CHAPTER VII

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES:
AGRICULTURE AND CRAFTS

The basic aim of the Christian missions in involving themselves in the fields of agriculture and industrial crafts was a step towards the self-support of the Christian community. In 1896 an article in the 'Quarterly Missionary Paper' stated, "One of the great methods of foreign missions, by which the majority of the human race are called to Jesus and trained in character to become Christian communities, is the establishment of agriculture and industry for young men and women, to work at farm or crafts, to form Christian households and extend Christian churches."

Wherever the missions were set up, their working was in accordance with a well set plan. To make Christianity stronger they looked to the economic welfare of the converts and created an impression upon others that acceptance of Christianity would mean material comforts to them. In a country with agricultural economy the missions could not be oblivious of the obvious fact that the economic well-being of their Indian community would depend primarily on agriculture and handicrafts and secondarily on other professions. The frequency of famines, starvation, epidemics and large number of deaths added importance to the productive economic activities. The establishment of orphanages, asylums and homes for the poor gave further impetus to the economic activities.

for their maintenance and support. The need for these in the Central Provinces was emphasised by 'The Missionary Intelligencer' in 1899 and by Dr. J. Sandilands of the Scottish Church at Bhandara in 1900 after the disastrous famine of that decade.

Alfred Taylor of the F.F.M.A. viewed the economic activities wholly from the evangelical point as they would offer an opportunity for the spread of the Gospel by close contact at the time of giving employment to the non-Christians. Rev. A. Hagensten of the E.S.N.A. held the view that the orphans should earn a considerable proportion of their maintenance themselves. Whatever may be accomplished through this would serve to make the children useful boys and girls for society.

With these diverse ends in view whenever a good number of farmers and workers outcasted from their society and totally dependent upon the missions became Christians, separate Christian villages were set up at several places in the Central Provinces. As early as 1888,

1. 'The Missionary Intelligencer' 1899, p. 270: "The leading thought in the industrial school is training the boys in useful occupations so that they shall be able to support independently themselves and their families. It is felt that this is a burning question to the native church. The industrial problem for those who have broken caste with their old religion must be solved before much can be hoped for in the way of self-support and self-propagation of the Gospel. It is the only remedy of demoralization and effeminacy. In connection with industrial training, care is taken to impress the boys with the truth that gain is all God's."

2. Letter from J. Sandilands to the Secretary of the Scottish Mission, dated Bhandara, July 31, 1900: "The subject is very important one, and it has now become an urgent one, for some of the children are becoming old, and should be in training immediately for their future, whatever it is to be. If we cannot begin at once to train the older children we may afterwards find that we are too late in beginning, and so far the reason, as well as for the fact that if we delay the site may afterwards not be available. I would urge that a decision in the matter be come to as soon as possible."

3. Taylor, A. in Our Missions 1899, p. 43.

Rev. Oskar Lohr of the E.S.N.A. purchased 1800 acres of land from the government at Bisrampur in Raipur District and started agricultural operations on large scale. In the same year Rev. A. Stoll acquired a lease of 18 acres at Baitalpur in the same district for 99 years for Rs. 300 and a rent of Rs. 25 per annum for a similar purpose. In the following year similar work was started at Simga village and 265 acres of land was bought at Ganeshpur by Rev. Nottrott for Rs. 300. The mission also owned many acres of fertile land at Parsabhader in the same district under the charge of Rev. A. Hagensten.

The Methodist Mission had 64 acres of land at Sironcha in Chanda District, with a yearly rent of Rs. 1½ per acre. John Lampard started cultivation at Nikkum in Balaghat District in 1897 which offered work to several families and some boys. Rev. C. B. Ward took up the work on 70 acres at Jagdalpur and on 52 acres at Autagarh in Bastar State. In Khandwa some of the older boys of the Burhanpur orphanage were engaged in agriculture on about 250 acres of land assigned to that orphanage. At Soghini village in Narsinghpur District 30 acres of land was freely and voluntarily handed over to the mission by the owners where boys from Narsinghpur orphanage were settled by Rev. J. O. Denning. A patch of 75 acres was added to it by the generosity of the Government for the support of the useful mission work.

At Damoh the Disciples received 400 acres of land for the orphanage from the Government on the basis of $ 90 per annum. Dr. Rambo was made in-charge of cultivation on that land. He used American ploughs for the purpose. In Bilaspur district a vast jungle land was purchased.

