

THE SIKHS, THEIR LAWS, AND THEIR CUSTOMS.

BY SURENDRA KARR.

ONE of the main reasons for the recent passage of the Rowlatt bills is apprehension that the Indian soldiers returning from the battlefields of France might join the revolutionists who are working for the independence of India. The Rowlatt bills incorporate all the previous measures designed to keep India pacified, and, besides, permit the ordinary police to exercise unlimited powers in interpreting freedom of thought, press, speech, and assemblage.

More than a million and a half of India's soldiers participated in the struggle to make the world safe for democracy. Many of them fought, bled, and died. The rest have returned, their minds filled with pictures of that portion of France from Neuve Chapelle to Givenchy which has been drenched with Indian blood. They also remember their countrymen who gave their lives—for what?

Earlier in the year, we read in the papers of riots and disorders in India. Since then, things seem to have quieted down again. Still, an editorial in the *London Times*, of April 15, may still bear quoting. It says:

"From the reports it is clear that by far the worst trouble was at Amritsar, the great and wealthy city in the Punjab, which is the religious capital of the Sikhs."

The Sikhs were the last to be conquered by the British, and with their awakening, the entire edifice of the British Empire in India would be endangered.

It is, indeed, fascinating as well as instructive to study the Order of the Sikhs. To understand the Sikhs it is necessary to get acquainted with the philosophy of their ideals and their conception of life.

Although the British Indian government recruits a large number of forces from the Sikh community, they were not militaristic in their nature when Nanak founded the Sikh religion.

Nanak tried to accomplish what was later attempted in a different way by Akbar, the great emperor-statesman (1556-1605). Akbar, though born in the Islamic faith, intended to create a common bond of understanding between all the peoples of India, forgetting and rejecting all the differences and accepting all that was best in the various creeds. He made an effort,

"To gather here and there
 From each fair plant, the blossom choicest grown,
 To wreath a crown, not only for the King,
 But in due time for every Mussulman,
 Brahmin and Buddhist, Christian and Parsee,
 Through all the warring world of Hindustan."

Had Akbar's aim been understood by his descendants, the history of India would have been written differently. "Heresy to heresy, orthodoxy to orthodoxy; *but the rose petal's dust belongs to the perfume-seller's heart.*" that was the feeling of Akbar, as aptly expressed by his historian, Abul Fazl.

Nanak was born in Talvandi near Lahore in 1469. He died in 1538, a few years before Akbar's birth. Unlike Akbar's, however, Nanak's interests were purely religious. His aim was to bring the Hindu and Moslem faiths on to a common ground, so their mutual detestation would naturally die out. He began to preach, in popular dialect, the doctrines he had formulated. His gospel gathered together pariahs and gentry alike. His was One God who does not recognize caste, color, or creed. Moslems may call him Allah, Hindus, Ishvara, and Christians, God; but He is the same. In Nanak's conception, there was no Hindu and no Mussulman. In the background of his philosophy is the essence of Hinduism which seeks the unity of all religions. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism embraces and includes all that is best in all, and never tries to extirpate the noble tenets of other religions.

Nanak was stirred in his early life by the teachings of Kabir, who was a follower of Ramananda. Ramananda again was the principal instrument in spreading the philosophy of Ramanuja, one among the two other revivalists of Hinduism in the Middle Ages, Shankara and Madhavacarya. Shankara was a monist; Ramanuja, a dualist; and Madhavacarya, a qualified dualist. The difference between Ramanuja and Madhavacarya is insignificant, excepting the method of approach. Ramanuja makes the distinction between Jivatman and Paramatman, i. e., the small self (individual soul) and the Great Self (Supreme Soul); while Shankara firmly upholds that there is but one Self, i. e., Brahman, the Absolute. He says:

"I have no death or fear, no distinction of caste;
 No father, no mother, no birth;
 No friend or relation, no master or disciple.
 I am the soul of Knowledge and Bliss,
 I am Shiva, I am Shiva" (i.e., the Absolute, Infinite).

Now, Ramanuja accepts the theory of Shankara, but lays stress on the theory that the small self can attain the highest stage of Self through proper functioning of its nature. The devotional element became the predominating factor in the Ramanuja school. It gave rise to a new Vaishnavite sect, whose preachings were that everybody is equal in the eyes of God. As the reactionary rise of the priestly power, with their superstitious rituals and exercises which excite the imagination of undeveloped minds, at one time pushed aside the most exalted ethics of Gautama, the Buddha, the revolutionary messenger of equality, liberty, and democracy, the Vaishnavites under Ramananda and Kabir gathered around them a large number of followers from all classes of people who put a ban on intellectual abstractions like Shankara's theory.

