

ENCLOSURE I.

Extract from the chapter on 'Rents, Wages and Prices' of the Muzaffarpur District Gazetteer, 1907.

PRODUCE RENTS.

Rents are generally paid in cash, but they are paid in kind for a small percentage of the area under cultivation. Non-occupancy *ryots* and under-*ryots* pay produce rents for 19 and 61 per cent, respectively of their holdings, but the area held by these classes of tenants is comparatively insignificant; and such rents are paid for only 7 per cent of the land held by occupancy and settled *ryots*, which accounts for no less than 82 per cent of the holdings. Where produce rents obtain, it is because the crops are precarious owing to the land being exposed to inundation or deterioration; and mango groves which bear fruit only at intervals are also frequently held under the same system. Rents are paid in kind more largely in the south than in the north of the district, and are most common in the Hajipur, Mahuwa and Lalganj thanas, where the area held on produce rents is 13.2, 11.6 and 7.5, respectively of the cultivated land. In Hajipur a considerable area consists of Gangetic *diaras*, where the crops are liable to be washed away by a sudden rise of the river. In Mahuwa there are numerous lakes, which serve the purposes of drainage areas, and the crops grown there in dry seasons are liable to be swamped by sudden floods. In the Lalganj thana again the land to the west is exposed to inundation from the Gandak. Not only are the drainage basins more numerous in the south, but the demand for land is greater, and cultivators are therefore tempted to take up land on terms which they would decline in less congested areas. This competition for land is, in fact, the main cause of the prevalence of produce rents, as it induces cultivators to settle for land on which the crops are very precarious.

BATAI SYSTEM.

There are three ways in which produce rents are paid, viz., by the *batai*, *bhaoli* and *mankhap* systems. Under the *batai* system the actual produce, including the straw, is divided between the landlord and tenant; generally each receives half of the crop, but occasionally it is divided in the proportion of $\frac{7}{16}$ ths to the *ryot* and $\frac{9}{16}$ ths to the landlord, or $\frac{5}{11}$ ths to the *ryot* and $\frac{6}{11}$ ths to the landlord. The crop is either divided on the field, in which case the practice is known as *bojh-batai*, because the landlord and tenant each get a fixed share of the sheaves (*bojha*), or the division of the produce takes place on the threshing floor and is called *agor-batai*, because the crop has to be carefully watched (*agorna*) to prevent pilfering.

BHAOLI SYSTEM.

Under the *bhaoli* system the crop is appraised in the field before it is reaped, and the value of the landlord's share is paid by the tenant either

Susta.—Also known as Susta *Bibah Panchmi mela*. It is held during *Aghan Bibah Panchmi* day. An important cattle fair is held in this *mela*.

Turki.—This *mela* is held at village Turki, police-station Kurhani. This is commonly known as *Sri Mahadeva mela*. It is held in early May and although religious in character it is marked by a large sale of cattle.

(Some purely cattle fairs are also held among which Madhurapur, Sonebarsa, Barharwa, Babhangama, Bagaha and Manikchak *melas* are more important.)

in grain or cash. This system is not so common as the *batai*, which is the most prevalent in the district, though appraisement is generally more advantageous to the landlord, both because there is no pilfering and because he can bring pressure to bear on the cultivator to secure a favourable appraisement.

MANKHAP SYSTEM.

The *mankhap* system of rent payment is a peculiar system, found mainly on the estates of the Raja of Sheohar in the thana of that name and on the estate of the Sursand Ranis in the Pupri thana: it is especially common in the Sheohar thana, where as much as 6.6 per cent of the holdings pay produce rents. Where it prevails, the tenant binds himself to pay annually a fixed amount of grain ranging in the case of rice from 8 to 12 maunds per acre, whatever the outturn may be. As a rule, the *mankhap* is paid on certain specified plots in the holding, usually on about 3 *kathas* in the *bigha*; but in some cases the tenant pays a fixed annual amount on the total area in addition to his cash rent. This system appears to be a comparatively modern innovation, and is not found in the more highly developed parts of the district, but only in areas reclaimed during the last century. It differs from the ordinary system of payment of rent in kind, in that the demand does not adjust itself to good or bad seasons; and it is in this respect that it is so inequitable, as whether his crop is a bumper one or an utter failure, the tenant has to pay the amount agreed upon. It is not surprising therefore that it is exceedingly unpopular, and that the *ryots* regard it as equivalent to cultivating their lands free of cost for the landlord. Fortunately the evil is a very limited one, as the lands held under the system are few in number; they are situated in a part of the district where rents are low; and they consist almost entirely of paddy-fields, which generally give a good outturn.

