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The New Mass Movement in India.

BY THE REVEREND NICOL MACNICOL, D.D., D.LITT., EDINBURGH.

THE world has not yet outgrown mass movements, if indeed it ever will. If we have them in India, we have them in Europe as well. Indeed, many would maintain that the pattern of contemporary life is collectivist rather than individual. We should, therefore, be able to approach with sympathy the phenomenon of mass movement that seems to be reasserting itself at the present time in India in relation to religion. This is not, of course, a new phenomenon. Ever since the Muslim conqueror entered India there have been mass conversions of Hindus to Islam, whether voluntary or under compulsion. Within the last eighty years similar movements towards Christianity have taken place from among the outcastes, with the result that it is estimated that three-fourths of the Protestant Christians of India belonged originally to these classes. The compulsion that sent them clamouring to the gates of the Christian Church was the compulsion of human need and of the desire for a better way of life. That they are finding in the Christian Church more than they sought is evident to every impartial witness who has knowledge of the character they bear in their new environment. If we may cite a single testimony, let it be that of the Hindu Census Superintendent of the Mysore State, who may be supposed to be impartial. He bears witness in his Report to their 'sober, disciplined, and busy lives.' But significant above all else of the change that has been wrought in them is the fact that for more than a decade now they are, in one great area at least, drawing towards themselves and towards Him whom they serve ever-increasing numbers of those whose oppression had made them once 'the tattered outlaws of the earth.' Isaiah shows us a picture in his prophecies of a world so transformed that those who were ravaging beasts and their victims will lie down together and 'a little child shall lead them.' The dream is more than fulfilled when now the proud oppressors are putting away their pride and when we see leading them to the feet of Jesus an outcaste man.

But for some years the impulse that bore so many from these despised communities into the Church has been growing gradually feebler. The first glow of the discovery of a way to hope and freedom would seem of late to be fading. This may be because others claiming to do for the

outcastes what the Christian Church was doing have arisen on all sides. The Christian road might not be the only road to the goal of emancipation. These doubts seemed to be spreading. But suddenly to-day something has happened that has brought about a transformation. Once more, but under circumstances somewhat different from those of two generations ago, the tide has begun to move and the stagnant waters to heave and surge with a violence greater than ever. Whether or not it is to be towards the Christian Church that the impetus of this movement will be directed can hardly be yet determined, but that there is to-day a new troubling of the waters is manifest to every observer, and to the Christian the interest of the situation and the expectation it arouses must be intense.

Can we trace the outward features of the process that has brought about this new orientation? The one human figure that stands out above all others as contributing to what is happening is that of Mahatma Gandhi. That he has done more than any other to raise the storm cannot be doubted; whether now that it has risen he can command it is more doubtful. It was no new crusade for him when he took upon himself the cause of the untouchables. A little girl of that class had grown up in his family as one of his dearest children. His convictions in regard to this matter were repeatedly and fearlessly proclaimed. 'If "untouchability" belongs to the Hindu religion,' he has emphatically declared, 'then I am not a Hindu.' But he is convinced that it is a blot on the religion from which it may and must be cleansed. He has made his position clear in this connexion beyond any possibility of doubt. 'Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom nor get it,' he says, 'if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of "untouchability"; and, as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing.'

It was accordingly under the pressure of an intense conviction that Mr. Gandhi, when he returned to India disappointed with the consequences of his political efforts, took up this business of the emancipation of the outcastes as his supreme task. No longer could this blot on Hinduism be merely

deplored and passed by as had been the rule in the case of so many well-meaning reformers in the past. Mr. Gandhi's courage was not of that sort. He who had outraged the orthodox by destroying in pity a poor, suffering calf would now defy Hinduism and all its terrors in the cause of a suffering 'Harijan.' When he gave to the outcastes this name in place of the names of insult that were theirs already, and so designated them, as we may translate it, 'people of God,' he did what words could do to make atonement, but he was not content with words. What he has done for them since then in the organization of effort for their uplift we cannot stay to describe, but nothing that he has done has meant more than has the setting of himself in the forefront of the battle. Whether his policy, for example, of pressing, among his chief demands, for temple-entry for those who had never been admitted within these sacred doors, placed the emphasis aright, might be—and was—questioned. But apart from such matters what is here emphasized is that the invasion of the scene by Mr. Gandhi's personality drew to the scandal the eyes of all India and created in the minds both of those within this class and those without a quite new sense of its reality and its magnitude. He quickened the conscience of India to its responsibility. 'Our shame and theirs,' he said, and for the first time both parties began really to feel that it was so.

