BENGAL

BENGAL (or, as it is often more precisely designated, "Lower Bengal"), the largest and most populous of the twelve local governments of British India, comprising the lower valleys and deltas of the Ganges and Brahmaputra, lies between 19° 18′ and 28° 15′ N. lat., and between 82° and 97° E. long. Excluding Assam, which was erected into a separate administration in February 1874, Bengal now includes the four great provinces of Bengal Proper, Behar, Orissa, and Chhotá or Chutiá Nágpur; and forms a Lieutenant-Governorship with an area of 203,473 square miles, and a population of 64,444,379 souls. Including Assam, which, until the spring of 1874, was a part of Bengal, the area was 248,231 square miles, and the population 66,856,859. This great lieutenant-governorship, excluding Assam, contains one-third of the total population of British India, and yields a revenue of £17,687,072, or over one-third of the aggregate revenues of the Indian empire. It is bounded on the N. by Assam, Bhután, and Nepál; on the S. by Burmah, the Bay of Bengal, and Madras; on the W. by an imaginary line running between it and the adjoining lieutenant-governorship of the North-Western Provinces, and by the plateau of the Central Provinces; and on the E. by the unexplored mountainous region which separates it from China and Northern Burmah. The territory, thus hemmed in, except at its north-western angle, by the unchangeable land-marks of nature, consists chiefly of two broad river valleys. By the western one, the Ganges brings down the wealth and the accumulated waters of Northern India. The eastern valley forms the route by which the Brahmaputra, after draining the Thibetan plateau far to the north of the Himálayas, and skirting round their passes not far from the Yangtse-Kiang and the great river of Cambodia, ends its boisterous journey of 1800 miles. These valleys, although for the most part luxuriant alluvial plains, are diversified by spurs and peaks thrown out from the great mountain systems which wall them in on the north-east and south-west. They teem with every product of nature, from the fierce beasts and irrepressible vegetation of the tropics, to the stunted barley which the hill-man rears, and the tiny furred animal which he hunts within sight of the unmelting snows. Tea, indigo, turmeric, lac, waving white fields of the opium-poppy, wheat and innumerable grains and pulses, pepper, ginger, betel-nut, quinine and many costly spices and drugs, oil-seeds of sorts, cotton, the silk mulberry, inexhaustible crops of jute and other fibres; timber, from the feathery bamboo and coronetted palm to the iron-hearted *sál* tree—in short, every vegetable product which feeds and clothes a people, and enables it to trade with foreign nations, abounds. Nor is the country destitute of mineral wealth. The districts near the sea consist entirely of alluvial formations; and, indeed, it is stated that no substance so coarse as gravel occurs throughout the Delta, or in the heart of the provinces within 400 miles of the river mouths. But amid the hilly spurs and undulations on either side, coal, and iron and copper ores, hold out a new future to Bengal, as capital increases under the influence of a stable government, and our knowledge of the country becomes more exact. The coal-fields on the west have for exactly a century been worked by English enterprise; in 1868 they yielded 564,933 tons, and more in the two following years. In the east, the coal measures of Assam, which province was separated from Bengal in 1874, still await the opening out of the country and improved facilities of transport. The climate varies from the snowy regions of the Himálayas to the tropical vapour-bath of the Delta and the burning winds of Behar. The ordinary range of the thermometer on the plains is from about 52° Fahr. in the coldest month to 103° in the shade in summer. Anything below 60° is considered very cold; and by care in the hot weather the temperature of well-built houses rarely exceeds 95°. The rainfall also varies greatly; from 500 to 600 inches per annum at Chará Púnji (Cherra Poonjee) on the range between Silhet and Assam, to an average of about 37 inches in Behar, and about 65 inches on the Delta.

