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Indian Castes

(London Spectator.)

It is difficult for a European who has not lived long in India, and even for en who has, to realize the insuperable barriers which separate these divisions. There is nothing to compare with them in the customs even of the most exclusive European aristocractes. Neither does the sum of all the racial or rel gious distinctions which separate Eurepean nations from each other and divide them within themselves equal the number of classes into which the Hindoos are divided by what is known as 'caste.' The 200,000,-000 of Hindoos are made up of diverse racia' element, speak about nineteen developed languages and over one hundred dalects. They are again divided into over 3 000 castes most of them with sub-castes. One of these castes, the Brahmans, is split up into more than 800 sub-caster, of which noise will intermarry and few will eat together.

The term 'caste' includes so many things that it is difficult to define it. There are, however, two properties essential to a true caste: (1) There is no entry except by birth. (2) Marriage outside the caste is absolutely forbidden. To preserve the purity and maintain the exclusiveness of the society many minute rules of conduct, many restrictions on food and many ceremonial observances are imposed on the members and enforced by penalties which cannot be evaded, against which there is no appeal and which in extreme cases fellow the offender beyond the grave. But that is not all. The relations of castes to each other are as much a matter of rel g ous observance as the rules for their internal regulation. The Brahmans are the highest, admittedly and undoubtedly superior to all the rest. After them come those who are acknowledged to be twice born. The less honored follow in a graduated descent until the untouchable and unspeakable are reached at the lowest depth.

It may be urged that the separation be

tween the Brahman and, let us say, the Kurmi market gardener is no wider than that between the peer of the United Kingdom and the coal miner. There is this essential difference, that it is impossible for an Indian to change his caste. The coal miner may be elected to Parliament, may become a Cabinet Minister, and if he can make money enough may marry his son to a duke's daughter. The Kurmi must remain a Kurmi. All the wealth of Croesus will not enable him to make an alliance with a Brahman family or touch a Brahman's hand. The members of a caste may and in some cases do raise them selves in the sight of other castes by adopt ing more elaborate ceremonies and more scrupulous observances. A half civi'izad Gond, for example, may find himself brought into contact with Hindoos, as the plough encroaches on the forest. He tries to raise his position and add to his self respect by ad opting the exclusiveness of his Hindoo neigh bors. He will even outdo them if he can; and if the Hindoo is scrupulous about his food, the convert will wash the very wood with which his dinner is cooked. No endeav ours of this kind, however, will avail to lessen by a hair's breadth the distance between him and a casts Hindoo or even to induce the Hindoo barber to look upon him as a client whose chin he may shave and whose toe-nails he may pare without degradation. Another point connected with caste which has a very practical bearing and must be taken into account is the power of coercion which it gives to the brotherhood. If a man is excommunicated by his caste fellows nobody in the caste will marry him or will accept water from his hands, or will eat with him. If he is married his wife will not touch him or speak to him. He is dead to his family. The priest will not perform ceremonies for him. The villiage barber will net shave him and the washerwoman will not wash his clothes These are the methods of bringing pressure

Irishmen have invented is mill compared to the final sentence of a caste punchayat.

A system I ke this is a stern fact which has to be faced. There is not a police case or a civil case or a trial at the sessions, there is hardly an appointment to office in Iudia of whatever degree in which the matter of caste has not to be considered. It forces itself i :o every assessment of land revenue, into every adjudication of justice, the proceedings of municipal and district councils. The influence and power of the Brahman and the idea that he is above the law and is not to be punished as other people are still alive although a century of British justice has done something toward eradicating them. On the other hand the suggestion that a man of lower caste might rise to an equality or nearer to an equality with members of a caste above him is unthinkable. Where the low caste men are there they must remain. If they behave themselves it will be made up to them in a future existance. Another aspect of the case is that the divisions of casts have no t rritorial basis. Hence there is no patriot ism in India in the proper sense of the word. Hindoos as such may have some common am bitions, especially when they conflict wi h Mohammedans or Europeans, but the only bond of union which has strength is caste spirit. Caste patriotism, it has been called, and this is incomparably stronger in Brahmans than in other castes. 'We are all Brah mans,' said the Bengall agitators to the Mah ratt: politicians. 'We are all Brahmans to gether.' The anarchic conspiracy in India is so difficult to most because it is essentially if not entirely a Braham conspiracy. To talk of introducing self-government or represent ative government or even local self-govern meut, except under severe restrictions, into a country thus divided against itself is not far from ridiculous. The advanced Indians who are pressing for measures of 'reform' ad mit this. Hence we find some of them pro claiming that the caste system is in its deaththroes. Others more honest, admit that In dia is still held by cast and see that as a first step toward the attainment of their political desires the system must be abolished and set themselves honest'y to work in that direction. No amount of abstract reasoning, how ever, or explaining away of the pronounce ments of writers like Manu will, it is to be feared, loosen the grip of caste.

It is more like'y that a new caste will be formed by Indians who have received a Western education and have visited Europe than the extraordinarily elaborate and deerly carved lines which have divided Indian Society for thousands of years will be erased. In existing circumstances no system of election or representation can be devised which will not end in giving the power to a class of whom the Brahmans will be the prominent leaders. For the masses of the people the sole hope not merely of raising their status and improving their condition, but even of securing ordinary justice and fair play lies in the maintenance of the benevoient and impar tial rule of an external rower. The present writer does not agree with those who denoun ce caste as an evil of the greatest magnitude, unrelieved by a single merit. The mission ary may call it a monstrous enigma of pride, dissension and shame, which could only have been invented in an utterly deceased condi tion of human society.' He may declare his Intense conviction that next to the universal prevalence of the Christian faith the greatest boon to India would be the absolute and com plete renunciation of caste.' It may be doubted, however whether such a change is to be desired until the Indians as a body shall have adopted some common religion of a purified to pe. It is at least possible that the rules and restrictions of caste and the self respect to which they lead have conduced to the purity of the family, as they certainly have to the cleanliness and health of the peo ple. But this much is certain, that so long



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it were inhabited by a homogeneous people who can be educated up to self-government as understood in this country must end in calamitous failure.

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So It Was

A writer in London Opinion reports the following dislogue, which is an excellent con temporaneous appreciation of current styles.

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"Do you like it"

"Oh, my dear, I love it! It's just too hldeously fashionable for words."—The

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The results of the elections in South Africa for the new federal parliament are surprising those who thought that General Botha would have a walkover and that Dr Jameson and the Unionists would be completely snowed under except in Natal. Dr Jameson early in the electoral struggle offered to join the Uni onists te the Progressive forces, and thus all low the first parliament of the Union of South Africa to come into being without party divisions, if General Botha would leave the language question, as taught in the schools, where it was left by Lord Milner, a system which had resulted in the Dutch child ren speaking English equally well with their mother tongue. It is said that General Botha would have liked to have agreed to this if it had not been far the 'Progressives' of the Orange River Colony, who insisted that the school curriculum must be reformed to favor the preponderance of the Dutch language ln the case of Dutch speaking pupils. As it happens, however, General Botha himself has been defeated temporarily by a Unionist, and his party numbers 67 members compared with 54 others, of whom 37 are Unionists, 13 Independents, and four Laborites. Here at least should be material for lively differences of opinion, and we may expect some interesting 'scenes' as time goes on and questions ripen for debate. - Montreal

