AMONG THE WOMEN OF THE PUNJAB

To Chhoti's Mother
Mrs. Coombs

"CHHOTI."

Among the Women of the Punjab

A Camping Record

BY

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AMONG THE WOMEN OF THE PUNJAB

CHAPTER I

Introduction

THERE are times when civilization seems just a huge blunder.

Civilization has given us houses and streets, cities and shops; snorting engines and whirring machinery. It has created a complex environment, and endowed us with complex wants; it has provided us with elaborate joys and manifold pleasures. But there are times when none of these things seem to compensate us for the loss of those treasures possessed by our forefathers when they lived the simple life in field and forest, hill and dale. The blood of these same forefathers still stirs within us at times, and makes us long to escape from the four brick walls and slate roof of civilization, and live a free life under an open sky, with, perhaps—since the elements are not always kind—a few square yards of canvas to shelter us. The human boy feels this stirring of the blood when he plays at Red Indians, and lives in an imaginary wigwam. The city dweller is led by the same instinct when, for a brief fortnight in the summer, he pitches his tent in some remote corner of

the earth, dispenses with much of civilization's garb, and returns to primitive ways of cooking and eating. The planners of conventions and conferences have regard to this instinct for the simple life, and to the drawing power of the few square yards of canvas, when they plan their conventions on the lines of a camp.

And who will say that it is not in part the working of the same instinct that—in India—sends the village worker out into camp for the cold season, whenever it is possible ?

It is good to escape from the mission house and the mission compound ; from the smelly, noisy streets of the city or town ; from the conventions, half English, half Indian, that pertain to life in a mission station. It is good to leave behind organizations and institutions, conflicting claims and distracting duties, and to steep one's body and mind in the sights and sounds and smells of primitive country life. Do you know the smell of a mustard field when the morning sun is on it ? Do you know the final lingering note of the well song ? Do you know the deep silence of the night, in which the chirp of a cricket sounds like the shrill blast of a trumpet ? Have you ever seen a herd of deer bounding through a cotton-field, or a flock of wild geese settling down on an ungleaned field ? If you understand these and similar delights, then you will understand, in part, what it is that makes camping so popular as a missionary method. But only in part ; to understand the rest fully you must be a village

worker, with your heart in the villages, and forced for the greater part of the year to adopt other and less satisfactory methods.

In a certain mission station, which we may call Malwar, in the south of the Punjab, lived a missionary whose particular duty it was to evangelize the women of four hundred villages within a radius of ten miles. The work in Malwar was more comprehensive than in the majority of small mission stations, for there were hospitals, a boarding school, city work and village work, outstation schools and dispensaries, and a fully organized church life. On paper it appeared to be an unusually well staffed station ; but none of the people working there ever felt over-staffed. The difficulty, as far as the village worker was concerned, lay in the fact that the more highly organized and institutional work made such heavy demands on the workers appointed thereto, that she herself was constantly being needed to step into the breach, fill up the gap, or act as buttress to the bowing wall and the tottering fence. She seemed hemmed in by the claims that other work made upon her, and the work that had the biggest claim on her had often to be left on one side.

It was nobody's fault, least of all the village worker's, who often ate her heart out in longing after the villages, while with the best grace in the world she undertook to supply some unavoidable deficiency elsewhere. The times when she could go away into camp, and do

uninterruptedly the work which she loved, to which she knew herself called, were the really golden times of her missionary life. Her love for the villages and villagers amounted to a passion, and she longed to make them forget that she was a foreigner, and one of the ruling race. It was not easy. How can a foreigner seem anything but foreign when she appears in a village for a few hours only, at infrequent intervals, and talks of things unheard of before, and hard to understand? She has driven over in a foreign cart; she wears foreign clothes; she lives five miles away. She has never been seen to do anything that an ordinary Indian woman does. Nothing is known of her daily life and habits; but rumour has filled up the yawning hole of ignorance with great and wonderful tales of foreign ways and customs.

To other people it seemed as though, in spite of such handicap, this particular village worker had in large measure overcome the barrier of race. Many women in many villages spoke of her as one "whose speech is as our speech"; one who is "just like one of ourselves." They no longer called her "the mêm," or addressed her as "Miss Sāhiba." They gave her an Indian name, "Chhoti," one of the commonest of names amongst themselves.

But Chhoti was not satisfied, and she loved the camping times, when she could, in great measure, not only sympathise with, but also share in, the daily life of the women she loved. Not every cold season brought

with it the joy of camping. There were years when the needs of other work were too insistent for it to be possible to leave the station. There were other years when a meagre week at the beginning, and another at the end of the winter, were all that could be given to camping. But there were a few blissful winters when for weeks, and even months, Chhoti was able to leave all other work and cares and give herself wholly to camping in the villages.

Such an opportunity came in the winter of 1912–13, and with much eagerness she planned for a three months' tour, with Panchi as a companion, and, as attendant, a woman named Kaliya. Kaliya was unattractive in appearance, painfully stupid, slow, and bad-tempered. But on a previous camping tour with Chhoti, her slow mind had been fired with the ambition of becoming a village Bible-woman. With this end in view she had set herself to learn to read, and with much labour and difficulty had mastered the intricacies of the Hindi alphabet, and was well on the way to becoming a fairly fluent and intelligent reader. The necessity for other qualifications did not enter much into her reckoning ; but Chhoti, knowing her general ignorance and slowness, her feeble grasp of spiritual things, and her frequent relapses into sulky bad temper, was doubtful whether her ambition would ever be realized. The three months' tour would be an opportunity for training and testing.

Kaliya's walking powers were small, and it would not

do to leave her alone for long together. She must have a companion ; and, for a time at least, Rāmdei, the half blind masseuse and evangelist at the hospital, was ready to fill that office. For convenience sake, Chhoti had decided, though reluctantly, to have a watchman ; one who could see to the pitching and striking of the tent, make arrangements for wood and fuel, fill the water vessels, do the shopping, and carry messages. The horse and cart must also go ; and John, the "grass-cut" (a name which explains the office), must go to look after the horse.

By the middle of November Chhoti was ready to start.

CHAPTER II

The Start

THREE of them—Chhoti, Kaliya and Panchi—sat tightly in a row in the somewhat ramshackle cart behind a somewhat ramshackle mare. They were wedged in too tightly to fear falling out. At their feet were various articles of luggage—a magic lantern box, a hurricane lantern, a tin of oil, a few pots and pans, a water vessel and a bundle of clothes. They left Malwar behind them, perched on its dust-heap, and turned their mare's head towards the south, along the Grand Trunk road.

It was a beautiful road, broad, and straight, and lined on both sides with trees which dappled its whiteness with soft blue shadows. There were monkeys, big and little, playing about among the trees. There was no lack of traffic on the road. They met ox carts rumbling along to the music of the bells round the necks of the oxen ; heavy waggons laden with grain ; rattling, clattering, jingling ekkas ; big men riding on little knock-kneed ponies ; foot passengers of all varieties. Here was a husband striding along with his shoes perched on the end of the long stick which he carried over his shoulder, while his wife hurried along behind him, with heavy swinging skirts, a baby perched on her hip, and a bundle balanced on her head.

Here was a line of women and girls each with a bundle of wood on her head. They had gathered it in the fields and along the sides of the road, and were now taking it into Malwar to sell. Here were a couple of little boys, just returning to their village home from the Malwar school with wooden slates and books tied up in a piece of calico. They saluted the cart and its occupants in approved Anglo-Vernacular schoolboy style. Here were one or two wandering fakirs, in saffron-coloured robes, a blanket over their shoulder, and a beggar's gourd in their hand, ambling along the road.

Everywhere the women's clothes, and in some places the men's turbans, made spots of gay vivid colour, which, however crude, never seemed anything but appropriate to the brilliant eastern sunshine and the rather tame eastern landscape.

The campers passed over a little tributary of the canal cutting the road at right angles. If they had gone on a little farther they would have come to the big canal itself. But before they reached it they turned off into a not very noticeable field track. The main road had been smooth and even and good travelling, but the field track was rough and bumpy and full of ruts. When Chhoti saw the water in the canal tributary she knew what to expect. The water was being carried into the fields by little channels at the side of the track. The channels were broken in many places, and the field track was turned into a bog. The

mare had a chronic weakness in the back; she could not pull the heavily-laden cart through the bog. But it was quite easy for the tightly-wedged travellers to clamber out and walk, picking their way as best they might through the mire. It was not, however, so easy to get packed in again when the bog had come to an end.

Before long the field track passed through the fringe of a village, and then by an uneven incline skirted round a big pond. Panchi held her breath, and wondered at how big an angle the cart could be trusted to keep its balance, and how long it would be before they were all three wallowing in the muddy pond. She breathed again when the pond was left behind. Then the road began running its narrow, winding, uneven course between two fields, sugar cane on one side and cotton on the other. A number of women came pounding heavily over the cotton fields. Their legs were bare to the knee, for their skirts were tucked up in front to form ample pouches which were already full and weighty with cotton balls. They greeted Chhoti as an old friend, and were uproariously pleased when they heard that she was going to stay just outside Sīkri for a fortnight.

"We will come and see the tent," they said, for Sīkri was not more than a mile off.

Chhoti in her turn promised to visit them in their village. The women begged for a *bhajan* (native hymn). Chhoti tried to excuse herself on the score of

its being late afternoon, for there was much to do to get settled in before dark. But the women would not be refused. So John, "the grass-cut," got down and stood gravely and stolidly at the mare's head while Chhoti and her two companions sang a hymn, known throughout the district, and indeed almost throughout India, with its haunting refrain "Jesus Christ the Saviour of my life—the Saviour of my life, Jesus Christ."

"The sinner who comes to Jesus,
Jesus is his Saviour.
I offer myself a sacrifice to Jesus Christ,
Jesus is my Redeemer.
The river is deep—the boat is old,
Jesus is my ferryman.
Lord of the poor, helper of the helpless,
You, Lord, are the remover of sin.
Keep the sinner under your protection,
To the end of time take care of me."

Then the women went back to their cotton picking; John climbed on to his perch at the back; Chhoti flicked up the mare; and they went bumping, jolting, over the remaining mile. In front they could see the village of Sīkri, with two minarets rising out of the middle, telling of the new mosque which Sīkri people had built for themselves with great pride some five years before.

Sīkri is not a big village. There is no wall round it, but it is quite compact and self-contained. The mosque is almost in the centre, and the Mahomedan

houses are grouped round it. It was originally a Hindu village, and the few Hindu houses remaining lie to the west and north, while the outcaste leather workers and scavengers have their houses on the edge of the village both to the south and to the north. The original Hindu population has been ousted by a Mahomedan tribe called Mêos, coming from the district of Mêwāt.

They are a people Hindu by origin but Mahomedan by religion. Their conversion, or perversion, is variously accounted for. Some suppose them to be descendants of the *Satnamis*, who in 1672 formed themselves into an insurrectionary band determined to overthrow the rule of the despotic Mahomedan emperor Aurangzêb. The insurrection was so successful in its beginning that many Rājpūts and other Hindus joined the band. But their fanaticism was their strongest weapon, and Aurangzêb was able to raise against them an army which equalled them in fanaticism, and greatly excelled them in skill and equipment. The insurrection was quelled ; thousands were slain, dying triumphantly as martyrs in a holy cause. Of the survivors, some apparently lacked the martyr spirit ; with their hopes quenched, and their spirits broken, they kissed the sword and learnt the victors' battle-cry, " There is no God but God and Mahomed is his prophet."

Their descendants seem to have inherited their fanaticism ; but it is fanaticism for all which their forefathers abhorred.

Others suppose them to have sprung from an illegal marriage contracted between a Rājpūt and a sweeper. This gross violation of the laws of caste was to have been punished by death ; but Aurangzêb, the zealous proselytizer, offered the guilty outcaste pair a refuge in Islām.

They are an agricultural people with the reputation of being cattle thieves. Their women are freer and more independent than the women of other castes and tribes. Their men on the whole are suspicious, grim, and bigoted. The tract of country they occupy is for the most part sandy and difficult soil. It is watered by no rivers or canals, and possesses few trees. Here and there a Mêo village is found in more fertile surroundings, but such villages are not strictly speaking part of Mêwāt ; they are Hindu villages which the Mêos have appropriated, pushing out the original inhabitants by a very gradual process of pilfering, stealing, and annoyance. Such a village was Sīkri ; and such was Rabupura, a village a mile away ; Mêo villages, both of them, but not part of Mêwāt.

The three campers got down from their cart and walked across to where their tent was going up. To the right of the tent was Sīkri village, in front was a big pond, and across the pond was the cattle fold. At the back of the tent was a primitive sugar press, not yet working, for the sugar-cane would not be ripe for nearly another month. Overshadowing their encampment was a big *pīpal* tree. There had been delay that

morning in getting off the tents, so when the campers arrived they had to set to work, tugging at ropes, hanging up curtains, hauling in boxes and beds, and sorting out furniture. A crowd of children swarmed round, inside and outside the tent. The big bearded *lambardār* (a head-man of the village), by whose permission the tent was being pitched, was there to superintend, and he suggested that the Miss Sāhiba should bring a cane and beat them all, or should cut off their ears. The far-fetched threat apparently struck terror into their hearts, and for a time they retired to a safe distance.

It very soon grew dusk ; the children went off home, the men and women also, and the campers were left in peace.

The encampment consisted of three tents ; one for John the " grass-cut " and Karīm Bakhsh the watchman ; one for Kaliya and her companion Rāmdei, who was to follow in a day or two ; and one for Chhoti and Panchi. In Kaliya's tent they kept a box containing pots and pans and plates and various stores, such as lentils, flour, sugar, and rice. A mud fireplace shaped like a horse-shoe, some ten inches high, had been made outside ; the *lambardār* kindly sent some wood ; a child brought some goat's milk from the village ; and very soon Kaliya had warmed up the *chapātis* (flat unleavened cakes of bread baked on an iron plate), cooked some lentils, and made the tea.

Chhoti and Panchi looked round their quarters with satisfaction ; to Chhoti the tent was an old friend, while for Panchi it had the charm of an almost new experience. It consisted of a sitting-room, partitioned off from a bedroom by two curtains hung on a string. In front of the sitting-room the tent roof projected to form a kind of verandah ; at the back of the bedroom was a bath-room. The two string beds, with an aisle between them, filled the bedroom space ; while with two string stools, a table on which to keep books, a couple of trunks and a lamp, the sitting-room looked very fully furnished. When the meal was ready a cloth was spread over one of the boxes, which served as a table on which to put the tea-pot and cups and saucers, and Chhoti and Panchi sat on their string stools, with plates in their lap, and ate their bread and lentils, and drank their tea with great relish. They besought Kaliya to have her food with them ; but Kaliya was shy and would not be persuaded.

Then the maps were brought out. Chhoti's map was covered with blackened dots for all the villages she had ever visited. Her map represented people, dearly loved, and greatly desired ; it represented experiences, amusing, heartbreaking, commonplace, thrilling. It represented hopes and despairs. It was a living thing.

Panchi's map was almost unmarked. It represented no actualities—only visions and dreams ; but visions and dreams which at times had made the desire for the actual almost overwhelming.

There was no need to speak of what those maps meant; they knew each other too well to make any mistake about that. So they sat discussing plans and programmes in proper business fashion, talking of good and bad roads, of distances and populations.

Chhoti wrote out the itinerary on a half-sheet of notepaper and pinned it to the tent wall next door to the map.

After this Kaliya—the small-minded, matter-of-fact Kaliya—came in. She sat down on the little stool she had brought with her, laid down her big Hindi Testament, took out her spectacles, and began polishing them carefully and deliberately with a corner of her *chadar*. Then she opened the book, and in a low, monotonous voice began to stumble her way through the reading. She concentrated her whole mind on it, was worried and harassed when her mistakes were corrected, was excessively bored when Chhoti stopped her to explain the passage she was reading. Kaliya's object was to learn to read, and her idea of learning to read was to get through so much print a day. It seemed barren and dull. But every now and then, something in the reading came into contact with her mind, and struck fire into her voice, and a glow into her face, and between two breaths she would swallow a hurried remark, "That's very good. I like that." Then back again she went to her jog-trot across the printed page.

Their night began early, but sleep did not come to

them quickly. Kaliya slept in the front part of the tent, and turned about restlessly ; the creaking of her bed was accompanied by the *ching ching* of her silver bracelets. In the big pond in front of the tent, flax was rotting. Little stacks of it were drying round the edge of the pond, and the smell of it came filtering into the tent. Two or three times dogs wandered into the little tent next door, and nosed amongst pots and pans and paper. Chhoti always found it difficult to sleep in a strange place, and to-night her heart was full with thoughts of the much longed-for opportunity, now gained, of once more telling the good news to her Sīkri friends. Panchi lay in a whirl of thoughts about villages and tents and maps, which gradually passed into confused dreams.

In the early part of the winter, one of the great delights of camp is the freshness of the mornings. Later on in the year the freshness becomes a bitter, nipping cold ; but the early mornings in Sīkri were beautiful. The early morning meal of *chapāti*, cheese, and tea, taken as they sat on their stools with bare feet in a patch of morning sunlight ; the fresh smell of the fields in place of the dank smell in the night ; the sight of the cattle straying in leisurely fashion out of the village fold ; the little children with muffled heads and bare legs dancing in the sun to get warm ; these memories all came back in after days as steeped in and pervaded by the freshness of that beautiful morning air.

Before the freshness and peace of the morning were

quite lost, Chhoti and Panchi shouldered their book bags, and walked along the little narrow paths bounding the fields to a village a mile or two away, hidden in a clump of trees. When they returned at midday, the freshness had given place to heat and dust, and the peace and quiet to the noise of a dozen or score of children playing round the tent, clamouring for attention.

CHAPTER III

At the Tent

In the afternoons Chhoti and Panchi took turns at staying at home to receive callers. They certainly were a very mixed and motley crew, those callers. There were little boys and little girls, clothed in a couple of bracelets and a piece of string ; small sisters nursing slightly smaller brothers ; big strong girls just off to the fields with sickle in hand, or coming back from the fields with bundles of sugar-cane or fodder for the oxen ; women carrying home a handful of green stuff to cook with the evening meal ; young mothers proudly nursing their first baby ; old ladies with wrinkled faces, and dim, almost sightless eyes. There were women rough and rude and unpleasing ; others with manners of true culture and refinement ; there were naughty, quarrelsome children, conceited children, disobedient children ; and others who were just as sweet and lovable as the sweetest and most lovable of English children.

Husnbi was a little Mêwani girl of twelve, with an unusually sweet expression and attractive face and a blind disfigured eye. She seemed to be a little drudge at home, and was never free from a small sister who was as lively as a piece of quicksilver. Chhoti, a ten-year-old, fought with everybody, from the time she

came to the time she left. She was a perfect little Ishmael, her hand against every man's, and every man's hand against hers. Abdul Rahīm was a fascinating little chap of two, much too dirty to be touched, but too friendly and charming to be resisted. Sulimān was a naughty little orphan boy, who would ride on the tent ropes, and in consequence had to be sent sternly away many times for his disobedience. There was a nice smart youth of about thirteen, who went as a weekly boarder to the Malwar Anglo-Vernacular school. He wore a beautifully wound, bright coloured turban, had beautiful manners, and chastised small boys who did not behave up to his own standard of politeness. There was a sweeper-woman—of the lowest stratum of Indian society—who took the camp and the campers under her patronizing wing, and supplied many surprising bits of information as to their habits and mode of life. Her language was often of the vilest. There was Nawāzi, a widow living a rather loose life, who, finding herself somewhat in difficulties, was considering whether it would not be an advantageous thing to quarter herself on Christians. The callers included all sorts and conditions of women, girls, and boys.

They had not, of course, come thirsting to hear the gospel, though incidentally they did hear it. They had come in much the same way, and for much the same reasons, as small boys and girls in England visit the field in which the travelling circus has encamped.

Anything fresh is full of interest, and they make it their business to see everything that is to be seen, and to hear everything that is to be heard.

The tent itself is a great attraction ; the campers, in their odd dress, and with their odd ways, are a still greater attraction ; but greatest attraction of all is Malūki the doll. She is looked at with awe and dread for the first day or two ; little girls back uneasily when she is held out to them ; biggish boys slink away without a word ; old ladies gaze at her fearfully. But they soon lose their fear, and Malūki is passed from one to another, admired and loved and caressed. Old ladies take her in their arms ; wag their heads at her, call her " darling " and " little daughter." " She looks just as though she were real," they exclaim. " See how she is looking at me ! If only she could speak ! Ah ! " they say, " nothing is hidden from you but the giving of life ! " Her clothes are examined ; she is made to *salām* and to clap her hands, while the audience, with hand on open mouth, gaze in delight at her many accomplishments.

But there are many other attractions. There are coloured picture books in which are set forth the tragic story of Henny Penny and the wicked Foxy Loxy ; the glories of Uncle Henry's farmyard with its wonderful sheep and cows in the brilliant green grass, and the ducks and hens round about the house ; the story of the silly hare who went to sleep and let the slow old tortoise beat him in the race ; and many other things. There is a turkey-cock made of paper, which suddenly

folds up and goes to sleep, and then opens and spreads out its tail in a most surprising way. If you stretch out your hand it will sometimes peck you, and sometimes it picks up imaginary grain from the floor of the tent. There is a funny piece of iron which will pick up a nail, or a pair of scissors, or a bunch of keys, right out of your very hand without even touching it!

Then there is the singing. At first the hymns sound a little bit strange, but they soon grow familiar. The villagers look aghast the first day some bold child opens her mouth and begins to sing with Chhoti. They wonder she is not afraid of being at once caught and made a Christian; but after a bit they all begin to sing, and by the end of the second week they know most of the hymns by heart.

Sometimes a book is brought out which is full of pictures of Jesus Christ. There He is lying on the straw in the oxen's manger; here He is at school learning to read with the other boys; here He is in the carpenter's shop learning to make a plough; here He is curing a crowd of poor sick people. And here He is loving some dear little babies—walking on the top of the water without sinking in—calling a dead man out of the grave in which he had been buried for four days. Buried four days, and then came to life again! What a thing! But Jesus was nailed on to a cross and died. And yet the book shows that He came to life again, and at the very end there is a picture of Him going up to heaven.

It begins to get dusk, and Chhoti and Panchi begin

to send the crowd away. But the crowd is loth to go. They squat round to watch Panchi filling and lighting the two lanterns ; or they stand in an admiring circle round the fire, watching Kaliya make the bread. They see the same process in their own homes every day of their lives ; it is difficult to see wherein lies the great attraction. " Does your mother never make bread ? " asks Kaliya sometimes.

But there is not always a crowd at the tent door. The callers sometimes come singly.

The youngest daughter of one of the *lambardārs* usually drops in on her way back from the fields, and sits chatting while Chhoti and Panchi eat their evening meal. She often brings with her an offering in the shape of a couple of long sticks of sugar-cane, a little green stuff to make *bhujjia* (vegetables fried in fat), or a piece of sweetmeat.

Once at midday the curtain was lifted and a clumsy, ugly girl stood looking shyly in.

" You have never been to my house."

" Where is your house ? "

" Just near the house where you came to sing the other day."

" But which house ? We have been to so many ? "

" Oh, you must know my house. It is near to Nijrau's."

