

XII.—THE SANTAL MISSION.

BY THE REV. W. T. STORRS.

FORTY or fifty years ago the Santals were an almost unknown race: I doubt whether any Government official was aware of their existence. They had crept up by slow stages from the jungles of Central India, possessing themselves of jungle land as they passed northwards, until a large number of them had settled themselves in a district called Damin-i-Koh, or fringe of the mountains, which had been set aside by Government for another aboriginal tribe, the Paharis of the Rajmahal Hills. Here the Santals occupied the valleys and lower slopes of the hills, while the original tenants, the Paharis, made the fastnesses of the higher hills their abode.

It was about forty years ago that Mr. Droese, the C.M.S. missionary at Bhagalpur, in his preaching itinerations southwards, came across a tribe of most simple habits, of great honesty, of most awful drunken tendencies, and of a language which he, familiar as he was with the Pahari tongue, had never heard. These were the Santals. He was attracted by them (he could not but be, as he got to know them), and determined, at their request, to establish some village schools among them; and at once did so. But he found that they were all in a great state of political unrest, owing to the frightful exactions of the Bengali usurers, who were robbing them of everything they had. One day Mr. Droese missed his little boy from his tent, and when in most pitiable anxiety he searched for him, found that he had been carried away by the Santals, who had made him king, in accordance, as they said, with a prophecy current among them that they should have a white man to rule over them, who should deliver them from their oppressors. With difficulty Mr. Droese got them to give back his child; but the thought of his mother's tears at the loss of her little son touched the hearts of the Santals, and they restored the boy.

The next thing that occurred was the Santal rebellion in 1855, when they rose against the *mahajons* (usurers), killed many of them, and fought with the troops sent against them. We must, however, tell this, that before they commenced their rebellion, they sent the Mission teachers back to Mr. Droese, carrying them and all their goods to a place of safety. The Santal leader, a man named Sido, declared that a book had come down upon his head one night while in his hut, and that this book was a revelation from God telling them to rise and kill their oppressors. The book was afterwards found on his person, and proved to be a copy of the Gospel of St. John in Hindi, which he must have obtained from one of the teachers! The struggle with English troops was short and sad: what could spears and bows and arrows do against muskets? And one of the officers who commanded the troops employed in the suppression of the rebellion told me he never had such distasteful work as the slaughter of these poor, helpless village people.

When the rebellion was stamped out, Government took the Santals in hand, respecting both their valour and honesty, and settled them in the valleys of the Damin. Mission work was then resumed among them in the form of schools, and a little preaching was attempted among them. But the first missionary to reside among them was Mr. Puxley, formerly a captain in the 4th Light Dragoons, but who, after the Crimean war, sold out of the Army, and gave himself to the work of the Church Missionary Society at his own cost. For a time, in a wretched hut or shed, he fought with the terrible malaria of the district and with the difficulties of its unwritten language; and then as Mr. Droese had gone to Europe for a time, he removed to Bhagalpur, taking some Santal boys with him, from whom he learned something of the Santal language, while he also studied Hindi. After two or three years he returned to the Santal district, settled at Taljhari, where he bought at his own expense some disused bungalows which had been built during the construction of the railway which had been carried through the district,

commenced a large number of village schools, and established a boarding or training school for some of the more intelligent of the Santal boys. Then again from exposure to malaria, and too great self-denial in his mode of living, his health utterly broke down, and he was ordered home.