THE RIVERS.—But the secret of Bengal is its rivers. These untaxed highways bring down, almost by the motive power of their own current, the crops of Northern India to the sea-board,—an annual harvest of wealth to the trading classes, for which the population of the Lower Provinces neither toil nor spin. Lower Bengal, indeed, exhibits the two typical stages in the life of a great river. In the northern districts the rivers, like our English ones, run along the valleys, receive the drainage from the country on either side, absorb broad tributaries, and rush forward with an ever increasing volume. But near the centre of the provinces the rivers enter upon a new stage of their career. Their main channels bifurcate, and each new stream so created throws off its own set of distributaries to right and left. The country which they thus enclose and intersect forms the Delta of Bengal. Originally conquered by the fluvial deposits from the sea, it now stretches out as a vast dead level, in which the rivers find their velocity checked, and their current no longer able to carry along the silt which they have brought down from Northern India. The streams, accordingly, deposit their alluvial burden in their channels and upon their banks, so that by degrees their beds rise above the level of the surrounding country. In this way the rivers in the Delta slowly build themselves up into canáls, which every autumn break through or overflow their margins, and leave their silt upon the adjacent flats. Thousands of square miles in Lower Bengal annually receive a top-dressing of virgin soil, brought free of expense a quarter of a year's journey from the Himálayas,—a system of natural manuring which renders elaborate tillage a mere waste of labour, and which defies the utmost power of over-cropping to exhaust its fertility. As the rivers creep further down the Delta, they become more and more sluggish, and their bifurcations and interlacings more complicated. The last scene of all is a vast amphibious wilderness of swamp and forest, amid whose solitudes their network of channels insensibly merges into the sea. Here the perennial struggle between earth and ocean goes on, and all the ancient secrets of land-making stand disclosed. The rivers, finally checked by the dead weight of the sea, deposit their remaining silt, which emerges as banks or blunted promontories, or, after a year's battling with the tide, adds a few feet or, it may be, a few inches to the foreshore.

The Ganges, which enters on the western frontier, and runs diagonally across Bengal, gives to the country its peculiar character and aspect. About 200 miles from its mouth it spreads out into numerous branches, forming a large delta, composed, where it borders on the sea, of a labyrinth of creeks and rivers, running through the dense forests of the Sundarbans, and exhibiting during the annual inundation the appearance of an immense sea. At this time the rice fields to the extent of many hundreds of square miles are submerged. The scene presents to a European eye a panorama of singular novelty and interest;—rice fields covered with water to a great depth; the


82
86
90
94
28
24
20
NEPAL
GREAT TIBET
BHUTAN
Various Independent Hill Tribes
Mishmis
Singpho or Chakatta
Lutchoties
Daphlas
Akhas
Nagas
Garos
Khasias
Kukis
Lushai Hills
Naga Hills
Manipur
Cachar
Sylhet
Tipperah
Hill Tipperah
Chittagong Hill Tracts
Arakan Hill Tracts
Arakan
Pegu
Burma
BAY OF BENGAL
Mouths of the Ganges
Sandoway
Scale — 108 Miles = 1 Inch.
Geographical Miles 60 = 1 Degree
100 50 0 50 100
English Statute Miles 69·16 = 1 Degree.
100 50 0 100
Railways thus
East of Greenwich

ears of grain floating on the surface; the stupendous embankments, which restrain, without altogether preventing, the excesses of the inundations; and peasants in all quarters going out to their daily work with their cattle in canoes or on rafts. The navigable streams which fall into the Ganges intersect the country in every direction, and afford great facilities for internal communication. In many parts boats can approach by means of lakes, rivulets, and water-courses, to the door of almost every cottage. The lower region of the Ganges is the richest and most productive portion of Bengal, abounding in valuable produce. Another mighty river by which Bengal is intersected is the Brahmaputra, the source of whose remotest tributary is on the opposite side of the same mountains which give rise to the Ganges. These two rivers proceed in diverging courses until they are more than 1200 miles asunder; and again approaching each other, intermix their waters before they reach the ocean. The other principal rivers in Bengal are the Ghagra, Son, Gandak, Kusi, Tistá; the Húglí (Hoogly), formed by the junction of the Bhágirathí and Jalangí; and farther to the west, the Damodar and Rúpnárayan; and in the south-west, the Mahánadí, or great river of Orissa. In a level country like Bengal, where the soil is composed of yielding and loose materials, the courses of the rivers are continually shifting, from the wearing away of their different banks, or from the water being turned off by obstacles in its course into a different channel. As this channel is gradually widened the old bed of the river is left dry. The new channel into which the river flows is, of course, so much land lost, while the old bed constitutes an accession to the adjacent estates. Thus, one man's property is diminished, while that of another is enlarged or improved; and a distinct branch of jurisprudence has grown up, the particular province of which is the definition and regulation of the alluvial rights alike of private property and of the state.