" Well, which do you call Nijrau's ? "

" Of course you know Nijrau's house. Did you not see Nawāzi there the other day ? "

"Oh, is that Nijrau's? Then where is yours?"

"Just over the other side and down the stairs. *Do* come to my house."

"We will if we can find it. If you hear us singing you come and call us."

"*A-ré!* I hope my buffalo has not got loose." And she disappears outside. A minute—and she is back again.

"Do come to my house. I am all alone. It is so dull. My mother-in-law is dead and there are no daughters-in-law but me. It is so dull. Do come to my house. My mother was calling me a few weeks ago, but they would not let me go. Now my brother says he will come for me. I do hope he will come. I do want to go back to my mother and father. It is so dull here. My brother says he will come for me at the feast of Ramzān. If he comes, I shall go with him. *A-ré!* I wonder if my buffalo is loose."

In quick, awkward sentences she blurts out her loneliness and home sickness, as though they had been pent up in her own heart for long, and now at last she was finding a sympathetic hearing. Between every two or three sentences she thrusts her head outside to see her precious buffalo, or goes outside to satisfy herself more fully that it is still as she left it, securely fastened to a tree.

Chhoti offers to sing her a hymn then and there. This is the hymn she sings :—

" Soul, sing the praise of Christ with your mind,
He has saved you from destruction ;
Soul, if you forget him in your soul,
How will you escape from destruction ?
Trouble and joy are both in his hand,
He will save you from woe.
When we were sinking in sin,
He came from heaven to save.
A man had been dead for four days,
He raised him from the grave ;
Do not forget him in your soul,
He will save you from woe."

The girl listened with a certain kind of hunger in her face. When it was finished she repeated one or two of the phrases in an awkward, jumbled way, and said, " I do not understand." Then Panchi went to the inner part of the tent, behind the curtain, thinking that if this were a hungry soul, perhaps Chhoti would break the bread of life to her more easily if she were alone. But in a very few minutes the girl grew troubled again about that buffalo of hers, and went off, repeating her entreaty that they would come to her house.

They tried to go the next day. They did not find quite the right house ; but it was very near by, and as they were singing to the small crowd which had gathered, they saw the girl come and stand on the stairs and listen to the hymns. But she was busy plastering the floor of her house, and did not stay to listen much.

The day that the camp was struck, she came round quite early asking for hymns. Chhoti was busy

giving various orders to Karīm Bakhsh about the packing of the tents, so Panchi sat down with the girl and sang a hymn. She did not seem very much interested, yet she did not seem inclined to go, so Panchi started the one they had sung to her before. As soon as she heard the words :

> " Soul, sing the praise of Christ with your mind,
> He has saved you from destruction,"

she exclaimed with satisfaction, " That is it ! That is what I have come to hear." As soon as it was finished she hurried off.

After dark, when the evening meal had been eaten and the work of the day finished, there would be a sound of shuffling feet, and voices outside would call " Chhoti ? Panchi ? "

In they would come, a dozen or more attractive Mewani girls and women, till they filled the front part of the tent to overflowing. They talked about all manner of things ; family gossip, popular superstitions, and Mussalmān customs. They explained how careful one had to be not to " read one's prayers " sitting on one's bed ; people who did that turned into monkeys when they died ; how wrong and foolish it was to weep over the little babies who died, for all the tears united to form a great river, and the poor little baby's soul trying to get across fell in and was drowned. They discussed the reason why English people ate with spoons and forks. Was it true that their nails were

poisonous and therefore they could not eat with their fingers? Was it true that mothers in England did not nurse their own babies? Was it true that all the soldiers in one regiment belonged to one family? People said it was so, because they were all of one height, and yet how could it be so? Besides, if one thought about it, were all sons in a family of the same height?

Sometimes they went a little deeper, and would speak of their religious beliefs, and compare them with Christian ones. Sometimes they would compare their own practices with the practices of English people. They would tell of the quarrelling that went on in their houses; of the way in which they teased the poor little wives when they first came; of the lying and deceit; of the unhappy marriages, and of the marriage laws so unfair to the women. Sometimes they asked for a hymn, and though there was not much teaching either asked or given, Chhoti and Panchi felt that those evening gatherings were invaluable for gaining points of contact, and establishing right relations; and the women's utter friendliness was a rejoicing to the heart.

Those evening gatherings were peculiar to Sīkri; in no other place did the women overcome their shyness sufficiently for such intercourse, but the afternoon work at the tent was the same in every place.

CHAPTER IV

In the Village

THE evangelistic missionary who wears a black frock coat, and a tall silk hat, carries a Bible under his arm, and stands from rosy morn till dewy eve under a palm tree, preaching to crowds of simple-hearted eager listeners, who with one consent throw away their idols and embrace Christianity—this hero is one of our childhood's friends. Yet he is never met with in India, and certainly his female counterpart is never seen.

Chhoti and Panchi wore nothing that for elegance or respectability could compare with a frock coat. They did not carry Bibles with them. The language of the Bible is much too classical for the majority of the people to whom they went. They carried gospel portions to sell to the few who could and would read them; but they talked—they did not preach—in a very homely village dialect. They mostly talked not to crowds, but to small handfuls of people, and in no case did they find their hearers so simple-hearted or so eager as to embrace Christianity on a first hearing.

There is something wrong about our childhood's picture; neither the portrait nor the setting is right. Will you, instead, imagine two evangelistic missionaries setting out, dressed in rather shabby cotton frocks—

for who knows where they may have to sit ?—wearing sun-helmets somewhat the worse for wear. Slung round their necks, or carried in their hands, are canvas book satchels. Chhoti's satchel is always heavy and bulky. Panchi may remonstrate as much as she likes ; Chhoti declines to lessen its weight or its bulk—who knows but that the books she leaves out may be the very ones asked for ? The sand is so deep, as they walk, that the ground seems to smoke in front of them, and before they have gone many paces their black shoes have become drab.

As for the setting—in Sīkri, at least, everything must be seen through a mist of light sand. Wherever Chhoti and Panchi go they are surrounded by a crowd of children, kicking up the sand, throwing it over each other, yelling, shouting, running, playing.

Not far from the mosque is a large courtyard, overshadowed by a big *gondni* tree. There are several houses running round two sides of the courtyard, in which live probably uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins, sons and small daughters, daughters-in-law, nephews, nieces and grand-children. Most of the young men and big girls are away in the cotton or sugar-cane fields. One daughter-in-law is cooking, another is running fluffy cotton balls through a primitive press to squeeze out the oil-seed. The mother-in-law is there, with two other women of the same family. There are several small children there also, and as Chhoti and Panchi come in they

bring with them the usual following of boys and girls.

It is a first visit here after a year or two, so a welcome of some sort or other is almost a certainty. Two string stools are brought out ; but at that moment a deafening noise arises. There are five or six dogs in the courtyard, and with one accord these begin to bark furiously. Small boys—the same all the world over—with keen delight heave bricks and stones at them, while a couple of youths bring down heavy sticks on their poor protruding backbones, and the thud and the yelping that follow makes at least one evangelistic missionary feel a sick shiver run down her spine. One or two of the dogs are successfully hounded out of the courtyard ; the rest retire to corners and behave like intermittent volcanic eruptions.

The women come to sit down, and one or two neighbours also drop in. After a few minutes of friendly chit-chat, just as a hymn is started a small fellow of three sets up a howl. His granny takes him between her knees, and tries to coax him into silence. But he will have none of her coaxing. Chhoti makes friendly advances towards him, but his terror increases. After a time, his granny loses patience, and alternately slaps and fondles him. She takes him into the verandah, and there he stands roaring and stamping, running round and round in terror and anger. It seems as though the best way of preaching the gospel is to have pity on the poor little fellow, and retire.

One of the first visits Chhoti and Panchi paid in Sīkri was to the wife of the *lambardār*, by whose permission the tent had been pitched. They found her in the midst of her toilet. Her *chadar* was off, her bodice unbuttoned, and she was sitting on the ground busy undoing the many tiny plaits in which it is the custom for Mêwani women to dress their hair. It was the first time her hair had been undone for a month. On that occasion she had washed and combed it, and with the help of a daughter-in-law had expelled all vermin from it. She had then rubbed in cocoa-nut oil, after which the daughter-in-law plaited and tied it up. This process was now to be repeated. She was not at all disturbed by the coming of the missionaries. She pulled out a string bed on which they sat down, and then herself sat down in front of them, leaning against her daughter-in-law's knees. The daughter-in-law was equally undisturbed as she began her careful systematic search. The little cotton press was being worked in a near corner; inside the verandah, a woman was grinding corn. Several children and neighbours were also there. They had come to see and to talk, but not to listen.

The *lambardārni* (headman's wife) talked in that smooth way which inevitably suggests a temper that on other occasions can be very shrewish, while her pious remarks suggested a nature insincere and superficial.

"Sing a hymn? Without doubt. How otherwise?

Now listen ! listen ! All that these people say is true, there is no lie in it. It is Allah's own truth. Listen ! "

She herself did not listen. She tried to be polite. She tried to look attentive, and every few minutes when she caught Chhoti's eye she remembered, and blinked her eyes in a pious ecstasy. But the next moment those bright, shrewd eyes opened wide as she turned round to a neighbour.

" What's that ? No, these are not married."

" Not married ? " said the scandalized neighbour.

Then a murmured remark passed between them, at which the neighbour laughed, and the *lambardārni* turned round in an animated way to Chhoti and said, " Miss Sāhiba, why are you not married ? "

Chhoti was in the middle of the hymn. She broke off to say " Listen ! " and then went on.

The *lambardārni* relapsed again into ecstatic piety, but her eyes would waver. She caught sight of Panchi's skirt. She felt the texture with her thumb and forefinger. She wondered what colour it was lined with. She lifted it up to see and was surprised to find another skirt beneath it. Just then the hymn came to an end, and Chhoti drew back their thoughts by saying : " Did you like that ? "

A murmur of approval went round.

" Did you understand ? "

Various heads gave a sideway jerk, various eyes closed with a snap, various tongues clicked as token of assent. But evidently Chhoti did not think their

assent was worth much, for she began to explain the hymn, trying to lead their thoughts on to the coming of Christ into the world. But the *lambardārni* turned round to talk to a daughter-in-law; one or two children coming in distracted the attention of others; and talking became general. One woman had an ailment about which she wished to talk; others wanted to see Chhoti's sun-helmet. What was inside it? Was it heavy? No, truly, it was not the least bit of a load. And the sun-helmet was handed round that all might see and feel for themselves. The conversation came round again to the everlasting question of marriage.

"Why are you not married?"

"As it is written in one's fate so it happens," said Chhoti; "apparently it has not been written in my fate."

Then she told them that a Christian marriage was very different from a Mussalmān marriage; it was a binding thing, not to be lightly broken, because it was an agreement made before Allah and in Allah's name. She brought their surface thoughts back again to Allah and His truth, and His mercy, and presently brought out a picture of the birth of Christ, hoping she might now get a hearing. They all looked at the picture with some interest, but not with sufficient interest to wish to have it explained; so after a little while she shut it up again.

The talk turned to the problem of suffering and pain. It is a very real and practical problem to them. It

touches their everyday life. Whatever thinking they have done has always centred round this problem.

These women talked about the mercy of Allah all the time. " God is gracious, God is merciful," was a constant phrase with them. But they did not believe it. He was a hard Judge to most of them. He paid back their forgetfulness by sending sorrow and pain. Chhoti tried to explain how Allah, with His heart yearning over His wandering, forgetful children, lets them fall into trouble and sorrow, that in their troubles they may turn to Him for comfort. The words chimed with their own thought ; the spirit of the words was unknown to them. " Without doubt—pain is the fruit of wandering from Allah. Without doubt—Allah sends pain to make people remember Him." But of the love and yearning on God's side, and the shame and sin on man's side, they have no thought.

" When at ease man forgets Allah. In trouble he remembers Him," said Chhoti, stating a fact which was perfectly patent in the lives around her.

" How otherwise ? " cried the *lambardārni*, and with a callous laugh she quoted an Indian couplet :

> " In trouble all remember Allah,
> In joy who is going to remember Him ? "

It was to her not only a fact of experience, it was a philosophy of life. Her callousness hurt Chhoti, and she answered quickly, " That is because you do not know Him. If you knew Him, and His great love and

mercy, you could not forget Him whether in pain or in joy."

They agreed to that, but showed no desire to know Him ; or perhaps it did not occur to them that their visitors could help them to a knowledge of Him. Their indifference seemed like a blank wall against which Chhoti beat in vain for an entrance.

Going along the street one day they were hailed by a woman sitting on the roof of a house. They climbed the little mud staircase, and were greeted by Hasni.

" Come in. *Salām ! Salām !* Sit down ! A stool ! Fetch another stool ! "

" It doesn't matter ; we can both sit on one stool. We shall not fight."

" No—no ! There's another one coming." She raised her voice. " Stool, fetch a stool."

A daughter-in-law brought it out from a little room on top of the roof, and Chhoti and Panchi sat down, with Hasni and several big, attractive girls sitting round. Two days before, when Chhoti and Kaliya had visited her, she had greeted them with the same enthusiasm, and had begged for a daily visit. But already, at the second visit, her ardour for listening had cooled. She was much busied with household affairs. She got up in the middle of the singing, and went into the little room, returning in a minute or two with some grain in a kind of basket scoop, and sitting down behind the rest, busily tossed it up and down, sifting it. She came round in front to look at the

picture, but did not stay to listen. Presently she brought some needlework with her, and sat down in front of Chhoti. About three or four girls were listening in an interested, intelligent way to the old, old story of how Christ came down to earth, and lived and suffered and died for sinful men.

Hasni broke in on the story with the eager question, "Miss Sāhiba, why do some Mêm Sāhibas wear rings on their fingers and some do not? Are the rings put on at marriage?" Oh, how weary the evangelistic missionary grows of this all-engrossing topic. The problems of life and death, the mysteries of pain and sorrow and sin, the hope of salvation, the vision of God Himself, all appear to be of minor importance; interest in them palls before the supremely thrilling and important topic of marriage. It is useless to decline to discuss the question. Occasionally one can treat the remark as a purely frivolous interruption which is best ignored; more often one has to deal with it as Christ seemed to deal with such interruptions—use them as the bottom rung of a ladder which reaches up to God's eternal truth.

So Chhoti explained to Hasni, patiently and seriously, the significance of the wedding ring. But Hasni was not in a mood for much listening. She heard a noise in the street below, got up and leant over the low parapet to see what was happening. When she sat down again she made it clear, but with perfect politeness, that it was time for her visitors to go.

"Come again on Monday," she said, "we have a guest coming on that day. Be sure you come on Monday."

The missionaries took the hint, and went, making no promises as to Monday.

Mêo men are ignorant and bigoted and suspicious, and they often made it difficult for the missionaries to teach and for the women-folk to listen.

One day, towards the end of their stay in Sīkri, Panchi went to Husnbi's house. She knew Husnbi as a constant visitor at the tent, but she had not before been to her house. Her mother was busy cooking; Husnbi was standing inside the doorway, with a black eye and a frightened look on her face, nursing the baby sister. Lying on a bed on the verandah was her father. He had been thrown and kicked by his horse a few days before, and was now laid up with a bad ankle. He had had his wound dressed and bandaged by a doctor, but as it had not got well at once, he decided the doctor's treatment was of no use, so tried other remedies. When Panchi went in, he was smoking the wound by holding a smouldering cake of dried cow-dung close to it. His temper was possibly never very good; a glance at his wife and daughter suggested that just now it was very bad indeed. Panchi found it difficult to talk and sing to a wife and daughter who, out of deference to the master of the house, did not listen, and she would have come away quickly. But he began to argue about the Sonship of

Christ, treating it in a most grossly literal way. He rolled out high-sounding Urdu and Arabic phrases with evident enjoyment, and obviously felt he was saying the last word there was to say. It was a profitless discussion, and Panchi left, hoping for Husnbi's sake that the ankle might soon be well.

It was not always so difficult to get a hearing. Most crowds adapt their mood to the mood of some one personality; and though one positively and actively inattentive individual would often make any kind of hearing impossible, yet one really earnest hearer often meant a whole audience attentive. So the first business in each house seemed to be to establish a point of contact, if possible, with some one individual, hoping through that one individual to gain the rest. A woman who remembered something of Chhoti's former visits would ask for some special hymn. A woman who had been to the hospital for treatment would welcome Chhoti as a friend, and for friendship's sake would listen where otherwise she might have paid no attention. Chhoti would focus her own attention on that one woman, explaining the hymn to her specially; displaying the picture as though for her sole benefit, telling the story as though there were no one else whom it concerned. Perhaps it was the innate contrariety of human nature making them want to know and to hear things that did not apparently concern them; perhaps it was the concentration of eye, and voice, and thought in one direction, acting

as a kind of magnet on other eyes and thoughts; in any case, if Chhoti could but hold that one listener, she would usually get a more or less satisfactory hearing from all.

Malwar hospital gave the missionaries an introduction into many houses, and secured for them a ready and intelligent hearing.

Salli was a captivating little girl of six, who had the honour to be the only girl reading in the school of twenty boys. Salli probably had no great thirst for knowledge; her great delight lay in making mud-pies, bathing in the canal, running about the banks devoid of all clothing. She very often played truant from school, and seemed to think it was the natural thing to do so when the missionaries visited her house. Salli's mother had been in hospital for a month or two, with Salli to keep her company. During those months she had learnt a good deal, though she always seemed careful not to show too much interest. But she looked upon the missionaries not only as friends, but also in a sense as her special property, and always welcomed them very warmly and sincerely into her house.

Salli's father was one of the six *lambardārs* (headmen) of the village. He was a fine, handsome man, and was always most polite. Salli had also a brother older than herself, and a still older sister called Malli, who, thanks to her father, could read fluently. When Salli's father was away, it was very easy to get the

attention of both mother and children. When he was at home, Salli's mother kept very much in the background, and neither spoke nor came forward to listen. Both Chhoti and Panchi felt that beneath the *lambardār's* politeness there was a very strong antagonism to both them and their message, and that if it had not been for the hospital, there would have been no welcome for them in that very attractive household.

After the first few days, it was the children who gained them an entrance into the houses. They had been to the tent, they had learnt some of the hymns, they had seen some of the pictures. "Chhoti! Panchi! Come along to my house!" was a very frequent request on the lips of the little string of children who followed them about the village. "Chhoti! Chhoti!" The shrill cry came from the roof of some house, "Come in here! O Chhoti! Come to my house!" And three or four little girls would come running down the stairs from the roof where they had been sitting, watching for her.

When their elders were shy or frightened or inattentive, the children almost compelled them to listen. It was they who decided which hymn was to be sung, and after the first, demanded another, and another. It was they who called for the pictures. "Where's the one of the sheep with its leg broken?" "Shew us the boy who fed the animals?" ("Animals" is the usual euphemism for "pigs"—animals too

revolting to be named more particularly.) "Let's see the one you showed at the tent yesterday—the one of the boat." And when the picture was brought out they gave more than half the explanation.

They were noisy, of course; they sometimes made it difficult to teach because of their chatter. But they created an atmosphere of interest and friendliness which swept away any possibility or suspicion of professionalism, and, in spite of their chatter, they learnt much. They sang the hymns with Chhoti and Panchi; they sang them afterwards by themselves, and at the end of the fortnight it seemed as though the place had been filled with the singing of those hymns. Not only in Sīkri, but in every camping place, the hymns proved a great attraction, but in no place did they gain such a strong hold over people as in Sīkri. In Sīkri, daughters-in-law ground to the tune of them, boys shouted them across the fields as they watched the cows and goats, women hummed them softly as they sat spinning in the afternoon. The hymns were known and asked for in every house.

The seed had been sown. Much of it had fallen by the wayside—some of it on rocky ground, and some amongst the thorns; but there could be no doubt that some of it had fallen on the good ground also, and would bring forth a harvest in future days. Chhoti and Panchi felt that perhaps that good ground, in Sīkri, at least, was to be found in the hearts of the children rather than in the hearts of their elders.

CHAPTER V

The Untouchable

THE sun had set ; a clear, yellow ball in a clear, cloudless sky. The cattle were leisurely straying along to the village cattle-fold, away beyond the large pond. Already the dusk had begun to fall. Chhoti had at last yielded to Panchi's entreaties, and lay on her bed inside the dark of the tent, nursing an aching head. With a sigh of relief, Panchi, having seen the noisy, lively crowd of youngsters leave the tent and go their way to their own homes, began to let down the tent curtains.

Then a woman suddenly came forward under the tent flap. Panchi thought she had come to see the doll, and remembering the poor aching head inside the tent, did not mean to notice her. But something made her stop just as she had unfastened the curtain ; and something—perhaps the expression on the woman's face—impelled her to ask, " *Salām !* Are you wanting anything ? "

The woman was a *chamāri* (a low-caste leather-worker), and, as such, despised, and technically " untouchable." She looked about twenty-two years of age, tall and thin. The expression on her face—her attitude and manner—suggested hopeless dejection, coupled with wistful longing. Panchi let the

curtain fall behind her, and stood waiting for the woman to unburden herself.

It did not take long to make the bitter sorrow known. After four or five years of married life her heart's desire had been fulfilled, and she had become the mother of a son. For two years she had held her head high, and lost her care for the future. But now there was an aching void in her heart. The two-year-old son had had fever, just ordinary fever such as other children have and recover from. But little white ulcers came on his tongue, and in his mouth, and he cried, and could not eat. He was still unweaned, but his mouth was so sore that he could not even take his mother's nourishment. For two days she had watched him helplessly. Then he had died, and they had carried his little body out of the house, to bury it away somewhere in the fields.

It had happened a month ago. The wild, noisy grief was past; but in its place had come an awful loneliness, a settled despair. If she sat in the house, she was all the time missing the sound of his voice; and without him to care for, there seemed little to do. If she went out into the fields, she saw other women with children in their arms, and saw herself lonely and bereft among them all. She had no pleasure in her life any more. Let her die. With clasped hands she prayed for a little medicine which she might eat and die.

"He healeth the broken in heart." "He hath

sent me to bind up the broken hearted." Here indeed was the broken heart; was there really in Christ's gospel that which would heal her hurt?

There was no balm for her in Hinduism as she knew it. It might happen that in some future birth the inner, undying soul, at present housed in her body and personality, might meet the soul which for a brief space had lived in her son. But the two souls would not recognize each other. It was the body and personality of her son which she had known and loved, and that was for ever extinct. He was gone. He was not. What did she know of his soul?

Panchi was glad to believe that in Christ's good news there was healing for even such a grievous hurt as this. She was glad she could assure that heathen mother that she would one day meet her child again at God's right hand. She was glad she did not need to begin by hedging about that assurance with conditions which the woman did not and could not understand until she knew something of Christ. It is true that only the pure in heart can see God; that he that hath not the Son hath not life; that the wages of sin is death. But it is also true that God is not willing that one of these little ones should perish; that one day His will shall be fully done, His victory be complete; that Christ, if He be lifted up, shall draw all men unto Himself. God's truth is big enough to be the answer to many contradictions, and Panchi was glad she had such splendid words of comfort wherewith

to bind the broken heart. She told of Christ's love for children; of heaven the home for little children; of God seeking the mother through the child; of Christ, the Saviour from sorrow and sin and death; of the certainty of meeting. She was painfully aware of speaking very feebly and poorly; yet she felt as though she were speaking, not into the empty air, but into somebody's mind and heart. The woman seemed to understand dimly; she seemed to catch a faint glimpse of the great vision; a tiny ray of hope seemed to shine into her soul.