CASH RENTS.

The average rates of rent paid by the several classes of *ryots* and under-*ryots* are as follows:—*Ryots* at fixed rates, Rs. 3-11-11; occupancy and settled *ryots*, Rs. 3-12-3; non-occupancy *ryots*, Rs. 4-9-0; and under-*ryots*, Rs. 4-5-8 per acre. The average incidence of rent per acre for *ryots* of all classes is Rs. 3-13-6.

Rents are higher in the south than in the north of the district, where the demand for land has developed at a comparatively late date. In the case of occupancy and settled *ryots*, who form the great majority of the cultivators, none of the thanas in the south, except Paro, return a rate of less than Rs. 4 an acre, while none of the thanas in the north return a rate higher than this. The rate of rent is highest in the neighbourhood of Hajipur, where poppy, tobacco, potatoes, etc., are grown on land which is never fallow and which often produces four crops in the year. Rents vary, however, not only with the character and situation of the land, but also according to the caste and position of the cultivator, and a tenant of high caste pays less than one of lower social rank.

ENHANCEMENT OF RENTS.

Compared with the neighbouring districts, Muzaffarpur does not occupy an unfavourable position as regards rent rates, in spite of the large increase which has taken place since the Permanent Settlement. Mr. Stevenson-Moore is of opinion that, speaking broadly, rent rates have increased 100 per cent in the past three-quarters of a century; and observes that though the increase of zamindari assets has been largely obtained by the reclamation of waste and the expansion of cultivation, there can be no doubt that enhancement of rent rates has been also an important factor leading to this result. Whatever the cause, whether it was the depopulation of Tirhut by the great famine of 1770, or its general inaccessibility and backwardness, the fact remains that half a century ago the rents were very light; and this fact greatly conduced to and also justified the subsequent increase. The two main methods by which enhancements have been obtained have been by partition and arbitrary increase of rent rates. Partition has been the main cause of the increase, and it is noticeable that with hardly an exception the most excessive enhancement of rent rates has taken place in the villages that have undergone partition. There is generally a keen desire on the part of proprietors of joint estates to get their shares separated by partition, and the result is the creation of a large number of petty landlords, who are unable to keep up their position, but who try to do so by squeezing as much as possible from their *ryots*. The other great cause of enhancement has been the way in which zamindars have been able to tamper with rent rates, enhancing them at their own pleasure and in a purely arbitrary way. Consequently, rent rates, even where they exist, have often little or no relation to the quality of the soil.

The *ryots* of large proprietors enjoy the greatest security with regard to tenant right, and the *ryots* of small proprietors the least: while the *ryots* of large tenure-holders enjoy the most privileged rent rates and those of small tenure-holders suffer the most excessive. The large tenure-holders are generally indigo-planters, and their policy is to leave rents alone, so long as land is given for indigo; and the rate is highest in estates held by petty lease-holders or *thikadars*.

PAYMENT OF RENTS.

Rents are usually paid in four instalments, except in the case of very petty zamindars, who generally do not adhere to any fixed instalments, but realize their entire demand as soon as they can. The first instalment is due in the month of Asin or October, when the *bhadoi*, the first harvest of the agricultural year, has been reaped. This instalment (*kist*) is invariably one-fourth of the total annual rent. The second is levied in Aghan or Pus (December), when the winter rice crop is reaped, and varies from one-fourth to half of the rental according to the extent of the rice land. The next instalment is paid in Chait (April) and varies from two to six annas; and the last is in Baisakh or Jeth (May), when the *rabi* crops have been reaped and threshed; in some cases it is

one-fourth and in some one-eighth of the total rental. A portion of this last instalment is frequently realized when the harvesting of the *bhadoi* crop is begun in September.

WAGES.

Statistics of the wages given for certain selected classes of labour during the ten years 1892—1901 will be found in the Statistical Appendix*. From this statement it will be seen that, even in so short a period, there has been a general rise in the rates paid for labour. This is most marked in the case of skilled labour, which now commands a higher value than it did formerly. Among masons, carpenters and blacksmiths the wage shows an upward tendency; the silversmith charges a higher rate for his workmanship; and the shoemaker and tailor have raised their tariff. The rise is gradual, but is clearly observable; and it appears to be due to a combination of circumstances, such as an advance in the standard of comfort among the natives of the better class, the opening of new lines of railway, and the resultant communication with large centres of industry.