The People.—Within the provinces under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal dwell a great congeries of peoples, of widely diverse origin, speaking different languages, and representing far separated eras of civilisation. They amounted in 1872 (including Assam, which then formed part of Bengal), to 66,856,859 souls, or over a million and a quarter more than the whole inhabitants of England and Wales, Sweden, Norway, Denmark (with Jutland), Greece, and all the Ionian Islands, with the total white population, Indians and Chinese, of the United States. The problem of government in Bengal, however, is not one of numbers. It is intensified and infinitely complicated by the fact, that while this vast population is ruled by a single head, it consists of elements so dissimilar as to render it impracticable to place them under any one system of administration. They exhibit every stage of human progress, and every type of human enlightenment and superstition,—from the sceptical educated classes, represented by the Hindu gentleman who distinguishes himself at a London Inn of Court and harangues the British public in the Brighton Pavilion, or from a metropolitan platform, to the hill chieftain, who lately sacrificed an idiot on the top of a mountain to obtain a favourable decision in a Privy Council appeal. A large section of the people belongs to the august Aryan race, from which we ourselves descend, having a classical language more kindred to our own than those of the Welsh or Scottish Highlanders. We address the Deity and His earthly representatives, our father and mother, by words derived from roots common to the Christian and the Hindu. Nor does the religious instinct assume a wider variety of manifestations, or exhibit a more striking series of metamorphoses, among the European than among the Indian branches of the race. Theodore Parker and Comte are better known to the rising generation of Hindus in Bengal than any Sanskrit theologian. On the same bench of a Calcutta college sit youths trained up in the strictest theism, others indoctrinated in the mysteries of the Hindu trinity and pantheon, with representatives of every link in the chain of superstition—from the harmless offering of flowers before the family god to the cruel rites of Káli, whose altars in the most civilised districts of Bengal, as lately as the famine of 1866, were stained with human blood. Indeed, the very word Hindu is one of absolutely indeterminate meaning. The census officers employ it as a convenient generic to include 42½ millions of the population of Bengal, comprising elements of transparently distinct ethnical origin, and separated from each other by their language, customs, and religious rites. But Hinduism, understood even in this wide sense, represents only one of many creeds and races found within Bengal. The other great historical cultus, which, during the last twelve centuries, did for the Semitic peoples what Christianity accomplished among the European Aryans, has won to itself one-third of the whole population of Bengal. The Muhammadans exceed 20½ millions of souls; and the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal is, so far as numbers go, as great a Musalmán power as the Sultán of Turkey himself. Amid the stupendous catastrophes of the seasons, the river inundations, famines, tidal waves, and cyclones of the lower provinces of Bengal, the religious instinct works with a vitality unknown in European countries, where the forces of nature have long yielded to the control of man. Until the British Government stepped in with its police, and canals, and railroads, between the people and what they were accustomed to consider the dealings of Providence, scarcely a year passed without some terrible manifestation of the power and the wrath of God. Marhattá invasions from Central India, piratical devastations on the sea-board, banditti who marched about the interior in bodies of 50,000 men, floods which drowned the harvests of whole districts, and droughts in which a third of the population starved to death, kept alive a sense of human powerlessness in the presence of an Omnipotent fate with an intensity which the homilies of a stipendiary clergy fail to awaken. Under the Muhammadans a pestilence turned the capital into a silent wilderness, never again to be re-peopled. Under our own rule, it is estimated that 10 millions perished within the Lower Provinces alone in the famine of 1769–70; and the first surveyor-general of Bengal entered on his maps a tract of many hundreds of square miles as bare of villages, and "depopulated by the Maghs."