From the time when this Triton plunged into the waters the agitation had gone on spreading more and more widely. It has now reached dimensions beyond the expectation, probably, of most of its initiators, and has taken to itself a direction which, we may be sure, was never desired by any of them. Mr. Gandhi has always called himself an orthodox Hindu, though years ago one of the chief representatives of that religion denounced him as a secret Christian, engaged in furthering the work of the missionaries. He quite obviously considers that the conversion of these little brothers of his, the Harijans, to Christianity, whatever good it may appear to have done to them, was never more than a process of 'proselytization,' a purchase of them in exchange for material advantages. He has too much insight and too much honesty to deny the right of any one to follow his sincere convictions whithersoever they may lead him, but at the same time he is undoubtedly a strong nationalist and is unwilling to believe that conversion need require the abandonment of national traditions and the national faith. He is said to have been much distressed at the recent profession of Islam by one of his sons.

This son, however, who is now called Abdullah Gandhi—strange collocation—seems never to have sympathized with his father's ideals and may have 'done it to annoy.'

But the movement that is now sweeping over India is quite definitely a movement that is resolved to break with Hinduism and to accept 'conversion.' It would appear that, in spite of Mr. Gandhi's sincerity and earnestness in the struggle in which he has been engaged, those whom he is championing find his rate of progress too slow and are beginning to doubt his ability to accomplish his purpose. Very many of them, it would seem, have come to believe that there is no hope for them so long as they remain within Hinduism. It is that conviction that has brought about their severance from Mr. Gandhi. At the same time it should be clearly recognized that it was the impulse he gave that, more than anything else, shook the torpor from them. He set them in motion, but now they are on the march under other leadership and towards another goal than he would approve. To-day we find in India in every province—north, south, east, and west—groups, often large groups, that are awake and astir, with little cohesion or positive leadership, it is true, but with two objectives that seem to be very widely accepted among them. These are, first, that they shall remain no longer Hindus; and second, that they must find some religious home to take the place of their old faith, within which, if possible, they will all remain together as one community, as they have been in the past.

It has to be remembered, of course, that it is only in a vague sense that they can be described as forming one community. They are scattered over the wide distances of India; they speak many languages and have widely differing characteristics and traditions. What unites them is their animistic Hinduism on the one hand, and on the other, and especially, the disabilities that bring them all under a common yoke. The badge of their tribe is suffering. One of their leaders—the one best known in the West because he was chosen by the Government to represent them at the last Round Table Conference in London—is Dr. Ambedkar, but while his influence is, no doubt, very great over his fellow-Mahars in the Bombay Presidency, his name is probably unknown, or no more than a name, to their yoke-fellows who speak Urdu in the north, or Bengali in the East, or Tamil in the South. But there is one thing that they all want—liberty. Dr. Ambedkar is reported to have said in a recent speech that some people asked him

what 'untouchables' would gain by changing their religion. His answer was: 'What would India gain by Swaraj? Just as Swaraj was necessary for India, so also was change of religion necessary for "untouchables." The underlying motive in both the movements is the desire for freedom.'

The desire for freedom is surely no unworthy aim. That strange Hindu-Englishwoman, Sister Nivedita, says somewhere that the passion of India through all her history has been for freedom. Certainly there have always been those who have been beating their wings against the bars of their cage, whether the cage has been life itself or a religious or social system or an oppressive rule. The desire for freedom may be irreligious enough, but freedom is a pre-requisite for religion, and provides the air in which alone a faith that claims to be Christian can breathe. Therefore, so far forth, in this aim of theirs the Christian must wish them God-speed. That that freedom can never be attained within their ancient Hindu prison-house they seem to be equally convinced. On the first of June, according to *The Times of India*, ten thousand men and women of the chief outcaste community of Bombay Presidency passed unanimously and 'with a mighty burst of applause' a resolution to the effect that a change of religion was 'the only remedy for the community to attain equality and freedom.' 'You have nothing to lose except your chains,' Dr. Ambedkar told them, 'and you have everything to gain by a change of religion.'

