XVIII

AND AFTER

THE YEAR HAD NOT PROGRESSED VERY FAR WHEN, as a result of unrest, communal riots broke out all over India. The brunt of the rioting fell on Kohat, which was strangely a military out-post on the North-West Frontier. There were riots in other places too. At Lucknow, Allahabad, Delhi, Shahjahanpur, Nagpur, Gulbarga. The dead and the wounded at Kohat totalled four thousands. Disturbed by the out-break of these communal riots, Gandhi decided to fast for twenty-one days. It was to be a penance because he felt he was to blame for this outbreak of violence. He had created in India a spirit of restlessness without first having educated the people sufficiently to observe non-violence. The decision to fast, following so soon after his serious illness, was somewhat dangerous. It was hardly the time for such an ordeal and his body could not be made to offer the necessary resistance. But he had determined to overcome the infirmity of body by will-power and an anxious people watched him begin his fast in the house of Mohamed Ali at Delhi.

Those were twenty-one breathless days, with the whole country anxiously looking on. A single man had by his own voluntary action caused anxiety to a whole nation. He had of his own accord brought about a condition, which, though not critical, was often serious. He need not have fasted. He need not have chosen so weak a condition in which to undergo the ordeal of a twenty-one days' fast. And yet when you look at it from Gandhi's point of view, his decision to fast was to be traced to the events that happened in India — the outbreaks of violence, the communal riots, the destruction of life and property which was committed by others and for which he felt responsible. It was not merely to appease his conscience that he underwent that gruelling ordeal. It would be an easy way for man to square himself with his God, if by fasting was understood the mere abstinence from food. But with Gandhi it was more than that. It was as much the purification of the soul as of the body. It was the feeding of the soul at a time when the body was denied food. That was the essence of Gandhi's fasts.

This idea is perhaps best expressed in an editorial article in *Young India*, written by Rev. C. F. Andrews, and quoted extensively in Indian papers throughout the country. It runs as follows:—

"At the foot of the Ridge at Delhi, on the farther side away from the city, is a house called Dil-khush, or Heart's Joy, where Mahatma Gandhi has been keeping his fast. Above the house stands out the historic Ridge itself with its crumbling ruins telling of many battles in days gone by. A "Mutiny Memorial" stands at its highest point.

"From the terrace on the upper story of Dil-khush there can be seen ruined buttresses and walls, and not far away from them Asoka's Pillar points its finger to the sky. In the darkness of the night these landmarks stand out in the starlight and against the moon. Between the Ridge and the house below, where Mahatma Gandhi lies in silence day by day, suffering and exhausted, lines of motor-cars in the Delhi season block the road each after-

noon, while the golfers play their rounds of golf.

"Mahatma Gandhi had called me to the terrace one afternoon. Some musicians had come, and he wished me to hear the music. It was one of his worst days; his weakness was extreme. A boy was singing softly at the far end of the terrace. As I passed in order to sit down and listen to the music, I could not but take note how drawn the face of the sufferer was with pain. The sight renewed my anxiety, and at first I hardly listened to the music. The sun was setting in the west, and shafts of light were pouring from it, piercing the open glades where the golfers were busily playing their rounds of golf. The rocks and ruins on the hill-top were flushed with crimson and gold.

"At last the beauty of the sky arrested me and soothed my inner fears; and then, as I looked towards the Ridge, there appeared to come before my imagination the whole story of the past. That Pillar, with its edict of toleration and non-violence, brought to my mind the Buddhist Age and the saintly King Asoka. The people of the land in those days were kindly and tolerant towards man and beast. It was an age of peace.

"But those fortress ruins with the Mutiny Memorial told me of another chapter in human history, filled with bloodshed and bitter strife. On that evening the sun was setting peacefully in the west; but all through the previous night the Ridge had been lashed by rain and tempest, and the winds had fiercely raged. The thunder had rolled along its sides and echoed in its rocks and hollows, and the jagged lightning had played against its summit. Even so, in Indian history the calm beauty of those peaceful days of King Asoka had been followed by the storm-swept days of war. Last of all, in the Mutiny, the Ridge had been stained with human blood and scarred by shot and shell.

"Below the summit of the Ridge, in the open spaces where the modern golf links had been made, I watched the golfers come and go. The clubs were swung and the balls were hit; muscular men and women marched forward,

while little boys carried their golf clubs behind. Physical activity was there in every limb—physical and temporal power.

"Instinctively my gaze turned back to the frail, wasted, tortured, spirit on the terrace by my side, bearing the sins and sorrows of his people. With a rush of emotion there came to memory the passage from the Book of Lamentations—'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see, if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' And in that hour of vision I knew more deeply, in my own personal life, the meaning of the Cross."

One good thing came out of this decision to fast. Leaders in all parts of India took this opportunity to unite and to respect freedom of conscience and religion and thereby to do away with the root of the trouble, for the origin of all communal rioting was to be traced to an intolerance on the part of one community to allow the other to indulge in its religious practices. The Hindu objected to cow slaughter by the Mohamedan because the cow was in Hindu religion a sacred animal. And the Mohamedan came rushing out of his mosque, knife in hand, to draw blood from those who played music so near his place of worship. All this seems so futile when you consider the slaughter of innocents which it involved. It was, therefore, to set an example in self-sacrifice that Gandhi had fasted, for was not all toleration based on the idea of sacrifice? And he succeeded, for the Unity Conference, which met as a result of his fast, attempted to bring about some harmony between these two major factions in the Indian people. Perhaps the future of India will depend upon the successful intermingling of these two conflicting and opposing cultures—the one cold, ascetic, passionless and vegetarian; the other passionate, full-blooded and fanatic. The fusion of these two strains may give India the generation of men, who will be unable to think in terms of communities or isolated religions or superstitions or beliefs. But such a fusion, which can result from mixed marriages and an abating of

strong religious allegiances is not so easily possible in a country where orthodoxy is supreme and unchallenged and where religion, whatever form or shape it may take, is the very life-blood of the nation. Nor has Gandhi at any stage of his life suggested this more scientific and biological way out of the communal tangle. Too much the man of religion, too much the devout Hindu, the Modh Bania, too staunch a believer in Jain philosophy, in non-violence and in the abstinence from taking all life, he could not possibly be the advocate of inter-marriage and mixed-breeding. Nor would he have adhered himself to the Indian people if he had uttered such heresies. And inter-marriage in India can always only remain a heresy.

But to return to the conference. It drew to itself members from all communities, and the Lord Bishop of Calcutta, Dr. Foss Wescott, gave it the benediction of the Christian Church. But the masses were as far apart as ever. It was only the leaders that had met. The temperament of the people was not conducive to religious toleration in spite of their devotion to Gandhi. Therefore, some believed that the fast benefited no one, for the communal question still remained the burning problem of a country unable to find a way of overcoming its internal dissension. And every day that news arrived of the outbreak of communal rioting, the men in authority in the Government Houses in India and the offices in Whitehall knew that they could with the help of His Majesty's forces hold out longer against the Indian people than they could against an India that was united in its struggle for freedom. Such set-backs were natural in the progress of any movement and the Indian national movement was no exception. And so faded into the background the twenty-one days' fast and the Unity Conference, and Gandhi devoted his energy once more to the active domination of the Congress of which he was elected President at the end of the year.

To be the President of the Congress was for Gandhi no great achievement. Lesser men had filled that office

before him. That was not material. He had virtually dominated the policy of the Congress long before its session at Belgaum in the December of 1924, when he formally accepted the role of President. Perhaps it was because his power over the Indian people was at that time at its lowest that he accepted that office. Subsequently we have seen a number of Congress Presidents who have almost been made by him. He was a President-maker, even as in the early days of English history there were the king-makers. Gandhi has since been the power behind the Presidential throne, but in 1924 he was not so sure of himself. The independent attitude adopted by Das and Nehru left him to lead that body of men who had followed the Congress from their secure jobs into the wilderness of non-co-operation. So he had gone back to preside over the Congress—but it was a Gandhi who was no longer fighting, no longer on the offensive, but a Gandhi who was waiting, waiting, waiting.

His presidential speech was characterized by his inner resignation. For the sake of his principles and for a certain consistency in his political philosophy he had given up the outer struggle. He knew that India was not in a frame of mind to fight for its freedom in the way in which he would have it fight. So he preferred that it should not fight at all. Politics seemed furthest away from his mind as he read his message to the delegates who assembled at Belgaum, through whom he hoped to touch the hearts of the people. He wanted that they should learn first that contentment and self-sufficiency which was inspired by the spinning wheel. This message was, as it were, emblazoned on his coat of arms, no longer couchant, but rampant. The spinning wheel implied the continuance of the boycott of foreign cloth, and this was the only form of boycott that was maintained after the discontinuance of the civil disobedience movement. All other forms of boycott were suspended.

It had been said that the spinning wheel was not exciting enough, that it was an occupation only for women, that it meant a return to the middle ages and that it was a

vain effort against the majestic march of scientific knowledge for which machinery stood. To this Gandhi said : "In my humble opinion, India's need is not excitement but solid work." It was this realization, following in the wake of the excitement of non-co-operation, that characterized his attitude on his return from prison. He had not cried halt in vain, for he knew that even so a certain amount of damage had already been done. As Gandhi said in his Presidential address : "Though not a single boycott was anywhere near completion, every one of them had undoubtedly the effect of diminishing the prestige of the particular institution boycotted. The most important boycott was the boycott of violence. Whilst it appeared at one time to be entirely successful, it was soon discovered that the non-violence was only skin-deep. It was the passive non-violence of helplessness, not the enlightened non-violence of resourcefulness. The result was an eruption of intolerance against those who did not non-co-operate. This was violence of a subtler type. In spite, however, of this grave defect, I make bold to say that the propaganda of non-violence checked the outbreak of physical violence, which would certainly have broken out, had not non-violent non-co-operation come into being. It is my deliberate conviction that non-violent non-co-operation has given to the people a consciousness of their strength. It has brought to the surface the hidden powers in the people of resistance through suffering. It has caused an awakening among the masses which perhaps no other method could have.

"Though, therefore, non-violent non-co-operation has not brought us Swaraj, though it has brought about certain deplorable results and though the institutions that were sought to be boycotted are still flourishing, in my humble opinion, non-violent non-co-operation as a means of attaining political freedom has come to stay and that even its partial success has brought us nearer Swaraj. There is no mistaking the fact that the capacity for suffering for the sake of a cause must advance it."

That was all he said reviewing the events of the past.

He was not going to trace the chequered career of the non-co-operation movement. It was more with the reasons why it had to be withdrawn that he was concerned.

"We are faced with a situation that compels us to cry halt. For whilst the individuals hold firmly to their belief in non-co-operation, the majority of those who are immediately concerned, have practically lost faith in it, with the exception of boycott of foreign cloth. Scores of lawyers have resumed practice. Some even regret having ever given it up. Many who had given up Councils have returned to them and the number of those who believe in Council-entry is on the increase. Hundreds of boys and girls who gave up Government schools and colleges have repented of their action and have returned to them. I hear that Government schools and colleges can hardly cope with the demand for admission. In these circumstances these boycotts cannot be worked as part of the national programme, unless the Congress is prepared to do without the classes directly affected. But I hold it to be just as impracticable to keep these classes out of the Congress as it would be now to keep the non-co-operators out. They must both remain in the Congress without either party interfering with or hostilely criticising the other. What is applicable to Hindu-Moslem unity is, I feel, applicable to the unity among different political groups. We must tolerate each other and trust to time to convert the one or the other to the opposite belief. We must go further. We must plead with the Liberals and others who have seceded to rejoin the Congress. If non-co-operation is suspended, there is no reason why they should keep out. The advance must be from us, Congressmen. We must cordially invite them and make it easy for them to come in."

Those were not words one would have heard from the lips of a fighting Gandhi. It was a Gandhi who was conscious of a saturation in human suffering and of the limitations of human nature. He knew that on future occasions when the novelty of civil disobedience had died down, he would not be able to count on the hordes

of young men and women who left their schools and colleges, their occupations, their work, their profession, to throw in their lot with him in the cause of freedom. The heat of the moment could not be expected to recur too often and what would count in the long run was cool, calculating thought and solid work, which the Congress must put in before it resumed the struggle for freedom. He was also conscious of the increase in the number of those who preferred the intellectual leadership of Das and Nehru to his own inspired and more religious guidance. The followers of Islam, too, now that the Khilafat question no longer existed, preferred to return to their own communal camp rather than follow the banner of an essentially Hindu leader who had retreated. And the Liberals, who in India bore out the truth of the maxim that the *via media* was the last refuge of indecision, knew that in the immediate future it would be to their advantage to pay homage to Government House. The pity of it was that Gandhi was wanting to invite them cordially and to make it easy for them to come into the Congress. What had happened to the Mahatma? Some of his devoutest followers wondered.

But his presidential address was not without its brilliant flashes. He had for the first time in a Congress presidential address dealt a blow to Hindu orthodoxy from which it was difficult for it to recover. The great caste machine on which Hindu society was built bore the brunt of his attack, when he said that untouchability was another hindrance to Swaraj. "It is," he went on to say, "an essentially Hindu question and Hindus cannot claim or take Swaraj till they have restored the liberty of the suppressed classes. They have sunk with the latter's suppression. Historians tell us that the Aryan invaders treated the original inhabitants of Hindustan precisely as the English invaders treat us, if not much worse. If so, our helotry is a just retribution for our having created an untouchable class. The sooner we remove the blot, the better it is for us, Hindus. But the priests tell us that untouchability is a divine appointment. I am certain

that the priests are wrong. It is a blasphemy to say that God set apart any portion of humanity as untouchable. And Hindus, who are Congressmen, have to see to it that they break down the barrier at the earliest possible moment. The Vaikom satyagrahis are showing us the way. They are carrying on their battle with gentleness and firmness. They have patience, courage, and faith. Any movement in which these qualities are exhibited becomes irresistible. I would, however, warn the Hindu brethren against the tendency, which one sees now-a-days, of exploiting the suppressed classes for a political end. To remove untouchability is a penance that caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of untouchables but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the untouchables, not even dirt and insanitation. It is our arrogance which blinds us, 'superior' Hindus, to our own blemishes and which magnifies those of our down-trodden brethren whom we have suppressed and whom we keep under suppression. Religions, like nations, are being weighed in the balance. God's grace and revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation. They descend equally upon all who wait upon God. That religion and that nation will be blotted out of the face of the earth which pins its faith to injustice, untruth or violence. God is Light, not darkness. God is Love, not hate. God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is Great. We, His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognise the place of the lowliest of His Creatures. Krishna honoured Sudama in his rags as he honoured no one else. Love is the root of religion or sacrifice and this perishable body is the root of self or irreligion, says Tulsidas. Whether we win Swaraj or not, the Hindus have to purify themselves before they can hope to revive the Vedic philosophy and make it a living reality."

