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INDIA SINCE CRIPPS

BY

HORACE ALEXANDER

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THE AUTHOR

April 18, 1921 *at Croydon, S.*

HORACE ALEXANDER was born in 1889. He was at school at Bootham, York, and was a history scholar of King's College, Cambridge. In 1919 he joined the staff at Woodbrooke, the Queen's College at Birmingham, where he has since lectured on international relations. He has an intimate knowledge of several European countries. In 1927-8 he visited the East and has since followed Indian affairs constantly, keeping in close touch with leading personalities in India and England. In 1942-3 he was head of a section of the Friends Ambulance Unit in Calcutta and also visited China. He is the author of several books.

One of his hobbies is ornithology and he goes off watching birds when he ought to be doing other things.

A PENGUIN SPECIAL

INDIA SINCE CRIPPS

BY

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I

INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, I am attempting to give an impression of developments in India from the spring of 1942 to the autumn of 1943. I spent most of that time (to be exact, from mid-June, 1942 to the end of August, 1943) in India, chiefly in Calcutta. During that time, I was officer-in-charge of the India section of the Friends Ambulance Unit, engaged in civil defence and relief. The F.A.U. is, of course, in no sense to be held responsible for the political judgments that may be found in this book. But I refer to the experience out of which this commentary has grown because, in fact, every writer is influenced by his angle of vision. It was not my first experience of India, but it provided a new point of view. A high percentage of English people who do jobs in India become in the course of years confirmed cynics. Much of the commentary on Indian affairs that comes from the pens of retired officials or business men, sometimes even of missionaries, reeks with acid: and even when that is avoided, there is too often an attitude of resigned contempt. If anyone working in India has good reason to become cynical it is surely the man engaged on an emergency job in war-time, with the enemy just outside the gates. He finds himself dealing with Ministers who are afraid to take a strong line for fear of offending the Governor or the permanent officials or his constituents or his parliamentary supporters; with officials who are tied up in miles of red tape and whose main pre-occupation seems to be to find reasons for not taking action; with delightful Indian collaborators who will discuss anything but the business in hand, or who leave you in the lurch because father has told them to come home; with a populace that is seemingly indifferent to the whole business or completely fatalistic. Perhaps if I had to spend ten years in the detestable climate of Calcutta I should become as cynical as the worst. If, even after one year, I can write (as I hope) with a measure of understanding for the passionate nationalism of India's sons and daughters (how weary one gets of listening to the same old story, so understandable if you have any imagination

and yet so often full of unreason and distortions), it must be due to what an older generation called the grace of God, rather than to any personal virtue. What is this "grace of God"? A mixture of patience and imagination. The patience that reminds you all the time that if you lose your temper all is lost. The imagination that keeps reminding you that it is their country, not ours; that very likely their standard of values, which puts friendship and good temper and gentleness before administrative efficiency, is really better than ours; that it must be maddening to have a lot of aliens running your country and telling you what is what all the time; and that really many of them are very charming and wonderful people, steeped in the graces of life, from whom we could learn much—even, perhaps, how to rescue humanity from race suicide—if only we ourselves were more teachable.

In fact, I do not claim for this book that it is a detached study of Indian affairs. No study of Indian affairs by an Englishman ever is, though many English writers delude themselves into thinking that their aloofness and apparent detachment show genuine impartiality. I can only claim that I try to be fair to everybody. To be fair to everybody is particularly difficult. For one thing, no true history of India can be written that omits unsubstantiated rumour. On both sides, among Indians and Europeans, the gossip at the Bar Library and the gossip at the club have a powerful influence on affairs. As often as not neither type of gossip has foundation in fact. But there is, on the whole, so little social mixing that the gossip of Indians about the Government and of Europeans about Indian leaders is repeated and repeated without being effectively challenged until it is accepted by all the educated Indians, or by all the Europeans, as the case may be, for gospel truth.

Rumour and gossip of this kind I have had to report again and again in these pages; what is more, in order to give some indication of the intensity of emotion often caused by these things, I have had to use strong expressions. I have done my best to safeguard myself, to make clear to the reader what is only alleged and what is known fact. But I must ask him to be on his guard to distinguish carefully which is which.

No book should be published on Indian public affairs in England without something in the nature of an A.B.C. English readers who essay to understand what is happening in India

soon give up the attempt because they find that apparently well-informed authors give them contradictory answers to the simplest questions. What is the Congress? What do the Moslems think? What about the Indian States? What

the Indian Christians or the Parsis come in? What about the Anglo-Indians? What about European business interests? The first thing that must be said about all these questions is that any one-sentence reply, any attempt to give the facts in a nutshell, is bound to be false, even though the publication in which the so-called "facts" are given may have the imprimatur of the India Office or the Ministry of Information—or of the Congress Party, the Moslem League, or anyone else. It is extremely difficult to state the whole truth on any of these matters; but an effort should be made.

First, then, what about the Congress? To begin with, it is not a Parliament or a House of Parliament, but a political party—and yet it is something more than that. It is the focus of a large proportion of Indian nationalist feeling and of Indian social and cultural resurgence. It is claimed on the one side that it is the mouthpiece of the whole Indian nation; on the other, that it represents only one and a half millions of the four hundred million inhabitants of India. That appears to be its present paying membership (though I cannot trace the authority for the figure): a few years ago the figure was much higher, but whether the diminution is due to a drastic pruning of bogus membership or to a genuine decline in its appeal to the masses, or to both, is not clear. The membership roll is not divided into Hindus, Moslems, Christians and so on, so that the statements and counter-statements on the relative proportions of the communities that support the Congress cannot be proved or disproved. My own impression is that in most parts of India the Congress to-day has little mass support among Moslems; but it is not easy for a European to judge what the position really is in country districts. A number of individual Moslems, usually men of independent character, sometimes young men to whom (as to many throughout the world in this era) religion means little or nothing, are active Congressmen. The present president of the Congress, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, is an ardent, devout and learned Moslem, but he seems to have little support to-day among men of his own faith. A very high proportion of

present-day Indian political leaders, including Mr. Jinnah, the leader of the Moslem League, have at one time or other been members of the Congress. Mr. Gandhi has often claimed that it represents eighty-five per cent of the population; by this he means the "dumb, semi-starved millions" of the villages, as against the middle classes and the townspeople. When asked on what he based such a claim he replied: "By right of service." The strength of the Congress certainly varies from province to province. It seems to be weakest in Bengal and the Punjab, strongest in many districts of Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces. In many areas it is run by the high-caste Hindus to the disadvantage of other communities. I should not like to guess whether, if a vote of the whole adult population of India were taken, the Congress would have eighty-five per cent of the votes, or ninety-five per cent, or only forty-five per cent. Gandhi himself undoubtedly has the support or at least the devotion of the masses, including many Moslems and "Untouchables" as well as caste Hindus; but that is not quite the same thing as mass support for the Congress. According to official estimates, Mr. Gandhi's support has been dwindling for twenty years; but when it comes to a test it seems to be just what it was. This may not give the reader a very clear picture of the strength of the Congress in India as a whole; it is the best I can do.

Next we come to the Moslem League. I am devoting a special chapter to its recent history, so it is not necessary to say much about it here. Since 1937, when it won less than twenty-five per cent of the purely Moslem seats in the Provincial Legislatures, it has gained enormously in influence among the Moslem electorate. If fresh elections were held to-day, it might probably win eighty or ninety per cent of the Moslem seats. Its total paying membership is not published, but it seems unlikely to be more than a million; possibly it is much less than that. Nor is it clear that the Moslem League has yet penetrated much among the rural masses, most of whom are still unenfranchised. It is a mistake to think that it speaks for the ninety million Moslems of India. All this talk of many millions is misleading and confusing. What can be justly claimed is that to-day the Moslem League represents the majority opinion among politically-minded Moslems.

What of the Hindu Mahasabha? It has powerful support among high-caste Hindus in certain parts of the country,

especially in provinces like Bengal and the Punjab, where the tension between Hindus and Moslems is acute, and where many Hindus of the privileged classes consider the policy of

favourable to the Depressed Classes or Untouchables. Like the Moslem League, and unlike the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha is primarily concerned for the interests of a single community, not for India as a whole.

Dr. Ambedkar and one or two able associates have organised a vigorous party among the Depressed Classes in Bombay and other parts of central and southern India, but the Depressed Classes as a whole probably tend still to look to Mr. Gandhi rather than Dr. Ambedkar as their protector. It is absurd to say that Dr. Ambedkar can speak for fifty million Untouchables—once again, *all* efforts to throw millions into one scale or another are misleading.

On the left there are two socialistic parties, namely the Communists and M. N. Roy's Radical Democrats. The Communist Party appeals to the students and to some industrial workers; locally, too, it has peasant support. The Radical Democrats are active in some of the chief industrial areas. A number of other minor parties exist, including several small Moslem parties, strong in particular provinces, and there are two or three separate Sikh parties in the Punjab. Finally, there is the Liberal Party, including a number of able men, mostly Hindus; they are nationalist in outlook but do not approve of the chief weapon of the Congress, Civil Disobedience. They rely on persuasion and constitutional agitation alone. Their following is small.

The Princes rule over two-fifths of India; their combined territories include one-third of the population. Some rule over great territories with millions of subjects; others are merely autocratic landlords. Out of several hundred only about thirty have introduced even the rudiments of democratic government; a few are enlightened autocracies; the rest are well described by a British resident of considerable experience as "bad, worse, and hell." Recent events suggest that their own local populations are beginning to bestir themselves, and may carry out revolutions in many parts of the country within the next two or three decades.

II

THE CRIPPS MISSION IN RETROSPECT

INDIA at the beginning of 1942 was facing something unprecedented. Every threat of invasion for thousands of years had been a threat from the north-west; even the European traders began their operations in the west and south; suddenly a mighty and apparently irresistible foe appeared on the horizon in the south-east. Peaceable, populous Bengal might at any time become the prey of the Japanese invader. The British forces had been driven out of impregnable Malaya and Singapore in a few weeks: they were withdrawing from Burma, and Indian refugees were beginning to stream over into India with terrible tales of disorder and confusion.

What did it all mean? Was the British Empire cracking up? Were the Japanese to be resisted as dangerous foes, as would-be conquerors; or were they to be welcomed as fellow-Asiatics, coming to rescue India from British Imperial domination?

Such were the issues suddenly confronting not only the eastern, maritime provinces of Bengal and Madras but all India when it was announced that Sir Stafford Cripps was coming plane-haste from England with proposals from the Government intended once for all to settle the controversy about Indian government.

Rangoon fell to the Japanese on March 7th, 1942; on March 11th Mr. Churchill announced that Sir Stafford Cripps would proceed immediately to India with a plan agreed upon by the Government, and on March 22nd Sir Stafford and his staff reached Delhi. What did he bring with him?

He brought a promise of full independence (if India so wished) immediately after the end of the war. But India is sick of promises. The tired donkey always sees the carrot a foot away, in front of its nose. No beast of burden can carry its load for ever on the food to be obtained from an intangible carrot. And, anyhow, what did "the end of the war" mean? In the autumn of 1939, when India was remote from the sphere of hostilities, when it seemed possible that England and France, backed by economic assistance from

America, might quickly dispose of Hitler, such an unambiguous promise might have been acceptable. Indeed, it would have been a welcome reply to the Congress demand for a statement of Allied war aims, and of how they would apply to India. But since then much had happened. In the first place, the British Government's reply to that demand had seemed to India evasive and highly unsatisfactory. In the second place, Britain's arch-imperialist, Winston Churchill, known best to India for his sustained attack on the 1935 Reform Bill, had become the Premier, the dominating figure in England. In the third place, the hopes excited by the publication of the Atlantic Charter had been severely damped by Mr. Churchill's explanation that it was not primarily intended to apply to India. India, he had said, was already covered by existing promises; but India did not find those promises adequate. Finally, and most important, the course of the war itself made any promise of what was to happen "after the war" appear unreal. Hitler was in control of nearly all Europe. England itself had only just escaped complete disaster. And now the Japanese had rapidly overrun Malaya and Burma. The British and Americans seemed to be quite unable to check their progress. So, though Sir Stafford Cripps's answers to questions about the future promise seemed water-tight—there were no ambiguous qualifications about the necessity of general agreement among parties or about safeguarding British commercial interests—Indian nationalism was not primarily interested in this "post-dated cheque on a failing bank," as Mr. Gandhi called it. What, if anything, did the Government's offer provide here and now? Did it really provide anything new?

The Draft Declaration brought by Sir Stafford is concerned for the first four-fifths of its length with the future. Only its final paragraph, headed (*e*), deals with the present. The opening clause of this paragraph is, from the Indian nationalist point of view, depressing enough. "During the critical period which now faces India," so the document runs, "and until the new Constitution can be framed, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for, and retain control and direction of, the defence of India as part of their world war effort." That seems plain enough. Responsibility for the government of India is not being transferred to India's representative statesmen. But that is not the whole of the paragraph. In lawyers' documents it is often the saving

clauses, the almost invisible qualifications, which really contain the essence of the whole thing. What comes after the inevitable "but"?

"But," proceeds the Declaration, "the task of organising to the full the military, moral, and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India." So far, the saving clause is, from the Indian point of view, no better than the first clause. For the Government of India is merely His Majesty's Government under a different name. In spite of the ever-increasing proportion of Indians in the Viceroy's Council, the Government of India is still controlled from Whitehall. The Indian members represent only a very small element of Indian public opinion. The Government of India is not an Indian Government. So, if "the task of organising to the full the military, moral, and material resources of India" was to remain the responsibility of a machine whose strings were pulled from Whitehall, India could not be expected to be interested. "The more they pretend to change it, the more it remains the same thing" would be the inevitable comment not only of Gandhi, Azad, Nehru and other Congress leaders, but also of Jinnah and his friends of the Moslem League, of Savarkar and Mookerjee of the Hindu Mahasabha, of Sapru and Jayakar and other Liberals and Moderates, and of a great many of the Princes. Only Ambedkar of the Depressed Classes, and one or two other leaders of small minority groups, were likely to be satisfied with this sort of thing. In fact, only those who did not want any immediate change would approve such a Declaration.

But we are going a bit too fast. There are still some more lawyers' saving clauses. The Declaration proceeds, "His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth, and of the United Nations." This looks as if it might mean something. But what? How is the participation of the "leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people" to be rendered "effective" if at the same time the direction of Indian defence and the organisation of Indian resources is to be kept in the hands of the British? To the suspicious Indian mind (and it has to be recognised that almost every Indian leader is profoundly suspicious of British inten-

tions) this was merely another example of the British tendency to offer with one hand what the other was deliberately withholding. "Will you walk into my parlour?" says the British spider—of so the Indian, feeling suspicious.

And, anyhow, was this proposal really any advance on the offer of August, 1940? The Viceroy's Council had at that time been expanded so as to include "a certain number of representative Indians." The powers available to such "representative Indians" seemed to the chief Indian parties—Congress, Moslem League, Mahasabha and others—to be so nebulous that they refused to come in; comparatively unrepresentative Indians had accordingly taken their places; the result had hardly indicated any serious effort on the Viceroy's part to turn his Council into a democratic Cabinet. The phrasing of the Cripps Declaration was a little happier ("immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people"), but did it really mean anything more?

The answer to this question could best be given by Cripps himself. In the main, it boiled down to two issues: first, if leaders of Congress, the Moslem League and other Indian parties came into the Viceroy's Council, would the Council become a Cabinet? Would the Viceroy, as chief executive, give some undertaking that he would normally be guided by the general will of a Council so constituted (assuming, of course, that it had a general will—which is not the same thing as a majority vote)? Secondly, as the main immediate task of the Government of India must be that "of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India," would the new Minister of Defence really have an effective part in the mobilisation of these resources? What would be his function *vis-à-vis* the Commander-in-Chief, whose department, hitherto, had been responsible for defence in all its main aspects? Would the relations between the Minister for Defence and the Commander-in-Chief in India be roughly equivalent to the relations between the Minister for War and the Commander-in-Chief in England or in one of the Dominions?

To the first question Sir Stafford Cripps, though he had spoken in terms suggesting the formation of an immediate National Government, could only refer his questioners to

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the Viceroy himself—adding, however, that if they disapproved of Viceregal action they could resign. This seems to have made less impression on them than perhaps it deserved. It is hardly to be supposed that any sane Viceroy, having as a result of great efforts brought four or five leading members of the Indian National Congress or of the Moslem League into his Council, will take any step that drives them out again, if he can possibly avoid it. But Indians are not easily convinced by such arguments. They think the resignation of the Provincial Congress Ministries in the autumn of 1939 was hailed with relief in Delhi and Whitehall, and some believe that efforts were being made to force them out when they resigned. They are not convinced that England really wants to see a responsible Ministry, supported by mass opinion, in charge of India, or that the chief officers of Government at New Delhi regard the prospect of working with independent and perhaps prickly nationalist leaders with anything but apprehension and dismay. They are inclined to think that any plausible excuse for quarrelling with them and driving them out would be jumped at, and would be covered by the explanation that the Ministers were insisting on some quite impossible and irresponsible policy.

On the subject of defence, Sir Stafford submitted a list of the subjects that would come under the Minister of Defence Co-ordination (in contrast to the Minister of Defence, who would still be the Commander-in-Chief). This list, under nine headings, was received by nationalist opinion with a chorus of jeers, and was caricatured as putting the new Minister in charge of stationery, canteens and petrol. Indeed, such a reception was inevitable. Although some important functions are indicated, such as Indian representation on the Eastern Group Supply Council, evacuation from threatened areas, and economic warfare, it is clear that the list was intended to leave the Minister subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief, not only with regard to war strategy (that was never disputed) but also more generally. There is no hint that such an essential function of a popular defence minister as recruiting would be transferred to the Indian minister. Even after further negotiation, when a new and more promising formula had been suggested, which contained no list, it was discovered that the old list was still valid: so that, as the Congress President, Dr. Azad, put it in his final letter of

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April 10th, "A new set of words meaning the old thing made no difference."

Although in its final rejection of the plan, the Congress Working Committee found grounds for strong objection to several grounds also, including the proposal to allow several practically independent States to be formed in India, and the refusal to recognise the right of the subjects of Indian States to participate directly in the making of India's free Constitution, yet the decisive issue was the failure of the British Government to contemplate the immediate establishment of a responsible National Government, as evidenced by the cautious nature of the proposals about the constitution of the Viceroy's Council, and the refusal to put the main responsibility for defence under a popular minister.

The other parties found other reasons for rejecting the plan, most of them concerned with certain aspects of the plan for Indian freedom after the war. There is little doubt, however, that if the Congress had accepted the plan (as it very nearly did, in spite of its dissatisfaction), the Moslem League in particular, and probably other groups, would have hastened to come in too. Mr. Jinnah's paper *Dawn* has admitted this as recently as October 1943. So that the main thing that has to be decided is the issue between the Government and the Congress. What can usefully be added about that?