Popular Religions.—The people of Bengal, thus constantly reminded by calamity of a mysterious Supreme Power, have always exhibited deep earnestness in their own modes of propitiating it, and a singular susceptibility to new forms of faith. Great tidal waves of religion have again and again swept over the provinces within even the brief period of the Christian era. Islám was one of many reformed creeds offered to them, and several circumstances combined to render its influence more widely spread and more permanent than that of its rivals. It was the creed of the governing power; its missionaries were men of zeal, who spoke to the popular heart; it brought the good news of the unity of God and the equality of man to a priest-ridden and a caste-ridden people. Above all, the initiatory rite made relapse impossible, and rendered the convert and his posterity true believers for ever. Forcible conversions are occasionally recorded, with several well-known instances of Hindus becoming apostates from their ancient faith to purchase pardon for crimes. Such cases, however, were few in number, and belonged to the higher ranks. It would also appear that a Mughul adventurer now and then

circumcised off hand the villages allotted to him in fief. But it was not to such measures that Islám owed its permanent success in Bengal. It appealed to the people, and it derived the great mass of its converts from among the poor. It brought in a truer conception of God, a nobler ideal of the life of man, and offered to the teeming low castes of Bengal, who had sat for ages despised and abject on the outermost pale of the Hindu community, free entrance into a new social organisation. So far as local tradition and the other fragmentary evidence which survives enable a modern inquirer to judge, the creed of Muhammad was here spread neither by violence nor by any ignoble means. It succeeded because it deserved to succeed. Nevertheless, it has conspicuously failed to alter the permanent religious conceptions of the people. The initiatory rite separated the Musalmáns from the rest of the Bengali population, and elevated the heterogenous low-caste converts into a respectable community of their own. But the proselytes brought their old superstitions with them into their new faith. Their ancient rites and modes of religious thought reasserted themselves with an intensity that could not be suppressed, until the fierce white light of Semitic monotheism almost flickered out amid the fuliginous exhalations of Hinduism. A local writer, speaking from personal acquaintance with the Musalmán peasantry in the northern districts of Lower Bengal, states that not one in ten can recite the brief and simple *kalmá* or creed, whose constant repetition is a matter of almost unconscious habit with Muhammadans. He describes them as "a sect which observes none of the ceremonies of its faith, which is ignorant of the simplest formulas of its creed, which worships at the shrines of a rival religion, and tenaciously adheres to practices which were denounced as the foulest abominations by its founder." Fifty years ago these sentences would have truly described the Muhammadan peasantry, not only in the northern districts, but throughout all Lower Bengal. In the cities, or amid the serene palace life of the Musalmán nobility and their religious foundations, a few Maulvís of piety and learning calmly carried on the routine of their faith. But the masses of the rural Musalmáns had relapsed into something little better than a mongrel breed of circumcised low-caste Hindus. Since then, one of those religious awakenings so characteristic of India has passed over the Muhammadans of Bengal. Itinerant preachers, generally from the north, have wandered from district to district, calling on the people to return to the true faith, and denouncing God's wrath on the indifferent and unrepentant. A great body of the Bengali Musalmáns have purged themselves of the taint of Hinduism, and shaken off the yoke of ancient rural rites. The revival has had a threefold effect—religious, social, and political. It has stimulated the religious instinct among an impressionable people, and produced an earnest desire to cleanse the worship of God and His prophet from idolatry. This stern rejection of ancient superstitions has widened the gulf between the Muhammadans and the Hindus. Fifty years ago the Bengali Musalmáns were simply a recognised caste, less widely separated from the lower orders of the Hindus than the latter were from the Kulin Bráhmans. There were certain essential points of difference, of a doctrinal sort, between the Hindu and Muhammadan villager; but they had a great many rural customs and even religious rites in common. The Muhammadan husbandman theoretically recognised the one Semitic God; but in a country subject to floods, famines, the devastations of banditti, and the ravages of wild beasts, he would have deemed it a simple policy to have neglected the Hindu festivals in honour of Krishna and Durgá. The Bengali peasantry no longer look to their gods, but to the officer in charge of the district, for protection; and when he fails them, instead of offering expiatory sacrifices to Káli, they petition Government, or write violent letters to the vernacular press. The reformed Muhammadan husbandmen now stand aloof from the village rites of the Hindus. They have ceased to be merely a separate caste in the rural organisation, and have become a distinct community, keeping as much apart from their nominal co-religionists of the old unreformed faith as from the idolatrous Hindus. This social isolation from the surrounding Hindus is the second effect of the Musalmán revival in Bengal. Its third result is political, and affects ourselves. A Muhammadan like a Christian revival strongly reasserts the duty of self-abnegation, and places a multitude of devoted instruments at the disposal of any man who can convince them that his schemes are identical with the will of God. But while a return to the primitive teachings of Christ means a return to a religion of humanity and love, a return to Muhammadan first principles means a return to a religion of intolerance and aggression. The very essence of Musalmán Puritanism is abhorrence of the Infidel. The whole conception of Islám is that of a church either actively militant or conclusively triumphant—forcibly converting the world, or ruling with a rod of iron the stiff-necked unbeliever. The actual state of India, where it is the Musalmáns who are in subjection, and the unbeliever who governs them, is manifestly not in accord with the primitive ideal; and many devout Muhammadans of the reformed faith have of late years endeavoured, by plots and frontier attacks, to remove this anomaly. The majority are not actively hostile, but they stand aloof from our institutions, and refuse to coalesce with the system which the British Government has imposed on Bengal. Their rebel camp beyond our frontier has forced us into three expeditions, which has broken their military power; and the calm, inexorable action of the courts has stamped out the chronic abetment of rebellion by Muhammadans within Bengal.

