CHAPTER IV
THE CASTE SYSTEM OF INDIA

The caste system of India is the most widely discussed subject all over the world; it is also the least understood. It is really surprising how little people outside of India know about the institution of caste, as it was originally evolved and perfected to form the basis of the country's social, political, and economic structure. Even students of Hindu philosophy and arts have but a very dim perception of the meaning of caste. You cannot talk about India for five minutes to any person without being confronted with the questions: "How about your caste system? Isn’t it true that the upper classes refuse to marry the untouchables, and even to come into any kind of physical contact with them? Have not the Brahmans of India always lorded over the classes for their own benefit? Wouldn’t they seize the power again for their own benefit if the English left India today? Don’t you see that we have given freedom to the negroes in this country? They have the same political rights as white men to vote and to hold office in our government. They can come into our homes and do the cooking for us and we feel no repulsion for them. Would you permit such association of the classes in India? This equality of spirit is democracy, and until India gives up her old aristocratic habits and changes to the new democratic ideals of the age, she will never be free politically, morally, or spiritually—talk what you will of your spirituality and ethics.”

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I have heard such sermons over and over again from Americans of every status in life. College professors and their wives, university students, teachers, ministers, shirt dealers, insurance agents, street-car conductors, bootblacks, and railroad porters have asked me similar questions. In reply, I do not deny that one class of people is called “untouchables” and that no other class will intermingle or intermarry with them. I question most seriously, however, the truth of the premise of the second statement. Brahmans have not always ruled the country with purely selfish motives. The priestly class has wielded immense influence in India’s political and social life at different periods of its history, but they have used their power mostly for the advancement of its culture and arts. To the Brahmans we owe in general the elaboration and systematization of Hindu philosophy. The vast treasures of Hindu literature and fine arts were both produced and preserved by the same class, who for unknown ages have been the sole repositories of knowledge in India. They have abused their authority at several periods, but on such occasions a great reformer like Buddha or Nanak always appeared among the Hindus and gave the corrupted priests fresh warning for their mistakes.

The power of the Brahmans was at its lowest when the British acquired India, and the Brahmans have found in the English rulers of the country great champions, who have succeeded first in demoralizing them and then in assisting them to demoralize in turn the rest of Hindu society. England with its mighty governing hand of steel is the strongest bulwark of aristocracy in India. And those who say things to the con-
trary either do not know the facts or they deliberately misrepresent them. We shall explain later how the subtle methods of our foreign rulers work.

Lastly, I do not deny that India needs a reorganization of its antiquated social system in order to fit properly into the modern world. Her caste regulations have given to her numerous races and classes only the negative benefits of peace and order at the expense of the positive opportunities of expansion and movement. If India is to live, and if it hopes ever to occupy its proper place among the family of nations, it must cut out of its system the cancer of untouchability. However manifest are the evils of India's rigid caste system and the necessity of its immediate overhauling, the contrast with America seems so unjust. With typical complacency, the Americans declare that there is no caste in the United States. Yet the American negro, although he has a right to vote and to hold office, has absolutely no opportunity to make use of these privileges. A child of ten has more chance of beating the world's heavyweight champion in a prize-fight than an American negro with the highest moral and educational qualifications has of becoming a governor of the smallest state in the Union. The world knows that in most states the law prohibits marriage between whites and negroes, while society everywhere will, in its own direct and emphatic American way, ban the union of a white girl to a negro. It is also true that in most states negro children are taught in separate schools, and that on Sunday colored people must go for prayer to separate churches. In the South, the center of the negro population in the United States, negroes must travel
in separate carriages on railroad trains and use separate waiting rooms at the stations. It is also a matter of history that on the average more than sixty negroes are lynched in America every year by mobs for crimes, which if committed under similar conditions by white persons, would be punished through the regular course of law.

This condition in the United States does not justify the injustice of caste in India or anywhere else in the world, but it may help to give the sharp critic of the Hindu system a milder temper in his judgment by reminding him that human nature everywhere has its virtues and faults. We shall now proceed to examine the origin and the function of the caste of India.