No one, after reading this denunciation of Hinduism and its prejudices, could say that Gandhi's religion was founded on the narrow interpretations of caste. The priestly class, if asked their opinion of Gandhi as a Hindu,

would have denounced him on this speech alone. For what was left to them of Hinduism once you abolished caste and you took away from the Brahmin the right to shun the untouchable ? That was the question asked by many a Hindu priest, who depended for his livelihood upon the existence and the maintenance of these caste differences and on the retention of superstitions as part of the essential ceremonial for the practice of a religion in which he traded. Gandhi had little to lose by being denounced by the high-priests of caste. Once before he had shown his utter indifference to the voice and authority of the caste-machine, when he left for England to study for the Bar. And if he could afford to neglect the opinion of the caste elders at so early an age in his life, it was not likely that he would worry about it now. Untouchability was too obvious a blot on Hinduism and he knew that enlightened opinion would always be on his side.

Yet all this was only social reform. The spinning wheel, Hindu-Muslim unity and the abolition of untouchability were hardly politics. Perhaps the boycott of foreign goods might have fallen under the latter head, but even this could more correctly be classified as economics. Politics, therefore, had to be touched upon in his presidential address, unwilling as he was to do it. He was not going to make any revolutionary utterance or any impossible promises. Gandhi, the politician, had quietened down. He was now concentrating more on the means of attaining freedom than the end itself and he knew that the spinning wheel, Hindu-Muslim unity and the removal of untouchability were only the means to this end. What was this end ? He himself was content to know the means, for means and end were convertible terms in his philosophy of life, but it was the people, who wanted to know the end, not vaguely but precisely. It was only right that they should know the full implication of Swaraj. So they asked : What is Swaraj ? What did it stand for ? What would it bring to the people who fought for it ? What was in short to be the end of it all ?

And Gandhi gave his answer. By Swaraj he meant the attainment of a state in which the franchise would be regulated on the basis of manual work and would not be dependent on property or position, where ruinous military expenditure, which was only indulged in for the sake of Imperial defence, would be curtailed to the proportion necessary for protection of life and property in normal times, where the administration of justice would be cheapened, where revenues from intoxicating liquors and drugs would be abolished, where the salaries paid to the members of the Civil and Military Services would be brought down to a level compatible with the general condition of the country, where there would be a redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis with as complete autonomy as possible for every province for its internal administration and growth, where all arbitrary powers would no longer be in existence, where the highest post would be open to all who may qualify for it, where there would be complete recognition of religious freedom and mutual forbearance in the case of a possible conflict, where the official language of a province would be the vernacular of the province, and where English would only be used for international diplomacy. That was to be the Swaraj of Mahatma Gandhi. Yet even in this Indian paradise, for whose extravagance he apologized, and at which he hoped they would not laugh, he had conceded to the princes their sovereign rights and had given to the foreigner the fullest guarantee of all vested interests justly acquired, after the examination of such monopolies by an investigating commission.

Something must be said about his somewhat meek attitude towards the preservation of the British connection. " I would," he said, " strive for Swaraj within the Empire, but would not hesitate to sever all connection, if severance became a necessity through Britain's own fault. *I thus throw the burden of separation on the British people.*" The italics are my own. These words are too disappointing to be left unnoticed and I would rather I admitted my disappointment than that those who may snoop through

these pages should spot them out for themselves. It is difficult even for the most sympathetic of biographers to gloss over a statement like this. It had by now become abundantly clear that if anyone desired the severance of the British connection it was the Indian and that the Englishman would fight to the bitter end to guard this heritage, which he had acquired through the spirit of adventure and the enterprise of the men who went to trade in strange lands in the days of the John Company, of Clive and Hastings and others like them, who brought this treasure to adorn the Imperial crown. There could never be any question of separation in the Englishman's mind. That would be an acknowledgement of defeat, the most bitter humiliation such as Great Britain has not yet known. More easily in the Rome of Nero might the slave have asked his master to leave the forum. It was not in vain that a little urchin at a street corner, leaning against a sooty wall and wondering why the blue sky was so far away, sang to the accompaniment of the barrel organ, the refrain of "Rule Britannia." Britons never, never shall be slaves! How could Gandhi under such circumstances believe that "it should rest with Britain to say that she will have no real alliance with India."

What had happened to the man who had seen Amritsar turned into a slaughter house, who had heard the evidence of Dyer and who had with his own eyes seen such repression as would horrify the most cold-blooded amongst us? Could there ever be a real alliance between two peoples whose interests conflicted at every stage of their mutual association? Could there be any real friendship between two such widely opposed ideals—the ideal of self-government on the one hand and that of colonial expansion on the other? At moments like these he was straining too much that faith he had in the English people. Or was this a leader in retreat?

June 1925—and the great Das died. Deshbandhu had passed away. Lawyer, politician, statesman. A man in the prime of his life, in the forefront of Indian politics, a headliner, a leader of men, a brilliant orator. And

India was the poorer for his loss. Not since the death of Tilak had India suffered such a national tragedy. Yet he was not so much a man of the people as an intellectual giant whom we respected. He had come to power because of his undoubted ability. He knew the art of convincing people. He had carried with him a substantial majority when he drifted from orthodox Gandhism to lead the Swarajist revolt. He had been even as a rebel against the authority, a success and not a failure. He had moved from strength to strength and now at the height of his power he had died a somewhat sudden death. Intellectually, he was respected as much as, if not more than, the Mahatma. Logic, reasoning, the courteous denials of debate, constitutional opposition, strategic deadlocks—these were the means he had used in his attempt to bring India quicker to its goal.

Once before in the history of the Congress a time had come when Tilak might have split its solidarity. And the fates decreed that Tilak should pass out of the picture rather than such a thing should happen. History had repeated itself and Gandhi was once more left supreme master of the Indian political situation, when the great Swarajist leader passed away on the sad sixteenth of June. Still in political retirement and at his spinning wheel, Gandhi was reluctant to resume the political leadership which fell vacant at Das's death. Instead he hastened to Calcutta to pay his tribute to a great colleague who was no more. Side by side, they had fought in many wars — wars for the liberation of humanity, wars of freedom, wars against oppression, wars against the armed might of a great Empire. What matter if in the last few months they had differed on a question of tactics?

Gandhi never forgot his duty. Back in Calcutta, he headed the funeral procession to the burning *ghauts*. P.R. Das, the brother of Deshbandhu, with whom I stayed at Patna only recently, described to me the scenes at his brother's funeral, which I had only seen on the screen. It was one of the more beautiful things that I have listened

to, as this last and youngest of the brilliant triology of Das brothers leant back in his little study and spoke of the passing of a hero. C. R. Das was a hero to the Indian people. He embodied the struggle of Indian freedom and we, Indians, were glad of the opportunity of paying homage to a man of his kind. He gave us courage by his conviction. And when P.R. Das said : "Even I, a brother, could not get near the bier, because the people had as of right claimed him as their own," I knew what Deshbandhu meant to India. And Gandhi was not slow to acknowledge that greatness, for he stayed on to build a memorial to commemorate Das's name and his work. He had come to the funeral to share in the national sorrow as a representative of the people of India.

XIX

MAN OF MYSTERY

WHATEVER MAY HAVE BEEN THE RIFT IN GANDHI'S intellectual following, the poor of India still saw the halo round his head and treated the ground he walked on as sacred. He was the one great holy man of India and in his religious greatness he enjoyed a splendid isolation. No one—not Das, nor Nehru, nor anyone else—brilliant as they may have been in the Courts of law and the Legislative Assemblies, could come up to him in the religious hold he exercised over the people of India. More than any other quality of his, this alone made him supreme as the Mahatma.

There are many opinions expressed about Gandhi's hold over the people. What was it in Gandhi, I have often asked some of the great Indians of my time, that appealed to the masses, who could not read or write and who were not in a position to be intellectually convinced ? I do not think there are many persons who have pondered over this question. Perhaps it was because Gandhi's hold over the masses has always been an undisputed fact.

Sic itur et est. So it shall be and is. *Sic semper itur.* So it shall always be.

But some have thought and given me an answer. There is a majority opinion which favours the idea of his being regarded as a man of superhuman qualities with the touch of the saint and martyr. A country like India, so impressionable, so believing, so very superstitious, could hardly resist the presence in their midst of a man who behaved like a saint, spoke like a prophet and conducted himself like a messiah. He was something after their heart. It was difficult for them to cast him aside as just another man. He seemed to incorporate all the qualities in all the idols which they worshipped. And yet he was so near to them that he was one of them, something they could touch with reverence and yet find human. Others have attributed Gandhi's appeal to the masses to other qualities. Perhaps the most significant view was that expressed to me once by Bhulabhai Desai, leader of the Congress opposition in the Central Legislative Assembly and a member of the Working Committee, a body which bears comparison to the Fascist Grand Council and in which also the supreme authority with relation to all Congress matters rests. It was Bhulabhai Desai who spoke of Gandhi's "fearlessness" as the one supreme quality of the man, which embraced all others. I cannot help feeling it is a well-chosen word, comprising Gandhi's religious fervour with his undoubted courage. It is an ample word. It expresses that power with him, of which we were conscious but which we could not quite describe. It was this fearlessness of Gandhi that made him shun danger and play with life. His fasts, his refusals to respect the threats against his liberty and person, his utter disregard of all sanctions that could have been enforced against him—these were the things that endeared him to the hearts of the people. He based his fearlessness on his faith in prayer and in God, and this faith supplied that strong religious flavour without which his actions would at times have appeared, though brave, a trifle foolish.

Strange things happened to this man. The mystery about him grew. He never quite satisfied the curiosity of the people. He had a disarming smile about him that turned cynics into blind sheep. He was too elusive to be nailed down. He was too vague to be satisfactorily described. Like the universe of Sir James Jeans, though finite, constantly being extended. He spoke not as an ordinary man but as a philosopher. He uttered little sentences that contained great truths. He was simple and yet profound. He was like a Pierian spring of which you could never drink sufficiently. He was as tantalizing as a fly that danced round the edges of a gluey paper. He was the sort of man about whom rumours had constantly to be denied. Yet he was just an ordinary little man—a farmer and weaver by profession!

* * *

ONE day there came to his *ashram* an English woman Her name was Lilian Slade. Many strange people had walked into his *ashram* out of curiosity before. The journalists of the world had flocked there for material. Tourists of repute made it a place of call to which they took their cameras and their note books. He was one of the sights of India.

But Lilian Slade did not come there like the others. She came seeking admission to the *ashram* in order to be able to devout her life to the cause of our country. And when the news spread through the length and breadth of the world that a white woman was devouting her life to the *ashram* of Gandhi, a gentle murmur ran through it. Who was this woman, they asked. Painfully they discovered that she was the daughter of an English admiral. And there were many English people who preferred not to discuss the matter any further. It would create undue publicity for a cause they disliked and it would certainly create a bad precedent. The irony of it must have been too much for the "Sahibs" of India. They had seen her dining with the pick of English bureaucracy in India—at Government House, with the Chief Justice and his wife, at the Bishop's and at the Commanding

Officer's. What a terrible blow it was to the prestige of the Englishman that the daughter of the admiral should now be an inmate of Gandhi's *ashram*. They felt a little relieved when later she changed her name to Miraben. But the damage had already been done, and the world watched eagerly this phenomenon of an English girl brought up in the strictest of discipline and etiquette, from whom, as Glorney Boulton says, the India of the Indians was withheld, breaking the artificial barriers of false pride to respond to the call of the most Indian among Indians.

But it was not just one single English girl that had come within the Gandhi spell. The left wing of English politicians, the socialists, the English Liberals, had begun to look upon this unusual man with respect. Even the clergy, impressed by Gandhi's sincerity of religion, had begun to pay him the reverence due to a holy man. At Cawnpore, at the Congress over which Sarojini Naidu presided, the Rev. J.H. Holmes of America rose amid the cheers of the Congress delegates, for he was wearing a Gandhi cap as a friendly gesture towards the Congress, and said : "Yesterday, I heard Dr. Abdul Rahman claiming Gandhiji as a South African. May I not claim him to-day for the whole world ? May I not say that the Society of Friends, which I represent, regard him with the same reverence and believe in his work as you do ? I ought to say that we have gone very far wrong in our Western civilization. We have gone too far in the pursuit of wealth and power. It is a deep evil in our whole Western civilization. Our love of wealth has resulted in its concentration, our longing for power has brought on war after war and will very likely plunge us in further wars until civilization is destroyed. So we gladly turn to you, who are indicating another and better way, and we hope that while keeping the good things in nature and inventions, we should follow the brotherly spirit which is represented by the great prophet among you."

Yes, the eyes of the world had once more turned on Gandhi, now supreme in India, though unwilling to

come into the limelight that was focussed on him. The time had not yet come for him to wear the mantle of a political leader. He preferred to remain the hermit in his ashram. The task of leading India into another fray was too much for him, and he believed that India was not yet in a position to respond. Speaking at Calcutta, Gandhi said : "I have admitted my incompetence. I have admitted that I have been found wanting as a physician prescribing a cure for this malady. I do not find that either Hindus or Muslims are ready to accept my cure, and, therefore, I simply nowadays confine myself to a passing mention of this problem and content myself by saying that some day or other we, Hindus and Muslims, will have to come together, if we want the deliverance of our country. And if it is to be our lot that, before we can come together, we must shed one another's blood, then I say, the sooner we do so, the better it is for us. If we propose to break one another's heads, let us do so in a manly way. Let us not then shed crocodile tears, let us not ask for sympathy from any quarter, if you do not propose to give any quarter."