Then I was brought from Lucknow, where for five years I had been working among Mohammedans, and took up the work. This was in 1863. The first thing, of course, was to learn the language, of which scarcely anything had been reduced to writing. A most difficult language it was, very different from the Hindustani and Persian which I had previously studied. The only way was to commit to memory short sentences, which were learned from three of the most intelligent young men or boys who had been put into the school by Mr. Puxley, and had acquired a fair knowledge of Hindustani. But in a few months a sufficient number of short sentences in Santali had been learned, with the help of these young men, for me to construct out of them an address in which I was able to set the Gospel simply but fully before the Santal villagers around me. But in learning the language and putting into their language the simple truths of the Gospel, the three youths who had helped me had themselves felt the power of the truth on their hearts and consciences; and to my great surprise one day the cleverest among them wrote in Hindi on a scrap of paper a request that I would instruct him and admit him into the Christian Church by baptism. I could scarcely believe my own eyes as I read the words; but two days after, another asked for baptism, and after a few weeks of careful, prayerful daily preparation, I baptized on Sunday, May 15th, 1864, the first Santal converts. The baptism took place in no church; we had none; nor in a font, but in a pool made by a spring of water near the Mission. There amidst a crowd of gaping Heathen, who very indistinctly understood what the ceremony meant, I admitted the first Santals into the Church of Christ. Few can know the joy of such a day; the first converts of a race! the first-fruits of how great a harvest for God, who could tell! It seemed as though over the Heathen, and over those young converts' heads, surely some of the angels hovered to carry up to heaven the news of Christ's first triumph over a race of Heathen.

After the first two baptisms there was a lull. The two young men themselves were full of hope and energy; but for a time no more came forward. Then there came, after a few months, one more, only one, but he a young man of great independence and strength of character. Just at this time Mr. Puxley returned from England with renewed strength, and with almost incredible energy swept through the district. After a few months of village preaching, the three young men who had been baptized being my companions—finding my health failing after nearly nine years in India, I returned home and remained in England eleven months. During that time Mr. Puxley had been hard at work, and had baptized several more, principally the people of the village nearest to our Mission station, Taljhari. Before I returned to India, short as my furlough was, Mr. Puxley was driven home again through illness, and my own strength was only so partially restored that things did not look cheerful to me, seen through the spectacles of feeble health, and in the dim light of a lonely household, our children being left in England.

But as soon as I could I went out into the district, and to my immense surprise, everywhere I found that the sowing of previous years, more by Puxley than by myself, had already taken root; that everywhere, by the earnest words and consistent example of the few, very few, already baptized—there was a wave of popular approval of the Gospel, not for itself, but as seen in its effects. At my first halt, twenty miles away from our Mission, where we had a little village school, I found a band of fourteen or more adults ready to confess their faith in Christ. I stayed a few days with them, teaching, examining, exhorting; and then on the evening before I left, they erected a rough stage over a large, clear, reed-circled pond, with pink water-lilies dotting the surface, and there I led down into the water these simple village people, and thus laid the foundation of the first separate little village "church." We passed on from village to village, and came to the native village of two of the young men first baptized. There I stayed many days again, praying, teaching, warning, and on the last afternoon baptizing fifty-five into the Church of Christ. A few miles further we stopped again (in all these places we had small village schools, and there had been Christian

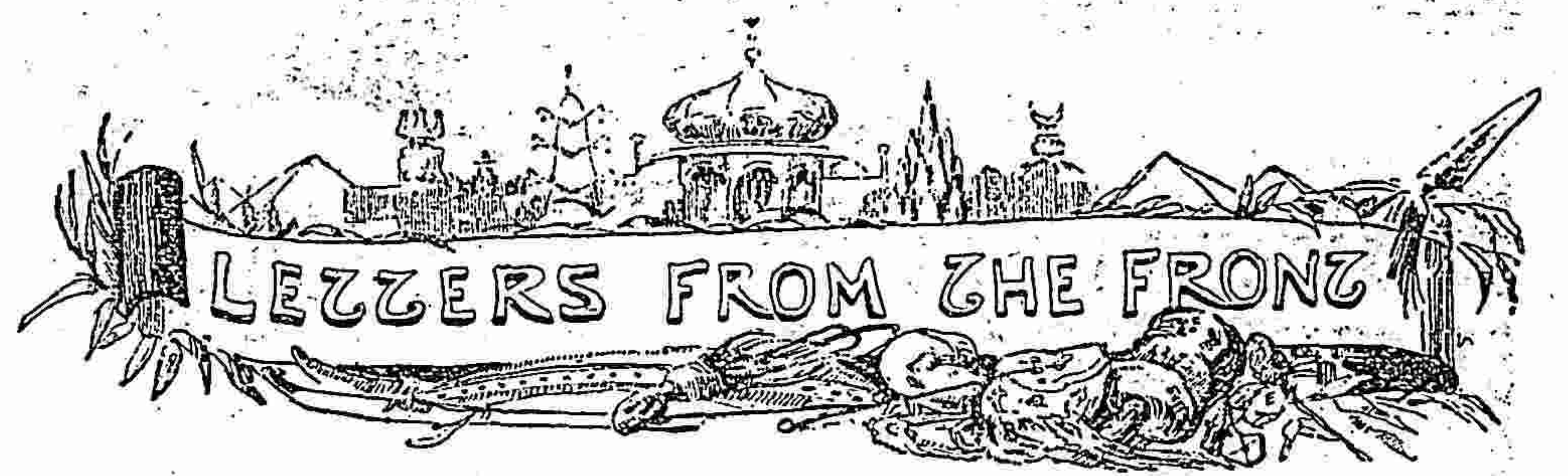
influence), and before I left, standing on a great rock in the stream of the beautiful river which flowed by, with a gigantic cotton tree over my head, I baptized twenty precious souls: in another more distant village there were twelve. With all I had direct personal dealing; to all I explained that they were not to look for any worldly advantage; to all I made it clear that from the very first they must learn the lesson of giving and not of taking.