First, the cleavage was a genuine one. It was not due to a misunderstanding. The British Government was not prepared to hand over the control of India at once to a National Government; nor was it willing seriously to reduce the authority of the Commander-in-Chief over defence policy. And there were strong reasons in favour of the British point of view.

England, in 1940 and 1941, had been nearer to a complete and crushing defeat—Hitler himself spoke of "annihilation"—than at any time in her history. Although Russia and America were both in the war now on the British side, the rapid and continued advance of the Japanese in the Southern Pacific showed that the war was by no means won yet. The Chinese were still struggling manfully; if the Japanese were successful in invading Eastern India the last possibility of sending aid to the Chinese would disappear. Even if it was short-sighted not to have agreed to Indian self-government

a few years earlier, surely the very moment when a Japanese invasion of India seemed imminent was hardly the time for handing over the government to men largely inexperienced in the difficult job of administration. Such a transfer would seem like an invitation to the Japanese to attack India.

Moreover, England had had a bitter experience with regard to Ireland. Irish neutrality had cost England dear in the matter of shipping. The advantage the Germans had gained from having agents in Ireland, able to keep Berlin well posted about British shipping movements and other British activities, was incalculable. Indian nationalists had again and again shown their sense of the value of Irish precedent in dealing with the British. Why should they not, if they got the chance, follow the Irish example and declare themselves neutral? Jawaharlal Nehru, it was true, had consistently written and spoken against Hitler and Fascism and the Axis. But would the Congress as a whole side with Nehru if he tried to keep India in the war on the side of Britain and her Allies? Not only were a number of his Congress colleagues bitterly anti-British; not all of them were by any means as much concerned as Nehru himself was about the fate of Russia and China. Only the socialist wing of the Congress (which is still a minority) cares much about Russia, and as for the Chinese, well, the Japanese are also Asiatics. Might it not be better for all Eastern Asia, India included, to be unified under the rule of the Japanese than to remain under the domination of such a remote western power as the English? A few years earlier Subhas Bose, the Bengal leader, had been Congress President, with a large and noisy following among the younger Congressmen. Gandhi and his colleagues had driven him out of the Congress Presidency, but he was still a powerful influence among Bengali nationalists, and to-day he was in Berlin, broadcasting on behalf of the Axis. Who could say what proportion of Congressmen (even of the Working Committee) were secretly in agreement with him, hoping to see a Fascist, authoritarian régime established in India, in alliance with Japan and Germany? Finally, would not Gandhi, by reason of his pacifism, prevail on his colleagues to refrain from helping the war effort—or even, as in 1940, work against it?

Such were the considerations that made even men of the left in England hesitate about advocating the immediate establishment of a National Government in India in the spring

of 1942. India had waited so long; could she not wait a few months, a year or two longer, till the Japanese menace had been successfully resisted, till the transfer could be carried through without fear that the inevitable dislocation of a period of transition would be used as an opportunity for a Japanese invasion?

India—or at least the Congress Working Committee—answered “No, we can wait no longer.” And the reason? Again, precisely because we are at this historic moment. No alien government, they reasoned, could ever make India feel that the war was her war. Under the existing system, recruits might multiply, driven into the army by the growing economic distress; superficially, in industrial production and other ways, India, with her vast resources of man power, might seem to be playing her part. But her enthusiasm was not stirred. At a moment when mighty issues in the realms of politics and morals were being fought out in the world, India, under alien direction, was completely neutral in spirit, more nearly indifferent than Ireland could ever be. It was a bitter thing for her leaders to feel that at this climax of history they were denied the direction of a great nation's destiny. Not after the war, but now, was the grand moment for proving their worth. As Gandhi expressed it: “With them (i.e. the British Government) it seems that to lose India is to lose the battle. It is terrible if it is true. In my opinion to keep India as a possession is to lose the battle.”

Here, then, is the cause of the breakdown. The British Government was prepared to agree to a free, Indian-made Constitution, even full Indian independence, at the end of the war, but it was not prepared to surrender its control of India completely while the Japanese were at the threshold. Nationalist India, as represented principally by Congress, held that nothing but the offer of such a transfer of power had value: promises for the future at such a moment were worthless. The two views, as thus stated, are so sharply opposed that the breakdown, far from being a matter of surprise, appears inevitable. Yet agreement was very nearly reached. At one moment the majority of the Congress Working Committee seem to have been ready to accept. Such a near approach to agreement is a credit to the force of goodwill on both sides. But, again on both sides, there were forces working against an agreement. In England

it is widely believed that the decisive factor on the Indian side was Gandhi's personal dislike of the Cripps scheme; not only so, but it is alleged that at the last moment he put through a long-distance telephone call from his home at Wardha, in the Central Provinces, to which he had returned a week earlier and that this personal intervention just swung the balance in the Working Committee. Sir Stafford Cripps himself apparently believes (or at one time did believe) this story. But it is evidently false. In June, 1942, when I visited Mr. Gandhi at Wardha, this story had just begun to get into circulation. Mr. Gandhi's secretary, Mahadev Desai, who died in detention two months later, explicitly denied it. He told me that after they left Delhi on the 2nd of April they had no further communication of any kind with the Working Committee until after the decision. Apart from the Press reports they knew nothing of what was going on. Mr. Gandhi himself also repudiated the accusation in more general terms. Mr. Rajagopalachari, who was a member of the Working Committee, and the only member who was free when Sir Stafford Cripps gave publicity in the House of Commons to this story of Mr. Gandhi's intervention, has also denied it most categorically and absolutely. Those who first invented the story (happily they remain anonymous) retorted that Mr. Rajagopalachari was absent from the decisive session of the Working Committee when Mr. Gandhi's message was delivered. The fact that Mr. Rajagopalachari had not noticed his own absence does not disturb these fabricators of falsehood. Presumably they would admit that he may have been present in body but absent in mind: a curious fit (or even feat) of absentmindedness.

But although we must reject this tale of Mr. Gandhi's deliberate intervention to prevent an agreement that was on the verge of accomplishment, his known dislike of the proposals may well have been the decisive factor in leading to their rejection by the Congress Working Committee. He has placed it on record with his usual candour that he was somewhat disappointed with Cripps the man, and profoundly disappointed—even disgusted—with his proposals. As to the personal disappointment, this seems to have been mutual. Perhaps each man suspected the other of being an astute lawyer; and perhaps both were right. In discussion of the Cripps proposals in June, I could not get Mr. Gandhi to

admit that they marked any advance on previous British offers. Independence at some date in the near future, the right of India (if her parties could agree) to make her own constitution, all this, he said, was implicit, even if not quite so explicit, in earlier statements. The offer of August, 1940, had brought an invitation to the Muslim League leaders to join the Viceroy's Council. Nothing was new. Cripps, as a sincere friend of Indian freedom, ought not to have allowed himself to be made the cats'-paw of the clever British imperialists in bringing such an offer to India at such a time. This, as far as I can recall it, is the gist of what Mr. Gandhi said in June, 1942, and it is supported by his writings at the time of the Cripps visit. His attitude was well known to the members of the Working Committee. Those of them who regard his judgment as infallible would inevitably work and vote for rejection of the offer. And they did. And it was rejected. What more needs to be said about Gandhi's responsibility? Actually, two things. First, he was not forcing an eager country to reject the offer. I have been assured by Europeans who were in close touch with Indian opinion that there was an almost audible sigh of relief when the announcement was published that the proposals had been rejected, so afraid was Indian opinion that their trusted leaders would be caught up in the toils of the British Government machine. How odd it is to reflect that whilst English people think themselves a bit stupid in politics, an easy prey to oriental subtlety, Indians think we are the subtle villains, and they the foolish innocents.

It is possible that on the British side, too, there were important influences working against Cripps. Whoever produced the list of subjects for the Indian Defence Co-ordination Department must surely have wanted to kill the negotiations. Indians often speak as if the "iron frame" of the Government machine in India has no will, no volition, of its own. This is surely a mistake. Sometimes high officials exert their personal will-power with decisive effect. Posterity may learn that the Cripps Mission was one of these occasions. Were there no sighs of relief in New Delhi?

III

GANDHI AND THE JAPANESE

We have seen that Mr. Gandhi's dissatisfaction with the Cripps offer was an important element—perhaps the decisive element—in the rejection of that offer by the Congress. Gandhi's influence on India and on Indo-British relations for the past twenty years has been so great that in any discussion of these topics, sooner or later one must attempt an estimate of Gandhi. An almost incredible amount of rubbish has been written about him; every writer on Indian affairs tries to "explain" him. Most of them seem to start out with some thesis which they seek to support by suitable quotations from his very numerous writings. The devil is said to be clever at quoting scripture to suit his own ends. Those who write about Gandhi have studied the same art. Indeed, the tendency to divorce text from context is as eagerly pursued by British propagandists as by any theological controversialist. No one can pretend that Gandhi's mind is easy to follow. The present writer has followed his weekly writings pretty closely for over fifteen years and is one of his thousand and one intimate personal friends. But he would not dare to stand before the world and say: "I can tell you what Gandhi really means." In what follows I can only say that I have attempted to follow what is surely the only honest way to interpret a man's writings: that is, to study all the relevant material that is available; to assume that language normally means what it says; to give most weight to the general cumulative impression; but to pay special attention to passages that seem to contradict the general impression, and which may possibly reveal some inner tendencies of which even the author himself may hardly be aware. To this I must add that in June, 1942, I spent most of two days in intimate and sometimes animated discussion and argument of the Cripps Mission and subsequent developments with Mr. Gandhi himself, and got therefrom a strong impression of the main forces that were influencing his mind.

There is one point which is common to all those who seek to explain Mr. Gandhi and his present attitude. All are agreed that he is a pacifist. Unhappily the word "pacifist,"

against supposing that the Japanese could be welcomed as friends and deliverers.

His pacifism does not mean neutrality. Gandhi has been a fighter all his life, battling against what he conceives to be evil. Neutral or indifferent he could never be in a struggle where he sees that moral principles are involved. But Gandhi, seeing the immense evils the world suffers when military force is resisted by military force, has suggested to an incredulous world that there might be some other way of resisting aggression and other forms of tyrannical force than by counter-measures of violence. "Non-violent resistance" means just what it says: resistance, but without violence. It should not be equated with non-resistance.

Let us see, then, how Mr. Gandhi, during the spring and summer of 1942, proposed that India should meet the threatened Japanese invasion. In an article in *Harijan*, on April 26th, 1942, soon after the departure of Sir Stafford Cripps, he propounded the idea, as already noted, that if the British armies withdrew from India "as they had to leave Singapore, non-violent India would not lose anything. Probably the Japanese would leave India alone. Perhaps India, if the main parties composed their differences as they probably would, would be able effectively to help China in the way of peace, and in the long run may even play a decisive part in the promotion of world peace." Moreover, if more soldiers were needed to defend India, why not adopt the cheaper and easier plan of training Indian soldiers instead of importing more British and Americans?

Some of his readers were unable to follow him in this line of argument. He received letters asking, "Are you not inviting the Japanese to attack India by asking the British rulers to withdraw?" He replied (*Harijan*, May 3rd), "I am not. I feel convinced that the British presence is the incentive for the Japanese attack. If the British wisely decide to withdraw and leave India to manage her own affairs in the best way she could, the Japanese would be bound to reconsider their plans. The very novelty of the British stroke will confound the Japanese, dissolve the subdued hatred against the British, and the atmosphere will be set up for the ending of an unnatural state of things that has dominated and choked Indian life."

Next week, May 10th, he developed the same theme again,

concluding with words that indicate his alternative method of meeting a Japanese invasion. "The presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India. Their withdrawal removes the bait. Assume, however, that it does not, free India will be better able to cope with the invasion. Unadulterated non-co-operation will have run away."

On May 17th he expresses his indignation at the hardships being inflicted on the inhabitants of East Bengal by the "denial" and "boat-denial" policies of which more must be said in a later chapter. "People in East Bengal may almost be regarded as amphibious. They live partly on land and partly on the waters of the rivers. They have light canoes which enable them to go from place to place. For fear of the Japanese using the canoes, the people have been called upon to surrender them. For a Bengali to part with his canoe is almost like parting with his life. So those who take away his canoe, he regards as his enemy."

And then follows the comment: "Great Britain has to win the war. Need she do so at India's expense? Should she do so?"

On May 24th, he amplifies his plan of action against the Japanese. Answering another questioner, he writes: "I have already said in my articles that it is just likely that the Japanese will not want to invade India, their prey having gone. But it is equally likely that they will want to invade India in order to use her ports for strategic purposes" (he seems to be beginning to recognise that it is a world-war, not just Japan v. England). "Then, I would advise the people to do the same thing that I have advised them to do now, viz., offer stubborn non-violent non-co-operation, and I make bold to say that, if the British withdraw and people here follow my advice, then non-co-operation will be infinitely more effective than it can be to-day, when it cannot be appreciated for the violent British action going on side by side." Again, the same week, "If the whole of India responded and unanimously offered it (non-violent non-co-operation) I should show that, without shedding a single drop of blood, Japanese arms or any combination of arms can be sterilised. That involves the determination of India not to give any quarter on any point whatsoever and to be ready to risk loss of several million lives." What Gandhi is saying appears to be this: If the Japanese invade India, and if the whole nation goes on

strike, and refuses to give them any help whatever, and refuses to be terrorised even if the Japanese shoot down millions in order to try and force India to work for her—if we can do this, their invasion will be paralysed. It will fail. He admits that India may not be prepared for such courageous action. But that doubt does not lead him to doubt the efficacy of a sustained “strike” of a whole nation.

In answer to further questions, he admits that, under existing circumstances, he cannot advise India to help either side in the war: “If I can convert India to my view,” he says, “there would be no aid to either side; but my sympathies are undoubtedly in favour of China and Russia. I used to say that my moral support was entirely with Britain. I am very sorry to have to confess that to-day my mind refuses to give that moral support. British behaviour towards India has filled me with great pain. . . . And, therefore, though I do not wish any humiliation to Britain—and, therefore, no defeat—my mind refuses to give her any moral support.” And again: “Both America and Britain lack the moral basis for engaging in this war, unless they put their own houses in order, while making a fixed determination to withdraw their influence and power from Africa and Asia, and remove the colour-bar. They have no right to talk about protecting democracies and protecting civilisation and human freedom until the canker of white superiority is destroyed in its entirety.”

Next week he writes more explicitly. “Of course people must not, on any account, lean on the Japanese to get rid of the British Power. That were a remedy worse than the disease.” Further, “I am trying to wean the people from their hatred (of the British) by asking them to develop the strength of mind to invite the British to withdraw and at the same time to resist the Japanese. With the British withdrawal, the incentive to welcome the Japanese goes, and the strength felt in securing British withdrawal will be used for stemming the Japanese inroad. I endorse C. R.’s (Mr. Rajagopalachari’s) proposition that the millions of India can resist the Japanese even without the possession of arms, modern and ancient, if they are properly organised. I differ from him when he says that this can be done even when the British arms are operating.” This was in answer to a correspondent who wrote that if Mr. Gandhi were not so much out of touch with public opinion, living at Sevagram, he “would not talk of

resisting the Japanese as you do. For the dislike of the British is so great that the man in the street is ready to welcome the Japanese."

A week later (June 7th) he writes: "Pandit Nehru told me yesterday that he heard people in Lahore and Delhi saying that I have turned pro-Japanese. I could only laugh at the suggestion, for, if I am sincere in my passion for freedom, I

could not consider it as necessary to involve India in the position of merely changing masters."

In the same week he publishes the following question and answer: "Q. Is it a fact that your present attitude towards England and Japan is influenced by the belief that you think the British and the Allies are going to be defeated in the war? It is necessary that you clear the position in this respect. A very important leader in the Congress thinks like that and he says that he is sure because he has this knowledge from his personal talks with you." "A. I wish you could have given me the name of the leader. Whoever he is, I have no hesitation in saying that it is not true. On the contrary, I said only the other day in *Harijan* that the Britisher was hard to beat. He has not known what it is to be defeated. . . . But I have said in my talk for the past twelve months and more that this war was not likely to end in a decisive victory for any party. There will be peace when the exhaustion point is reached. This is mere speculation. Britain may be favoured by Nature. She has nothing to lose by waiting. And with America as her ally, she has inexhaustible material resources and scientific skill. This advantage is not available to any of the Axis Powers. Thus, I have no decisive opinion about the result of the war."

On June 14th he answers questions about the relationship of his desired Indian National Government to the United Nations. "Assuming that the National Government is formed," he writes, "and if it answers my expectations, its first act would be to enter into a treaty with the United Nations for defensive operations against aggressive powers, it being common sense that India will have nothing to do with any of the Fascist Powers and India would be morally bound to help the United Nations." From further replies it seems clear that by "defensive operations" he is thinking chiefly of the defence of China, "by means other than resort to slaughter"—for, if he has his way, India will have disbanded her army, and will use only

non-violent methods of defence. Also, he hopes the National Government will "use all its power, prestige and resources . . . towards bringing about world peace. But of course," he adds, "after the formation of the National Government my voice may be a voice in the wilderness and national India may go war-mad."

The same week an interview with some American journalists is reported. The salient passage seems to be that if the British will not withdraw their forces, "India's non-violence can at best take the form of silence—not obstructing the British forces, certainly not helping the Japanese."

A later reply in the same interview is important. "Remember," says Gandhi, "I am more interested than the British in keeping the Japanese out. For, Britain's defeat in Indian waters may mean *only the loss of India*, but if Japan wins India loses *everything*." (Gandhi's italics.)

By this time Gandhi was changing his position about the departure of the Allied troops. The reasons for this are not quite clear. Nehru had had long conversations with him, and so had Rajagopalachari and others who disapproved of this plan. One reason he himself gives in answer to another American journalist (*Harijan*, June 21st): "I do not want them to go," he says, "on condition that India becomes entirely free. I cannot, then, insist on their withdrawal, because I want to resist with all my might the charge of inviting Japan to India." Another answer to this journalist perhaps reveals one of the overmastering reasons for the line Gandhi and his colleagues were taking, and were about to take still more vigorously: "It is a terrible tragedy," he says, "that forty crores (400 millions) of people should have no say in this war. If we have the freedom to play our part, we can arrest the march of Japan and save China." To be a great people, with one of the most profound cultures yet evolved on this earth, and yet to have no say in this momentous struggle, to be thought unfit to have a say! That is the bitter pill to every sensitive Indian, the unbearable insult. He must somehow prove that he is worthy of this hour, and he can only prove that by doing something, taking some autonomous action of his own and by doing it now—against the Japanese if possible; or, if the freedom to take his own action is denied him, then, perversely if you like, his action will inevitably be directed against England, against the short-sighted rulers

who stand between him and his destiny. And so, here we have it again, still in the same interview: "If the Japanese compel the Allies to retire from India to a safer base, I cannot say to-day that the whole of India will be up in arms against the Japanese. I have a fear that they may degrade themselves as some Burmans did. I want India to oppose Japan to a man. If India was free she would do it, it would be a new experience to her in twenty-four hours her mind would be changed. All parties would then act as one. . . . If live independence is declared to-day, I have no doubt India becomes a powerful ally . . . I say that if the war is to be decisively won, India must be freed to play her part to-day. I find no flaw in my position. I have arrived at it after considerable debating within myself. I am doing nothing in hurry or anger. There is not the slightest room in me for accommodating the Japanese. No, I am sure that India's independence is not only essential for India, but for China and the Allied cause."

