking all things into consideration one feels bound to say that the system of administration in the country, more especially that part of it which pertains to local governments, is not calculated materially to advance the well-being of the ryot in the village. This defect was noticed by Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford in the report which goes by their name, as may be observed from the following paragraph in that report:

"A simple, cheap and certain system of law is one of his greatest needs. He greatly requires to be protected against the intricacies of courts and the subtleties of law, and enabled to defeat the advantage enjoyed by long-pursed opponents. The working of all the great procedure codes, the law of usury, of registration, of limitation, of contract, the court fees act, and the stamp act, is felt, in the remotest village in the land. The ryot and hundreds of thousands of his kind may be lifted to comfort by a canal project costing millions of pounds; one of his constant needs is protection [Page 16] against the exaction of petty official oppressors. Improvement in seed or stock, manure, ploughs, wells, the building of new road or new railway, facilities or grazing his cattle, or getting wood for his implements, the protection of his crops from wild animals, his cattle from disease and his brass vessels from burglars, co-operative banks to lend him money and co-operative societies to develop his market, and provision of schools and dispensaries within reasonable distance, these are the things that make all the difference to his life". Quite true. Twelve years have gone by and we are not now appreciably nearer to the promised land than we were when these words were written. Not only that, in several directions we appear to be heading fast for a crisis, and are forcibly reminded of the words of our President, Dr. Annie Besant, that of all the dangers to an established Government the unsatisfied hunger of the masses is the gravest.

I am afraid I have presented to you rather a harrowing picture of the present conditions in India. My excuse is that I have endeavoured my best to present as true a picture as possible. Further, I feel that a correct knowledge of our present state is very essential if sufficient effort is to be put forth for bettering our condition, at least, hereafter. The great Hindu Scripture, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, is a treatise on Yoga and consists of 18 chapters, each chapter dealing with one or another [Page 17] of the different systems of Yoga. The very first chapter, which is really an introduction to the rest of the book is called the "Vishada Yoga" or the Yoga of anguish, sorrow or Despondency. To my mind, it is indicative of the fact that before any real progress can be thought of by any individual, he should realise his true state and feel deeply how far from satisfactory that is. The deeper such realisation and the more intense the consequent discontent, the greater, perhaps, the urge for and the likelihood of growing better. A correct appreciation, therefore, of the present situation in India cannot but fill the heart of every friend of India — be he Swadeshi or Videshi — with great anguish, and deeply stir him to find ways and means for advancing the cause of India and her people.

What, then, shall we do to get out of the present tangle we find ourselves in ? Is there anything that we can gather from the past of India which will throw light on the causes that have led to her present deplorable state, and give us a clue as to the lines on which we should proceed hereafter to make the people contented and happy ?

That India was prosperous in the ancient days cannot be denied by anyone. The descriptions we have of towns and kingdoms in ancient epics and other literature bear testimony to it. Thus, in *Ramayana* the kingdom of Dasaratha, is described. (I quote from the translation of Mr. C. R. Srinivasa Iyengar.) “The broad realms of Kosala extend far [Page 18] away on either bank of the Sarayu, rich in the wealth of flock and herd, fertile fields and broad pastures with farms and happy homes of countless millions”.

“And of that kingdom is Ayodya the capital famed of old through all the world and fashioned in ages past by the royal hand of the divine Manu. Built on a level stretch of ground, well watered and fertile, lovely groves adorn it, and broad fields where waves the golden corn. Excellent roads lined with branching trees connect it with every part of the world, her lofty walls measure 12 leagues from end to end and three from side to side, high are her ramparts and massive and, all around them, a moat, wide and deep. The city gates are large and strong and of exquisite workmanship. The high roads planned perfectly straight and to the very gates of the city are ever kept clean and well watered and strewn with fragrant flowers. Long lines of palatial shops adorn the merchant quarters stored with the rarest works of nature and art. Charming villas and pleasure grounds peep out from every lovely hill and eminence. Splendid mansions, flashing with gold and gems, rise in goodly row and meet the eyes at every turn. Numerous flags and banners gaily wave over the roofs of the towering houses built on lofty platforms, and give one the idea of the radiant aerial paths of the happy ones who have won the [Page 19] abodes of the Gods by the force of their religious merits”.

