

**THE EDUCATIONAL DESTITUTION
IN BENGAL AND BEHAR; AND THE
LONDON CHRISTIAN
VERNACULAR
EDUCATION SOCIETY FOR INDIA**

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Destitution in Bengal and Behar;

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*The Educational Destitution in Bengal and Behar; and the
London Christian Vernacular Education Society for India.*

[Our readers are now well apprized of the formation and objects of the above-named Society. Missionaries of all denominations having hailed its formation with the greatest delight, the subject was formally brought before the Calcutta Missionary Conference, on Tuesday, 6th April last. On that occasion a Committee, with Dr. Duff as its Convener, was appointed, and requested to draw up a statement or report, to be submitted to a future meeting of Conference. On Tuesday, 1st June, this statement was brought up by Dr. Duff; and after being read and carefully considered, was cordially and unanimously approved. As the object is, as far as possible, to assist in promoting the noble design of the London Committee, it was agreed that the statement should be printed, and copies of it forwarded to the President and Members of the Committee at home. It is proper to add that the statement now prepared, was submitted to, and approved of by, the Conference, before its author knew of the existence of a statement recently published by the London Committee, in accordance with a resolution passed at the preliminary meeting held on the 18th December, 1857.]

The Destitution.

In order to quicken and arouse the philanthropy of the people of Great Britain, and impel them to embark their utmost energies on the enterprize, the first point on which their most earnest attention ought to be concentrated and rivetted is the fearfulness of our educational destitution.

Having to deal exclusively with the Provinces of Bengal and Behar, we shall, for the sake of brevity, purposely confine our remarks to these; though we may add that careful enquiry has satisfied us, that, with regard to the matter now on hand, all the Provinces of India—Northern and Southern, Eastern and Western—with their 180 millions of inhabitants, belong substantially to the same category of Educational Destitution.

The aggregate population of Bengal and Behar, has been estimated, at the lowest reckoning, in round numbers, at *thirty-six millions*.

Now, as regards the *juvenile* part of the population, from the most favourable average, furnished by European Statists, it appears that 366 in a 1000, or about *eleven-thirtieths* of the whole people of any nation may be reckoned as under *fourteen* years of age*—and

* To prevent all mis-apprehension on the subject, it may be as well to state, once for all, that the writer of these remarks inserted, several years ago, in the Calcutta Review, an article on "the indigenous education of Bengal and Behar"—and that, in freely availing himself, in the course of the following observations, of the statements and conclusions of that article, he is only borrowing from himself.

that of this entire population of children *three-sevenths* are of an age to go to school, even when the school-commencing age is fixed at *seven years complete*. In India, however, the school-commencing age is, in point of fact, not *seven*; but *five* years. This would render the proportion of the juvenile population of the school-going age not *three-sevenths*, but about *three-sixths* or *one half*. Let us now, then, actually apply these proportions to the case before us. In Bengal and Behar, as already stated, there is a population of 36,000,000, or *thirty-six* millions. Eleven-thirtieths of this aggregate will give us a juvenile population amounting to 13,200,000, or upwards of *thirteen* millions. The half of this gives us 6,600,000, or upwards of *six millions and a half*, as the number of children of a school-going age.

Here the important question arises,—Of this vast aggregate of a school-going age, how many, apart from recent Missionary* and Government operations, receive school instruction of any kind?

On this subject we are happily not left to the results of casual observation or loose conjecture.

In 1835, Mr. Adam—a gentleman pre-eminently qualified by his knowledge of the people and their language—was appointed by that enlightened nobleman, Lord William Bentinck, as Commissioner, to “conduct enquiries into the state of native education in Bengal;” in other words, to ascertain, “with all attainable accuracy, the present state of instruction in native institutions and in native Society”—his instructions plainly stating that the Government “deemed it more important that the information obtained should be complete as far as it went, clear and specific in its details, and depending on actual observation or undoubted authority, than that he should hurry over a large space in a short time, and be able to give only a crude and imperfect account of the state of education within that space.” It is not too much to say that never were such wise instructions more wisely, energetically, or searchingly carried out. Of the multifarious results, or returns, of Mr. Adam’s most minute and elaborate investigation, it is not too much to say, that, considering the life and vigour which he infused into all his operations, and the unslumbering vigilance with which he superintended them down to the minutest items of detail—considering, too, the nature of his own official appointment and the full equipment which he possessed of all the official means, appliances and agencies necessary to render his enquiry at once extensive in its scope, and complete and accurate in its details,—it is not too much to say that the returns must be regarded as the most perfect of the kind ever yet obtained in India, and in general worthy of the most assured and undoubting confidence.

