

missionaries admittedly do not interfere with caste distinctions. They object only to those caste customs which are distinctly idolatrous. Conversion in most cases means an accession of respectability, and is accompanied by facilities for education, assistance in getting employment, and the like.

The increase in the number of converts has been most remarkable in the Panjab and in Madras. In the former province, Hinduism has given 40,000 converts to Mohammedanism during the last decade, and nearly three times that number to Christianity. It is interesting to note that in Upper India the Methodist Mission of America has had by far the largest measure of success, for it has 104,000 converts. The Lord Bishop of Calcutta, who is also the Metropolitan of India, has been amazed at this unexpected movement among the masses in Madras and the Panjab. He is reported to have said that hundreds of thousands could be admitted as converts if the church had the necessary workers.

## RABINDRA NATH TAGORE.

THE POET LAUREATE OF INDIA.

BY KSHITISH CHANDRA NEOGY.

THIS is the felicitous appellation which was conferred on Rabindra Nath Tagore by Lord Hardinge two years ago after an appreciative address by the Rev. C. F. Andrews at the Vice-regal lodge. Great as has been the renown of Rabindra Nath as the foremost poet of modern India, it has to be confessed that the rapidity with which the fame of the newest star in the poetic firmament has been traveling over civilized earth, has surpassed the sanguine expectations even of his admiring countrymen. Indeed, the sudden acclamation in the West of Rabindra Nath Tagore as a world-poet of the first magnitude, has made a few critical spirits in India shake their heads in doubt and weigh and scrutinize the meed of praise that has been bestowed on this illustrious son of Ind. Whether the halo that surrounds him to-day will endure is more than one can say. And these Indian critics are inspired with the fear that what appears to be natural splendor radiating from a lustrous gem of the Indian deep, may, after the excitement of the passing hour has spent itself, prove to be but the illusive effect of some handy optical stage device, impressed into service at the impatient call of the

goaded desire of the West for something fresh and quaint in the way of stimulants.

It would appear that the poet himself shares these misgivings. Speaking at a *conversazione* at the Ram Mohan Roy Memorial Library in Calcutta, some time before his recent trip to the Occident, Rabindra Nath Tagore said that it all seemed to him like a dream. And he was not quite sure that the present enthusiasm in Europe about his poetry might not turn out to be merely an ephemeral "cult" that was to be rudely brushed aside in favor of a more engaging one to-morrow. There was however no unreality—not a tinge of insincerity or patronizing condescension—about the attitude of those friends who chaperoned him, as it were, in the intellectual society of the West. The modest bard did not claim any striking merit for the translations which first turned the attention of European literary men on himself: "It was just an essay to taste and enjoy my old drink in a new cup." And the translations were not originally inspired by any desire that they ever should see the light of day on Britain's shores. There were, the poet continued, other poems of an earlier date, more delicately wrought, more tuneful and charming, which he could have given to the English-speaking world, if he had at all set his mind on European fame. It was therefore a wonder to him how brother poets and discerning critics of Europe could extol his translations in the way they have done. It might be possible, added the poet, that they were carried away by undue zeal and were in the wrong. Even the award of the Nobel Prize for literature, which was a great epoch in an Asiatic poet's life, could not be said to truly determine the merits of his writings. Time alone was the true judge, if a bit stern; and the poet was not sure what its verdict would be about his productions.

Overwhelmed as the poet has been by the eulogy and benediction with which he has been greeted from all quarters, he does not seem to be quite happy with his Indian audience. After his first return from Europe, Rabindra Nath was received everywhere in India with affectionate regard. But he seemed to suspect that much of the honor showered on him, particularly in his native province of Bengal, was but the echo of the tributes of praise that were unstintedly rendered to his genius in the West. "The mission of the poet is to touch the heart," observed Tagore, and if he had succeeded in achieving that he would be proud and thankful. But what he prized above all was the sincere appreciation of his work by his own countrymen. And he would consider it a good fortune if he could win the love and esteem of his brethren at home. If he had

done anything for his country he felt that he could claim the love and good-will of his people. But he would certainly not expect from his countrymen a mere echo of the sentiment of the West. If the honor they showed him in India did not carry with it the love and good wishes of the mother he would throw it away, just as a loving child flings away a toy given by its mother when it is discovered to be a mere fake. It might be said that a poet was oftentimes more honored by posterity than by his own generation. But, the poet observed, posthumous fame had no attraction for him. He hungered for the love and affection of his country, and if his fellow countrymen could offer him these he would be quite satisfied. He thoroughly detests the tinsel sheen of honor, for it has nothing of warmth in it.

It may be interesting to note that, although the most popular poet of India, Rabindra Nath Tagore is not altogether a favorite with a certain school of criticism in Bengal. His originality and mysticism seem to have been beyond the depth of these critics, whose standard of measurement of poetic genius was borrowed from a past generation. The number and influence of these detractors however is not such as to justify Dr. Tagore in charging his countrymen in general with slowness of appreciation or want of gratitude. Even before he first sailed for the West the Bangiya Sahitya Parisat (the Academy of Bengali Literature), being the foremost and most representative institution of its kind in India, gave him such a public reception in Calcutta as might turn a viceroy green with envy.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### OUR INDIA NUMBER.

We take pleasure in presenting in this issue a number of articles relating to India and treating the subject in many different phases. The authors are all prominent men in their various fields, but as all may not be equally known to our readers a few words of introduction will not be out of place.

Mr. William Alanson Borden writes on "The Religions of India" from the point of view of a student who has had opportunity for close observations. He spent the three years from 1910 to 1913 in the native Indian state of Baroda which is about the size of Massachusetts. He was invited there by the wise and public-spirited native ruler of Baroda for the purpose of instituting a system of free public libraries throughout the state. The story of what he was able to accomplish in establishing circulating and traveling libraries and training librarians for their administration was told in the December 1913 issue