The description of Lanka, the Kingdom of Ravana, is indicative of an equal if not even a greater splendour. Descriptions such as these are very frequently met with in most of our old books. Allowing for some poetic exaggeration, one cannot but agree with Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer when he says that “it would be absurd to suppose that such descriptions of cities and towns in literature were not founded on a solid substratum of truth”.

Not only was India rich in what is popularly known as the prehistoric days, but she continued to be so even up to comparatively recent times. Visitors from foreign lands like the Grecian Magasthenes, or the Chinese Hiouen Tsang, have borne eloquent testimony to the prosperity of the land when they visited it. The most convincing proof, if any is needed, of India's prosperity up to comparatively recent times is to be had in the successive invasions of which she has been the victim from the old Pathans to the present Britishers. Surely, it was no spirit of philanthropy which attracted the East India Company and their countrymen to Indian shores, but pure love of wealth and the knowledge that it could be had in India. As late as the beginning of the 19th century Sir Thomas Munro speaking of India testified to “a good system of agriculture, unrivalled manufacturing skill, a capacity to [Page 20] produce whatever can contribute to convenience or luxury, among other characteristics of her high civilization. The old system of village administration contributed largely to the above prosperity. That it worked fairly well even until the middle of the 19th century is clear from the observations of Elphinstone and Sir Charles Metcalfe. Apparently one had more experience of the conditions in the South and the other of those in the North. Still their observations are strikingly similar. In 1820 or thereabouts Elphinstone left on record his impressions as follows: “Though probably not compatible with a very good form of Government, they (village

organisations) are an excellent remedy for the imperfections of a bad one. They prevent the bad effects of negligence and weakness and even present some barrier against its tyranny and rapacity. Again, these communities contain in miniature all the materials of a state within themselves and are almost sufficient to protect their members, if all other government were withdrawn. In the stability and continuity of Indian village life and organisation, is to be sought the secret of the good things achieved by India in the past, in spite of apparent incapacity to develop political institutions of an advanced character”.

In 1830 Sir Charles Metcalfe, who was senior member in the Governor-General's Executive Council and later on succeeded Lord William Bentick as Governor-General, made the following [Page 21] observations. “The village communities are little republics having nearly everything that they can want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relation. They seem to last where nothing else lasts, dynasty after dynasty tumbles down, revolution succeeds revolution Hindu, Pathan, Mogal, Mahratta, Sikh, English are all masters in turn, but the village communities remain the same! The union of the village communities, each one forming a little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the peoples of India through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and are in a high degree conducive to their happiness and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence”.

It would be worth while, therefore, to study the conditions of life in India in her palmy days, the basis on which her high civilisation was founded and the fundamental principles that underlay the administration of the country and helped it to retain its prosperity for a long time even after the days of degeneration had set in. We should find out how far these basic principles were inspired by the teachings of the Divine Wisdom and whether any or all of them are applicable to the present day conditions in India.

A study of the ancient Indian works, specially of the portions therein pertaining to God and His universe, kings and kingdoms, duties of the rulers [Page 22] and the ruled, the respective dharmas of various castes and classes, the plan on which towns and villages were built, the old inscriptions describing the functions of councils and guilds, leads us to the following conclusions:

