"THE NEW WAY" SERIES.

X.

# INDIA
## and the Empire.

*By*

LORD MESTON, K.C.S.I., LL.D.

# NOTE.

*In these post-war years all accepted political doctrines are undergoing challenge, and a vast number of intelligent people have lost the anchorage of political principle, and are drifting in bewilderment on a sea of conflicting ideas.*

*The pamphlets of which this is one are designed as a contribution towards clarifying this confusion. They are issued under the auspices of the Council of the Liberal Summer Schools. But they are not intended to preach a rigid party orthodoxy. Their aim is constructive study and enquiry rather than dogmatic assertion or acrid denunciation. Some of the writers are not even professed adherents of the Liberal Party, and the pamphlets make no claim to represent accepted Liberal policy. Each writer speaks only for himself. But all have been invited to write because they have given special study to the subjects with which they have to deal. And all are united by two beliefs : the first, a deep dissatisfaction with many aspects of the existing order, at home and abroad ; the second, a conviction that these evils cannot be cured by the glib repetition of sweeping formulæ, or by violence or class-conflict, or by mere destruction, but only by hard thinking and good will.*

# INDIA AND THE EMPIRE.

## I.

INDIA is a problem which all of us would gladly, if we could, keep outside the sphere of party politics. A grave Imperial responsibility, it calls for a united Imperial policy. But unhappily, except under the pressure of war, Englishmen appear unable to unite in an Imperial policy on any subject whatsoever; and there are at least two good reasons why we Liberals need not hesitate to apply our own principles to the Indian question—apart from the third and still more excellent reason that we believe our principles to be the best.

One is the traditional and unbroken association of Liberals with the political progress of India. Nearly 150 years ago it was the two mighty Whigs, Burke and Fox, who inoculated a Parliament, not then too receptive of such ideas, with its duty of limiting the arbitrary power of the East India Company. In the following century, John Bright was largely instrumental in transferring India from that Company to the Crown. It was the first Marquess of Ripon who laid the foundations of local government in India; John Morley's name will always be linked with the beginnings of a wider political freedom; and it was a Liberal Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, who had the courage and tenacity to carry the Constitution of 1919 through a Coalition Cabinet and a puzzled Parliament. That is the argument of Liberal tradition: the other reason is the argument of Liberal theory. For two doctrines to-day are frequently in men's mouths, to which Liberalism, as I conceive it, can give no quarter. The doctrine of "the strong hand and no d——d nonsense" finds a congenial home among our Conservative friends, just as our Labour

friends seem to smile on the opposite thesis of the immediate surrender of Indian administration to Indian agency. These are definitely party tendencies, which compel Liberalism to declare a line of its own, however much it would prefer a policy with no label except that of Patriotism.

In suggesting such a line for consideration, I do not propose to go further back than the Act of 1919. It was accepted by the Liberal Party as an offer to India of the richest political gift which we had it in our power to make,—the gift of the democratic principle, with an opportunity for training India in the practical work of democracy to the end of fitting her for the ultimate realisation of responsible government within the Empire. It is this gift which is now being attacked, this opportunity which is being rejected, by the great majority of Indian politicians. Let us then examine the conditions of the gift, the reasons given for its rejection, the psychology which underlies those reasons; and so we may arrive at an understanding of the situation for which a policy has to be designed.

There are three features of the 1919 Constitution which differentiate it from the normal type of responsible government. The first of these is what has been nicknamed dyarchy. It is confined to the provinces only, and is an arrangement by which certain departments of government (the "transferred departments"), such as Education, Agriculture, Public Health, are controlled by Indian Ministers responsible to the legislature, while other departments (the "reserved departments") such as Law and Order, the Police, the Land Revenue, are controlled by the Governor and his Cabinet of officials. The second peculiarity is that in the central Government the Viceroy and his Cabinet, in the control of all the central departments, such as Defence, Railways, Posts and Customs, are amenable only to Parliament, but have to obtain the laws and the supply

they require from the central legislature, to which in no other respect are they responsible. (The same is true of the provincial Governor and his colleagues in their handling of the "reserved departments.") The third distinctive feature of the Indian Constitution is its safeguards, the chief of which are briefly as follows. The Viceroy at the centre and the Governor in his province has power, not only to veto legislation, but to override his legislature in matters of law-making and finance, when he certifies such a step to be necessary for the safety or tranquillity of the country. The civil services are protected by special provisions of law, intended to secure them fair treatment and some compensation for the change in their status which the Constitution has effected. Authority exists for handing back a "transferred department" to the Government temporarily when Ministers cannot or will not undertake it. And finally there is to be no change in the substance of the Constitution before 1929, when Parliament is pledged to have a full enquiry as to how the first stage in self-government has worked, and how far it is possible to enlarge it.