But it had grown dark, and she should be going home. Yet she could not bear to go. She put both hands on Panchi's shoulders, and begged to be allowed to stay with them always. If not that, then at least for that night. But that could not be. The woman herself knew that. She had her home and her husband. She left, promising to come back and learn more about Christ.

She did not come; but after two days Panchi went to look for her in the leather-workers' quarters, and found her. A smile and a salām was all the sign that either dared to give of mutual recognition and remembrance. The woman came and sat down on a low string stool, and listened to the story of the widow whose only son was brought back from death by the wonder working Son of God. Did Panchi only fancy that her listening was different in quality from that of the other women? Was it just her fancy that the door

of someone's heart was ajar, and that the good tidings were stealing in? Or was it really true that God's Word had gone forth and had not returned to Him empty? Was there perhaps a breath stirring amongst the dry bones?

CHAPTER VI

The Quest

A CONSIDERABLE element of adventure enters into village work. Knights of old rode forth in quest of adventure, and never knew what they would encounter round the next corner, a distressed damsel, or a dragon, or an enchanted wood. Village workers of to-day go forth under less romantic conditions, but there is still the same feeling of quest, of going forward into the unknown. One holds one's breath as one enters a new village, or passes through an unfamiliar doorway. What is in front—the cold shoulder and a prompt dismissal, or the friendly noisy crowd in anything but a listening mood? Will one find some specially needy heart and soul; a seeker after God; one of Christ's sheep who hear His voice and follow Him? Will one be able to say the right word, or will one be led into fruitless discussion and argument by the people who try to catch us in our talk? Chhoti and Panchi fared forth on their quest one day, deciding to separate at the first village two miles away. Panchi would seek her adventures there; Chhoti would go to the next village, a mile farther on.

"Well, good-bye. I hope you'll get on all right, and have a good time."

" Good-bye. If I can't manage, I shall come on to Silūki to you."

Panchi went into the village. It was the first time she had ventured in an unknown village alone. It was uncomfortable to have one's heart beating so hard in one's throat and ears. It would make singing and talking very difficult. A woman was coming down the hilly street with her water pot on her head, just going out to the well to draw water. She looked at Panchi, and Panchi looked at her, but the woman gave no friendly greeting; so Panchi passed on. It was not a good omen. A little farther up she met two more women on their way to the well. As they gave no greeting Panchi felt she must introduce herself somehow.

" *Salām*," she said, and the women stared, and made a slight movement with their hand in response.

" I've come from Malwar. Perhaps you remember the time when my sister came from Malwar before ? "

" No—don't remember," said the women decidedly.

" Not remember ? Well, my sister remembers you; she has gone on to Silūki, but she sent greetings through me."

To this there was no answer, so Panchi had recourse to the usual form of greeting between casual acquaintance, and said:

" All happy and well in the village ! "

" All happy and well."

" That's right. I'll go on up into the village."

" All right, go on."

It did not sound encouraging. Still a little farther on, she met another woman, and tried to engage her in conversation. This proved a little more hopeful. " Come from Malwar ? " " From Malwar." " There's a grain dealer's wife from Malwar." " Where does she live ? " " Up there and turn round at the corner."

The grain dealer's wife was there, but she did not seem very friendly, and Panchi found herself left alone standing just outside the shop, facing a crowd whose looks she did not much like.

Their laughter and their jokes embarrassed her. However, the grain merchant offered her a string stool, and asked her to sing. She found the *bhajan* hard work ; for the grain merchant came and sat down on a stool much too near for her peace of mind, and the crowd sitting on the little low wall outside the shop, and assembling in the narrow passage the other side of the wall, was too predominantly a male crowd. She was morally certain that they were making unpleasant jokes at her expense, and she could hardly keep her own thoughts on the story she tried to tell, much less could she keep their thoughts on it. The wife had retired indoors, and Panchi felt unprotected and alone. She was glad to get up and go. But where should she go next ?

" Come along ! This is the road—here's the road," called out a man who had been squatting on the wall in front of her. But the laughter that followed his

remark would have suggested that that was not the road to follow, had the man's face and manner not suggested it also.

So Panchi got away from the crowd as quickly as she could, and went up the hill, feeling her courage running out at her heels all the way up. She met several people. They stared, but gave no spontaneous greeting, while those who did respond to her greeting did not ask her in. She *must* get in somewhere.

Through a big doorway, she saw a woman sifting some grain. It looked nice and quiet inside that doorway; men would not be likely to push in there; perhaps the woman would be friendly, and a few others would gather, and it would lead to further invitations to other houses. So Panchi stood and called out a greeting. The woman turned round—stared—and gave a hesitating response. Then she returned to her sifting.

"I've come from Malwar," said Panchi.

The woman jerked her grain scoop from side to side, and then carefully picked out small pieces of stone that were mixed with the grain.

"We have got a tent pitched just outside Rashīn in a garden."

Now the grain was being tossed up and down to get rid of the chaff, and the woman was either too engrossed in her occupation or too scared at Panchi's unexpected appearance to say anything.

"I have never been here before. Two of my

sisters came here once before. One came with me now, but she has gone on to Silūki."

She had to go on talking, for the woman said nothing, and Panchi felt as though all her hopes of an entrance into the village centred in this woman, and as though the one thing to be desired was an invitation inside that quiet, empty courtyard. But no invitation came.

"Would you like me to sing a *bhajan* to you?"

The woman came forward at this as though to prevent it, but another woman, coming up the street, caught the suggestion, and said heartily, "Oh, yes, sing a *bhajan*."

"But where will you sit?" said the woman of the house.

"I'll sit here, shall I?"

There were stone seats on either side of the big door, and Panchi sat down on one of them, hoping that the hymn would prove attractive enough to gain an entrance inside that much desired court. Instead, it won a low cane seat, placed outside in the doorway. However, a little group of women and children gathered round, and they liked the hymn, and were interested in the picture, and were listening quite attentively to the explanation. But alas! the sound of the singing had reached to some of the men who had been in the former crowd, and they gathered on the edge of this crowd, and made stray remarks which drew away the women's attention. The same unpleasant

laughing and jesting began again, and Panchi got up to go.

This time a man came up, and asked her quite politely to follow him. She hesitated, but he seemed polite and she decided to go. As she followed her guide past the crowd and through the narrow streets, a man came and stood in front of her, pulled aside his coat to show a rash on his back, and then, thrusting his face unpleasantly close to hers, asked for medicine to cure this rash. Panchi backed a step or two—the man's manner was so insulting that she found it difficult to answer him. " There is a men's hospital at Malwar, or there is a *bābū* at *Rashīn*. You can get medicine there. We do not treat men. Let me pass, please."

" Why shouldn't you give me medicine? Why not? "

" Let me pass, please."

She began to wish herself outside the village. The men seemed horrible, and the women seemed scared or unfriendly. Then she wondered whither the man was taking her. Surely they would be coming to the edge of the village soon. She hoped he was not politely conducting her outside the village! It was one thing to go out of one's own accord; another thing altogether to be turned out, and by a trap. She had no intention of allowing herself to be turned out; yet they certainly were getting near the edge of the village.

"See, now, where are you taking me? You are leading me right outside the village."

"No, no! It's just here."

On the very outskirt of the village, high up, and looking down on the road, was a tumble-down house, with a thatched hut or two adjoining. One or two string beds were placed out in the sun in front. Panchi, glancing hastily round, saw only men.

"But I've come to talk to the women. I see no women here."

"Oh yes, there's a woman here," he said, jerking his head sideways towards the doorway of one of the huts, where a woman stood winding skeins of cotton. The man had already squatted down on his heels and pulled the *huqqa* towards him with one hand, while he pointed to a stool on which Panchi was to sit. So she sat down and began to sing. An old man came and drew his stool directly in front of her. Panchi did not like him, and she liked him still less when, after she had finished the hymn he began abusing Jesus Christ, though his own Scriptures taught him to reverence Him. "Jesus Christ? He was a thief," and then followed a great deal more which Panchi could hardly understand.

"Well, you've had your say, now let me have mine."

She knew that she presented the claims of Jesus Christ very badly, but at least the man kept quiet, and finally got up from his stool, and went round to the side where the other man was smoking the

huqqa. A couple of women had stopped close by to see and hear what was going on, and in the forlorn hope that one of them might be sufficiently interested to ask her into her house, she sang another hymn. She prayed in a kind of desperation that someone might be interested and friendly, and give her a chance of getting into the village; but it seemed too good to be true, when suddenly a loud voice broke in on the singing, and an old blind lady came gropingly forward, saying, "Now I've found you! I recognized the voice at once, and now I've found you! I have been all round the village searching for you and now I've found you! Come along, come along."

The old lady was an entire stranger to Panchi, but she was a woman, and the voice was the voice of a friend, and the hand grasp was that of a friend. Very gladly Panchi got up from her stool, and half led, half followed, the old lady who had seized her by the wrist. She was a garrulous old lady, but it took some time for Panchi to discover that she was an old hospital patient, and that she was under the delusion that she had the Doctor Miss Sāhiba by the hand.

They mounted the hill, and came to a big open place. Panchi no longer feared the crowd or their remarks; she had gained the footing she had desired. She had found a friend.

"Now lean up against this wall," said the old Mêwani woman, "and tell them that story you told

me in hospital, about the good-for-nothing son who ran away from his father, and fed the animals."

"All right," responded Panchi, "but first I'll sing you a *bhajan*. You'll remember that too."

She did remember it and joined in, singing in a funny, cracked, unmusical voice, and by the time the hymn was over, there was quite a nice number of women and children, who looked at the picture of the Prodigal Son, and heard his strange adventures with much interest. "A thorough-going scamp he was," interjected the old lady in the middle of the story. There was no doubt that the story had got hold of her, however little she may have understood its meaning.

"There now, you've all heard?" she demanded of the crowd, then turning to Panchi, "Now come along to my house."

In the house Panchi was regaled with reminiscences of the never-to-be-forgotten time five years ago, when the old lady was at hospital. It was Christmas time, and there was a Christmas tree; there was a doll for each patient, and a beautiful *kurta* (jacket) for herself. She told how the Doctor Miss Sāhiba used to come in every morning, and laugh, and say, "Well, Rūpaniya, how are you to-day?" and when she said she was no better, and was getting no benefit from the treatment, she laughed again, and smacked her hand, and said," Rūpaniya, you are very naughty!" She told of a son of her own, who seemed to her to bear a close resemblance to the son of the Parable

in his degenerate days. No doubt fellow feeling with the father was the point of contact which had prepared her to receive and understand the story.

A daughter-in-law came in, and a niece and a grandchild. They told of other old patients in the village, and Panchi would have liked to find them out. But nobody seemed to have leisure to act as guide. Sitting in Rūpaniya's courtyard, on the same bed as Rūpaniya, faced by the friendly little grandchild and the pleasant daughter-in-law, she thought she would find them out by herself. But when she got into the street again, and had to consider which way to go, she felt as though she could not face the possibility of more rude jokes and vulgar remarks, and she turned her steps down the hill, making for the edge of the village.

She came out on a different side from the one at which she entered, but there was the road, right enough; and there was Silūki shining through the trees. It would be good to have Chhoti as companion once more, and if she hurried, she would probably be in time to share in the work with her. But just as she gained the road, a youth came running out after her.

"Won't you come and sing to us?"

The man was one of the scavenger caste. Panchi did not want to refuse him, lest he should think it was because he was an outcaste, but she had had enough of the men of that village, so she declined, saying, "There are no women here; they are all

away at their work; and I have not come for the men."

"There's a woman inside there," said he. "Oh, Mother, come here!"

A woman showed her face at the door of one of the houses, and then went inside. Panchi wavered.

"Perhaps you will not wish to come inside our quarters? Perhaps you would rather sit out here?"

"I'll come in if you want me to."

"Come then. Will you sit on a bed or shall I get a stool?"

Panchi looked a bit doubtfully at the bed with a dirty quilt lying on it, but said, "I don't mind. I'll sit on a bed if you bring me one."

But an older man evidently thought that not sufficiently good, and a stool was brought. Panchi had never had such attention before. They sat quietly listening, but every now and then stopped her to ask questions. They were eager about "*Sat yūg*"—the age of truth. When would it be? When would the Sinless Incarnation appear? They seemed to understand that an outward Age of Truth without truth in the heart was an impossibility. They spoke of prayer with some experimental knowledge. They said they worshipped God as Allah because they lived amongst Mahomedans, but whether one called Him Allah or whether one called Him Parmêshwar—the Great Spirit—He was the One God. They prayed to Him in the morning to give them good success, and

to keep them from harm; and again at night they prayed for safe keeping. They responded eagerly and earnestly to Panchi's suggestion of a prayer asking for God's truth to come into their hearts, repeating it two or three times, as though to impress it on their memories. Panchi felt, as she tramped along the white dusty road to Silūki, that Rūpaniya's friendliness and the scavengers' earnestness more than compensated for the roughness and rudeness of the others.

Palūkrā, Ladolekā, and Tambonkā are a trio of Mêo villages lying respectively two and a-half, three, and three and a-half miles from Rashīn. Time was scarce; if all three were to be visited they must be visited the same day. But Chhoti knew Palūkrā of old, and knew that it would not be at all satisfied with a hasty visit at the tail end of a morning's work. So they decided to divide forces, Chhoti taking Tambonkā, Panchi taking Ladolekā, and both joining forces again for Palūkrā. According to custom they had looked up the villages in the village register, dating back many years. Ladolekā and Tambonkā had been visited only a few times, but the reception as recorded in the register had never been good, and Chhoti and Panchi started off on their round with some anxiety. The way seemed long and tedious, turning and twisting with the intricate windings of the fields. About three quarters of a mile from the two villages they separated, Chhoti going to the left and Panchi to the right.

As she came near the village, Panchi saw two men near the entrance looking out over the raised wall of thorns which marked and guarded collections of grain or of fuel. With a kind of amused dread she saw them hastily run to the entrance ; she saw another man come running in from the field to join them ; she saw another come out from the village ; and by the time she had gained the entrance, a fifth had also appeared. They stood, a grim group of five stiff-lipped, silent, gloomy men guarding their village as it were from the approach of the enemy. Would she get into the village ? Would she succeed in conciliating those stern guardians of the way ? Anyway, she would try.

She greeted them as pleasantly as she could, receiving suspicious looks and but a half-greeting in return. She explained her business, whereupon one of the five said, " Let us hear a *bhajan.*" When it was finished, they said, " Let us hear another," and after the second one they wanted a third, and after the third a fourth. Well, they held the key of the citadel ; the only hope of getting in lay in propitiating the warders. But Panchi was tired of singing, and tired of propitiating them, and thought the time had come to make a venture. She said she was tired of standing and tired of singing, and in any case had come chiefly to sing to the women, of whom there were several waiting just inside the village. Might she go in ? " Go," was the laconic reply ; and she went, filled with premature elation.

The women waiting for her were friendly, in fact almost too friendly. Their attentions were rough, noisy and embarrassing. One woman seized her by the arm, the others tumbled over each other in front and behind her, and, with much laughter and acclamation, led her to the big door of a big brick house, in front of which was a large open space. They hastily swept a little mud platform in front of the big house and made her sit down, the woman who held her by the arm sitting down beside her. The rest crowded round, women, children, men and boys. The woman at her side constituted herself mistress of ceremonies; asked all the questions, made most of the comments; and kept the crowd in order. She had once been in Malwar hospital, so had a kind of proprietary interest in the Miss Sāhiba. After some time of singing and talking, she told Panchi of another woman who had just come back from Malwar, very angry, having been badly treated, apparently, in hospital. She suggested that Panchi should go to see her, and Panchi agreed.

The crowd was getting more and more rough and noisy, and she felt that a move was desirable. A boy volunteered to guide her to the house of the angry one, and on the way they passed the village *chaupāl* (club-house) from which some of the elders of the village called out to Panchi to come up and sing to them.

"No, thank you, I don't sit on *chaupāls*. They are not the place for women folk."

She found the angry one very angry indeed, and most unpleasantly rude, so she left her and came out again just in front of the *chaupāl*, which was now crowded. They repeated their request to her to come up, and she repeated her refusal, but offered to stand below and sing a *bhajan*. She had scarcely started, when with great politeness they handed down a string stool. Panchi fell into the trap unsuspectingly. In the middle of the *bhajan*, when another stool was handed down from the *chaupāl*, and when an old man with a long grey beard followed the stool, and sat himself down directly in front of her, she saw that she was trapped indeed.

In front of her, on the wall or platform of the *chaupāl*, with their toes on a level with her sun-helmet, sat a row of men, smiling, and evidently excited at the prospect of her immediate discomfiture. Behind her was a group of women, silent and expectant. On the left was a miscellaneous group of men, boys and children. Directly in front within an arm's reach was the old Mussalmān, evidently a *Maulvi* of some local repute. She knew that it was always wise to avoid an argument, but she felt that now she could only avoid it by running away. She knew that the *Maulvi* would throw down the challenge directly she had finished the hymn, and she felt that there was nothing for it but to accept the challenge, though she realized that the *Maulvi* would probably come out best.

The sun has risen, morning has come,
Why do you still sleep ?
The sun has risen, morning has come.

Death stands at your bedhead.
You lose your life for nought ;
The sun has risen, morning has come.

The wise pandit, giving learned judgments,
Repeats vedic texts as a parrot might do.
The sun has risen, morning has come.

One spends his life telling his beads ;
What comes of repeating the creed ?
The sun has risen, morning has come.

Go, ye thirsty ones, go to Jesus,
He is the fountain of waters.
The sun has risen, morning has come.

Those without strength He maketh strong ;
Whatever He says, comes to pass.
The sun has risen, morning has come.

It is just a collection of current sayings, loosely strung together, leading up to a definitely Christian ending. There is not perhaps much teaching to be obtained from it, but it is a *bhajan* which is popular, and useful for gaining attention. When it was finished the *Maulvi* said :

" ' Repeats vedic texts as a parrot might do ! ' Yes, *Pandits* are like that."

" ' One spends his life telling his beads ; what comes of repeating the creed ? ' " quoted Panchi. " That also is true, as true of Mahomedans as Hindus."

"That also is true," he gravely replied. Then he opened fire. He questioned Panchi as to the sacred books of the Christians; how many were there? In what language were they written? How and when had they been translated? Was the original copy of the gospel extant? If not, how was it proved that the present version was correct? He broke into eulogies on the Qurān; he denounced the gospels as corrupt, and their picture of Jesus Christ the Son of God as a blasphemous heresy, built up on the fact, acknowledged in the Qurān, and by every true believer, of Jesus, one of the prophets of God, the greatest after Mahomed.

Panchi answered his questions, and sustained his attacks, as best she could. She begged him to leave for the present the title Son of God, which he understood as meaning something no Christian ever intended; and to ponder instead the meaning of a name once given to Him in one of their own books—Jesus, the Spirit of God. By realizing its meaning, he would come near to realizing what Christians meant by calling Jesus the Son of God.

The *Maulvi* drew a deep breath, and swaying slightly backwards and forwards, began intoning some verses from the Qurān in Arabic. He then translated them, but in such high Urdu that it left Panchi as wise as before. She had no answer to give, if indeed any answer was needed. Question followed question in quick succession, and she felt that her answers were growing more and more feeble.

At last she collected her wits, and remembering excellent advice she had read somewhere, said :

" Please stop a little. See. You ask questions and you will not wait to hear my answer. Let us agree to this. I will sit quite quietly and let you say all you wish to say, and when you have finished, then I will begin and you will sit and listen to me. After that I shall have to go ; it will be getting late."

This was agreed to, and she sat trying to listen to the eloquent flow of language ; trying to make her heart beat less violently ; trying to remember that all these people were sitting, not to discover the truth or to hear a discussion, but for the pure pleasure of seeing her baited, and that therefore it mattered much more that she should keep a pleasant face and an even temper, than that she should return clever, convincing answers. After about ten minutes of easy, uninterrupted flow of speech, she asked pardon for interrupting, but would the *Maulvi Sāhib* make his discourse brief, as she had yet to give her own answer and it was getting late. About five minutes later the *Maulvi* stopped and took breath, and people drew a bit closer, settled their legs into a more comfortable position, and waited.

The *Maulvi Sāhib* had expatiated on the enormity of Christians trying to entice people away from one faith into another. Panchi tried to show that it was not a matter of changing one's religion ; that it was a question rather whether one had or had not that

true knowledge of Allah without which one had nothing.

Above her head a row of legs jerked backwards and forwards, as though they were jerking out an accompaniment to her words. The crowd behind were not particularly interested, and were carrying on their own conversation. The constant chatter did not make it any easier. Once there was quite a stir at the back, and she wondered what was happening. The *Maulvi Sāhib* looked over her head in a quick, interested way, and half rose from his seat ; then he changed his mind and resumed his former attitude. Two blank spaces gaped in the row on the wall. Two pairs of legs and their owners had suddenly taken themselves off on important business. Then the little stir subsided, and Panchi began to draw her answer to a close.

There had been sinking into her mind during the last fortnight the realization that these people, in spite of all their professions and their theoretical religion, were practically living without God and without hope in the world. His name was always on their lips. The children playing round their tent called out, " The oath of Allah," " the oath of God " to support nearly every statement. But the women in the houses admitted in a most cheerful, matter-of-fact way that they did not know God, and Panchi, looking round on the little crowd, was suddenly conscious of a great desire that they might realize how empty life was without such knowledge. She tried to tell of the joy such know-

ledge brought to the heart ; she tried to witness to the fact that Jesus Christ had actually brought that knowledge to countless multitudes. She knew that in her desire and her nervousness she was speaking too emphatically and too dogmatically, and she ended off abruptly. She rose from her stool, and prepared to go. There sat Chhoti just behind her ; and in a moment all her halting attempts at Christian apologetics rushed back to mind, and she stood ashamed and discomfited.

" Bless me ! I hadn't an idea you were there."

" It's all right. I've not been here long. I couldn't get into my village."

But Panchi knew exactly when that stir had taken place behind her, and realized now what it had been about, and, remembering, longed to hide her diminished head.

When she had recovered from the shock of Chhoti's presence, she found the *Maulvi* talking in a conciliatory tone.

" Please do not imagine that we are saying anything against you or your religion. On the contrary, we hold both you and your religion in great honour, and we honour *Hazrat Isā* also—may Allah give peace ! You are our mother and father ; you are our king ; how should we say anything against you ? Will you not sing another *bhajan* ? "

Of course Panchi ought to have sung, if only to remove the impression that emphatic tone of hers had evidently left upon him, that she was offended and

angry. But she felt like an air balloon which has been pricked, and could sing and talk no more. She wished for nothing but to get outside that village into which she had won an entrance with such elation. All the effective answers she might have given, all the foolish feeble attempts at answers which she had actually made, kept crowding back on her mind as they went along the way together to the third village.

They won an entrance here easily enough, and a hearing of a sort. The women would have kept them, and would have listened, but one or two of the men kept persistently reminding them of the way out and offering to act as guides, and it was not possible to stay.

