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ESSAY

ON THE

NATIONAL CUSTOM OF BRITISH INDIA

KNOWN AS

CASTE, VARNA, OR JATI.

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PART I.—CASTE IN THE WORLD.

Lecture at the National Indian Association, 1879.

PART II.—CASTE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Contribution to "Mission Life," 1881.

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PART I.

CASTE IN THE WORLD.



CONSIDER myself fortunate in having the opportunity to bring this subject forward in an assembly presided over by you, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, for the following reasons. Those who, like myself, have spent their lives in India, have the reputation of being prejudiced in favour of the people; those who stay at home, sometimes from incorrect reports, conceive a feeling against them. You, sir, who had the privilege of taking mature English experience to India, and of bringing back Indian experience to England, are able to hold the scales fairly betwixt those, who know the people too well, and those who do not know them personally at all.

The subject of Caste is one of considerable importance. There exists unquestionably a social institution in British India, which is found nowhere else in such compact rigidity: it lays claim to considerable antiquity, and is a social phenomenon, which cannot be overlooked: it is proposed to examine the features of this institution.

It is of no practical advantage to discuss the origin of Caste. Of one thing there is no doubt, that it is not alluded to in the Rig Veda, as a social feature of the early Arian population. The Post Vedic Laws of Manu lay great stress upon Caste, but it is not clear, when these laws were written, by whose authority, and in what part of India. The idea has been hazarded, that they were compiled at a comparatively late date, with a view of upholding Caste against the levelling tenets of the Buddhists. At any rate, they have no more binding force upon the people of India generally than the Book of Leviticus has upon Europe. We shall see further on that eighty-six per cent. of the population of British India does not belong to either of the Priest, Warrior, or Merchant Castes of the Books of Manu, but are members of the Sudra Caste, or of mixed Caste, or absolutely without any Caste properly so called. The subdivision of a nation into Priest, Warrior, and Merchant classes, with a fourth for the common herd, is not unusual in Oriental nations. It is notorious that