Kabir's field of work was in Benares, the center of Hinduism. Here he found a strong rival of his doctrine in the proselyting religion, Islam, which, besides, was supported by political power. However, instead of antagonizing the Moslems, he taught: "God is One, whether we worship Him as Allah or as Rama. The Hindu God lives at Benares, the Mohammedan God at Mecca; but lo, He who made the world lives not in a city made by hands. There is one Father of Hindu and Mussulman, One God in all matter." In this way he unified the various creeds, and the Hindu-Moslems fraternized with each other. The light of love of Kabir enlightened young Nanak, who, following in the footsteps of Kabir, aroused the central and northwestern parts of India.

Nanak did not believe in caste, and ceremonies of worship he strongly condemned. The liberal-minded people flocked to him, proclaiming the doctrine of equality and fraternity. Devotional doctrines appeal to the people much more quickly than anything else, either elevating them to be active and loyal to the right cause, or causing them to degenerate into slavish inertia. Both Kabir and Nanak urged their followers not to become ascetics, but to go on with their ordinary daily avocations. "One God, whose name is True, the Creative Agent without fear, without enmity, without birth, without death," was the belief of Nanak. He did his best to convince the Hindus and Mohammedans that the only salvation for them was in obliterating their differences. He left no stone unturned to induce them to forget all distinctions of sex, caste, and sectarian feelings. Like Buddha, Nanak revolted against the invidious distinction of caste and the formalism of the priestly class.

Nanak laid the foundation-stone of Sikhism, which was built up by the nine other Gurus ("teachers") who followed him in the pontificate. His adherents came to be known as Sikhs ("disciples") and their creed as Sikhism. In the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, the doctrines of the Sikhs spread all over upper India; many conversions were made and a community was thus organized.

After the death of Nanak, Angad became the second Guru. He is said to have invented the script, Gurumukhi, in which the dialect spoken by the Sikhs is written. Many Arabic and Persian words have been introduced into this language, but Sanskrit words in very modified forms predominate.

The third Guru, Amar-das, took a strong stand against the caste system, and it is said that he would never receive any one who had not dined with a person of another caste.

The fourth Guru, Ram-das, built the beautiful city of Amritasars ("Fountain of Immortality"), where the Golden Temple of the Sikhs draws the travelers from all parts of the world. The temple is built of marble inlaid with precious stones and, in places, overlaid with gold, and is reflected in the adjoining artificial lake, where the devotees take their daily ablutions.

The fifth Guru, Arjun, son of Ram-das, collected the inspiring sayings of the Gurus into a great book, called the *Granth Sahib*, the bible of the Sikhs. Selections from the works of the Bhagats (saints), both Hindus and Moslems, were included in this collection, thus putting them all on a level. It was in the year 1581 that he ascended the *gadi* (chair) of his father. During this time Jahangir (1605-27), the son of Akbar, began to show antipathy toward the movements that were striving for a union between the two communities, the Hindus and the Mohammedans. Arjun, restless and spirited as he was, was put to death owing to his opposition to the divided policy of the Moslem ruler. This stirred up the Sikh community, and they found it necessary to make plans for their own safety.

The sixth Guru, Har-Govind, son of Arjun, appealed to his followers to prepare themselves to defend the defenseless and to put an end to the aggression of the aggressors. He himself adopted the practice of wearing two swords in order to signify his dual role of spiritual as well as military leader. He advocated the policy of *mens sana in corpore sano*, emphasizing that spiritual development must go hand in hand with good health.

Guru Teg-Bahadur, son of the sixth Guru, Har-Govind, strove to consolidate the Sikh community. He was beheaded, in 1675, for

espousing the cause of the Hindus who, in fear of forceful conversion by the Moslem rulers, sought shelter with him. More and more did oppression and persecution open the eyes of the Sikhs, causing them to band themselves together and to develop a martial spirit.

Guru Govind, son of Teg-Bahadur, called upon the Sikhs to organize into a disciplined army to fight the battle for freedom. By this time, the upper classes of the Hindus had widely embraced the Sikh faith. The heroic Rajputs, the philosophic and warlike Kshatriyas, the Jats, the peasants, the tailors, the barbers, the washermen and the like, they all could be found in the ranks of the Sikhs. Guru Govind knew how to fan the fire of enthusiasm and all joined hands as comrades in arms as they were comrades in faith.

