

# THE WEST AND THE HINDU INVASION

BY AGNES FOSTER BUCHANAN

*Mr. Mukerji, an Indian scholar, has given in this issue of Overland Monthly his ideas on the subject of the Hindu in India and in America, and he has managed to lay before our readers a very pathetic view of a people, torn by internal factional differences and divided by caste and religion. He has shown us that in this clash many have broken away from the old dogmas, and that in the fight for survival and for liberty, for one is the same as the other, there has been evolved a new class. The student class of India, who are trying heroically to throw off bigotry, custom and caste, all at one effort, and who will try to attach to the wisdom of the Orient some of the Practical Sense of the Occident, are the militant advance guard of Indian regeneration. Agnes Foster Buchanan, the author of "The West and the Hindu Invasion," has given us another view of the matters discussed by Mr. Mukerji. She tells of the laboring class who have headed the Hindu Invasion of America. It is needless to say that the Western view of Eastern matters is never concrete, and equally it cannot be said, with truth, that it is abstract, for that would be to acknowledge liberality, tolerance and broadness of policy in the treatment of the alien Asiatic. We must, therefore, be content with the saying that the Occidental view is as various as the Western individuality.*

EDITOR OVERLAND MONTHLY.



IT SEEMS to be inevitable that the most perplexing problems of immigration with which this country has to deal must come from the far East. It would seem equally as inevitable that the Golden Gate should be the entrance through which these problems should force themselves.

The two premises granted, perhaps the

conclusion is not an unexpected one. San Francisco, California, in a broader sense, has come to be regarded as a political Nazareth, out of which can come no good thing.

California gave to the country the Chinese question. Californians of the Denis Kearney days still remember the street riots which followed each fresh arrival of Celestials. The Geary Act was the result of these agitations. Then followed a few years of comparative quiet. Coolies ceased

from troubling, and the country was at rest. The quiet was, however, a temporary one. While the Chinese stood knocking at our outer doors, which had been barred and closed by legislation, their neighbors, not waiting for permission, crept stealthily past the suppliants, entered and took possession. When San Francisco awoke from her short sleep, she found herself face to face with the Japanese question, infinitely greater and more insidious in its influence than the Chinese problem had ever threatened to be, for while the yellow men had raised a labor question, their brown brothers have created an industrial one. And then, while the Western press inflamed, and the Eastern journals calmed, neither wholly right nor wholly wrong, another stranger sought the Western coast—the land of promise. He is tall of stature, straight of feature, swarthy of color. But unlike the other visitors, this last is a brother of our own race—a full-blooded Aryan, men of like progenitors with us.

The Hindus and the Hindu Invasion is the latest racial problem with which we of the West have to deal. Not that it is as yet fully recognized as such. As in the cases of the two previous invasions of the coast by Orientals, it is only for the close observer that coming events cast their true shadows.

But to such an one, the influx of Hindus means something more significant than merely an augmentation of our already cosmopolitan civilization.

The question presents an interesting study from more points than one. To intelligently understand the situation, we must consider the characteristics of the different races which inhabit that empire which Macaulay called "the epitome of the world."

In Hindustan we find over 400,000,000 of population and a vast variety of peoples. The two great divisions are the Hindus and the Mohammedans—the former followers of the teachings of Brahma, the latter acknowledging the claims of Mohammed as the great prophet. The Mohammedans are in the minority, and are the descendants of those warlike races which swept down from the North and settled as conquerors from the banks of the Indus to Cape Camorin.

As every one knows, India is bound hand and foot by caste and its inexorable decrees. To enumerate these castes would be almost as impossible as it would be uninteresting.

