

## MRS. BESANT'S INDIAN WORK

IN connection with the application of Theosophical truths to life in India, Mrs. Besant insisted on Indian members doing their utmost to change the social conditions of the country. With this in view, she organised in 1906 two associations called "Sons of India" and "Daughters of India". In 1912, a new departure was made by her in the Theosophical Order of Sannyasis. This Order is composed of Hindu Theosophists who take vows of renunciation like regular Sannyasis, but dedicate themselves especially to spread the message of Theosophy. At this time also, an organisation known as the Stalwarts was founded. The Stalwarts took a pledge to show by their personal example that they dissociated themselves from certain evil customs in the country like child marriage.

Elsewhere is narrated the attacks on Mrs. Besant and the Theosophical Society, which took place in 1913. Towards the end of this year, Mrs. Besant definitely began to work in the political field. In October and November, 1913, she delivered a series of stirring addresses, on social and political reform, which bore the general title of *Wake Up, India*. She founded also a weekly, *The Commonweal*, and definitely entered the political field in India, as long ago she had entered the social and religious fields. Next year, she purchased the *Madras Standard*, and changed its name to *New India*. The stirring history of her activities in this department need not be here recorded. But one result was that, throughout India, the public began to see that Theosophists are not a set of dreamers, but a body of devoted patriots, whose love for their Fatherland or Motherland is not less because



FIG. 181

MRS. BESANT IN 1915

they have a liberal attitude to religion, or an international outlook to problems of race. From this time onward, though Theosophists have been misunderstood repeatedly both by the Indian Government and the Indian public, it is however generally recognised that Theosophists aim, on the one hand at making India a Self-governing Dominion within the British Empire, while on the other hand they desire for all Indians the fullest freedom within their own Motherland.

Mrs. Besant's work for the political uplift of India roused against her the opposition of the Government, and orders of "internment" were served on her by the Government of Madras on June 16, 1917. Similar orders were served at the same time on her assistants G. S. Arundale and B. P. Wadia. On



FIG. 182

G. S. ARUNDALE



FIG. 183

B. P. WADIA

June 21st, Mrs. Besant went into internment at Ootacamund in the Nilgiris. There then ensued in city after city such vehement denunciations of the Government's action that finally, on the 17th of September, Mrs. Besant was released from internment. This

year she was elected President of the Indian National Congress, and she presided at its session in Calcutta. In her address in December as President of the Congress, she outlined certain "Problems of Peace" which were in urgent need of solution. These were: National Education, Reform in Penology, more just treatment of Labour, the uplift of the Submerged Classes, National Service for all, and an equal Standard of Morals for both sexes.



FIG. 184

MRS. BESANT

as Commissioner of Boy Scouts

In this year, just before Mrs. Besant went into internment, she organised a striking association called "The Order of the Brothers of Service". In this Order, the members of the highest grade contribute all their earnings to a common fund. No vows for life however are taken, and any Brother of Service can retire at will. One grade of the Order is composed of Lay-Brothers who donate one-tenth of their income. Since its organisation in 1917, the Brothers of Service have given invaluable aid in the development of the Theosophical Movement in India. But for their service, the educational work of the Theosophical Schools could not have been done. They have also worked most efficiently in various departments of the T. S., as also for the Order of the Star in the East. They are a select body of men and women with high



qualifications and capacities, taking vows of Renunciation, Obedience and Service, and recognising the Brother Server of the Order, Mrs. Besant, as their Head.

In 1918, another activity of Mrs. Besant was the organisation of the Indian Boy Scout Movement. Very able assistants in this work were F. G. Pearce and M. V. Venkateshwaran, who began the Scout Movement in Madras Presidency at Madanapalle. Later, Dr. Besant's Boy Scout Movement affiliated with the Baden-Powell Scout Movement in India, and to-day they form one body. The Indian Scouts wear turbans, while the Baden-Powell Scouts wear hats. On April 6, 1921, Mrs. Besant was appointed Honorary Commissioner for all India of the Boy Scouts Association.

In 1921 also, a signal recognition of Mrs. Besant's services to the cause of Indian Education was the conferring on her of the degree of Doctor of Letters by the Benares Hindu University. By the statutes of the University, none but Hindus can be on its governing body, but by special act of the Indian Legislature an exception was made in the case of Dr. Besant, and she is the sole person, not born a Hindu, who is on the governing body of the University. The Benares Hindu University began as the Central Hindu College which she founded.