A very different atmosphere prevailed in Kol, a large Mêo village some six miles south from Rashīn. For some reason patients had always come rather freely from Kol to the hospital. It was now about a year since a young woman called Ghosan had come as a patient and stayed in hospital some three or four months. She had shown more than usual interest in the Bible stories and *bhajans*, which she heard in hospital; and when she was discharged cured, Chhoti resolved if possible to visit her village the next winter. As they drove along the dusty, deep-rutted road, and looked across the flat plain, the villages looked as though they had been shaken out of a pepper pot. They tried at first to fit in the villages they saw with the names on the map, but where there were five

names, there seemed to be at least ten villages and it seemed hopeless to try to sort them up.

There was no mistaking Kol, with its tall minarets rising on one side of the very long village, set on a long sandhill. They left the trap at the foot of the hill, and started up the steep sand track. The wind was blowing down from the top of the hill, and sent whirlipuffs of sand into eyes, ears, nose and mouth. Their feet sank ankle deep in sand; their shoes were filled with it. The hill seemed a mountain for heaviness of going. They reached the really insignificant top to find that the long narrow village they seemed to see, perched on the top of the ridge, was a very small part of the village; in reality it covered the south side of the hill. A crowd quickly sprang up from nowhere; friendly men and women crowded round, enquiring their business, and welcoming them to their village, treating them with perfect politeness in spite of the excitement caused by the first visit of an English woman. From both sides of the village people came speeding up; cane seats were brought forward, and one of the leading men proffered a request for a *bhajan*. The wind seemed piercing cold, but the crowd of a hundred people or so gathered round proved a considerable protection from its searching keenness.

Here there was no suspicion, no rudeness; all was eager friendliness and good listening, to a degree unusual in a new village. The hospital was well known

and freely talked of. A few women pushed themselves a little shyly in front of the men, and spoke to Chhoti of one and another who had been there.

"Malūki? Yes, of course I remember her. Is she keeping all right? Nijrau's wife? What was her name? Chāndni? Let me see, was she in to have her eyes made?"

"No, no, have you no remembrance of her? She had her foot cut and a piece of bone taken out. No, she's not here, she has gone to her father's house."

"Do you remember Natthiya?" asks another. "She had a spleen, and was with you for many months. Where is Natthiya? Go and tell her, someone, that the mêm is here."

"Natthiya's here."

"Where?"

Then a stumpy little Hindu woman, with a round, jolly face, and a round, jolly baby on her hip, comes forward and salāms, half shyly, half laughingly. She sits down in front of Chhoti, and talks softly of the time in hospital, of her illness and the treatment, and begs that they will follow her to her house.

When Chhoti and Panchi move on, nearly the whole crowd moves on too. Natthiya and her baby head the procession, which dives down narrow alleys, through an archway, up a few steps, over a roof, down another alley, round a corner, over stones and rubbish, helter skelter, shouting to bewildered questioners, "The mêms have come!"

In an open place which, without any apparent reason, forms the converging point for quite a number of alleys, there sat an old, old lady sheltered from wind and sand, warming herself in the sunshine. She stumbled up, and hobbled forward a few paces, and insisted that the mêms should come and " cause her to hear." The crowd protested they were on their way to Natthiya's.

" They shall go to Natthiya's afterwards," replied the old lady, " *now* they will cause me to hear."

An old lady with dim eyes, wrinkled skin, and quavering voice, is not easily resisted, especially when she speaks in a tone of such quiet assurance. There was no seat to be had other than the dusty ground, so they squatted down in front of the old lady, with a restless surging crowd behind them, and sang. In the middle of the hymn, a woman gently elbowed her way through the crowd. She wore the long plain *kurta* and full embroidered skirt of the ordinary Mêwani woman, but wore them with an unusual grace. The heavy brown *chadar*, with its elaborate embroidered piece turned back over the head, framed the gentlest of Madonna-like faces. Chhoti's face lighted with pleasure, and the woman's intimate manner made it not difficult for Panchi to guess that this was Ghosan.

Very gently and sadly she told of a great sorrow which had befallen her. The father to whom she was devoted had died. She had walked over to her old home but was too late to see him, yet not too late to

join in all the religious ceremonials connected with death. She had stayed to complete the days of mourning, and had returned only yesterday. Yes, she had been very well since coming from Malwar ; but days and nights of weeping had made her the withered thing they saw.

Then she took Chhoti by the hand, and led the way to her own home, up the hill, round the corner, over the roof, up the steps. Chhoti and Panchi sat on the bed with her, and sang *bhajan* after *bhajan* at her request, she herself joining in at frequent intervals. She asked for pictures, and herself took up the stories, and told a bit here and a bit there, which she remembered from her three months' teaching in hospital.

" You must wait here, you must go no farther, you must let me feed you."

" No, no," said Chhoti, " you are tired. You have only just come back to your village, you must not take so much trouble. We are not hungry for food ; if we were, we have brought some bread and sweets with us. We will eat when we leave the village. But we were hungry to see you, and now you have satisfied our hunger."

Rather unwillingly, and yet with a certain sense of relief, Ghosan gave in, for she was very tired. Yet tired as she was she followed the two from house to house ; now down the hill, now up again ; now to sit on bleak roofs in a whistling wind, now to be crushed into a tiny courtyard filled to overflowing with eager crowds.

Natthiya never forgot that they were on the way to her house, and having at last got them there, right over the side of the village, at the bottom of the hill, she refused to let them go till she had fed them on sweetmeat balls ordered from the sweetmeat shop round the corner. She being a Hindu, the crowd at her house was predominantly Hindu too, and was distinctly rougher than that at any other place. But in spite of roughness, they were perfectly friendly, and polite according to their own ideas.

When the tray of sweetmeat balls arrived, Chhoti and Panchi took off their shoes and sat down on the verandah. Natthiya had bought about a couple of pounds of sweetmeat stuff, and kept urging them to eat more. She heated some milk over a wood fire, threw in a handful of brown sugar, stirred it round with a straw, extracted stray particles of dust with her forefinger; then poured it from one brass dish into another and back again, to cool it. Finally she set the dishes before them, each holding at least a pint of milk and said, "Drink." The crowd politely turned its back and busied itself in other matters. Only Ghosan stood looking on at a little distance, a little disconsolate, feeling that Natthiya was playing the rôle which by right belonged to her.

For several hours Chhoti and Panchi went backwards and forwards, hither and thither, besieged by requests to "Go along to my house"; "Come along with me." They visited house after house, always with a

large crowd in attendance, of which about a third seemed to be a constant factor, the rest temporary accretions. Some of the faces grew very familiar, and surely the hymns and the pictures and the stories must have grown somewhat familiar to them. After some hours of this rather exhausting proclamation of the gospel, it seemed to Chhoti that some of the men were beginning to get anxious, and to wish them away. It seemed a pity to allow any feeling of uneasiness to mar what had been such a very hearty welcome; so long before the women were at all ready for them to go they began to make their way outside the village. Ghosan—who had absented herself from one crowd—lay in wait for them, and with a slight air of triumph pressed an eight anna piece into Chhoti's hand. "For the hospital," she explained. Now she had settled scores with Natthiya, who could not possibly have spent more than six annas on the sweetmeats!

She followed them down the hill outside the village, and watched them climb into their ramshackle trap. They turned round as they drove off, and had a last view of the bleak sandhill, covered with its irregular line of houses, the tall minarets standing out clear against the clear winter sky, and in the foreground Ghosan, giving a farewell greeting. It seemed to the two that in this quest they had to-day found not only human friendliness, but also a heart into which had shone a little of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

One day the quest brought them to a village into the whole of which some of that light seemed to have shone. Just outside Kaundri they found an old Jāt farmer sitting among his millet with his wife and child. He left his wife breaking off the ears of millet, and picking up his child he ran forward, giving the two strangers friendly greeting, and begging them to come over to where he was sitting, and sing. He wanted "Jesus Christ, the Saviour of my life—the Saviour of my life—Jesus Christ." He had heard it before and remembered it well enough to join in at times. He talked about it afterwards in a serious, understanding way, and asked questions with the air of one out in quest of truth and ready to welcome it from any quarter. Inside the village, everywhere, with hardly an exception, they found the same serious hearing.

A snake charmer was going into the village just as Chhoti and Panchi were being escorted in by a band of friendly women, who, though on their way out to the fields, turned back for the novel pleasure of hearing the *bhajans*. The snake charmer blew his miniature bagpipe, and rattled his miniature drum, but he found himself but a secondary attraction that day. He came and set down his saffron coloured bags at the outer edge of successive crowds gathered to hear the hymns and see the pictures; but it was not till the missionaries had moved on to another part of the village that he had his chance. A snake charmer

one may see many times a year; but the mêms not more than once or twice in a lifetime,

Chhoti and Panchi were often struck during that winter by the serious way in which the Jāts discussed religious questions, and especially by the great hold the idea of "*Sat yūg*"—"the age of truth"—had on them. But never had they been so strongly impressed by it as in Kaundri. They had already spoken to large, attentive audiences in several houses, and were passing down the street, when they came upon eight or nine elders, sitting on a kind of wooden platform just beneath their *chaupāl*. They were Jāts all of them. Most of them were wearing the distinctive red or brown turbans roped round their heads after the manner of their caste. One or two had old wrinkled faces, others were younger. They were talking together as they sat in a group, passing the stem of their huqqa from one to another. One of the younger men held in his hand a Hindi book, which he had just bought from Chhoti for an anna. It was called "The Good News," and was a Life of Christ woven together of the different accounts in the four gospels. It was easy to see that the book and its message formed the subject of their discussion.

With straightforward politeness they set a couple of string stools for Chhoti and Panchi just opposite to their platform, and listened with deference and respect to their hymn. The huqqa passed from hand to hand as the hymn went on, but the smokers were all atten-

tion. They asked serious questions about the life and death of Christ, especially with regard to His Second Coming. They told of the popular surmise that the Great Spotless Incarnation who should usher in the Age of Truth was about to appear in Morādābād in fulfilment of ancient Hindu prophecy. They enquired tentatively whether that fitted in with what Christ said of His return. They listened attentively while Chhoti read to them a page out of " The Good News," giving the Substance of Christ's teaching as to His return. They turned round to one another, gravely and quietly discussing.

A number of women with water pots on their heads had passed by during the discussion. They passed the men with heads averted and screened by their *chadars*. Then they took up their stand beyond the *chaupāl* at the corner of a narrow street. They were hidden from the men, but in full view of Panchi and Chhoti, and they signed vigorously for them to come. When Chhoti rose to go, one man said, " Will you please sing another hymn ? We have heard, but there are several women standing about. They also will be wanting to hear."

The discussion did not cease when the women joyfully seized the singers and carried them off to other groups of women. The elders rose and went to another *chaupāl* nearer the end of the village, and there discussed the question with other elders and fathers. When Chhoti and Panchi came by presently they

found two stools placed in readiness, and once more they were questioned closely about the Age of Truth and the Spotless Incarnation whom they proclaimed. When they at length left the village it seemed not difficult to picture a time when a whole village or even a whole caste should step over the line of " not far from the Kingdom " into the light and joy and peace of the Kingdom itself.

CHAPTER VII

The Lantern

WHEN Aladdin, in days of old, stood before the fast closed door of the cave, he had but to speak the magic word " sesame " and his way was open to the treasure for which his heart was athirst. For any evangelistic missionary round about Malwar, *tamāsha* is a magic word which opens the door of access to the villages.

A *tamāsha* may mean a couple of gipsy-looking men, in saffron-coloured clothes, with curly long hair, and curly long beards, and heavy earrings. Depending from a pole carried across the shoulder are a couple of saffron-coloured bags, and inside the bags may be a couple of snakes, or a dog, pigeons or rabbits, or a weird collection of primitive conjuring apparatus. Again, a *tamāsha* may mean an important, magnificent assemblage of crowned and bejewelled monarchs, against a background of bands and banners, elephants and horses, pomp and splendour. It may mean a wedding procession ; or, again, it may mean a disreputable nautch. In fact a *tamāsha* is a " show " or a spectacle, and though the word may sometimes be applied derisively to the evangelistic missionary in the sense of St. Paul, when he said he and his fellows had become a spectacle for men and angels, yet its

technical meaning in such a connection is just a very primitive magic-lantern show.

Some ten or twelve years before, Chhoti had accompanied one, Satiya by name, on a tour through the villages. The tour was in the nature of a flying survey of the field, previous to the actual campaign; or of the very essential ploughing of furrows in fields presently to be sown with good grain. In the morning, they scoured the country on their ponies, visiting perhaps as many as five villages, delivering their message, and hurrying out again before the people had time to fear. They offered a *tamāsha* or magic lantern show in any village which would welcome it, and night found them going their round of villages, blazing out their message from the shadowed mud wall of some insignificant house facing an open square. Those were hurried and strenuous days, but the furrow they ploughed is still plainly visible.

"Are you not going to show a *tamāsha?*" is the cry in nearly every village, followed by reminiscences. Sometimes these reminiscences are extraordinarily clear and definite; mostly they are vague and general, yet sufficiently vivid to make a *tamāsha* seem most desirable in the eyes of all assembled. But the ploughing season is nearly over; it is the time for sowing, and the *tamāshas* have to be few and carefully planned.

Chhoti rarely thought it advisable to carry their *tamāsha* farther then the village in which they were

camping ; and she used it, not so much to call attention to their gospel, as to bring home, and fix, teaching which had gone before.

Under good conditions, it would be difficult to think of a more effective method of general teaching. Given a good open space, sufficiently large to accommodate all who wish to come ; given a good wall in good shadow, and a sheet hung fairly tight across it ; given good oil, a well trimmed wick and no wind ; given a couple of fairly steady string *morhās* or stools on which to rest the lantern ; given a fairly quiet, orderly crowd ; and Chhoti, with the help of her crudely conceived and crudely coloured slides, in homely speech and telling phrase, will give a picture of the Life of all lives, so vivid, so convincing, that even Panchi, with a heart grown dull with long years of knowledge and assent, realises with a sudden thrill that it is all actual living fact.

But frequently the conditions are adverse. The wall which had looked so entirely suitable in the morning is found now to be in full moonlight, and the only other available wall faces on a space into which it is impossible to squeeze the crowd. Two stools have been promised, but each one had waited to see if his brother will not provide them, and none are forthcoming. When, after long moments of waiting, two are produced, they will not balance one on the other, or they are too low or too broken to be a success. The chimney smokes and flares almost past bearing ;

or perhaps one of the wicks is obstinate and refuses to respond to the screw; for lanterns wear out in the course of years. Half-a-dozen dogs are spoiling for a fight, and keep prowling through and through the crowd, growling and snarling, and every now and then flying at each other's throats with yelps and howls. One or two screaming babies; one or two obstinate sisters who will not take them away; a couple of noisy quarrelsome women or noisy boisterous men, and the *tamāsha* may be utterly spoilt.

Chhoti and Panchi camped just outside a large and difficult village called Shatīr. They had already had a taste of the men's manners in the village, their unpleasant jokes and absolute selfishness, and knew that a large show would also be a difficult one. But they did not wish to shirk it, and so miss what might be a great opportunity.

Near one of the entrances to the village, on a slightly rising piece of ground, was a splendid wall, and a magnificent open space in front; the people were eager about the show, and the two campers decided to venture.

The hymn-writer speaks of a place where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile. The open space at the entrance to Shatīr that evening was just such a place. The wall was all that could be desired; it was in splendid shadow. The space was ample for all who could possibly wish to come. But man,

especially man as distinguished from woman, was very vile indeed.

Before the show had begun, while Chhoti was still arranging the lantern, a row of men had taken up their position close to the sheet, effectually blocking everyone's view. There is no public opinion against selfishness in these villages, and it was with great difficulty that they were persuaded to move farther back. In most places it requires only a little firmness and patience to enforce the rule of " men one side, women the other " ; here no amount of firmness or patience, banter or ridicule, would make the men see that they had not a right to all the best positions on both sides of the lantern. The light was shut down absolutely for five minutes before an obstinate group of men would yield the point and go over to the other side, thus giving the row of women behind a chance of seeing. It was a man who, just as quiet and order were gained, drove a couple of cows right through the crowd, though with very little more labour he could have taken them round at the back. They were two men who, coming out of a house just to the left of the sheet, obstinately stood, lantern in hand, breaking into all the shadow, and talked in loud conversational tones which spoiled what might have passed for silence. They were men who climbed up into an empty cart at the back, and from their exalted position made ribald remarks over the heads of the crowd. Men called across to each other ; they sat and discussed crops over their *huqqa*

inside the crowd instead of outside ; if they were interested and wished to see they pushed themselves right in front of the women ; if they were uninterested, they prevented anyone from hearing by their loud talk and laughter. It was a shameful exhibition of selfishness and indifference to the wishes of others. Chhoti and Panchi came away tired, disgusted and sick at heart. It had seemed such a splendid opportunity ; several hundreds of people and ample room for all to see and hear in comfort ; and it had been spoilt by the wretched selfishness of the men.

But to measure results is always a difficult task, and in this kind of work one has next to no data on which to base one's conclusions. One can discover the general temper and spirit of one's audience ; beyond that one cannot go. Yet occasionally one gets a glimpse of the thoughts and feelings aroused in some individual heart—a heart which may itself be a picture of many other hearts.

On the edge of Sandeshpur lived the dyers and the Mahomedans. They were friendly and responsive, and begged in season and out of season for a *tamāsha.* It was not easy to find a suitable place, the only wall in shadow being a tiny one huddled up in a corner wedged between two narrow alleys leading into the centre of the village. At the appointed time a small crowd gathered, and sat down close to the wall and to the lantern. Behind stretched a large empty space away to the road. It did not take long to discover

that the wall was a very unstrategic point. From both alleys people came straggling, attracted by the sound of the singing. With their backs to the wall they stood and stared at the lantern, asking where the pictures were. They blocked the view for the crowd, who shouted at them so energetically that it took a long time for them to discover what was being said. Then they turned round, and facing the screen gazed in astonishment, while the exasperated crowd shouted to them to "Get away behind." "Go to the back." Go to the back? Not for anyone. Why should they go to the back? Was not the front the best place? Shouting and grumbling and frequent wars of words ensued. Two or three times the show had to be stopped while Panchi went round trying to get the crowd seated in some kind of order. But as soon as she had gained her point more stragglers would trickle out of those alleys, and the whole process began again. It was a tiring, baffling occasion, and they returned to the tent dispirited.

The next afternoon Panchi and Kaliya were singing in a house near to the dyers' quarters, when a man came in and said, "That picture you showed of the man who had been buried four days; did it really happen? Did you see it?"

"It happened, yes! but not before my eyes. But of those who did see it, one wrote it all down in a book. I can show you what he wrote; I have it in a book."

The man carried off "The Good News" and when

Panchi and Kaliya left the house a little later they found a group of men outside listening to one man who was reading St. John's account of the raising of Lazarus. The reading stopped as they came out, and the men began to question them as to the facts of the story.

The reader broke in.

" It cannot be. It is not true. That a man's life should return to him after he has been buried four days is impossible."

" Not with God," said Panchi, " God can do everything. You yourself call Him *Sarb shakti mān*—The All Powerful."

"And what does the All Powerful mean ? " asked the reader.

" That He is able to do everything," replied Panchi unthinkingly.

" Then you mean that God could be His own Father ? "

Panchi was nonplussed by this unexpected turn in the argument, but without waiting for her to reply the man went on, " No ; All-powerful means that God can do everything which is in accordance with His own nature, and the laws that He has made, and this is altogether outside His law, that a dead body should come to life again."

" How do you know it is outside His law ? Jesus Christ has proved that it is not."

" It is outside His law."

Panchi did not think much would be gained by arguing, and suggested that if they wanted to know more about it they might come to the magic lantern show they were going to hold that night on the other side of the village, or they might buy the book and keep it. They gave the book back. They were interested; but after all a whole anna was not to be thrown away lightly.

Neither Chhoti nor Panchi much wanted to give a magic lantern show that night. They did not think there was much desire for it, but they wanted to show courtesy to the *patwāri* and his wife, who had professed great friendliness and shown much indifference, but had set their hearts on having a show near their house. It was an ideal place, but the crowd was a bit thin and scattered, and the quality of the listening seemed poor. There were two men in the crowd who asked interested and pointed questions, but on the whole the show seemed to have fallen flat. The *patwāri's* wife, because it was not held in the identical spot she had wished for, had not taken the trouble to come, though it was not more than two minutes' walk from her door.

The next day, as Panchi was returning to the tent, she heard a man following her, and turned to see what he wanted. He came and squatted on his heels in front of the tent. His knees were drawn up to his armpit, and with his right hand stretched out he mechanically picked up little straws from the ground and arranged them into heaps, while he told in matter-

of-fact tones of the death of his little son. Panchi remembered to have seen him, a poor little chap of perhaps five, with sunken, emaciated limbs, and a dry, hot skin. Several times one and another had seen him and begged his parents to take him to Malwar for treatment. On Sunday Chhoti had met the father and mother taking the child across to a village three miles away to a fakir, for a charm to make him well. Now he was dead. The father said his wife had had three sons. First one had died, then the other. There still remained this one who had comforted them for the loss of the other two. They had hoped he would get better. Since the father had seen the pictures, and heard of Jesus Christ curing the sick, and raising the dead, he had been praying to Him. These matters had gone straight into his heart the first night he saw them ; and last night he had been at the " show " again. He had gone home, and had spent the night praying to Jesus Christ to heal his son. In the morning he took him into Malwar, and the Doctor Sāhib gave him a dose of medicine then, and another to give him when he reached home again. They had given the medicine, but before the child could swallow it, he was dead.

Panchi guessed that the Doctor Sāhib had tried to persuade them to let the child stop in hospital ; but knew that if that were so, they would not in the least realize that they themselves were partly responsible for the child's death. She wondered whether they held the Doctor Sāhib and his medicine responsible,

and herself and Chhoti responsible also, because they had urged the visit to Malwar. But the father did not seem to be thinking of that. The child's death seemed to him the act of God, and he was not troubling to look for secondary causes. Nor did the apparent futility of his prayers seem to trouble him. He said he had made up his mind to leave the world, and go away to worship Jesus in solitude. He had nothing left in the world —God had taken all. He did not know why God should deal thus with him. He did not remember any special evil that he had done; he had always been kind to his cattle, and looked after them. It was true that in his field work he had committed sin, taking the life of insects and small animals. Other men did the same and they escaped. But doubtless it had been written of him, it was his fate. Now he would leave it all, and devote himself to prayer. His wife could go back to her father's home; he would devote himself to God. The gods and goddesses were well enough in their way they were, so to speak, the bottom steps of the palace of a king; but Jesus Christ was the top step. One was glad of the help of *patwāris*, and *lambardārs*, and *tahsildārs*, when one had a request to make of the deputy commissioner; but to speak to the deputy commissioner himself, that was best of all. In future he would leave the gods and goddesses, and take the name of Christ only.

His dialect was a little different from others, and Panchi found it difficult to follow his talk; several

times she answered him according to her understanding, and not according to his meaning. But he was in earnest and ready to listen. He could not see that there was any call to him to comfort his wife for her great loss. He felt no responsibility on that side. It seemed to Panchi that however much there might be of mistake in his response, there was no question that he had heard the call of God, and that he was endeavouring to respond. He had caught a glimpse of God ; to his mind the only possible response was a renunciation of the world, and a life of solitude or wandering. Well, there had been saints of all countries, and of all ages, who had interpreted God's call in the same way. It would be difficult to say that they had been wholly mistaken. In any case, if these two disappointing shows had helped to open the man's heart to God, they had been more than worth while.