The Sanskrit word which has been wrongly translated into caste is Varna, which means color. Thus the derivation of the term shows that the original classifications in Hindu society were made on the basis of color or race.* When the Aryans first migrated into India, they found themselves face to face with hordes of savage tribes belonging to inferior and aboriginal races. The position of those Aryan forefathers was analogous to that which later confronted the immigrants of Europe into the continents of America and Australia. While these latter invaders have sought to simplify their race problems by exterminating the original inhabitants of these countries, the early Hindus under similar conditions accepted the inferior races as units in their social structure and gave them a distinct place in the scale of labor, the nature of their functions

* Max Müller.
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being strictly determined according to their qualification. Even in our present stage of advancement we find that caste prevails throughout the civilized world. Its ugly symptoms are most prominent in America, Australia, and the white colonies of Africa. In the United States, the lynching of negroes in the South and the strict anti-Asiatic regulations of the state of California, and in Australia the "Keep Australia white at all cost" spirit among the population,—both of these show how deeply the spirit of race hatred has penetrated into the system of the dominant white races of the world. In the state of California, which is the center of oriental population in America, law prohibits the Asiatics (Japanese, Chinese, Hindus) from owning property and even from temporarily leasing lands for farming purposes. Another statute rules against marriage between whites and mongolians. The anti-Asiatic land lease regulations of California have given a severe blow to the oriental population of the state. The Japanese, Chinese, and Hindu immigrants to the United States were chiefly agriculturists. In the early days of California these frugal, honest, hard-working people contributed materially to the development of agriculture. And the fact cannot well be denied that the intensely hot regions of the Imperial Valley and the mosquito-ridden, swampy northern counties were brought under cultivation almost exclusively through the initiative of the Japanese and Hindu farmers of California. The Chinese, in conjunction with the other oriental races, had much to do in developing the largest asparagus growing region in the world, represented by the deltas of the Sacramento Valley. Imperial Valley is
today the richest vegetable growing colony in the world. The northern counties produce the finest qualities of California rice in immense quantities, while the Delta asparagus has made California's name famous throughout the world as the producer of the choicest qualities of both white and green asparagus. But the simple, peace loving, industrious, and retiring Asiatics who toiled to make the name of agricultural California great are barred by law from making even an honest, meager living through farming on a small scale. And all because of the caste of race! As one of the state senators exclaimed not long ago: "We must keep California safe from the yellow peril." To which an eminent Hindu publicist humorously replied: "I have seen no danger of a yellow peril in California except that of the 'Yellow Cabs'."

When a small group of immigrants in any land find themselves surrounded by an endless environment of barbarous tribes, we grant that the situation is critical. The small group of Aryan immigrants in India, however, unlike the American colonists, who exterminated most of the original inhabitants of the country, sought to assimilate the barbarous tribes, and hence found themselves confronted with a difficult problem. They were inspired with the desire to preserve the purity of their superior race and culture on the one hand, and to assimilate in their social system the aboriginal races as well as they could, in order to save them from annihilation. On the other hand, they felt it necessary to safeguard their race by refusing to intermarry with people on a lower scale of civilization. The Aryan forefathers of India, by giving to the original population of
the country a distinct place in its social life, however low, have preserved them on the one hand from extermination and on the other from slavery of person. "Was this not the very solution which suggested itself to the American emancipator Lincoln, when at a much later date he faced the same problems under similar conditions? That adjustment of their racial differences that had been declared wise and that had been practised by the Hindus many thousand years ago, was at last acknowledged by the leaders of the western world as the only salvation from their difficult situation." In the meantime, whole populations had been obliterated, and generation after generation of human beings had been subjected to the tortures of slavery,—to injustice and suffering of the most loathsome kind.