Outside urban areas the wages of labour generally maintain much the same level from year to year, and this is particularly the case with unskilled labour. But, even here, there has been a noticeable increase in the daily wage obtained by the labourer during the last generation. Adult male labourers, who 30 years ago used to receive only 4 pice, now get 8 Gorakhpuri, or *lohia* pice; women get 6 pice where formerly they were paid 3 pice; and boys are paid a daily wage of 4 to 5 pice instead of 2 pice. This class therefore has not been seriously affected by the corresponding increase in the price of food; and they are moreover, to a great extent, secure from suffering on that account, as wages in the villages are still usually paid wholly or partly in kind. A ploughman is paid 2 annas for half a day's work, but besides this, he is given for breakfast half a *kachcha* seer (5 chittacks) of some inferior grain like *marua*, *makai*, etc. In all agricultural operations prior to reaping, except ploughing, a labourer, when paid in kind, gets 4 *kachcha* seers of one of the cheap grains, such as unhusked coarse paddy, *marua*, *makai*, *khesari* and *kodo*. When paid in cash, he gets 8 Gorakhpuri or *lohia* pice, besides one-eighth of a seer of *makai* for his breakfast. When engaged in transplanting, labourers are usually fed once a day on coarse rice and pulse. Weeding is done at a period when the cultivators' circumstances are straitened, and the labourers sometimes have to accept a little less food. At the current prices of the grain in which labourers are paid either in whole or part, the average wage in cash would be $1\frac{1}{2}$ anna, except for transplanting, when it equals to 2 annas. From the time of reaping agricultural labour is everywhere paid in kind. In reaping and threshing the labourer gets one-eighth of the produce reaped. The remuneration for the person who watches crops is 5 *dhurs*, or $\frac{1}{80}$ th of the gross produce. In the case of *makai*, when the cultivator adopts the unusual practice of employing some one else to watch the crop, a double wage is paid, the responsibility being so much greater.

*Not quoted (P. C. R. C.)

Carpenters, blacksmiths and other members of the village community, who indirectly assist cultivation, are also paid in kind for their labour, and it is estimated that they absorb altogether $\frac{1}{40}$ th of the gross produce. On the whole, it may be said that $\frac{1}{40}$ th of the gross produce of all food-crops goes to defray the cost of watchmen, village artisans, etc. This system is particularly suited to an agricultural country like Muzaffarpur, as it has the advantage of being unaffected by any rise in the price of food-grains. Whatever the fluctuation in the price of these, the labourer's wage remains the same.

LABOUR SUPPLY.

It is estimated that the supply of labour exceeds the demand by 68 per cent, and that there is labour for about one-third of the female labouring population after the male population has been satisfied. In these circumstances, the continuance of the indigo industry has a very important bearing upon the labour problem, as will be seen from the facts and figures quoted by the Settlement Officer. He showed by calculation that indigo requires four and a half times as much labour as other crops, an acre under indigo giving employment to 172 labourers, while an acre under ordinary cultivation would only give employment to 39 persons; and he stated, on the authority of the Secretary of the Association, that the concerns of the Indigo Planters' Association had indigo on 74,214 acres and employed an average of 35,000 labourers per diem throughout the year. The industry has suffered terribly since that time (1901) from the competition of the artificial dye; several factories have been closed or have reduced their cultivation; and it is stated in the final forecast of the indigo crop of 1905 that the area under cultivation in 1904 was only 35,000 acres, and that the area estimated as sown in 1905 had fallen to 25,000 acres. According to the above scale, this means that over 24,000 persons have been thrown out of employment, of whom only about 5,500 can have found employment on the cultivation which has taken the place of indigo. The decline of the industry has also had a serious effect on the wages obtained for labour; for, according to statistics prepared by the Director-General of Statistics, the number of persons employed in indigo factories increased from 1891 to 1896 and then fell, while the wages of agricultural labourers rose steadily till the latter year, and then fell from Rs. 4 to Rs. 3.