It is in the *Harifan* of the following week that he confesses his earlier blindness in his demand for withdrawal of the Allied troops. Somehow, in confessing his mistake, he hardly seems to face the enormity of the change involved in his own position. "There was obviously a gap in my first writing," he says. "I filled it in as soon as it was discovered by one of my numerous interviewers." [But surely it was something more than a mere gap!] "Non-violence demands the strictest honesty, cost what it may. The public have, therefore, to suffer my weakness, if weakness it may be called. I could not be guilty of asking the Allies to take a step which would involve certain defeat—I could not guarantee fool-proof non-violent action to keep the Japanese at bay. Abrupt withdrawal of the Allied troops might result in Japan's occupation of India and China's sure fall. I had not the remotest idea of any such catastrophe resulting from my action. Therefore, I feel that if, in spite of the acceptance of my proposal, it is deemed necessary by the Allies to remain in India to prevent Japanese occupation, they should do so, subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by the National Government that may be set up after the British withdrawal."

Having once moved to this position, he adhered to it. "Whilst we may be ready to face the Japanese, we may not ask the Britishers to give up their position of vantage merely

on the unwarranted supposition that we would succeed by mere non-violent effort in keeping off the Japanese." And again, in the same number: "It has been pointed out that not to consent to the Allied troops remaining in India during the period of the war is to hand over India and China to Japan, and to ensure the defeat of the Allied Powers. This could never have been contemplated by me. The only answer, therefore, to give was to suffer the presence of the troops, but under circumstances the reverse of the existing. They will remain under the permission of Free India, and not at all in the role of masters but of friends."

Finally, on July 18th, he wrote his appeal "To Every Japanese." This needs to be quoted at some length. The opening sentence is blunt enough. "I must confess at the outset that though I have no ill-will against you, I intensely dislike your attack upon China. From your lofty height you have descended to imperial ambition."

After speaking of the various ways in which, in early life, he had learnt "to prize the many excellent qualities of your nation," he continues:

"In the background of these pleasant recollections, I grieve deeply as I contemplate what appears to me to be your unprovoked attack against China, and, if reports are to be believed, your merciless devastation of that great and ancient land.

"It was a worthy ambition of yours to take equal rank with the Great Powers of the world. Your aggression against China and your alliance with the Axis Powers was surely an unwarranted excess of that ambition.

"I should have thought that you would be proud of the fact that that great and ancient people, whose old classical literature you have adopted as your own, are your neighbours. Your understanding of one another's history, tradition, literature, should bind you as friends rather than make you the enemies you are to-day.

"If I was a free man, and if you allowed me to come to your country, frail though I am, I would not mind risking my health, maybe my life, to come to your country to plead with you to desist from the wrong you are doing to China and the world and, therefore, to yourself.

"But I enjoy no such freedom. And we are in the unique position of having to resist an imperialism that we detest no

less than yours and Nazism. Our resistance to it does not mean harm to the British people. We seek to convert them. Ours is an unarmed revolt against British rule. An important party in the country is engaged in a deadly but friendly quarrel with the foreign rulers.

"But in this they need no aid from Foreign Powers. You have been saying, I know you are, that we have chosen this particular moment to embarrass the Allies when your attack against India is imminent. If we wanted to turn Britain's difficulty into our opportunity, we should have done it as soon as the war broke out nearly three years ago.

"Our movement demanding the withdrawal of the British Power from India should in no way be misunderstood. In fact, if we are to believe your reported anxiety for the Independence of India, a recognition of the Independence by Britain should leave you no excuse for any attack on India. Moreover, the reported profession sorts ill with your ruthless aggression against China.

"I would ask you to make no mistake about the fact that you will be sadly disillusioned if you believe that you will receive a willing welcome from India. The end and aim of the movement for British withdrawal is to prepare India by making her free for resisting all militarist and imperialist ambition, whether it is called British Imperialism, German Nazism, or your pattern. . . . Our appeal to Britain is coupled with the offer of Free India's willingness to let the Allies retain their troops in India. The offer is made in order to prove that we do not in any way mean to harm the Allied cause, and in order to prevent you from being misled into feeling that you have but to step into the country that Britain has vacated. Needless to repeat that if you cherish any such idea and will carry it out, we will not fail in resisting you with all the might that our country can muster. I address this appeal to you in the hope that our movement may even influence you and your partners in the right direction and deflect you and them from the course which is bound to end in your moral ruin and the reduction of human beings to robots.

"The hope of your response to my appeal is much fainter than that of response from Britain. I know that the British are not devoid of a sense of justice and they know me. I do not know you enough to be able to judge. All I have read

tell me that you listen to no appeal but to the sword. How I wish that you are cruelly misrepresented and that I shall touch the right chord in your heart! Anyway, I have an undying faith in the responsiveness of human nature. On the strength of that faith I have conceived the impending movement in India, and it is that faith which has prompted this appeal to you."

The reader may be left to draw his own conclusions from these quotations. But something must be added in commentary on the White Paper, "Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942-43," "published with authority," in which Mr. Gandhi's writings are freely quoted, and in which the anonymous author attempts to interpret the workings of Mr. Gandhi's mind. In some places he seems to be very understanding of Mr. Gandhi's outlook; in other places he has quite misunderstood and misrepresented him. A few illustrations may be taken.

On page 7, the following quotation is given from Mr. Gandhi's writings in *Harijan*: "It (the movement against the British Government) will be a movement which will be felt by the whole world. It *may* not interfere with the movement of British troops, but it is sure to engage British attention." No comment is made on this passage, but the word "may" is italicised, and we are not informed that it was not so italicised in the original. We are left to assume that the italics are Mr. Gandhi's own.

On page 12 this identical passage is quoted again, again with the word "may" italicised. Once again, there is no immediate comment, but the reader's mind is bound to be influenced by the repetition, and by the sight of the word "may" in italics twice. So that when at the bottom of the next page he reads that Mr. Gandhi was evidently planning a mass movement to include "strikes and the stoppage of railways, and possibly interference with British troop movements" he naturally accepts this as a fair deduction. On page 17, the writer goes a step further, and speaks of "Mr. Gandhi's expressed preparedness, if necessary, to interfere with the working of the railways and the movement of troops." There is no other relevant quotation. All depends on the little word "may," and its interpretation. No other passage is quoted on the subject. Is it a permissive "may," or is it a deliberate ambiguity? Or is it neither?

Now, the English language is a very subtle instrument, and the word "may" is an awkward customer. If I say, "Well, we *may* not come this evening," with all the stress on the word "may," my hostess will know that it is still an open question. Circumstances ~~may~~ prevent us: but there is still a doubt, a possibility. But if I say: "NO, we *may* not come this evening," with the stress, if anywhere, on the "not," my listeners know that "we" are under orders not to come. The expression "may not," so used, is even stronger than the expression "must not." It is not a special order given for to-night only, it is some special rule or law that would be violated if we tried to come.

And that, in fact, is what Mr. Gandhi has said about interference with troops, as is shown both by the context of this particular passage and by his repeated use of the word "may" in this sense on other occasions. The particular passage comes from a talk with an American journalist. The journalist has been putting a number of questions about Mr. Gandhi's attitude to the troops. The whole passage is worth quoting:

"Do you see a situation when after full independence is granted, American and Allied troops can operate from India?" Mr. Grover pertinently asked.

"I do," said Gandhi. "It will be only then that you will see real co-operation. Otherwise, all the effort you put up may fail. Just now, Britain is having India's resources because India is her possession. To-morrow whatever the help, it will be real help from a *free* India."

"You think India in control interferes with Allied action to meet Japan's aggression."

"It does."

"When I mentioned Allied troops operating, I wanted to know whether you contemplated complete shifting of the present troops from India?"

"Not necessarily."

"It is on that that there is a lot of misconception."

"You have to study all I am writing. I have discussed the whole question in the current issue of *Harijan*. I do not want them to go, on condition that India becomes entirely free. I cannot, then, insist on their withdrawal, because I want to resist with all my might the charge of inviting Japan to India."

"But suppose your proposal is rejected, what will be your next move?"

"It will be a move which will be felt by the whole world. It may not interfere with the movement of British troops, but it is sure to engage British attention. It would be wrong of them to reject my proposal and say that India should remain a slave in order that Britain may win or be able to defend China. I cannot accept that degrading position. India, free and independent, will play a prominent part in defending China."

As for Mr. Gandhi's tendency to use the expression "may not" as the strongest possible prohibition, here is another example. On May 24th, discussing the rights and wrongs of a "scorched earth" policy in case of Japanese invasion, he said: "I think it is ruinous, suicidal, and unnecessary—whether India believes in non-violent non-co-operation or in violence. And the Russian and Chinese examples make no appeal to me. If some other country resorts to methods which I consider to be inhuman, I may not follow them." In other words, the moral law forbids it: that is the force of the English expression "may not", as opposed to "must not," which normally indicates that some human will or order is being invoked to forbid the proposed action.

It is true that in modern English the expression "may not" is now rarely used in this sense, as implying a moral prohibition. We habitually say "must not." Perhaps that is because, in the west, we no longer believe in moral absolutes: we only attend to men's commands.

It may be objected, however, that if this is the only passage bearing on such an important subject, some other readers (including his Indian followers) might have misconstrued Mr. Gandhi's intentions just as the writer of the White Paper did. Did Mr. Gandhi say nothing else on the subject? Yes, he did; and what he said bears out this interpretation of the "may not" passage. Thus, only a week before (June 14th), when some other correspondents were interviewing him, the following passage occurred: "So," said Mr. Gandhi, "India's non-violence can at best take the form of silence—not obstructing the British forces, certainly not helping the Japanese."

"But not helping the British?"

"Don't you see non-violence cannot give any other aid?"

"But the railways, I hope, you won't stop; the services, too, will be, I hope, allowed to function."

"They will be allowed to function, as they are being allowed to-day."

"Aren't you, then, helping the British by leaving the services and the railways alone?" asked Mr. Bellidon.

"We are indeed. That is our non-embarrassment policy."

Here is another example of White Paper misunderstanding.

"It is no coincidence," says the writer, "that, at the same time as Mr. Gandhi was developing his 'Quit India' theme in *Harijan*, he was also inveighing against any form of scorched earth policy (Mr. Gandhi's solicitude for

largely industrial property be it noted, which it might have been necessary to deny to the enemy, contrasts strangely with his readiness to sacrifice countless numbers of Indians in non-violent resistance to the Japanese. The property must be saved; it is perhaps legitimate to ask—For whom?). Not a single quotation is adduced to justify this attack. Let us see what in fact Mr. Gandhi did say about a "scorched earth" policy. Actually we have seen something about it already. We have seen him denouncing the "boat-denial" policy, which had already been enforced (are the country-boats of the peasants "industrial property?"). He had also spoken strongly (June 14th) about "thousands of villagers who are being summarily asked to vacate their houses and go elsewhere, for the site of their homes is needed by the military." We have also seen that he repudiates a "scorched earth" policy in general because it is "inhuman." Taking that passage alone it would be natural to assume that Mr. Gandhi, when he spoke of "scorched earth" was thinking of scorched earth—he has a very literal mind—or, if you like, of the destruction of crops, trees, animals, farm-buildings, not of "industrial property." But in fact he was more explicit. The question put to him (May 24th) was in this form: "Would you advise non-violent non-co-operation against 'scorched earth' policy? Would you resist the attempt to destroy sources of food and water?" The questioner is evidently thinking of Government orders to peasants to evacuate, of possible plans to make the countryside uninhabitable before the Japanese land. Mr. Gandhi's reply, as already quoted, shows his strong objection to any such policy, in spite of the Chinese and Russian examples, and he says: "A time may come when I would certainly advise it"—i.e. non-co-operation against measures for making the countryside uninhabitable. But the questioner then goes on: "But what about factories—especially factories for the manufacture of munitions?"

Mr. Gandhi replies: "Suppose there are factories for grinding wheat or pressing oil-seeds. I should not destroy them. But munition factories, yes; for I would not tolerate munition factories in a free India if I had my way. Textile factories I would not destroy, and would resist all such destruction. However, it is a question of prudence."

The writer of the White Paper has suggested that Mr. Gandhi, by rejecting a "scorched earth" policy, is showing his desire to protect the profits of the factory-owners, whilst indifferent to the lot of the poor. The truth is precisely the opposite. The livelihood of the poor he is striving to protect; even factories for the manufacture of food or clothing he hopes to save; other factories may go. And in writing this he is merely reflecting the teaching and practice of his whole lifetime of service to the Indian peasants.

One further example. "We can only infer," says the White Paper, "that in the admittedly possible event of Japanese aggression on India after the departure of the British, he (Mr. Gandhi) was prepared to concede to their demands." As we have already seen from the quotations given in this chapter, week after week he had been preaching that there must be no concessions to the Japanese.

IV

THE CONFLICT OF AUGUST 1942

SEVERAL of the passages quoted in the last chapter, which primarily intended to throw light on Mr. Gandhi's attitude to the Japanese, have shown that during the second quarter of 1942 he was meditating some sort of operation against the British Government. He talks at one moment about how India can resist the Japanese if they invade the country; at the next of how India may resist the British Government. To him, British and Japanese are alike at least in this, that they appear as aliens, the one dominating the country, the other threatening to dominate, whereas he holds that India should govern herself and that the transfer of power into Indian hands is long overdue and can be postponed no longer. It is not easy for an Englishman to transplant himself into this mental atmosphere; but it is important to make the effort, for it is not only Mr. Gandhi's mind, but the mind of nearly every Indian, prince or peasant, Hindu or Moslem or Christian, even though many, in speaking to an Englishman, may seek to hide it. To us in England to-day, it seems axiomatic that every man must either be pro-Axis or pro-United Nations. Every man who does anything to embarrass the war-effort of the United Nations, it is assumed in England, must be at heart a friend of the Axis. But this is not the way things appear to most Indians. A few, including presumably a good many Government servants—though even they suffer from the divided mind—also many of the Liberals, Mr. Rajagopalachari and up to a point Jawaharlal Nehru, do regard the struggle between the United Nations and the Axis as paramount; and they are prepared to temper their patriotism, to subordinate it if necessary for the time being, in order to concentrate on the supreme object of defeating the Axis. But to the vast majority of Indians, India (whether Hindustan or Pakistan) is still the centre of the picture; her freedom, her immediate freedom, is the paramount necessity. If Britain will not give way, she must be forced to give way. If Japan tried to take India as a possession, to supersede Britain, she too must be resisted. A good illustration of this mentality is to be found in the argument

used by one of India's nationalist leaders in favour of a pro-British policy. "If we side with the British," he is reported to have said, "we side with a waning power, and soon the British will withdraw and we shall be free. If we side with the Japanese, we side with a waxing power. If the Japanese come, we shall begin all over again with a new imperial domination, which may subject us for another hundred and fifty years."

Both Gandhi and Nehru (and for that matter Jinnah too), share this point of view to some extent, though they seem to reach their conclusions by different routes. Each man has been struggling with a dilemma, but the two dilemmas are not the same. Gandhi's dilemma has been something like this. On the one side he did not want to embarrass the British if he could help it, nor do anything that might favour the Japanese. But on the other hand, he has for long been convinced that the continued rule of India by the British (and let no one raise the objection that British rule has almost disappeared from India, for it hasn't) is bad not only for India but equally for England, and for the British reputation in the world. He believes that if England would really part with power in India, and part with it so unequivocally that the people of America and China and Europe could see that it was a genuine act, the moral effect on the whole world, even on the Axis Powers, would be so immense that the true victory, the victory of freedom, would be thereby secured. So he insisted that drastic action must be taken to convince the British people that the time had come: India *must* be free, and free now. By forcing the issue he believed that he was acting as the best friend of the British people and of the Allied cause. He would rid them of a moral burden.

Nehru seems to have reached the same point by a rather different mental process. To him the defeat of the Axis is a vital necessity. In the late 1930's he watched the appeasement policy of the Chamberlain Government with the gravest suspicion; but it was just what he would expect of an imperialist power. The domination of Imperial Britain might be less disgusting in its methods than the domination exercised by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany over their victims. But domination, in his view, was all of one genus, even though there might be distinct species. When Britain declared war on Nazi Germany in 1939 he had hoped that it represented a real swing away from the "pro-Fascist" phase of British

policy—so signally witnessed by British vacillations over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and still more by her Franco policy during the Spanish war. The best test of this change would be the British attitude to India. If the British Government were converted to the cause of human freedom, they would quickly hand over power in India to a national Government. But the cautious Government statement of 1939, the language used in the offer of August, 1940, indeed the whole trend of British war policy in India, convinced him more and more that there was no real change. He perhaps agrees with Lowell: "Sermon thru, an' come to *du*, why, there's the old J. B., a-crowdin' you an' me."

What could be done about it? Again and again civil disobedience was considered. In the autumn of 1940 a movement was started, but on a deliberately restricted scale, as a gesture rather than as an effort to interfere with British power. Individuals courted arrest by making anti-war speeches. This was the so-called "non-embarrassment" policy. It achieved little, and petered out by the end of 1941. Then came Cripps, a personal friend of Nehru, who was prepared, both on that ground and on Cripps's political record, to give his proposals favourable consideration. But he did not like them; they fell far short of his demand; and he concluded that the British Government, in spite of Cripps, had still not changed its mind.

What next? On the one side, the Japanese must not be encouraged; but on the other hand, as such men as Nehru saw it, the British were exhibiting the inevitable weaknesses of an imperialist power. By contrast with the heroic and successful resistance of the Russians and the Chinese, in spite of their lack of equipment, a resistance inspired by the united will of free peoples, the British, unsupported by any local enthusiasm, had made a mess of things in Malaya and Burma, and the same mess was bound to happen if the Japanese attacked India. Nehru was convinced that the British could not defend India; they were, in his view, inefficient, inept and certainly lacking the ardent support of any considerable portion of the people. "It is a people's war," called out a communist interrupter at a meeting Nehru was addressing in Bombay. "Go and ask the people," retorted Nehru, "they think so." But it must be turned into a people's war if the Japanese were to be successfully resisted. How? By

seizing the Government. There was no other way. The British would not give up their power voluntarily. They must be forced to surrender it. But could it be done? Nehru and some of his colleagues apparently believed that it could. The workers in essential war factories and on the railways would join in a general strike, and would refuse to be forced back to work until a National Government was formed. Possibly a large section of the army would mutiny, or would at least make known its demand for an immediate National Government: for Nehru knew that he was popular in the Forces. The struggle would be short and sharp. The decision would be reached in a few weeks. Anyhow, the risk had to be run; for thus, and thus only, if I am interpreting him correctly—and he spent some hours explaining his position to me in July, 1942—would India be free to play a worthy part alongside Russia and China.

