

East and West at War in India

Lord Ronaldshay Sees Industrialism as Alien to Its People

INDIA: A Bird's-Eye View. By the Earl of Ronaldshay. Illustrated. 322 pp. Boston and New York: The Houghton Mifflin Company, \$2.

THE Earl of Ronaldshay is an authority upon India, for he has traveled widely over the country, has spent many years there, and was formerly Governor General of Bengal. This book shows him to have been a student and an observer of all the many phases of his subject. He is the author of several other books on India, and he indicates in this one that he is preparing to write still more. This volume he offers to meet the needs of the general reader who wants some knowledge of the outstanding features of India, its people and its life, and wants them presented in a way that will illuminate their significance. Therefore his work is something more than what is generally understood by a "birdseye view," which usually is concerned chiefly with material aspects. In his preface the author thus describes his purpose:

This then is what I have tried to do—to bring together vignettes of Indian history; glimpses of Indian architecture and archaeology; sketches of the social and industrial economy of her peoples; indications of the modes in which their religious thought has found expression; illustrations of their unceasing war with their environment, particularly in the matter of climate and disease—to construct a mosaic which will present to the man who wishes to know something of this huge and varied land an intelligent prospectus.

But the book is not a mere patchwork. Lord Ronaldshay has handled his material so cleverly that it all works into an organic whole. He writes with a graphic pen and with such a comprehensive knowledge of his subject that his easy, flowing narrative presents an immense amount of significant information in a picturesque and readable manner. He is, however, inclined to a deplorable indulgence in verbosity.

The author sets off on his birds-eye-viewing with a vivid chapter of spectacular contrasts and startling conjunctions of features of which each in itself is arresting. At the outset he tells us that three-fourths of the citizens of the British Empire are East Indians. He speaks constantly, throughout the book, of India as a continent and says of the custom of generalizing about it that "One does not generalize about Europe, and in some respects Europe is more homogeneous than India." But, notwithstanding the enormous "population of 320,000,000, practicing nine great religions and speaking 130 dialects belonging to six distinct families of speech," he insists that there are certain rough generalizations which may be made, as that India is essentially an agricultural country, since 72 per cent. of its people depend upon agriculture for their living and the great mass of the population lives in small towns and villages. A later chapter studies the way in which the Occident has attempted to superimpose upon this agricultural people the industrialism that has transformed its own civilization. There is nothing in the whole volume more interesting or more significant than this graphic outline of the results of the effort.

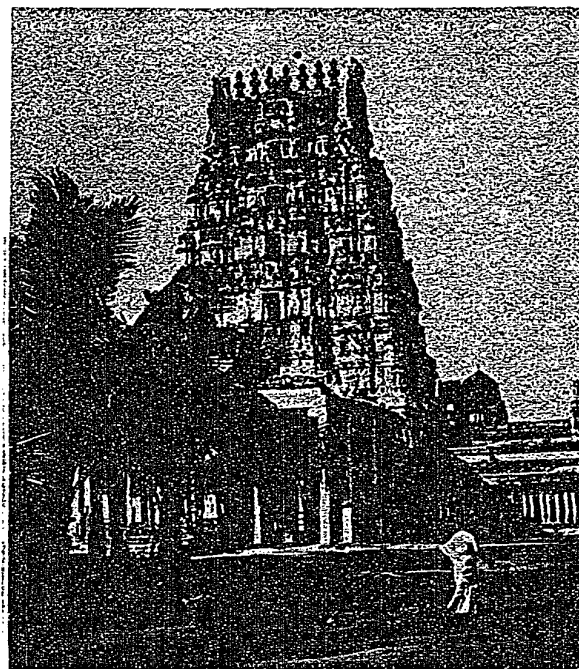
Modern industrialism, the author admits, has made great inroads in India. The cotton industry, chiefly centred in Bombay, and the jute industry in Calcutta, have developed enormously, especially during and since the war, the former producing yearly more than 1,500,000,000 yards of woven goods, while the jute industry exported yearly when the World War was at its height, 805,000,000 bags and 1,250,000,000 yards of cloth. A number of hydro-electric projects which either have been or soon will be completed will soon be followed by the installation of new industries or the extension of old ones. The author mentions several manufactories that are seemingly prosperous and are producing important quantities of goods. But notwithstanding all this he insists that Western industrialism is exotic in India and has been superposed upon it by the British. Bombay has become an industrial city. Years ago an observer said that the industrial revolution had already been accomplished there. And Lord Ronaldshay quotes an Indian nationalist as

declaring that it is now nothing but "a foreign wren on the face of India." Its manufactures are almost wholly in the hands of natives, keen business men of the Parsi race who have become great captains of industry. But outside of Bombay it is chiefly British capital and British business brains and management that institute and keep going Indian industries. After setting forth this situation, the author comments:

I find it difficult to escape from the conclusion that the organization of industries on the lines evolved by Western nations is something which is altogether alien to the genius of the Indian people. Western industrialism is, indeed, regarded by a not inappreciable section of educated public opinion not merely with indifference but with deep-rooted aversion. And the modern factory is as uncongenial to the Indian workman as is the industrial system to the educated Indian idealist. It sounds almost a paradox to say that in a country with a population of 320,000,000 the demand for factory labor is in excess of the supply. Nevertheless, such is the case. And the key to the puzzle is provided by the census statistics, which show that 90 per cent. of the vast population of the continent is classed as rural. Even the worker in the factory or mill is still a villager at heart. The Indian peasant is not, consequently, an efficient workman.