It made some of his best friends wonder whether the years in gaol had dimmed the light which once shone in this man.

XX

IRWIN - BIRKENHEAD - SIMON

THE YEAR THAT FOLLOWED WAS COMPARATIVELY uneventful. Riots had become a common feature in India. It was only when the disturbances happened outside your bedroom window that you sat up and took notice. Reports of rioting had lost their headline importance and one had to run carefully through one's paper to find out how law and order were progressing in India.

It was a Good Friday on April 6, 1926, when there came to the shores of India a devout Anglican as Viceroy of India in succession to Lord Reading. The day had its significance for a man with the religious fervour of Lord Irwin. A Yorkshireman, a genuine product of the backwoods of England, the son of the then Viscount Halifax, Lord Irwin* was an experiment in Britain's administration of India. He was different from his predecessors. He had not the arrogance of Curzon, the foreign-office manners of Chelmsford, nor the precision of Reading. Lord Irwin's approach to the Indian problem was influenced by his own individuality, and not by the traditions

* Now Lord Halifax, but I have preferred to refer to him in this book as Lord Irwin.

of the India Office to which he was constitutionally subordinate. It was the approach of a man who was man-loving and God-fearing. He was a humble person who walked with his head upright and his conscience clear. Yet he walked on earth, not in the clouds. He preferred to set foot on India as it was, with the full realization of the awakening of its national conscience rather than on the India that *was* — a long, long time ago.

It was characteristic of the man that he insisted on observing the sanctity of the day. He did not wish it to be obscured by the celebration that ordinarily accompanies the arrival of the new Viceroy. Nor were conditions in India conducive to celebration, and he was even more aware of the unrest among the people than were those who were enthusiastically preparing to receive the representative of their King with a fanfare of trumpets. Such was the man who arrived in India on the afternoon of that day in April to take over the helm of Government and to play, opposite the Mahatma, a part memorable in the annals of Indian history. England had sent out a gentleman at last.

At the same time in Whitehall in the office of the Secretary of State for India sat the burly figure of the late Lord Birkenhead. As one looks back now upon the amazing career of this man who began as plain Mr. F. E. Smith, various periods of his life and career stand out by their sheer brilliance. Among his achievements one can perhaps look upon his Presidency of the Oxford Union and his term of office on the woolsack as the most distinguished, and with equal certainty, upon his tenure of office as Secretary of State for India as being conspicuous by its complete lack of understanding of the problem which confronted him. It was the most undignified ungallant, ungenerous period in an otherwise sparkling career. No man was by nature more unsuited to control the affairs of India than this unsympathetic English peer, who coined epigrams with as much ease at Oxford as he did later in life and who carried with him in his thought

and manner an impertinence all his own. His was perhaps the most sophisticated mind since the days of Oscar Wilde. There was a strange similarity in their thought — if only in the style of expression. Much of what he said was worth remembering — not so much because it made any contribution to profundity of thought as because it sparkled far above the conversation of ordinary men. He was the very antithesis of simplicity and genuineness. He seemed as if he was always brilliantly superficial, though more often brilliant than superficial.

It is true Birkenhead has made a great contribution to the jurisprudence of our time. His work on property legislation, his decisions as Lord Chancellor, his judgments in *Edward* v. *Butler* and in *re Polemis* will long be remembered by the student of law. Even so, the generations that will think affectionately of him will remember him rather by his after-dinner speeches, his quick repartee, his subtle humour, his biting sarcasm and his audacity. It is with these that his name will be more associated than with property legislation and Ireland and the appointment of the Simon Commission for India for which he was entirely responsible.

The appointment of Birkenhead at the India Office was an unfortunate event for India. It was as if the destiny of the Indian people had come under the influence of an evil star. For the calm that had come over the face of India disappeared when at the fag end of 1927 it was announced that there was to be no Indian on the Royal Commission appointed to draft the future constitution of India.

* * *

GANDHI still lived in retreat. He travelled widely, and in those two years he captured the hearts of the people by going into their very homes, their fields, their little plots of grounds. What had been to a great many of them a mere vision, had in these many months become a reality. They had now got a glimpse of the man of whom they had heard even in outlandish districts, where there were no newspapers, no radios and where news travelled only by

word of mouth. For many months his presence was almost ignored by the bureaucracy when consultations were held with distinguished Indian statesmen on various questions affecting India. The new Viceroy had interviewed several Indians, but he had refrained from making any contact with Gandhi. The time had probably not yet come, Lord Irwin must have thought, for Gandhi to be disturbed in the seclusion of his retreat. Or perhaps his ill-informed advisers had believed that Gandhi's star had fallen and he was now no longer worth attention. Whatever the reason, it was not till the November of that year—1927—that along with several other politicians, Gandhi received an invitation from the Viceroy to see him at Delhi at his convenience on and after the 5th of that month. From Mangalore in the South to Delhi way up in the North, Gandhi hurried, cancelling his programme to the disappointment of many thousands of people, to respect the invitation of the man who was the head of the British administration in India. Yet all he got was a copy of the Secretary of State's announcement regarding the appointment of the Simon Commission. Sitaramayya poignantly says "When asked whether that was all the business, Lord Irwin said 'Yes.' Gandhi felt that a one-anna envelope would have reached it to him."

* * *

ON the 8th of that same month, the news was broken to the press and the public. There was a general disappointment felt at this deliberate and insulting exclusion of Indians from the Simon Commission. The Congress, however, were not disappointed. Those who expect nothing can hardly feel disappointed when nothing happens. But to a great number of Indians who had not yet thrown in their lot with the Congress, it was a sad revelation to find that Britain did not rise to great heights of statesmanship at this crucial hour. Britain had failed because there was the wrong man at the helm of the India Office. And nothing would make Lord Birkenhead change his mind. There were several representations made to him. George Lansbury, Ramsay

Macdonald, Philip Snowden, went hastily to persuade Birkenhead, but his lordship refused to budge.

Reviewing the events that followed the boycott of the Simon Commission, Robert Bernays, sent out by Tom Clarke as special correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, said that this giving-in of Lord Irwin was one of the bad mistakes of his Viceregal career. "He ought," Bernays says, "to have yielded to the clamour of the Indian politicians that they should have direct representation on the Simon Commission. The Government at home would hardly have resisted on that question the advice of the man on the spot. Instead, he backed up Lord Birkenhead in his refusal to admit Indians and thereby doomed the Simon Commission to failure before it had landed in Bombay. I am told that Lord Irwin admits this mistake today. It is the one act in his Viceroyalty that he would most like to undo."

This pre-determination on the part of those in authority made Gandhi feel that there was nothing he could say regarding the Secretary of State's announcement of an All-White Commission. The days were over when India looked forward with enthusiasm to the "boons" which Britain periodically conferred on its brown subjects. Lord Irwin was aware of this change in India's attitude when, without another word, Gandhi left Viceregal House, painfully conscious of the loss of his time and energy in having been invited somewhat pointlessly all the way to Delhi. His cold indifference was unlike anything Lord Irwin had expected. It made the Viceroy feel small, and the fact that Gandhi preferred to regard the announcement as of no importance, put him somewhat ill at ease. Here was a man whom Lord Irwin had always been asked to regard as a rebel, a man probably of low cunning, one whom he should avoid if possible, and this same man, when informed of the appointment of a Royal Commission, had shown an indifference towards it which would chill the enthusiasm of the greatest of Viceroys. That moment, in his heart, Lord Irwin knew that the Simon Commission was doomed to failure in India. Only his sense of loyalty to his King

and his immediate superior, the Secretary of State, made him refrain from disassociating himself from the appointment of that Commission.

What was wrong with the Simon Commission? It has been said that the presence on it of a handful of Indians would have appeased Indian demands, while it would still have left the last word in the hands of the Englishmen. This is a false impression to convey. As Dr. Ansari, presiding over the Madras Congress of 1927, said: "It is not the question of the appointment of a Hindu peer or a Muslim knight, nor is it a question whether Indians should participate in its work as members, assessors or advisers. The principle involved is totally different. It is basic and fundamental. No sane or self-respecting Indian can ever admit the claim of Great Britain to be the sole judge of the measure and time of India's political advance. We alone know our needs and requirements best and ours must be the decisive voice in the determination of our future. It is our inherent and inalienable right. Taking its stand on these principles the Congress has all along advocated the convening of a Round Table Conference of the Representatives of India and Great Britain, with plenipotentiary powers, to decide the basis of the future constitution of India to be incorporated into an Act of Parliament. It is only on these conditions that India can, consistently with national honour and dignity, agree to co-operate."

It was as if Gandhi himself had spoken through Dr. Ansari, his devout friend and admirer. The resistance to authority, which appeared to have died down, was beginning to crystallize itself again in the hearts of the people.

Many months had passed since the February of 1922. Months had become years and India had recovered from the weariness of its first great struggle. The wounds had healed up and there were young men walking briskly over the face of India, ready for another struggle. Younger men had brought fresh blood into the main artery of the national movement and altogether there was

an enthusiasm which had sprung up spontaneously from the people — an enthusiasm which was waiting to be diverted into some specific channel. India was ready to fight it out once again.

* * *

BLACK flags and a funeral reception awaited Sir John Simon, when he came to the shores of India to hold the constitutional enquiry with which he was entrusted. The cry on the lips of the people was "Go back, Simon." The Legislative Assembly was the centre of several unpleasant exchanges between the elected representatives of the people and the nominated representatives of the Government. On at least one occasion its President, Vithalbhai J. Patel, had threatened to resign. The first Indian to be elected Speaker of that House, Patel had always maintained a very independent attitude. He had given his casting vote against a Public Safety Bill, because it was a reactionary measure purporting to give autocratic powers to the Government. He threw the onus of certifying it on the Viceroy. Once before he had placed on record that the decision of the Assembly was not the free vote of a free Assembly. And in every way he showed in his presidential term an impartial firmness in conducting the debates of the House, which showed that India had caught the spirit of freedom, and the word that seemed most expressive of the mood of the country was the word—"Challenge." The atmosphere in India was really tense.

XXI

THE ERA OF PRONOUNCEMENTS

ALL EYES TURNED TO THE CONGRESS AT CALCUTTA, where, to complete the annoyance they had already caused the Government, the Congress passed the following resolution: "This Congress having considered the Constitution, recommended by the All-Parties' Committee Report welcomes it as a great contribution towards the solution of India's political and communal problems and congratulates the Committee on the virtual unanimity of its recommendations, and, whilst adhering to the resolution relating to complete independence passed at the Madras Congress, approves of the Constitution drawn up by the Committee as a great step in political advance, specially as it represents the largest measure of agreement attained among the important parties in the country. Subject to the exigencies of the political situation, this Congress will adopt the Constitution if it is accepted in its entirety by the British Parliament on or before the 31st December, 1929, but in the event of its non-acceptance by the date or its earlier rejection, the Congress will organise

a campaign of non-violent non-co-operation by advising the country to refuse taxation and in such other manner as may be decided upon. Consistently with the above nothing in this resolution shall interfere with the carrying on in the name of the Congress of the propaganda for complete independence."

In such certain terms was the Congress ultimatum couched. It was generally referred to as the Calcutta resolution. Gandhi had with his usual courtesy included a sentence in the original draft of the resolution empowering the President to send the text of this resolution together with a copy of the report to the Viceroy for such action as he may be pleased to take, but the younger element in the Congress, Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose, were not in favour of taking any notice of the Viceroy or anyone else. They believed that the Congress should in its decisions be self-sufficient. Courtesy, which Gandhi regarded as the heritage of all great people, had to be forgone. But except for these differences on minor points, Gandhi's word had again begun to assert itself. The Swarajists had suffered a great loss in C. R. Das, and Nehru, the elder, was a little tired of his followers. Council entry had had its day and Motilal Nehru returned like the prodigal to the fold.

Meanwhile, an invitation came to Gandhi to undertake a European tour in the following year. The world had begun to take a more active interest in Indian affairs and people all over the world, and particularly in Europe, wanted to get first-hand information about what was happening in that great continent from a man who could fairly be said to represent the Indian people and to express their hopes, their fears, their aspirations. But Gandhi declined the offer. There was a great deal of work to be done in India as a result of the Congress ultimatum to Government. The Congress resolution, by which civil disobedience was to be revived, might have consequences which he could not foresee and it was inadvisable for Gandhi to leave India at such a crucial moment. His instinct as ever guided him on such occasions. He wrote

in reply to the invitation:

"I have no voice from within prompting me to go. On the contrary, having put a constructive resolution before the Congress and having received universal support, I feel that I will be guilty of desertion if I, having voted for the resolution, never meant to carry it out. It may be that I shall have nothing to do during the year in respect of the programme, but I feel that it is not for me to reason thus. I must not lose faith in the workers. A voice from within tells me that I must not only hold myself in readiness to do what comes my way, but I must even think out and suggest means of working out what to me is a great programme. Above all, I must prepare myself for the next year's struggle, whatever shape it may take."

This was in its way a prediction of the trouble that was to come. No man has in this age relied so much on instinct as Mahatma Gandhi. His inner voice had seldom erred and even when at times it seems to conflict with reason and all the laws of deduction, later events always proved that the instinctive guidance he got was right and what was considered to be the more logical deduction was often based on false premises. It was the key-note of Gandhi's success — this staking of his conduct on the urge of the inner self.

Already, therefore, by the February of 1929, there was a growing feeling in India that the unrest would spread itself all over the country and some sort of mass resistance would be offered in view of the humiliation that had been inflicted on the people by the appointment of the Simon Commission and the deliberate exclusion of Indians from its personnel.