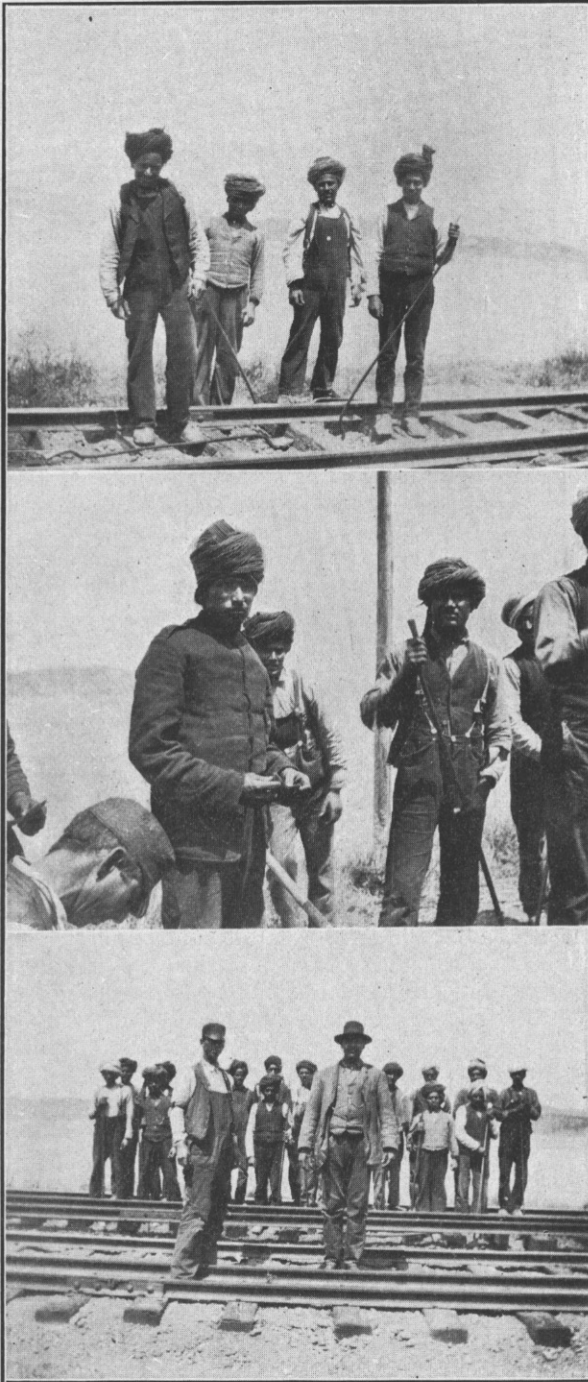
The four principal castes are all that need be mentioned here. The Brahmins are, of course, the highest of all, and according to the law, should be priests or teachers. Like father, like son, applies absolutely and irrevocably to the caste-bound natives of India, for the caste represents a trade, an avocation.

Especially does this law of caste hold the women in its iron grip. A story is told of a young Englishman traveling in the Southern districts. The Brahmins, being the best educated of the people, naturally fall heir, through public examinations, to the fattest plums to be shaken from the political tree. Mr. G—— found at one place where he was staying overnight a very pretty young Brahmin woman, serving as post-mistress, in her husband's absence. He asked for his mail, and as he took it from her, held her hand, and because the arm was smooth and lovely, he placed his free hand upon it. The poor girl's face assumed a look of genuine terror. She pulled her arm away, looked around to make sure that no one had witnessed the sacrilege, and then began to rub the arm as though in this manner to rid herself of the taint. "There's nothing to hurt you," assured Mr. G——. "It's all right." But still the unflattering cleansing process went on.

"Think of it," she said at last, slowly and solemnly, "I have been touched by a man who has eaten fowl, fish and cow! I am unclean!"

Now, hemmed in as these people are by the obligations of their castes, the exactions of their religions, and the superstitions of their race, we must look for some mighty leaven that could have worked upon them to such a degree as to influence them to break through laws and traditions held sacred through the ages.

We have not far to look. It is not too bold to attribute to the Russo-Japanese war this latest immigration to our coasts. The spirit of unrest and discontent engendered in the far East by that extraordinary conflict, spread itself insidiously through the Eastern possessions of the



ON THE CANADIAN PACIFIC.  
MEMBERS OF A CONSTRUCTION GANG.  
SECTION GANG.

British empire. In every nation, in every community, there are a few venturesome spirits ever ready to throw aside the bonds of tradition and convention. To such as these among the inhabitants of India, the liberty and prestige acquired by the Japanese arms, appealed like fairy tales to children. They formed the opening wedge and it needed but a few of the stories which came floating across the water to send the wedge in far enough to accomplish a final separation. These stories told how, far beyond the setting sun, there was a wonderful land of riches, where famines never came, and where men could earn more in a day than they could at home in a month.