Before we judge the Hindu too harshly for refusing to drink the same water as the non-Aryans and to eat food cooked by their hands, we must remember that most of the aborigines of India were carrion eaters and were more unclean than their Aryan neighbors. The Aryan would not perform any act of life without previously taking his morning bath; he was scrupulously clean in all his habits. He felt, therefore, that it was merely a hygienic precaution not to allow the filthy barbarians access to his person or his house. But it is the nature of caste to convert temporary inhibitions into permanent barriers. In so far as the early Hindu sociologists safeguarded the superior Aryan culture by laying down strict rules—such as the refusals to intermarry and to drink the same water,—they were in the right. Therein they recognized the diversity of races and the necessity of keeping separate the
most highly developed and the least civilized. "But they erred most dangerously in not grasping the fact that differences between human beings are not fixed like the physical barriers of mountains, but are mutable and fluid with life's flow." * "It is the law of life to change its shape and volume through the impact of environment." "Was it not expected that contact with the civilized Aryans would develop among the aboriginal inhabitants of India the wholesome qualities of cleanliness, honesty, peace, and love characteristic of an advanced race?* To have thus bound in an iron frame the growing body of a healthy people was not only an intellectual blunder, but a spiritual crime. As a result, India, which is fundamentally one nation, is now torn into innumerable castes and communities. And this is the cause of her degradation and ruin. India, which should be the mightiest nation of the world today, on account of her ancient culture and history and the nobility and height of her spiritual idealism, is now fallen. If there exists anywhere the law of Karma, the Hindus of the present age are atoning for the sins of omission of their ancient forefathers. The great, great, great grandchildren of those who denied their fellow humans the natural rights of humanity have been cast out of the world's progressive life as the black pariahs of the race. In a recent decision of the United States Supreme Court, which has ruled out the natives of India as ineligible to the citizenship of America, the Honorable Justice remarked: "Hindus of the high caste belonging to the Aryan or Caucasian

* Tagore.
race, are not white persons.” Those Hindus who pride themselves as twice-born Brahmans should take notice of this language.

Let those who wish clamor loud about their Nordic superiority or Brahmanic purity. What is needed in the world today is not the purity of the race so much as the purity of the human soul and its motives. How far the soul of the western people is clean I would not say, but being myself a Hindu, I do know that the soul of India is black. By denying to their fellow brethren their rightful position as human beings, the upper classes of India have sinned most atrociously against themselves and their gods. “Where the touch from a fellow human being pollutes and his shadow corrupts, there the gods can never reside, or truth prevail.” The laws of nature are immutable. You may err against them for a short time, but you cannot afford to ignore their existence forever. In the ultimate reckoning nature will fall upon you in a mad fury and wreak for your mistakes a terrible vengeance. Thus, those who set out to humble and degrade others are in turn humbled themselves. “In the act of tyranny, the tyrant loses sight of his ideals and develops the pride of power, which is another name for the lowering of his soul. Like a man under the influence of liquor, he may feel for the time powerful and strong; yet from the moment an individual loses hold of truth, the insanity of cruelty and injustice starts its deadly work, which will end in his ruin and death.” *

* Tagore.
If the Hindus wish to survive, they must first humble themselves before the members of the lower classes against whom they have long sinned so terribly. They must purify their souls and promise to sin no more. Unless they can do this, it is foolish to expect national freedom, and it is idle to desire it. Those who will not grant freedom to those below them, are themselves not fitted to have freedom.

The high-born Hindu should think over the situation in which he finds himself today. When he despises the Mohammedans and the lower caste Hindus to such an extent that the mere physical touch from the most highly cultured and clean of their kind will spoil the cooking of the wretchedest of the so-called high-caste, how in the name of God, man, or the devil can he expect them to love and serve him? The entire history of mankind does not afford one instance in which an oppressed class has fought to protect the honor or power of its oppressors. It is idle to hope that the oppressed classes of India will ever consent to shed their life-blood to win the freedom of their country. They may at some time make immense sacrifices in the service and at the bidding of such a universal soul as Gandhi, or perhaps unite to drive out an intensely hated foreigner like the British. True liberation, however, can be brought to the nation only through the spiritual unity of its peoples; under the present social regulations the hope of such a union is not only visionary but idiotic.