A story is told how the Guru called a big assembly of the Sikhs and stirred up the people by his declaration that he wanted five human heads, to be offered by those who were true to the principles of their creed. "Come on," he called, "whoever wants to offer his head on the altar of freedom." The people were electrified, for lo, there came one calmly on to the platform. Pin-drop silence prevailed. Guru Govind took him away to the back of the stage. With bloodstained hands he reappeared, beckoned to the audience and made an eloquent appeal: "I want four more heads." Nerves began to break, brains to fag; but the heroic ones were determined enough to stand the trial. One after the other, the four offered their heads. Many more were eager to sacrifice their heads for the cause, but to their great disappointment they were refused. After washing his hands, Guru Govind again came out on the platform and said: "Brethren, I am pleased with your enthusiastic response to my appeal. You have stood the test patiently and heroically. With your cooperation and the five heads, we shall be able to save our freedom, faith, and honor. I am convinced that death cannot scare us, nor can fear reside within us, for life is death and death is life when we rightly understand the mystery of life. Rest assured that upon your corpses will rise a nation of immortals." There was a silence, and then amidst the outbursts of wildest enthusiasm, the five sacrificed ones appeared on the platform. Instead of taking the heads of his disciples, the Guru had only killed a few sheep to show the blood.

Guru Govind introduced a system of initiation, called *khanda-di-pahul*, baptism by the sword. Those who were initiated were named *khalsa*, the elect. Caste was entirely abolished, and everybody became a warrior, taking a solemn vow to fight for the faith

to the death, and to regard every other member of the league as a brother (*bhai*). Thus the Sikh Brotherhood became an army of heroes as unconquerable as Cromwell's Ironsides.

The Khalsa were asked to wear as articles of dress: *kesh* (hair), *khanda* (dagger), *kanga* (comb), *kara* (bangle), and *kuchh* (breeches). *Kesh* represents the vow that the hair will not be shorn until freedom is attained. It used to be the custom in those days to make a promise in this fashion. *Khanda* and *kuchh*—the sword and the breeches—indicate a soldier. *Kara* signifies the iron ring that has to be put around the enemies. *Kanga* serves two purposes—a practical one, the long hair may be held together by it, and a symbolical one, reminding its wearer that watchfulness should be as pointed and many-sided as the teeth of a comb. The Sikhs still wear these articles of dress. At the instance of Guru Govind, they now also adopted the surname Singh, i. e., Lion. They were strictly forbidden to indulge in smoking and drinking.

This politico-religious body, under Guru Govind Singh, became a well-organized and disciplined army and had many successful encounters with the troops of the Mogul Aurang-Zeb (1658-1707). Guru Govind and his four sons finally met their fate at the hands of their enemies (1708). Banda, the successor to Guru Govind, though not appointed by him, carried on successful campaigns with vigor and strength until 1716, when he suffered a disastrous defeat. The military power of the Sikhs was thus disorganized, and so was their political life; yet, though well-nigh exterminated, the spirit with which they were born remained alive.

After the death of Aurang-Zeb the Mogul Empire began to disintegrate. The throne of Delhi began to totter at the onrush of the Mahrattas in the south and of the British in the east. Newer elements entered the political history of India. The Persians and the Afghans invaded the country from the northwest. At last the Sikhs saw a splendid opportunity to regain and reassert their power. Left to themselves, they reoccupied all their lost territories, drove the Afghans out of the country, and kept them at a safe distance. This was the time when, on a solid foundation, they could at last build up a national state of their own. Both men and women took the sword as their profession.

The democratic ideas embodied in their religious beliefs were introduced into their political organization. Two small republics, called Taran Dal and Budha Dal, were established. The village became the unit of administration, and a council of five, *panchayet*, elected by popular vote of both men and women, administered

justice and peace. Taran Dal and Budha Dal were subdivided into twelve petty states or *misl*s. The states were organized on democratic lines, but decentralization took the place of a strong central control. Consequently they became too individualized and began to look with jealous eyes upon each other.

Having nobody to fear, the Sikhs, for the time being, lapsed into repose and idleness. Their former spirit began to wane, and degeneration set in.

During this critical period of Sikh history, Ranjit Singh was born, in 1779, of the Sukarchakia clan. Though only a lad at his father's death, he saw a great peril hovering over the destiny of the Sikhs. The British, in the meantime, had been crushing the Mahratta power, surrounding the Punjab from both the east and south. In the northwest, the Persians, Afghans, and Russians were hatching plans for the invasion of India.

Ranjit Singh's aim, therefore, was to unite all the Sikhs in one centralized state. In 1799, by rendering a good service to the Amir of Afghanistan, he secured possession of Lahore. Ten years later he scored a diplomatic success over the British with whom he concluded a treaty enabling him to give his undivided attention to rounding out and consolidating his possessions in the Punjab. It may be interesting to know that one of his most formidable opponents was his mother-in-law, Sadakour, who was the head of the Kanhaya clan. In those days, women of India used to take active part in politics, as some of them are taking now. One by one Ranjit brought all the separate bodies of Sikhs under his scepter, subduing all turbulent elements, including a slave girl who had raised a large force and made a gallant stand against him. His ambition was realized and the Sikhs were united under a common central government.