Events soon took a rapid turn. The Simon Commission returned to England. Baldwin, Birkenhead and the rest were out of office and Labour had gained a victory at the polls. That was the May of 1929 when Mr. Ramsay Macdonald became once more the tenant of 10, Downing Street, and Wedgewood Benn came to the India Office. Almost immediately, sensing the change that had come

over the English people when they turned Left, Lord Irwin took four months' leave and rushed to England to see if the complete failure of the Simon Commission could not in some way be averted. So long as Lord Birkenhead had been in charge of Indian affairs, Lord Irwin knew this was impossible. Birkenhead's obstinacy on previous occasions had convinced him on that point. But now there was a different atmosphere in Whitehall, and as Lord Irwin said, he was going to England to devise some means whereby the constitutional question might be clarified, and a greater degree of co-operation obtained from all sections of Indian political opinion before Parliament was asked to pronounce upon whatever scheme of reforms might be laid before it as a result of the statutory enquiry." With this purpose in mind, Lord Irwin left India.

* * *

THE four months were not without fruit. When Lord Irwin returned in October, he was in a position to lay before the Indian people proposals, which went a long way to show that His Majesty's Government had changed its attitude towards India and that it had realized the need of Indian co-operation in order to effect a lasting solution of the Indian problem. These proposals were embodied in a statement issued by Lord Irwin on his return to India.

For the first time it was officially recognized that the destiny of India was bound up with that of the Indian States and that its future would have to be determined in relation to those autonomous and sovereign bodies to which, geographically, it was permanently bound. It showed that Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru had not in vain pleaded in the past for the consideration of a federal scheme for India. The second important announcement was the formation of a Conference at which British and Indian delegates would meet to consider the proposals which would finally be submitted to Parliament. This was to be the Round Table Conference.

The last part of that announcement, which was perhaps the most important, was the enunciation of British

policy with regard to India and the goal which it was striving to achieve. "It is His Majesty's will and pleasure that the plans laid by Parliament in 1919 should be the means by which British India may attain its due place among his Dominions. Ministers of the Crown, moreover, have more than once publicly declared that it is the desire of the British Government that India should, in the fullness of time, take her place in the Empire in equal partnership with the Dominions. But in view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and India regarding the interpretation to be placed on the intentions of the British Government in enacting the Statute of 1919, I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgment it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status."

These were not ambiguous words. The Statute of Westminster, which was at that time in contemplation, was to give the Dominion a freedom which would enable them to decide their own internal and external policy. To attain its due place among the Dominions, was, therefore, quite a clear objective and the first reception of that news in India gladdened many an Indian heart, which felt that the vision and foresight of a Christian gentleman had at last triumphed over the stolid diplomacy of Empire-builders. There was also a different type of man in charge of the affairs of State. The bulk of Labour Cabinet Ministers came from a very humble walk of life. Sons of miners, engine-drivers, school-masters—they had been for many years the under-dogs of England. Only now with the awakening of a class-less conscience, the destiny of the country had fallen into the hands of those who were the people themselves. It was only natural that the coming into power of Socialism in England would reflect in England's attitude to India.

Within less than a day the Congress Working Committee gave its consideration to the offer made by the Viceroy and after carefully studying the situation, expressed its

desire to co-operate and work for a peaceful solution of India's problems. But it laid down certain essential conditions which were vital for the success of a Conference. These conditions were three in number—that a policy of general conciliation be adopted to induce a calmer atmosphere, that the Government should grant an amnesty to political prisoners, that the representation of progressive political organizations should be effectively secured and, as the Indian National Congress was the largest among such bodies, it should have a predominant representation.

The only other point raised in their statement was the clarification of the paragraph in the Viceroy's statement which dealt with Dominion Status. The Congress said: "Some doubt has been expressed about the interpretation of the paragraph in the statement made by the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government regarding Dominion Status. We understand, however, that the Conference is to meet not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be established, but to frame the scheme of a Dominion constitution for India. We hope we are not mistaken in thus interpreting the import and implications of the weighty pronouncement of His Excellency the Viceroy."

Gandhi himself was "dying to co-operate." "I have," he said, "responded on the very first opportunity that offered itself, but I have meant every word of the joint manifesto, as I have of the now-famous Calcutta resolution of the Congress. The two are in no sense contradictory. The letter of a document is nothing, if the spirit of it is preserved in effect. I can wait for a Dominion Constitution if I can get real Dominion Status in action. That is to say, if there is a real change of heart, a real desire on the part of the British people to see India a free and self-respecting nation, and on the part of the officials in India a true spirit of service. But this means substitution of the steel bayonet by the goodwill of the people. Are Englishmen and Englishwomen prepared to rely for the safety of their lives and property upon the goodwill of the people rather than upon the gun-mounted

forts? If they are not yet ready, there is no Dominion Status that would satisfy me. My conception of Dominion Status implies present ability to sever the British connection if I wish to. Therefore, there can be no such thing as compulsion in the regulation of the relations between Britain and India. If I choose to remain in the Empire, it is to make a partnership of power for promoting peace and goodwill in the world, never to promote exploitation or what is known as Britain's imperialistic creed. . . ."

It was characteristic of Gandhi and the Congress that they no longer contented themselves with vague generalizations. So much had happened in the past to disillusion them that they distrusted vagueness in any form. They knew the years that it had taken to implement the Montague announcement, and even now, India was as far away from that goal as ever. That is why they wanted to know exactly how they stood before getting too enthusiastic about the pronouncement of Lord Irwin and the goal of British policy which it contained.

The fears of the Indians were not unjustified. Already within the next few days there was an uproar in the House of Commons, and Conservative die-hard opinion strongly resented this new policy of conciliation which the Labour Government had inaugurated in India. Speeches were made about the glory of the Empire, forgetting, as these great Empire-builders did, that they could no longer hold India by the sword. Even so these die-hards were hard to placate, and in the attempt to keep them quiet the Labour Government through its spokesman Wedgewood Benn, the Secretary of State for India, undid much of the good work Lord Irwin had done in India when he made the announcement. The policy of His Majesty's Government had not changed, Wedgewood Benn kept repeating to that hostile House of Commons, and as he succeeded in convincing English Conservative opinion on that point he also inadvertently convinced India and the Congress that the gestures of Lord Irwin and the new Labour Government were not meant to be taken too seriously.

With such thoughts in his mind, Gandhi went with several others to Delhi to meet the Viceroy to see if some basis of co-operation could be agreed upon. The Viceroy had the advantage of drawing sympathy on his side, because of a miraculous escape from a bomb explosion which might well have wrecked his train. Courtesy demanded that one should be sympathetic at a time like this and there was a consensus of opinion deploring such actions, all of which was in Lord Irwin's favour. Then the Viceroy came to the point. He broke the ice by asking where they should begin. In his attitude he reflected an earnestness to extend a hand which was continually being pulled back by those who were in the offices at Whitehall. Lord Irwin wanted to make the right gesture by releasing the political prisoners, but Gandhi would not swallow the bait and preferred to know the real position regarding Dominion Status. Was the Round Table Conference to presume the grant of Dominion Status or was that essential factor still problematic? Lord Irwin regretted he could not give Mr. Gandhi any assurance on this point and both knew at that time that co-operation between them in such circumstances was impossible. The Viceroy's statement was, therefore, only an attempt to bend the nettled hedge to allow a poacher to pass temporarily in dubious safety.

* * *

GANDHI was now playing a strange role in Indian politics. He did not want to risk another failure and the responsibilities attached to a leader were too great for him to bear. A set-back was often too depressing, and he therefore declined to come to the front of the stage and take the bow. Indian opinion was so fickle that there was no knowing whether he would be greeted with applause or with ripe tomatoes. And Gandhi wanted neither. He disliked applause for he was modest. But he was also very sensitive to criticism and ripe tomatoes. Therefore he declined to lead the Congress at that crucial stage and preferred to nominate its President. This was a privilege which he now enjoyed almost as of right,

Gandhi judged the tempo of Indian opinion, and in view of the happenings and the announcements of the day, he pressed upon the Congress the leadership of the young Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress accepted Gandhi's advice and one saw for the first time a young and impetuous man as the accredited leader of the Indian National Congress — the Congress which met at Lahore. Son had followed father, because in the year before at Calcutta, it was Motilal Nehru who was the President.

Comrades! — Nehru said, beginning his fiery Presidential address in a manner unorthodox for India and based, perhaps, on the speeches in the Red Square of Moscow. That was the note on which he began, initiating a new era in the politics of Congress, for it was the first time in its history that the Congress had associated itself with Socialism, even though it was only the personal association of its President. "I must frankly confess," Jawaharlal said, "that I am a socialist and a republican and am no believer in Kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even kings of old, and whose methods are predatory as were those of the old feudal aristocracy." And Gandhi smirked a little. How refreshing to hear these things uttered by a young man so full of life and courage, even though he would not say them himself!

The Congress attitude to the Viceroy's announcement was then laid down. It was one of comparative indifference. How could they co-operate so long as there was no guarantee that real freedom would come? It had not matter whether you called it Independence or Dominion Status. The real thing was the conquest of power and it was the complete freedom of India, in the fullest sense of that word, that the Congress stood for.

These were some of the sentiments Jawaharlal Nehru expressed. One could see in his utterances the conflict between his own instinct and his loyalty to his guide and master, the Mahatma, whom Jawaharlal had always been taught by his father to look up to and respect.

It was in his wavering between the various methods to be employed in achieving India's goal that this conflict was to be found. The intellectual conviction, which had come to him through the works of Lenin and Marx, differed from the teachings of Gandhi. The best that Nehru could do under the circumstances was to try and assimilate these two conflicting doctrines. "Our choice," Nehru said, "is limited, not by our own constitution, which we can change at our will but by facts and circumstances. Article one of our constitution lays down that our methods must be legitimate and peaceful. Legitimate, I hope they will always be, for we must not sully the great cause, for which we stand, by any deed that will bring dishonour to it and that we may ourselves regret later. Peaceful, I should like them to be, for the methods of peace are more desirable and more enduring than those of violence. Violence too often brings reaction and demoralisation in its train, and in our country, especially, it may lead to disruption. It is perfectly true that organised violence, rules the world today and it may be that we could profit by its use. But we have not the material or the training for organised violence and individual or sporadic violence is a confession of despair. The great majority of us, I take it, judge the issue not on moral but on practical grounds, and if we reject the ways of violence, it is because it promises no substantial results."

In these last words of Nehru was to be found the new attitude of the younger generation of Congress socialists to non-violence. They rejected the use of force on practical grounds — a dangerous philosophy to preach in a country, which could barely be kept under control by Gandhi's continual preaching of *Ahimsa* principles. It was not because non-violence was more practical that Gandhi had preached it. It was rather because of its high moral value. Let there be no mistake whatever about that. Its practicability was only a secondary consideration or else it would have lost its purpose. However, be that as it may, what emerged so conspicuously from the Lahore Congress was that there was a new fighting spirit in the

rank and file — a spirit which had hitherto not expressed itself so firmly and so resolutely. It was a determination to fight to the finish. This was what Gandhi sensed at Lahore and he knew that the time was soon to come when he would lead his country to fight once more for the liberation of its people.

XXII

TAKING STOCK.

IT WAS NOW TIME TO ASK WHAT WAS THE ULTIMATE goal of Indian aspirations. Words had been bandied about without attention being paid to the difference in their meanings — differences, which implied whether a greater or lesser degree of responsibility was to rest on those in whose hands the government of India would eventually fall. Dominion Status and Independence seemed easy enough to be included in Congress resolutions at a time when there was little likelihood of getting either. But with the Round Table Conference in sight and the climb down of the die-hard and reactionary element in England, it seemed as if, with a generation or two at the very latest, India would be in a position to decide for itself whether it wanted to remain within the protection of the British Empire or whether it wanted to gamble with its destiny on its own.

It had always been a truism about British policy, from whatever aspect one looked at it, that, by trying to stand on its dignity and its somewhat over-rated prestige,

it had made the opposing side clamour for demands which went much further and to which in the end, under greater pressure, England had always to accede. This missing of the appropriate and psychological moment seems to be inherent in the British character. It was to be seen in the history of Ireland and the rise to power of Mr. De Valera. It was responsible for the eventual passing of the Statute of Westminster — and much later in the various negotiations between Britain and the Fascist dictatorships in the Italian and the German attitude to the treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, it became evident even to large sections of English public opinion that England would have done better to have given of its own accord and given freely what in the end was taken from it without grace, leaving very little dignity.

The history of the Indian national movement has borne out the truth of these remarks. The Indian answer to the strong hand used in Indian policy was the Congress determination to fight to the bitter end for the complete and absolute freedom of the Indian people. It pledged itself to gain complete independence for India, chiefly because of the way in which the English people behaved soon after the Viceroy's announcement of the goal of British policy in India. Had His Majesty's Government given Gandhi and the Congress the assurances which they wanted and which could reasonably be interpreted from the Viceroy's declaration, namely, that the Conference in London was to try to give effect to Dominion Status, much of the bitterness of feeling that was later aroused and has since existed between the two nations could have been avoided, and with the co-operation of the Congress, a workable scheme could have been evolved, which would have left certain ultimate powers in the hands of the British Government and still have given India a substantial measure of self-government. India would have been satisfied with such a gesture. As it was, the debate on India in the House of Commons showed quite clearly that England wanted to hang on to that priceless jewel in the Imperial Crown, defending it with all the armed force at

its command and caring little or nothing for the wishes, the welfare and the advancement of three hundred and seventy million Indian people.

It has been asked by the more practical and able British statesmen and civil servants whether the Congress and its spokesman, Mr. Gandhi, in making the demands for independence realized its implications. Would India be able to support itself financially? Would India be able to defend itself in the event of a foreign invasion? Would any one section of Indian opinion or religion be able to withstand the onslaught upon it of the other? In short, if the British were to withdraw from the Indian scene, would not law and order end up in complete chaos?