1). In the old days, a country, town or village was not considered to be a mere geographical area, consisting of a certain number of houses and people. It was held to have an individuality of its own apart from the persons composing its people. Like man, it was a soul with a mind and a body of its own. The *Bhagavad-Gita* mentions Sri Krishna as saying: “Nor is there aught, moving or unmoving that may exist bereft of me” In the stanza but one after that, it is said: “Having pervaded this whole Universe with one fragment of myself, I remain”. In the *Purushasukta*, the following description of Purusha occurs: “A thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, Purusha has and He covers the whole universe and extends to 10 inches beyond. What has been before, what is to come hereafter all this Universe, is Purusha, ... yet, the Purusha is greater still. All the manifested things of this Universe form but a quarter, and three-fourths of Him yet remain as unmanifested Divinity.” “As above, so below. If the universe is ensouled by one life, parts thereof, countries, provinces, towns and villages also are ensouled by reflections of the One Life. We find this idea beautifully brought out in the *Ramayana*. [Page 23] Hanuman, the devotee of Sri Ramachandra, in his search for his master's wife Sita, ultimately reached the island of the demon king Ravana and found himself near to the capital Lanka where Sita had been imprisoned. When about to enter Lanka, Hanuman is accosted by a being in the guise of a woman and she asked him who he was, and told him that he must not proceed any further, as she is the power that watches over the safety of the Capital. “May I know something about my questioner”, asks Hanuman, and the

reply received is: I am Lanka. ...”

2). There is hardly an ancient classic among the Hindus which does not refer frequently to Devas (shining ones) and the Deva kingdom. They are credited with various functions, such as the administration of the laws of nature, looking after vast areas such as kingdoms and empires, as well as quite small areas like towns and villages (Village Goddess is a very frequent expression), attending to men's prayers and so on.

3). None can escape the Law of Cause and Effect. Neither in their individual nor in their collective capacity can people set themselves up against this Law of Ishwara governing the Universe. This may put some of you in mind of the words of Henry Ford in his book *My Philosophy of Industry*: “There is one thing that we know about Universal Law; it operates for us if we will, against us if it must, but it operates”.
[Page 24]

4). As the state, town or village is really each an organism informed by one life and subject to one law, it follows that, if the organism is to fulfil its highest purpose well and truly, its various limbs should be sound and work in perfect harmony with each other. Thus, we find it stated in the Balakanda of *Ramayana*, that “Ministers eight in number, assisted the wise, warlike monarch of this vast Empire” and that they “worked in perfect harmony” always with “their eye on everything that tended to the best interests of their master and was dear to his heart”. And the dearest thing to the heart of their master, King Dasaratha, was the well-being of all his people.

5). Higher than all teachings was considered to be good conduct. “By good conduct man attains life. By good conduct, he attains fair fame here and hereafter”. Right behaviour and prosperity go together. The intimate relationship that exists between prosperity and right behaviour is finely described, in the Shanti Parva of *Mahabharata*. Duryodhana was filled with envy at the prosperity of his cousins, Yudhishtara and his brothers, when they were living at Indraprasta. Questioned by his father, the blind king Dhritarashtra, he confessed to him that he was burning with grief at the sight of the prosperity of his cousins. To this Dhritarashtra replied as follows: “If you wish, O Duryodhana, to acquire prosperity like that of Yudhishtara or that which is even [Page 25] superior to it, do you then, O son, try to be of virtuous conduct. Forsooth, one may by his conduct alone conquer the three worlds. There is nothing which virtuous persons cannot obtain”. As if to further emphasise the intimate relationship that existed between right conduct and prosperity, Dhritarashtra told the story of the great Daitya King Prahlada who by the merit of his virtues had obtained from Indra the sovereignty of the three worlds. Indra, with a view to regain his lost kingdom, disguised himself as a student and came to Prahlada to find out the methods by which Prahlada had obtained his sovereignty. In due course Indra discovered that it was Prahlada's righteousness which was instrumental in securing for himself the sovereignty of the three worlds. So, one day, taking advantage of a promise made by his teacher Prahlada to grant him any boon, he asked and sought of him the gift of his behaviour, and Prahlada, true to his word, renounced it in favour of the pupil, Indra in disguise. As he sat brooding over what he had done, a flame of light came out of his person. It had a shadowy form of great effulgence and huge proportions. Prahlada asked the form: “Who are you?” The form answered: “I am the embodiment of your conduct renounced by you. I am going away”. So it went to dwell with Indra, the erstwhile disciple of Prahlada. After the disappearance of that form, another similar form issued out of Prahlada 's [Page 26] body. The Daitya King addressing it said: “Who are you?” The form answered: “Know me, O Prahlada, for the embodiment of righteousness. I shall go to reside where conduct lives”. Successive forms of effulgence emerged out of the body of Prahlada embodying truth, good works and