My misguided Hindu brethren of India should remember what the followers of Nanak, the Sikhs, have already done, and what the Arya Samajists are doing
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now in the Punjab. They can do the same and much more! If they need a leader to guide them, they can find no one holier or wiser in the whole world today than Mahatma Gandhi, who will show them the light as soon as they are ready to see it. Gandhi, the Mahatma (the Great Soul), the leader of millions, has adopted an untouchable girl into his family, whom Mrs. Gandhi is bringing up with their own children in their home. This action has made Gandhi no smaller in the sight of God or man. Will it make other Hindus smaller if they come forward and say to their brethren: “Come, brothers, we embrace you. We shall forget the past and be one again. Children of the same Father, we are all equal before His law. There shall be, in future, no high or low among us. Brahman and Sudra, Mohammedan and Parsi, we shall join hands and strive to bring our motherland back to its former vigor.” Then and then alone will the regeneration of India be possible.

We find that quite early in the country’s history Hindu society fell into two main divisions, the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The former were again divided into three orders represented by priests, warriors, and Aryan farmers or merchants; while the non-Aryans constituted the servant class or the Sudras. The division of society into the three priestly, warrior, and merchant classes is a natural one. We find its parallel in ancient Persia, where the division of the community into priests, warriors, and husbandmen is shown in the Avesta. “In fact, the caste sentiment prevails in greater or less degree in all monarchical countries of the world. In mediaeval Europe the sentiment of caste
grew so strong that it found expression in literature and law."

The work of society in India was distributed among the four castes as follows:

1. Brahmans, the priestly class, were the teachers of the rest of mankind. Their function was to study the Vedic scriptures and various branches of knowledge such as science and philosophy. They were to offer spiritual guidance and to assist all other classes in the performance of religious rites and ceremonies. Everyone depended upon them for favor with the gods, for they were believed to be specially favored to interpret the Veda. As a tribute to the Brahmans' spirituality and learning, they were respected and loved by the other classes. Their simple physical needs were amply provided for, so that they were absolutely free from any form of material care. Within the realm of their appointed duties they were the free, intellectual lords of the Universe. This rule applied to the entire class of scholars and religious teachers, and not to any chosen group among them. A parallel state of intellectual freedom could be reached in the modern western world if all of its professors and religious instructors were born with independent means. The Brahmans' threefold function of teaching, studying, and renunciation inspired among the masses of mankind the feelings of reverence and affection for them. "A Brahman's body was on that account regarded as sacred, and to hurt him in any way was the heaviest sin; while to kill a Brahman was an unpardonable sin which could not be expiated even by penance through an unlimited number of successive rebirths."
While the priestly class thus received the love and homage of the populace, they at the same time enjoyed many immunities and exemptions. From certain punishments a Brahman was always exempt, and his high rank secured him pardon for numerous crimes. On the other hand, special rules were laid down for his class in order to preserve its sanctity. "He could never drink, eat meat, or enjoy the coarser pleasures of life." In fact, the law codes of the different castes specify that for certain offences a Brahman should be punished many times more than a man belonging to the lower classes. This severity was due to the belief of the law-givers of India that "greater knowledge demanded greater restraint, and that with the raise in a person's status his responsibility must also rise." The rule for a Brahman as given by Vasistha is this: "Those are true Brahmans who, well-taught, have subdued their passions, injure no living being, and close their fingers when gifts are offered them." Again, the same teacher has said that a Brahman by birth is not a true Brahman but a slave unless he lives a virtuous and clean life devoted to study and restraint. Says Manu, the great law-giver of India: "A Brahman who does not live as a Brahman is no better than a slave." He could be made an outcast and demoted socially into a lower rank.

Thus we find that while on the one hand their higher status won for the Brahmans respect and reverence from the populace, on the other hand their better position imposed upon them special restraints. It is difficult for us to realize the wisdom of this dictum, yet the Hindu law which prohibited its intellectual
classes from possessing property and otherwise amassing wealth was one of the most profoundly wise laws in the social history of man. Looked at in conjunction with the text "that a householder obtains high merit in this life and hereafter by giving food, drink, and raiment to Brahmans," the dictum against the acquiring of wealth by the Brahman class will appear not only wise but highly just. "Here was a class of scholars, leaders of mankind, who were safe from the two great evils which are the curse of their noble profession—the anxiety of making a livelihood and the temptation to acquire fortunes."