Thus, travelling along different routes, Gandhi and Nehru, as often before, found that their paths met, and they united to lead the Congress into a full movement of Civil Disobedience in the summer of 1942.

Up to the end, Nehru seems to have recognised the risk, for Mr. Gandhi has himself recorded that "he fought against my position with a passion which I have no words to describe. But the logic of facts overwhelmed him."

On July 14th, the Congress Working Committee, which had met at Wardha, Mr. Gandhi in attendance, published a resolution calling on the British Government to withdraw and hand over authority in India to "a provisional government representative of all important sections of the people of India, which will later evolve a scheme by which a Constituent Assembly can be convened in order to prepare a Constitution for the Government of India, acceptable to all sections of the people. Representatives of free India and representatives of Great Britain will confer together for the adjustment of future relations and for the co-operation of the two countries and allies in the common task of meeting aggression."

But "Should this appeal (to the British) fail, the Congress cannot view without the gravest apprehension the continuance of the present state of affairs involving a progressive deterioration in the situation and the weakening of India's will and power to resist aggression. The Congress will then be reluctantly compelled to utilise all the non-violent strength it might

gathered since 1920, when it adopted non-violence as part of its policy, for the vindication of political rights and liberty. Such a widespread struggle would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi."

The publication of this resolution caused a considerable sensation in India. Some of Mr. Gandhi's friends had indicated his determination to get some drastic change of Indian-Muslim relations in the near future; but he had assured me in the middle of June that he was not expecting to court imprisonment in the near future. He seemed to suggest that he had some quite different form of action in mind. As he had spoken on various occasions of Lord Linlithgow as a friend, and as it was popularly believed that they liked each other, it had seemed probable that before taking any definite step he would seek an interview with the Viceroy. Perhaps it was still not too late. An Indian Christian (one who had in the past year or two been working for a Gandhi-Jinnah agreement) accompanied me at once to Mr. Gandhi's home at Sevagram, and we asked him if he was willing even now to talk over the whole position with the Viceroy. He expressed himself as more than willing. The Working Committee's resolution was only a draft, to be considered by the All-India Congress Committee (a much larger body consisting of several hundred members). Meanwhile, if he could see the Viceroy much might happen. He had been telling the journalists that "there was no room left for negotiation," so this readiness to discuss things with the Viceroy seemed rather surprising. But he declared himself as confident that there would be no struggle. A way out would be found. Some of his intimates who saw him at that time, including Mr. Rajagopalachari, apparently got the same impression. He was in no hurry to act.

It is difficult to reconcile the two voices with which he seemed to be speaking at this time. By "no room for negotiation," he apparently meant that it must be real freedom, nothing less; no room for a compromise, no room for half-measures. He did not mean no room for conversations. If he found, as he hoped, that Lord Linlithgow was genuinely anxious to hand over effective power to a National Government, whether primarily Congress or primarily Moslem League, there need be no serious difficulty. Short of that, the Congress was determined to demonstrate the national will to freedom. So,

too, when he spoke of "open rebellion," could he really expect the Viceroy to talk to him amiably in the face of such a threat? Mr. Gandhi, no doubt, would have argued that it was not a threat, only a provisional statement of intentions, like massing the police along a thoroughfare before an important procession takes place. He has always believed in that kind of disconcerting candour. But if he had been seriously intending to come to an understanding with the Viceroy, would it not have been better to approach him before the resolution was published rather than after? To be sure, Hitler found he got much greater concessions from France and England when he was obviously threatening them than his German predecessors got when they were unarmed and unable to threaten. But the positions are hardly parallel; and one does not expect Gandhi to act like Hitler. Not for the first time, Gandhi seemed to be strangely at fault in his estimate of British psychology. Although Lord Linlithgow was informed of Mr. Gandhi's desire to meet him, there was no response. The Government had evidently made up its mind that the Congress, and Mr. Gandhi in particular, had decided on a struggle. They waited to see if the protests of various moderates would have any effect; but the resolution in a slightly modified form, including the outline of a programme for world order, was ratified by an overwhelming majority, and thereupon the Government, without waiting for the letter which Mr. Gandhi had announced that he would write to the Viceroy, struck at once and arrested Mr. Gandhi and all the Congress leaders.

It was on Sunday morning, the 9th of August, that the news of the arrests spread across India. In the Prayer-book gospel for that morning, the tenth Sunday after Trinity, occurred the words: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. . . . They shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Did any faint echo of those words reach the Viceroy's ears, on that Sunday morning, in the great edifice which Imperial Britain has built among the ruins of ancient imperial capitals outside Delhi? Possibly not, for Lord Linlithgow is a good Presbyterian, and his energetic secretary a Roman Catholic, who had perhaps attended early Mass and was now methodically working through his files

just as on every other day. Yet Viceroys and their secretaries are human beings. Reasons of State and high policy, the necessity of upholding law and order, the need to keep an outward semblance of unity in the face of the Japanese threat, had driven them to this step. In spite of the obvious political necessity of the step (if Gandhi claimed that he had waited long enough, had not they, too, waited and waited for reason and moderation to assert themselves in the minds of the Congress "high command"?) perhaps the controllers of Indian

... passed for a moment that Sunday morning and whispered inaudibly, "I wonder what the end of it all will be. . . . If thou hadst known, even thou, the things which belong to thy peace!"

Some such thoughts may well have passed through the minds of those who were living in the Viceregal Lodge at New Delhi. For those who were living in the highways of India, the voice we heard was unmistakable. Even from the lips of men who twenty-four hours ago were openly criticising Gandhi and the Congress, there came almost fiercely (but Indians seem hardly to know what ferocity means) the words: "This is the end. No more peace after this. The last hope of Indo-British understanding is shattered."

Mr. Gandhi had used some strange language in his statements just before the conflict began. "This," he had said, "is open rebellion." "If, in spite of all precautions rioting does take place, it cannot be helped." "I shall take every precaution to handle the movement gently, but I would not hesitate to go to the extremest limit, if I find that no impression is produced on the British Government or the Allied Powers." Finally, his call to the country was in the words, "Do or die." Such expressions immediately suggest to the western ear, accustomed only to battles in which both are armed, that Mr. Gandhi was really inciting his followers to violence, and that all the expressions about non-violence in which they are wrapped are but a thin cloak. To anyone who has been a careful follower of Mr. Gandhi's speeches and writings over a number of years, or who has lived in the atmosphere of his mind—as the millions in India have done—they must appear in quite another light. A systematic breach of the law, however non-violent, is obviously "open rebellion." And it is Mr. Gandhi's way to call a spade a spade. He hates subterfuge and pretence. As to the rioting that may break out, he has had long experience

of police methods in India, he knows that things happen sometimes which may goad to violent fury crowds that have intended to act quite peacefully (nor is it only in India that these things occur). On this particular occasion, in one University City I was assured on what I believe to be reliable authority that the students, as soon as they heard of the arrests, organised a procession and demonstration which was a model of orderliness and restraint. Next day they organised further peaceful demonstrations. But the police were ordered to fire on the crowds. The authorities of the university got private information from the police and tried to dissuade the students. The latter indignantly rejected the proposal that they should call off their procession. Such cowardly conduct would be unworthy of their leader; had he not anticipated just such a situation when he had said, "Do or die?" They must do; they must proceed with their procession: if the police opened fire they must die, die the death of the hero of non-violence who is prepared to be killed but not to kill. And so it happened. After the shooting, disorder broke out, but not before. This may not have been typical; it may be, even, that I was not exactly informed: all I am sure is that my informant, who was in a responsible position in the city at the time, believed it to be a true account of what happened. In any case, it is certainly the kind of thing Mr. Gandhi was anticipating, when he said: "Do or die." If he had meant, "Kill or die," he would have said "Kill or die." England may not appreciate the difference, but India does.

About these expressions, strong as they are, there would not be much misunderstanding in India. But there is a passage from one of his innumerable unrehearsed interviews, published in *Harijan* on August 25th, 1940, which I find it hard to follow. He had already been reported as saying that in his opinion the Polish resistance to the German onslaught in the autumn of 1939 might be considered almost non-violent. So his interviewer asks him why, if that is so, he should disapprove so strongly of the Congress Working Committee's recent decision to support the arming of India to resist a possible invasion. "Surely," said Mr. Gandhi, "there is no analogy between the two cases. If a man fights with his sword single-handed against a horde of dacoits armed to the teeth I should say he is fighting almost non-violently. . . . Supposing a mouse in fighting a cat tried to resist the cat with his sharp

beak, would you call the mouse violent? In the same way, for the Poles to stand valiantly against the German hordes vastly superior in numbers, military equipment and strength, was almost non-violent. I should not mind repeating that statement over and over again. You must give its full value to the word 'almost.' But we are 400 millions here. If we were to organise a big army and prepare ourselves to fight foreign aggression, how could we by any stretch of imagination call ourselves almost non-violent, let alone non-violent?

...man ever prepared herself that way, she would constitute the greatest menace to world peace."

Although it is very clear that Mr. Gandhi is here pleading against the militarisation of India and warning his hearers against drawing analogies for India from what he has said about Poland, yet even so the argument about Poland seems a little far-fetched. Perhaps this was in part because he was misinformed as to the extent of Polish armament. But surely non-violence is an attitude of mind, not a matter of weakness or strength. If I resist the attack of an enemy with such physical weapons as I have, the fact that my weapons are poor does not make me either non-violent or almost non-violent. But if I stand unarmed, and can say quietly and confidently to my assailant, "Do what you will," or even, "Thou couldst have no power against me except it were given thee from above"—that, surely, is the only wholly non-violent response to aggression. Perhaps, after all, Mr. Gandhi was only trying to insist that there are stages in the development of a non-violent attitude; even the courage to stand and wave a feeble stick in defiance is one step higher than running away. And all this was written in 1940, so it has nothing to do with the Congress Resolution of August, 1942.

Although I do not believe the language he used before his arrest was understood by any of his followers to imply a change in his or the official Congress attitude concerning violence, the issue of violence or non-violence is not the real issue, and a great deal of humbug has been written about it. British statesmen and other public men have held up their hands in sanctimonious horror because Mr. Gandhi, the great exponent of non-violent political action, has, as they think, deliberately led his people into a violent rebellion against British rule. But it does not lie with them to express horror against violence. Has any one of them espoused the cause of

non-violence, or even begun to imagine what difficulties both in human nature and in the present structure of society lie in the path of any man who tries to use non-violent methods of political action? If we Quakers venture to question some of Mr. Gandhi's expressions we can at least claim that we too are trying to find ways of activity without violence. Some of us in 1940 began to face the possibility of coming under Nazi tyranny. How could we live (or if necessary die) under that tyranny without violent resistance to it, but without submission and acquiescence? The Christian people of subject Europe are to-day heroically exploring this perilous path. "Do or die" is their motto; and to some of them death has come. But it does not lie with those who are urging the subject populations of Europe to sabotage their overlords and rise in armed revolt to turn round and express moral indignation that similar methods have been employed in India.

The real issue is much simpler. Was it a crime against humanity, and against the cause of freedom and democracy in the world, to declare an "open rebellion" of any kind, however non-violent, in the summer of 1942? However ill Britain was governing India, it is arguable that, if you are putting the interest of the world first (as you should) and of your country second (as you should) the Congress was committing a crime against humanity. Those who adhere to that ground have a strong case. They must still face Mr. Gandhi's argument that the freeing of India would have been such a moral victory for the Allies that even a momentary military disadvantage might have been worth risking. But even if that is true, how does it justify India attempting to force England (whether the means of pressure are violent or non-violent) to free India? If the British are forced out of India, how does the Allied cause gain a moral benefit? It is only if England is converted to the rightness of handing over power that the world is likely to be impressed. Mr. Gandhi would no doubt say that the campaign he was planning was intended to convert rather than to force England. But in that case he seems to misjudge the effect of his action on the British mind. It seems to have had precisely the opposite effect. It has stiffened British resistance to the demand for an immediate transfer of power.

The main questions we must answer are: "Was the Congress action of August 1942 inevitable and right or inexcusable and

wrong?" and "Were the arrests of the leaders inevitable and right or inexcusable and wrong?" and not the question, "Who is primarily responsible for the violence that afflicted India in the autumn of 1942?" But a brief summary of those events and some discussion of responsibility is called for.

According to official statements, in the weeks immediately following the arrests, some 250 railway stations were damaged or destroyed, over 500 post offices were attacked, and of these fifty were burnt out and over 200 seriously damaged. The

eastern districts of the United Provinces was dislocated for many weeks. Trains ran very late and very slowly when they ran at all. Telegrams often took longer than letters to reach their destination. Communications were seriously interrupted over a large part of India.

Over 150 police stations were also attacked, besides other governmental buildings. Over thirty members of the police force were killed, and a few other officials and soldiers.

It has not been so generally known that 20,000 men, the whole of the working staff of Tata's Iron and Steel Works, by far the most important munitions factory in India, went on strike, and declared that they would not return to work until a National Government was formed. They were men from various provinces, and of all creeds and castes. They remained on strike for a fortnight, and there was no disorder. But when it became clear, contrary to widespread anticipation, that neither the railwaymen nor other industrial workers in any number were joining them, and that the Congress "lightning stroke" was a failure, the management induced the men to return to work on the understanding that the management itself would do its utmost to bring a National Government into being. If there was any trouble in the Army, the fact did not get round; and in India nearly everything, however secret, does get round, so it may be fairly safely assumed that the Army did not express any great agitation at the arrests.

On the other side, the civilian casualties from August to November inclusive were over 900 killed (official figure) and many more injured. Nationalist estimates of the killed were much higher. The official figures are presumably based on the bodies recovered after the police or troops had opened fire. Some bodies are usually removed by the friends or relations of the deceased who are in the crowd with them.

In Calcutta, during the short time of the disturbances there, the figures I heard from Indian doctors connected with the hospitals were much higher than the figures of casualties officially published. But even if we accept the Government figures as approximately correct, it is clear that the casualties on the Government side were only perhaps a twentieth of those on the other side.

During the early autumn, a number of typed or ill-printed sheets were being distributed in various parts of India, purporting to give instructions on behalf of some local Congress Committee of the measures to be taken against the Government. I saw one or two of these which had come into the hands of officials in Bengal. In the White Paper published in March, 1943, a "secret" document of this nature from Andhra (South India) is given. Practically the only "violent" action there called for is the cutting of telegraph and telephone wires, and it is immediately followed by the note: "N.B. Rails should not be removed or permanent way obstructed. No danger to life, should be a great caution." The last phrase is quite good Indian English. The reader is being strongly cautioned against endangering life. The Bengal documents, as far as I recall them, provided for some rather more drastic action against Government property.

Who issued these documents? The official view seems to be that they represent Mr. Gandhi's own instructions. I do not believe they emanated either from Mr. Gandhi or from the Working Committee. I think it is almost certain that Mr. Gandhi had not worked out his plans in any detailed way before he was arrested. Those who were left outside for the time being had to try to interpret his mind. This they did according to the statements he had been making and according to the programme of previous civil disobedience movements. But that does not account for quite everything. A section of younger Congressmen, some of whom were impatient with Mr. Gandhi's delays and hesitations, and who were quite frank in disapproving his strict adherence to non-violence, deliberately "went underground" to try and organise the movement secretly. It seems likely that these men were in some cases responsible for the strongest measures, especially in Bihar and the United Provinces. And there were others, with still less loyalty to the Congress and Gandhi. These whole-hearted revolutionaries were presumably responsible

for the "Appeal to the People" also quoted in the White Paper, published on January 26th, 1943, when all the responsible leaders had been long out of harm's way. This is a frank appeal to the workers to strike and to sabotage, to workers and peasants to form guerrilla bands, and, indeed, to take precisely those revolutionary measures against the British which the people of occupied Europe are being invited to take against the Nazis. It seems to have evoked practically no response.

MR. JINNAH AND THE MOSLEM LEAGUE

SOME readers will no doubt be saying to themselves: "This fellow is just another of the Congress apologists and Gandhi-worshippers. He thinks that, by writing about nothing but what Gandhi thought and what Congress said, he can induce in his reader the notion that Congress stands for all India, and that only Gandhi matters." I do not, in fact, think either of these things. To spend a year in Bengal would itself be sufficient to convince anyone that Congress is not all India. For years the Congress has been weak in Bengal. Only in the Punjab is it weaker.

In the last five years the Congress seems to have lost strength all over India: but it has had such tremendous "come-backs" in the past, as, for instance, after Lord Willingdon had suppressed it for several years in the 1930's, that it would be rash to assume that it will be weaker in 1945 than it was in 1937. Whatever may be the case with the Congress, it is quite certain that the Moslem League has increased its strength beyond all expectation in the past six years.

At the time of the provincial elections in 1937, out of a total of 482 Moslem seats in the eleven provinces of British India, the Moslem League only captured 110. In Bengal, it captured 37 seats out of a total of 119; several Independents were "pro-Moslem League." In the Punjab it captured none. An Indian Moslem writer, Professor Humayun Kabir, who is neither a member of the Moslem League nor of the Congress, thus describes the events of that year:

"When one looked at the alignment of forces on India's parliamentary map, it seemed that the forces of progress had triumphed everywhere. Among Hindus, Congress swept the polls and stalwarts of the past régime were overwhelmed. Among Mussulmans also, the reactionary elements were discredited if not destroyed. In Bengal, the League representing the vested interests was demoralised by Mr. Fazlul Huq's victory on a Proja ticket over the Bengal leader of the League. In the Punjab, the League

standing for communal exclusiveness and reaction, was routed by Sir Sikander's combination of the moderates among Hindus and Mussulmans. In the United Provinces, the League which represented a relatively progressive force triumphed over the vested interests organised by the Nawab of Chatari and his group. In the North Western Frontier Province, Congress trounced the League, which fared hardly any better in Sind. In a word, all over India, the stage seemed set for a move forward in which the best elements among the Mussulmans and the Hindus would co-operate.