At the same time, the planters complain that far from there being an excess of labour, they suffer from a serious deficiency. Rates have gone up, and they are already inconvenienced by the emigration which takes place to the eastern districts every year. Further, the consequence of their changing from indigo to sugar and other country crops has been that they need labour at the same instead of at a different time from that at which the ordinary zamindar and cultivator require it.

PRICES.

A statement of the prices current in each subdivision during the years 1893—1902 is given in the Statistical Appendix. It is interesting

to compare these prices with those obtaining a century ago, and to realize how enormously the value of food-grains has risen. On the 1st December 1799 the price of the finest *arwa* rice was 32½ seers, and of *sathi* rice 1 maund 5 seers per rupee; and in 1803, a year of scarcity, the cheapest rice sold at 1 maund 3 seers and the dearest at 20 seers per rupee, while the same sum could purchase 2 maunds 10 seers of barley. From the statement in the Statistical Appendix it will be seen that during the decade ending in 1902 the price of rice in the head-quarters subdivision was never less than 16 seers per rupee. Although, however, the price of staple food-grains has increased so greatly, the value of labour has also risen; there has been a great growth in the income of all classes; and during the last generation the development of communications has had the effect of levelling prices over larger and larger areas. Thirty years ago there was no railway in the district, but now each subdivision is bisected by a branch of the Tirhut State Railway, which places them in direct communication with the great granaries of India. There is consequently less variation in the prices of food-grains in different parts than formerly; and the failure of the crops has a tendency to be less felt, as well as the effect of failures in isolated tracts. Besides this, a great quantity of the labour is of an agricultural character and is paid in kind, so that the high prices affect a large section of the community less than would otherwise be the case.

FAMINE PRICES.

In the famine of 1866-67 the maximum price of rice was Rs. 8 per maund; and in 1873 prices were much higher than this in the beginning of January. On the 10th of that month the cheapest rate at which rice could be bought was Rs. 3 a maund, while barley, the cheapest grain in the district, fetched Rs. 2 a maund. The highest price of common rice reached during this famine was Rs. 5-12-0 a maund. In the famine of 1897 the price of common rice went even higher. In 1895-96 prices were below the normal up to July 1896, when they began to rise, the price of common rice going up steadily from that time from 11 seers to 10, 9 and 8 seers per rupee; the last figure was reached in the head-quarters subdivision in December 1896, in Sitamarhi in March 1897, and in Hajipur in April 1897. When it came to be realized that the *rabi* crop would be insufficient for the support of the people, prices rose again, and in July 1897 the price of common rice in Sitamarhi reached 6½ seers the highest recorded anywhere in the district during that famine or at any other time.

MATERIAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE.

Writing in 1877 the Collector of Muzaffarpur described the people as pinched and stinted, partly by reason of over-population and partly through the *thikadari* system and the insufficient protection the rent law afforded the *ryots*. In good years the majority of the *ryots*, he said, enjoyed a bare sufficiency of the necessities of life, and in years of short

outturn they suffered privations and sunk deeper and deeper in debt: Nine years later the Collector painted their condition in even blacker colours.

“ Extreme poverty ”, he wrote, “ is undoubtedly the lot of the great majority of the inhabitants of the district. The prevailing poverty is accompanied by a degree of dirt and sordidness in the personal habits of the people and of grinding penuriousness, which I have not seen in other parts of India. The circumstances of the lower classes have approached dangerously to the limits of destitution ”. Since that time the district has passed through the searching test of famine, which, straining as it does all their resources, is perhaps the best test of the prosperity of a people so dependent on the soil. The famine of 1896-97 furnished a striking demonstration of the general improvement which had taken place during the last generation, and showed that the picture drawn a decade before of the wretched condition of the people was either overdrawn or no longer represented the existing facts.

Nowhere did the famine of 1873-74 cause greater suffering than in the district of Tirhut, which comprised both Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga; and we have it on the authority of Sir A. P. MacDonnell that the *ryots* of that district were so impoverished, so utterly without resource, and so unable to bear up against the failure of a single season's crop that one-third of the population was at one period in receipt of relief from Government. In 1896-97, when the distress was at its greatest, more than three-fifths of the persons receiving relief in the division belonged to the districts of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga; but instead of forming one-third of the population of those districts, they now formed less than 3½ per cent of it. The opinion of the Government of Bengal on this point is contained in the following extract from the Resolution on the Commissioner's report:—“ That under less favourable circumstances than in 1873-74, the numbers requiring Government relief should have been so much less would appear to establish the fact of general improvement in the general circumstances of the people, but the whole conditions of the relief administration during the two famines were so different that the inference is not so conclusive as it would have been had the same methods been adopted in both cases. Nevertheless the general experience and observations of the officers engaged in the famine, some of them with knowledge of facts, both then and now, as well as the concurrent opinions of non-officials acquainted with these provinces, do indicate that even in Bihar, during the past quarter of a century, there has been a considerable advance in material prosperity, and that the power of the country as a whole to withstand the calamities of seasons has greatly increased. ”