power and each went to reside where its predecessor had already gone to stay. After this, a Goddess of great effulgence came out of Prahlada's person. The Daitya King questioning her, she answered him that she was the embodiment of prosperity, adding: "I lived in you, O hero, O you of Prowess, incapable of being baffled. Renounced by you, I shall follow power". She went on to explain how Indra knowing that it was by his conduct that Prahlada had reduced the three worlds to subjection, had robbed him of his conduct, and how righteousness, truth, good works, power and herself (the Goddess of prosperity) all originate in conduct. This belief that prosperity depends on virtue still persists among the masses of India. If rains hold off, the villager will exclaim: "How can there be timely rains with so much of Adharma, or sin rampant in the world". This would explain, what to western minds might be puzzling and inexplicable, the association by Gandhiji of the 'charka' (hand-spinning wheel) and the removal of untouchability with the winning of Swaraj.

It is true that ancient India believed in divine guidance and the scrupulous operation of the Law [Page 27] of Cause and Effect which gave every man his due. However, neither the oppressor nor the oppressed could point to this law, one to justify his oppression and the other to resign himself to it. Obviously, an oppressor can be no judge of himself in these matters. He is not a Bhishma of unclouded vision who knew all the subtleties of Dharma and could decide when he might side with an apparently unrighteous cause, and having sided with it, when or how he might withdraw his support from it. So far as we are concerned, every man's obvious duty, as much in his own interests as in that of others under his sway or committed to his care, is to do the best he can for the latter with the purest of motives possible; he must leave to the Lords of Karma to regulate how far the results of the good acts should reach those for whom they are intended. Similarly it is the clear duty of those under subjection to do their utmost to better their condition, and not sit still with folded hands saying that it is all their fate to suffer. They should bear in mind that exertion is after all greater than destiny and that, if the present is the result of the causes set going in the past, the future can be modified by causes set on foot in the present.

What are the teachings of the Divine Wisdom, which should be familiar to all of us students of Theosophy ? Briefly, they are:

1. One eternal, infinite, incognizable, real existence. From That the manifested God. [Page 28]
2. From the manifested God, many spiritual intelligences guiding the cosmic order.
3. Man, a reflection of the manifested God, the inner and real self being eternal, one with the Self of the universe.
4. Unfoldment of Life and growth of its vehicles under the operation of the Law of Sacrifice and the Law of Cause and Effect or 'Action and Reaction'.

A comparison of what appear to be the principles which, in the past, governed the administrative policies of areas, big and small, with the teachings of the Divine Wisdom as we understand it from a comparative study of religions and from the books of our leaders, shows how close was the application of Theosophical truths to the daily practical problems of those days.

We may now proceed to examine whether, and if so how far, the above principles can still be applied with advantage to the solution of problems confronting us now in the village and in the country. Or, shall we find it necessary, as the result of such examination, that we should break away altogether from our past as no longer furnishing a stable foundation for the future edifice to be built upon it? As students of Theosophy, we would prefer whenever possible evolution to revolution. Woodrow Wilson is quoted by our President in her lectures on political science as saying: "Each people, each nation must live upon the lines of its own experience. [Page 29] Nations are no more capable of borrowing experience than individuals are. The histories of other peoples may furnish us with light but they cannot furnish us with conditions of action. Every nation must constantly keep in touch with its past".

