

CURRENT MAGAZINES

THE INDIAN PROBLEM

Face Over India.—Mr. Edward Thompson, in *Time and Tide*.
Parties and Politics in India:—Editorial, in the *Round Table*.
Civil Liberties in India:—Mr. R. Lothia, in *Current History*.
Indian Assembly:—Mr. P. Lacey, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

IT is obvious even to the most casual observer that the Indian crisis has reached a new stage. British efforts on an unexampled scale to overcome it by concession have called forth native artifices, likewise unexampled, to prevent such concession from proving effective. One feels that to a survivor of former controversies, recalling how little—relatively—was then either yielded on the one side or expected on the other, it must seem hard to say which phenomenon just now is the more remarkable: the profusion of British offers, or the contemptuous abruptness of Indian refusals.

A parallel which at once suggests itself is from Ireland. One often heard from Indian publicists that *Sinn Fein* is the proper method for a nationality ill used under British control, and it does seem that the process by which the Irish Free State was established is being reproduced in numerous details of Indian Congress policy. One remembers the "invisible government" set up in Dublin during the years immediately after the close of the Great War; the all but unanimous ignoring of British officials and substitution of native directors over wide areas of Southern and Western Ireland, where by the strength of public opinion the King's Writ was no longer allowed to run. This is what India has of late most conspicuously illustrated, and has taught us to call *systematized non-coöperation*. But during the present year, since the new Constitution became operative (or attempted to become operative), suggestively enough on April 1, a further and most significant step has been taken in the non-coöperative enterprise.

The Congress, which India set up for herself over fifty years ago, now seems to be the real influence to which the native mind will voluntarily respond. Councils, Legislatures, the whole apparatus installed by the Western Conqueror, have been progressively ignored. Last step of all, taken as from April 1 of the present year, marks the passage from ignoring outside to thwarting inside. Instead of refusing to vote for the newly established Legislatures, as

Hindus refused under Mahatma Gandhi to vote for the Councils established in "Dyarchy", this time the Congress Party urged that Indian patriots poll their full strength, capture if possible the machine imposed upon their country against their will by its western tyrant, and use their control of the instrument to defeat the purpose for which it was constructed. It has been a successful ruse. The Congress Party got command of a majority of the new Legislatures, and proceeded at once to make it impossible for any Cabinet in them to hold office. These are events of a significance quite different from what we have hitherto seen in the evolution of Indian policy. They are perhaps best studied in the light of certain dominant personalities. A world of meaning is to be found in the change from the leadership of Gandhi to the leadership of Nehru.

I.

One most revealing recent document in this field is the autobiography of the new Congress leader. Jawaharlal Nehru has now given us the story of his own intellectual and social development. The English translation of his book was reprinted nine times within twelve months from its first appearance, and it is indeed invaluable—when read, of course, with the precautions needful for that kind of witness—if we would understand how purposes in India are still changing fast. Nehru is head and front of the resistance that is being offered to effective operation of the latest British scheme, and his autobiography (written like *Pilgrim's Progress*, *De Profundis*, and some others in a very mixed collection, from prison) shows how his temper of disbelief in the London-made reforms gradually hardened. It is all the more impressive because of the writer's acknowledgment not only of his debt to his own British training, but of the powerful influence which British methods and ideals still exercise over his thought about international relationship. Here is a characteristic paragraph:

Personally, I owe too much to England in my mental make-up ever to feel wholly alien to her. And, do what I will, I cannot get rid of the habits of mind, and the standards and ways of judging other countries as well as life generally, which I acquired at school and college in England. All my predilections (apart from the political plane) are in favour of England and the English people, and if I have become what is called an uncompromising opponent of British rule in India, it is almost in spite of myself.