They struck camp the next day, and saw no more either of the man or of his wife.

The small show in the courtyard of a house presents an opportunity of a different kind. The appeal is made to the few instead of to the many ; but it is an appeal which can be made more deep, definite, and intimate.

Kalawati and Kalawati's mother lived in a large *haweli* (house of brick or stone enclosed in its own courtyard) in the middle of Rashīn. They were Ārya Samajists, intelligent, enlightened, and interesting. They were always ready to discuss religious questions.

Theoretically they were free from all superstitions connected with caste and idolatry; practically they were still very much bound by both. At the *Deuthni* festival, when the gods waken from their long winter sleep, Hindu women decorate their floors with symbolic designs, and feed their friends and spiritual leaders as a meritorious deed to add to the pile of merit which they trust they are accumulating in the other world. Chhoti and Panchi on that day sat and ate *khīr* (rice boiled in milk) in Kalawati's mother's house, and asked about the symbolism of the designs on her floor. Kalawati explained that the symbolism meant nothing to them; they had no belief in such superstitious practices; but it was the custom; what harm in following a custom? Her mother told how her son, a student at the S.P.G. College in Dehli, had been home yesterday, and had disapproved of those designs. "But he is young, he is free to do as he pleases; he is not bound by custom as we are."

When the two guests rose to go, they had themselves to place their "defiled" earthenware dishes on the scrap heap. Kalawati and her mother, who believed that God made of one flesh all classes and races of mankind, feared to touch dishes defiled by their Christian friends. It is hard to say where custom ends and superstition begins.

But it was a great pleasure to visit these two eager heretics. They expected and welcomed a daily visit. Their friendliness could hardly have been greater.

They spoke of slipping out some dark evening and visiting the tent, not more than five minutes' walk distant. But " custom " here, too, laid her iron hand upon them. It was too great an ordeal for their courage, and they never came. They begged for a magic lantern show in their own house, and Chhoti willingly promised one.

A big, iron door faced on to the road. This door stood always open. Climbing over the high step, they found themselves faced by another big iron door, fast shut. To the left and right of the intervening space were small rooms, in which lived a male relation of Kalawati's mother. He was sitting there smoking the *huqqa* with one or two men acquaintances when the four campers, with the magic lantern box, stood beating on the fast closed inner door. There was a shuffling of slippered feet ; the *ching ching* of bracelets and anklets ; and the next moment, Kalawati undid the heavy clumsy bolt of the little door cut out of the big gate, and the four, stooping and bending, squeezed themselves through the door into the courtyard.

Kalawati was a big, pleasant-faced girl of about nineteen, wearing the tightly buttoned jacket, the plain, wide, divided skirt, common amongst Arya girls. The courtyard was square, with the iron door in the extreme right hand corner. Directly inside one had to step over an evil-smelling drain. Round the four sides ran an arched verandah, with brick pillars and parapet. These verandahs formed the living

rooms of the household ; the dark airless rooms within were really storerooms for clothes and boxes and all other worldly possessions. An uneven stone staircase led up from the corner facing the door, on to the verandah roof which gave access to a number of small upper rooms.

Kalawati's mother gave her usual friendly, gentle welcome. Kalawati's little sister was sent off through the little door to give word to a neighbour who also wished to see the show. The old Brahmini lady, who cooked for the family, orthodox and dirty to the last degree, came out of the shadow of one of the verandah rooms, and greeted them all round. The sheet was hung between two of the arches. The lantern was placed on a couple of string stools. There was a small dispensary in the town, run by an Indian Christian who had been trained in Malwar. His wife and a Christian woman staying with her came to the show and sat on a bench behind with Kalawati, Kaliya and Rāmdei. The mother and the neighbour and the little sister sat on a bench to the left, while the old Brahmini squatted in front, or standing against one of the pillars, peered silently at the pictures. The little door cut out of the big one was fast shut ; there was no possibility of noisy interruptions ; and Chhoti was able to show her pictures in luxurious leisure and quiet. The women interrupted frequently with a question or a remark, but they were interruptions which helped rather than hindered.

Chhoti showed them first a few animal pictures, so

that they might grow accustomed to the novelty of the thing, and then passed to the story of the Prodigal Son. It was a story of every-day life to them.

They saw him setting out, clothed in purple and fine linen, with all his worldly possessions loaded on a string of camels, and they saw him making merry with his dissolute companions in the far-off big city. They saw him reduced to absolute poverty and in the grip of famine. They knew all about famine; it was not so many years since they themselves had experienced it. They saw him helplessly seeking work, and pitied him. But when they saw him—the boy of high birth, reduced to such straits that he became the servant of a sweeper, and went to feed his pigs,—they cried out against him in scorn and contempt, for they realized his degradation as perhaps English people cannot who have never seen the East or its pigs. Yet there was no doubt in their minds whether his father would receive him. "How otherwise? A father's love is like a mother's." And they quoted an Indian proverb, "Pūt kū pūt hojae. Mān kū mān na hoe"—

> "A son a bad son may become.
> A mother a bad mother will not be."

"Father or mother, it is all one," they said.

From the thought of such tender, faithful, human love, Chhoti led them on to think of a love more tender and faithful still. She showed them scenes from the life of Him Who came seeking the prodigals, and

leading them back to the Father's home; and the women looked and listened with interest and respect. The story was partially familiar to them; they were able to join in the hymns which were sometimes used to explain the pictures. Most of Chhoti's pictures were crude, and to European eyes almost ludicrous; the one of the Crucifixion was beautiful in every way. When it was thrown on the screen, the solitary figure of the Christ hanging on the cross, and His Mother bowing low in grief over His feet, they made an exclamation of horror and pity. It was pity for human suffering and human grief; the suffering of the tortured body, the grief of the mother's heart; perhaps they were not able to get much beyond that, but their cry awoke an echo in other hearts.

Around was dim, dim darkness; above was the dark unfathomable blue of the night sky, pierced by glittering stars. The picture broke the darkness as that cry of pity broke the silence; two isolated facts in the world of sight and of sound. Almost the picture ceased to be a picture; almost it seemed as though one were gazing, not on a picture, but on the actual tragedy enacted nearly nineteen hundred years ago, the tragedy of human sin breaking against Divine righteousness; and suddenly there shone forth the tremendous thought of the wonderful, unfathomable love of God.

The Cross, to the Aryas, is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. God Omnipotent cannot suffer and

die as a weak man. It is blasphemous to think of it. God rules by His might, not by His grace. Yet perhaps as they looked at that picture there may have been borne in on their hearts, awake and eager, the thought of what an infinitely richer thing life would be if " the All-wise were the All-loving too."

CHAPTER VIII

The Shadow

"In all their afflictions He was afflicted," said the prophet, speaking out of his own heart the thing he knew.

As he moved about among his people, his heart was sore within him because of their afflictions. Their burden became his burden; their grief became his grief; and in becoming one with his people in grief, he knew that he had become one with God. Could God be less sensitive to others' woe? Could God be less tender, less compassionate, than man? The prophet looked into his own heart. Then he raised his eyes to God, and dared to believe that He also was burdened with the sin, and pain, and bitter woes of the world.

It would be difficult to go in and out among the villages and not in some small measure share the prophet's experience. It would be difficult, day after day, to see sorrow, pain, and disease; day after day to hear sounds of grief and woe; day after day to come into contact with burdened, grief-stricken lives, and not in some small measure come into touch with the grief-stricken burdened heart of God.

There was sin. In England sin—in its grossest forms—loves to creep into corners, and slink along by the untrodden ways. It hides itself under the curtain

of darkness. It fears and hates the light of day. In India sin, even in its grossest forms, walks too often along the broad highways, naked and unashamed, flaunting itself in the clear light of noon.

Yet it is very possible to exaggerate; very easy to lose one's sense of proportion; very easy for the picture one gives of Indian life to be out of focus. The Pharisaic "God, I thank Thee" on the lips of English people is bitterly resented by educated Indians who know something of English life. But it is impossible to ignore the fact that in India there is very little public opinion against sin of any kind. On the whole, the Indian conscience is not sensitive to sin. Often where, in England, sin has to defy public opinion, and trample on outraged conscience, in India sin and public opinion walk arm in arm through the street, while conscience follows them with greetings of peace. It is not necessary to speak of the manifestations of sin which assail the eyes and ears of any evangelistic missionary. It is sufficient to state one pregnant fact; that it is often impossible in an ordinary village crowd to speak of the Fatherhood of God, and of the Sonship of Christ, because of the foul thought and speech which follow.

There was sorrow—the sorrow of loneliness, of bereavement, and desolation. One reads and hears so much of the sorrows of Indian women that when one first comes into contact with them one is surprised to find them so easily amused, so fond of laughter and joking, so eager over small pleasures. One thinks that

perhaps the sorrowing daughters are a myth. It is not so really. There are plenty of truly happy homes and truly happy lives in India ; and even in sad homes, and sad lives, there is a great deal of fun and amusement. To ignore this, and to speak as though India had a monopoly in sin and sorrow, is to give a distorted and unfair impression. Yet one does not need to search far for the sorrow. It comes to the surface very quickly and very often.

Less than a score of years ago plague was unknown in India ; now it is spoken of in round about phrase, and with bated breath, in every village in nearly every province of India. It is called "the illness," "the fever," "the trouble." This year there had been no plague in the villages round Malwar ; it was not always before people's eyes as a dread and a terror. But as a memory it was present.

A Mahomedan widow came to the tent—a widow who had lost her husband and six children within two years. "When the illness came that time my husband went, and a son, and a married daughter. The next time, three sons and one daughter went, and now I am left, and my grandson." She drew the little grandson down on to her knee, saying, "No one else. Gone—all of them gone."

Yes, gone, and gone where ? As far as the woman's own thoughts in the matter go, into darkness and oblivion, for whatever hope of reunion there may be in Islām itself, these ignorant village Mussalmāni women,

living in the midst of Hinduism, have very little hope of reunion after death.

You may, if you so please, suppose that this woman had not a soul touched to finer issues, was not very spiritually minded, was not capable of a very noble or spiritual grief. But will you try to picture to yourself, as Panchi did, sitting in the dusk of the tent after the woman had gone, how that woman's life had been stripped bare of all the loves and interests with which it had clothed itself—how utterly the sun had been eclipsed in her sky—how her blossoming garden had suddenly become a desolate wilderness ?

Outside her own family, and the gossip of her own circle, she had next to no interests in her life. She had thought of wifehood and motherhood as the only things that really counted in a woman's life. All her thoughts, all her speech, all her life had centred round them from childhood. All her days had revolved round these two facts. Cooking and sewing, buying and selling, household cares—the arranging of marriages, the keeping of festivals, the gossip brought in by husband and sons—all these had gone. The centre of her life had been torn out, and she was left, like a planet spinning uncertainly in an empty void from which its sun had suddenly vanished. That was surely sorrow !

Chhoti went into a grain merchant's house. A crowd of noisy, light hearted children went with her, full of fun and laughter, full of delight over the rag-dolls she was making for them ; without any sorrows of their

own, and caring nothing for the sorrows of others. Inside the house they found bitter need and sorrow. One of Chhoti's three listeners was a widow, the other two were her sisters-in-law. Her husband died soon after her marriage, and she went back to her mother, who was also a widow. But her mother did not want her, and she came back to her husband's family. They did not want her either, but they tolerated her. In her grief she gave herself up to religion, and tried to ease her poor heart by sitting in devout abstraction with rosary in hand murmuring the name of God. "*Rām — Rām — Rām — Rām.*" The slow drawn-out murmur was like a bell tolling for the death of all her hopes and joys ; but it could not still the restless grief which was eating at her heart.

By chance, or—shall we not rather say ?—led by the Spirit of God—she fell in with an educated lady belonging to the Ārya Samāj. She was drawn towards her, and told her of the bitterness of her life, and of her fruitless search after forgetfulness in the outward forms of religion. Then the Ārya Samajist showed her a more excellent way. She told her of the Great Spirit above all, of His love and power, and the peace that came from true enlightenment. She taught her some Ārya hymns ; and because she herself had gained some knowledge of God, she was able to bring comfort to the storm-tossed soul.

The newly awakened soul left her rosary, her idols and idol worship ; she fixed her thought on the one

Great Spirit—All-powerful, All-seeing. She listened to the hymns ; she tried to sing them when she was alone ; she tried to learn to read, and was surprised to find a measure of peace coming into her heart. Then the lives which had touched each other were parted, and gradually the light faded out of her soul again.

The memory of it—the hope of it—the desire for it —came crowding back at the sound of the Christian hymns, and she poured out all the story of her woe in a tumultuous, eager way which made the preaching of the gospel seem suddenly a very urgent business indeed. God knows whether or not she caught the vision of the Christ Who transfigures sorrow by the light of His own joy—of the Christ in Whom is life, and love stronger than death. She did not own to any light or comfort. " There is no joy for me in this life," she said. " My daily prayer is ' O Bhagwān, if it be Thy will, may my face be to-day covered with a winding sheet.' " Death is a dread visitor. Even when, beneath the mask of death, are seen the kind eyes of the Son of Man, human hearts still break. Bereavement is bitter even when by one's side sits the never-failing Friend. But sorrow, death, bereavement, must be bitter indeed when the Man Christ Jesus is hidden from one's eyes.

There was also physical pain and disease ; the maimed, the halt, the blind, the withered, were found in every village as they had been when Christ went

round about the villages of Galilee preaching and healing the sick. Sometimes the cry of all these ills —of the sin, the sorrow, the pain and disease—seemed to swell and grow till it became a vast cry—the cry that St. Paul heard, the cry of "the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the revealing of the sons of God." Human ills seemed to become a vast shadowy shape, dogging their footsteps and ringing out an insistent challenge to their message of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World. That shadow took many shapes and forms; it looked out of many eyes; it spoke through many voices; but in every shape and in every voice there was the same unavoidable challenge.

"Jesus went about all the cities and villages teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness." "*Went* about?" mocked the Shadow. "Has He then ceased to go? Perhaps He no longer sees the multitudes distressed and scattered as sheep having no shepherd; or perhaps, seeing, He has yet ceased to be moved with compassion for them. He sends forth labourers into His harvest, He charges them to 'Preach, saying, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,' but He no longer gives them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. Or have the labourers let slip that authority? Earnest, burdened souls are asking concerning Jesus Christ, 'Is this He that cometh or look we for another?

Is this the Spotless Incarnation who at His coming shall usher in the Age of Truth ? But can the sons of the kingdom point them to the things which they do hear and see as a proof that Christ is the one for whom they are looking ? ' " Day by day this challenge of the Shadow rang in their hearts. If their circumstances and surroundings had been less like the circumstances and surroundings of Jesus Christ it would have been easier to stifle it. There was comfort in the thought of the hospital in Malwar and the possible healing to be found there. But few could get to the hospital. Their own prejudice, based on ignorance ; other people's prejudice, selfishness and callousness formed an impassable barrier. And for many there seemed no prospect of healing even in the hospital.

In one house there was a young daughter-in-law, who sat in a corner of the courtyard, working at the little cotton press. She did not look up when the two missionaries came in, nor give them any greeting. She sat quite still, in an attitude of impassive dejection. Even when her sour-faced mother-in-law began talking about her she made no sign.

" Oh yes ! She is blind ! It is I who have to cook all the bread. It is I who have to do all the work. Might as well have no daughter-in-law. She is no use at all. No use for any kind of work. *' Ná dām kī nā kām kī, roti chamach dāl kī '* (' Of no worth, of no use, all for bread and spoon and lentils,') that's what

she is. She sits there and quarrels with me all day long."

Perhaps it was not surprising if the daughter-in-law did quarrel with such a very sharp-tongued mother-in-law. The girl came forward at the woman's call, with a look of hopeless misery on her face. She had cataract in both her eyes, but Chhoti thought that without doubt she would be able to get back her sight if she came to Malwar. Would her people allow her to come? They asked so many questions about the hospital, in such a business-like way, and it was so much to their own advantage to have a daughter-in-law who could see, that one really dared to hope they would bring her in for an operation. Meanwhile—if one could but get that stony, despairing look out of her face! If one could but plant a seed of hope in her heart! If one could but make Christ's good news real to her! The thought came of how Christ healed the man born blind. Could one quicken hope and faith and desire in her heart by telling that story? Then out of those sightless eyes looked the nameless Shadow, and uttered his challenging cry. That story was a story of the Christ of yesterday. Was the Christ of to-day quite the same? Was He still the banisher of disease? Even supposing He *could*, as a matter of fact, *did* He? Christ the hearer and answerer of prayer? Yes, so long as one's prayer went coasting along the waters navigated by medical science, but what if one's prayer had to cross the dark unnavigated waters of incurable

disease? Was Christ the Healer to be found there too?

The story was told; but no responsive gleam of hope came into the girl's face. There was probably none in her heart. Perhaps the Shadow's challenge had drowned the voice of the story-teller. In any case she did not come to Malwar for the healing she would almost certainly have found there.

Another day that same Shadow looked out from a boy's eyes. He stood in the middle of the crowd, called up by his mother. He was a boy of about fourteen. He was deaf and dumb. He was imbecile. His long, narrow head was never still. He blinked his vacant eyes, and turned them up till nothing could be seen of the pupils. Arms, legs, and body were moving all the time. He carried a twig in his hand, and as he stood there he was diligently gnawing at the end of it as though it was the one business of his life. The mother asked pathetically if it were too late for any thing to be done. She had taken him to Malwar once, perhaps a year ago, but the Doctor *Sāhib* had said it was too late. He could do nothing for him. If she had brought him in when he was a baby, perhaps something might have been done. Before the mind's eye there rose the picture of that other boy—the lunatic—the epileptic. Faith longed to tell of the Christ Who healed him, but shrank back, afraid, as she caught sight of the Shadow in the boy's eyes and heard its mocking voice. So the boy shambled off; running, slinking along, in a half doubled up position—a

repulsive human form; ears that could not hear, tongue that could not speak, eyes that could not see plainly, members moving, each at its own bidding, lacking the control of the master-brain. Yet " In all their afflictions He was afflicted."

On the edge of Rashīn, towards the east, lived the potters. Panchi and Kaliya found their way thither one afternoon, turning off from the *bāzār* down a narrow alley, and thence into one of the three more or less open courtyards round which the potters' houses were grouped. They sat down on the inevitable string bed outside one of the small houses. Looking into the dark of the house, through the open door, they saw a moving shadow. It came towards the door, and Panchi saw that it was an old woman, slowly and painfully shuffling her way out into the open—propelling herself along in a squatting posture.

" You seem to be in great pain and trouble," said Panchi.

" Very great pain," said the woman.

Very slowly and carefully she lifted up a piece of dirty rag, and showed her poor leg, a mass of ulcers from knee to ankle. They had been coming for several months. As soon as one healed up, another came. She could not bear to touch her leg. To move gave her the greatest pain. If she were lying on the bed and anyone shook it in passing, it gave her greater pain than she could tell. Just now she was trying some ointment recommended by a washerwoman, and it

seemed to be doing her a little good. But meanwhile she lay there useless, a burden to herself and to others. She could do no work. Two years ago she was kicked on the arm by a buffalo, and see—that had now become a useless stick. Her leg would become the same ; and with a dead arm and a dead leg, what place was there in the world for her ? Panchi thought of days and nights of suffering, and with all the earnestness she could command begged her to go to Malwar, and lose her pain.

" How can I go ? I cannot walk."

" No, but there are carts going into Malwar every day. Do not the farmers send in their cotton every day ? Surely someone would take pity on you and let you go in his cart."

" What farmer is going to let a potter sit in his cart ? "

" Why not ? Surely someone would do that much kindness for you."

" Kindness ! When did the world ever show kindness. It's a selfish world."

" Still, people would be glad to earn that much merit. Have you not a son who could arrange it for you ? "

Yes, there was a son, but when he came forward he seemed quite indifferent as to whether his mother went or not. He did not think there was any chance of her leg being cured ; he did not think she would care to go ; he did not think they could manage without her. Yes,

the daughter-in-law was there. No, certainly with that leg and that arm his mother could not cook bread or do any work. But, after all, he did not think he could get a cart, and if he could, he did not think his mother would care to go, and in any case he did not think her leg would be cured if she did go. "The will of God. What can we do?"

By this time several men had come in and were sitting down a little way off, smoking the *huqqa* turn and turn about. The son joined the group. One of the men passed the stem of the *huqqa* to him, and he took two or three long pulls at the pipe. One or two women were sitting on the ground, or on the bed close by. A crowd of noisy children had gathered; two young wives were looking over the wall that divided the potters' from the dyers' quarters. They were all happily excited over the visitors. No one seemed to be troubled at the old woman's pain; not even her own son. This utter indifference was very baffling.

Panchi began to speak to them of Christ; of His heart so easily moved to grief by others' grief; of His power to banish pain and sorrow; of how He had healed people of all manner of disease and sickness. She told the story of how He had healed the broken heart of the widow by bringing back to life her only son.

"A story of the Golden Age. This is the Black Age," said the old lady.

" It's a story of the Black Age. It happened in the Black Age. That is just where the love of God comes in, that He came to the world in the Black Age, and did these wonderful things to show that when we trust Him, the Age of Truth has already begun."

But the old lady declined to believe the story, and declined to believe that any cure was possible for her. It is true that she said : " Very well, I will go to Malwar to-morrow," but Panchi knew quite well that it simply meant she was tired of arguing, and wished to drop the matter altogether. She was therefore not surprised to find, when she visited her two days later, that she had not gone.

In a certain very rough village, a large crowd of women had gathered, and were listening to several hymns. Women were coming and going all the time. One woman came and sat down in front. She was a big, coarse-looking woman, with a baby in her arms. The baby's face was hidden under the mother's *chadar*, but the little body was all exposed to the cold wind which was blowing. The child looked blue and cold, and the mother carried it in an indefinably careless way which somehow suggested a want of love. Suddenly she pushed back the *chadar* and shewed the child's face, asking if anything could be done. Poor little baby ! It was just a month old, and hanging between its eyes, pressing down upon its nose, was a large naevus. It could not open its eyes properly, its

breathing was difficult. The poor little face looked hideous and repulsive.

" Show us," said a woman sitting next to her.

The mother turned the child towards her, and the woman laughed, turning round to the other women that they might also see. Why, it hardly looked like a child's face! It looked more like a pig! Was ever such a face seen! She laughed again. The mother laid the child carelessly down across her knees.

Panchi's whole heart rose up in rebellion. The sight of the poor little face was bad enough, but such callousness was unbearable. She clutched eagerly at Chhoti's assurance that the Doctor Miss *Sāhiba* could almost certainly remove the evil. She longed to compel the woman to believe it. When the mother told of having already been to Malwar, and of the doctor's verdict that nothing could be done, Chhoti was quite certain that there must have been some mistake, quite certain that the disfigurement could be removed, and Panchi clung to that certainty. Perhaps in reality the woman had never been at all. Perhaps she had been unwilling to stay in hospital. Chhoti begged her to go again, even if she had been already, and see if there had not been some misunderstanding. But the woman was not in the least inclined to do so.