It may not be possible now to reproduce the old system of village-administration in every detail. But that it can be revived within limits and with every chance of success is the observation of many statesmen and writers who have placed on record the results of their experience of experiments at re-establishing village councils. Lord Ronaldshay in his book called *India a Bird's-eye View* has much to say about it, and his account of the working of the Panchayats or village councils constituted in Bengal during his time, is quite encouraging.

The Lord Bishop of Madras has somewhere said that he found the Panchayats extremely useful in the administration of affairs connected with his church.

Recently, Panchayats were constituted in the Province of Madras to look after village forests which were till then under the control of the technically trained and highly paid officers of the Government; the reviews of their working show that the Panchayats have succeeded where their official predecessors had failed; and, even from a financial point of view, the Government [Page 30] have gained considerably after the introduction of the Panchayat system.

The Royal Commission on Decentralisation in India emphasised in their report (1909) the fact that "the foundation of any stable edifice which shall associate the people with the administration must be the village as being an area of much greater antiquity than the new administrative creation, and one in which people are known to one another and have interests which converge on well recognised objects". However, it was eleven years after this strong expression of opinion by no less a body than the Royal Commission, that a provincial government sanctioned the establishment of village councils, subjecting them to several handicaps. The Inspector-general in charge of these Panchayats has recently testified to their many useful activities, while admitting that they have had to work under distinctly discouraging conditions.

If these institutions are to be really efficient and of maximum use, I consider it necessary that there should be the right kind of attitude on the part of the people and its officers to the village and its needs. The original spiritual background should be restored to the village. The truth that the village is a living organism with a spirit, mind and body should be constantly borne in mind. It seems to me that the ancients, as if to emphasise this fact, almost invariably made the temple the heart of the village and the centre from which all [Page 31] activities were conducted; it had a school for training the mind of its future citizens; and it so designed the administrative machinery as to make itself self-sufficient and work smoothly, each part of it working in co-operation with the other and for the common good of the entire body politic. The remuneration of the officers and the other staff of the village consisted partly of grants of

land and of grain fees, to be given by every cultivator in the village in proportion to the area cultivated and the produce secured by him, and other perquisites given at the time of the more important feasts and festivals. This contributed not a little to the good-will between the village staff and village people on the one hand and among the villagers themselves on the other. So, it is of paramount importance that the ancient spiritual background should be restored. We can neither forget nor overlook the differences that exist between men and men as regards temperament, knowledge and outlook, and the things which appeal and which do not. Places of worship should be provided for the Hindu as well as for the Musalman. for those who permit images in their places of worship and those who do not, for the contemplative as well as the practical people. None who comes to any place of worship with a reverential spirit should be denied admittance to it, because of his caste, creed or race. These places of worship should, as of old, be in the charge [Page 32] of the best available people — people of character, piety and knowledge. If, by any chance, anyone proves himself unworthy to hold this high office, the village Council should have the power to remove him and appoint a better man to his place.

Also the question of the relationship existing between the human and the Deva kingdoms deserves to be examined and placed on a rational basis. I know I am treading on delicate ground in dwelling on this subject but cannot help doing it. There is no doubt, from what I have observed of the survivals of certain feasts and festivals and ceremonies that still continue in the villages, that there is a vague recognition of an intimate relationship between the human and the Deva kingdoms. The *Gita* tells us that “nourished by sacrifice, the shining ones shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire, and a thief verily is he who enjoyeth what is given by them without returning them aught”. I am too ignorant to speak to any useful purpose on this subject but I feel I owe it to you and to myself to state that, three times, during my official career, when the people in my area were threatened with famine conditions, they had recourse to certain traditional forms of worship and ceremonies which met with almost immediate and gratifying results. These were Varuna Japam (Invocation of the invisible Intelligences in charge of the distribution of rain), Parayanam from Sundarakanda and Virata [Page 33] Parvam (Recitations from the sacred books), Navagraha Japam (Invocation of the spirits of the nine Planets), Laksha Tulasi Archana (worship with 100,000 triple-leaves of the Sacred Tulasi) in Vaishnavite temples, Kumbhabhishekam and Laksha Bilva Archana (worship with 100,000 Bilva leaves) in the Saivite temples, worship and prayers also in all other temples and mosques, a camping out of the entire town in a devotional attitude throughout the day followed by a Vanabhojanam (dining in the garden or forest) of all people, rich and poor without distinction of religion and caste. I know this is a matter in which the credulous ignorance of the masses might be unscrupulously exploited. That is why I want men of knowledge and character, possessing the necessary occult vision, to make independent investigations into this aspect of village life and place it on a rational and scientific footing.