Here one thinks immediately of a Sinn Fein chieftain who had begun with the mild projects of the Irish Nationalist Party. We have the

same picture of struggle not so much against particular injustices as against the conception of a dominant and directing foreign system; the same complaint that well-meaning alien reformers, "who will do anything for us except get off our backs", now constitute a peril greater than that of an avowed enemy. Another passage brings to mind how a De Valera, an Arthur Griffiths, a Michael Collins used to speak about an H. H. Asquith outside and a John Redmond at home:

Times have changed, and the country-house type of civilisation is not accepted willingly now, either in England or in India. But still there remain people amongst us who desire to stick to the servants'-halls and take pride in the gold braid and livery of their service. Others, like the Liberals, accept that country-house in its entirety, admire its architecture and the whole edifice, but look forward to replacing the owners, one by one, by themselves.....

For them *Swaraj* means that everything continues as before, only with a darker shade. They can only conceive of a future in which they, or people like them, will play the principal rôle, and take the place of the English high officials: in which there are the same types of services, government departments, Legislatures, trade, industry—with the I. C. S. at their jobs; the princes in their palaces, occasionally appearing in fancy dress or carnival attire with all their jewels glittering to impress their subjects; the landlords claiming special protection, and meanwhile harassing their tenants; the money-lender, with his money-bags, harassing both zamindar and tenant; the lawyer with his fees; and God in His heaven.

How far the drift of Nehru's thinking had thus carried him, how completely this British-trained Indian had at length renounced the foreign influences which exerted such early power over his mind and had made himself the spokesman of the least tractable native sentiment, became clear last April. He issued a statement that British action in setting up a minority government for the six new provinces, in which the majority refuses to take office, proves the whole constitutional "reform" to be insincere! How else he supposes that Great Britain might have dealt with the matter (apart from surrendering to the forces that would make government impossible) Nehru does not indicate. Obviously his solution is that she should have surrendered! How does a man so highly gifted, well trained by western methods, keenly appreciative of the values of the modern world, reach a position such as that?

II

In numerous respects Nehru is very different from his predecessor, Mahatma Gandhi. It is by no means Eastern Mysticism, but rather Western Socialism that is now dominating the thought of the Indian Congress leader, and it is the obstruction of Socialism under the new constitutional scheme that he particularly fears. Mere change of personnel, he points out again and again, would leave India without the power of tackling those abuses which matter most of all—particularly the land system, the feudal tyranny under which Hindus in the 20th century still have to endure what Europeans long ago escaped. No one who appreciates the clause in the new Constitution about "special powers" for governors in an "emergency" will—in Nehru's view—have any doubt that under it the land system would remain, no matter how Indians might vote to have it altered. India, remaining under the fetters of British finance, would have various new privileges of self-government, but none that touch her vital interest. For this reason, regarding a merely apparent reform as worse than open neglect, and even the good in such matters as enemy of the better, the critic bids his countrymen join in obstinate resistance.

Not less scornful is Nehru's attitude to the news which has brought so exultant a note into the British Liberal press, that the so-called "Native" Indian States are to share in working the new Constitution. Autocrats such as cannot be found anywhere else in the world to-day are to join, forsooth, without compromise of their despotic rights, in a democratic movement! Those Princes, he reminds us, make no secret of their purpose in the combination which they would dominate. A leader among them, Chancellor of their House, has intimated that whoever thinks they have the furtherance of democracy in view is living in a dream.

Whatever be our judgment on Nehru's intransigent policies, we have much to learn from this autobiography, not only about the motives which shaped them in his own mind, but about the sources of their present disastrous popularity in India. His book gives us a sombre picture of the arrogance, the assumptions, the pretension of rights and authority and privilege on the part of a conquering Western Power to make India mere material for its own purposes. One is driven to think that British designs and plans for the country were often misrepresented in deplorable fashion by British on the spot. The hand of officials was often both heavy and clumsy.