Almost at the same time, seven hundred miles to the north at Lucknow and six hundred miles to the south at Cochin, large gatherings of similar communities declared with equal emphasis that they renounced the Hindu religion. The community that assembled at Cochin is one that has a place of special interest and importance. They are called Ezhavas (or Thiyas); they claim to number two and a half millions; and, in spite of having to live in what is reckoned the most caste-ridden region of all India, they have shown themselves to possess energy and ambition. Not a few men of ability have arisen among them and have proved their quality in competition with those who consider themselves their betters. In recent years there arose among them a religious leader who possessed up till his death their devoted allegiance and who seems to have proved himself in many ways worthy of it. They claim that he was not opposed to their conversion to another faith provided they maintained their identity as Ezhavas. As in the case of the other outcaste gatherings that

have been referred to, the resolution passed at Cochin was concerned mainly with the first step towards their goal. They declared unanimously their purpose to abandon Hinduism and form themselves into an independent and self-respecting community. Thus far it would seem that there is an overwhelming agreement of view among at least the articulate members of some of the most important of those classes that the Bishop of Dornakal prefers to describe as belonging to 'the exterior castes.' As far as words can bind them they seem to be definitely resolved to have done with their ancient faith. They no longer view it as their Mother. Their attitude is nearer to what Dr. Ambedkar expresses when he calls it not a religion but a disease.

The chairman of the Ezhava Conference emphasized the fact that the resolution which the Conference passed 'gave every one the freedom to choose his own faith and at the same time made clear that they should break off from Hinduism.' What faith will be chosen to take the place of that which they abandon remains as yet undecided. The Ezhava leader who had just been quoted appealed to his audience, 'not to estrange any one who got converted to any faith by the mere reason of such conversion.' Dr. Ambedkar takes a different and more politic line. He does not profess to be a religious man himself, but he believes that his community needs, and cannot do without, religion. He believes, further, that for political reasons they must preserve the unity that religion gives them and must on no account break up into groups. He wishes, therefore, to lead them all into a single religion. At the Conference at Bombay he announced that he had chosen the religion that it was his intention to adopt and into which, no doubt, he hopes to lead his brethren *en masse*, but what that religion is he did not divulge.

Needless to say there is considerable competition for the position of residuary legatee of Hinduism, though the legacy is no more than this despised and broken multitude. After all, every one of them counts to swell the size of the community he chooses and so to strengthen it in communal rivalries. Mr. Gandhi has stated that if the Harijans really wish to join another religion they should do so, but that they should not bargain, for conversion is not a matter of auctioning oneself to the highest bidder. Dr. Ambedkar, on the other hand, bids his followers 'seek kinship with some other communities, so that their resources might become available to them in their struggle.'

'That,' he adds, 'is only another name for conversion.'

It is at this point, of course, that the whole value of this movement will be tested. How will the choice be made? Already the auction market has begun. A leading Hindu editor quotes Dr. Ambedkar's definition of conversion, just cited, and adds in a tone of justifiable contempt, 'Nothing could be clearer, and proselytising creeds need be at no loss as to how to draw the Ambedkar groups to their folds.' But fortunately Dr. Ambedkar's influence has definite limits and the movement is not likely to be controlled by him or by any other individual. The Christians, at any rate, have no intention of entering upon any such competition as is suggested. When it was announced that what had all the appearance of a competitive presentation of the religions was to be staged at a Conference of representatives of the depressed classes at Lucknow, the United Provinces Christian Council urged upon the leaders concerned the undesirability of making use of such a method. Christianity, at least, is not to be bought or sold. In addition to Christianity the religions or sects that claim to be able to give untouchables what they desire are the faith of Islam, which has always claimed to create a true brotherhood; Sikhism, a Puritan revolt from Hinduism which rejects caste; in the north the Arya Samaj, a theistic reforming sect within Hinduism; and in the south Buddhism, a child, indeed, of India, but now a stranger to the land, ready, however, to return. Some of these are already winning recruits, but there seems to be little doubt that it is toward Christianity rather than in any other direction that most eyes are turned. It may be indeed that the action of individual leaders, such as Dr. Ambedkar or a member of the Legislative Assembly who has recently accepted Islam, may draw their immediate following after them into the haven of their choice. But there are indications in many parts of India—in the United Provinces, in Rajputana, in the Madras Presidency, in Travancore—that the Christian Church may soon find many knocking at her door, and that therefore all who are waiting for the Kingdom of God should be prepared for what may well prove to be an inundation.

How, then, should the Christian Church bear itself in the face of such an opportunity and such a challenge? We can see how in some areas its members are already searching their hearts as to their fitness for a task of such magnitude, and bracing their faith for the encounter. Reference has already been made to the possibility of a large

influx from the Ezhavas, who are found in Travancore, Cochin, and British Malabar. It is there that the ancient Syrian Church has had its chequered history through the centuries. To some of its membership the realization of this movement at their doors has come with an awakening and almost a dismaying power. It may be that it will drive them to the Source from which even their disrupted Church may find the strength they will need if they are to prove equal to the call. One leading Syrian has declared that if they fail this time to meet the opportunity that is being granted them they will deserve to receive the judgment of God. There are certainly many among them who must be saying among themselves, 'Who knoweth whether we are come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?'