Then, there remains the body politic, whose many needs have to be administered by the village-council. The question of how this council is to be constituted and what its functions should be was carefully gone into by the national conference which was formed in 1923 and later, by the National Convention formed in 1924 — both under the inspiring influence of our President. This was a body consisting of 231 elected members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures, 19 elected representatives of the National Home Rule League [Page 34] and 26 others, some elected by other political organisations in the country, and some prominent Indian leaders including Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and the Rt. Hon 'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastry. A draft constitution was drawn up, establishing Self-Government and the Commonwealth of India Bill embodying it, was finally sent to England in 1925 with a memorandum to the Government of Great Britain urging the early adoption and enactment of the bill, if serious danger to the connection between India and Great Britain was to be avoided. The third schedule of this bill mentions the powers and duties

of the village council under the following heads:

- (1) Education and Protection.
- (2) Protection.
- (3) Economic and Industrial Ministration.

Dr. Mckee, a great educationist and authority on rural schools, says that “an examination of the present official curriculum reveals the extent to which Indian Education has become separate from real life and experience. At present the child is unable to utilise the experience he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself, and he is also unable to apply in his daily life what he learns at school”. He complains that “through compelling child to secure a verbal command of extrinsic subject matter, definitely harmful attitudes are built up. Inattention, dawdling, deception, lack of [Page 35] initiative are common traits amongst school children and are frequently the result of forcing uninteresting, remote and difficult subjects on pupils whose interests are elsewhere”. He is further of the opinion that “the official course of studies also ignored the development of those attitudes and ways of living which make for health and cleanliness, for the understanding and appreciation of house and community life, for the wise use of leisure time, for good citizenship and for the disposition and ability to contribute to the the improvement of the village and the wider environment”.

In brief, according to Dr. Mckee the instruction imparted in schools must be such as to make the pupils good citizens, which is also the idea of every theosophist. Educationists like Dr. Arundale must think out and lay down the scheme of education both for the higher and the lower classes of a School and the village committees might be trusted to look after their share of work in that scheme of education.

But if these functions have to be satisfactorily discharged, the village council should not be treated in a step-motherly fashion. A perusal of the book called *Village Government in British India*, by John Mathai will show that “Local institutions of the kind do not fail where a sufficient degree of genuine responsibility is laid upon them but that they flag and droop where the forms of [Page 36] local autonomy are emptied of real responsibility and power”. That is perfectly true. A definite and substantial share of the revenue accruing from the village should be earmarked to form the nucleus of the fund for its improvement to be supplemented, if necessary, by additional taxation, and supply of free labour, and in other ways according to the circumstances of the village and its inhabitants. Granted the above, and a little sympathy, guidance and reasonable facilities in the beginning, on the part of the authorities placed above them, the village councils will, I am confident, prove themselves more than competent to discharge successfully the duties entrusted to them.

My experience of the village welfare associations which I helped to form in the days of the Home Rule agitation has convinced me that the old community spirit is only dormant and not dead and may be revived and rendered active once again.