It is indeed one of the melancholy phenomena of our time, not in India alone, but in many other places, that some slight measure

of palliation is put forward, in all sincerity and by those who at least mean well, although their thinking is weak, to meet a grievance which such a measure can only intensify. Resistance in India, led by such men as Sir Michael O'Dwyer, and developed to such tragic issue by General Dyer, against what every foreign critic could see to be the plain justice of the case has made the situation rapidly worse. It is quite beside the point for their friends to urge on their behalf that it was not the Rowlatt Acts and the Amritsar policy which did the damage, but rather the failure to follow these up with the needful ruthlessness, and a sentimental weakening at the behest of co-called "Liberals". The O'Dwyer and Dyer programs had to be abandoned because, like Mr. Winston Churchill's advice for India just now, they shocked the conscience of the world. Hardened as our age may be, it is fortunately impossible either to cajole or to threaten the British people into acquiescence in measures of such coercion even though the Indian Empire should be "lost" by their refusal. But, short of such policies as bore their bitter fruit after the Amritsar affair, driving into the camp of Hindu insurrection so many who had been among the best friends of British rule in India, there are those other policies of reluctant and half-hearted adjustment in this or that detail, to satisfy native resentment and divide native feeling. From the old arraignment of open enemies, a leader such as Nehru has now passed to the exposure of pretended friends. Some of them, against whom his rhetoric is most vehement, are not pretending—any more than the men who when British feudalism was finally breaking down a century ago, under the assault of the rising middle class, should be called pretenders—for the eager but then useless "concessions" which they offered to stem the tide. One recalls the landowning aristocrat in Kingsley's *Yeast*, who pointed out to his confidential friend the limits of feudal generosity. The problem, he remarked, was as to how much might be granted to "the lower classes" in detail, on the assumption that the essential privileges of an hereditary *noblesse* should not be disturbed. This being the constant, the "fixed point", how far could conciliation proceed in administrative detail? But, the speaker exclaimed in a moment of insight, suppose it should occur to some agitator that this need no longer be taken as a fixed point, or a constant? That would be to pose an altogether new problem. Apparently the further stage has been reached in India, and in the world of Anglo-Indian officialdom there is still considerable wondering as to what happened, or why it happened.

III

VERY near in date to the appearance of Nehru's book was that of another and a very different autobiography with reference to Indian affairs. The last product from Rudyard Kipling's pen was the all-to-short story about himself, and in it we find an allusion of characteristic bitterness to the men who were promoting, perhaps too late, the scheme for the new Indian Constitution. To Kipling for India, as to Lord Salisbury half a century back for Ireland, it was the plan of "resolute government" which alone held promise of peace, and the weak-kneed advocates of "more generous" measures were the danger most to be feared. The only safety lay in "No Compromise." Recalling the men of long ago, those "Liberals" of his own youth who had put forward pretext after pretext for making terms with Indian revolutionaries lest something even worse should be precipitated by official obstinacy, Kipling could see just the same foolish temper in the compromisers of the present. As the latest bill was going through, to his own limitless chagrin, he waited "as in a dream for the very slightly altered formulas in which those who were parting with their convictions excused themselves." The formulas duly came:

Thus; "I may act as a break, you know. At any rate, I'm keeping a more extreme man out of the game". "There's no sense running counter to the inevitable"—and all the other Devil-provided camouflage for the sinner-who-faces-both-ways.

The doom pronounced with such facile and fluent confidence upon those who "face both ways" is not more in the Kipling than in the Nehru spirit. In each a bitter impatience of men who seek a middle course, a peremptory demand to choose one's horn in the dilemma, rather than to attempt the old trick described by logicians as "escape between the horns", made of Nehru a fierce Indian Nationalist as it made Kipling a no less fierce British Imperialist. Should it thus give pause to each of the so sharply intolerant sides, when it is seen that they are the provocatives of each other, and that the upshot of either is war to the knife?

Those who framed the new Constitution for India, and who are endeavoring, amid the equal and supplementary abuse of extreme men on both sides to commend it to public trial, have need just now of a double portion of the statesman's spirit. The new Constitution is frankly put forward as one to meet, by an imperfect and no doubt often an illogical scheme, the demands of a