" Won't you take the baby yourself and bring it up ? " said the woman. " If it lives you can keep it ; if it dies—it dies."

If only one could make them see God in Christ fighting against all sin and sorrow and suffering, perhaps they might learn to fight against it too. If only one could show them that all calamity was not the will of God! If only they could have the vision of Him Who in all their afflictions is Himself also afflicted!

CHAPTER IX

Friendships

I SUPPOSE there is nothing so fatal to the success of Christian work as professionalism. It is a charge that is often brought against Christian workers, especially evangelists. It is no easier in India than in England to avoid the fatal taint. Yet no one could have ever accused Chhoti of professionalism. The personal factor entered so largely into her work she could not be professional. Hers was a ministry of friendship. The people to whom she went were always her friends ; her message was always one she had received from the Friend of friends. She could never be content to deliver her message only ; she was concerned that it should be accepted ; and no service was too lowly, no labour too great, if only it might serve to commend her message, and dispose to the acceptance of it.

Her kindnesses were constant. At one time she would be teaching a stupid girl to knit. The hymns had ceased to attract, she was tired of learning to read, she did not think she wanted Jesus Christ ; but she wanted Chhoti, and she wanted to learn to knit. Since no other point of contact was possible, Chhoti accepted the one that knitting offered her, and held on in hope that one day her message might also be wanted. At another time she would be writing a letter from an old

mother to a son somewhere far away. When the prodigal answered the letter by returning to his old mother, Chhoti shared in the rejoicings and found a heart ready to receive the story of the Father in Heaven yearning after His prodigals and welcoming them home. A bevy of little girls were asking for rag dolls, and Chhoti sat up far into the night that they might not be disappointed, and the word of a Christian be found untrustworthy. The giving of medicine, or the recommendation of some homely remedy, the carrying of messages from a daughter-in-law in one village to her mother in another, was all done in a spirit that made them essentially part of her message.

That message was the message of friendship. It is difficult in these villages in talking to the women to find any words to express the friendship of Christ. There are several words one may use when one speaks of Christ as a friend, but whichever word one uses, one can never be sure that the woman sitting in front will not suddenly cast a sideways glance at a man standing behind listening, and the smile on her lips, and the look in her eyes, make one vow one will never use that word again. But every woman recognises a peculiar relationship which perhaps contains more of the essence of the idea of friendship than any other. It is the relationship of *bahinêli*, "adopted sister." It represents love, intimacy, obligation, protection, service. It implies an unchangeable relationship. Chhoti had many bahinelis in many villages, and her bahinelis

gave her a footing in the villages which nothing else could have done.

Panchi was often amused to find that her bahinelis were most unlikely, and, in a sense, unattractive people. Sometimes they were noisy, flighty young girls, who seemed incapable of taking anything seriously; sometimes lofty, superior young women, who patronized her; at other times, rough old women, who grumbled and contradicted and interrupted, and made things very difficult. Yet beneath the flightiness, in spite of the patronage, and along with the disagreeable manner, one could feel the sincere affection; and Chhoti did not easily lose patience.

While they were in Rashīn, Panchi went with her on one of her almost daily visits to Chandaniya, an old asthmatic woman whom Chhoti had known for many years. They went into a pokey little courtyard, and found Chandaniya lying wheezing on her bed.

"Why did you not come yesterday?"

"Where was the leisure?" responded Chhoti, in true Indian fashion answering one question by another.

"'Um! Goes to others—doesn't come to me. However, let it pass," wheezed the old woman, as she slowly sat up in bed, and reached out a skinny hand and arm for her *chadar*, which lay in a tumbled heap at the end of the bed. She pushed a stool forward for Chhoti, signed to Panchi to bring one for herself from the other side of the yard, and then suddenly demanded in an aggrieved tone:

"The rain—why doesn't it come?"

"Ah, if it only might come! What have you sown?"

"Channa" (a kind of lentil). "But what's the use? All drying up. The ground is like a stone. The rain—why doesn't it come?"

"What can I say? It is not in my hand."

"In whose hand is it?"

"In the hand of the Great Spirit. Who else?"

"Without doubt. In the hand of the Great Spirit. Who else? But what does He care? What does He know? He has left us."

Chhoti tried to justify the ways of God to the old lady, but she cut her short, saying, "Why haven't you brought me any medicine? My cough crushes the life out of me."

"When have you asked me for medicine?" laughed Chhoti, and began sympathetically to ask after the cough, and the breathing, and the headache, and the backache, and ended by bringing out of her bag a minute packet of tea. Chandaniya had great faith in the medicinal properties of tea, and Chhoti had great faith in its comforting powers, and was much given to recommending and supplying it when there was no other obvious remedy to suggest. Chandaniya tied the little packet in a corner of her *chadar* and grew more cheerful. She asked for hymns, and had her own ideas as to the ones which would "come into her understanding," and the ones which would not.

" What picture have you brought with you ? " she presently demanded.

Chhoti placed in her hand a picture representing the feeding of the five thousand. Chandaniya looked and listened while Chhoti told the story of the crowd of women who, with their fathers, husbands, brothers, children, had set out for a big *mêlā* (fair) in the sacred city, and turned aside to see and hear a famous *gurū* (teacher) who was in the neighbourhood ; whom some people took to be the Sinless Incarnation they were expecting to appear ; how they stayed and stayed till they had eaten all the food in their bundles, and there was no *bāzār* near at hand from which they could get fried cakes or sweetmeats ; how the *gurū* understood their need, and found a poor farmer's son who had still got five little barley cakes his mother had given him the day before, when he left home. The cakes were stale, but the *gurū* asked him for them, took them in his hand, said a prayer and then divided them up, telling his disciples to give them to the hungry people ; and the people ate and ate, and the disciples kept coming back for more and more, till at last the people said, " *Jhik gaye.*" " Full up." Then the people began to say : " All this bread, where did it come from ? Who cooked it all ? " and the story went round of the little boy and the five cakes, and the women said : " Just listen to that ! " and the men began to say : " Without any doubt this is the Sinless Incarnation, and the Golden Age has at last come."

Chhoti dwelt on the love and tenderness of the *gurū* Jesus, and claimed for them, as Jesus did, that they were just a revelation of the love and tenderness of the Great Spirit our Father, and of what He could do for us. So the talk came round to the question of the rain—would it come ? the question which seemed uppermost in Rashīn just then ; and Chhoti was sure it would if people would turn to the loving Father, and seek it from His hand.

" We must go now," said Chhoti. " It is nearly food-time."

" Just wait," said Chandaniya. She laboriously got off her bed and hobbled across the little yard, bringing back with her two sticks of sugar cane.

" Take — eat," she said roughly, and squeezed Chhoti's arms in a rough caress. " Come again to-morrow."

Another *bahinêli* in Rashīn was Bhūpo. She had been a friend when she lived in her mother's house in another village. The friendship had held after she came to live in her husband's house in Rashīn. Her husband was a grain merchant, and Bhūpo seemed to have all the hard, money-loving characteristics of her caste. She had known much trouble. In illness she had found Chhoti a true friend and helper. In the far greater trouble of the death of first one child and then another, she had turned to Chhoti for help and comfort, and Chhoti had not failed her. Yet when every third or fourth day Chhoti went to her house, Bhūpo greeted

her with scanty welcome, dismissed the teaching with a contemptuous remark, and seemed to take pains to show her most unpleasant side. Yet sometimes it seemed as though, in spite of herself, she allowed the longing to look out of her eyes, and the hunger in her heart to appear. Chhoti had been telling the story of the Lost Sheep to a number of women sitting outside their houses, spinning and sewing in the street. Bhūpo was sewing a new skirt, a bright orange cotton one, heavily gored, piped with black. Chhoti was telling of the love and tenderness of the Shepherd, which made him brave the stony mountain path in the dark, and think nothing of the clothes and hands torn on the bushes, or of the toilsome way home with the sheep on his shoulder. Bhūpo laughed as she re-threaded her needle.

"How otherwise? He knew it meant money to him."

"Ah, Bhūpo, that's regular *baniya's* talk. I doubt whether that sheep was worth much to him. Look at it—its leg broken—its wool torn—it is on the point of death. What worth has it to anyone?"

"Worthless—quite worthless," said two of the elder women sitting near.

"But if you like to think that it was because the sheep was worth something to the Shepherd, then you must think this too, that the world which has wandered from the Great Spirit must be worth a great deal to Him if He could come and plunge Himself into the

sea of existence in order to win it back to Himself. But that's a *baniya's* way of talking, and the Great Spirit is not a *baniya*. He is a father."

Bhūpo turned the subject with a jesting remark. But when Chhoti went on to tell of the love of the Great Spirit, as shown in the seeking, suffering Saviour, Jesus Christ, Bhūpo let her work drop and for a few minutes forgot to be indifferent and forgot to scoff.

At other times Panchi found that Chhoti's bahinelis, though rough and ungracious to others, were kindness itself to her. Of these was Amri. They climbed the steep hill—for Amri lived in "a city set on a hill" that cannot be hid for many miles round—and entered the courtyard. At the sound of Chhoti's voice calling on the threshold: "May we come?" Amri got off the bed on which she was sitting and welcomed her as a mother might welcome her daughter after long absence, taking her in her old arms, and laying a withered cheek against hers. She shouted and scolded at a little grandchild because she did not bring stools immediately, and then turned to Chhoti and began in friendly, confidential fashion to tell of her daily life and its happenings since they last met. She soundly rated a daughter-in-law because she placed before the visitors two bowls of hot sweetened milk without having first strained the milk through a cloth. Her voice and manner with the whole household were tyrannical to a degree, but the way in which a small grandchild came and leant against her granny's knees,

and was folded in her granny's arms, suggested that it was a surface tyranny only. Amri spoke of her very dim sight, which almost amounted to blindness. "But let it go—let it go—if I may but have the vision of God. The vision of God—that is what matters." Chhoti had often told her of Christ, in Whom one sees the face of God, and she told her now, more fully than she was able to do with most people, the story of His death on the cross, and Amri listened as most people did not listen. And when they rose to go Amri said: "The vision of God, that is what matters to me and to you. God grant we may find it."

Panchi had no bahinelis, but before they had been in Sīkri many days, Nahni, the youngest daughter of one of the *lambardārs*, formally claimed her as a ***bahinēli*** by the gift of a bead neck-band peculiar to Mēwani women. Nahni was about sixteen years old, very attractive, volatile and friendly. She used to come to the tent at all hours of the day and chatter in a continuous stream of very broad dialect. Panchi's chief attraction seemed to lie in the fact that she had great difficulty in understanding the continuous stream. She would look helplessly across to Chhoti for explanation, and Nahni would laugh and say, "Oh, Panchi, my heart has gone out to you very much," and Panchi could only reply, looking into the pair of dark, laughing eyes, as Nahni sat cross-legged on the floor in front of her, "My heart has gone out to you, too."

In Sandeshpur Chhoti had two very special friends;

her friendship with them was of long standing, and grew closer and deeper during the ten days' camp there, and so continued to grow long after the camp was broken up. These two women were the greatest possible contrast to each other. Lahrkor, a helpless cripple, wholly dependent on other people, was attractive chiefly by reason of her gentleness and cheerfulness; Dākhā, a woman strong both in physique and personality, difficult in temper, had a kindness of heart which with her energetic character combined to make her a personage in the village.

There was tragedy in Dākhā's life; a tragedy very common in India; she had no child. It was not merely the hunger of mother love. It was, perhaps, more the haunting dread lest her husband should one day bring home another woman to share or even to take her place in the home. It was, perhaps, the almost unconscious instinct which makes an Indian woman feel that—since the individual is nothing, the race everything—there is no particular meaning or value in her life apart from the bearing and rearing of children. Childless, the race of life goes past her. Dākhā had visited all the hakīms and fakīrs in the neighbourhood in the hope of finding some charm or medicine through which her heart's desire might be fulfilled. She came to the Malwar hospital, also, driven by the urgency of her desire, and it was there that she came to know Chhoti.

Chhoti had visited Sandeshpur many times—but it

was in hospital, away from the absorbing household and village life, that Dākhā first opened her heart to her and her message. It was probably the empty space in her life, and the longing in her heart, which made the message of salvation seem acceptable. She probably thought of it as one of the many " ways of religion " to which, if wifehood and motherhood failed, a woman might turn, and find comfort. When she was ready to leave hospital she asked Chhoti to drive her back home, and Chhoti agreed, glad and astonished. " Dākhā has come back ! " " Dākhā was sitting in the Mêm's cart ! " " The Mêms have made her a Christian ! " The word was in everybody's mouth, but Dākhā was unperturbed.

The friendship, begun in hospital, continued. More frequent visits to the village led to a greater intimacy with Lahrkor, the cripple. One year Chhoti camped for a fortnight just outside Sandeshpur. When one of the *lambardārs* by threats, and jeers, and insults, succeeded in keeping other people away from the tent, Dākhā snapped her fingers at him. What was it to him ? He was not her man. She too had a tongue, and if he abused her she could return abuse double for all that he gave.

In those days Chhoti found the Jāts proud and self-satisfied ; the desire for knowledge had not yet seized them. But it had seized Dākhā : Lahrkor had caught the infection, and, to a lesser extent, other women also. The Spirit of God seemed to be working visibly in their

hearts. Villages were usually afraid and suspicious of frequent visits; but after that fortnight in camp it became possible to visit Sandeshpur at first each month, and latterly each fortnight. The desire for learning ebbed and flowed; the friendship always remained; and it was with great longing and hopefulness that Chhoti, remembering the former camping, looked forward to ten days there.

But as far as Dākhā and Lahrkor were concerned, it seemed at first as though the opportunity were being largely thrown away. Both had reached a stage beyond which it seemed impossible to bring them. Perhaps they were impressed with the amount they knew, and did not realize the need for anything further. Perhaps they feared the path to which further teaching might bring them. In either case, while insisting on a daily visit, they seemed quite indifferent to the teaching Chhoti longed to give them. Dākhā especially was in a difficult mood. Her very strength of character often made her difficult, and just at this time she was quarrelling with her husband. Such quarrels were not infrequent, though each loved the other greatly. But Ghamandi, the husband, occasionally grew jealous, and afraid of Dākhā's free and easy ways; and, being smaller than his wife in stature, mind and character, he had recourse to a stick to remind her of the fact that, being a man, he was immensely superior to her, and was in fact as well as theory her lord and master. So Dākhā was feeling preoccupied and resentful, and

though she expected to be visited daily, she treated the teaching as something she had heard along ago, and understood so well that there was no need to listen further. Indeed, the only opportunity for teaching in her house seemed to be when another woman was there sewing, or sifting grain.

" Let her hear," Dākhā would sometimes say ; " sing to her such and such a hymn—shew her this or that picture." At other times she would interrupt and say loftily, " What does she understand ? What's the use of teaching her ? I understand these things — but these others—they know nothing."

One day Kaliya turned on her: " You're very proud, Dākhā, very proud. Such a boaster ! If you understand, why aren't you a Christian ? You're so busy, you don't listen to anything we say. We'll not come again. We'll go to other people who will listen. Wanted us to come, and then other people are at the tent all day long, but Dākhā never comes ! Dākhā's too busy ! Quarrelling with your husband ! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you who know so much ? "

Dākhā laughed and grumbled. " He beat me with his shoe. Who's he to beat me ? If he beats me again, I shall leave him. I shall come to your school, and become a Christian."

" What ! do you think we will have you in our school ? Quarrels, leaves her husband, and then comes to our school ! "

" Does no one quarrel in your school ? " asked Dākhā.

It was Kaliya's turn to laugh shamefacedly, and Dākhā, having successfully turned the tables on her admonisher, with an air of generosity asked for another hymn.

In spite of the difficult mood, there was something very attractive about Dākhā. Panchi, who had barely seen her before, felt greatly drawn to her. But Chhoti, who remembered the last visit, was grievously disappointed. Yet she held on to the belief that it was " just a passing stage," and that the only thing to do was to wait till the desire for more light returned. Her love was ever of the order that " hopeth all things, believeth all things."

There was a considerable feeling of rivalry between the two bahinelis. " Have you been to Dākhā's ? " was always one of the first questions Lahrkor asked, and " Have you been to Lahrkor's ? " was usually one of Dākhā's questions. " Has Dākhā fed you yet ? " asked Lahrkor's mother on the third day, as Chhoti and Panchi sat on two little stools inside the big doorway, with two large brass dishes on their knees, and their fingers busy conveying *khīr* (rice boiled in milk) to their mouths. It was the festival of Shakrāt, a day when Hindus feed their *gurūs*, religious teachers, Brahmins, and anyone they especially wish to honour ; and on coming back at half-past two, after a hard morning's work in a very difficult village, Chhoti and Panchi found that Lahrkor's mother had been to the tent and begged that before eating their midday meal

they would come round to her house to eat *khīr*. So the two crossed the sandy stretch of ground between their tent and the village and walked up the street, greeted many times with the question: "Are you going to eat at Lahrkor's?" (In Indian villages one person's business is everybody's business.)

They turned up the narrow alley between the high walls of houses, at the top of which stood Lahrkor's house.

It was a small brick house, with a large doorway leading into a long, low, narrow room, in a corner of which was the mud horse-shoe stove, while at the other end stood a string bed. Opposite the big doorway was another—a smaller doorway, leading into a dark inner room in which were more string beds, little recesses in the wall filled with bundles of various shapes and sizes, pegs in the wall and hooks from the rafters, from which depended other bundles containing perhaps clothes, perhaps grain. There were no windows. A little hole in the roof was the only ventilation beside the doorway. In this small dark house lived Lahrkor, her mother, her sister-in-law, her brother, and various nephews and nieces.

Lahrkor was very fond of her small nephews and nieces, and was always ready to have a fractious baby deposited on her bed, and with awkward jerks of her poor arms and queer clicks of the tongue would soothe it into quiet. She was half lying, half sitting, on a string bed, close up against the wall to get the last

patch of sunshine that remained in the overshadowed alley. She had a fine, large, contented face, and broad shoulders. But her back was hopelessly crooked, her legs were hopelessly twisted, her hands were hopelessly drawn. She could move her head freely, her arms a little; her two thumbs had to do all the work of the fingers. They were very clever thumbs. As the two guests came up the alley, they saw her by the aid of those two clever thumbs working a coarse needle and coarse yellow cotton backwards and forwards through a piece of coarse red cloth, working out an effective pattern of conventional leaves.

"Mother! Chhoti's come," called Lahrkor in a harsh, strident voice; and in the doorway there appeared a rough old lady, with nutcracker jaws and no teeth; very bright eyes and wrinkled face. She was a sharp, shrewish old lady, but she was devoted to her daughter and she loved Chhoti, and for both of them she always softened the asperities of her tongue considerably. Round the corner came the daughter-in-law, rough, noisy and disagreeable in manner. Lahrkor's mother had often spoken to Chhoti about that daughter-in-law. She was not very kind to Lahrkor; the old lady used to wonder what would happen to her daughter when she herself was gone. At such times she would say:

"When I am gone, Lahrkor must become one of you. There will be no one else to love her when I am gone." But she probably knew, as Chhoti did, that however little love the relations might feel for her, they would

not, for the honour of the family, easily allow her to fall into the hands of Christians.

As soon as the *khīr* was ready the two guests were invited to sit inside the big doorway, and it was then that the old lady, squatting in front of them, asked the question : " Has Dākhā fed you yet ? " She opened her mouth and gave a pleased grunt when Chhoti told her that she was the first in the village who had fed them.

" You have eaten *khīr* at Lahrkor's ? " asked Dākhā reproachfully an hour or two afterwards; and then she added : " I shall bring you some millet bread and some lentil tops this evening."

Lahrkor had been married many years ago ; had been thrown in as a make-weight with one of her cousins. But she had never left her mother's home, and it probably made no difference to her when her husband died a few years after the marriage. The longest journey she ever made was to a kind of barn or shed near the outskirts of the village ; thither the household used to migrate in the harvest time, spending the day reaping or threshing the grain in their fields close by. The old mother and the rough sister-in-law would carry Lahrkor and her bed thither, and the jerking and the jolting would hurt her back badly ; but it would not occur to any of them, least of all perhaps to Lahrkor, that a little more care and gentleness would have prevented much of the pain.

When Chhoti and Panchi spoke of the tent, and

above all of Malūki, the doll, Lahrkor longed to come and see. Chhoti offered to bring the cart to the very entrance of the village. Her bed could have been carried to the entrance, and she could have been placed quite carefully in the cart, and guarded from jolting. But though Lahrkor longed to accept the offer, she could not overcome the wholly unreasoning fear, not of the jolting, but of what the neighbours would say if they saw her sitting in Chhoti's cart. She begged that Malūki might be brought to her, but for long Chhoti withstood the suggestion. If Malūki once began paying calls, who knew where it would stop? But when there seemed no possibility of Lahrkor's coming to the tent, Panchi was one day commissioned to carry Malūki, carefully wrapped up and hidden away, to the little house up the narrow alley. Lahrkor examined her in her rather quiet, impassive way, but her pleasure in her was almost spoiled by her anxiety lest one of the mischievous nephews should break her. The sister-in-law demanded Malūki as a gift, and was rude and disagreeable over the inevitable refusal.

"Let it pass, let it pass," cried Lahrkor. Then, turning to Panchi, "Your great kindness—now I have seen—now take it away."

Almost every afternoon Kaliya and one of the other campers turned up that narrow alley and sat by Lahrkor's bed. The general noise and clamour of the household often made it very hard to teach or gain a hearing. The only one who made any show of listening

was Lahrkor, and her listening sometimes seemed peculiarly devoid of interest. The old mother and the daughter-in-law would interrupt constantly with rude joking and laughter. Yet Chhoti clung to the belief, born of occasional wistful looks and exclamations, that deep down in Lahrkor's heart there was a certain appreciation of the message of love and a certain desire for it. And even when no opportunity came for definite teaching, Chhoti believed the time was not wasted; that human love and friendliness, and common everyday intercourse on common everyday matters, might yet be the channel along which the waters of God's love and truth should flow to thirsty souls.

Dākhā recovered from her sullen mood just as the campers were preparing to leave. She and her husband had once more come into amicable relations, and with a mind free from care on that matter, she seemed suddenly to become aware of the opportunities she had let slip.

"Why haven't I been learning to read all this time—wretch that I am!" she cried on the last day. "With a daily lesson I might by now have learned to read. Why do you want to go away? You stayed a month at Rashīn, why don't you stay a month here? If you'll stay, I'll put away all my work, and will set myself to read."

The thirst for knowledge, which had been dormant, was once more awake. The bond of friendship had

been greatly strengthened by the ten days' intercourse. Many in the village had begun to share in the friendship, and to realise something of the same desire after knowledge. About half-a-dozen women and girls announced their intention of "reading" with Chhoti, if she would come regularly to teach them. Chhoti left Sandeshpur with renewed hope and desire, promising that if it could possibly be arranged she would pay weekly visits there as soon as camping work was over.