There is little doubt as to India's self-sufficiency. Rich in food and raw materials, it is known to produce almost every commodity, which is required for a nation. On the contrary it has large exports of surplus. Even the cotton, which it now imports from America, will in the near future be grown in India itself, and the only thing for which India will have to be dependent upon other countries will be the machinery it uses. It seems hardly possible that if England should refuse to export machinery to India, there would not be other countries, such as America and Japan, willing to supply.

Moreover, the severance of the British connection would mean that India's national debt, which was chiefly incurred because of Britain's Imperialistic wars, would automatically be cancelled. The only safeguard for the payment of these debts is the existence of the British Army in India and the control which Britain still retains over India's finances. If one analyses this debt, one begins to realize how England has lent India money to make India fight for England. So it was in the last War. It is hardly an *Indian* national debt. The cancellation of such a debt would not be against the conscience or the morals of the nation. On all other financial matters India would gain by severing the British connection. At the moment there is a great deal of Indian revenue going out of India every year in the shape of pays and pensions of

Englishmen who work in India but whose families are always in England. Consequently a large portion of Indian moneys are spent in England and elsewhere and India is the poorer for this loss. There is also a great feeling of resentment at the salaries paid to officials, most of whom have been for many years not Indians but Englishmen, and this becomes almost an absurdity when you bear in mind the poverty of the country and its average wage-earning capacity, which has been rated as a little under two annas or two pence a day. All these facts as also the retention of an army for Imperial purposes, far above that required for the safety of India itself, show that financially India has been crippled by the British raj and that it has everything to gain by disassociating itself from British obligations and British commitments.

What about India's power to defend itself? This is a question which has to be answered in relation to certain existing facts which cannot be overlooked. It is universally known that Britain, so long as it can hold India at the point of the sword, will not hesitate to do so. A hundred and fifty years of British rule have borne witness to that. In such circumstances it would be right to say if India did overthrow the supremacy of the British raj in India, that power would by itself be sufficient to withstand any other foreign invasion. It would seem hardly probable that a foreign nation would cast eyes on a country which Britain, a first rate power and with all the resources at its command, could not hold. But all this is hypothetical. The Indian demand at no stage has expected a complete and immediate withdrawal of the British. It has been said, even by the moderate section of Indian opinion which went to the earlier Round Table Conferences, that a certain Indianization was necessary in the Army. To this end, they tackled the British spokesmen on the other side and asked them how soon and at what rate they were prepared to Indianize the Army in India. It was the non-committal answers, which they received, that showed how completely farcical that Conference was intended to be. Figures have shown that if the replacement of all the

wastage in the Officers' class was entirely Indian, it would still take over fifty years to Indianize the Officers alone. And that would be the most drastic measure that India could take. So that, if proportionately only half the wastage was Indianized, it would take double the time. Under such circumstances it is difficult to try to answer a question which should never have been asked in the first place. The main argument has always been that the British domination over India has not been exerted for India's benefit and that is what the Congress and Gandhi and India as a whole resent with all the force at their command.

It is pertinent at this stage to say that Gandhi has exercised almost a restraining influence on India. Were it not for him, there is little doubt in my mind that India, charged with a more daring patriotism, would have made a bolder bid for power. The method it would have employed would have been the method employed elsewhere, bringing much suffering and destruction in its train. But it would have left its mark on the English countenance. Those of us who would hate to see this futile shedding of blood, and who have dreaded the emaciation of the species, the mutilation, the disease, the carnage which would have followed, have prayed silently that the British would have the sense to give India the substance of self-determination in the lifetime of Gandhi, rather than that later, without him, we should be urged by forces with which we have little sympathy, but which may absorb the masses into them and be beyond our power to withhold. Therefore, if something like Dominion Status with the added privileges granted by the Statute of Westminster were to be given to India in the lifetime of the Mahatma, it would be possible to maintain the British connection and safeguard the vested interests of Great Britain in India—interests which might later be in danger of complete extinction.

Some of these desperate sentiments were embodied in a Congress resolution in the year 1930. It gave the reasons why the Congress had then pledged itself to Purna

Swaraj or complete self-government. It was choicely worded, expressing that latent sorrow which was in the hearts of the people. It read: "We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any Government deprives a people of those rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence. India has been ruined economically. Village industries, such as hand-spinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts, and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries for the crafts thus destroyed. Customs and currency have been so manipulated as to heap further burdens on the peasantry. British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. Customs duties betray clear partiality for British manufactures, and revenue from them is used not to lessen the burden on the masses but for sustaining a highly extravagant administration. Still more arbitrary has been the manipulation of exchange ratio which has resulted in millions being drained away from the country. Politically, India's status has never been so reduced as under the British regime. No reforms have given real political power to the people. The tallest of us have to bend before foreign authority. The right of free expression of opinion and free association has been denied to us, and many of our countrymen are compelled to live in exile abroad and cannot return to their homes. All administrative talent is killed and the masses have to be satisfied with petty village offices and clerkships. Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our

moorings and our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us. Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us unmanly and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression, or even defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers and miscreants. We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this four-fold disaster to our country. We recognise, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will, therefore, prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj."

Such was the stand which the Congress was determined to take in answer to the disappointing reply it received when it asked the Viceroy to state clearly the purpose with which the Round Table Conference was to meet. In his several utterances subsequent to his original declaration, he made it quite clear that there was no question whatever of self-determination. The power to determine India's future constitution would remain finally in the hands of Parliament. The Round Table Conference was, therefore, convened only in order to enable British statesmen and British public opinion to be acquainted with the Indian point of view and with India's aspirations. As this was the case, the Congress was not prepared to go to England merely to act as an information bureau for Britain. It was in keeping with its idea of self-respect that it refrained from attending the Round Table Conference.

COLLEGE LIBRARY

XXII

"ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH. . . ."

THE ENERGIES OF GANDHI AND THE CONGRESS WERE diverted once more to the renewal of civil disobedience. It was to be on a larger scale than that attempted by the first non-co-operation movement. With his genius for hitting upon the appropriate legislation to resist, he selected the Salt Tax as symbolic of the British administration. No one had till then raised any objection to the duty levied on salt nor had anyone complained about the monopoly which the Government exercised. It was a fact, which was generally known, that salt made by the individual from sea water was more expensive and less hygienic than that which was manufactured by Government. That, however, was not the point at issue. The objection of Gandhi to the Salt Tax was on a moral ground irrespective of any material loss or gain.

There was something very paradoxical about the whole situation. Here was a man urging a whole country on to civil disobedience on a purely theoretical objection. It was a fight for a principle. And so the movement

which that struggle engendered, being based on moral grounds, and being tacked on to a mere symbol, gathered force by reason of its symbolism. Altogether it was an ingenious idea. Let it not be supposed, however, that the opposition to the Salt Tax was a trivial example of obstructionist tactics. There was also an argument underlying it, which did not manifest itself on the surface. It was that a commodity regarded as a necessity of life by the entire population should not be taxed in however small a measure, because the minutest fraction of a penny was bound to affect a country whose average wage-earning capacity was less than two annas a day. When you regard the Salt Tax in terms of the wage-earning capacity of the Indian people, it appears an inequitous burden for the masses to bear. And this was not too unreasonable an argument for Gandhi to adopt.

From the point of view of political tactics, Gandhi had very aptly chosen the Salt Tax for civil disobedience. It had, of course, nothing to do with India's immediate needs. There had been no recent legislation in connection with salt duties. It was only because it provided a simple argument for Gandhi to put before the masses that he chose the salt tax as the basis of his agitation.

The condition of the Indian masses was such that they would not have understood any constructive argument against Imperialism. Such an argument would have been beyond the understanding of those whom he wanted to enlist for his campaign. Gandhi's whole idea was that his next movement should be a mass movement embracing every type and shade of individual. With this end in view he wanted to have a simple and uniform argument to present to the masses. This he found in the Salt Tax and the reception, with which it met, supplied him with a following of tremendous proportions. It was an eye-opener to the Government. They knew then what it meant when Gandhi spoke. They knew on whose behalf he spoke. They knew, as never before, that his was the echo of the voice of India—a genuine, unamplified echo that was clear and distinct.

Unlike other *coups*, the plans of which are kept a dark secret, Gandhi gave the widest publicity to his campaign. It was characteristic of his method of attack that he always informed the adversary of his every move. He did this with two motives. The one was to play fair, no matter what the consequences. The other was to leave open a possibility of converting the opponent to his way of thinking, for a victory earned in that way was worth much more to Gandhi than one earned by coercion or force.

Accordingly he wrote the now famous letter to the Viceroy. It contained a bitter condemnation of the British rule and its effects on India. It was in parts a very humble appeal to the man who was at the head of the administration in India. It gave his reasons for resuming civil disobedience and the shape that this disobedience was to assume. Taken to New Delhi by an Englishman, Reginald Reynolds, it was one of the more spectacular documents despatched from Sabarmati Ashram. It was a letter from the representative of the people to the representative of the Crown. It began with the words: "Dear Friend." I reproduce only some of the more pertinent passages.

"Before embarking on Civil Disobedience, and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out.

"My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India.

". . . .Since the announcement, many events have happened which show unmistakably the trend of British policy. It seems as clear as daylight that responsible British statesmen do not contemplate any alteration in British policy that might adversely affect Britain's commerce with India or require an impartial and close

scrutiny of Britain's transactions with India. If nothing is done to end the process of exploitation, India must be bled with an ever increasing speed. The Finance Member regards as a settled fact the 1s. 6d. ratio which, by a stroke of the pen, drains India of a few crores. And when a serious attempt is being made, through a civil form of direct action, to unsettle this fact, among many others, even you cannot help appealing to the wealthy landed classes to help you to crush that attempt in the name of an order that grinds India to atoms.

"Unless those who work in the name of the nation understand, and keep before all concerned, the motive that lies behind the craving for Independence, there is every danger of Independence itself coming to us so changed as to be of no value to those toiling, voiceless millions for whom it is sought and for whom it is worth taking. It is for that I have been recently telling the public what Independence should mean.

"Let me put before you some of the salient points. The terrific pressure of Land Revenue, which furnishes a large part of the total, must undergo considerable modification in an Independent India. Not only, then, has the Land Revenue to be cosiderably reduced, but the whole revenue system has to be so revised as to make the ryot's good its primary concern. But the British system seems to be designed to crush the very life out of him. Even the salt he must use to live is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him, if only because of the heartless impartiality of its incidence. The tax shows itself still more burdensome on the poor man, when it is remembered that salt is the one thing he must eat more than the rich man, both individually and collectively. The drink and drug revenue, too, is derived from the poor. It saps the foundations both of their health and morals. It is defended under the false plea of individual freedom, but in reality is maintained for its own sake. The ingenuity of the authors of the Reforms of 1919 transferred this revenue to the so-called responsible part of Dyarchy, so as to throw the burden of prohibition on it, thus, from

the very beginning, rendering it powerless for good. If the unhappy Minister wipes out this revenue, he must starve education, since in the existing circumstances he has no new source of replacing that revenue. If the weight of taxation has crushed the poor from above, the destruction of the central supplementary industry, *i.e.*, hand-spinning, has undermined their capacity for producing wealth.

"The tale of India's ruination is not complete without reference to the liabilities incurred in her name. Sufficient has been recently said about these in the public Press. It must be the duty of a free India to subject all the liabilities incurred in her name to be the strictest investigation, and repudiate those that may be adjudged by an impartial tribunal to be unjust and unfair.

"The inequities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstrably the most expensive in the world. Take your own salary. It is over Rs. 21,000 per month, besides many other indirect additions. The British Prime Minister gets £5,000 per year, *i.e.*, over Rs. 5,400 per month at the present rate of exchange. You are getting over Rs. 700 per day, against India's average income of less than 2 annas per day. The Prime Minister gets Rs. 180 per day against Great Britain's average income of nearly Rs. 2 per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times British average income. On bended knees, I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon. I have taken a personal illustration to drive home a painful truth. I have too great a regard for you as a man to wish to hurt your feelings. I know that you do not need the salary you get. Probably the whole of your salary goes for charity. But a system that provides for such an arrangement deserves to be summarily scrapped. What is true of the Viceregal salary is true generally of the whole administration.

"A radical cutting down of the revenue, therefore, depends upon an equally radical reduction in the expenses

of the administration. This means a transformation of the scheme of government. This transformation is impossible without Independence. Hence, in my opinion, the spontaneous demonstration of 26th January, in which hundreds of thousands of villagers instinctively participated. To them Independence means deliverance from the killing weight.

"Not one of the great British political parties, it seems to me, is prepared to give up the Indian spoils to which Great Britain helps herself from day to day, often in spite of the unanimous opposition of Indian opinion.

"Nevertheless, if India is to live as a nation, if the slow death by starvation of her people is to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief. The proposed Conference is certainly not the remedy. It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interests by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death.

"It is common cause that, however, disorganised, and, for the time being, insignificant it may be, the party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt. Its end is the same as mine. But I am convinced that it cannot bring the desired relief to the dumb millions. And the conviction is growing deeper and deeper in me that nothing but unadulterated non-violence can check the organised violence of the British Government. My experience, limited though it undoubtedly is, shows that non-violence can be an intensely active force. It is my purpose to set in motion that force, as well against the organised violent force of the British rule as the unorganised violent force of the growing party of violence. To sit still would be to give reign to both the forces above-mentioned. Having an unquestioning and immoveable faith in the efficacy of non-violence, as I know it, it would be sinful on my part to wait any longer.

"The non-violence will be expressed through civil

disobedience, for the moment confined to the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement with its obvious limitations.

"I know that in embarking on non-violence, I shall be running what might fairly be termed a mad risk. But the victories of Truth have never been won without risks, often of the bravest character. Conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously preyed upon another far more numerous, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk.