Besides the 42½ millions aggregated under the name of Hindus, and the 20½ millions of Musalmáns, a great residue remains. These consist, with the exception of two very small bodies of Christians and Buddhists, of semi-aboriginal and distinctly non-Aryan races. They number over 3½ millions, equalling almost exactly the population of Scotland. These peoples dwell, for the most part, among the lofty ranges and primeval forests which wall in Bengal on the north, east, and south-west, or upon the spurs and hilly outworks which these mountain systems have thrown forward upon the lowlands. Some of them represent the simplest types of social organisation known to modern research. Their rudimentary communities are separated by religion, custom, and language from each other and from the dwellers on the plains. Many of them, till lately, looked upon war as the normal condition of human society, and on peace as an unwelcome temporary break in their existence. For ages they have regarded the lowland Hindus as their natural enemies, and in turn have been dealt with as beasts of chase by the more civilised inhabitants of the valleys. Within the present generation human sacrifice continued to be an obligatory rite among them—a rite so deeply graven upon their village institutions, and so essential to the annually recurring festivals of their religious year, as to seriously occupy the Indian legislature, and to require a special agency to suppress it. To this day instances of the detestable practice occur; and their extreme jealousy of anything like foreign rule renders it the wisest policy to leave them as much as possible under their own hamlet communities and petty chiefs. Nevertheless, they form the most hopeful material yet discovered in Bengal for the humanising influences of Christianity, and of that higher level of