Now, the Hindu looks upon the ocean as a thing accurst. To cross it is to cut oneself off from one's fellows.

The first breaking of this superstition came when the English began importing Hindu policemen and soldiers into Hong-Kong. Having crossed the sea once with no ill effects, the Pacific became less and less fearful as acquaintance with it became more intimate, and in these watchmen or policemen in the English service in Hong Kong the wanderlust most naturally developed. And it was still further developed when the British sent Indian troops to the Mediterranean to warn the Russians that an entry into Constantinople meant war.

They have come to this coast eager, more than eager, to do any and all kinds of work. They are to be found in our iron factories, they are picking fruit, railroads engage them as section hands. And right here comes in the problem of cheap labor which is forever and always the same in similar situations. Asiatics are, by their manner of life and living, able to subsist on incomes that would be prohibitive to the white man. This is a trite truism, but



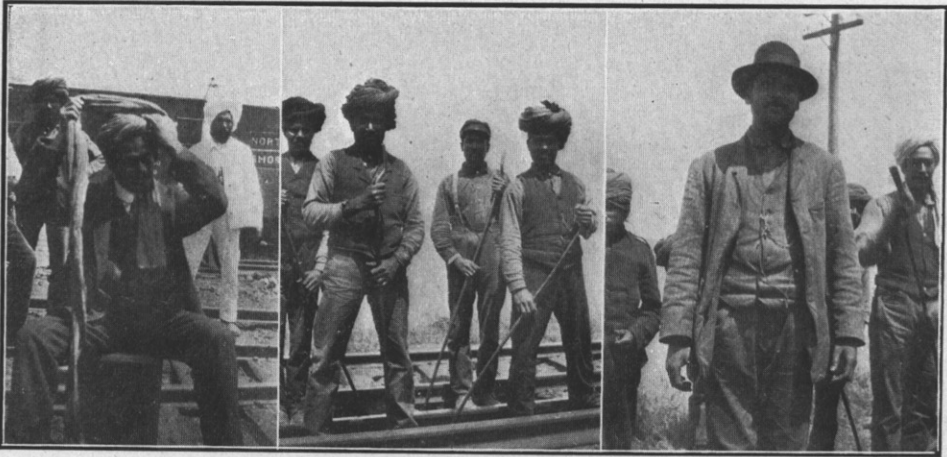
it is the hinge upon which the open or shut door of immigration must hang. The Hindus live together in colonies, a number in a house, and their living expenses are purely nominal. They do not exceed \$3 a month per capita. It requires no statistics to demonstrate that a white man must starve on such an allowance.

Then, too, the Hindus have no families to support—that is, there are no women among the new-comers, nor are there likely to be. Among other insignia of conquest, the Mohammedans forced upon the Hindus the “pardah nashin” or drawn veil, which relegated the women of the higher classes to close confinement in their homes, while those of the higher

here, and several other equally impertinent questions, such as we deem permissible in our conversation with foreigners whom we do not understand.

This particular man had been here long enough to learn something of our habits and customs, and understood that men actually went to the homes of the women to call upon them. So after patiently answering the questions I had put to him, he turned toward me, and with the greatest courtesy asked me if he might call upon me the next day!

I gave the desired permission, anxious to see the outcome. I warned the maid of my expected caller, for I did not wish him to be left standing for any length of time upon the doorstep.



SHOWING HOW THE TURBAN IS MANAGED. THE HINDOO BOSS. RAILROAD WORKERS.

classes, who were compelled to go abroad, were heavily veiled. Not even with the establishment of the British rule has this custom been abandoned, and it is this dislike of the Hindu to expose his woman-kind to the eyes of the world that has brought to the United States only bachelors and widowers.

Strangely enough, to mention a man's wife or daughter is the deadliest insult one can offer a Hindu.

The writer had a novel and amusing experience with one fine-looking Sikh, who is employed in the boiler room of an iron factory. I asked him of his plans for the future—whether he expected to remain

About three o'clock that afternoon she came quickly up-stairs. “He's come,” was all she said, but her eyes spoke unabridged volumes. She had not even attempted to learn his name.