"I have deliberately used the word 'conversion.' For my ambition is no less than to convert the British people, through non-violence, and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them, even as I want to serve my own. I believe that I have always served them. I served them up to 1919 blindly. But when my eyes were opened and I conceived non-co-operation, the object still was to serve them. I employed the same weapon that I have, in all humility, successfully used against the dearest members of my family. If I have equal love of your people with mine, it will not long remain hidden. It will be acknowledged by them, even as the members of my family acknowledged it after they had tried me for several years. If the people join me, as I expect they will, the sufferings they will undergo, unless the British nation sooner retraces its steps, will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts.

"The plan through civil disobedience will be to combat such evils as I have sampled out. If we want to sever the British connection, it is because of such evils. When they are removed, the path becomes easy. Then the way to friendly negotiation will be open. If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognising our Independence. I respectfully invite you then to pave the way for an immediate removal of those evils, and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only

in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging terms of mutual help and commerce equally suited to both. You have unnecessarily laid stress upon the communal problems that unhappily affect this land. Important though they undoubtedly are for the consideration of any scheme of government, they have little bearing on the greater problems which are above communities and which affect them all equally. But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the 11th day of this month, I shall proceed, with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the Salt Law. I regard this tax to be the most inequitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the independent movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil. The wonder is that we have submitted to the cruel monopoly for so long. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner, to take up the work after me, and in the act of disobeying the Salt Act, to lay themselves open to the penalties of a Law that should never have disfigured the Statute Book.

"I have no desire to cause you unnecessary embarrassment or any at all, so far as I can help. If you think that there is any substance in my letter, and if you will care to discuss matters with me, and if to that end you would like me to postpone publication of this letter, I shall gladly refrain, on receipt of a telegram to that effect soon after this reaches you. You will, however, do me the favour not to deflect me from my course, unless you can see your way to conform to the substance of this letter.

"This letter is not in any way intended as a threat, but is a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister. Therefore, I am having it specially delivered by a young English friend, who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence, and whom

providence seems to have sent to me, as it were, for the very purpose."

That letter speaks for itself. It has been described as an ultimatum, and certainly it was the most arrogant, the most self-assertive and audacious letter that had yet been received by a Viceroy of India. The tone of this letter was firm. Gandhi did not seem to care very much whether its substance pleased His Excellency or not. Even so it was respectful towards the Viceroy as a man. It stressed again and again Gandhi's desire not to hurt Lord Irwin's feelings, not to cause him any undue embarrassment. It revealed in thought and style that Gandhi was a man with a strange personality, a queer mixture of the naive and the calculating, a philosopher and a politician, a man of religion and a man of affairs, simple, straightforward, and sincere. The letter itself was, I take the liberty of saying, beautifully worded.

The reply of Lord Irwin was brief and formal. It deprecated Gandhi's intention of violating the law and of causing a breach of the peace. It was the typical reply of a British administrator. Lord Irwin could not as Viceroy have replied otherwise. Lord Irwin as an ordinary individual might have.

Gandhi commented on the Viceroy's curt note by saying that on bended knees he had asked for bread and received a stone instead. Now his mind was made up, and all India waited anxiously for the fateful day to arrive.

* * *

DAWN had hardly broken on the 12th of March when in the Ashram there was feverish excitement about the arrangements that were being made for the commencement of Gandhi's march. It was expected that Gandhi would be arrested. Gandhi himself was a little surprised that with all the notice he had given the Government, they had not already attempted to frustrate his plans. He had some time before written an article in "*Young India*" giving his followers full instructions as to what they should do when he was arrested. He had appointed a

long list of persons to succeed him in turn and thus carry on the satyagraha march from where the last man left off. But nothing happened to Gandhi. Against all expectations, with the route through Ahmedabad lined with a hundred thousand people from the early hours of the morning, with journalists covering one of the major assignments of their career, Gandhi, still a free man, stepped out of the Ashram, staff in hand to lead his Israelites to the sight of the promised land.

The sight was touching in its simplicity. No pompous ceremonial, no bright uniforms, no material accoutrements, no trimmings, no trappings. Clad in khaddar, some of them half-naked, with a shawl thrown over their bare torsos, they followed him. "Lead, kindly light! Lead Thou me on!" the soul of India cried. The subsequent manufacture of salt in little pans on the sea-shore at Dandi against the laws of the mighty Government of India was the climax of a pacifist creed. But there was another aspect of this same march. For it drew the ridicule and the scorn of an Anglo-Indian press which had made it its business to be ignorant of the purpose, the motive and the driving force of a movement based essentially on soul-force. Fleet Street only gave it prominence through its cartoonists. That was forgivable. Fleet Street was ten thousand miles away from the scene of the suffering and the sorrow that was India. But there were Englishmen in India, who earned their bread on the soil of India and who were in a position to influence and guide Anglo-Indian and English public opinion, who might have had the grace to refrain from pouring scorn on the Dandi March. Living as they did in the midst of a nation's struggle, they might have struck one sympathetic note. But one cannot draw blood out of stone, nor sympathy from barren souls. It is only so long as a nation remains subjected that others dare to ridicule it. A day will come when we will have cause to remember the march to Dandi, even as the Latins remember their march on Rome, or the Soviets the October revolution, or the French the Quatorze Juillet. Somewhere in India a

revolution had begun. Not in the homes of the rich perhaps, but in the hearts of the poor. These downtrodden people had begun to acquire some backbone. Fearlessly they donned a Gandhi cap and wore khaddar in the very same Government offices, where ten years ago they would not have been allowed to set foot in such clothes.

The wearing of swadeshi was a result of this renaissance of Indian nationalism. The boycott of foreign goods became most effective. Lancashire began to feel the effects of that more intense boycott and the bread line in the Black North became mightier than ever. The boycott was too quick to give them time to think. That was how England first heard that there was a nationalist movement afoot in India. Nothing else brought it so vividly to their minds as the spectre of unemployed men and the gradual diminution of smoke from the chimneys of the mills in Lancashire.

If you look back now and trace the history of that boycott back to the salt pans and the sea-shore, where bare-footed, the Mahatma was ostensibly amusing himself by making salt, you begin to realize how he had by that march to Dandi fired the imagination of the Indian people. And that it should have been achieved by discipline and non-violence made it an achievement without parallel in the history of the struggle of humanity to free itself.

The weeks rolled on and the second civil disobedience movement grew. India wondered what was in Lord Irwin's mind. Why had he left Gandhi alone against all Viceregal precedent, against the advice of Anglo-India, against the expectations of Gandhi himself? Was it that Gandhism had triumphed or that Lord Irwin had by some means been converted? Was the Viceroy trying to answer satyagraha with satyagraha? That could not be. He had already ordered the arrest of several important Congress leaders. He had promulgated a ruthless Press Ordinance which virtually put an end to the liberty of the press. Securities were demanded from every newspaper and these were confiscated if the newspaper gave

any space to seditious activities, for in so far as the civil disobedience movement was calculated to overthrow the British rule in India, in however peaceful a manner, it was, because of its avowed purpose, a seditious movement.

All over India there was a tense atmosphere. It looked like the eve of a great revolution.

* * *

ONE very striking feature of those days was the entry of women into the national struggle. Gandhi had addressed an appeal to the women of India. It was embodied in an article in *Young India*. He urged them to take up the picketing of shops which dealt in foreign cloth and liquor. Thereby he wanted to stimulate the production of khaddar and to bring prohibition more vividly before the public eye. There was, he realized, less excitement and adventure in this form of satyagraha at a time when the spotlight had fallen on the sea-shore. But, said Gandhi: "....if they will put their whole heart in this agitation they will find more than enough excitement and adventure. Before they have done with the agitation, they might even find themselves in prison. It is not improbable that they may be insulted and even injured bodily. To suffer such insult and injury would be their pride. Such suffering, if it comes to them, will hasten the end."

If there was any one country, which was conspicuous by the backwardness of its women, it was India. It was not many years ago that a woman in India was treated like a chattel. She had no position in the society of man. In those religions, which recognized polygamy, she was one among many in a man's household. The Hindu religion did not regard a woman's life worth living after the husband's death, and she was known to kill herself by jumping on the burning funeral pyre which enveloped the corpse of her dead husband. Orthodox society encouraged this practice of *Suttee*, applauded it and considered it as the right thing to do.

All this happened many years ago. Even so, in a country with that historical background, it had seemed

inconceivable, however advanced a form of civilization it attained, that one would live to see the day when the women of India — the real women of India as apart from the few straggling individuals one encountered in the great cities — would be emancipated. Therefore, Gandhi's appeal seemed somewhat misdirected. But such was the temper of the country that from their seclusion these women emerged to play an active part in the political struggle of their country, such as is played in other parts of the world only by the most enlightened women. No one had ever anticipated that those women, who were reluctant to appear in male company and who behaved all their lives like shy school girls, would ever take this short cut to freedom without halting for a few years in the neighbourhood of social reform.

I do not say that Indian women are, in the wider sense, emancipated even today, but the response which met Gandhi's appeal and the way in which thousands of women of the most orthodox families came out in the streets to picket the shops, made one pause and wonder what was happening in India. Satyagraha and the civil disobedience movement could hardly be called a revolution in the accepted sense of the term, but they certainly seemed to effect the most rapid evolution that a people of such immense proportions could undergo.

The appearance of women on the political scene presented a completely different problem to the Government. It was one thing to charge into a phalanx of men and break up civil disobedience by '*lathi*' charges, but how were they to deal with the women? After all, there was still the prestige of Britain to be considered. The customs of the West and its code of etiquette regarded it necessary for an Englishman to give up his seat in a bus to a lady and to raise his hat to her on the slightest provocation. And woman was woman all over the world.

Faced with all these new problems the Government eventually decided to strike. It now decided to crush the Indian nationalist movement by the promulgation

of ordinances, which corresponded to the Imperial edicts of the Romans and which justified themselves on the ground that they were brought into being by the state of emergency which had arisen at that time. What English statesmen in England and the bureaucracy in India, so anxious to preserve law and order, failed to realize was that this was no longer a state of emergency, but that it was the normal condition of a country fighting for its independence. Nevertheless, the Congress was declared unlawful all over the country and an ordinance was passed by which all property belonging to the Congress was made liable to confiscation. That was Lord Irwin's answer. He had revealed his mind at last. Gandhi had written his second letter to the Viceroy, in which he laid bare his further plan of campaign, which was to seize the Salt Depot at Dharasana and to ask whether on the eve of taking such a step the Government would not agree to give him the substance of Independence which India demanded. That letter also contained an accusation against the Government's methods of fighting the civil resisters. "I had hoped," Gandhi says, "that the Government would fight the civil resisters in a civilised manner. I could have had nothing to say if in dealing with the civil resisters the Government had satisfied itself with applying the ordinary process of law. Instead, whilst the known leaders have been dealt with more or less according to the legal formality, the rank and file have been often savagely and in some cases, even indecently assaulted. Had these been isolated cases, they might have been overlooked. But accounts have come to me from Bengal, Bihar, Utkal, the United Provinces, Delhi and Bombay, confirming the experiences of Gujerat, of which I have ample evidence at my disposal. In Karachi, Peshawar and Madras the firing would appear to have been unprovoked and unnecessary. Bones have been broken, private parts have been squeezed, for the purpose of making volunteers give up salt which is valueless to the Government but precious to the volunteers. At Mathura, an Assistant Magistrate is said to have snatched the national flag from

a ten-year old boy. The crowd that demanded the restoration of the flag, thus illegally seized, is reported to have been mercilessly beaten back. That the flag was subsequently restored, betrayed a guilty conscience. In Bengal, there seem to have been only a few prosecutions and assaults about salt, but unthinkable cruelties are said to have been practised in the act of snatching flags from volunteers. Paddy fields are reported to have been burnt, eatables forcibly taken. A vegetable market in Gujerat has been raided because the dealers would not sell vegetables to officials. These acts have taken place in front of crowds who have submitted without retaliation in pursuance of the Congress mandate. . . . Yet this is only the fifth week of the struggle!"

Five weeks had gone, in which the Government had refrained from laying hands on Gandhi. But now Lord Irwin decided to take quick action, and before Gandhi could start on his march to Dharasana, he was arrested at dead of night and taken by train to Borivli, a little station near the town of Bombay, and driven from there surreptitiously to Poona, where he was incarcerated in the Yeravada Prison. The correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* describes that scene: "There was something intensely dramatic in the atmosphere while we were waiting for the train, for we all felt we were sole eye-witnesses of a scene which may become historical—this arrest of a prophet, false or true, for, false or true, Gandhi is now regarded as a holy man and saint by millions of Indians. Who knows whether, one hundred years from now, he may be worshipped as a supreme being by three hundred million people. We could not shake off these thoughts, and it seemed incongruous to be at a level-crossing at dawn to take the prophet into custody."

Unlike his arrest in 1922 it was to be followed by no great trial. In fact, there was no trial at all, great or small. The Government had ceased to rule the country by the ordinary law of the land. Gandhi was, therefore, detained during His Majesty's pleasure. The venerable and late Dadabhai Naoroji might well have called it "This

un-British rule," for Englishmen were now governing India against the laws and principles which they had fought for and which were a heritage of which Britain had always been justly proud.

In a way it was a triumph over the ordinary law of the land, even though the reason given by those in high authority was one of expediency. As Mrs. Naidu said : "A powerful Government could have paid no more splendid tribute to the far-reaching power of Gandhi than by the manner of his arrest and incarceration without trial, under the most arbitrary law on their Statute Book. It is really immaterial that the fragile and ailing body of the Mahatma is imprisoned behind stone walls and steel bars. It is the least essential part of it. The man and his message are identical, and his message is the living heritage of the nation to-day and will continue to influence the thought and action of the world, unfettered and unchallenged by the mandate of the most autocratic Government of the earth."