Lest it be supposed that the scholars of India lived on the charity of other classes, a condition which is not regarded in the West as honorable, it may be added here in the form of a corollary that charity in India has an altogether different meaning from that in the West. The motives behind such acts in India and the western countries are quite different. According to Hindu theology, the giver of a gift and not the recipient is the beneficiary. Absolutely no sense of pride or self-importance is attached to the bestowing of gifts. Such deeds are always accompanied by a sense of deep humility and thankfulness in the heart of the householder. "It is the dharma, which may be translated as the man-ness of man, of every householder to provide handsomely for the needs of a Brahman, and he does this from a sense of religious and social duty as well as from a desire for a religious blessing." It is as much the householder’s duty and joy in life to accommodate a Brahman as it is the hope and delight of every mother to comfort her child. To assist a strange
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scholar in his work is considered no more an act of charity in India than is the support of a son at college in Europe or America. The experiences of Mrs. Margaret E. Noble, an Englishwoman of literary eminence, who went to India for a study of its philosophy, are illustrative of the Hindu psychology in this matter. She relates in her book The Web of Indian Life the story of her residence in the Hindu section of Calcutta. After news reached the neighborhood that she had come to India as a student, she found in front of her door one morning a jar of fresh milk and a basket of provisions left by some unknown visitor. This experience was repeated almost every day of the year until her departure. Yet the donors of these simple presents never made themselves known to Mrs. Noble, nor was she ever questioned by anyone of her neighbors regarding her views on Hindu life. They did not care whether she was friendly or hostile to them in her judgments. The fact that she had come among them as a student was sufficient reason for them to provide for her. India is the only country in the world where poets and priests never starve.

2. Khashatriyas or the royal and military class were the rulers of the country, and their duty was to protect the other classes. The Khashatriyas constituted the knightly caste of India. They were brave and chivalrous. The enjoyment of the senses and of pleasures subject to such laws as may protect the weak from the strong were the legitimate rewards of this class. Many a deed of extreme heroism committed by this class under the noble impulse to protect justice or to serve Cupid is related in the epic history of India. [95]
“Chivalry taught them the lessons of gaiety and enjoyment. They learned to admire and desire beauty. Unlike the austere ascetic Brahmans, passion and pleasure in the company of woman was sought by the gallant suitors of the warrior class. Women were often objects of jealousy, and they always exercised great power through their beauty and charm. Fine, full-blooded creatures they were, who knew how to get and give love. Both men and women loved superbly and passionately. Their passions were strong and consuming and their thirst for love great.” Theirs was a love about which a poet sung:

"Give me your love for a day,
A night, an hour;
If the wages of sin are death,
I am willing to pay.

Oh! Aziza, whom I adore,
Aziza, my one delight,
Only one night—I will die before day,
And trouble your life no more."

(LAWRENCE HOPE.) *

3. The Vaishya or the merchant and husbandman class constituted the body of the people. Theoretically they were the equals of the other classes of the Aryan family; but “practically this class together with the fourth caste, namely the Sudras, formed the majority of the population, whose duty it was to support and serve the two upper classes.” They managed the business life of the country and were responsible for the maintenance of the other classes. They tilled the soil and managed the entire commercial and industrial af-

* Quoted from Otto Rothfield—Women of India.

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fairs of the land. This class was again subdivided into various groups according to their profession. This classification of the middle class of India on the basis of occupation was founded upon a thorough understanding of the laws of heredity—"the purpose being to develop the best qualities through heredity transmission. Thereby an attempt was made to develop further the brain of the scholar, the skill of the craftsman, and the ingenuity of the trader through the cumulative influence of careful selection from generation to generation." By thus shutting different trades and professions into air-tight compartments the Vaishya deprived themselves of the benefits of the infusion of young blood into the old system. While on the one hand it had the wholesome effect of reducing the evils of competition to the minimum, on the other it has gradually tended "to turn arts into crafts and genius into skill."

4. **Sudras** or the servant class constituted the entire aboriginal non-Aryan population of the country, whose function was to do mechanical service in the household life of the community. According to Manu the highest merit for this class was to serve faithfully the other three classes. The Sudras performed the most degrading tasks, and were allowed to come into contact with the Aryan population only as menials. On account of their filthy habits these aboriginals were not allowed a close approach to the persons of the higher classes—hence the origin of the term "untouchable." Yet the fact stands that even the "untouchables" are members of the Hindu family group. At marriages and other festivals gifts are freely exchanged between
them and the upper classes. For a householder it is equally important to participate in the ceremonies of the village “untouchables” and his own cousins. I remember very clearly how as a young boy I was instructed by my mother to bow each morning before every elder member of the family, nor forgetting the servants, or Sudras.

