

[Questions and Answers.]

(b) Apart from weaving, which is far the most important cottage industry in the Province, no scheme has yet been prepared for the development of such industries.

Bakrid prisoners
of Shahabad

The Hon'ble Babu Adit Prashad Singh asked :—

(a) Will the Government be pleased to lay on the table a statement showing how many of the convicts who were tried under the Defence of India Act in Shahabad Bakrid riot cases, are still undergoing sentences of imprisonment?

(b) Are the Government aware that strong hopes have been aroused that mercy will be shown towards these prisoners in view of the Royal Proclamation of December last?

(c) Do the Government propose to include these cases within the scope of the clemency granted by the Royal Proclamation?

Reply by the Hon'ble Mr. Rainy :—

(a) Out of 2,250 persons originally convicted by the Special Tribunals, 1,054 are still undergoing sentences of imprisonment.

(b) and (c) In paragraph 6 of His Proclamation, His Majesty the King-Emperor has directed that His Royal clemency to political offenders shall be exercised in the fullest measure compatible with the public safety, and the same paragraph refers to "those who in their eagerness for political progress have broken the law," and to "persons who for offences against the State or under any special or emergency legislation are suffering imprisonment or restrictions upon their liberty". The scope of the amnesty is sufficiently defined in the words quoted. The persons convicted in the course of the riots which took place in the Patna Division at the Bakrid of 1917 were not political offenders; their crimes were not directed against Government, and they were actuated not by any desire for political progress but by religious fanaticism. They cannot therefore claim to benefit by the Royal clemency which has been extended to offenders of a different class. They were convicted of offences not under any special law but under the Indian Penal Code, including dacoity, in some cases accompanied by murder, robbery, arson, the destruction or defilement of mosques, causing grievous hurt and mischief. Their offences were committed not in the heat of a dispute about *kurbani*, but in the course of unprovoked attacks after the Bakrid was over on upwards of 150 Muhammadan villages, in many of which there was not even a suspicion that *kurbani* had been performed. The persons in jail represent a very insignificant proportion of the large mob which took part in these excesses.

Nevertheless Government have from the first been anxious to mitigate the punishment of those who were led astray by ignorance and folly and to extend mercy as far as possible even to those whose offences were more serious. At the end of the year 1918 Government directed the release of—

(i) all persons under twenty years of age, unless they were regarded as specially criminal, and

(ii) all persons who had been sentenced to imprisonment for periods of three years or less.

Again on the occasion of the peace celebrations Government granted a remission of three years to all persons who were sentenced to terms of imprisonment not exceeding six years and of half their sentence to the remainder. On both occasions all persons over 50 years of age, whose health was reported to be bad, were released.

The Lieutenant-Governor in Council is not prepared to grant further concessions at present, and he is constrained to add that the immediate release of a large number of Bakrid prisoners still under confinement would not in his judgment be compatible with the public safety. In this Province the Bakrid is not only the annual occasion of grave anxiety to Government,