1. Folder 83-3-Hist. 62 : Beginning of Work; Bisrampur. E.S.N.A. Archives.
2. Penn, K.: Parsabhader. Folder 83-6, Pars. 25. E.S.N.A. Archives.
at Pendra village from its malguzar in 1897 and a village of Pindhridih near Mungeli was purchased by Dr. Anna Gordon with her own money. The G.M.S. held estate at Chiraidongri and Patpara in Mandla District under the charge of Rev. Champion. The Friends Mission established a Christian village at Bhatna in Hoshangabad District and acquired 200 acres of land for cultivation by its inmates. It also secured 800 acres of land at Seoni Malwa and Simordha and 960 acres of land at Lahi, Sali, Nandamwara, Khaparia and other 14 villages. The E.M.M.S.S. prepared a definite plan for the rehabilitation of the children brought in its fold during the famines. For this purpose three villages were purchased having 500 acres of land at Seja in Chhindwara District, 300 acres at Khurai in Sagar District and 400 acres at Amagohan in Betul District. These agricultural operations for rehabilitating the children baptised during famine years and providing work to the adult converts constituted the constructive and productive work undertaken by the mission organisations at school centres. Along with the agriculture, the gardening work was another important economic activity of almost all the missions. They grew a variety of vegetables and fruits to be used in the orphanages or sold in the market. The Disciples at Damoh and Mennonites at Dhamtari earned a good name in the gardening work.

On the mission fields all sorts of crops were grown such as wheat, rice, maize, jowar, gram, tilli and other oil-seeds and the pulses. For raising the output adequate arrangements were made for irrigation during its scarcity. Wells were dug, made canals, small streams were dammed up and irrigation tanks and reservoirs were built. To raise the products, water was made available to meet the need during its scarcity.

1. Taylor, A. in Our Missions 1899, p.43.
2. Polson, C. : Now and Then, p.44.
on the failure of rains. For boosting up production fertility of soil was improved, best seeds and manure were procured, the lands were cleared of all kinds of weeds and best agricultural implements were used. This well-organised cultivation and mission farms served as model for the neighbouring cultivating communities. The ownership of land belonged to the missions which had purchased or obtained as donation or acquired for purposes of cultivation. Thousands of acres of land in the Central Provinces had come to their possessions. The missions paid the assessed amount of money as revenue on the portions of land actually taken up for cultivation. Sometimes they distributed the land among the Christian tenants, collected rent from them, paid revenue to the government on commission basis and thereby made earnings for the missions.

As a result of these agricultural activities a huge quantity of grain was produced which was much more than the quantity required for feeding the small Christian population of the region. The surplus was sold in the open market. By this effort the Protestant Christian Missions solved the problem of feeding the orphans at different stations, without being much burden on them. The change in the methods of production with new implements brought about by the missionaries should have inspired the local cultivators to adopt it, but they hardly showed any interest in changing their traditional farming techniques with which they were familiar. Rev. K. W. Nottrott wrote that the village people were very much loath to exchange the agricultural customs of their ancestors for the new-fangled ideas of the White man which might be all right for Vilayat, but they would not like to do things that way. Thus the missions were the first to start scientific agriculture in the Central Provinces, but the village folk did not profit by their example for want of financial resources and conservative attachment to their own
modes. According to Rev. E. Rambo of Damoh much time was given to the study of methods in agriculture and kindred aspects relating to it, as a result of which extensive cultivation of the soil was possible and agriculture could be made a profitable undertaking. Dr. Sandilands of the Scottish Church, stationed at Bhandara, was not at first in favour of agricultural pursuits for his mission, for it seemed to him that it was the failure of agriculture that had thrown the destitute children on their hands. But soon his mind changed when he considered the issue in all its bearings.

Some research work in agriculture was also initiated by the missions which was highly appreciated and encouraged by the government. The Secretary to the Department of Agriculture asked the Christian mission at Damoh to grow better seeds for the district. In response to that a special quality of wheat was raised which came to be known as 'Damoh wheat' and became famous all over the Central Provinces. In the twentieth century its demand increased considerably. The orchards and gardens of the missions also received due recognition from the government for raising excellent fruit and vegetable crops. The careful use of seeds and the pruning and grafting of fruit trees by their workers elicited a great deal of appreciation, favourable comments and surprise. The Orange garden that came up in Narsinghpur District under the charge of Rev. J. O. Denning of the Methodist Mission set an example by which many were benefited. Rev. Jacob C. S. of the E.S.N.A. earned a good name as an accomplished botanist who knew how to handle various plants. Just for this scientific skill he was requested to take over the government garden at Raipur.