Bhagavad Gita, the Bible of the Hindus, lays down the following rules for the different castes of India:

“The duties of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, as also of Sudras, are divided in accordance with their nature-born qualities. Peace, self-restraint, austerities, purity, forgiveness, and uprightness, knowledge, direct intuition, and faith in God are the natural qualities of the Brahmin. Of the Kshatriyas, bravery, energy, fortitude, dexterity, fleeing not in battle, gift and lordliness are the nature-born qualities. Agriculture, protection of cows, merchandise, and various industries are the nature-born duties of the Vaishyas. Conscientiousness in menial service is the nature-born duty of the Sudras. A man attains perfection by performing those duties which he is able to do.”

This division of duties among the different castes “in accordance with their nature-born qualities” needs special notice. We find here that the original distinctions between different classes were made on the basis of their natural qualifications. “The purpose of the early Hindu sociologists was to design a society in which opportunity was allowed to everyone for only such experience as his mental and spiritual status was capable.”* In the beginning, castes were not fixed by iron barriers, nor were the occupations and professions
of the people hereditary. There was freedom for expansion, and everyone enjoyed the privilege of rising into the higher scales of social rank through a demonstration of his power and ability to do so. It is a curious fact of Hindu history that nearly all of its incarnations,—namely, Buddha, Rama, Krishna—belonged to the second or military caste. But the Hindu castes had already lost their flexible natures as early as the sixth century B.C., when Buddha once again preached the doctrines of equality to all classes of people. Through the influence of Buddhist teachings and for over a thousand years during which Buddhism reigned over India, artificial hereditary caste divisions among peoples were almost entirely demolished and forgotten. "Buddha gave to the spirit of caste a death-blow. He refused to admit differences between persons because of their color or race. He would not recognize a Brahman because he was born a Brahman. On the other hand he distinguished between people according to their intellectual status and moral worth."* He who possessed the qualities of "peace, self-restraint, self-control, righteousness, devotion, love for humanity, and divine wisdom" was alone a true Brahman. To the Buddhist, caste was less important than character. His Jataka tales preached this doctrine in a simple but highly eloquent manner:

"It is not right
To call men white
Who virtue lack;
For it is sin
And not the skin

* E. W. Hopkins.
That makes men black.
Not by the cut of his hair,
Not by his clan or birth,
May a Brahmin claim the Brahmin's name,
But only by moral worth."*

About 600 A.D. however, when Buddhism declined and the Brahmans regained their power, caste was once again established on the old hereditary lines. Since that time the influence of the vicious system has prevailed, except when it was checked by such teachers as Chaityna who have regularly appeared at critical periods of the country's history. Nanak's influence in modern times has been the strongest in breaking down the barriers of caste. He was born near Lahore (Punjab) in the year 1469 A.D. and became the founder of the Sikh religion. He recognized the equality of all human beings, irrespective of their color, rank, or sex. In one of his most popular verses he says:

"One God produced the light, and all creatures are of His creation. When the entire universe has originated from one source, why do men call one good and the other bad?"

Even in the present day the followers of Nanak are a tremendous force in demolishing caste. In a recent general assembly of the Sikhs held at Amritsar (the official headquarters of the Sikh religion) it was announced that at all future gatherings of the community, and in all of its free kitchens everywhere, cooks belonging to the "untouchable" class shall be freely employed and even given special preference. As a beginning of this policy the usual pudding offering of the Sikhs was distributed by "untouchable" men.