crisis which thoroughly logical and unflinchingly idealistic craftsmen of the State would be pretty certain to conduct to disaster. Lord Baldwin has lately told us how it is the very genius of British management of affairs to trust the intuition of a moment and the common sense which guides in a particular case, rather than wait for the framing of some universal principle which will apply not only at one time but at all times. For times and circumstances are seldom the same. History, in defiance of the old rule laid down for it, seldom or never repeats itself. The men upon whom rests the burden of keeping India at peace, administering justice, and preventing the zeal of some immediate reform from creating diseases worse than any it can cure, need much more the sympathy than the reprobation of leisurely armchair onlookers. If special powers are held in reserve, for use by Governors in special emergency, every honest man knows the reason. It is illustrated, for example, by those Hindu-Moslem riots which resulted in much bloodshed, and might well have resulted in far more, but for the resolute interference, by that tyrannical western Power which in the past enforced peace and order and equal rights on native populations to which all this had previously been unknown. Here is but an example of the necessity for an ultimate appeal beyond native legislatures, beyond machinery whose action can be "automatic": a certain power of discretionary intervention, ready to suppress even what is very dear to native custom and practice, because it is an outrage on humanity beyond what native practice and custom have allowed either Hindu or Moslem to appreciate. How, one may ask, within the limits of Indian "independence" would the horror known as *suttee* ever have been stopped? The "right" of a Hindu widow to sacrifice herself upon her husband's funeral pyre, her supposed duty and privilege so to do, had to be overridden by one of those discretionary acts of the controlling western Power for which it did not ask any native permission or endorsement. Will Nehru deny that there are situations still persisting, situations still quite capable of arising, where reform if it is to be achieved at all, must in the first instance be introduced by a like arbitrary act?

So the allegedly illogical character of the new Constitution, with its provisions which seem at once to establish and to cancel the rights of Dominion status for India, need not by such inconsistency very much trouble our minds. Rather might we well be troubled if for circumstances so definitely heterogeneous a single, clear-cut, universally applicable formula had been devised.

“That church spire”, I once said to the contractor who had put up a building, “looks to me rather short and stubby”. “It is”, was the reply, “stubby and short, like the funds that were available to pay for it: you have got to make these things correspond.” One need not blame the architects of the new Indian Constitution if, like that contractor, they had a surprise when half through, with a sudden and disappointing shortage of the essentials for their task. Many a surprise, met by many a twist and turn in policy, lest something still worse might befall, must be recognised in the record, if one would do justice to the imperfect accomplishment of those who have to repair without destroying, to rebuild without an entirely new foundation, some structure of public life and government.

But if such reflections make us pause before yielding to the blandishments of the persuasive Nehru, they must be borne at least equally in mind when Kipling, the apostle of the opposite sort of “unflinching consistency”, presents his no less dangerous plea.

Back to “resolute government”—to the days before a reforming, softening, humanizing influence had entered into Anglo-Indian relations; back to the régime of a dominant Western Conqueror holding the subordinate races in thrall, and conceding to their aspirations nothing more than the kindly consideration of a planter in the Southern States, prior to the Slave War, for the colored folk he owned. The tone of Mr. Winston Churchill is like that, and the tone of Sir Oswald Mosley, and that of many another less audaciously vocal. Everyone knows, particularly each of these writers and speakers himself knows, that it is now an idle dream, that such a program belongs to a social and national order which has gone, never to return. What is, however, altogether practicable is that officials on the spot, inspired by the encouragement of these eminent leaders of British opinion, who talk in a direction in which they well know it to be impossible to act, may indulge the arrogance, the assumptions, the strut in India which serve so notably the propagandism of Nehru.

Lord Linlithgow is at the moment apparently endeavoring to bring together the men of real good will, those of soft hearts and hard heads, rather than the opposite sorts too often in evidence hitherto—whose hearts are as hard as their heads are soft. Why cannot those ultimate issues of which Nehru has spoken, and which he despairs of seeing threshed out under the new Constitution in India, be presented through such combined wisdom to the British

public? The land question for India is one not so remote that we are incapable of being made to understand, in other countries, what would be involved in a scheme of Indian Socialism. Why not break away from the pretentious tribunal of those "experts on the spot", who contradict each other with equal confidence, and yet demand our unquestioning submission, to the wider arena of world—or at least of Commonwealth judgment?

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