2. Letter from J. Sandilands to the Secretary of U.F.C.S. dated Bhandara, July 31, 1900.
4. Folder - Sketch No. 32-2, Gas 59, p.2. E.S.N.A. Archives.
Agriculture was not the only vocation which the missions organised for the Christians in the Central Provinces. Encouragement to craftsmanship was found no less important in their scheme of things. In the agricultural economy, agriculture and industrial crafts go together admirably well. Agriculture was not the whole time and all the year-round engagements of the people. Hence arrangements were made by several missions to provide training in the most popular crafts which may give the Christians a source for employment.

To provide employment for the educated young people coming out of the mission schools, Rev. Lohr began in 1880 to experiment with stones at Birsamur, preparing them for lithographic printing. He taught them to write letters in words inverted on stone slates from which pages were printed. The experiment was quite successful. Forty boys were trained for the job whom the prominent ones were Benjamin Manshi, Luth Burwa and Timothy Leknath. Huge orders were placed by the Government for the printing of forms. The mission press undertook type and lithographic printing in English and Hindi, and book binding at moderate rates. In 1881 its establishment expenses were Rs.1300 and income Rs.1500. The government extended its patronage to this press by placing huge orders for the printing of various kinds of forms used in the Government offices and the press opened a new vista for the employment of trained persons.

The D.C.I.M. selected Damoh as a centre for training in carpentry, blacksmithy and tailoring. A workshop was started in an 80 feet long and 40 feet broad hall. An air motor was erected there in 1898 to provide training in grinding and sawing. The workshop developed to such a state of efficiency that it received about 400 orders a year.

Rev. Rambo who was believed to have pioneered the industrial work in the mission compound, brought many sophisticated tools from America. In course of time provision was made in that workshop for training in shoe-making. Similar training centres were set up by them at Bilaspur and Mungeli.

The Methodists opened a big workshop at Marsinghgarh under the charge of Dr. Felt in 1897. It granted admission to a hundred boys for training in carpentry, another one hundred for shoe-making and twenty for tailoring. John Lampard started a training centre in carpentry at Beihar for Balaghat District.

A large industrial work was set up by the F.F.M.A. after the visit of Frederick Sessions. The Government engineers encouraged Samuel Baker of Hoshangabad to take up a project of tiles-manufacturing. For this purpose a plot was allotted to him and a guarantee was given to that the Government would purchase his products. In 1892 the F.F.M.A. started another workshop which undertook a variety of crafts such as cabinet making, carriage building, blacksmithy and repairs of all kinds, clocks, watches and small machines. It manufactured moulds for casting locks and door handles in brass, iron-hinges, mortising machines and lathes. In 1899, the industrial branch of this workshop was transferred to Rasulia village in Hoshangabad District where its work became quite conspicuous. The workshop received a valuable gift of a 15 horse power Robey Vertical steam engine from Messrs. J. H. Lohan & Co., Electrical Engineers of New Castle on Tyne and a planing machine from George Cadbury.

In 1897 Rev. Lundborg started a mission workshop at Sagar where many of the orphan boys were trained as smiths and carpenters. Lewis opened the same at Bhaisadahi in Betul District to train the Kurku
converts. Most of the expenses for the workshop run by the Mennonites at Dhamtari in Raipur District were paid by the Government, as it did work for the Government.

Another small scale industry taken up by the missions was the weaving work at those centres where raw cotton and weaving facilities were available. One such weaving centre was started at Hoshangabad in 1896 by George Swan in a little street of wooden frames thatched hunt on the mission compound. In 1897, it had 40 looms and 20 workers, all of whom were professed Christians. These looms were somewhat primitive in construction and were entirely worked by hands. The weaving work turned out cloth for kurtas and other garments for the majority of the people of that district. Among other customers to whom cloths were sold were the famous Pandita Ramabai, the Presbyterian Mission in Rajputana, the Church Mission, Jabalpur and the Swedish Mission, Sagar. The government also ordered 1000 yards for clothing the famine stricken destitutes in the the poor houses. The weavers were paid Rs. 6 a month with which they supported a family of five. Notable improvements were made in the weaving work in the subsequent years. New methods and instruments of weaving were introduced. George E. Clark prepared an adapted form of the fly shuttle handloom, which in the hands of a careful workman met the need of the time. This instrument was much appreciated by the people and the Government awarded a gold medal to its maker in the open provincial competition in weaving held in 1900.

The Methodists started the weaving of coarse cloth at Khandwa in 1898 for the use of the orphans. At Jabalpur the older orphans were taught weaving and the younger ones and girls, spinning and

sewing. At Sagar and Bhaibadehi in Betul District the F.N.M.S.S. and the Kurku Missions commenced carpet and cloth weaving respectively during the famine years.