## What Dyarchy Is.

These are what may be called the three abnormal features of the Constitution—dyarchy in the provinces, at the centre an executive which is not answerable to its legislature, and certain safeguards unusual in countries of maturer political growth. On test they yield nothing more sinister than the fact that what India obtained in 1919 was not complete responsible government, but the first instalment of it. From this fact they draw their justification. Dyarchy is a contrivance for reserving to Parliament an effective hold over the essentials of government while Ministers are gaining experience—often by their own mistakes—in their own field of work. The curious combination in the central Government of an irremovable executive with a legislature to which it is not responsible, is an

attempt to make the Viceroy, in determining his policy, lean rather on the consent of the people than on the approval of Whitehall. And as for the peculiar safeguards, they are all intelligible on similar lines; they were designed to prevent this daring experiment in democracy from being wrecked at the outset by inexperience, or from impatient tinkering before it had a reasonable chance of making good.

Such were the conditions, neither onerous nor grudging, on which India was launched in its course of training for self-government. To-day every single one of them is the subject of vehement protest from all the sections of political opinion of which the voices are heard in England. Dyarchy in particular has become the regular Aunt Sally of Indian politics. Among those who have their fling at her are many of ourselves. Retired Indian officials who never liked the idea cannot resist the temptation of insisting on its failure. One eminent proconsul who has just returned says quite frankly that he never believed in dyarchy and never tried to work it; two others who were his coevals in adjoining provinces both accepted it, and successfully worked it. Certain critics condemn it to an end worthy of what they regard as its doctrinaire origin, forgetting that the scheme emanated from that cautious and experienced administrator the late Sir William Duke. Many labour under the impression that dyarchy was at the root of Lord Reading's trouble when he certified the salt tax in order to balance his Budget. One well-known M.P. held an argument the other day on the obvious hypothesis that dyarchy is a division between the civil and the military powers. (It was almost reminiscent of the old Indian gentleman who, when he first heard the unaccustomed word, gravely hoped that we would not enforce *dyar*chy if it meant the rule of General Dyer.) But the system has more serious assailants than these; "it has failed in practice," says the Indian politician; "Ministers have never had a fair

chance ; funds have been withheld ; the services have been obstructed," and so on.

## Sweeping Accusations.

Similarly with the other safeguards in the Constitution. They are all represented as affronts to the national spirit, and shackles on the growth of freedom. We have bolstered up the public services (Lord Lee and his colleagues being the latest culprits) into a position where they can thwart the policy of those whom they ought to serve. We have used our overriding power to defy the wishes of the people. And in particular the ten-year moratorium is intolerable ; it is not for us to say when India is fit for further responsibility ; it is for her people to get it when they ask for it ; and they demand it at once. Finally and generally, there are sweeping accusations of bad faith, hypocrisy, unreality ; we have given the shadow and withheld the substance ; we cannot part with the loaves and fishes ; we mean to make the progress to self-government so slow and painful that India will break her heart in weariness.

Now, what is all this about ? Is there evidence in support of these charges, generic and specific ? The new system certainly started under singularly unfavourable conditions. India was passing through severe financial depression, and there was no money for the many social developments on which Ministers had set their heart. Mr. Gandhi and the Ali brothers were making life miserable for Indian gentlemen who were trying to co-operate in the new regime. Prices were rising, and there was much economic discontent. The disturbances in the Punjab, and certain episodes in their suppression, had sent a flood of racial animosity surging through the length and breadth of the country. The services were disheartened, and it is not to be supposed that every member of them was equally enthusiastic for the reforms. But of any general disposition on our part to hinder the new

policy there is no proof whatsoever ; and there is the slenderest foundation for the accusations and suspicions which are so freely voiced. Had they come only from the extremists we need not have been troubled about them ; for the extremists had announced from the start their determination to be irreconcilable and to take no part in the new Constitution. As non-co-operators they boycotted the first elections, and stood outside the Councils so long as Mr. Gandhi's influence predominated ; as Swarajists they have entered the Councils now with the avowed intent of breaking them up.