To show how effective and useful a village council can be to a village even when there was no real encouragement for its active functioning, at the hands of the Government, I will illustrate in some detail one instance out of many within my knowledge. As the result of a casual conversation I had with the

people of a particular village who had evidently come to see me on other business, some of them took to heart my [Page 37] suggestion that they should see to it that their village had at least a night school. After their return home they duly started one with the help of about a dozen or more friends who agreed to pay each half a rupee a month. It then occurred to them that it was not to their credit that the two or three chief temples in the village should be in a dilapidated condition, and they forthwith undertook their repairs. Some gave cash, some timber, some carted free the materials, and some gave other labour and so on without minding their sectional and sub-sectional differences, and soon the temples were restored to a satisfactory condition. There was no rest-house for travellers and one was built. Some of the villagers were careless about their cattle and allowed them to roam at large during the day and sometimes during the night also. This was very inconvenient, specially to the owners of fields close to the village when they had crops on, and the village council appointed a man to watch the crops, whose duty was to see that stray cattle did not damage the crops. If anyone's cattle were left at large and caused damage to crops, the watcher reported the fact to the owner of the animals, who then had to measure out and give a specified quantity of grain to the watcher. The people had frequently to go to distant courts to recover their debts or claims for damages for wrongs done to them, and the council decided to try such cases [Page 38] themselves. This meant some expense to the council who had to engage a man to summon parties and their witnesses. To meet this and other expenses, the petitioner in each case was required to deposit a rupee or half a rupee (how much exactly I forget now) with his written petition. The result was that the people, both the petitioners and the counter petitioners, were saved considerable time and money and that justice, not merely law as so often happens in the regular court, could be had at their very doors, so to speak. Once, a girl of the village who had been married to a young man of a different village left her husband's house without telling anyone and came back to her parents. The husband's people after searching for her in all likely places finally traced her to her parents' village; and learning that there was a local council which dealt with all local disputes, drafted a complaint and presented it to the council with the prescribed fee. The council met, and sent for the girl. The latter admitted that she had left her husband's house without anyone's knowledge, and pleaded in excuse that she could not put up with the ill-treatment accorded to her there. The village council sent a couple of respectable people to the village of the husband to enquire into the truth of her complaint and, on being assured that she had not exaggerated matters, sent for the husband's people and told them that as the [Page 39] marriage was meant to be for her happiness and not for her misery, they were not prepared to let the girl go back to them. The latter promised that they would not ill-treat her thereafter but the council said that they were not prepared to accept their mere statement but would take a more lenient view if some respectable people of their village gave the council an assurance that they would watch the girl in her husband's home and see that she was not badly treated. After that assurance was secured, the council permitted the girl to go back to her husband's home — no doubt with some words of admonition to her also.

In this connection I want you to note how this village council all unconsciously followed the example of the ancient councils and tried to bring about an amicable settlement satisfactory to both parties and avoided room for future misunderstandings. Whereas modern courts, by giving an award in favour of one party and making the other an absolute loser, cause one of the parties to form a grievance against the other and wait for an opportunity to revenge himself in some foolish way for the real or supposed wrong done to him.

I have no doubt, whatsoever that the affairs of a village are best administered by the people of the village itself, and that all our efforts should, be to make the village autonomous consistently with the wider interests [Page 40] of the country, by making the village council the starting-point, nay the foundation of the rest of the administrative edifice. Sydney Webb suggests in his preface to *Village Government in*

British India that as a factor of effective social progress in India, the development of local government stands second in importance to scarcely anything.

To a Theosophist all these questions resolve themselves into this, *viz.*, that all the misery we are now witnessing in the world is the result of broken brotherhood. Family discords, as well as state problems like social, industrial, and political troubles, are all questions of brotherhood. If only the principle of brotherhood were more widely accepted and practised, even the bigger troubles connected with large areas would disappear. Let us take but one case — the undesirable increase in the population of India, by a large class who are said to constitute the lowest stratum of the Indian nation and act as a heavy drag on its progress.