Some missions took cattle farming to improve the quality of the livestock. At Damoh a dairy and piggery were started which were provided with English pigs and the best Indian breeds of cattle. Some boys in the farm were trained in milking, churning of milk and separate the cream and prepare cream and butter. Rev. A. Hagenstien introduced sheep-rearing. He maintained 150 sheep and the wool was used for preparing blankets for the use of the children of the orphanage at Parsabhader. Mrs. Swan of F.F.M.A. started a dairy at Itarsi. Rev. K.W. Nottrott of the E.S.N.A. initiated the breeding of silk worms at Chandkuri village in Raipur District.

Several other small-scale industries owned and managed by the missions provided employment to the Christians. Among those brick-making, tailoring, shoe-making, masonry, poultry, rope-making, stone-cutting, mat and basket making were quite popular. The women and the girls were engaged in cloth work such as making of tea cosies, tray cloth, cushions, twine and rope, buttons, thread works and phulkari or the flower work prepared with the indigenous silk and other materials.

All these agricultural and industrial undertakings were by no means exhaustive. Several other vocations were taken up to make the mission establishments and Christian colonies economically self-sufficient in respect of day to day basic needs of its people as much as possible. The Methodists purchased a forest from the Government to make charcoal and carted it to Jabalpur which provided work to a

2. Hagenstien, A. My Work in Chhattisgarh (Manuscript) Folder 82-17, Ch.42(1) E.S.N.A. Archives
considerable number of people. The oil-extracting was started by the Mennonites at Dhatari and by the F.F.M.A. at Itarsi. An oil mill was erected in order to provide employment to a large number and to make an article of home need locally available at moderate price. The oil taken out from the lin-seeds and cotton seeds was also used for preparing varnishes and paints. At Itarsi all kinds of tin goods were turned out and all varieties of small tin boxes, mugs, plates and other articles of domestic use were made. The missions also made supplies to the government. At Hoshangabad and Seoni Malwa the Public Works Department recognised the missions as their authorised suppliers of furniture to circuit houses, rest houses and government offices throughout the division. At Rasulia in Hoshangabad District two hundred sign posts were made for the Public Works Department and the post office building was made for the government.

The missionary economic enterprises opened many opportunities for the employment of local Christians and other people where the former were not available. They enabled the missions to meet the demand of their orphans and other Christians to a great extent. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the industrial works were greatly commended by both British and Indian officials and visiting European missionaries. At their training centres the boys learnt several vocations and gained a technical knowledge and practical experiences. The missions associated the skill and workmanship with the principles of honesty and right use of the hard earned money. They put up an example for the non-Christians to follow. They gave fillip to the small scale cottage industries as a source of economic strength to the country and its people. They were the first to arrange co-operative societies to cater to the demands of the people. They introduced machines and other modern equipments in the province.
Although the missionaries tried to use the western implements and teach the people new methods to turn out work at less expense and quickly than before, they found them very slow to give up the methods of their ancestors and agreed that changes must be brought about only gradually. George Swan was convinced that the missions could not overlook the fact that those whose families had practised one kind of trade for generations had better qualifications to accomplish that work more efficiently and heartily than the new techniques with which they were least familiar. Another problem which the missions experienced temporarily was the difficulty of disposing off goods manufactured in the Christian enterprises owing to the religious prejudice against the use of goods made by Christians, but the persistent efforts succeeded in overcoming that difficulty. After a couple of decades the people were more attracted by the variety, durability, and cheapness of the mission-made goods.

The missions put up much emphasis on sincerely performed hard work, for they believed that 'laziness is the cradle of sin'. They re-established the importance of work by equalising and dignifying vocations. A very special contribution of the missions to the economic problems was the introduction of a job-oriented education. They attached their farms and workshops to their schools and thus started a system of the industrial schools. Miss Carpenter suggested that in the education of the masses in India, industrial work should form an essential part. Connected with all vernacular schools there should be workshops adapted to the condition and wants of the locality. In these, the boys should receive good physical development by useful work and skilled labour, with an introduction to the simple laws of physical science.

1. Letter from George Swan to the Secretary of F.F.M.A., Box No. 378/26 Friends House.
The real missionary aim of spreading the Gospel could not be fulfilled through these economic institutions. There was a rare conversion of the workers or trainees to Christianity, because the missionaries did not use them as means to the conversion and did not exercise economic pressure on them to accept their religion.