Equally striking evidence of the increased prosperity of the people is afforded by the results of the enquiries made by Mr. Stevenson-Moore during the last settlement operations. He found that there are, on an average, in each square mile 45 persons who cultivate as landlords, 496 pure cultivators, 171 cultivating labourers, and 81 pure labourers, and

that 90 per cent of this population live in ordinary years in a very moderate state of comfort. It would, he considers, require a succession of very bad seasons to bring the cultivating labourer or the pure cultivator in any numbers to destitution, and the danger grows yearly less; but, he adds, it is impossible to obscure the fact that indications exist of cultivators being starved out to make room for the increasing pressure on the soil of the superior castes and landlord classes. This tendency is inevitable in a district containing a rapidly increasing population of petty proprietors. There is no doubt that the agricultural development of the north is more pronounced than that of the south; and it may be said broadly that in the south and centre of the district, where the standard of cultivation is high, where irrigation is practised to some extent, and where the population is not wholly dependent upon the rice crop, the lower agricultural classes are fairly well off, but that in the north and west, where these advantages do not exist, these classes, though better off than their neighbours in many parts of the districts of Champaran and Darbhanga, are in but poor condition and are liable to suffer severely in times of scarcity.

The one class which justifies the account given above of the destitution of the people is that of the landless labourer. Spending what he earns from day to day, he has very little to pawn or sell in times of distress; he gets no credit from the *mahajan*; and he is the first to succumb if the crops fail and he cannot get labour. His total income is estimated at Rs. 10—15, or Rs. 2—6 less than the amount required to maintain him in a fair state of comfort, and the first indication of real distress throws him on the hands of Government. Pure labourers, however, form only 9 per cent of the total population, and manage both their meals by having for one of them cheap root-crops, like *alua* and *suthni* which usually sell very cheap at the season when there is little field work to be done, viz., in January and February. The agricultural classes are in a far better position, and have a resource unknown to the *ryot* of Bengal proper in the cultivation of indigo and opium. It has been calculated that on the whole the cultivation of indigo costs Rs. 40 per acre; and with the exception of Rs. 2 per acre for seed, which is obtained from the United Provinces, all the remainder of this cost is expended in the district. In this way, it is estimated, over 18½ lakhs were paid away in hard cash in the famine year 1896-97. The cultivation of opium is on a far smaller scale, but the amount it brings into the pockets of the cultivators is considerable. Those who undertake to grow poppy receive advances in cash from the Opium Department, and these advances are made at a time when money is most wanted. In the famine of 1896-97 nearly four lakhs of rupees were paid on this account to the cultivators, and no less than six lakhs were advanced in 1904-05.

Another matter which should not be left out of account in estimating the prosperity of the people is the extent to which they receive remittances from abroad. Large numbers of labourers migrate annually at the

beginning of the cold weather, in search of work on the roads, railways and fields in other districts, returning to their homes at the end of the hot weather, in time for the agricultural operations, which commence with the bursting of the monsoon; and besides this, a considerable number of the adult males are spread over other parts of India in *quasi*-permanent employ. All these persons make remittances to their homes, while those who migrate for a time bring back with them the balance of their savings. In this way, large sums of money are sent or brought into the district every year, and are expended in the support of the inhabitants. In the famine year 1896-97 over 15 lakhs were paid by money-order in Muzaffarpur, the money-orders being almost all for sums below Rs. 10, and the average about half that sum; and it appears certain that a very large proportion represented remittances sent by emigrants to their homes. Since that time the amount thus remitted has increased, and in 1904-05 the total value of the money-orders paid amounted to 23½ lakhs of rupees. Considering that the amount paid in 1896-97 was unusually large in consequence of the exceptional drain on the resources of the inhabitants, this increase may fairly be taken as an indication of growing prosperity.