*Jataka, 440. Quoted from E. W. Hopkins Ethics of India.
and women to a group of nearly twenty thousand delegates at the convention. Prior to this, resolutions condemning “untouchability” had been passed on innumerable occasions at social service conferences; but never before had the ages-old custom been trampled upon, in a practical way, by any other community belonging to the Hindu religion. May this auspicious beginning inaugurate a triumphant conclusion. It is sincerely hoped that the leadership of Gandhi and the virile followers of Nanak in removing the curse of “untouchability” will soon be recognized by the entire Hindu community. This alone could insure the enthusiastic Hindu nationalists political economic freedom for their country. Had it not been for the selfishness of the Brahmans during the mediæval period,—a selfishness which has tended to segregate the Hindus into different sections through the strict caste restrictions of various types,—India would occupy today the vanguard of the world’s progress instead of the rear. In spite of her present weakness India possesses, however, within herself a marvelous reserve force which will enable her to pass through this crisis. While the haughty West, which has always delighted in taunting the Hindus for the latter’s caste, has not even begun to examine her problem of race-conflict, India is already on its way to solving her own caste problem. Gradually, as the younger generation among the Hindus gains more power, “untouchability” and its allied diseases will disappear. Personally, I believe that the leaders of India are headed in the right direction, and that soon equality among members of the different castes will be estab-
lished in the country as a permanent part of its social structure.

"In the Hindu system, once the people were divided into different castes, equality of opportunity for all prevailed within their own castes, while the caste or group as a whole had collective responsibilities and privileges." Each caste had its own rules and code of honor; and so long as a man's mode of living was acceptable to his caste-fellows, the rest of the community did not care about it at all. On the other hand, a man's status in the outside world or his wealth made no change in his rank within the caste. I shall offer an illustration from my own experience. During the mourning week after the death of a near relative of His Royal Highness, the ruling Prince of the native State of Kashmir, Her Royal Highness gave a state reception to the sympathizing friends. Whereas she greeted the wives of the two highest officials in the State, the English Resident and the Prime Minister, with a nod of the head from her seat, Her Royal Highness had to receive standing the humble housekeeper in my brother's home, because the latter belonged to the same caste as the ruling prince. "Society thus organized can be best described by the term Guild Socialism."

Another distinctive feature in the study of its caste is the communal character of Hindu life. Hindu society was established on a basis of group morality. No set of rules were held binding on all classes alike, but within a given caste the freedom of the individual was subordinated to the interest of the caste. Men lived not for their own interests or comfort, but for the benefit of the community. It was a life of self-
sacrifice, and the concept of duty was paramount. The good of caste, of race, of nation stood first, and that of the individual second. Social welfare was placed before the happiness of the individual. "For the family sacrifice the individual, for the community the family, for the country the community, for the soul all the world."

Which of the two ideals, the communism of the Hindu or the individualism of the Westerner is the better? Says Rabindranath Tagore: "Europe may have preached and striven for individualism, but where else in the world is the individual so much of slave?"

On the other hand it must be remembered also that all ideals are good only so far as they assist the individual to develop his full manhood, and the moment they begin to hamper him in his natural growth and thwart his own will they lose their value. So long as the caste regulations of the Hindus assisted them in their spiritual development, they were justified. But the moment they began to lose their original character and became an oppression in the hands of the priestly classes, who used their authority to stifle the nation's spirit, they had lost their usefulness and invited the ridicule and censure of all intelligent thinkers.

Where finer feelings of fraternal human-fellowship prevailed over self-interest and individual gain, in such a community no voice cried in vain at the time of distress. When deaths in the family left small children parentless, or sickness and misfortunes made homes penniless, the protection of other members of the caste was always available for those in need. Orphans and helpless members within the caste were taken into the homes of caste brothers and carefully brought up and
fed with the rest as members of the family. Here the lucky and the unlucky were brought up side by side. Thus there has never arisen in India the necessity of orphanages and poorhouses. As was said by an eminent English writer: * "For to the ripe and mellow genius of the East it has been always clear that the defenceless and unfortunate require a home, not a barrack."