Looking, then, at the authoritative numerical tables, with which

* These are purposely excluded from our estimate, because, however improved the *quality* of the instruction given in connection with these, the *number*, actually benefited by it, is so small, compared with the teeming masses that are unaffected by it, as to resemble a drop in the ocean or an atom in the mountain.

Mr. Adam has supplied us; and bearing in mind that under the term "instructed" are included all that have obtained *any kind or degree of instruction*, however humble—including even those who can merely *decipher writing or sign their names*, and often even that very imperfectly,—we deduce this generalized result, that, in Burdwan, the most highly cultured of the *specimen* districts visited, only 16 per cent. of the teachable or school-going juvenile population do actually receive any kind or degree of instruction; and in Tírhat, the least cultured district visited, only 2½ per cent. receive any kind or degree of instruction;—while the *aggregate average* for all the districts visited is no more than 7¼ per cent., leaving 92½ out of every 100 children of the teachable age *wholly destitute of all kinds and degrees of instruction whatsoever!* And taking this as a fair, legitimate, and inductively established average for all Bengal and Behar, with their many millions, how fearful—how utterly appalling the aggregate amount of educational destitution! Since there are, as we have already seen, in these two Provinces, 6,600,000 or upwards of *six and a half millions* of the school-going age; and since of these, only 7¼ in a 100, receive instruction of any kind; it must follow that only 511,000, or about *half a million*, receive any kind of instruction—leaving 6,088,500, or about *six millions* of children, capable of receiving school instruction, wholly uneducated! That is, a number of school-going children in the provinces of Bengal and Behar alone, wholly uneducated; *greatly more than double the aggregate of the entire population of Scotland, including men, women, and children!*

But the mind cannot adequately realize the aggravated nature of such destitution, unless it be distinctly remembered, that a wholly uneducated juvenile population must give us a wholly uneducated adult population.

Not satisfied, however, with deducing this as a necessary consequence from his tables of juvenile educational destitution, Mr. Adam, in order to ensure the strictest accuracy, resolved, for the sake of comparison, check, and correction, to institute rigid inquiries into the numbers of the *infant* and *adult* population, or persons below *five* and above *fourteen*; as also, into the respective number of the *latter*, or adult population, that were *more or less instructed, or wholly uninstructed*. From the tables and statements which he has furnished under this head, we deduce this as the result; viz., that the *aggregate average* of *more or less instructed adults* for all the districts visited is no more than 5½ per cent., leaving 94½ of every 100 adults *wholly destitute of all kinds or degrees whatsoever of school instruction!* What, then, must be the amount of educational destitution among the adult population of Bengal and Behar with their many millions? The sum total as we have already seen, of the population in these two provinces, is 36,000,000, or thirty-six millions. Deducting from this amount, the juvenile population of 13,200,000, or upwards of *thirteen* millions, it will leave 22,800,000, or *nearly twenty-three millions* as the aggregate of the adult population.

But we have already found that, of the adult population, only an average of $5\frac{1}{2}$ in 100 have received instruction of any kind. It will hence appear that, of the entire adult population of about twenty-three millions, only 1,254,000, or about *a million and a quarter* have received school instruction of any kind;—leaving 21,546,000, or upwards of *twenty-one and a half* millions of adults wholly uneducated!—that is, a number of adults, in the provinces of Bengal and Behar alone, wholly uneducated, considerably exceeding in amount the entire aggregate of the population of England and Scotland united, including men, women and children! What a tremendous conclusion to have been arrived at, is this! Upwards of *six millions* of children of the school-going age, and upwards of *twenty-one and a half millions* of adults, in the provinces of Bengal and Behar alone, without one shred or tittle of school instruction of any kind or degree, however humble, meagre, or inadequate!*