This was, however, not yet to be. The Congress was reluctant to accept office under the new constitution, for it was little enough that it offered. The prospect of responsibility without power opened up by the new régime had little to attract, and provincial autonomy seemed a mockery. And yet it was a mistake to hesitate. Even as a party pledged to wreck the new constitution, it was obviously realpolitik to capture every vantage ground and use it for a further forward urge. The only alternative to that was total abstinence from all parliamentary activities and concentration upon agitational and organisational work. The policy actually followed by the Congress combined the disadvantages of both the alternatives without the advantages of either. It attempted to wrest from the Governors an assurance of non-interference in the daily administration of affairs, but it must be admitted that the controversy over assurances achieved little. In spite of elaborately courteous and diplomatic phraseology, the substance of the Congress demand was not conceded. Nevertheless, after a good deal of hesitation and controversy, Congress decided to accept office. At first it did so in the provinces where it had a parliamentary majority, then in the provinces where it was the largest single party in the Legislature and still later wherever it could. From acceptance of office under no conditions and in no circumstances, to acceptance wherever and however possible, the wheel revolved a full circle, but in the meantime a golden opportunity had been lost.

"Congress indecision about acceptance of office not only indicated divisions of opinion within its ranks, but what is worse, it let slip the opportunity of capturing power in some of the provinces where through coalition with other

groups, it might have formed the Government. In Bengal, Mr. Fazlul Huq pleaded and pleaded in vain for active co-operation or even tacit support. Forced into the arms of the Moslem League, he did perhaps more than anybody else in India to restore the prestige of the League and win for it support among the masses of the land. Sir Sikander also helped in this strengthening of the forces under the banner of the League, for, a moderate occupying a position in the centre, opposition from the left gradually forced him to move further right. The alignment of forces emerging out of the general elections of 1937 was disturbed and the reactionary elements found a breathing space and fresh rallying grounds.

"This setback of the progressive forces had its reaction in those provinces as well in which Congress decided to accept office. The reactionary forces had got over the shock of defeat and started to retrieve lost ground. The League wanted to share in the power which Congress had won, but after the League's discomfiture in the general elections and the reactionary character it revealed, Congress refused to form coalition ministries with members of the League. This caused great resentment among Leaguers and they took every possible step to discredit the Congress among Moslems. This did not prove difficult, for many of the Congress ministers were inexperienced men and in any case they were human. Through lack of experience as well as for personal faults, they made mistakes in handling some of the problems that generally cause communal friction.

"The charges of the Moslem League against Congress Ministers may be enumerated under the following heads: (a) Interference with religious rights; (b) Tampering with cultural traditions; (c) Attempts to curtail share in services and representation, and (d) Social snobbery. Congress ministers have denied all these charges and issued plausible explanation of actions that might at first sight seem to justify them. Their good faith need not be questioned and yet it must be realised that the agitation and discontent among large sections of Moslems cannot be dismissed as merely the work of an interested clique. Even cliques require some genuine grievance to work up feeling among the masses. The agitation in the minority provinces could

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not continue unless there was real discontent or some
injury behind it. The ground may have been imaginary
but the discontent was real."

Professor Kabir goes on to enumerate some of the major
grievances that inflamed Moslem feeling. There was the
so-called "Wardha scheme of education." This scheme, as
he points out, was "worked out by a committee presided over
by a well-known Moslem educationist, while an Indian
Christian played an almost equally prominent part in the
final shape to its recommendations." Its main principle,
that of combining manual with mental training, links it
the emphasis from literature to vocational efficiency, and shifting
closely to a scheme of education drawn up by Dr. Muhammad
Iqbal, the outstanding poet and seer of the last generation—
the Mussulman opposite in some respects of Rabindranath
Tagore.

But unhappily some Hindus tried to give the whole scheme
a religious significance—confusing religious revivalism with
cultural renaissance. At the same time, in some areas, these
Hindu enthusiasts introduced the Nagari as opposed to the
Persian script in these "Basic" schools, and the Mussulmans,
who are already suffering from educational backwardness,
felt this as an attack on their culture, a further attempt to
undermine their distinctive Islamic culture. Indeed, in India
to-day religion and culture are so closely interwoven that it
is desperately hard to promote cultural revival without in fact
promoting the revival of one faith at the expense of the other.
Mr. Jinnah himself expressed it in this manner in private
conversation: "You English," he said, "in spite of your small
number here, just because you control the Government, have
imposed your pattern of life on us—clothes, food; in all
sorts of ways. We are irresistibly led to follow your western
habit of life. If the Hindus, by far the majority community,
and the more advanced in education, control the Government,
they are bound to impose their pattern of life on us—to
destroy our culture and with it our religion." And the short
experience of the basic education scheme does to some extent
support this thesis.

Then, too, says Professor Kabir: "The attitude of the Hindu
social matters towards all non-Hindus in general and the
Moslem in particular has been one of the most potent causes

INDIA SINCE CRIPPS

Hindu-Moslem misunderstanding and ill-feeling. Social disabilities obtrude themselves upon the consciousness in a way in which economic or even political ones do not, though social disabilities are in the end only symptoms which express deeper malaise and this will be found to lie in economic and political inequities. Moslem resentment at Hindu orthodoxy, which is often indistinguishable from snobbery, is natural, but the forces of the modern world are here working in co-operation to break down the barriers of caste and untouchability. Growing industrialisation and the country bus are solvents too powerful for the intransigence of obsolete customs and old beliefs, but till they actually break, they are bound to act as irritants."

But in the opinion of Professor Kabir, the most important cause of all that led to the alienation of the Moslems was their jealousy of the Hindus in the matter of political appointments and commercial activity. Larger representation in the legislatures is desired, he says, "because of the power it gives to control ratios in service and influence political and economic policy, so that the communal conflict in India is ultimately seen as a struggle between the middle classes of the two communities to share in the good things of life. In Bengal, it is the struggle of the Moslem middle class to have a share in what has so long been the monopoly of the Hindu middle class, while in provinces like the United Provinces or Bihar, it represents their attempt to preserve the privileged position they have till now enjoyed. Mass energy is used only to further that end, and once there is a satisfactory solution of the problem of power, the causes of the friction will automatically disappear." As a commentary on this I may remark that in Bengal, where various Hindu and Moslem parties have made pacts together in recent years to form the Provincial Ministry, there has been a great deal of astute manoeuvring to capture one or two key posts in the Ministry for a leader of local government and consequently carry with them a large amount of patronage. In 1942, when many fresh appointments were being made in the A.R.P. services, Moslem League speakers made violent attacks on the Ministry of Calcutta at that time because the number of Moslems appointed in Calcutta and neighbouring districts was not equal to the number of Hindus. They conveniently overlooked the fact that, although

Moslems and Hindus are about equal in number in the Province as a whole, Hindus greatly outnumber Moslems in Calcutta and western Bengal. The lack of members of the Depressed Classes in the A.R.P. services was also brought into the picture so that their representatives in the Bengal legislature might be induced to join in the attack. The Moslem Premier, Mr. Fazlul Huq, determined to show that he was no less zealous for the progress of his community than his Moslem League critics, promised that the numbers should be adjusted. He managed, it is true, to insert a proviso that forthcoming appointments would be given to Moslems and members of the Depressed Classes *if* suitable candidates were forthcoming. As they were not available in sufficient numbers, the only effect of this was to hold up recruitment in an essential war-time emergency service, especially in the women's A.R.P. service, which would have been hard enough to develop effectively in any case.

I have taken this example from recent Bengal history to illustrate the general theme; but the important thing to observe is the Moslem reaction to the way in which the Congress Ministers used their patronage during their control of six or seven Provincial Ministries in the years 1937-1939.

Congress has been in the wilderness of opposition throughout its history. Now it was in office for the first time, and therefore able and eager to find Government appointments for its friends and supporters. Now this did not necessarily mean Hindu appointments. In every Congress Ministry except one there was at least one Moslem Minister, and members of other communities were deliberately brought into office. But only on one condition. They must be members of the Congress, or at least very close adherents. In most provinces, the Congress being largely Hindu in colour, most appointments did in fact go to Hindus. Moslem members of the Congress got their share; but members of the Moslem League got little or nothing. Thus, the Moslem League had a party grievance which they were quick to turn into a communal grievance. They did not say: "Why don't you give appointments to Moslem Leaguers?" but, "Why don't you appoint Moslems?"—a far more effective battle-cry.

Before the 1937 elections, there had been something like an election pact between the Congress and the Moslem League. In the United Provinces, for instance, where the Congress did

not expect to get an absolute majority of seats, it was understood that they would act together, and that if a Ministry was to be formed at all, it would be a coalition Ministry. But the Congress won a clear majority, and when, after the hesitation already described by Professor Kabir, the Congress leaders decided to form Provincial Ministries, they refused to have any Moslem League colleagues unless they would desert their own party and join the Congress. It looked as if they hoped that the Moslem League, having done badly at the elections, would gradually fade out, and be swallowed up by the Congress. If that was their calculation, it was utterly misguided. The very opposite occurred. Congress, it is true, had a strong case for the line they took. Subsequent events—above all the economic condition of India to-day—show the mischief that may follow when great provinces are run by unstable Ministries composed of shifting coalitions, and whose provincial-mindedness is allowed its head. The strict party discipline which enabled half a dozen Provincial Ministries to work along closely parallel lines for two years without fear of defeat or disintegration was abundantly justified by the social progress achieved. But against this must be put the fact that the Moslem League, under its brilliant tactician, Mr. Jinnah, was able to exploit the grievance of his adherents who failed to get appointments, together with isolated cases of nepotism and the impulsive follies of the lesser ranks of Congressmen, to rouse all the latent fear and anger of a large section of the Moslem community. The fury thus aroused does not seem even to-day to have reached its peak. Professor Kabir adds the comment: "The irony of the situation lies in the role of Mr. Jinnah, who retired from the Congress during the non-co-operation days [early 1920's] when that body adopted a programme of direct and if necessary unconstitutional action. His fate pursued him and made him the instrument through which the League was transformed [from a 'highly respectable and somewhat sedate body of aristocratic and well-connected gentlemen for whom politics was a polite diversion from the urgencies of official or professional life'] into a body advocating direct and if necessary unconstitutional action."

All that Mr. Jinnah needed to set Moslem India aflame was a battle-cry; and this he found in the demand for Pakistan. In January, 1933, some Moslem students at Cambridge had

circulated a pamphlet "on behalf of our thirty million Moslem brethren who live in Pakstan." Pakstan meant the Punjab, North-West Frontier or Afghan Province, Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan. "India," they claimed, "is not the name of any single country, nor the home of one single nation. It is in fact the designation of a State created for the first time in history by the British." For some years the "two-nation" idea here propounded received little attention from Moslem leaders.

It should be noted that Mr. Rakmat Ali, the originator of the Pakistan idea ("Pakstan" was soon turned into "Pakistan," land of the pure) was not proposing a union of all Indian Moslems in one state; nor was he claiming that all Indian Moslems belong to one nation, as distinct from all Hindus. It is the Moslems of the north-west who are the distinct nation, claiming a federal State of their own, to be composed of five Provinces; but in order to emancipate the other Moslems from Hindu domination, he proposed to carve two other Moslem States out of India—Bang-i-Islam, to consist of Bengal and Assam; and Usmanistan, which is a new name for Hyderabad, named after its ruler the Nizam. Such precise proposals are all very well in academic pamphlets: but on political platforms it is better to be vague. Since Mr. Jinnah adopted the Pakistan cry in 1940, no one has been able to ascertain for certain whether the Pakistan he proclaims is for north-west India only, or whether it will include Bengal (or only East Bengal, which is the Moslem majority area); and whether Hyderabad, whose ruler is a Moslem, though its population is predominantly Hindu, is to be invited to join, too, is even more obscure. There have even been hints about "corridors." If the Bengal Province of Pakistan and the Usmanistan Province (Hyderabad) were both united to the north-west by corridors, there would not be much left of Hindustan.

In March, 1940, under Mr. Jinnah's leadership, an exceptionally large session of the Moslem League at Lahore adopted a resolution in favour of separation. A constitution was to be prepared for a Moslem State, giving it "all powers such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs, and such other matters as may be necessary." Since that date, month by month, Mr. Jinnah and his followers have gone ever further in their demand for complete separation of the predominantly Moslem parts of India; and apparently the

decision is to be taken as a result of a bare majority vote, only the Moslems being entitled to vote, but the Hindus and other minorities living in each area will be obliged to accept the consequences.

During a period of nearly five years, from the beginning of 1938 to September, 1942, in 56 Moslem by-elections that have been contested, the Moslem League has captured 46 seats, the Congress 3 and other parties 7. If the figures for the past year could be given they would show an even greater Moslem strength. It has at last established its position in the North-West Frontier Province, which had been a Congress stronghold.

Mr. Jinnah's personal ascendancy is extraordinary. In the Punjab and Bengal, neither Moslem Premier was a member of the League in 1937. Both had joined by 1940. Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, the Punjab Premier, refused, however, to commit himself to Pakistan, as he was head of a coalition ministry including Hindus and Sikhs, and the latter denounce separation even more strenuously than the former. Mr. Fazlul Huq, Bengal's Premier for six years, tried to defy Mr. Jinnah, broke from the Moslem League, and within a year was pushed out of office in favour of a more tractable League member. Mr. Allah Baksh, Premier of Sind, who remained outside the League and rejected Pakistan altogether, was also driven from office. Both Premiers were dismissed by the respective Governors of their provinces: was there any collusion between them and Mr. Jinnah?

Mr. Jinnah, though refusing to allow any member of the Moslem League to take office in the Central Government, is evidently determined to show that he, like Mr. Gandhi, can have his tame provincial ministries. To-day there are coalition ministries with Moslem League Premiers in Bengal, Assam, the Punjab, Sind, and the North-West Frontier Province. All appear to work under instructions from Mr. Jinnah. He is determined to be the Moslem Gandhi. But whereas the former Congress Ministries could in nearly every case rely on well-disciplined parliamentary majorities, the Moslem League Ministries are all unstable coalitions, relying perhaps chiefly on the goodwill of the Governors of the Province.

Professor Kabir writes: "There has also been a revolting transformation in the programme and policy of the League. It has thrown off all pretence of working for the welfare of

Indian Moslems or the independence of India and stands revealed as a coterie of vested interests who are prepared to serve the behests of British imperialism for personal or party gains. Provincial Governors have been exhibiting an unseemly anxiety for installing League ministers into office in the Moslem majority provinces that cannot be explained on any hypothesis other than a secret understanding between the bureaucracy and the League. The change in Mr. Jinnah's political role has also come as an unpleasant surprise, for till now even non-leaguers regarded him as an honest if misdirected worker in the cause of India's freedom. The sordid conspiracy between the bureaucracy and the League has culminated in the disgraceful events which led to the substitution of Mr. Fazlul Huq by the Bengal leader of the League in the office of the Chief Minister of that province and the installation, for the first time in its history, of a League ministry in the Frontier. These events are, however, so recent and still so charged with passion and partisanship that it is difficult to disengage the conflicting tendencies and attempt a detached historical survey." This last sentence is, perhaps, a fair commentary on what goes before. Professor Kabir is a supporter of Mr. Fazlul Huq, so that he may well feel bitter about recent events in Bengal; but if some allowance is made for his own political prejudice, there remains a good deal of force in the general conclusion that he reaches. It was a member of the Moslem League who told me that in his opinion Mr. Jinnah had been completely outwitted by the British bureaucracy, who now had in office a number of ministries apparently autonomous, and apparently Moslem League in colour, but in reality almost wholly amenable to official pressure.

Pakistan, if it comes, will be the result of widespread emotional excitement, not of calm reasoning. An exhaustive study of the issues has been written by Dr. Ambedkar, who, as a leader of the Depressed Classes, is more or less impartial as between Hindu and Moslem. He shows how difficult the problem of Indian defence would be made. Although in 1930 only 30 per cent of the Indian Army was Moslem, to-day the proportion seems to be higher; and the proportion of recruits from the north-western provinces of India is extremely high. Dr. Ambedkar doubts whether, after a division into two States, these troops could be relied on to defend India against invasion either from the north-west or from the south-east.

He proceeds to point out that to-day the army of India, which contains almost as many Moslems as Hindus, is being supported in the proportion of seven to one by contributions from "Hindustan" as against "Pakistan."

It is also noteworthy that nearly all the mineral wealth of India lies in "Hindustan." The Moslems are a poor community to-day. In Pakistan their poverty would be intensified.

There must be a wiser way of assuring full political, economic and cultural autonomy to Indian Moslems than by the partition of India. The twenty million Moslems of China are not hampered in the full exercise of their characteristic ways of life. China's example shows what toleration can achieve. The Hindus are traditionally tolerant. But partition is only too likely unless some of the Hindus—especially some of the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha—adopt a more conciliatory tone. If the Moslems are to be induced to stay in India, Hindus must win their confidence and convince them that they have nothing to fear. Mr. Rajagopalachari has been doing his best, and has had a measure of success. Others will perhaps follow his lead.

MR. GANDHI'S FAST

THE campaigning season in the difficult country that separates Bengal from Burma does not come till the end of the autumn, when the monsoon rains are over. It was generally anticipated that as the Allies attempted a push into Burma, the

Japanese would reply (if, indeed, they did not make an attempt to land on the Bengal or Orissa coasts, or at least by bombing Calcutta and other places of strategic importance. All November passed, and nothing happened. Half December was gone. At last, in the early hours of December 22nd, the first bombs were dropped on Calcutta.

I had gone to spend Christmas with friends in the Central Provinces. Our newspapers contained the news of this bombing on the 23rd. It appeared to have been a slight raid, but no one except myself—not even a retired British police official—believed the official announcement. Although we were over 500 miles from Calcutta, within two days the trains to the west were so full that no tickets were being issued at the country railway stations along the line. The hour of doom had come. All that the Burma refugees had told of their sufferings was about to be repeated in India. When it became known that further raids had occurred on the following nights, it was generally concluded that Calcutta was already in ruins. When I left for Calcutta on the morning of December 26th, the good Christian friends of Sohagpur, who came to see me off, seemed to think I was going to as certain a death as if I had walked into Sodom and Gomorrah when fire and brimstone were descending upon them.

In the afternoon of the 27th, we reached Burdwan junction, sixty miles from Calcutta, where the Grand Trunk road crosses the line from Calcutta. All along the road, in both directions, were men and women marching along, with bundles on their heads, or pushing hand-carts. The railway platforms were packed with people waiting for trains—but none of them got into ours. A goods train going the other way was jammed with human beings with their bundles, their all, escaping from the terror. As I had just been reading in my paper an official

assurance, telephoned from Calcutta to Delhi, to the Civil Defence Member that Calcutta was spending Christmas Day in a perfectly normal way, my English faith in official announcements was badly shaken. Should I find our house destroyed, and my colleagues dead or in hospital? A few hours later, we reached Calcutta. I could see no damage anywhere. Nor have I seen any to this day. The Japanese obliged by one more raid which gave me an excuse for spending an hour on the roof-top on a beautiful moonlit night, and then, the moon being on the wane, we were left to sleep again in peace.