CHAPTER X

"The Fellowship of the Gospel"

"IF India is to be evangelized at all, it must be by Indians themselves." The thought has become a commonplace in missionary politics, but in some parts of India the day when the Indian Church can be left to propagate itself seems far distant. Perhaps it is not so far distant as it seems. Chhoti, to whom the problem of evangelizing her beloved villages seemed often a burden greater than she could bear, clung to the hope that the day was soon coming when the Church in Malwar would realise and undertake its responsibility for those who knew not Christ, and there was nothing that so eased the burden as the discovery amongst the Indian brethren of a genuine concern for the coming of the Kingdom. That experience — as she had hoped — awaited her in Rashīn.

Rashīn is a fair-sized town about nine miles south-west of Malwar, along a broad country road worn into deep ruts by the country carts. It has a busy *bāzār*, for it is the centre for all the villages of Mêwāt. It is a wealthy little town. The *baniya* caste—that is, the caste of grain merchants and money-lenders—flourishes in Rashin. For a long time Malwar hospital had held a weekly dispensary there, and for a year or two Bābū

Amar Dās, one of the chief workers at the hospital, had ridden over once a week on his little brown nag, and throughout a long day had dispensed medicines, dressed wounds and sores, and visited patients in their homes. He had gained the respect and confidence of the leading men, and even the friendship of one or two. The wealthiest and most influential *baniya* in the place had pressed for him to come and live in the town, offered to rent him a house, to use his influence to obtain premises in the *bāzār* for his medicine shop, and made promises of financial support on behalf of himself and his caste fellows.

At last it was arranged, and *Bābū* Amar Dās went to settle about the house and the daily dispensary, and to see how the work would shape itself. After a week or two he sent for his wife and small son.

His wife, Ānandi, like her husband, had been a famine orphan. He had been brought up in an orphanage in the United Provinces. Ānandi had lived since she was twelve or thirteen in the mission boarding school just outside Malwar. She was always a jolly, merry young person, finding jokes in everything, and delighting, in a thoroughly good humoured way, in teasing everyone, big or little, who came near her. But beneath all her fun and nonsense there was a very serious, solid goodness. About a year before she left the school she was engaged to Amar Dās, then training at the Malwar hospital, and when she left there were weeping and lamentations amongst the girls, while

even Ānandi herself, in all her bridal array, could not forbear a few tears. For some months, while she still lived in Malwar, she came to and fro as a teacher in the school.

A bitter disappointment awaited the young couple. Twin boys were born to them, but were taken from them in the very hour of their birth. Ānandi was in hospital. In the same ward lay a motherless babe—a day old. It was not perhaps surprising that in the first bitterness of her grief Anandi utterly refused to take the little one and give to her the place of her own sons, even though the child's life seemed to depend on it. But love triumphed. She took the wee babe and brought her up as her own daughter till, a year after, a stepmother appeared on the scene eager to have the child.

Ānandi's life and home seemed blank without her, and everyone rejoiced with her when at last the blank was filled, and Ānandi used to walk down to her old school on a Saturday afternoon with a strong, lusty boy in her arms. He was called John, and John became a great favourite in the school, and had a very good time indeed, when he and his mother came, as they sometimes did, to spend a week's holiday there. It was at the boarding school that Amar Dās left them when he went over to Rashīn.

When all was ready he sent an ox-cart, and Ānandi and her small son, and Mihrāb, one of the women from the boarding school, sat in it, and trundled gradually

along the nine miles of rough road, and settled down in the new house. It was the first time Ānandi had lived away from Malwar and all her Christian friends ; but Mihrāb helped to break the loneliness.

When Chhoti had decided on Rashīn as one of their camping places she applied to *Bābū* Amar Dās to help them in the matter of getting their tent fixed up, securing a daily supply of water and milk, and other small matters. The camp arrived on a Saturday, and as soon as the tents were up Chhoti and Panchi went into the town to call on Ānandi. They passed up the busy *bāzār*. At a bend in the narrow street where the throng of buyers and sellers, beggars and gossips seemed greatest, they suddenly caught sight of Amar Dās. He was standing in an open shop front about three feet above the level of the street. The sleeves of his white shirt were rolled up, and he was bending over a man squatting on his heels before him, holding up a damaged finger which had been crushed by the falling of some heavy weight. Amar Dās looked up as the two passed, and left the finger, and came forward to say a few words of greeting. He had been called to attend to the finger, which must not be left till to-morrow, otherwise he would not have been at his medicine shop just then. In the afternoons he was usually away, riding on his nag over fields and roads to visit village patients. "The boy's mother is watching the road for you," he said, returning to the damaged finger. "She heard you had arrived."

A few minutes' walk brought them to the house, and there was Ānandi standing in the doorway, smiling and salāming. At a word from his mother John ducked his head, slapped his forehead with a chubby little hand, and said " *Salām !* " in a very gruff voice. The house was in the *baniya* quarter. It was built of mud and brick in ordinary Indian style, but even had Ānandi not been there, it would have been easy to guess that this was her house, for it was the only house in the street whose doorway was not decorated with the marks of worship, symbolic marks in red and white and yellow clay. The undecorated doorway led into a narrow porch room, in which lay a girl on a string bed, with her old mother squatting beside her. They were Mêwani women from a village three miles away ; the daughter's ulcer required more attention than Amar could give in her own home.

The old mother gazed rather fearfully at the visitors and salāmed with great respect. She was fearful and anxious as to what might accrue from her desperate venture of living on the threshold of a Christian house. The porch room led into a passage, at the side of which *Bābū* Amar Dās's brown nag was contentedly munching grass.

As they entered the courtyard, Mihrāb rose to greet them. She had been sitting on a low stool sewing, with two little *baniya* girls seated in front of her, gazing admiringly at her drawn thread embroidery. Children ran in and out of their courtyard pretty freely, Ānandi

explained, and Mihrāb, used to evangelistic work in the villages, found opportunity to teach them Christian hymns.

Ānandi was proud to shew them the glories of her new house. Across the courtyard was the *dālān*, a verandah room behind scalloped arches. The walls of the *dālān* were decorated with big Scripture pictures, texts of coloured paper letters, old Christmas cards, and numerous photographs and paper ornaments. A recess in the wall was filled with books, and in another recess stood a cheap clock and one or two photographs in frames. Across the end of the room was a table covered with a bright cloth, and close to it were a couple of stools and a chair. Beyond the *dālān* was a large inner room; dark, for there was no window, but not so dark as many inner rooms, for Ānandi had had the walls washed with white clay. Here stood beds and boxes; among them one or two tin trunks—wooden boxes covered with ornamented tin, such as Indian women love. The cooking was done on a little verandah round the corner, where Ānandi showed with some pride a pile of brightly burnished pots and pans.

They sat in the courtyard, Chhoti being given the chair as the seat of honour, and talked of things old and new. Several little girls had followed in the wake of the visitors, and they sat down, uninvited but unembarrassed guests, to hear all the conversation and to watch John, a source of endless attraction to them

with his energetic, independent, inquisitive ways. John showed his pigeons, and told of his little cock, now, alas! defunct. Mihrāb sat quietly sewing and left most of the talking to Ānandi, who joked, and laughed, and teased, in the old school-girl way. When the visitors left, she sent teasing messages to Kaliya and Rāmdei, and promised to come round to the tent just before the evening meal.

On the next day service was held in the Bābū's house at ten o'clock. It was a bitterly cold day, and the four, Kaliya, Rāmdei, Chhoti and Panchi, hugged their shawls and wraps closely round them as they walked quickly through the *bāzār*, where the buying and the selling, the gossip and the chatter, went on as on any other day. Amar Dās was waiting at the door to receive them. Inside there was an unmistakable Sunday air about everything, and John and the two women wore the rather solemn look that is apt to go with Sunday clothes. A light coloured drugget was spread on the floor of the *dālān*; the table was set out with Bible and hymn books; string stools were arranged in a semi-circle down and across the room, a semi-circle which terminated in a low footstool for John on the very threshold, next to his mother. The wooden arm-chair was reserved for the preacher.

Amar Dās introduced the new-comers to another Christian brother—one Mangla, a weaver by birth and by trade, for whom a Hindu reform movement had been the path from Hinduism into Christianity. At

one time he had been in the employ of the Malwar Mission as an elementary school teacher in Rashīn, his own town. Perhaps he had been led astray; perhaps he had been guilty of serious misconduct; or perhaps he had been the victim of false accusations and jealous slander. Amar Dās believed the latter to have been the case. Mangla left his home and the work of the mission, but not apparently his Christianity. When Amar Dās settled in Rashīn he found that he had returned, and, in addition to his weaving, was doing a little elementary teaching on his own account amongst the boys in the weavers' quarter.

Amar Dās liked the man, and trusted him. He persuaded him to renew his church membership, gladly accepted his occasional help in preaching and teaching, and coveted him for one of the regular band of Malwar preachers. "He can preach in a *bāzār* better than any of us," he said; "he can shut the mouths of some of these *pandits* and *sādhus* and *jogis* better than we can. He can quote their own Scriptures to them to show them they are wrong. I tell him that if he had the New Testament as much at his tongue's end as he has the writings of Kabīr, he would be a great strength to us when we go on a preaching tour."

The little congregation was further swelled by the entrance of an old man and his son, leather-workers, whom Amar Dās had found sufficiently interested in Christianity to wish to read the New Testament. These

two, with Mangla, sat near to Amar Dās at the table. The womenfolk sat on the stools at the other end; John, on his little stool, making great efforts to be good and quiet, and heaving most prodigious sighs from time to time.

A small audience also gathered in the courtyard at the sound of the singing. The old lady left her daughter's bedside and came and leant up against the doorpost at the other side of the courtyard, listening, observing, and wondering. A little crowd of children ran noisily in, and, admonished by Ānandi, sat down more or less quietly just outside the *dālān*. When they had grown tired of listening and being quiet, they got up and went away.

The order of service was strictly English and un-Indian. Chhoti and Panchi would have been glad if it had been otherwise, but they were glad that Amar Dās, instead of English hymns translated into the vernacular and sung to English tunes, chose *bhajans* —native hymns sung to native airs. The translated hymns remain foreign and unintelligible to non-Christians or Christians not brought up in mission schools, but the *bhajans* seem familiar and understandable.

" Help me, O Christ,
Beside Thee there is no Helper.
Give the Vision, make me Thine.
Take me and save me.
For the salvation of this world
Thou camest, being born.

Thou didst rise from the grave in three days.
Thou didst converse with Thy disciples.
Hear, Lord, my petition.
Treat me not according to my unworthiness."

Bābū Amar Dās's sermon was a refreshing one. He took the old story of David and his fight against Goliath, and saw in it much encouragement for the small companies of Christians who, in the face of all the forces of Hinduism and Mahomedanism, felt themselves small, and weak and unavailing. He saw in it a rebuke to the little faith which sighed for many rich, many mighty, many noble to be called, in order that non-Christians might be impressed with the greatness of Christianity. He saw in it a call to a strong faith in the power of God, working through the weakest instruments. It seemed to Chhoti and to Panchi that he was giving forth something of which he had himself felt the need and proved the comfort.

There was a good deal of intercourse between the tent and the house in the town during the month of camping. Sometimes, in the late afternoon, Ānandi and Minrāb and John would come round, and sit and chat in friendly fashion. John was captivated by Chhoti's picture book, especially by the picture of the cock, which no doubt reminded him of his departed pet. As Chhoti turned the leaves for him he would suddenly call "*Murga! Murga!*" "Cock! Cock!" and the leaves had to be turned back till the beloved picture had been found. Other children, at first a little shy of both

camp and campers, were made bold by John's boldness, and soon became as much at home with everybody as he himself was. Ānandi told of the wealthy *baniya* who had worked for their settling there, how he had already begun to grow afraid lest the coming of the Indian Christian might lead to the coming of the Christian missionary, and altogether more Christianity than he had bargained for. She told how she had once or twice gone by special invitation to see his women-folk in their house outside the town. The *baniya* had built what almost amounted to a tiny suburb of the town for himself, his family, and those who worked for him. The women folk were friendly, Ānandi said, but ludicrously inquisitive and suspicious as to the ways of Christians, and quite averse to receiving any teaching.

Sometimes *Bābū* Amar Dās would come and conduct his wife and son back to the house. He usually had something of interest to report or to talk over. On one such occasion he brought with him a copy of a Christian vernacular magazine, and, greatly excited, pointed to an article he had just read. It was an account of the baptism of five men, learned Brahmins, who had studied the Vêdas in one of the large orthodox Vêdic colleges. The satisfaction they sought and failed to find in the Vêdas they had at last found in Christ. On a pilgrimage through the sacred places of India with other like-minded men, they had heard an Indian Christian in a Bengal city preach Christ cruci-

fied. Like the Bereans of old they examined the Scriptures daily whether these things were so, till at last five of them proclaimed by baptism their faith in Christ as the Saviour they had sought.

"Five of them!" cried Amar Dās. "What an influence theirs may be! They know the thoughts and desires of men like themselves; they will be able to lead others by the path they have come. God's kingdom truly comes—though here it seems to come so slowly."

Evidently the progress of the Kingdom of God was to him a matter of real moment. The news of this signal victory of the truth appeared to him as a piece of personal good fortune. From talking over this glad news he passed to talk about the villages round Rashīn, and Chhoti brought out her map, and together they hunted up the names of villages they knew well, and compared experiences. Amar Dās told of experiences in them since he had been working in Rashīn, and of experiences in other years when he and other brethren from Malwar had camped round about in the district. He discussed magic lantern shows, their methods and results, and hoped that one day the Doctor Sāhib might be able to get for him the gift of a magic lantern from England, as the Pādri Sāhib had already done for Bābū Nand Lāl. Chhoti suggested that he should help her with one or two shows in the town, and in some of the towns and villages near by which were begging for a *tamāsha*. Amar Dās gladly

agreed, and there and then a show was fixed for the following night in a certain open space not far from the *baniyas'* quarter. Chhoti would work the lantern, Amar Dās would do the speaking.

The magic lantern show would have been more effective if Chhoti had done the speaking herself. *Bābū* Amar Dās spoke too much at length, and too argumentatively. He did not allow the story of Christ's life to speak for itself. The pictures of the Good Samaritan suggested a long dissertation on the evils of caste, the picture of Christ on the Cross led to an exposition of the Atonement, crude, dogmatic, and unlovely. People grew weary; their attention wandered.

Panchi was disappointed, and voiced her disappointment very emphatically on the way home. But Chhoti refused to be disappointed. It was a pity he was so lengthy; it was a great pity so many had to get up and go away before the end. Perhaps it would have been better to have fewer slides. Perhaps the brethren were accustomed to use a few slides to illustrate their talking, rather than many slides and just sufficient talking to explain them. Yes, such a representation of the Atonement was terrible. Still, it was worth while to ignore mistakes and defects for the sake of working with the Indian brethren. She was sure that that was the right line of working. Probably the gain all round was great enough to counteract the loss caused by very obvious mistakes. After all, the work

was God's, and apparently He was willing to put up with the bungles we made for the sake of working with us.

And so it came to pass that four or five times when a magic lantern show was asked for, Chhoti worked the lantern, Panchi helped in the singing, and *Bābū* Amar Dās stood up close to the pictures, and preached according to the faith that was in him. Chhoti came away from Rashīn gladdened and refreshed by such fellowship in the gospel. It was a day of small things, but it pointed forward to a day of great things, the day when the Church in the Mission field should be its own missionary society.

CHAPTER XI

"Towards the Ideal"

SOME seven miles from Malwar lies the village of Jaipur. It is a village in which work has been carried on for several years. It was visited frequently by Satya and Chhoti in the early days. The English missionary and the Indian brother had preached there and taught there. The Doctor had opened one of his branch dispensaries there, and placed one of his own trained men in charge of it. One of the early results of work there was the conversion of a Brahmin youth, who after his baptism suffered persecution and imprisonment for Christ's sake at the hands of his relatives, and was now a Christian worker in a distant province.

In 1909 one of the leading men amongst the *chamārs* (leather-workers or shoe-makers) announced his intention of becoming a Christian. He carried with him perhaps half-a-dozen of his brethren. They asked for teaching, not only for themselves, but also for their women-folk. Chhoti rented a small house in the *chamarwār* (leather-workers' quarter), and for the best part of a month, day after day, taught them of the things of Jesus Christ. But other forces were at work; other members of the community dissuaded and threatened, and the desire of many waxed cold.

Two families, however, stood firm to their purpose, and in each case the husband and wife were to be baptized. But before the baptism could take place, plague visited the village and one of the couples died. "See," said the neighbours, ignoring the many other deaths which had taken place in the village, "see what comes of changing the customs of the fathers, and leaving the brotherhood! Unfortunate ones! What they sowed they reaped." Such arguments might frighten, but could not move, the two enquirers who now remained out of the original dozen or fifteen; and in due course they were baptised and received into the Christian Church.

Chhoti had spent a fortnight in Jaipur since then, and had found the two new Christians suffering some inconvenience and ostracism, but no real persecution. She also found them growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But they were very ignorant. They could not read; they were very dependent on teaching; and for the sake of giving them further teaching and in the hope of finding amongst others the smoking flax which might yet be kindled to a flame, Chhoti had arranged for a fortnight's work in Jaipur at the close of the camping tour.

Bābū John Dāūd, in charge of the Jaipur branch dispensary, had kindly secured a house for them in a Mussalmān quarter not far from the leather workers. The house consisted of two narrow rooms—each about fourteen feet by six—and a flat roof reached by a mud

staircase. In front of the house was a tiny courtyard, divided from the street by a little passage and a dilapidated wooden door. In the inner room, whose only light and air came from a hole in the roof and the doorways into the outer room, there was just space for a couple of boxes and two string beds. One or two recesses in the mud walls held their stores, rice, lentils, sugar, salt, etc., and their books and writing materials. In the outer room were water-vessels, three stools, and up in the corner a little mud stove. A third bed stood out in the courtyard during the day and was brought into the outer room at night, Kaliya, Chhoti and Panchi taking it in turns to sleep there. Pots and pans and all other belongings were placed on the floor. Washing apparatus was placed in the passage near to the door leading into the street, privacy being obtained at the expense of light, by a curtain hung over a rope.

" My dear—a palace ! " exclaimed Chhoti. " Before, we had only one room, and had to turn our beds out into the yard as soon as we got up in the morning, so as to have room to move. There was a little grass lean-to we used as a bathroom. But the vermin— ! I had no self-respect left after a fortnight of it."

The carts which brought them and their belongings had reached Jaipur about two o'clock. Kaliya's temper was seriously ruffled because her cart had arrived some twenty minutes before the other, and she had been obliged to wait in the street, not knowing where the house was. So she stood in the courtyard, dumb

and deaf as a post, hardly stirring to help with the boxes and other luggage, or to put the house in order. She boiled the water and made the tea, but declined to share the *parāmṭe* (flat pastry cakes) which they had cooked and brought with them. She chose to consider that her dignity and comfort had been slighted.

"Left there standing! Stared at as though I was an animal! As though I was nobody at all! Nobody has any thought for me!" she grumbled in little spurts of wrath, as she sat watching the kettle boil. Chhoti was used to her tempers, and knew it was useless to argue or remonstrate, so Kaliya's grumbles passed unheeded. After the meal she said:

"You'll like to come to see the *Bābū's* wife?"

"I'll not come—tired out—going to sleep."

"Very good, sleep away. We'll go and see the Bābū's household and the others, and shall be back in time to help you with the cooking."

So Kaliya lay on her bed, and Chhoti and Panchi passed out of the dilapidated door, and down the narrow Mahomedan street, stared at by all, and greeted by some. They came into the *bāzār*, past the grain sellers' shops, past the dyers', where yards of dark blue cloth was hanging over a string to dry, and turned off to the left by a carpenter's shop, in front of which lay old cart wheels, logs and trunks of trees, a big saw, rough planks, and a broken plough. Their road led straight through the leather workers' quarter, and some little girls playing *gittu* (an Indian version of

knucklebones, played with five pebbles) in front of one of the houses recognised Chhoti, and leaving their play ran forward joyfully shouting " Chhoti has come ! Chhoti has come ! "

" We'll come back directly," called Chhoti, and did not stay for more than a passing greeting ; for etiquette demanded that the first visit should be to the *Bābū's* wife.

Flora received them with real kindness and friendliness into her nice little house on the outskirts of the village. Her three little girls hailed Chhoti with enthusiasm ; Panchi they did not know. Chandu, a rather feeble-minded, unsatisfactory Christian brother, who for a small wage filled the post of bottle-washer at Bābū John's dispensary, was there with his wife and children, and at once offered help in the matter of daily shopping and bringing of milk, an offer Chhoti gladly accepted. His wife, Munniya, came forward rather shyly, and held out her baby boy to Chhoti, saying : " Your boy."

" Without doubt. My boy," laughed Chhoti, taking him in her arms. For, two or three months before, in another village, Chhoti had found Munniya in her hour of need, and in the absence of other help, had herself helped her, and brought her through her time of fear and danger, and rejoiced with her in her new joy. The boy was a strong bond of union between the two.

Chhoti was so utterly friendly and kind herself that she placed great value on friendliness and kindness

shown towards her, and the hearty welcome made her glad. But perhaps she valued still more the welcome which awaited them as they returned to the leather-workers' quarter. Ganga Dei stood at one of the doorways leading from the thoroughfare into the houses behind. She was a tall, thin woman of perhaps forty, with dim, watery eyes, and hair strained tightly off her forehead and twisted into a tight knot on the crown of her head. Her bright red *chadar*, bound with green, was drawn well forward over her face. Its folds reached nearly to the bottom of her very full skirt of coarse, dark-blue cotton, but its corners were picked up and tucked into the skirt-band at the back. Her tight-fitting bodice was of pink flannelette, piped with black. There was nothing about her dress to suggest that she was different from the other women about her.

But Ganga Dei was very conscious of the difference, as she came forward and with great solemnity, though with all friendliness, shook hands with both of them. A *salām*, with its gesture of deference and its greeting of "peace," is picturesque, and well enough as a greeting between common acquaintances or strangers; but friendship and brotherhood demand contact, and Ganga Dei, born and bred amongst the "untouchables," seemed to regard the handshake as a sacrament of Christian brotherhood, and as symbolic of the difference between her and her neighbours.

Just in front of his mother stood little Shib Lāl, about ten years old, in funny, buff-coloured trousers, a light check shirt, a green waistcoat, and a round brown cloth cap. With his little squat figure, his little squat nose, wide mouth, and bright, restless eyes, he looked ludicrously like his father, Nanhūa, who now appeared in the passage with an elder son, Bhagwān.

On either side of the passage was a raised mud platform, on which were arranged many shoes, red, and green and brown. Bhagwān and his father had been sitting there, working at the shoes, stitching, with thin leather thongs, the thick soles on to the gay tops which Ganga Dei and other women embroidered in their spare time. The handshaking ceremony was performed with a like solemnity in the passage which served as a shop, and then Chhoti and Panchi were led into the courtyard, common to a group of houses, called a *bakil.* In Ganga Dei's *bakil* there were three houses, entirely separate, each facing a different side of the irregular shaped courtyard, each with its own verandah, and with a single sloping grass roof covering inner and outer rooms and verandah.

Stools were placed on the verandah, and both Ganga Dei and Nanhūa sat down to talk, while Shib Lāl swarmed up the wooden posts which supported the roof, or sat on the top of the low wall behind them. They talked of themselves, their health, their work, their family. Chhoti enquired about the eldest son,

Ganga Dei's step-son, who had bitterly resented his father's becoming a Christian.