"Un-British was the right word when you considered the brutal way in which the Government tried to crush civil disobedience. There are not many English people who have ever imagined the sort of injuries that the police, as upholders of law and order, inflicted on the crowds which they encountered. It was brute force of an order which made the most hard-bitten shudder. I do not think that evidence of police atrocities was ever published in the English papers. Had Fleet Street bothered to feature it as front page news, the more recent history of India would have been very different. I believe that the English people as a whole have a greater sense of morality and of justice than those who come in their name to rule over the destiny of India. There has recently been a humanizing of public opinion in England for which, I venture to say, socialism and suffering are largely responsible. The England that stood up to protect against the persecution of the Jews, against the atrocities committed by Fascism or those who were less prepared for an armed conflict — that England would not

have stood up for the brutality which was committed by Englishmen in India.

Lilian Slade, the Admiral's daughter, was one of those who were in a position to see for themselves what was really happening in India. Her testimony should carry weight among her countrymen. She went to Dharasana to see for herself what the police were doing to the satyagrahi volunteers. Lathi blows on the head, chest, stomach and joints. Thrusts with lathis in the private parts and abdominal regions — and a lathi, one must remember, is a heavy iron-rod stick. The stripping naked of men before beating. The tearing off of loin cloths and thrusting sticks into the anus. The pressing and squeezing of the testicles till the man became unconscious. The dragging of wounded men by the legs and arms, often beating them while in a wounded condition. The throwing of the wounded into thorn hedges and into salt water. The riding of horses over men as they lay or sat on the ground. The thrusting of pins and thorns into men's bodies, sometimes even when they were unconscious. And the beating of men even after they had become unconscious.

That is what Lilian Slade, an Englishwoman, saw at Dharasana. The words are not mine but hers and are taken from a report which appeared in the *Young India* of June 12, 1930.

My blood curdles as I read through this grim chronicle of atrocities. I doubt very much if England, alleged to be the guardian of these three hundred and seventy million people, would have tolerated this mutilation of human beings in the name of law and order, if it had been aware of what was happening in India. The bombing of Almeria seems a civilized form of warfare in comparison to this and the ravages in China, where whole towns were blown up, a cleaner way of doing things. In point of sheer vulgarity and indecency of assault, it would be very difficult to equal the British attempt to suppress civil disobedience in India.

Meanwhile, the arrest of Gandhi infuriated Indian

opinion beyond all calculation. The wisdom of Lord Irwin in postponing this action now became evident. He had gauged Indian opinion better than all his advisers. He knew then that with Gandhi in prison it was impossible to bridge the gulf between the Government of India and the people. Later he gave way to other advice and tried a complete suppression of the Congress. His edicts declaring it illegal were such as had not been attempted by any predecessor of his. He knew that the strong-hand, even when taken out of the velvet glove, could do little in the face of the non-violent resistance which was offered. But his hand was forced. If there was no precise instruction from Whitehall, there were behind him a hundred and fifty years of British rule, on the analogy of which he had to govern. At times like these one saw in him the clash of two opposing strains. He was two men in one — the Christian and the Viceroy. And torn between two rival senses of duty, he tried unsuccessfully to fulfil both. It seemed then that the Viceroy in him had triumphed over the Christian.

* * *

ONE soon becomes un-Christian in India. It is one thing to preach Christianity, quite another to practise it. In the eyes of God, all men may be equal, but not in the eyes of the Government of India. Lord Irwin had laid particular emphasis on his Christian duties. No one had doubted his sincerity, his religious fervour, his high Catholicism. But to pray to God on Sundays was not enough, if in one's actions the rest of the week there was a complete disregard of Christian principles. The persecution that took place in Lord Irwin's regime was not the work of a consistent Christian.

Yet Lord Irwin was hardly to blame. Environment can have a great influence on a man's life and environment did funny things to the Englishman in India. Nowhere else did he behave in the shabby manner in which he conducted himself in India. You can put it down to the heat, if you are an apologist of the British regime. You can put it down to the opportunities for exploitation, if

you are an ordinary student of human nature.

There is something artificial about English life in India. The Englishman here has to conform to standards which have themselves been artificially maintained. Add to that the constantly growing complex in him which makes him feel consciously superior. It is a false sense of superiority, even as the feeling within him that his Empire is secure is based on premises which no longer exist. Circumstances and conditions in India have altered beyond all measure. It is all very well for the Englishman to say that the presence of a small battalion on the scene of a riot or a political disturbance can cause a panic in the hearts of the Indian people. But that is nothing to boast about. There would be the same panic among the members of the Yacht Club or the Officers' Mess, staunch and brave men though they may be, if a detachment of Indian troops suddenly arrived, armed with rifles, to interrupt a meeting of the club or a dinner party at the mess. It is in both the thought of certain death that causes the fright. The Englishman without the gun has no dynamic presence to cause fright. Give India an army of its own, disarm every white man in the country and let us see how brave the Englishman feels in that India. And so we feel in a country, where martial law gives a handful of young English lieutenants the power of life and death over thousands of unarmed Indians.

English life in India is not worthy of emulation. We have seen the English live. It seems to me so much a life of trifles. Let us chronicle some of these things which we have learnt to associate with the Englishman in India. To start with, there is the Not-at-Home box, the dinner jacket and black tie, the overgrowth of the public school spirit, the red-carpet without which no Governor would tread on Indian soil, the whistle which precedes the Governor's car to and from the most social of functions as distinct from visits of State, the *punkhas*, which symbolize British rule in that "the natives" sweat to keep the white man cool, graft among the lesser fry, the sanctimonious piety with which they read the *Sketch*

and the *Tatler*, the periodical letters to the local *Times*, the mutual interchange of congratulations on the mutual exchange of honours and titles, the Army and Navy Stores. There are other things which are not quite trifles. There is a lack of knowledge of elementary Indian problems, of Indian conditions and of all Indian languages, customs, and history, the Englishman's pride in that ignorance, his unhealthy consumption of large quantities of alcohol which he can seldom digest in his system and less often pay for, his contemptuous attitude to anything Indian from nationalism to art, his refusal to accept anything that is un-English, his pride therein, his refusal to understand the Indian point of view, his belief that Britons are the supermen of today in spite of the fact that Fascist corporals have challenged this theory, his belief that in a hierarchy of sanctitude God comes first and then the Englishwoman, but that an Indian woman is hardly to be accorded the same respect, his blindness to the gradual disintegration of an Empire and to the danger of eventual relegation to the status of a small island in Europe.

These are some of the things which we have associated with the British in India. The pity of it is that Englishmen have created different images of their own. All these years they have stood before a magnifying mirror and prided themselves on the image they beheld. Some day that glass is sure to break, leaving no image and no mirror.

All this has led to a strained relationship between Indians and the Englishmen in India. Efforts have been made by some of the younger members of the European community, those that came fresh from Oxford and Cambridge in particular, to see if socially one could not meet more often in India and by such meetings bridge the wide gulf. But it has ended always in failure. You could hardly have expected to solve Britain's differences with Germany by inviting the German students in England to tea at Lady Margaret Hall. So is it also in India. These abortive efforts of young enthusiasts ended as they began, without having got so much as an inch nearer to the real

India which they did not know and which they will never see. If there is to be a change of heart, it has obviously to come from somewhere else.

There was, among the star reporters who had flocked to India to cover the civil disobedience movement, an English journalist by the name of George Slocombe. He represented the *Daily Herald*, which at that time led the circulation of Fleet Street with a certified daily sale of two million. Slocombe somehow managed to get permission to interview Gandhi in prison and the result was a sensational article in the *Daily Herald*. Slocombe was an eye-witness to the salt raids at Dharasana. "It was humiliating," he said, "for an Englishman to stand among the ardent, friendly but deeply moved crowd of volunteers and sympathizers and watch the representatives of the country's administration engaged in this ludicrous, embarrassing business." Slocombe had now published his interview with Gandhi in an article. It contained the terms, the fulfilment of which Gandhi demanded as a condition precedent to Congress participation in the Round Table Conference. The publication of this article caused a first-class sensation in the House of Commons and sent the right-wing of Fleet Street into hysterics. What a preposterous idea that Gandhi should *demand*! How could Britain now adopt an attitude of conciliation towards "the natives," an attitude which would inevitably lead to the loosening of Britain's grip over its Indian Empire

Never before had any Indian dictated conditions before taking part in a conference with British statesmen. In the old days it was always looked upon as an honour to sit at the same table with English politicians. But Gandhi and the Congress had done away with this hero-worship of our rulers. And Slocombe put it very forcibly, when he tolled the knell of the old Imperialist method of approach and said: "Negotiation is still possible and after my two meetings with Mr. Gandhi in prison, I am convinced that conciliation will be met with conciliation, but that violence on either side will not compel surrender of

the other. Incalculable disaster may yet be avoided by the frank recognition that the imprisoned Mahatma now incarnates the very soul of India." This was a result of two interviews with Gandhi at Poona on the 19th and the 20th May, 1930. The substance of Independence and not the Simon Report, which had been universally rejected by the Indians, was demanded as the basis of discussion at the Round Table Conference. Some satisfaction was to be granted to the demand for the repeal of the Salt Tax, for the prohibition of liquor and opium and for the ban on foreign cloth. There was to be an amnesty granted to political prisoners. Without this, Gandhi would not call off civil disobedience. But more important than the demands themselves was the fact that Gandhi was in a position to make these demands. Britain could no longer afford to treat his demands with that same contempt, with which it had treated them in the past. That was his achievement.

It is not possible in appraising the importance of the nationalist movement to quibble over points of detail. It was thought that Gandhi's eleven points were a feeble attempt to crystallize the substance of Independence. Independence could not be defined in eleven cardinal points. Nor did Gandhi believe that it could so be done. It was only to lay down what gestures—and "gestures" was the right word—should be made as proof of Britain's desire eventually to grant India the substance of Independence. He was fighting for an abstract principle. The details could be worked out later. He was content to break through the lethargy of those who had ceased to think, of those who did not want to think, of those who were not allowed to think. That is why he wanted to infuse even the abstract idea of freedom into the minds of the Indian people. Only when face to face with the oppression which the British administration inflicted on the masses, would righteous Indian public opinion be aroused.

Negotiation and Slocombe's impassioned journalism were of little avail. Things had come to such a pass that

it was impossible for either side to concede an inch without losing a certain amount of self-respect and prestige. The Government and the Congress had taken radically opposite and uncompromising attitudes, and it was impossible to bridge the gulf between the two until one or the other gave way even a little. And this neither the Government nor the Congress was prepared to do. Under these circumstances it was impossible to find a common basis of agreement when the difference was on fundamentals. The Congress wanted the assurance that the Round Table Conference would begin on the assumption that Britain had conceded or was willing to concede Dominion Status to India. And Lord Irwin was not in a position to give that assurance, nor would it have been constitutional to pre-judge the eventual verdict of Parliament and thereby deprive Parliament of its sovereign power. After several efforts, the attempt to bring Congress to the conference was abandoned. The arrests of those who dabbled in Congress activities went on even as the delegation of Indians, chosen by the Viceroy to represent India, left the shores of Bombay to attend the historical conference in London, which was expected to evolve a scheme of reforms which would satisfy Indian demands.

XXIV

EVENTFUL DAYS

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE in London is too well known to bear repetition. The discussions and speeches of the British and Indian delegates are to be found in a blue paper publication, which gives the authentic story of that first Conference. But what emerged from it and what was perhaps not so widely disclosed was that without the Congress all this discussion was futile. In spite of the ordinances the Government of India had passed, by which the Congress was made an unlawful institution and its leaders sent to prison without trial, one could not get over the fact that the Congress was still the only political organization of any consequence, which could negotiate terms on behalf of the Indian people. Without the Congress, the Round Table Conference could not be anything more than a debating society, putting forward arguments without being able to act with any authority on behalf of the Indian people.

As the first Conference was drawing to a close, two of the Indian delegates, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and

Mr. Jayakar, took upon themselves the initiative of bringing the Congress delegation to London at any cost. They contacted the Government and the Congress, and pleaded with the latter to hold up all action until their return. The members of its Working Committee — those who were out of prison, could not on their own responsibility take such action, and they passed a resolution, which was for private circulation only, in which they stated their inability to act in the absence of their colleagues. Somehow this resolution got into other hands and within a few days Lord Irwin published a Government Order, which came as a surprise to the people of India, as to those elsewhere, for it granted the members of the Working Committee who were in prison an unconditional release in order to make it possible for them to negotiate with the Government the terms on which some peaceful solution of the Indian deadlock could be evolved and probably to open the way for the Congress to be represented at the Conference with its self-respect preserved.

Meanwhile, there occurred a national tragedy in India, which cast a veil of grief over the country. Motilal Nehru was dead. Brilliant, cultured, polished in speech and manner, fabulously rich, with a practice at the Bar which was without comparison anywhere else in India, Motilal Nehru gave up all the pomp and splendour of his mode of life to devote his time to the cause of his country and the liberation of his countrymen. Here was a man, who had all that material wealth could buy. One would have thought he could not desire anything more. And yet there was something he yearned for, something that money could not buy. It was self-respect and freedom. That was the tragedy of India. You could amass a large fortune and still not be free. When he gave up his beautiful house, his rich manner of living, his great legal practice, one began to realize what freedom meant to a man. It was an example worthy of emulation. It made the rank and file begin to think. It gave the poorer middle-class a chance of finding out that even large wealth does not make a man happy.

Motilal Nehru's work for India was confined to the intellectual sphere. He did occasionally make an appeal to the Masses at Gandhi's instance, but he was not a man of the people. His mission in life, and his mission in the Congress was to educate the more enlightened form of public opinion to the nationalist way of thinking. His fight was, therefore, confined more to the Assembly and Council Hall rather than to the market-place and the villages. It was the natural counterpart of the work that was being done by men like Gandhi and Vallabhai Patel. Now Nehru was dead and there were not many people, who could easily fill his place in the Legislative Assembly, where by sheer brilliance he shone out as the Leader of the Opposition. Even the most hard-bitten of Civil Servants, who had risen to high office in the service of the Crown, were a little uncomfortable when facing the attack of Motilal Nehru. For pure logic and reasoning, coupled with just that right amount of emotion, the Pandit was in a class by himself. As one listened to him, one wondered why anyone hesitated to hand over the Government of India to the Indians, when there were men of the calibre, the culture, the education of Motilal Nehru.