The Japanese raids were not, however, wholly without effect. As soon as the raids began a number of people, chiefly non-Bengalees, streamed out of the city; domestic life was gravely embarrassed (we were rather proud that our domestic staff all stayed: it was perhaps partly because we had filled in the slit-trench in our garden, and as they knew we were supposed to be experts in A.R.P. that probably meant that we knew that there was no serious danger to be feared); the garbage of Calcutta, which insults the nose at the best of times, was not properly disposed of for several weeks; Japanese agents spread cunning stories that the real raiding would begin on January 12th—or the 17th—or the 25th: always a little way off, like the British promise of Swaraj; but in the end the Japanese defeated their own ends with incredible skill. So long as there were no raids, with a heavy raid coming "next week," naturally people stayed away—even though they began to learn that a few buildings in Calcutta, including even the great new bridge over the Hooghly—really were still standing. But at the January full-moon the Japanese attempted two further small raids. Neither of these even reached the city. Half the planes were shot down. All Calcutta thereupon began to say "What brave fellows we are," and just jeered at the Japanese. Everyone returned to work, and life went on as before. Even the street sanitation returned to normal, and the professional beggars were back at their posts. The Brahminy bulls that roam the streets had never deserted, though one—poor beast—was among the few casualties.

Returning to normal in India means, of course, returning to politics; but politics were becoming arid. The Congress leaders were silenced; their followers were demoralised.

Mr. Jinnah and the Moslem League were having it all their own way. Non-Congress Ministries were being established in several provinces, under Moslem League Premiers. In at least one province the Ministry could only keep its majority while some of the Congress members of the Legislature were in jail. However, we were assured that the Constitution was now functioning as it had been intended to function, and not in the unorthodox, unconstitutional manner of 1937-39, when the provincial Ministers were under the direction of the Congress "High Command." Weak coalitions were apparently preferred to disciplined one-party government resting on secure majorities. The famine was not yet in sight.

In November, seeing that the Congress attempt to wrest power from the Government had failed, Mr. Rajagopalachari, who wanted to get all India united in support of the war effort, appealed to the Viceroy for permission to visit Mr. Gandhi in detention at Poona; alternatively, he would like to visit England, perhaps with Mr. Jinnah, to try and overcome the ill-will which, as he fully realised, the Congress resolution of August had provoked. He got no response. The one door was locked, the other closed.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru made great efforts to get all the leaders of the non-Congress parties to unite in order to promote a settlement with the Government. The first meeting in Allahabad in December was very successful, but the Moslem League remained outside. Just when Sir Tej thought he had induced the League leaders to take part in further discussions the Viceroy made a speech stressing the unity of India. Mr. Jinnah was furious, and declared that the British Government was in league with the Hindus. He refused to come near any unity conference. Sir Tej and his friends believed that the Government had deliberately acted in such a way as to kill the unity conference.

Suddenly, on February 10th, India learnt that Mr. Gandhi was about to undertake a three-weeks' fast in his house of detention (the Aga Khan's palace) at Poona. And at the same time the correspondence that had been passing between him and the Viceroy during the previous six weeks was released to the Press and published. An attempt must be made to analyse that correspondence, and especially to understand why Mr. Gandhi fasted. But before proceeding to that it will be convenient to observe how India reacted to the news. It was

widely believed that Mr. Gandhi could not possibly survive a three-weeks' fast at the age of seventy-three. It was also deduced from the correspondence that if he were unconditionally released he would not proceed with the fast—though it is difficult to find clear evidence of this in his letters. Accordingly immediate efforts were made from many quarters to obtain his unconditional release. In particular, a large conference of leading men and women from all over India was immediately summoned in Delhi. This Conference, which met on 19th and 20th February, was attended by fifty-five persons. As the Congress leaders were all in jail, they, of course, did not attend. Most of those present were Hindus of very varied types, but there was a sprinkling of Moslems (some of them outstanding leaders, but none from the Moslem League), Sikhs, Parsis and Christians (including two leading Protestant missionaries). Some seventy telegrams were received from individuals all over India, some from men who had been long in government service, some from Moslems of importance, all wishing the Conference success in its effort to secure Mr. Gandhi's release. Over a hundred telegrams of a similar character were also received from "associations, institutions and public bodies," from every part of India and even from South Africa, many of them from student bodies, some from college staffs, many from Chambers of Commerce and Merchants' Associations, some from Communist groups, from Women's organisations, from "Indian Christian leaders," from the Punjab Moslem Association, Lahore, from special public meetings and prayer meetings, and so on. Two Indian voices were silent: the ruling princes and Mr. Jinnah. Three members of the Viceroy's Council resigned, Mr. M. S. Aney, Mr. N. R. Sarkar, and Sir Homi Mody; the last named is a Parsi.

The resolution passed by the Conference urged the Government to release Mahatma Gandhi forthwith "in the interest of the future of India and of international goodwill." The Government replied that no new factor had been introduced into the situation (such a widespread demand is apparently no factor at all), that it rested with Mr. Gandhi himself, not with the Government of India, to end the fast, and they therefore rejected the appeal. Perhaps it would have been simpler if they had said: "We are indifferent both to Mr. Gandhi's fast and the possibility of its fatal termination and to your desires."

From Poona, also, action was attempted. Mr. Gandhi's son had noticed that his father had asked to be given the evidence on which the Viceroy convicted him of responsibility for the violent outbreaks. He thought it possible that if even now the Government would promise to submit the evidence to him, he might agree to suspend the fast. This would not involve a climb down on either side. But this proposal was also rejected by the Government; and when it was proposed to Mr. Gandhi, though he was interested in it, he did not seem to be in the least concerned about shortening the fast. Having once embarked on it he seemed less concerned about ending it than anyone except the Government. Indeed, at one point it was thought that he contemplated lengthening it, as his companions heard him observe: "This fast ought to have been for forty days, not only for twenty-one." But when they expostulated he mildly replied: "Oh, you need not be alarmed. I am not proposing to extend it."

Well, he survived it, and then disappeared again into the silence of the Aga Khan's palace, behind the barbed-wire. What was it really all about?

The present writer must confess that he first read the correspondence last February with a sense of exasperation, which he feels again on re-reading it nine months later. The minds of the two men seem to be working in wholly different planes. It starts out hopefully; both the first letters are frank and friendly. The Viceroy is eager to respond if Mr. Gandhi wants in some way to reconsider the position. Mr. Gandhi in his second letter can still playfully say: "My letter was a growl against you. Yours is a counter-growl." But, alas, from growl it goes to barks, and from barks to something like a deadly fight. Mr. Gandhi says (I here attempt to summarise): "Show me that I am wrong and I will recant." The Viceroy says: "The fact of violence is here. You can take it from me." Mr. Gandhi says: "Of course, I know that there has been violence; but you haven't proved that I am the culprit." The Viceroy says: "But of course you are the culprit. The August resolution was your doing, wasn't it?" Mr. Gandhi says: "But that proves nothing. It was your arrests that caused the trouble." The Viceroy says: "But we had to arrest you. Otherwise you would have done no end of mischief. And you don't seem to have an open mind. What is the use of putting evidence before you? And now you are trying to

had an easy way out of your responsibility. You are trying to blackmail me into submission to your demands. Do you call that non-violence?" And Mr. Gandhi replies: "What, you, my friend, call a twenty-one day fast an easy way out, and *you* accuse me of blackmail! I had not thought it of you. Well, after that there is nothing for it but to begin, and I hope still that my fast will make some appeal to your better feelings." And so he begins. Shouting at each other across hundreds of miles of space, and hundreds of years of misunderstanding, they get further and further apart. If only they could have met. . . .

But why fast in any case? What did Mr. Gandhi really expect to get by fasting? To begin to understand we must consider his exact language. In his first letter he complains that the Viceroy had arrested innocent men. For six months Mr. Gandhi had waited, hoping that the Viceroy as a friend would do something about it—would summon him to come and talk things over and try to convince him of his wrongdoing; but nothing has happened. Mr. Gandhi still believes that he and his colleagues were unjustly treated. So he says, "I had given myself six months 'in the hope that some day those that have power will realise that they have wronged innocent men.' The period is drawing to a close, so is my patience. The law of Satyagraha as I know it prescribes a remedy in such moments of trial. In a sentence, it is 'crucify the flesh by fasting.' That same law forbids its use except as a last resort. I do not want to use it if I can avoid it. This is the way to avoid it: convince me of my error and I shall make ample amends. You can send for me or send someone who knows your mind and can carry conviction."

We have already seen how the correspondence developed. The main points to disentangle are two: What is this "law of satyagraha" that he speaks of, which enjoins fasts as a last resort? And, why did he resort to it now?

The word "satyagraha" is best translated into English as "soul-force" or "truth-force." In human affairs, when two men or two parties are in disagreement, they can try to persuade one another by reason, by persuasion and argument; and through such means a tolerable compromise is often reached, and a new *modus vivendi* is established. But if this fails, and if they cannot reach an agreement, either a third party must be called in to settle their dispute for them, or one side must

give way. Normally, in human history it has been the side that had the greatest physical force at its disposal which "in the last resort" has been able to compel the other to give way. Mr. Gandhi, sharing the widespread recognition that such "argument by physical force" is in contradiction to reason and all the best instincts of humanity, has tried to discover some alternative method of carrying conviction, to be used only as a last resort, when reason has failed.

His principle may, I think, be fairly stated in the following terms. If neither party can convince the other by reason and argument alone, let means be found, not by physical coercion, but by one party demonstrating the intensity of its conviction by undergoing suffering instead of by inflicting it. Or one may put it this way: If you and I have an argument about some subject of vital interest to us both, and if neither can convince the other, how are we to resolve the deadlock? If your conviction of your case is so profound that you are prepared to undergo some severe suffering to demonstrate it, I am likely to be impressed. If I dislike you, your action may increase my anger; if I like you, your action may convince me that you really are right, or at least that I ought to give way. In either case I am bound to be impressed by the fact that you really do care. For a man will not undergo the rigours of a prolonged self-punishment except for a very deeply held conviction. Such penance certainly does not prove that he is right; but it does prove how intensely he cares, and how strongly he believes in the justice of his case. Whatever else it may be, it certainly is not an easy way out. It may seem as if he was taking an unfair advantage of the decent feelings of his opponent; but, in so far as he is in fact using force, it is an attack on the other man's feelings; the opponent has the option of refusing to be moved. Physical coercion is much more unreasonable, for it leaves no such option. If we reject this "law of satyagraha," we either fall back on physical force "in the last resort" or we must find some better way of resolving conflicts.

Now, the difficulty that Mr. Gandhi is up against in India is this. The Government starts out from an assumption that he and his Congress colleagues cannot accept. The Government claims that it is the only lawful authority and therefore it has the right in the last resort to enforce obedience. If it cannot either convince or be convinced it will enforce the

law against objectors, however "conscientious" they may be. Nor can it admit that a third party should be called in to arbitrate. But Mr. Gandhi and the Congress deny all this. They do not admit the legitimacy of the Government: they do not consider themselves bound by any social compact, even a tacit one. The present Government is to them a usurpation. They have therefore not only the right but even the duty to resist it. But Mr. Gandhi has insisted that such resistance is to be confined to non-violent actions. And the most perfect weapon of all, in his view, is the pressure that can be exercised through fasting. This is, in his opinion, "an appeal to the Highest Tribunal," which may mean both the conscience of mankind and God. When the Lord Mayor of Cork fasted to death it is doubtful whether the most fire-eating "Unionist" really believed that the English reputation for justice was enhanced. His action might be perverse, but he had sealed it by giving his life, through weeks of suffering, without shedding the blood of his enemies. Somehow, something stuck.

So, too, if Mr. Gandhi had died last February, though it appears that there would have been rejoicings in New Delhi and in England, they would have been short-lived, and they would not have been shared by the world as a whole. Gandhi would have won.

Did he, in fact, lose? That, of course, depends on what he was aiming at. His first aim undoubtedly failed. He had hoped to touch the heart of the Viceroy, to persuade him to say, at the very least: "Well, let us get together in a friendly way and talk it all over. I will show you my evidence and seek to convince you. You must produce your evidence and seek to convince me." But it achieved no such result.

But Mr. Gandhi's fasts have secondary aims, too—secondary, but often more far-reaching. In the silence of his Poona internment, totally cut off from all communication with the outside world, he had evidently been troubled by the deeds of violence and the thought of violence and despair that were filling India. Fasting was the only means left to him to appeal to the people of India to discipline themselves, to purify and quicken their minds, to find ways of serving their fellow-men, instead of wasting their energies in idle disillusionment. Did his fast achieve anything in this respect? Certainly India has been more peaceful since March than it was before.

Government would probably claim that this merely proves that they had got well on top of the civil disobedience movement, and that Mr. Gandhi's fast did not give it any fresh lease of life. Perhaps they are right, but perhaps Mr. Gandhi's fast really did help to promote peace and order in the country.

Finally, there is the effect on the faster. A fast, as undertaken in India, is always intended in part to promote self-purification. Only Mr. Gandhi himself can say whether his fast was effective in that respect. But I can testify that in Poona during the last days of his fast there was a curious atmosphere among his family and friends, identical, as it seemed to me, with the kind of thing evoked by what Christians call "retreats." When they achieve their objective they become in fact "advances." People who came to Poona angry and pessimistic, after visiting Mr. Gandhi's bedside, went away cheerful, hopeful, courageous. One seemed to get a sense of renewed sanity; the world was seen in juster proportions. Evil was still big and noisy on every side; but good, though it might be hardly visible or audible, was known to be the conquering force.

VII

A YEAR IN BENGAL: REVOLUTION, CYCLONE, FAMINE

INDIA does not consist solely of Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and the Viceroy, with here and there an odd Prince or Liberal poking his head up: nor does it consist of incredible millions of Hindus, Moslems, Depressed Classes and other minorities, who can be weighed in the scales *en masse*, and usually found wanting. It consists of human bodies, and human souls, much like you and me, gentle reader, except that the bodies are browner and thinner and the souls gentler and unspeakably patient.

In this chapter an attempt will be made to concentrate attention on one province, and in large measure even on one district, containing not more than a million bodies and souls. A study of that one district—happily not typical, but in a profound sense symbolic—may help to bring into focus the state of India in 1943.

Bengal as I found it in June 1942 was waiting for the Japanese. Many Calcutta families, fearing air-raids or invasion, had evacuated their families to places up-country in Bengal or even further from the coast. Some political unrest was caused by the "denial" policy and the boat-denial policy. These expressions refer to measures taken by the Defence Department to meet the anticipated invasion. In the coastal districts of Bengal certain areas were cleared of their inhabitants in order to make room for aerodromes, and a large proportion of the country-boats used by the people living in the coastal districts (where most goods are carried by boats along the innumerable rivers and channels) were impounded by the Government for fear of their use by Japanese invaders. When I visited Mr. Gandhi in June, 1942, I found that he was troubled by the reports reaching him of the hardships suffered by the local population as a result of these measures. On reaching Bengal, I learnt something of the official side of the story. From the defence point of view the measures were no doubt necessary. The Government of Bengal was trying

to see that the measures were applied with the minimum of hardship: as far as possible fresh lands were assigned and new houses built for the people who were forced to leave their homes. Arrangements were made by which a proportion of the seized boats could be released again at the seasons when they were most needed for moving the rice crops. Probably there was faulty administration of these measures in some areas, and in any case people who do not understand why their lives are being violently interfered with, and who feel they are being roughly treated by a government they do not love, are apt to turn nasty. Consequently, in the very areas where the Japanese were most likely to land, the peasants (as far as I could learn, Moslem no less than Hindu) were alienated from the Government, and disposed to welcome an invader who came with fair promises of good treatment. Later in the year a progressive section of Army Officers was detached to do propaganda in the villages of Assam, at a time when these villages were subject to Japanese bombing. They explained the war aims of the Allies in ways which they thought would appeal to the village people; and as they believed in what they were doing they made an impression on the local population. An imaginative Government might have detailed men for similar work in the coastal districts of Bengal; if they had done so, some of the troubles that followed in the autumn and winter might have been averted.

The summer wore on, and the Japanese did not appear, either in the air or over the sea. Instead, the conflict between Government and Congress broke out in August. As there were no large demonstrations in Calcutta or other parts of Bengal immediately after the arrests of the Congress leaders, the official view that the Congress had little support in Bengal seemed to be justified. Subhas Bose, the former Bengal Congress leader who had been ejected from the Congress Presidency and had formed a "Forward Bloc," which still claimed to be "Congress," was in Berlin, broadcasting in Bengali, that the Japanese were coming to save India from her oppressors. Some of his former Forward Bloc colleagues were members of the Coalition Ministry under the Premiership of Fazlul Huq, apparently loyal supporters of His Majesty's Government. Dr. B. C. Roy, one of the foremost Congressmen in Bengal, Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, continued his busy life as a popular doctor and as a member

of most committees in Calcutta, quite undisturbed by the clash between Government and Congress. Kiron Shanker Roy, official leader of the Congress Party in the Provincial Assembly, spent a few days in jail in the autumn, but his friends soon got him out again. Dr. Azad, the Moslem President of the Congress, who is more of a figure in All-India politics than in Bengal, was the only outstanding Bengal politician in detention. A good many of the "lesser fry," who were active Congress workers, were rounded up, but on the whole Bengal was quiet. Mr. Amery, reviewing the general situation in early September, while recognising the gravity of the position in Bihar, the United Provinces and other areas, where railway lines had been torn up, signal boxes burnt, post offices destroyed, and other acts of violence committed against Government property, and sometimes also against the police and the officials, was able to claim that Calcutta, one of the chief centres of unrest and of violence in the early years of the century, and the obvious base for military action against the Japanese in Burma, had remained quiet.

It was an unfortunate claim to make. On the very next day some of the students or revolutionaries or hooligans in Calcutta began their campaign of violence against Government property. Trams were burnt, wires cut and other violent acts were committed. For some days the tram and bus services were almost at a standstill. But in Calcutta the trouble did not last very long. On two or three occasions, the police opened fire on the demonstrators. There were casualties, some of them fatal. One day a man up a telegraph post, apparently cutting the wires, was shot dead. Unfortunately it was afterwards discovered that he was really mending the wires. By the end of September the trouble was practically over.