Almost weekly one or other was brought in by the influence of those who had become Christians. I organised a little band of the young men who had been first baptized, and who were the most intelligent, and during the week instructed them every day as far as I had time, and every Saturday sent them out twenty, forty, fifty miles to hold services with the scattered little flocks, or sometimes only families, of Christians, and to return again on Monday. In every place where there was more than one family of baptized, the people built a little place for worship. It was, it is true, only a hut of mud and wattle, but constructed in the same way as their own houses; and they made, in their own rough style, a little table for the Holy Supper, and a desk for prayers, and mats for the floor; and in some cases they bought a tiny gong to call to service. In every place on every Sunday at every service there was an offertory, and the gifts, though small, were regular. Dear Bishop Milman came up from Calcutta to see the work, and a large number came from long distances, some nearly eighty miles, for Confirmation.

At the Bishop's suggestion, I began to build a large church, to hold about 800, on a hill above the Mission, and commanding the whole country round—the very hill on which the Santal leader of the rebellion had had his camp, so to speak, and which an old man told me had been in his memory the haunt of wild elephants, and even of rhinoceros, according to his description. Indeed we missionaries have more than once encountered wild elephants in the district, and tigers and leopards at one time quite infested our neighbourhood. Perhaps the building of so large a church was a mistake; I think it was—but the church formed a sort of cathedral for our Mission, and on great occasions I have seen it packed with Native Christians, where a few years before there was not one who confessed the name of Christ. I have seen the people by hundreds bringing up their offerings (we did not make collections; the people came up in most orderly fashion to offer)—and laying them down before the Holy Table, or pouring their pice into the plate held out to receive them by the minister. There I have myself administered the Holy Communion at one service to about 225 Native Christians. There I presented to the Bishop for ordination the first three Santals, men who have since “earned for themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith.”

But the work was not only at Taljhari. In 1869 the Rev. H. W. Shackell (a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and an honorary missionary) joined the Mission, and built in the west of the district a Mission House at Godda at his own expense, and this became another centre. Hiranpur had been previously occupied by a German missionary, whom for some time Mr. Puxley supported, and who worked in subordination to him. Then in 1878, when the staff of missionaries had been increased, two more new stations at Barharwa and Bhagaya were built and occupied; and a few years later, under the guidance of the Rev. A. J. Shields, a colony of Christian Santals was located north of the Ganges, just below the lower ranges of the Himalayas in Assam, the Government giving the jungle land at a nominal rent which they were to bring into cultivation. Now altogether the Santal Church in connection with the C.M.S. numbers nearly 4,000, of whom more than 1,000 are communicants.

At Taljhari there is a boys' boarding and training school of 150 boys or young men, which is continually supplying fresh converts of the best and most useful kind. At Barharwa there is a girls' boarding school, in which a splendid work is being done. All over the district are little scattered congregations, some of units, some of dozens, who have generally built themselves simple but suitable places of worship. They in a measure help to support their own pastors, and are learning increasingly the lesson of self-reliance. They support two Native lay missionaries to preach among their Heathen fellow-countrymen. In some of the congregations, no doubt, spiritual life is low, but in most of them there is much warmth, and reality, and life; and as I look back to the day when the first Santal confessed Christ, and see now the Church that has been built up and is still growing, I can only say, “What hath God wrought!”