morality and religious hope which Christian missions represen

Government.—Nor are the diversities in race and religion among the 66¾ millions of Bengal less marked than their different capacities for self-government, and the varying degrees to which they can be subjected to administrative control. They exhibit every stage of political development, from the great municipality based upon English models, with powers of self-taxation and a public debt of its own, down to the primitive hill hamlet, which pays no rent, acknowledges no higher tenure than the aboriginal one of priority of occupation, clings to its ancient system of nomadic husbandry, and is scarcely aware of any power superior to that of its own tribe fathers. Including Assam, which up to February 1874 formed a part of Bengal, the territories under the Lieutenant-Governor consist of five great provinces, each of which speaks a language of its own, and has a separate political and ethnical history. For administrative purposes these five provinces are divided into 58 districts, of which 36 are regulation districts, whose advanced state has rendered it expedient to place them under the complete system of Anglo-Indian law; while 22 are non-regulation districts, in which this has not yet been found practicable. The latter contain territories of three distinct classes. The first of them consists, for the most part, of newly-acquired territory, to which the general regulations have never been extended in their entirety. The second, of tracts inhabited by primitive races specially exempted from the operation of the regulations, to whom a less formal code of law is better adapted. The third, of semi-independent or tributary states, administered, or partly administered by British officers. The management of the whole is firmly concentrated in a single man, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, who is answerable to the Government of India, and through it to Her Majesty's ministers and Parliament. His responsibility is divided by no executive council, as in Madras or Bombay. All orders issue through his secretaries in his own name; and although his policy is subject to the watchful control of the Government of India, represented by the Viceroy, yet to the Lieutenant-Governor personally belongs the reputation or disgrace of a successful or an inglorious administration. In making laws for his people he is assisted by a legislative council, composed partly of his principal officers, partly of leading members of the non-official European and Native communities. In his legislative, as in his executive functions, a power of control, amounting if needful to veto, rests with the Government of India—a power which, from the English talent for harmonious proconsular rule, is very seldom exercised. The administration is conducted by a body of covenanted civilians, supplemented by a few military officers in the less civilised districts, and aided by a staff of subordinate officials. The civilians are appointed direct from England, enter into a bond with the Secretary of State, and give securities for the discharge of their highly responsible duties. In 1871 they numbered 260 men. The military officers belong to the staff corps of the Bengal army, and are employed to the number of 52 in the backward tracts, which do not require so exact an administration, and cannot afford to pay for the cost of it. The subordinate district officials are appointed in Bengal by the Lieutenant-Governor, and consist chiefly of natives and Anglo-Indians; but several departments, such as the educational, telegraph, and public works, are now officered to a certain extent by gentlemen engaged direct from England. The revenues raised in the territories under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal amounted in 1871–72 to £17,687,072. Of this sum, £16,713,636 accrued from the imperial taxes laid on by the Government of India, and £973,436, from provincial, municipal, and rural taxation. The total cost of government was only £6,338,968, leaving a surplus from this single one of the Indian local governments of £11,348,104. It is scarcely too much to say, that so long as the British power retains the port of Calcutta and the rich provinces under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, it would have sufficient revenue to effect the reconquest of India if any accident should happen in the Panjáb or north-west. The vast income which the Lower Provinces yield is not altogether derived from their people. China pays an annual tribute of over 5 millions in the shape of opium duty, and the inland parts of India contribute about a third of a million to the customs of Bengal. Taking the total thus obtained from other territories at a little over 6 millions, the population under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal pays, in round figures, 11½ millions a year, or about 3s. 5d. a head. This includes imperial, provincial, municipal, and rural taxation of every sort.

The return which the Government gives for this light taxation may be briefly summed up as follows:—It assures to the provinces absolute protection from foreign enemies. The army employed in the territories under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal numbers only 11,554 officers and men, exclusive of a detachment of Madras Native infantry stationed at Cattack, in Orissa, and numbering about 600 men—making a gross total of troops in Bengal of about 12,000 men. Of this small force 4662 are massed in Calcutta and its environs, with a view to their proximity to the sea-board, rather than with an eye to the internal requirements of the country; 6892 guard the frontiers, with detachments on the line of railway, which now forms the great highway of Bengal; a detachment of about 600 effective troops of the Madras Native infantry is stationed in Orissa. Taking 12,000 as the total military force stationed in Bengal, 3000 consist of European troops and English officers, and 9000 of Native officers and men. The Government is a purely civil one, the existence of any armed force being less realised than in the quietest county of England; and of the 66¾ millions of people under the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, probably 40 millions go through life without once seeing the gleam of a bayonet or the face of a soldier. Internal order and protection to person and property are secured by a large army of police. This force consists of two elements: a regular constabulary introduced by the English Government, numbering 33,913 men in 1871, and costing £584,059 to the state; and an indigenous police developed out of the rural watch of the ancient Hindu commonwealth, numbering 184,645 men, and costing £435,336 a year, paid by grants of land, or by the villages and landowners. The total number of the Bengal police amounts therefore to 217,558, or one man to every 307 of the population; and, excluding uninhabited swamps and hill jungles, about one policeman to each square mile of area. This minute supervision costs just over a million sterling a year, being at the rate of £4, 2s. 1½d. per square mile, or 3½d. per head of the population.

A great system of state education has been rapidly developed since 1854. In 1871–72 the Government and aided schools numbered 4383, with 7292 teachers, and 163,280 pupils,—maintained at a total cost of £194,716, of which Government contributed rather under one-half, or £89,649. The total annual cost of education per pupil was £1, 12s. 9d., of which Government bore under one-half, or 15s.; the remainder being obtained from school fees, local subscriptions, &c. Besides these, there were 10,907 ascertained schools not receiving aid from the state, with 11,026 teachers, and 169,917 pupils. In addition to these, there is a vast number of petty hedge schools in Bengal, of which no statistics exist. The total of state and *ascertained*