In some country districts, however, and above all in the notoriously revolutionary district of Midnapore, in the extreme south-west of Bengal, a district the Japanese might easily choose for an attempt at a landing, and where the people were further disaffected owing to the boat-denial policy, the revolutionary movement was assuming grave proportions. Leaflets were circulating in this area in the name of the Congress calling on the people to rally in support of Subhas Bose and the Japanese, and threatening violence to those who helped

the Government. Numbers of minor officials in the coastal belt were seized by the revolutionaries: some of them were never seen again. On 29th September at Mahisadal a large crowd collected outside the palace of the Rajah, the chief landowner in the coastal district; they set fire to the local post office and to the office where most of the land and rent records were kept. The military were called in to assist the police. Fire was opened on the crowds; local opinion had it that about fifty people were shot dead; the official figure was seventeen. That was presumably the number of bodies recovered by the police; others may have been taken away by their friends or relatives. Fifty dead is probably an exaggeration; but the whole affair was a nasty business. There were other attacks about the same time by large crowds on Government buildings in other districts, and on at least half a dozen occasions the police opened fire and people were killed. There were murders and kidnappings of police and of loyalists.

On 15th October the coast of Midnapore was struck by the fiercest cyclone Bengal had known for over seventy years. The wind blew furiously and sheets of rain fell all through the night of the 15th to 16th. A hundred miles from the coast in Bolpur district great banyan trees were uprooted; the botanical gardens near Calcutta were a sorry sight on the afternoon of the 16th. There were a few fatal casualties in Calcutta itself; but all this was nothing to the horror of that night in the villages near the mouth of the Hooghly river.

There, the sea-banks were breached in at least a dozen places by the fury of the storm as it drove the tide higher and higher. The sea poured across the fields of ripening rice, and flooded an area roughly forty miles by ten, to a depth of six or eight feet. The terror-stricken population tried to climb on to their roofs or into trees. But the houses were blown to bits, and the trees torn up or stripped of their leaves and branches. Some weeks after, as I was walking with the Mahisadal estate manager near one of the palace buildings he stopped and said: "Just here a man and his wife were struggling through the deep water with the gale raging, trying to find refuge in the palace, as many of the other local people did. They were only twenty feet from the steps when one of their two children was blown from her mother's arms into the flood. In their effort to recover the baby, the father lost his hold on the other child. They arrived at the palace

in a state of utter exhaustion, knowing that both their children were drowned a few feet away." Some weeks later I was visiting a feeding-centre where milk was being provided for infants and their mothers. An elderly woman was in the queue. "Yes," my companion explained, "we decided to make an exception in her case. She is the only survivor of a family of thirteen."

The official death-roll, published some months later, gave 10,000 people drowned or killed on the west side of the Hooghly in Midnapore district; on the other side of the river, in the 24 Parganas district, the number was 1,000. About a quarter of a million cattle were drowned. At the end of October the Calcutta-Madras railway line was littered for miles with the carcasses of cattle and goats; and this was twenty or thirty miles from the coast. For nearly fifty miles along the railway the metal telegraph posts were bent flat. Contai town, five miles from the coast, twenty miles from the Orissa border, received the full blast of the gale. Every building except the jail was damaged. Some brick buildings were completely demolished. Concrete walls had great holes in them; and as Contai is on a low sandhill, above the level of the invading tide, all this damage was due to the direct action of wind and rain: there was no gale-whipped sea to assist in the destruction.

As all communication with Calcutta was cut off, the first news of the disaster came through by wireless from the military camp near Contai, where some English soldiers were among the people drowned. But it was a few days before Calcutta realised the extent of the catastrophe.

Three or four days after the cyclone, when the news had reached the Bengal Secretariat in Calcutta, an aeroplane was sent to survey the flooded country. Its observations confirmed the reports that were beginning to come through. Accordingly, measures were immediately taken to send food and medical relief to the survivors; a first load of food was sent by barge down the Hooghly to Contai on the 21st or 22nd, and a second, accompanied by a medical party, on the 24th, arriving at Tamluk on the 25th. By that time the water had receded, leaving vast stretches of oozy mud. Bridges had been destroyed, roads were impassable because of the multitude of trees that had been blown down across them, wells were destroyed, tanks were all fouled with corpses and carcasses, hundreds of which were lying unburied in the fields and ditches,

making a disgusting stench, while pariah dogs, kites, vultures and other beasts and birds of prey gorged themselves and acted as public scavengers.

For military reasons no full public announcement was allowed to appear in the Press for a fortnight. By that time the representatives of various humanitarian societies had already visited the cyclone-stricken area: one of them was arrested on his arrival and after spending a night or two in the lock-up returned to Calcutta an angrier man. Quickly members of the Opposition in Calcutta began to denounce the Government for its callousness. It was alleged that cyclone warnings had been received twenty-four hours before the cyclone hit the coast, but the people had not been informed. If their boats had been available, many could have escaped. The District Magistrate and other local officials, it was said, had been dilatory in reporting the catastrophe, and had minimised it. Some were reported to have declared that it served the people right, and that relief ought to be withheld to teach them a lesson. And so the misery of the people of Midnapore rapidly became, like everything that happens in India, a subject of fierce political discussion.

Some of the Bengal Ministers wanted to use the disaster as an opportunity for a political amnesty. They visited the Midnapore jail, and tried to persuade the leading political prisoners to agree to suspend all anti-Government activity if they were released, so that everyone could work together to succour the survivors. Some agreed; others said they could only agree if Mr. Gandhi would issue instructions. But there was no access to Mr. Gandhi. So nothing came of those efforts. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, working President of the Hindu Mahasabha of All India, Minister of Finance in the Bengal Cabinet, and generally regarded as the strong man in the Ministry, who had had feuds with the Governor before, resigned, as a protest against the Government's lack of imagination and zeal.

In the end, it was this controversy that led to the downfall of the Huq Ministry. In March, 1943, the Opposition Party leaders in the Bengal Assembly tabled a motion demanding an enquiry into alleged police excesses in Midnapore. Strong speeches were made, not only by Congressmen but by Moslem Leaguers and indeed from almost all quarters in the House, culminating in a fiery oration from Dr. Mookerjee. How

would the Premier respond? Rising when only a few minutes were left before the closure of the session, Mr. Fazlul Huq made a short, carefully prepared reply promising that, in the interests of the police no less than of the people, in view of the terrible accusations that had been levelled against them, the Government had decided to undertake an enquiry, which would be conducted by persons of the status of High Court Judges. This statement saved the Ministry from a vote of censure. But it immediately became known that the decision had been made by the Ministry without reference to the Governor. And the Governors of all the provinces were under orders from New Delhi not to agree to any judicial enquiries concerning the conduct of the police while the conflict with the Congress was still in being. So, within a fortnight, instead of the names of the committee of enquiry being announced, the resignation-dismissal of Fazlul Huq and his Ministry was announced. And nothing more has been heard of the enquiry. Fazlul Huq, after six years of office, had been outwitted at last by a combination (probably not deliberate) of the Governor, the European Group, the Hindu parties, the Congress, the Moslem League, and perhaps some other powerful agencies. But this is to anticipate. We must turn back from Bengal politics to Midnapore cyclone relief measures.

Early in November, the Government, finally convinced of the gravity of the situation, set up adequate machinery for the administration of large-scale relief, and appointed a Special Commissioner. The Governor, who had been ill and away from Calcutta at the time of the cyclone, at last issued a statement expressing his sympathy with the victims. He opened a relief fund of his own, and invited the representatives of all the voluntary organisations who were collecting funds or organising relief (there were at least thirty of them) to serve on a Committee over which he presided, so that relief activities might be co-ordinated. Rice was distributed either by Government or by voluntary societies to all needy people over a large area, efforts were made to improve the water supply, relief works were started. But the political conflict went on, side by side with relief. Government agents were from time to time kidnapped, post offices and other Government property burnt, and night after night the military went out to help the police in rounding up revolutionaries who were

"on the run." Very unpleasant incidents were recorded on both sides. The punitive measures taken by Moslem Punjabi soldiers against Hindu infidels are not gentle. But these rough soldiers and their European officers did much to help the relief workers. The officers at any rate had little heart for the job of punishing villagers, however rebellious, who were suffering from such a visitation of nature. They had come to fight the Japanese, not the Indian peasants.

An English nurse walked over miles of muddy pathway and waded through deep channels to reach remote villages where cases of cholera were reported, and to inoculate the people in villages that were immune so far. "What is the use of saving us from cholera, if we are to die of hunger?" they asked. The answer seemed to be that the Government was trying to supply them with enough rice to keep body and soul together, and would pay them wages for working on the dykes, so that they might soon be able to buy enough to keep them alive till the next harvest. But the rice dole was terribly meagre. It was distributed each fortnight at a centre to which each family from eight or ten villages sent one of its members—some elderly man or woman or a small boy, who could be spared for the day from work in the house or on the fields. There they stood or sat for hours, till their names were called. Their thumb-print was taken, they took a square yard of worn and faded cloth from their shoulder, and received three or four pounds of rice, which must somehow be made to feed the family till the next dole was forthcoming. Some fish could still be caught in the ditches; a few vegetables were still growing in the fields; and no doubt the wealthier men, in pukka houses that had not been badly damaged by the storm, still had some undamaged stores. But the outlook was bleak.

One day in March this year, when the time for ploughing was drawing near, a peasant returning home from his work on the new sea-wall—an impressive great embankment—gave some figures of what he was earning and what he needed. The price of rice had already risen so much in the local markets that it was difficult to see how his wage, Rs.3 8as. per week, would buy him enough to feed his family of five, let alone other expenses. He was hoping to club together with a neighbour to pay the necessary deposit for the loan of a bullock, he might be able to buy a plough if he was lucky, and

seed was to be distributed free. But prices went on rising, and it may be doubted whether he or others like him were able to afford the plough. Certainly, long before their new rice crop could be ripe—it does not ripen till November or December—the price of grain in the market had soared far beyond his means; and by May or June he was no longer working for wages on the sea-wall. The Government issued loans to enable the people to rebuild their houses before the coming of the rains at the end of May: the loans were used for food. Seed-grain was distributed: some of it was used for food. And already by the end of May officials at Contai and in Calcutta alike were whispering the ominous word, "famine."

The death-rate among the survivors of the cyclone was rising all the time. The rice-doles had stopped in February and March, when the people ought to have been in a position to buy food with their wages. Some cheap pulses and vegetables they could still buy in small quantities; but the food they were getting was even less than in normal times. Milk was still being distributed to infants and their mothers; but the older children were showing the symptoms of starvation more and more plainly: spindly legs and swollen stomachs. The incidence of starvation-diseases—dysentery, acute diarrhoea and the like—grew rapidly. In February, inexperienced relief workers (such as the present writer) had had hopeful dreams of a reconstruction plan which would bring village industries, improved agriculture, new medical facilities, and all manner of other blessings to the inhabitants of Contai and Tamluk and their several hundred villages. By the end of May it was becoming clear that not even a return to "normal" was possible. The survivors of the cyclone were doomed to die of slow starvation.

What had the Government done or failed to do to avert this tragedy? The special measures taken to meet the effects of the cyclone have already been described. But by the spring of 1943 it was clear that the Midnapore district could not recover unless effective steps were taken to control both the price and the transport of rice and other commodities in Bengal as a whole, or even in India as a whole. To what extent had the rise in prices and the difficulties of transport in war-time been anticipated, and what steps had been taken to mitigate the disastrous effects which those circumstances

were bound to have, not only on the people of Midnapore but on all those in the province of Bengal and elsewhere, who had no grain stocks of their own?—for all the landless people and those whose crops had failed in the country districts, and for industrial workers and other wage-earners in the towns and cities?

Hitherto we have been concentrating our attention on the cyclone area: now we must look at the whole province of Bengal. When one asks, "What had the Government done?" it is necessary to consider, "Which Government?" Under the 1935 Constitution, the several provinces of British India were given authority over food; thus, so far as food is concerned, the Government of each province (in Bengal, the Indian Ministry) was responsible. But this answer is far too simple. It was certainly the Ministry which, in the first instance, was responsible for undertaking measures to deal with prices, and with hoarding if hoarding was suspected. It is not clear that much was done, or even attempted, by the Fazlul Huq Ministry. After the resignation of Dr. Mookerjee it seemed incapable of doing anything much beyond clinging to office; and whatever may be said about its final dismissal by the Governor at the end of March, 1943, many observers thought its days were almost numbered. But we must not be too hard on it. The normal method of dealing with rocketing price-levels in India is to bring in imports from abroad. If consumer goods could have been imported, the peasants who were holding back stocks, distrustful of paper-money and anticipating a Japanese invasion, would have been much more ready to part with some of their stock; and the merchants, who were controlling the market price, would have seen that the price would come down when Government imports began to flood the market, and would have yielded to this form of pressure. In the circumstances of 1943, it was quite impossible for the Provincial authorities in Bengal to adopt this normal expedient. Surplus wheat was available in Australia: if that could have been brought to India early in the year, even though wheat is not rice, the food situation would have been so eased that the famine might have been stayed. At the beginning of 1943 the Bengal Premier declared that the Province could feed itself. Mr. Amery's first attempt to get wheat from Australia was not followed up, as the need was not realised. By the time Bengal, and after Bengal Delhi

and Whitehall, became aware of the urgent need of food from overseas, it was already too late.

When the Government of India tried, in the early summer of 1943, to bring food into Bengal from other parts of India, the authorities in other Provinces, such as the Punjab and Orissa, were not at all co-operative. They were afraid that their own stocks might run short.

Transport was a further difficulty. In war-time, and especially at a time when Bengal's defences were being rapidly developed as the base for an attack on Burma, defence traffic naturally obtains priority. The roads of India are still of little use for large-scale transport. Goods must go by rail. And so, while the railway lines were congested with defence traffic, trucks loaded with civilian goods had to remain in the sidings for weeks or even months.

The Government of India has been given extraordinary over-riding powers, which it is the duty of the Governor of each province to administer, to take such measures as the defence situation may demand. If and when the Government of India decided that, in order to win the war, it must save the people from famine, it could take what measures it thought appropriate. But perhaps the truth is that the Government of India, like the Provincial Government, had to confess itself powerless in face of abnormal circumstances.

When the new Ministry came into office, its energetic Food Minister, Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, soon announced that he was instituting a food drive all over the province, to ascertain what the total stocks were, and to form the basis for a plan of equitable distribution. This announcement was met with angry protests from some quarters. First it was noticed that Calcutta and its suburb Howrah were not included in the food drive. Were the Minister's friends among the Calcutta rice-merchants so strong that he dared not tackle them? And as to the rest of the province, Mr. Suhrawardy, being a Moslem League extremist, who had made many virulent communal speeches in the Assembly, was accused of setting up local committees of Moslems to investigate the stocks of Hindus; false charges and increased communal friction would result, rather than alleviation of the misery of the masses. Dr. Mookerjee was wise enough to insist that he and his friends welcomed the principle of the food drive, and would co-operate with it if it was fairly carried

out. But the co-operation did not materialise, and the food drive does not seem to have been a great success. Some weeks later, a similar enquiry was held throughout Calcutta and Howrah: but again, whatever hoards may have been discovered, the result did not bring under Government control enough rice to enable the authorities to force prices down or to stay the march of famine, but only enough to enable them to supply rice free to such voluntary organisations as were prepared to distribute it to the queues of starving people who by that time (July, 1943) were crowding into Calcutta, hoping to buy food at the Government food-shops.

Throughout August, starvation grew steadily worse. Thousands of people had come into Calcutta from country districts where rice was unobtainable, especially from the Midnapore cyclone area, and were living or dying on the streets. At first the hospitals refused to take in people who were suffering from no disease except starvation, but a number of beds that were being reserved for air-raid victims were made available for famine-victims, and day by day the numbers admitted to hospital and the numbers who had died in hospital were published. From such numbers as 12 or 15 and 80 to 100 respectively they rose to twice that number; and during September the numbers still rose. Late in August an official investigation showed that over 17,000 people were receiving free food in Calcutta daily, but the number requiring it was far in excess of this. The starving people from the countryside brought cholera and other epidemics into the city. Reports from other parts of Bengal told of equally tragic happenings in many other districts.

But, the incredulous English reader will say, surely something more could have been done by a strong and determined government. Yes, but on one condition only, and in India that condition is not to-day fulfilled. It is not enough that a government shall be strong and determined. It must also have the confidence of the public; and that, under present circumstances, no government authority in India can count on. The present Ministry can reckon on widespread support among Moslems, but not among Hindus. The honesty of the Prime Minister, Khwaja Sir Nazim-ud-Din, is generally recognised, but the Hindus look upon him as a tool in the hands of Mr. Jinnah, and it is doubted whether he can stand up either to Mr. Jinnah, or to some of the wealthy Moslem

merchants, or—in case of a difference of opinion—to the Governor; nor could he count on the active support of all the communities if he tried to take his own line. The European group, representing chiefly Scottish business interests in Calcutta, has a controlling influence in the Legislature, owing to the feuds between the various Indian parties. There are a number of enlightened European business men in Calcutta, who are concerned for the welfare of the masses, but any Ministry that embarked on a policy strongly at variance with European business interests would probably soon go the way of Fazlul Huq and his colleagues.

Direct British rule might be more satisfactory than the present state of party intrigue, but it would not solve the real problem. A Governor who can win the confidence of all the chief party leaders and who can convince them and the public that he is really determined to alleviate the present misery and to tackle the problem at its root, might bring into being an all-party ministry with a programme of drastic social and economic reform. Such a Ministry, working with such a Governor, is Bengal's immediate need. Mr. Casey, the new Governor, will perhaps be able to form a united front against famine and pestilence.

After the end of August, the Bengal famine assumed such grave proportions that it became the dominant issue in India and a subject of first-class importance in imperial politics. We must examine it again in this wider setting.

VIII

WAVELL'S OPPORTUNITY

WHEN the appointment of Field-Marshal Wavell to the Viceroyalty of India was announced in the summer of 1943, Indian opinion showed little interest. A few newspapers took the line: "This means naked military rule." The majority of comments were to the effect: "This means no change." It was assumed that a man who had been a member of Lord Linlithgow's Council would carry on the Linlithgow policy, and that he had been appointed to get on with the war against Japan, not to promote peace with Gandhi and Jinnah. The mood of India is one of profound scepticism. Such a speech as Lord Wavell's to the Pilgrims in September, when he said he was not one of those who believed that political progress in India was impossible in war-time, was analysed and minimised rather than welcomed. At the most it was interpreted as confirming the opinion already expressed in some quarters in India that the new Viceroy would proceed to the full Indianisation of his Council by finding suitable Indians to fill the portfolios of finance and home affairs. It would not mean an active effort to revive negotiations with the chief political parties.

But Mr. Rajagopalachari, having recovered from an obstinate illness that had kept him quiet in South India for several months, began to bestir himself once more. He urged that the Cripps proposals should be taken up again, at least as a basis for discussion, instead of being allowed to lie on the table, and that Cripps himself should be invited to take up his unfinished task.