Motilal Nehru's death damped the fighting spirit of the other leaders. India was in a mood for peace. It made the Indians realize that perhaps it would be better to achieve their objects in a more peaceful manner. There was a general feeling that if Gandhi expressed a desire to see the Viceroy, something would come out of it. It was not long before Gandhi acted on this advice. And a short letter arrived at Viceroy's House, which Lord Irwin, in his heart, had long awaited. It was to be the break of a new dawn.

A great deal has been said and written about this historic moment in our lives, which Mr. Winston Churchill was ungallant enough to refer to as "the nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of Viceroy's Palace, there to negotiate and to parley

on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor." It would not add to the purpose of this book to say all that we think of this utterance of the Right Honourable Gentleman. One does not want to indulge in more abuse than is necessary in life. I will content myself with saying that there are not many people in England who are capable of so mischievous an utterance. For it was calculated to give offence to the Indian people and destroy whatever chance of a settlement there might have been. Mr. Churchill certainly could have had no idea what peace meant to the Indian people. Here we were, tired out and exhausted, but still fighting on till our bodies were numb with wounds, our homes shattered and the normal routine of our life destroyed. Mr. Churchill knew little of the suffering of our people. Born in the lap of luxury, with a name which brought him early in life to the high offices he held, he has that something inherently mischievous in his nature, which wants to make a mockery of the sorrows, the faith and the religion of other people. Gandhi was to India a whole religion. It was in fact the only religion that embraced the whole country, and Churchill with his utterance wanted to polute the sanctity of an occasion on which depended so much. As I said before, there are few people in this world who would stoop to such mischief. But India did not take his utterance too much to heart. Mr. Churchill was no longer in office and there were not many members of the House of Commons, who wanted to take the responsibility for the utterance of this then irresponsible person. We realized here in India that for the time being he was not a live force in his own country but merely a brilliant orator who had made his speeches more for effect than out of conviction. He had a flare for making his voice heard on important political situations and could still fill the House of Commons when he addressed it. But he never knew why the members of that august assembly crowded round to hear him. It was not for their love for him or what he had to say, so much as the manner in which he said it — the vitriol, the power of speech, the invective, the abuse, the

grandiloquence, the choice phraseology, the purple patches, the perorations, which in spite of all one may say about the man, delighted the ear and sharpened one's appreciation of oratory. He was a trenchant orator, heartless, cold, calculating and without that nobility of character one would have expected from a man of his calibre. As someone said of him, he wanted that life should be one perpetual tragedy and that he should be always in the centre of it. He was a fit theme for Marlowe to handle. One has to have a world war to see him at his best as he is now — First Lord of the Admiralty.

Elsewhere in England, English people were not so offensive. There were many whose complacency was a trifle shaken at this sudden recognition of this man, Gandhi, whom they had been taught to look upon as nothing better than "a native rebel." But almost overnight the responsible sections of the press reversed their opinion of him, and elevated him to that importance which would make him worthy of a Viceregal invitation.

* * *

THOSE were eventful days. Perhaps the best account of them appears in Robert Bernay's *Naked Fakir*. More than anyone else, I think, this protege of Tom Clarke, then editor of the *News Chronicle*, has gasped the spirit of the Gandhi-Irwin meeting. Many gallant attempts have been made to describe what really transpired behind the scenes. But they must all remain wild guesses, until Gandhi or Lord Irwin can sit down one day and narrate the facts. Even so, the details of that meeting are not important. The topics, which they discussed, were fairly well-known. On the one hand, Gandhi wanted a thorough inquiry into the Police atrocities and the Viceroy was trying to convince the Mahatma that this was not possible. However, what was really important was the fact that they had met — the representative of the people and the representative of the Crown. That was the turning point in our British-Indian history. It marked an epoch, for there was to be a change in policy, and this to India was an important thing.

Day after day, while Gandhi continued to go to the Viceregal palace, one wondered what would come out of it? Would he go to England after all? Would Lord Irwin succeed? What would it feel like to have Gandhi in London? And a thousand other questions were in the air. Out of the meeting of these two great men came the Gandhi-Irwin pact. Something had at last been achieved, and it is not fit nor proper to belittle that work now, by trying to analyse who succeeded in that battle of arguments or who scored the greater number of points. It would not be the right way to look upon this historic occasion. Whoever might have won, it ended one sad chapter in our history — a chapter which but for the efforts of these two men might have ended with more sorrow and more pain and more suffering. That is what we should be grateful for.

Yet, well might it be asked, what did they achieve? Perhaps, it would be better to summarize the Gandhi-Irwin agreement, which was embodied in an official notification of the Government. This is the authentic record of the agreement, whatever may be the events that led up to it. It was the result of a fortnight's discussion during which an anxious India held its breath, wondering from day to day whether peace would come at last.

Issued from New Delhi, dated the 5th of March 1931, signed by H. W. Emerson, Secretary to Government, this notification announced that "consequent on the conversations that took place between His Excellency the Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi, it was arranged that the Civil Disobedience movement be discontinued, and that, with the approval of His Majesty's Government, certain action was to be taken by the Government of India and Local Governments. As regards constitutional questions, the scope of future discussion was stated, with the assent of His Majesty's Government, to be with the object of considering further the scheme for the constitutional Government of India discussed at the Round Table Conference. Of the scheme there outlined, Federation

was an essential part. So also are Indian responsibility and reservations or safeguards in the interests of India, for such matters as, for instance, Defence, External Affairs, the position of Minorities, the financial credit of India, and the discharge of obligations. In pursuance of the statement made by the Prime-Minister in his announcement of the 19th of January, 1931, steps were taken for the participation of the representatives of the Congress in the further discussions that took place on the scheme of constitutional reform. The settlement related to activities directly connected with the Civil Disobedience movement. Civil Disobedience was effectively discontinued and reciprocal action was taken by Government. As regards the boycott of foreign goods, there were two issues involved : firstly, the character of the boycott, and secondly, the methods employed in giving effect to it. The position of Government was as follows. They approved of the encouragement of Indian industries as part of the economic and industrial movement designed to improve the material condition of India, and they had no desire to discourage methods of propaganda, persuation or advertisement pursued with this object in view, which did not interfere with the freedom of action of individuals, or were not prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order. But the boycott of non-Indian goods, (except of cloth, which had been applied to all foreign cloth) had been directed during the Civil Disobedience movement chiefly, if not exclusively, against British goods, and in regard to these it had been admittedly employed in order to exert pressure for political ends.

"It was accepted that a boycott of this character and organised for this purpose was not consistent with the participation of representatives of the Congress in a frank and friendly discussion of constitutional questions between representatives of British India, of the Indian States, and of His Majesty's Government and political parties in England, which the settlement was intended to secure. It is therefore, agreed that the discontinuance of the Civil-Disobedience Movement connotes the definite discontinuance of the employment of the boycott of British commodities as a political weapon and that, in consequence, those who had given up, during a time of political excitement, the sale or purchase of British goods must be left free without any form of restraint to change their attitude if they so desired.

"In regard to the methods employed in furtherance of the replacement of non-Indian by Indian goods or against the consumption of intoxicating liquor and drugs, resort will not be had to methods coming within the category of picketing, except within the limits permitted by the ordinary law. Such picketing was unaggressive and it did not involve coercion, intimidation, restraint, hostile demonstration, obstruction to the public, or any offence under the ordinary law. If and when any of these methods were employed in any place, the practice of picketing in that place would be suspended.

"Mr. Gandhi drew the attention of Government to specific allegations against the conduct of the Police, and represented the desirability of a public enquiry into them. In the present circumstance, Government saw great difficulty in this course and felt that it must inevitably lead to charges and counter-charges, and so militate against the re-establishment of peace. Having regard to these considerations, Mr. Gandhi agreed not to press the matter.

"Where a Local Government had moved any High Court or had initiated proceedings under the Legal Practitioners' Act in regard to the conduct of Legal Practitioners in connection with the Civil Disobedience movement, it would have made an application to the Court concerned for permission to withdraw such proceedings, provided that the alleged conduct of the person concerned did not relate to violence or incitement to violence."

The day after this agreement was made public a group of distinguished journalists, representing the press of the world, interviewed the Mahatma. It was a day of triumph for him and his prestige went up in the eyes of the world. From the journalist's point of view he had

that something which in the language of the press is called "news-value." This interview elucidated much of what was embodied more formally in the notification. The questions they asked him and his answers make it possible for the layman to understand Gandhi as he was on the day after that momentous agreement.

"What is your correct interpretation of 'Purna Swaraj'?"

"I cannot give you a proper answer as there is nothing in the English language to give the exact equivalent of 'Purna Swaraj.' 'Swaraj,' in its original meaning, means 'self-rule.' Independence has no such meaning about it. 'Swaraj' means 'disciplined rule from within.' 'Purna' means 'complete.' Not finding any equivalent, we have loosely adopted the words 'Complete Independence,' which everybody understands. 'Purna Swaraj' does not exclude association with any nation, much less with England. But it can only mean association for mutual benefit, and at will."

"Would it be consistent for the Congress to reaffirm its resolution relating to full Independence?"

"Yes; decidedly. Because there is nothing to prevent the Congress at Karachi passing a similar resolution, and, what is more, pressing that at the forthcoming **R. T. C.** I am betraying no secret by telling you that I took good care to ascertain that position and to make my own position clear before agreeing to the settlement."

"Will you participate formally in the Conference?"

"I hope to. In fact, it is 'HIGHLY LIKELY'."

"Will you press for 'Purna Swaraj' at the Conference?"

"We shall deny our very existence if we do not press for it."

"Will you accept the present safeguards and reservations?"

"Not the present safeguards and reservations. Truly, in this respect the Congress position has been made clear to the world, and whoever invites the Congress to a political conference is expected to know what the Congress stands for. I have taken as much precaution as my being is

capable of, to make the Congress position clear, and knowing that it is even now open to His Majesty's Government not to invite the Congress to participate in the Conference. There is nothing in the settlement, as I read it, to compel that participation."

"What was that which turned the tide of negotiations when things became hopeless on Saturday?"

"Goodness on the part of Lord Irwin and, perhaps, equal goodness on my part as well."

"So you regard the present agreement to be the greatest achievement of your life, to your credit, so far?"

"I do not know what great achievements there are to my credit so far, and if this is one of them."

"If you could attain 'Purna Swaraj' would you consider that such an achievement?"

"I think, if that comes, I should certainly consider it as such."

"Do you hope to achieve 'Purna Swaraj' in your lifetime?"

"I do look for it most decidedly. I still consider myself a young man of sixty-two according to Western notions."

"Would you be prepared to admit any safeguards in the future Constitution?"

"Yes, Those that are reasonable and wise. Take for example, the question of Minorities. I can understand that we cannot achieve our purpose as a great nation, if we do not regard the rights of Minorities as a sacred trust. I should regard that as a legitimate safeguard."

"What about Army and Finance?"

"Finance, yes. That is to say, if we have a Public Debt, as we have, so much as falls to our lot will have to be secured. To that extent I would be bound in honour to entertain safeguards for the country's credit and her consequent expansion. With reference to the Army, so far as my intelligence takes me, I cannot think of any safeguards except this, that we should guarantee the pay and the fulfilment of any other condition we might have

undertaken to fulfil in connection with British soldiers required for the sake of India. That I can well understand."

"Will you repudiate India's debts?"

"I will not repudiate one single farthing that can be legitimately debited to us. But unfortunately there has been a great deal of confusion about this talk of repudiation. The Congress has never sought to repudiate a single rupee of the national obligation. But what the Congress has asked for, and will insist upon, is the justness of the obligation that might be sought to be imposed on a future Government, even as a buyer would like to know what obligation is undertaken when entering on a new purchase. The Congress has suggested that in case there can be no adjustments, an independent tribunal may be appointed."

"Do you think the League of Nations a proper tribunal?"

"So far as I can say off-hand, the League of Nations is a proper tribunal. But the League of Nations may not undertake such a responsibility. Besides, England may not like such a tribunal. Any tribunal agreeable, therefore, to England and India would be acceptable to me."

"Will you press this question at the Round Table Conference?"

"It will be necessary to do so when the question of examination and acceptance of national obligations comes up. You may say, in other words, that these obligations will be taken up subject to national audit."

"Does this provisional settlement represent the practical application of the Sermon on the Mount?"

"I do not think I can judge. It is for the critics to judge how far this has been done."

"Do you think boycott of foreign cloth should be relaxed as a result of the settlement?

"On the contrary, no. The boycott of foreign cloth is not a political weapon, but is intended for the promotion of the universal supplementary industry of India—the

Charka. Its activity is wholly in connection with importation of foreign cloth. If I had the reins of Government, I would certainly resort to high protective tariff. I consider such protective tariff possible even by the present Government. The present duties that have been imposed are, however, not prohibitive but merely revenue duties for economic purposes.

"What is your idea of 'Purna Swaraj?"

"I am a visionary and, therefore, picture to myself all kinds of things that have no reality about them. 'Purna Swaraj' is not incompatible with, but is based upon, complete equality. The popular mind cannot conceive of that equality. By equality I mean that instead of Downing Street being the centre of Imperial activity, Delhi should be the centre. Friends suggest that England may not accommodate herself to that position. The British are a practical people and as they love liberty for themselves, it is only a step further to have liberty for others. I know, if the time comes to concede the equality I want for India, they will say that is what they have all along desired. The British people have a faculty of self-delusion as no other people have. Yes, to my mind equality means the right to secede."

"Do you prefer the English people as a governing race of other races?"

"I have no choice to make. I do not want to be governed but by myself."

"Would you like to have 'Purna Swaraj' under the British flag?"

"Not under this flag. Under a common flag, if possible; under a separate national flag, if necessary."

"Do you expect to solve the Hindu-Muslim question before you go to the Conference?"

"That is my desire, but I do not know how far I can realise it. At present, I do not think it will be worth while our going to the Conference without solving this question. I do not think unity can be brought about at the Conference."