"Has he become at all reconciled to you?"

Ganga Dei shook her head.

"He grumbles much, and gives his father abuse. He has been trying to persuade his father to drink the *huqqa* (smoke the pipe) with the other *chamārs*."

"But I refused," said Nanhūa. "Are they my brotherhood? I am a Christian, I am not one of them."

"And his wife?"

The son had been married since Chhoti's last visit. The girl had been living with them before her marriage according to the *chamār* custom, and Chhoti had seen her and liked her, and hoped the marriage might do something to heal the strife.

"She's all right. She comes to me very often. She doesn't say anything. Her day of happiness is coming near now—very near. Perhaps it will be while you are here."

"Miss *Sāhiba jī*, how is my brother, Rām Lāl?" asked Nanhūa, enquiring after a Christian chamār of Malwar who had become a great friend of his.

"He has been very ill," said Chhoti.

"Yes, so I heard. Is he no better?"

"He is much better. I went round this morning especially to enquire, for I knew you would be asking me."

"I sent him a postcard, but he has not replied."

"So his wife told me. I told them I should be seeing you, and they sent many *salāms*. He is certainly better. There is hope that he will soon be quite well."

"And how is elder sister Sampi?" It was Ganga Dei's turn now.

"Sampi is well also. I saw her in church yesterday, and she sent *salāms* to you. She says she has now two hearts, and one of them has stayed behind in Jaipur. She told me of the hymns she had taught you, and hoped the children had not forgotten them."

Shib Lāl and others were ready on the spot to show they had not, by repeating one of the hymns they had learnt from Sampi a month ago, when she had been living in Jaipur with her husband temporarily in charge of the dispensary.

"We used to go round to her house every day," said Shib Lāl.

"She gave me two picture cards," cried another.

"She was very friendly," said Ganga Dei. "One day she made a tea-party for us."

"I went too," interposed Shib Lāl. "She gave us biscuits. I ate three."

They all laughed at his eager recollection, and Chhoti rejoiced that Sampi had proved herself so acceptable.

By this time many of the daughters and daughters-in-law from other *bakils*, and a large number of boys and girls, had gathered round them. Chhoti had to try how far she remembered the names of each. One

or two young wives had small sons or daughters to show, and Chhoti had to handle the babies, and promise a wee shirt or vest. There were others whom she missed and enquired for; daughters who had been married and were at their father-in-law's; daughters-in-law who had returned for a time to their fathers. Then she spoke of new hymns to be learnt; of an examination, and possible prizes for those who took pains; and of new pictures and new stories she had to tell. Shib Lāl brought out a ragged, well thumbed book from a calico wrapper, and desired Chhoti to see how well he had got on with his reading at the little low-caste school taught by the old munshi Jacob Dāūd, John's father.

"It's getting late. We must go," said Chhoti at length.

"Why? There is still much day left. Will you sing no *bhajan* at all?"

"Shew a picture," shouted Shib Lāl. "The new pictures, where are they?"

"Another day I'll show you the pictures. I have not brought them now. I have not unpacked my books yet. I only came to give you a *salām*. We'll sing one hymn and then we must go. Kaliya will have begun to cook and will be watching for us!"

"Is elder sister Kaliya here? Why did she not come with you?"

"She was tired, and she will come to-morrow. Which

hymn will you have ? Shall it be an old one or a new one ? "

A new one was the general desire ; a very nice one, easy to understand. Chhoti, who had already looked out five or six new ones she wished to teach them, turned to Ganga Dei and said :

" I will sing you one which you can use as a prayer. It is just the prayer you want. You say sometimes you are so thronged with household duties that you have not much leisure for gaining the vision of God. This is just the prayer for people who feel like that.

And Chhoti and Panchi sang :

" Lord Jesus, grant the vision of Thyself; give me refuge."

" Thou indeed art the Saviour of the world.
We are sinful, lowly and helpless ;
Show Thine own mercy.
Lord Jesus, grant the vision of Thyself ; give me refuge."

" Thou indeed art the King of Heaven.
Thou camest into the world for the sake of the lowly ;
Make me Thine own.
Lord Jesus, grant the vision of Thyself ; give me refuge."

" This Satan is a giver of much sorrow,
He has led the world quite astray ;
Make him a captive.
Lord Jesus, grant the vision of Thyself ; give me refuge."

" We indeed are lost in the things of sense ;
We are filled with household cares ;
Give Thy Holy Spirit.
Lord Jesus, grant the vision of Thyself ; give me refuge."

The hymn finished, they rose, promising to come again the next day.

They found Kaliya's temper somewhat improved by her sleep. She had peeled and sliced the potatoes, and was now kneading the dough in a shallow pan. A few boys had followed Chhoti with the intention of buying one or two farthing books, and while she displayed her wares, discanted on the respective merits of each, and helped the boys in their choice, Panchi helped Kaliya to make the bread. Kaliya made the round balls of dough, and pressed them into thick flat cakes, working them round between her thumb and fingers. Panchi took them and patted them to and fro in her hands, or, taking a rolling pin, rolled them out on a stone into wafers of the required thickness. She was not so clumsy at it as she had been at first, but even now she could not always make them spin round under her rolling pin in the way that make them such a perfect round when Kaliya wielded the pin. Chhoti, having dismissed the boys, cleaned and filled the lanterns, talking the while to the women and children who lived close by, and had wandered casually into the yard. Kaliya baked the bread on the iron plate, spiced and cooked the potatoes, boiled the kettle, and then they all three sat round the welcome fire and ate their evening meal together.

The next day, after the early morning meal was finished, just as they were starting the hymn and reading and prayer with which the day's work always

began, Bābū John's three little girls came round to say that their mother had sent a *salām*—especially to elder sister Kaliya—and was expecting them all to come round and see her. They sat down cross-legged on the floor and joined in the morning worship with much decorum, and afterwards escorted their three elders with much chatter and noise and laughter to their mother's house. Kaliya stayed there all the morning, for she and Flora had become great friends on a former visit. Chhoti and Panchi went to Ganga Dei and the other leather-workers.

In a corner of Ganga Dei's *bakil* a little group of women soon gathered together, Ganga Dei herself amongst them. She was stitching together many coloured pieces of material, making one of the gay little bodices village women commonly wear. On a lower stool near her sat a woman working on a piece of leather cut out for the upper part of a shoe. A stick crossed under her knee held the piece of leather in position; both hands were busy stitching down the gold and silver thread in a closely embroidered pattern. A third woman sat on the ground nursing a restless baby. Chhoti and Panchi sat on a bed opposite to them. At their feet, hugging their knees, playing with their book-bags, patting their shoes, were a dozen or more little boys and girls and small babies. Occasionally Nanhūa, or some other man, would come to the doorway with a piece of leather in his hand and listen leaning up against the wall.

Chhoti, on the first visit, had aimed at getting into the heads and hearts of the would-be Christians a number of hymns and a number of Bible stories, sufficient to give them a clear idea of the main facts of the life of Christ. On the second visit she had filled in that picture of Christ's life and death with more detail. On this third visit she proposed to follow the same plan, the memorizing of hymns and the presentation of the life of Christ.

Panchi was struck with the difference between this group and similar groups in other villages. Here there seemed a foundation of knowledge on which it was comparatively easy to build up further teaching.

The work that morning in Ganga Dei's *bakil* was typical of the whole. The teaching was nearly always addressed to the children rather than to the older people; but the older people listened attentively, though less noisily than the children. There was much singing and shouting of the well-known hymns; new hymns were sung, and also taught line by line. Each day one of the new pictures was brought out, and admired, wondered over, and explained, and always the new teaching was so interwoven with the old that one or more old pictures had to be brought out. Chhoti and Panchi took the teaching turn and turn about. There was so much singing, and it was all so noisy, that their voices soon grew tired and hoarse. Many in these groups were former enquirers, and some, though non-Christians themselves, had Christian

relatives in other villages; two of the lads belonged to a family of lapsed Christians. With the exception of Nanhūa's son, and the man who had first asked for baptism, there seemed no one who had any violent feeling against the new faith.

Once or twice they visited the little school where Shib Lāl, *Bābū* John's two daughters, Chandu's little boys, and many other children learned to read and write and do simple arithmetic; where they also learned hymns and Bible stories. It was a very primitive little school. Its methods were the methods of the dame school and the horn-book. But the boys certainly learned to read. They learned by a process of memorizing, swaying backwards and forwards, droning over and over the well-known sentences, which they followed across the page with a grimy forefinger.

What a commotion there was as the visitors came in! They all jumped to their feet, shouting *Salām* in uproarious fashion, and came crowding round, eager to show how well they could read, and how beautifully they could write. The old *munshi* (teacher) shouted and scolded at them in a funny cracked voice, but they did not pay much attention. There was no furniture beyond a string stool, the scholars all sitting on the floor. They did their writing in all kinds of queer, huddled up positions, for there were no desks. They brought their slates and books and pens with them in a calico wrapper, and their blue earthenware inkpots they carried in the hand. On the walls were a few

pictures, mostly Scripture ones ; and in one corner of the room was a plain cupboard in which a stock of books and slates was kept.

Twice the campers gave a tea-party. Their accommodation was limited ; their supply of crockery was still more so ; so they invited Ganga Dei and Munniya and their children one day, and Flora and Jacob Dāūd's wife and children another day. They had only three stools, so the floor had to provide most of the sitting accommodation, with a blanket spread over it to make the place look festive. They had only three cups, so the children had to drink out of saucers, and further deficiencies were supplied by tooth glasses and aluminium cups. Biscuits and sweetmeats—the much loved *jalêbis* and *laddūs*—formed the repast. Flora was used to tea-parties—had she not been to many New Year's Day tea-parties on the Pādri Sāhib's verandah ?—but to Ganga Dei they were rare and rather solemn occasions. In India the host feeds his guest ; the feast where host and guest sit down together is an innovation from England. The Indian feast shows deference, respect, or goodwill ; but the English feast is, like the handshake, a sacrament of friendliness and brotherhood, which Ganga Dei, "the untouchable," probably appreciated greatly.

One afternoon, when Panchi and Kaliya went into Ganga Dei's *bakil* and sat down on her verandah, Nanhūa left his shoe making, brought a stool, and sat down by his wife's side.

"We want to present a request to you," he explained. "You will not be angry?"

"Why should I be angry? What is the request?"

"Our son, Bhagwān" (here Bhagwān, who had been standing in the doorway, disappeared into the passage), "he's a big boy now. He will soon be sixteen. All the other boys of his age in the village have been betrothed long ago."

"Oh, but he is so young," protested Panchi. "We Christians don't believe in early marriages. He is only a child, he is not fit for any such responsibility."

"You don't understand," explained Nanhūa. "We are not thinking of marriage. His brother has been trying to arrange a marriage for him, but we have said no. Bhagwān wishes to be as we are. He has not yet been baptised, but he wishes to be a Christian, and we will not have him married to anyone but a Christian. But he is a big boy now, and we thought you might know some one of the girls in your school who would be suitable for him."

"But, Ganga Dei, we should never marry our girls so young as that. Bhagwān is only fifteen, and the girl, to be suitable, ought to be at least a year younger. We couldn't even think of it. If you wait till he is eighteen we could find someone for him."

"You don't understand," repeated Nanhūa. "We are not thinking of marriage, but we want him to be betrothed. All the other boys of his age are betrothed."

"But he is so young. Even if he waited a year he would still not be seventeen. It is not right for a boy so young to marry," said Kaliya.

"See," said Ganga Dei, "Bhagwān's father makes shoes, and Bhagwān makes shoes, and I and all the women embroider them. When Bhagwān's wife comes she will have to embroider shoes too. We want a good, nice-tempered girl who can cook and grind and sew shoes as the rest of us do. We don't want a girl who can do none of these things."

"Of course you don't. All our girls cook, and some of them grind and some of them do field work. As for the shoe work, we don't teach them that, but surely a girl would soon learn that?"

"How is she going to learn it when she is old? She must begin when she is young, or she will never learn. Besides, she will not be used to our life and our ways and it will be hard for her if she is old."

"Could you not find a wife for him among other Christian leather-workers in other villages?"

"No; we want one from your school. They are taught to read and sew, and many other things there."

"But even if Bhagwān were to be betrothed to one of them she could not come to you before she was married, and you say it is not marriage you are thinking of?"

Ganga Dei laid her hand on Panchi's knee. "Listen. We do not want anything now. But we want you just to remember Bhagwān, and think of some suitable

girl; and when he is sixteen he will be baptised, and then we will come and ask for a girl from you. Among us, after the betrothal, a girl comes, and sits down in her father-in-law's house and does the shoe work, but there is no thought of marriage till afterwards."

It sounded strange to Panchi, utterly unlike the Hindu customs she had heard of, whereby a bride often does not even see her husband till she is married to him. Yet as she thought about it, it seemed reasonable; and she promised to talk it over when she got back to Malwar, and see if anything could be done.

"We want a good, nice-tempered girl," said Ganga Dei. "The big boy is so bitter, and he does not let his wife have much to do with us, and other people draw away from us because we are Christians. Bhagwān is a good boy, he does not fight or gamble or go in for horseplay as the other boys do. We want a girl who will sit down and be happy with us, and teach us the things she knows. I will look after her as though she were my own daughter. You need not fear to trust one of your girls to us."

"No, I know she would find a good home and a kind mother-in-law here," said Panchi.

When many of the details of that bit of camping had grown vague and dim, Panchi often thought of that Christian home. She had sometimes wondered what it was exactly that made Jaipur seem so different from the other places they had been to. It was not because

there were Christians there. There were Christians in Rashīn too, though not so many as in Jaipur. In Rashīn there was the one Christian household, the Christian dispenser, and his wife; and one Christian man, whose household refused to follow him in his Christianity. In Jaipur there were five Christian households. Three of the heads of households were in the employ of the mission. A native agency paid by the mission is not an ideal at which mission policy should aim. At best it is but a doubtful stepping-stone to a self-propagating, self-supporting native church. To many people it appears a real stumbling block in the way to that ideal. A fourth Christian household had for its head a man who, formerly employed as a preacher by the mission had now quarrelled and severed his connection with it and with his Christian brethren, and had smoked the *huqqa* with the *chamārs*, an act which in Ganga Dei's eyes was almost equivalent to an act of recantation. A backsliding Christian is certainly not ideal, though his occasional appearance seems almost inevitable.

The fifth household—ah! it was the fifth household that made the difference. They were ignorant, for at most they knew only a dozen or fifteen Christian hymns and a score of Gospel stories. Many incidents in Christ's life they had never heard of; of a large part of His teaching they knew nothing; their knowledge and understanding of Christian doctrine was meagre in the extreme; probably their code of Christian

ethics included only very broad moral issues, and took no account of finer ethical questions and distinctions. They were illiterate; neither husband nor wife could read or write; their boys were at the very A.B.C. of learning. They were simple, unsophisticated folk, and neither in dress nor manner nor speech did they differ from their caste fellows. But therein lay their importance. They lived the Christian life while sharing in the ordinary everyday life of their fellow countrymen. Their Christianity had in no sense made them foreign; they remained of the people. They were independent, carrying on their own trade, living in accordance with their own customs; yet living themselves and bringing up their children in the fear of the Lord. Yes, it was Ganga Dei and her household that made the difference.

From time to time in other villages round about Malwar, other households had been found similar to Ganga Dei's, but of these households only one or at the most two remained. The others had drifted back again into their former communities; their Christianity had not been deep enough or vital enough to withstand the backward pull of their old environment. Would Ganga Dei and her household stand? None realized more fully than Chhoti the importance of this type of village Christian; none saw more clearly how fragile a plant was their Christian faith, and how tenderly and wisely it needed to be handled if it was ever to strike deep root and bring forth even the thirty-fold.

Caste and all the social customs bound up with caste make it supremely difficult for individual converts to live out their new found faith among their own people. It might seem, and has seemed to many people, as though a solution of the difficulty lies in " mission institutions " in which the new and immature convert is lifted right out of his old environment and transplanted to a soil more favourable to Christian growth. Yet while our mission institutions may train Christians of a high order—well-educated, capable, sensitive to moral questions, spiritually-minded—the Christians come out of these communities almost inevitably denationalized, foreigners in their own land, foreign in dress, in speech, in thought, in habits.

Caste seems to make mission institutions almost a necessity, yet mission institutions almost inevitably tend to denationalize the Indian Christian Church.

In seeking an escape from the horns of this dilemma, it might seem and has seemed to many people as though the solution lies to their hand in " Mass movements," which have been so prominent a feature of mission work in India. So far these movements have been almost entirely confined to low caste people. Hundreds and thousands of ignorant and despised outcastes have been swept by the force of the movement into the Christian Church. Whole communities have turned their backs on Hinduism and Islam, which have little or nothing to give them, and have turned their faces towards Christianity for the temporal and

spiritual well-being which they sought. Whole communities which, so far, have remained outside Christianity have nevertheless through this widespread movement been brought to realize their miserable condition, and to seek for some power to raise them out of it, and bring them social, moral and mental betterment.

But while mass movement Christianity may solve some of the problems surrounding the relations of the new Christian to his old environment, it has also brought into prominence many other problems at least as acute, and we may find ourselves on the horns of yet another dilemma.

Chhoti was never given to looking for short cuts, or trusting to quick and easy methods; she was shy of institutions and organizations; she looked at the mass movements of the northern Panjab with a certain wistfulness yet with a certain dread, as at a force of whose tendency she was uncertain. Meanwhile she sought to solve the problem of these ignorant village Christians—so vastly important—and so pitifully weak, by the slow and toilsome but Christlike way of patience, faith, and love.

Ganga Dei's Christian faith might be smoking flax; Chhoti would passionately guard it from being quenched and patiently nurse it into a flame; it might be a bent reed; Chhoti would raise it and support it till the sap had time to heal the hurt. For in Ganga Dei and her household, living the Christian life in the midst of

their village community, she caught a vision of the ideal—the vision of hundreds and thousands of such households, with a generation of Christian education and Christian experience behind them, in the closest possible touch with Indian village life and thought—the ideal of an independent Christian community preparing the way for an indigenous independent Christian Church.

The ideal may be a long way off, but we are moving towards it ; and Chhoti thought she caught a gleam foretelling the glory of the risen sun, and was filled with new hope and longing.

After

AND so that bit of camping came to an end. The last good-byes had been said ; the large sum of eightpence had been entrusted to *Bābū* John for the rent of the house ; the water-man had received half that sum for the water which he had filled into the vessels at the rate of a farthing a skinful ; the sweeper-woman had salāmed elaborately over the receipt of a few coppers ; and then the ox-cart lumbered off with the campers and the camp, leaving Shib Lāl and a small collection of children gazing after its vanishing cloud of dust.

The bit of camping had come to an end. They reflected on the fact regretfully as the cart jerked and jolted in and out of the deep ruts. They wondered how much that bit of camping had accomplished. They wondered how much of the seed which had been sown would bring forth a visible harvest. What was the net result of the three months' tour ?

It is difficult to estimate the result of any kind of work in this world. One's vision is too limited ; one's knowledge is too partial. It is peculiarly difficult in the case of evangelistic work such as " camping " stands for. If the only result for which one looked were immediate and definite conversions which could be tabulated as a certain numerical increase in the

Christian community, it would be easy. But such conversion is not by any means the only result. Camping seems often to be rather a necessary "preparing the way," a sending forth before His face into every place whither He Himself is about to come.

The needed preparation takes place in the mind and heart of the camper. The contact with the simple everyday lives of the village women leads to a knowledge of their thoughts and needs, their hopes and fears, without which it is almost impossible to present Jesus Christ to them in terms that they can understand. The friendships formed in camp foster desire and longing, without which, perhaps, souls cannot be won. The preparation takes place in the minds and hearts of the villagers, for the visit of the campers quickens in them new thoughts and desires, new aspirations and dissatisfactions. It leads them into a new attitude towards the messengers and the message, which provides new opportunities in the future. Such results are not estimated easily or immediately. Chhoti at least realized this, and she was content to wait and allow the future to show what had or had not been accomplished.

The end of that bit of camping marked the end of Chhoti's camping days. Throughout the hot weather and the rains she was busy with zenana and school work in Malwar itself; for the regular zenana worker was away on furlough. At the beginning of the next cold season, Panchi asked Chhoti as to her plans.

" Of course I get rather rampant for the villages at times, but it has been a real pleasure to get back to old friends and pupils and to find them so much further on than in the old days. I must stick to them till their own Miss Sāhiba comes back at Christmas."

" Perhaps you'll get in some camping after that ? "

" I don't think so. You see the near villages seem rather important just now, and I don't quite see how to leave them."

It was true. Work in the near villages was at a rather different stage from what it had been the previous year, and the camping was in part responsible for this. The thirst for knowledge which had seized Dākhā had led to a weekly visit to Sandeshpur, where half-a-dozen eager women wrestled with the intricacies of the Hindi alphabet, and seemed peculiarly open to receiving Christian teaching. There was the same keenness for reading and willingness for Christian teaching at two of the Malwar out-stations, and in one of the two were a number of enquirers amongst the leather-workers who needed teaching such as Chhoti had given in Jaipur some years before. Part of the sweeper community just outside the walls of Malwar had been bitten with the same desire for learning, and some of them were even asking for baptism. Two other would-be disciples needed much teaching, advice, and help. They had yet to be brought to the point of open confession, and Chhoti felt she must be " on the spot " to help them when they needed.

One of these two—Rumāli—had been away when they had visited her village from camp. She had once walked into Malwar for the express purpose of being taught Christian hymns, but when they visited her village, chiefly for her sake, she was away ; the rest of the village seemed scared ; scarcely a soul was willing to listen, and the visit seemed quite profitless. But shortly afterwards Rumāli's mother had visited Chhoti and told her of her daughter's desire to learn to read and write, and to learn the way of religion as contained in the Christian hymns. She told of Rumāli's unhappy marriage, of her resolution never to go back to a man whose wickedness had appalled her. She hinted at her own thought that on the whole the safest thing for her daughter would be to become a Christian. She begged Chhoti to come to the village and teach her, and before long Chhoti was paying a weekly visit to Rumāli's village and Rumāli was paying a weekly visit to Malwar, and seemed to be very near to an open declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

It almost seemed as though a little bit of the harvest had begun. It seemed to be the time for putting in the sickle rather than for the broadcast scattering of seed.

So all that cold season, and through the hot season and on into the rains, Chhoti did the thing that was nearest, and week by week entered the names of the same half-a-dozen villages in the village register, glad of the opportunity for the systematic teaching of the

few, though her heart longed also after the more informal teaching of the many. Such desires, which could find no other outlet, found one in prayer.

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And then she passed to the place of open vision ; the place of unfettered service ; the place of solved problems and painless desire. One's thought tries to follow her into her new life. Is it so very different from the old ? Are there no links between the old and new ? Do human love and desire still hold ? What of the questions which perplexed, and the problems that grieved ? Have the perplexity and the grief vanished in the fuller light of God's love and power ? One's thought is not equal to the task, and has to sink back on the faith that she has attained her desire, that she sees His face, that she does Him service ; and that she waits with us in expectation of the breaking of "a yet more glorious day," when—

> The saints triumphant rise in bright array,
> The King of Glory passes on His way—
> Hallelujah ! "
>
> " From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
> Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
> Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—
> Hallelujah ! "