For a time, it seemed best to the British to let Ranjit Singh alone. Russia lying ever ready to invade India, in cooperation with Afghanistan, they would have preferred to keep the Punjab under Ranjit Singh's sway as a buffer state. But his suspicion and distrust of British policy in India were deep-rooted, and the great majority of the people shared his views. He had to wait, however, for an opportune moment to strike. In accordance with the wise counsel of his minister, Aziz-u-Din, he postponed crossing the river Sutlej, the boundary of the British sphere of influence, in order to make more thorough preparations.

Ranjit realized that in order to fight the British he must train his soldiers along Western lines. He therefore invited two French-

men to his capital, Ventura and Allard, distinguished officers of Napoleon's army, and with their help reconstructed his whole army, especially the artillery. Owing, however to the ominous advance of the Russians through Persia to the borders of Afghanistan, he finally signed a new treaty with the English, thus maintaining friendly relations with them to the end. Had Ranjit lived long enough, perhaps he would have conquered and annexed a large portion of Afghanistan, against which he directed several campaigns.

Ranjit Singh died in 1839. He left behind him a united Sikh Confederacy, and a disciplined army of 60,000 troops.

In 1842, the British lost their prestige in India in the Afghan campaign. At last, in 1845, the Sikhs crossed the Sutlej, and all but succeeded in winning the victory. But in 1849 they were finally subdued, and all that had still remained free of India came under British suzerainty.

This, in rough outline, is the history of the Sikhs, whose doctrines were non-military in their inception but who were forced by circumstances to become militaristic.

Fear and death are unknown to the Sikhs. Their conception of death is the union of the soul with God. Their funeral hymn sets forth the ideal which they practise:

"In the House where God's praise is sung, and He is meditated on, sing the Sohila and remember the Creator.

"Sing the Sohila of my fearless Lord: I am a sacrifice to the joy by which everlasting comfort is obtained.

"The year and the auspicious time for marriage (i.e., the mystic marriage of the soul with God) are at hand, meet me my friends: anoint me with oil like the bride. Pray, my friends, that I may meet my Lord. The message comes to every house. The invitation goes forth every day.

"Remember the voice of the Caller, Nanak, the dawn is at hand."

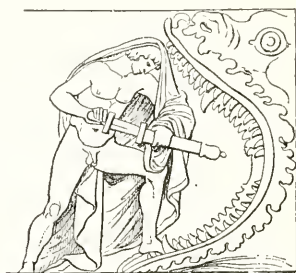
Who can doubt that the Sikhs will play an important part when the principle of self-determination will at last be applied to India? Who can doubt that they will not apply, in the future government of India, the principles of democracy with which the Sikh Order was established? To-day the differences between Hindus and Moslems are submerged in a common national and political consciousness. The two groups are united in a spirit of cordiality, in order not only to preserve India as a national unit, but also for the emancipation of India and the safeguarding and promotion of her

culture and civilization. In April last, the Mohammedans went to the Hindu temples and the Hindus to the Mohammedan mosques, to pray and plan for the protection of their national rights and interests. Such an event is unparalleled and unprecedented in the history of India. The Sikh Order proves that that bugbear of Indian hopes, caste system and religious antagonism, resides only in the pamphlets and speeches of imperialistic propagandists and missionaries. The work of Akbar, the statesman, and Nanak, the teacher, cannot but infuse a spirit of harmony in all faiths of the Indian nation. We may patiently watch the events.

THE COSMIC MOUTH, EARS, AND NOSE.

BY LAWRENCE PARMLY BROWN.

IN mythology the underworld is generally conceived as a vast cavity or cave, with its entrance mouth on the western horizon where the sun, moon, and planets set; while these luminaries are supposed to rise through an exit orifice in the east, otherwise an entrance to the upper world—most words for mouth also having the broader



HERACLES ENTERING THE DRAGON'S MOUTH.

(Etruscan vase picture of Perugia.)

significance of an orifice or opening, generally as an entrance to a cavity, sometimes as an exit from the same. But all the stars of the visible heaven rise and set (with the exception of those in the arctic circle having the north pole of the ecliptic as its center), whence it was natural that some should recognize the whole horizon circle as the vast mouth of the underworld figure that swallows nearly all the celestial bodies and again vomits them forth.