

India Sees America

There is more poetry in "Caste and Outcast" (Dutton) than in most books of modern verse, and it is simply straightforward prose written by an Indian, Dhan Gopal Mukerji. Here is a story which at once combines a quality of eager intellectual adventuring with an unusual sense of how to marshal facts to create a readable

story. Mukerji is a Brahmin. He draws deep of the stars of Hindu learning. The early portions of his book dealing with his childhood are filled with poetic beauty and mysticism. This, for example:

I asked my father once, "Why music?"

He answered, "I don't know, but I think this. Once on a time there were nine stars and one of them was attracted by the life of the world and fell away to come to earth. No one knows what happened, but it lost itself in everything that lives. From time to time it cries out to the other eight stars; that is music."

Or this:

Toward midday we came to where the Himalayas began to tell us everything: we heard the booming of the cataracts falling from far up in the rocks, and the little rivers screeching, the moan of the tiger, and the screaming of the eagle, while above all, the vast white head of the mountains rose saying, "Nothing matters. Sit still. I have sat still thousands of years, and because I sit still the rivers flow, the eagles fly and the tigers call." Then for the first time I understood what was meant by silence and being.

After a life of prayer and meditation, wearing the saffron priest's robe, begging from door to door, meditating on the littleness of events and the greatness of God, imagine the change of scene when the young man finds himself in America.

Somebody directed me to a boarding house where I spent the night. When I was called to breakfast the next morning I noticed the sugar was missing from the table. When after some fuss the landlady produced the sugar, I said to her: "This reduces the entire discussion to a *reductio ad absurdum*", she exclaimed: "My God, what's that?"

Mukerji found himself quickly associated with radicals of one sort or another. Here we have a graphic picture of those young men who, in every country, I suppose, sit about tables, half starved, intensely curious and allow their souls to wander among the philosophical stars. What better pic-

ture of the case of anarchistic philosophy than this paragraph.

"Oh, yes!" Jerry said. "Man is a strange slave. If he is not the slave of love, he is indeed the slave of pity. If you arouse his pity he'll do anything for you. I seem to do nothing but arouse everybody's pity. I despise them for it. I am nothing but an occasion on which they exploit their own emotion. I continually feel like a victim."

Graphic enough, don't you think?

Presently, however, Mukerji, after his struggles to educate himself, becomes a respectable lecturer. He still remains, fortunately, a poet. This is a moving story and an appealing one. It is as good in its way as "Up Stream" and sounder in its conclusions.