Thus to look down on an expanse of absolute ignorance—a sheer intellectual and moral waste—would be sufficiently painful. But, alas, there is something more painful still;—and that is to look down on a region that is not merely sterile of all that is useful or wholesome, but spontaneously prolific of all that is unprofitable and noxious. Now, that is precisely what truth and reality—justice to the great cause we advocate, and justice to the people of India—imperatively demand of us. Mr. Adam was too much disposed to view the whole case *negatively*; in other words, to treat it simply as a question of *ignorance*. Even then, as we have seen, on his own showing and in accordance with his own clear admissions, the contemplation is a harrowing one. But, how much more so does it become, when we reflect, that as regards the overwhelming majority of the juvenile and adult population, there is not merely a *total absence of school-instruction of any kind for good, but the positive presence and over-active energy of an education of circumstances for all manner of evil?*

As regards *actual innate* ideas or impressions, the mind of man may be truly allowed, agreeably to the phraseology of Locke, to come into the world, as unvaried a blank as “a sheet of white paper.” But then all sound philosophy, backed by scripture and experience to boot, must convince us that, though destitute of actual innate ideas or impressions, the mind does come into the world endowed with various *innate powers, susceptibilities or tendencies* which only await the presentation of their appropriate objects to insure their various and fitting development. In this truer aspect of the case, the mind may be said rather to resemble “a sheet of white paper,” which has been written all over with divers chemical solutions—the letters, words, and sentences remaining wholly invisible, until brought in contact with heat, or any other exciting cause,

* Facts like these may help the friends and supporters of the British and Foreign Bible Society to understand better the force of some of the statements in the recent minute or memorandum of the Calcutta Auxiliary, which went to check or even rebuke the over-sanguine expectations of many relative to India as a field for the *immediate and universal* distribution of the Bible.

fitted to reveal them in perceptible legible forms. The mind of man, somewhat similarly endowed with latent and undeveloped powers, susceptibilities and tendencies, is, immediately on its introduction on the actual stage of time, plunged, as it were, into an atmosphere of circumstances, which, calling these varied powers, susceptibilities and tendencies into active exercise, impart unto them all their own peculiar tinge and colouring. It is thus that the intellectual and moral faculties are most influentially moulded,—the future life and character most effectually shaped and formed. The manners, language and pleasurable associations of earliest youth become the habits of maturer years. The feelings, prejudices and predilections of the susceptible mind of the child become the predominant feelings, prejudices and predilections of the indurated mind of the man. In this view of the case, we cannot but respond to the truth and accuracy of the sentiment expressed by a British Journalist, when he exclaims,—“How infinitely small is the education which is obtained at school, compared with that which is obtained at home! The formation of habits and the acquisition of rules of conduct, the most efficacious of all processes of education, take place outside the walls of schools, and are derived chiefly from example and association in infancy. It is indeed in the dwellings of the people that the mind and character of the people are formed, that their physical frames are matured, their moral natures educated, their judgments guided and directed, and that their future place in the scale of morality and intellect is determined.”

Such being the acknowledged potency of the education of external circumstances, let us consider, for a moment, the social atmosphere into which every Hindu is plunged from the very dawn of his palpable being! What sights and sounds encompass him all around, by night and by day—imprinting the most vivid images of sense on the captive mind, and exciting the most carnal propensities of the unregenerate heart! The subject is too vast to be entered on here; we can only passingly and incidentally allude to it. It would require whole volumes to depict the endless round of shews, spectacles, and revelries,—the monotonous circle of mechanical forms, frivolous rites and ceremonial mummeries—which constitute the popular worship of Hinduism, and endow it with resistless fascinations to infantile minds, whether of earlier or of riper years.

Now, viewed in reference to its effect on the *intellect* only, what must be the influence of a system like this in perpetual operation? a system which robs the divine Being of every attribute fitted to awaken veneration, gratitude or love;—a system, which virtually and practically converts cows, monkeys, dogs, jackals, squirrels, birds and other animals—trees, plants, books, wood, stone and other lifeless substances—into gods, or objects of religious reverence;—a system studiously inculcating as worship a mass of trivialities such as one would think “could only be practised by infants taught to do so by their nurses, or by persons devoid of intellect?” What, we ask, must be the direct and legitimate influence of such a system on the intellect of its enthusiastic votaries, young and old?