



Editor's Note: The following letter is from Mr. H. J. Hockley, a member of Evangelical Teacher Training College at Vryheid, Natal, S. A. E. T. T. C. is the College of which Rev. E. A. M. Kierstead is Headmaster, or Principal. Mr. Hockley is joining our missionary staff and will work among the Indians and Half-castes of Rhodesia. You will find this letter most interesting.

A NEW MEMBER OF OUR MISSIONARY FAMILY WRITES:

Dear "Highway" Friends across the sea:

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

We seem to be quite a long distance apart, and geographically may never be nearer to one another, but in other respects it is possible that we may be, as time passes; and lest some of you may be wondering, - "now who is this queer old Englishman, a kind of free-lance, self-supporting missionary, who is interested in the new work in N. Rhodesia and plans to go and lend a hand there, especially amongst the Indians; and who are these Indians, and what are they doing in Africa?" - I feel led to write you a few lines in an endeavour to give some light on these points.

Africa of course is predominantly a land of the dark-skinned folk, the Negro and Bantu races, but it also contains many others. Especially at the southern tip, around the Cape, one meets types or traces of almost every race under the sun, with the possible exception of Eskimos and Australian Aborigines. So it is that peoples of India are here also.

Here in South Africa they were brought in about a hundred years back, in order to work in the sugar plantations and mills around Durban, and the majority of them stayed. I have met a few old Indian men who say they can remember coming out from India in their early days, but most of them, and their parents too, were born in this land and know no other home. They are restricted from moving around or living anywhere they wish, so are mostly congregated around the Durban area of Natal. Up in Tanganyika, which is much freer, there are quite a number of Indians all over the country, who probably came out seeking a new and less over-crowded land than their own, and have become quite a worthy element of the population, under British rule and with no colour-bar restrictions, - artisans, engine-drivers and station-masters on the railways; store-keepers, bankers, and business folk in the towns. They are inclined to be a rather proud, reserved people, strongly and blindly bound to their ancient customs and religions; here in S. Africa especially having little or no use for the white man and his religion, and altogether a tough lot to approach with the Gospel. Little wonder that the general attitude is to leave them alone, which is their desire.

As to my own interest in the Indian folk, it began long ago, much farther back than most of you can probably remember. At a very early age I gave my heart to the Lord, a puny, delicate kid I was in those days, extremely shy and untalkative - a more unpromising specimen for future service in the foreign field there never was, but I loved to read the few simple missionary papers which came our way, and wished most of all that I might some day work for the peoples of India, and used to pray in very simple, childish fashion, - "Please Lord, send me to help the poor outcast

Indian peoples, or lepers somewhere; those who through no fault of their own are despised and rejected". I believe God always answers our prayers, if they are sincere and in line with His will, though not always exactly as we expect, and so it was in my case.

At the age of 16 I offered for missionary service, but was turned down, too frail in health, too poorly educated, and still too young; - and then came a most extraordinary training-ground, the battlefields of the first Great War, 1914 - 18. Those four hard years toughened me and taught me, not only to endure, but to enjoy hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and that largely accounts for my rugged simplicity in the mission-field. After the war ended I threw myself into spare-time training for the mission-field, and in 1924 a door opened, to Africa of all places, and not India as I had always hoped and prayed. It is a long story, much too long to launch into here; I found Africa to be a land of outcasts alright, especially this southern corner; then came some years of service to lepers, in some of the wildest parts of Nigeria and Tanganyika; then in 1937 back again to South Africa, all on my own and entirely self-supporting, and built up a church amongst some of the very poor coloured folks of the Cape.

In all that time I had not come in contact with Indian peoples, apart from the few whom I met in Tanganyika. Once at the home of a friend in the Cape, I picked up a book on the races of South Africa, very well written it was, and it naturally fascinated me, so I soon found the portion which dealt with the Indians; very good it was, describing how they came to be here and so on, and it went on to say how, especially in the streets of Durban and its suburbs, one sees so many of the reserved, sad-eyed Indian mothers, leading along strings of thin, sad-eyed Indian children, a very true picture, like the rest of the book, but it struck me, "How sad, how tragic, that such is the picture which whites see of the Indians in this land", and I felt there must be another side to it. (One sees that reserved, sad-eyed expression in so many of the African folk too, until the love of Christ dispels it).

Well, it was in 1949, just seven years back, that my steps were led up into Natal, to lend a hand, with Mr. Kierstead and his colleagues, in the work of this large new training college for Africans. We are some distance from Durban and its main Indian population, but just a few of them are scattered around working in the coal mines which stud the mountains of N. Natal. So it is that in my free time I have been able to get around, mostly by bicycle, and have at last discovered the Indian folk, finding that there is another side to the picture. Owing to the distances I have to travel, the terrible roads, the long hills and my limited time, it is not very much I have been able to achieve, beyond building up wayside Sunday-Schools here and there, and breaking down their wall of reserve, for in most of the Indian homes I am now welcomed as one of their own, a brother and friend in Christ, though they cling tight, so tightly, to their old customs and beliefs, even when they more truly believe, as so many of those dear kiddies do, in Jesus as their Saviour.

Yes, the Indian work is one which calls for great patience, tact, and boundless Christian love, but in the long run the latter must win through. Even now I often rejoice as I can see the mists and clouds being dispelled before the true Light, especially as I hear my little Indian friends (so dull and stupid and tuneless at first), singing the song they nearly always pick upon when asked to choose - "I've found a Friend in Jesus; He's everything to me".

So much for a very scanty outline of the Indian peoples out here in Africa, and how it is that I love them and long to serve them more fully; and please forgive if this, my first letter, has been somewhat on the long side.

(To Next Page, Col. 2)