

REPORT

ON THE

CENSUS OF INDIA, 1901.

CHAPTER I.

Distribution of the Population.

Introductory Remarks.

1. In respect of those decisive physical features which determine the course of the national movements of mankind, India may be described as an irregularly triangular or pear-shaped fortress, protected on two sides by the sea and shut in on the third by the great bulwark of mountain ranges of which the Himalaya forms the central and most impregnable portion.* As these ranges curve southward and westward towards the Arabian Sea, they are pierced by a number of passes, practicable enough for the march of unopposed armies, but offering small encouragement to the halting advance of family or tribal migration. On the east, though the conformation of the barrier is different, its secluding influence is equally strong. The ridges which take off from the eastern end of the Himalaya run for the most part north and south, and tend to direct the main stream of Mongolian colonization towards the river basins of Indo-China rather than towards India itself. On either frontier, where the mountains become less formidable, other obstacles intervene to bar the way. On the western or Iranian march, the gap between the Suleiman range and the Arabian Sea is closed by the arid plateaux and thirsty deserts of Makran; to the east, the hills of the Turanian march rise in a succession of waves from a sea of trackless forest. On either side, again, at any rate within historic times, the belt of debatable land which veiled a dubious and shifting frontier has been occupied by races of masterless men knowing, in the west, no law except that of plunder and vendetta; and in the east, owning no obligation but the primitive rule that a man must prove his manhood by taking the stranger's head. Along the coast line a different set of conditions tended equally to preclude immigration on a large scale. The succession of militant traders who landed on the narrow strip of fertile but malarious country which fringes Western India, found themselves cut off from the interior by the forest-clad barrier of the Western Ghats; while on the eastern side of the peninsula, the low coast, harbourless from Cape Comorin to Balasore, is guarded by dangerous shallows backed by a line of pitiless surf.

2. The country thus isolated by physical and historical causes comprises three main regions, the Himalaya or abode of snow; the Middle Land, or Madhyadesa, as the river plains of Northern India are called in popular speech; and the Southern table-land of the Deccan with its irregular hill ranges rising out of undulating plains. Each region possesses an ethnic character of its own, and has contributed a distinct element to the making of the Indian people. The Deccan, itself one of the most ancient geological formations in the world, has, since the dawn of history, been the home of the Dravidians, the oldest of the Indian races. The most recent of the three regions, the alluvial plains of the

Ethnic isolation of India.

Five main regions:
1. Himalaya.
2. River plains.
3. Deccan.

* Professor Huxley's comparison of the shape of India to "the diamond on a pack of cards, having a north angle at Ladakh, a south angle at Cape Comorin, a west angle near the mouth of the Indus, and an east angle near that of the Ganges," is possibly more accurate than that adopted in the text. It brings out the great projection of the Punjab and Kashmir towards the north and the long straight line of frontier which forms the north-western side of the diamond. On the whole, however, the triangular aspect seems to catch the eye more as one looks at a map and is thus better suited for descriptive purposes. Huxley's description is to be found in the first volume of the Journal of the Ethnological Society of London. It is curiously parallel to the 'rhomboid' of Eratosthenes and other Greek geographers.