Turning his gaze to the inner nature of man as he has developed in India and finding there much interplay between environment and spirit and many significant consequences, Lord Ronaldshay devotes half a dozen or more chapters to surveys of the chief religions practiced in India, the methods and manifestations and their influence upon life,

and some of the important features of Indian character. Under the last head he is especially interested in the pessimism and sadness of the Indian and studies it and its causes at some length. One of the few generalizations that he admits can be justly made is that "a certain submissive sadness is characteristic of the people of India." It has, he thinks, both physical and intellectual causes. The former are easy to discover, and include the lassitude due to climatic enervation in such regions as have a damp and hot atmosphere and the relaxed physical conditions which make the Indian an easy prey for disease and death. Bubonic plague sweeps across the country and carries off its millions. Influenza proves as deadly. The hook-worm is appallingly prevalent, with its invariable consequences of chronic apathy and low vitality. In some sections examination has shown as high as 80 per cent. of the population to be infected. The Anopheles mosquito blights vast regions with malarial fevers that blast body and spirit. But there is a more subtle cause for that "inherent pessimism which darkens the outlook of the Indian upon life," and Lord Ronaldshay searches for it in the course of a brilliant analysis of the religion and philosophy whose thinking has penetrated deep into the inmost hearts of all the Indian people. The doctrine of Karma, he says, "spreads its sombre shadow far and wide over the Indian continent, impregnating men's minds with the germs of an enervating fatalism." In the endeavor to find some escape from its merciless law of unending action and reaction Indian thinkers fell upon the desires of man's heart and "the annihilation of desire,"



A Dravidian Temple.

says the author, "is the great teaching common to all the religions and all the systems which the intellectual genius of India has given to the world. It is," he adds, "the essence of the wisdom of the East."

Since it has been Great Britain that has made India a factor of consequence in the modern world, the author, of course, pays attention to the imprint the great nation of the West has made upon this silent, aloof, dark continent of the East, with its swarming, sad millions. And in the whole book, full though it is of arresting statements and startling

pictures, there is nothing that seems more amazing than this story of how Britain rules India. Here is the epitome with which he begins the account:

What we actually exercise control over is a continent the size of all Europe, excluding Russia, with a population of 320,000,000 people. Rather less than two-fifths of this area, and rather less than one-fourth of the total population, is administered and governed under British suzerainty by the rulers of 700 native States; the remainder is administered directly by us. And the whole of the vast machinery necessary for this stupendous task is directed, controlled and kept in motion by a body of officials of all kinds—civilians, Judges, engineers, doctors, educationists, forest officers and so on, of whom the number of Englishmen has at all times been less than 5,000, and is likely in the near future still further to diminish. The achievement is all the more remarkable when it is remembered what it is that is done through the agency of the public services. India is a huge going concern run by the State. The State does not merely carry on the work of government and the administration of justice, it does many other things besides. It constructs and runs railways; it undertakes huge irrigation works; it organizes famine relief; it fights pestilence and plague; it doctors and it sanitates; it undertakes the exploitation and scientific treatment of the immense forests scattered over the land; it monopolizes the manufacture of salt; it runs schools and colleges; it makes its influence felt, in other words, in every department of the people's life.

There is some account of the machinery by which this marvelous work is carried on, the key to its success being, the author believes, in its principle of repeated subdivision of territory and responsibility. Along with this well-organized system there goes, says Lord Ronaldshay, a system of local self-government which he does not think to be entirely happy in its methods and results. He goes with some detail into an account of a system of local self-government evolved in India centuries ago quite different from that which the British have endeavored to graft upon its civilization. "The fundamental cause," he decides, "of the disappointing results of nigh on three-quarters of a century of endeavor is to be found in the incorrigible belief in the English as a race in the superiority of their own institutions over those of all other people, however different the conditions may be." He thinks that if some of those ancient features had been reconstituted and local self-government developed along lines congenial to the people it would have made much more satisfactory progress.

The author has a way of vivifying his narrative with brief descriptions of scenes he has witnessed that adds greatly to its reality, significance and human interest. He deserves the thanks of all readers also for the excellent map of India he has provided. The illustrations, from photographs, are admirably chosen for their vital connection with the text.



Priests in Council. Painted About 1640. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

From "Indian Painting Under the Mughals, A. D. 1550—A. D. 1750." By Percy Brown, Oxford University Press.