When we try to find out which part of the people produces mostly this addition to the population, we shall find it to be those classes of people whose standard of living is relatively very low. Mr. J. T. Martin, in his report on the 1921 census, says that in India as in every other country, the most prolific portion of the population is at the lowest stratum of life. This is confirmed by what is said by Doctors Weltham in their book on *Heredity and Society*. [Page 41] They observe that the “birthrate is highest in those sections of the community which like the feeble-minded and insane are devoid of intelligent personality; or, like many of the unemployed and casual labourers, seem to be either without ideals or without any method of expressing them. In all the social groups which have hitherto been distinguished for coherence, for industry, for good mental and physical capacity, for power of organisation and administration, the birthrate has fallen below the figures necessary to maintain the national store of these qualities”. If this process continues it is obvious that it will tell on the quality of the nation. Further, in a country like India, along with the high birthrate goes also a high death rate, specially among the infants, of whom two hundred in every thousand die within a year of their birth. There is no point in this huge waste of human strength and its gradual deterioration. The people living in overcrowded slums amidst dirt and squalor are our brothers, and it is our duty to improve their condition and enable them to adopt a higher standard of life, and see that their children do not begin the struggle for life under a serious handicap. Reforms on above lines, all inspired by a spirit of kindness and sympathy, will result, though it might never have been present to them in a reduced birthrate among the hitherto most prolific and the least civilised part of the population and lessen the otherwise [Page 42] heavy pressure of population on the resources of the country.

Again a study of the laws of reincarnation and of Karma tells us that good or bad souls, if such epithets may be permitted for a moment as regards souls, will be drawn to incarnate according as the environment is pure and healthy or the reverse. So, then, if attention is concentrated on improvement of sanitation, and hygienic conditions are brought about in villages and towns, better souls will incarnate in places where formerly we had the low and uncivilized population. If there is any country in the world where the ancient and ever true Dharmic ideal may be established more easily than anywhere else, it is perhaps in India, and when that happy consummation is attained, India will undoubtedly have many lessons to teach to the rest of the world.

If only Great Britain will realize that the days of empires and commonwealths, each thinking only of itself and its own well-being, are passing or ought to pass away soon, and that the ideal now should be, in the words of our illustrious President, “a group of commonwealths or empires forming organised humanity” intent on the welfare of the whole of Humanity, the British statesmen will help and not hinder India from rising to the full height of her stature.

Our President has quoted in one of her books the perfectly true words of Mr. Rushbrook Williams [Page 43] in his report *India in 1922-23* prepared under the direction of the Government of India, to the following effect: "The impending struggle between the East and West, foretold by many persons who cannot be classed either as visionaries or as fanatics, may easily be mitigated or even entirely averted, if the British Commonwealth of nations can find a place within its wide compass for three hundred and twenty (now three hundred and fifty) millions of Asiatics fully enjoying the privileges and adequately discharging the responsibilities, which at present characterise the inhabitants of Great Britain and the self-governing dominions". Like the true servant of humanity that she is, Dr. Besant passionately hopes that "the Future of India will be united with that of Britain for the sake of both nations and for the sake of humanity at large".

We Indians, also, have to look to our duties and responsibilities. If people of different persuasions and castes — Hindu and Musalman, Parsi and Sikh, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, the so called touchables and the untouchables, and people of different parts of India; Bengal and Behar, Bombay and Sindh, Madras and Orissa, British India and Indian States; only realise that they are all parts of one organic whole; and that, according to the idea of Plato, when a part suffers it is not the part which suffers but Mother India in that part; how soon will not the present unseemly differences now [Page 44] dividing the people be composed, and the united move on the part of all India prove too strong for any earthly power to resist it for long ? And assuredly we shall have then won by our behaviour all that we wish for our people — for their contentment and prosperity, and even more. For, verily we shall have sought then "the Kingdom of God and his righteousness", and discovered that "all these things have been added unto us". We shall have proved to the world that spirituality and material prosperity are not exclusive of each other but always go together.