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Life in East Endia

By Frances Thomas

HOW would you like to eat off a banana leaf, using your fingers for silverware? Not a very pleasant mental picture, yet that is the custom of the Indian people in East India.

The Hindu people go on the theory that "fingers were made before forks," and use no silverware of any kind. Each family owns one or two earthenware bowls in which the food is cooked.

Like the Chinese and Japanese, the Indians are very fond of rice and are content to make it their chief dish each meal every day. This, however, is not possible for the poorer class of people, because the head of the family does not earn enough each day to buy rice. So they eat a grain which resembles our millet.

The East Indian housewife does not have to bother with a gas or electric bill, for cooking is done over open fireplaces. The houses are small mud buildings of one room. In one corner is the fireplace, usually minus a chimney, over which the meals for the family of six or eight are cooked daily. The Hindu people seem to care little for sanitation, for not only they but their calf, cow or goat eat, sleep and live in the one small room. Of course, there is no furniture to take up space, for the people sit on the floor and sleep there, also, using a grass mat for a mattress and a cotton blanket for their covering. The richer inhabitants have small pillows stuffed with grasses or bits of cloth.

The Indian does not care for dry food, so all the ingredients for one meal are put in an earthenware pot and cooked as a sort of stew. This soft meal is repeated three times a day.

The value of vegetables in the diet is either unknown or disregarded by the Indians. Although 85 percent of the people are agriculturists, they spend no time raising vegetables. If the housewife desires something green for food, she goes out in the hills and returns with her arms full of queer roots and herbs. The leaves and roots of every shrub and tree seem to be utilized by the Indian woman as a substitute for our vegetables.

Mangoes, oranges and bananas are

the principal fruits used. Bananas, which are very cheap, from three to five cents a dozen, are used extensively as a food. A variety of oranges considerably smaller than American oranges and known to the natives as "loose jackets," are a commonly used fruit.

Peanuts are grown extensively in the East Indies and shipped to many of the European countries, including



France and England. Many of the peanuts eventually become olive oil and are shipped to America in that form. The Indians use many peanuts as a food and Indian children munch them as American children do candy.

It is a superstition of the Hindu that nothing must touch his mouth or lips or he will become contaminated. Hence he works his food into tiny balls with his fingers and flips it into his mouth. When he drinks, he tips his head back and pours the water into his mouth.

The Hindu eats no meat except goat and that only on rare occasions. The great majority of the people are very strict vegetarians. In spite of that fact there are almost as many cattle as people. This is perhaps due to the fact that the people feel prosperous if they own a cow, whether she be of benefit to them or not.

That cows are of little value is decidedly true. Never do they give more than a quart of milk and the usual amount is about a cup, for they are always underfed, especially in the summer months. The Indian never thinks of storing up food during the

rainy season either for himself or his livestock.

Infant care in the East Indies is on a very low scale. The infant death rate is very high, due principally to habits of sanitation and faulty diet. The young baby, whose mother is not able to feed it, dies within a few weeks of starvation, for there is no milk to feed it, and very few of the children are able to survive on the only food available, a coarse grain gruel.

Most of the babies and many of the larger children have severe cases of rickets. Most of the children are pictures of starvation. It is not an uncommon sight to come across children in the street in a half crazed condition, due to lack of food. If there is no work, there is no food for the family and children as well as adults suffer.

To help these conditions, various churches have started mission schools throughout the country. When children are seven years old they are taken into the boarding schools, where they are fed, clothed and taught by the mission school teachers. A certain fee is charged the child's parents, according to the financial standing of the family. It is surprising to note how quickly the children begin to improve both physically and mentally.

In the larger schools for girls, they use the cottage system, housing 25 girls in a cottage. These cottages are run on a cooperative basis. Each girl has certain duties each week. They are given an allowance for food each week, 30 cents being allowed each girl each day for plain, nutritious food. Even when they are their own cooks, the girls get tired of the food and complain about it just as the American girls do about dormitory food. Girls will be girls, whether they are Indians or Americans.

In the article, "You Need Another Oven," by Ethyl Cessna Morgan, on page three of the May issue, the sentence in the middle paragraph of the last column which reads "But these figures do *not* show that there is a real saving," should read, "But these figures *do* show that there is a real saving in fuel cost by use of the portable oven."