Most of the Congress and pro-Congress Press was hostile to this proposal, but Mr. Jinnah's paper *Dawn* was more friendly: "We do not object to a revival of the Cripps plan," it said. "But Mr. Rajagopalachari should not be lost in tactics of escapism. He should importune Hindu leadership to solve the deadlock, instead of representing Mr. Jinnah as a hindrance. If the Hindu leaders are really in earnest they should divert their appeal to the ear of the Mahatma, who still remains in a state of hypnosis." It may be that Mr. Rajagopalachari

holds a key position in India to-day. The Congress papers will not commit themselves to his support, for he has broken with the Congress Party, and until its leaders are released they are bound to keep him at arm's length. Nor will the Moslem League commit itself to open approval of his efforts to promote an agreement, while the future remains dark. But, at a time when Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah still dominate the picture, and seem to be quite irreconcilable, it is a noteworthy fact that Mr. Rajagopalachari has the ear of both. A member of the Moslem League, speaking in August of possible future developments, hazarded the guess that Mr. Rajagopalachari might be destined to become India's first national Premier—a remarkable tribute from a zealous Moslem to a high-caste Brahmin. Probably he would not have said it in public. But what men say in private is sometimes a better indication of the way the wind is blowing than what the Press or the politicians say publicly.

It was not the Cripps proposals, however, nor indeed anything political or constitutional, that confronted Lord Wavell on his arrival in India in mid-October. It was famine. The new Viceroy's arrival was announced from Delhi on October 18th. Two days before, a Reuter telegram from Calcutta announced that 2,154 persons had died in the city from starvation that week, as compared with 1,967 the previous week. The total Calcutta death-roll from September 19th to October 16th was 7,249. The White Paper (Cmd 6479) on the Food Situation, 1943, published at the end of October, says: "The total number of cases of disease directly or indirectly due to or aggravated by malnutrition which were admitted to hospitals in Calcutta alone between August 15th to (*sic*) October 15th were 9,448, of which 2,757 persons died. About twice as many deaths have been accounted for in the same period outside the hospitals. No reliable figures of mortality in the districts are available but conditions in the south-east and south-west districts are reported to be worse than in Calcutta." On October 8th, the Acting-Governor of Bengal, in a broadcast, said that over a million people were receiving relief. By the end of the month, the number exceeded two millions.

Lord Wavell visited Calcutta and some of the worst affected districts of Bengal within a week of his arrival in India. Perceiving that transport of supplies to some of the country

districts was one of the most urgent needs, he arranged at once that the Army, which naturally controls most of the transport in Bengal to-day, should assist in the distribution of food. By the end of October, Mr. Amery was able to announce in the House of Commons that three ships, carrying between them some 20,000 tons of grain, had reached India, whilst others were on the way. But improved distribution was still running a race with increasing scarcity. It did not catch up till late November or even December.

Lord Wavell's action in going straight to the famine area, dispensing with all pomp and ceremony, must have made a favourable impression, possibly most of all on the prisoner at Poona.

It is nearly two years since Mr. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* (January 26th, 1942): "The greatest need of the immediate present is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. There is already scarcity in the land both of food and clothing. As the war progresses, both the scarcities must increase." He went on to give detailed proposals to meet the situation. The well-to-do must change their diet, so as to make available for the poor such things as pulses and oil, which they badly need to improve their slender and diminishing diet. "Grain-dealers have to shed their greed and the habit of making as much as possible. They must be satisfied with as little as possible. They run the risk of being looted, if they do not gain the credit of being keepers of grain for the sake of the poor. . . . Congressmen have to visit grain dealers within their beat and give them the message of the time."

"By far the most important part of the work consists in educating the villagers to keep what they have and to induce cultivation of fresh crops wherever water is available. This requires widespread and intelligent propaganda." He names certain fruits and vegetables that can easily be grown.

He proceeds in similar practical fashion to deal with the problems of money scarcity and of the clothing shortage—which has been acute most of the past year—and he concludes: "Any organisation that tackles these two problems successfully will command the love and confidence of the people. I hope that all will join in this real war effort. It is none the less effective because it is peaceful and constructive. Will the princes let their people do this work without let or hindrance? Will Qaide Azam Jinnah allow the members of the

Moslem League to co-operate with the Congress workers in this truly national but non-political work which is also humanitarian? There are 23,000 Moslem spinners, carders and weavers earning their daily bread through the All-India Spinners' Association."

England, which knows Mr. Gandhi chiefly as the metaphysical politician—the man who, with the Japanese at the gate of India, can call on the British to leave India, to God or anarchy—too rarely hears about Gandhi the practical friend of the peasant. It is hardly realised that he is the founder and inspirer not only of the All-India Spinners' Association, with its hundreds of thousands of working members, but of the All-India Village Industries Association, which for years past has done much to develop village crafts up and down India, of the Cow Protection Association, which has tried to improve the breed of Indian cattle, of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, with branches in many parts of India, which provides schools, wells and other amenities for members of the Depressed Classes, of the Basic Education Programme, and of several other welfare societies. This is the Gandhi who commands the devotion of the Indian peasants. On the very page of *Harijan* from which I have just been quoting, I find a notice: "Just Published. *Constructive Programme, Its Meaning and Place*, by Gandhiji. Price, As. 4," and then "*Constructive Programme, Some Suggestions*, by Rajendra Prasad. Price, As. 4." Who is Rajendra Prasad? In a moment we shall see.

C. F. Andrews, who knew Mr. Gandhi better perhaps than any man, always declared that the condition of the poor was his primary concern. Those who listened to Mr. Gandhi's speeches in London at the time of the Round Table Conference of 1931 got almost tired of his constant references to the "dumb, semi-starved millions," whom he claimed to represent. Last summer, when I was talking to Mr. Stinivasa Sastri, one of the wisest of India's elder statesmen, one who has been a liberal, a moderate, and a friend of England all his life, he said: "Sooner or later, as far as I can see, you will have to come back to Mr. Gandhi. And if or when Lord Wavell is considering an approach to him, he should bear in mind, that the way to win his trust is to convince him that he, the Viceroy, is concerned first and foremost for the welfare of the masses. Difficult political issues will remain, but when his confidence has been won, nothing is impossible."

Lord Wavell has taken the first step to win that confidence by acts that speak louder than words.

In 1934, the province of Bihar which adjoins Bengal was visited by a terrible earthquake. An area as large as Scotland was devastated, over 10,000 people were killed. A great area was covered with sand and rendered temporarily uncultivable. At the moment of this disaster, the Congress was engaged in a long struggle of civil disobedience against the Government. The chief Congress leader in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad, who is loved and trusted by the peasants, happened to have been released from jail just at the time of the earthquake. Mr. Gandhi had also been released. Rajendra Prasad wrote at once to the Chief Secretary of the Bihar Government. "I am writing," he said, "to assure you that in this humanitarian work there can be but one consideration, and that is to render such service as may be possible. It will be our privilege to assist and co-operate with other organisations, official and non-official, working for relief."

When Mr. Gandhi arrived in the district a few weeks later, he toured the stricken villages, and urged the people everywhere to help themselves. "If you take money from the relief funds, see that you earn it." And with equal persistence: "This is no time for differences between Government and Congress; between Hindu and Moslem; between Touchable and Untouchable." This was a hard doctrine; some on both sides did not relish it. But in the main there was fruitful co-operation.

If famine, which has slain hundreds of thousands in Bengal, and which threatens all India, is to be stayed, the aid of every true friend of the Indian masses must be secured. In the courageous speech he made in the Central Legislative Assembly on August 9th, the then Member for Food of the Viceroy's Council, Sir Azizul Huque, pointed out that "If statistics are correct, rice production in India from 1911-12 to 1942-43 has remained nearly constant between the figures of 25 million tons and 27 million tons. . . . In the meantime, the population has increased from about 311 millions in 1910-11 to 388 millions in 1941, with the corresponding increase of the rice-eating population." He also pointed out that the per capita production of rice in the decade 1911-12 to 1920-21 was 384 lbs.; in the years 1940-41 to 1942-43 it was only 283 lbs. Taking Bengal alone, the per capita production

has decreased in thirty years by 70 lbs. No wonder there is a famine! And he frankly commented: "I am not aware of any nation-wide effort to tackle the problem of nutrition, the ultimate purpose of food. Did we realise within ourselves that the very basis of our economy is so made that it is hardly enough to meet our minimum needs, and certainly lacks the strength to stand the pressure of any abnormal circumstances or conditions of strain?"

The fundamental changes needed in India's rural economy if food production is to be substantially increased can only be carried out by the co-operation of all. But if Mr. Gandhi and some of his colleagues who have expert knowledge of village economy and the capacity to influence the peasants and the merchants were released, what guarantee is there that they would not start a new anti-war campaign? The precedent of Bihar is one answer; the precedent of Mr. Gandhi's earlier release from jail to work for the Depressed Classes when he deliberately refrained for many months from all political activity is another. If he promised to confine himself and his followers to famine work, his whole life testifies that he would keep to his promise.

But that is not all. The root of the present trouble between England and India is mistrust. They do not trust us; we do not trust them. Is there any better way of learning to trust your opponent than by working with him on a job that both know has to be done, where each needs the other, and by finding that he is a trustworthy fellow-worker? One leading Congress personality, Mrs. Pandit, formerly Minister for Health in the United Provinces, president of the All-India Women's Conference, has been in Bengal already, helping the women of Bengal to open orphanages, and taking other vigorous relief measures, alongside officials, Moslems, Hindus, all sorts of people. After the Midnapore cyclone, the Governor's Relief Committee in Calcutta contained officials, Congressmen, Moslem Leaguers, Hindu Mahasabha people, Radical Democrats—all co-operating to relieve distress. So too the famine and its aftermath can only be fought on an All-India basis, through all-party action.

Strange things happen in this world. Though the Gandhian outlook is so foreign to our English mind in some respects that it seems as though the two would never mix, it may be that after six months working together it would be found that,

almost imperceptibly, a National Government had come into being, with Congress and Moslem League equally represented, and seats occupied also by a Hindu Mahasabha man, a Depressed Classes man (Dr. Ambedkar), a Sikh, a Liberal, with Lord Wavell as chairman and as the very willing servant of a united cabinet.

"How there can be effective planning of campaigns against Japan while the huge frontier province of sixty million people wallows in the present dreadful economic morass, threatening the troops with pestilence," said the British-owned *Calcutta Statesman* the other day, "is hard for thoughtful people to imagine." That is the picture of Eastern India to-day. To-morrow, or the day after, can we picture Bengal, under a National Government in which Hindu, Moslem and the last British Viceroy are effectively co-operating, her prosperity renewed, becoming the base for campaigns against cholera and typhus, against poverty and dirt, a centre of hope for all Asia?

Such transformation can only come if it is accompanied by certain other transformations: changes of heart, or changes of mind. First, as already noted, there must be a change of mind in Mr. Gandhi, so that he can see in the British not overlords but servants of the Indian people. Perhaps Lord Wavell is doing something to-day to produce that change. Some of his colleagues will probably be more difficult to convince. Whereas Mr. Gandhi has always an open mind about men, and is particularly inclined to think well of Englishmen, Jawaharlal Nehru and others are profoundly sceptical about the possibility of any "change of heart" among the British rulers. In July, 1942, Pundit Nehru assured me that, after the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations, the Congress would hardly accept anything short of complete Viceregal abdication. His desire to help Russia and China might, however, still outweigh all other considerations. Some of his colleagues are likely to be even more intractable. It is not the "hard core" of pacifists who are the greatest difficulty. They will agree to what Mr. Gandhi agrees to. The real "hard core" is the embittered young Congressman who wants to run his own country and to throw out all the exploiters—the British, the Princes and the rest—by any means he can lay his hands on. To him, Gandhi is a visionary and Nehru a moderate. Eighteen months' internment is not likely to

have softened the mind of such a man. Even so, if Mr. Gandhi can be won to a plan of effective co-operation in fighting poverty, he is likely to be able to persuade the Congress as a whole to follow his lead. Less than ten years ago British officials in India were declaring that Mr. Gandhi was our best friend. He declares that he is still our friend. He has not changed.

Next, then, there must be a change of mind on our part about Mr. Gandhi. We must try to recognise in him first of all a man who understands far better than any Englishman what the social and economic needs of India are. Then we must reassure ourselves that he is not pro-Japanese, and that his pacifism is not of the kind that will prevent him from giving full moral support to a National Government that is acting whole-heartedly with the Allies. I hope earlier chapters in this book may have done something to reassure its readers on both these points.

Next, the present attitude of mutual suspicion between the Congress and the Moslem League has to undergo a radical change. The Congress must give unqualified recognition to the right of the Moslems to form a separate State if and when they may wish to do so. And Mr. Jinnah must come down to earth and define what he really means by Pakistan, and how the issue of separation is to be decided.

One good effect of Sir Stafford Cripps's negotiations was his insistence that if Congress and the Moslem League accepted his proposals, he would go ahead. That does not mean that the minor parties will be forgotten. It means that they cannot indefinitely hold up progress.

The achievement of such a measure of mutual trust appears at the moment about as remote as the defeat of the Axis appeared to be in June, 1940 or even in August 1942. It depends largely on the same factors that have produced the change in the war perspective: a conviction that what ought to be can be and must be; perseverance in its pursuit; quickness to turn to advantage any opportunity that presents itself; and perhaps even willingness to admit the value of outside help in disentangling the tangle. Profound psychological changes can come more rapidly than profound military changes.

Two schools of thought about Indo-British relations seem to be current in Britain to-day, both of them misguided. On the

one hand, the average imperialist seems to assume that the British Empire is a permanent political structure, that India is a natural and organic part of that Empire, that however much self-government India may achieve within the next few decades her continued dependence on Britain can be taken for granted, and is in the natural ordering of things. As to the immediate future, according to this view, the Congress leaders have proved themselves so dangerous and irresponsible that they must be kept under restraint till the end of the war, when we can set in motion again the growth towards self-government. But such a view rests on unsound assumptions. It assumes that the British Empire can remain more or less static. In fact, it cannot do so. It has been in a state of rapid evolution ever since it began; and it has shown the greatest vitality during the seasons of impetuous experiment and innovation. It also assumes that the evolution of India can follow the precedents of the self-governing Dominions. Could anyone but a constitutional pedant or an ignoramus fall into such an error? The Dominion pattern has been difficult to fit on to the body of South Africa. Ireland has refused to fit into it. Much less can India, populated by four hundred million Asiatics, be expected to become a British Dominion. Then, the assumption that we can cause history to stand still for two or three years in India, by keeping Ghandi and his colleagues in jail, is the blindest folly of all. Already this action has assisted to precipitate India into an almost irremediable communal breach. The prospect at the moment seems to be economic misery and political anarchy, and most of the British soldiers will be saying at the end of the Burma campaign (unless I wholly misread their temper): "For pity's sake let us leave this God-forsaken country of squalor and disease and superstition. Let us abandon Asia to her own devices."

And a powerful section of British opinion will unite itself to this instinctive reaction of the British Army. This section, which is already vocal, argues that it is unrealistic to try to turn a curious accident of history, by which the merchant-adventurers of a little Atlantic island were able to overrun a great populous territory thousands of miles away, inhabited by people of a totally alien culture, into a basis for an enduring imperial structure or even a special political partnership. Let us shake ourselves free from the fantastic insular conceit

that has led us to suppose that the British are the predestined mentors of Asia, and leave India to run her own show, well or ill, before we get ourselves hopelessly entangled in the job of trying to police for an indefinite period a continent that becomes more and more obstreperous the longer we refuse it responsibility for its own order.

Both these views are superficial and short-sighted, based on half-truths. The relationship of India and Britain is unique in history. It can neither be made to conform to some general pattern, nor can it be suddenly dissolved. It is a vital relationship, one element in a world process, in which all nations and peoples are being rapidly brought together. Unless the whole of modern progress is reversed, the world must become more and more of a unity: but that unity may bring—and in many ways seems to be bringing—not more harmony and mutual aid, but more and more friction and conflict. Domination must be rapidly turned into partnership, not only in economic and political affairs, but still more in the attitude of mind that each people adopts towards its neighbours. Or else we face race suicide.

In these days, nations and peoples quickly shuffle and re-shuffle their pacts and treaties in the race for power. To-day Europe fights Europe and Asia fights Asia, while Africa is hardly yet in the fight. To-morrow, if the white man tries to keep on dominating, he may find that Asia and Africa have united to eject and destroy him and his power. But if India and Britain can form a pact of honest partnership, Britain, the link that can bind Russia and the Continent of Europe to America, and India, the link that can bind China and Japan to Islam and Africa, may lead the world into union.

The prophetic insight of Gandhi must be fused with the political common sense of the British. There is no time to lose. We cannot sit still. Either we decide to go forward or we slip dangerously backward. The end of the war may be too late. Now is the time. The cry of India's starving millions must be the battle-cry for rallying all men of good will in both lands. That is the first task for the partners. When it has been set in motion, perhaps we shall find still further tasks in which Indians can help to relieve some need in Britain. For every true partnership implies mutual need and mutual aid. When we in Britain discover our need of India,

Indians may be more inclined to admit their need of us. We may give them practical aid in the science of social welfare; they may help us to learn the art of living; each may help the other to a renewed vitality in which moral obligation springs from an ardent conviction of spiritual truth.

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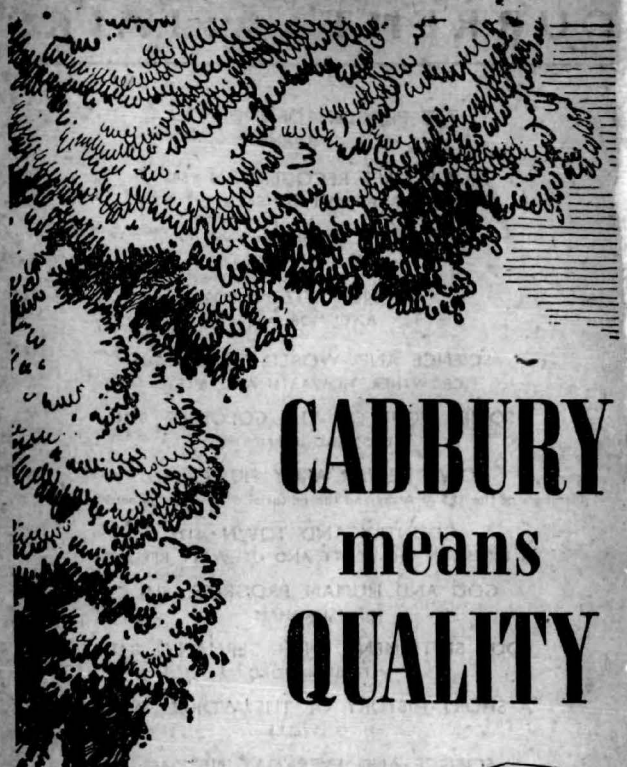
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