We can, indeed, see the hand of God preparing the way for this coming. Reference has already been made in the case of the Ezhavas to the appearance thirty years ago among them of a prophetic figure, who, though no Christian, drew his fellows towards the one God. He may well prove to have been the John the Baptist for this Advent. Also throughout the whole Christian Church we can see how a highway has been built by the establishment in recent years of the National Christian Council of India, and by the call issued by it a year ago to a Five Years' Forward Movement in Evangelism. Nothing could be more fitting than that the Bishop of Dornakal, as President of the National Christian Council, should take the lead in this great enterprise. This Indian Bishop has an unequalled experience in dealing with a movement such as this. In the Telugu country he, alongside of the English Methodists, has been shepherding for a quarter of a century caste Hindus and out-caste Hindus into the Kingdom of God, and no one among his own countrymen or among foreigners has more of the wisdom and authority of experience to enable him to deal adequately with this new call. He knows the dangers that have to be surmounted, the road of the spirit to be chosen. In a letter that he has issued in the name of the National Christian Council to all heads of Churches and Missions in India he gives advice, shrewd and practical and deeply Christian, for the guidance of those who are meeting this challenge. Every word is full of the distilled experience of the wise shepherd, and nowhere more than in his emphasis upon the duty of Christian worship. It is as worshippers that the suppliants for admission into the House of God must be led into that Presence. 'Religion,' he says, 'is worship.'

The leaders of the Indian Christian Church are well aware that if this movement grows to what they hope for it will overwhelm them. At the same time they are resolved that before they appeal for the help from the older churches that they will assuredly need they must first arouse their own churches to face the situation and to set themselves in faith and courage to a task that is primarily their concern. That they are now engaged in securing. A challenge as gigantic as that which God may be preparing for the young Indian Church might well overwhelm it, were its resources only in itself. The missionaries who have had a share in the building up of the Church in India during the past fifty years, and some of whom have had experience of mass movements, can see many errors and failures in their service as they look back. The guidance of those who have come up from slavery, and especially their guidance when they come in their battalions, so ignorant and so beset with a multitude of needs, requires the possession of gifts such as few possess by nature and of graces that we are often slow to seek. For that reason those to whom this great opportunity and responsibility seems to be coming, Indian and foreigner alike, need and ask from us our sympathy, a sympathy which can only come from informed and deeply interested minds, and they ask also the support of our prayers which cannot be offered worthily unless

they proceed from such sympathy and such knowledge.

The Conference of British Missionary Societies, which is keeping in close touch with this movement and which has received a deeply interesting report on it from the Reverend William Paton of the International Missionary Council, has issued a call to prayer, which should find a response in all Christian hearts. They do so, they say, because this situation can only be faced by the Christian forces acting on a common plan with perfect mutual trust and belief in one another and all together in God. We are invited to have before us the following urgent needs :

1. That the depressed classes, sheep without a shepherd, may be drawn into the fold of Christ, in whom is their only hope.

2. That their leaders may be rightly guided by the Holy Spirit to seek spiritual answers in Christ for the deep spiritual need of their people.

3. That the churches in India may be drawn into new unity and fellowship, and that thus all their resources may be set free for the great tasks of evangelism and caring for the multitudes.

4. That the life of the churches at home may be quickened, so that they may perceive the working of God's Spirit in the movement in India ; that they may be ready to answer His call, and make available for His service those additional gifts of life and of money which are so urgently needed.

Some Outstanding Old Testament Problems.

IX. Problems of the Pentateuch.

BY THE REVEREND CANON J. BATTERSBY HARFORD, D.D., RIPON.

Two questions have been raised in recent years with regard to the Pentateuch. The first in order of thought is that which has been raised afresh by Professors Volz of Tübingen and Rudolph of Giessen : Is there an Elohist at all and, if there is, what was the nature of his work ? The second is that which has been raised by Emeritus Professor Welch and which has been treated by him in a succession of works on Deuteronomy : What is its date and what, if any, is its relation to the Northern Kingdom ?

It is obvious that these two problems can only be dealt with very briefly, but the writer trusts that

his treatment of them will, so far as it goes, be just and fair.

I. Is there an Elohist at all ?

As early as 1798 Ilgen pointed to duplicate narratives and distinct vocabularies within the Elohist portions of Genesis. Hupfeld in 1853, working independently, argued cogently for the existence of two writers who used Elohim in preference to Yahweh, while he also showed how closely related one of them was to the Yahwistic writer, so much so that they were in his opinion combined (= JE) before being attached to P and D. His argument has been accepted and built upon by