IV.—“SEE HOW THESE CHRISTIANS LOVE.”

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER FROM A SANTAL CLERGYMAN.

IN the GLEANER for August, 1893, we gave some account of the formation of a Santal Christian colony in Northern Bengal, far from their own country. Mr. Storrs also briefly refers to the colony in the article on this page. The following insight into the work of the Native Church in the colony was written by the Rev. J. B. Hembron, a Santal clergyman, to the Rev. J. Tunbridge. Mr. Tunbridge forwards the letter, remarking that it shows that “whatever faults there may be in our Christians, there are elements of hope and encouragement:”—

“SANTALPUR, ASSAM, Sept. 10th, 1894.

“MY DEAR GURU BABA,—Accept my love and salutation. By God the Father's love I am at present well. . . . I must tell you that on Aug. 15th I was sent by the Church to the Alipur Duars Santal colony very suddenly. . . . There was no other pastor available, and I may stay here for three or four months. I left my family at Talpabari, in Santalia, and am here alone. . . . It seems exactly like a Christian land. The people are upright, and their conduct is beautiful to behold. They are bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and manifest much love and respect for their pastor. There is even a rivalry amongst them as to who shall entertain me and provide for my wants—several wishing to claim me as their guest at the same time. The services in church are also splendidly attended, the average on Sundays being 372. They listen with great pleasure to the sermons, and there is a feeling of great joy.

“The Christians have founded six villages, from two to four miles apart. It is difficult and dangerous to visit them on account of the dense jungle, which is infested with tigers and bears; but there are one or two catechists to assist me, and I manage to visit daily. The village daily prayers are well attended in the various places by an average of from sixty to eighty souls.

“Their crops are splendid, being quite double those in the old country, and the people are well-to-do—wanting for nothing. They give liberally at the offertories, and large quantities of grain are accumulating for the Native Pastorate Fund.

“Your loving pupil,

“JOEL BARSA HEMBRON.”

V.—CHINESE IN AUSTRALIA.

FROM MISS LATHAM, a New Zealand candidate training at Sydney.

“MARSDEN TRAINING HOME, SYDNEY, Sept. 24th, 1894.

“On Saturday evening, the 22nd, four Christian Chinamen came to tea. There were just Miss Hassall (Principal of the Home), Miss Oxley (who works amongst the Chinese, and is to go to Fuh Kien), myself, and these men. Two of them are leaving this coming Saturday for China. One of them, Mark, is able to talk fairly good English, and is the chief spokesman. Miss Hassall asked the other, why he was going to China. To see his mother, he said. ‘And what will you say to her?’ ‘I say, Come, Jesus Christ.’ After tea the Melanesian boys belonging to Miss Oxley's class came in, about fourteen, and Mark showed them a magic-lantern he has bought to be the better able to teach people. He accompanied the pictures with such animation and earnestness, and so graphically in his broken English, that he certainly made the Prodigal Son very real to me.

“‘And the Father watch for him, wait for him, look out of the window for him, that good Father?’ with a note of interrogation which I cannot express. But best of all, when he told why he was going to China, he read St. Matt. v. 14, 15, 16, and said ‘I come Australia, eleven years, want to get rich, get money; I get better than money, I get Jesus Christ, I Christian.’ He is giving up a good position in Sydney to return to China, at his own expense, but he has a promise of work there.”

VI.—A TAMIL “PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.”

EXTRACT FROM THE REV. T. WALKER'S ANNUAL LETTER.

“I should like to mention, as a special cause for thankfulness, the publication during the year of a remarkable book, written by a Native Christian scholar. It is a masterly rendering, in elegant Tamil poetry, of John Bunyan's immortal allegory, the *Pilgrim's Progress*. The author is employed by the C.M.S. as a literary agent, and this, his first great production, is calculated to introduce the truths of the Gospel into many a quarter which is closed against the ordinary evangelist.”