I went down stairs into the living room, and there sat Binga Singh, resplendent in spotless white. The suit was a remnant of past glories—of the days spent in Hong-Kong as a watchman. On his head, of course, was an enormous, highly-colored turban. He rose as I entered the room.

“This is a great honor,” said he, as he salaamed before me. We talked superficially of nothing for a few moments,

while I adjusted myself to the new experience of entertaining a turbaned stranger.

Then, as he understood more fully of my intention of writing a sketch of his people, as we see them here, he became more willing—anxious, I thought—to have certain facts understood.

"I will be very glad to give you any assistance in my power," he said graciously. "At best, it is little that I can do. This is a strange land. Were I at home, I might offer you the true hospitality." I could not but notice the pure English at his command, nor the courteous ease of his bearing. I remarked upon the former, congratulating him upon his mastery of the language. He seemed pleased and then explained.

"I am a Brahmin," he said, proudly, "of the highest caste in all India. For years I have lived in Hong-Kong. There my friends have been English and Americans, and from them I have learned the language." And then this member of the oldest aristocracy on earth went on to tell me of the restrictions which his birth had imposed upon him, but which in his new environment he had of necessity laid aside.

"A true Brahmin must eat alone," he said, "with his face turned to the wall. It is a sacrilege that any one should see him eat."

"But here, you surely——" I exclaimed—but he interrupted me.

"Oh, here it is different—very different. There are many of us in one room." I remembered the common-place shanty in the squalid part of town where these men lived. It was not an easy place to live up to the demands of an exclusive religion.

"Do you find everything very high here—living, I mean? Provisions, meat." Again I was interrupted: "But we eat no meat—that is, no beef. The cow is sacred. We eat no beef, no chicken—nothing that grows under the ground!"

"But you drink milk," I objected, remembering that this was given the place of honor on their menus. "Your cow gives you the milk!"

His eyes grew large with wonder at my smallness of vision. "Yes, we drink our mother's milk also, but we do not

eat her," he countered, and I had no argument wherewith to meet him.

"Are you a citizen of this country yet?" I asked him, "or are you going to be?" He shook his head slowly.

"I applied for naturalization papers," said he, "and was very nearly an American at one time. I can read and write, you know," said he, with a little touch of pride. "Everything was going beautifully, until the judge wanted me to remove my turban to take the oath. Of course, I could not do that, and so I am still a British subject."

It is just this fact that these men *are* subjects of Great Britain which makes their right of way into this country more or less an undisputed one. The payment of two dollars head tax and the price of steerage passage out here are all that can keep them, under the present treaty, from swarming over our land.

We are not the only ones to whom this immigration appears vital. Vancouver and Victoria are favorite Meccas for England's Eastern subjects, and the dissatisfaction and jealousy of the citizens of these towns against Asiatics in general have been brought to a focus by the greatly increasing number of Hindu arrivals. The Colonial Government is literally between the devil and the deep sea, in its attempt, on the one hand, to propitiate the labor unions on whose vote the party exists, and on the other to avoid offending the Home Government.

The Hindus make good, steady workmen, though on account of their peculiar diet they lack physical endurance. In appearance they are striking, well-built fellows, many of them with features of Europeans. They are all born soldiers and they look it. Indeed, the bearing of our own military compare but poorly with their erect and soldierly appearance.

Two Hindus stood one day at the Ferry Building in San Francisco watching the crowds coming and going. A number of soldiers from one of the posts around the bay passed them. The foreigners laughed.

"What are these?" said one in his native tongue.

"I suppose they are 'gorah logue' (soldiers)," answered the other. Whereupon they both laughed so derisively as to convince the hearer without further argument

of the estimation in which our soldiery was held.

So California and the West give to the Powers that be in Washington another question for legislation, for it must needs be by legislation that the present crisis is to be bridged. The small cloud on the horizon, now no larger than a man's hand, is threatening because misunderstood, but grows larger and larger as each wind that

blows from the East brings it nearer.

The sacred writings of the Vedas say: "I gave the earth to Arya." This is a propitious moment for the State Department to adopt an amendment to the Vedas and to tell our brothers of the East that while the earth is large enough for us all, there is no one part of it that will comfortably accommodate both branches of the Aryan family.