Let us now review the entire subject of caste thus: The Aryan invaders of India found themselves surrounded by hordes of aboriginal and inferior races. Under similar conditions the European invaders of America and Australia exterminated the original population by killing them off, or converted them into human slaves; the Hindu Aryans avoided both of these inhumanities by taking the native inhabitants of the land into their social life. They gave these inferior peoples a distinct place in the scale of labor, and assigned to them the duties of menial service, for which alone they were qualified at the time. Further, to safeguard their superior culture, the Aryan leaders laid down strict rules against intermarriage with their non-Aryan neighbors. And as these aboriginals were filthy in their habits and mostly carrion-eaters, it was also ordained as a measure of hygienic precaution that the Aryans should not be allowed to drink the same water or eat food cooked by non-Aryan hands. This was the beginning of untouchability.

Simultaneously with this racial division rose a functional division among the Aryan population separating

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* Margaret E. Noble.
it into three orders of priests, warriors, and husbandmen. This constituted the four-fold division of the Hindu caste system—the Aryan inhabitants of the land forming the first three castes of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, while the non-Aryans constituted the fourth caste of servants or Sudras. At first these divisions into different castes were flexible and persons in the lower castes were allowed to rise into the ones higher by virtue of their merit. We find that most of the historic religious teachers of the Hindus, namely, Rama, Krishna, and Buddha, came from the second class.

Gradually, however, the castes began to lose their flexible nature, and before the birth of Buddha in the year 600 B.C. they had already acquired a hereditary character. The teachings of Buddhism had the tendency to break down the hereditary barriers of caste, and during a thousand years of its reign the people of India had forgotten their caste boundaries. "Around 600 A.D. Buddhism began to decline and the Brahman priests gained fresh prestige. They set up the different castes on the old hereditary lines once again, and, except for a few local breaks through the appearance of such leaders as Nanak in Punjab and Chaityna in the South, the spirit of caste has prevailed throughout Hindu India since the decline of Buddhism." The greatest champion of the lower classes who has appeared in recent times is the peaceful leader of India's silent revolution, Mahatma Gandhi. He has spoken and written against untouchability and its allied evils more bitterly and longer than against other vital political and economic wrongs of the country. He has told his
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countrymen time and again that India's soul cannot become pure so long as untouchability stays amongst the Hindus to defile it. And as a proof of his own sincerity in the matter he has adopted in his own family an untouchable girl whom he calls the joy of the household.

The evils of caste are quite manifest. It has tended to divide the Hindu community into various groups and thus destroyed among them unity of feeling which alone could insure national strength. Lack of united power opened the way for foreign invasions, which, again, has resulted in dragging India down from her former place of glory to her present state of humiliation and ruin. Yet alongside with the many evils of India's caste system several advantages have accrued from it. Its existence has tended to make the people of India conservative and tolerant. With the institution of caste they felt so well fortified within themselves that they did not fear the influx of new ideas into their midst. India offered a safe and welcome home to the oppressed minorities from other lands. The Parsis and Jews came and settled there. They were not merely tolerated but welcomed by the Hindus, because the latter, assured of their own wonderful powers of resistance, had nothing to fear from outside influences. The Hindu caste system may be described as "the social formulation of defence minus all elements of aggression." Since the beginning of her history India has been subjected to numerous invasions, but she has stood against them successfully. In the cultural sense India, instead of being conquered, "has always succeeded in conquering her conquerors."
The invaders belonging to different civilizations and races have come and disappeared, one after the other; but India still survives. *

Again, in the Hindus' scheme of the division of labor care was taken to assign to every man his task and remuneration in such a manner as to avoid all unnecessary friction among the different classes. Its value will be readily recognized by those who are familiar with the evils of modern industrialism, arising from the intense hatred within the different classes.

Finally, it must be said to the credit of Hindu sociologists that, at least, they had the courage to face the problem of race-conflict with a sympathetic mind. The problem was not of their creation. The diversity of races existed in India before these new Aryan invaders came into the country. The caste system of the Hindus was the result of their sincere endeavors to seek a solution of their difficult problem. Its object was to keep the different races together and yet afford each one of them opportunity to express itself in its own separate way. "India may not have achieved complete success in this. But who else has? It was, at least, better than the best which the West has thought of so far. There the stronger races have either exterminated the weaker ones like the Red Indians in America, or shut them out completely like the Asiatics in Australia and America." "Whatever may be its merits," says Tagore, "you will have to admit that it does not spring from the higher impulses of civilization, but from the lower passions of greed and hatred."

* Tagore.