From a party in this frame of mind no detailed criticism need be taken as a *cri de cœur*. But it is from the party which we once called Moderates that the clamour is arising. They now style themselves Liberals or Independents ; but they are the same men who negotiated with Mr. Montagu, and reasoned before Lord Selborne in Committee Room A, and voted in their own Congress for the acceptance of the Constitution. Surely something must have gone seriously wrong to drive them into open hostility all along the line to the scheme of 1919.

Before we attempt to discover why the Moderates have been alienated, let us look for a moment at what they demand in place of the new Constitution. They assail it in detail, but their remedy is anything but homœopathic. They went into the same lobby with the Swarajists at Delhi last February in demanding a round-table conference to draft a scheme of full responsible government. For this they had fortified themselves at their Poona Conference in the previous Christmas week, when they defined their policy as follows :—

" That this meeting of the All-India Liberals is emphatically of opinion that full responsible government in the provinces, and complete responsibility in the central Government except in the Military, Political, and Foreign departments should be established without delay, and for this purpose urges the immediate appointment of a Commission similar to

that provided for in the Government of India Act of 1919 for making a full enquiry into the actual working of the present constitution and making recommendations in respect of future constitutional advance."

Since joining hands with the Swarajists in February they have sought to demonstrate their independence of those fierier spirits by sending home a deputation to secure sympathy in England. Mr. Sastri, Mrs. Besant, and their working lieutenants have not failed to make their purpose perfectly clear. They claim that India has a right to make its own Constitution as they assert the Irish Free State did ; and they are busy on the materials for a draft which they hope shortly to present for ratification by the British Parliament.

It has not yet been disclosed in its full details : but it certainly aims at nothing short of complete autonomy for the provinces, and our intervention in the central Government only for the purposes of managing the defence of India, internal and external, and her foreign relations. In all this there is no question of training India for the great task of self-government ; no question of the progressive march towards free institutions by stages as experience is gained ; no question of Parliament satisfying itself of the fitness of her leaders for increased responsibilities. These cardinal features in our policy of five years ago are tossed aside, and the cry is for Dominion status and full responsible government without further delay, provided we police and defend the country for such fee as its legislature may choose to fix. As to the next stage, Mr. Sastri and his friends are perfectly frank : if Parliament cannot concede their demands, they tell us, political India will at last be united under the Swaraj banner, and the tranquil stream of Moderatism will merge in the turbulent sea of Extremism.

## II.

Even if this sketch overstates the situation—and it is certainly not intended to do so—the key to the position is surely given by the Moderates' own words and actions. It is not wholly disappointment with the pace of progress from which they are suffering ; it is not any real suspicion of our good faith or any fear that Parliament will not generously fulfil its promises: nor is it any irremediable complaint against the details of the new Constitution or the methods of its working. What is upsetting the Moderates is something much more radical than all that ; and it is only right that we Liberals should face the true problem if we are to put forward any solution for it. That the problem is what I am going to describe the Moderates would strenuously deny, many of them quite honestly because they do not want to realise it, and also because in their heart of hearts they do believe that the future of India is bound up with the British connection. But no one who has patiently studied the Indian psychology can seriously doubt what is the true situation to-day. The crucial feature in that situation is a violent reaction against us, with all our virtues and all our failings, and against our work with all its defects and all its blessings. The reaction is racial, ethical and religious.

Before I develop the theme, let me set the stage and describe the *dramatis personæ*. Take first the Moslems of India. Composing nearly one-fifth of the entire population, they are not much in evidence in the South ; in Middle India they are more numerous but not particularly effective ; and in the North they are powerful. The vast majority are simple cultivators, hardly distinguishable from the masses of the Hindu peasantry among whom they live and work.

Their upper classes and educated men fall broadly into two types. One is the old-fashioned, conservative, placid Mussulman, deeply interested in his religion

and its traditions, but otherwise not looking far beyond his large family, and too often disheartened by penury and debt. The other is the more modern product of the Young-Turk school, restless and voluble, perfunctory in the duties of his faith, sensitive to whatever is happening in the Moslem world outside India, and with dreams of a great Islamic renaissance. Neither type is among the chief actors in the drama of reaction. So long as we are careful of their *amour propre* and manage to maintain friendship with Turkey, they will not seek to get us out of India and they have no serious quarrel with our civilisation or our methods. In religion they are, of course, much closer to us than to the Hindu ; and in their hearts they cling to our rule as their only protection against the crushing economic competition of the more industrious and more subtle Hindus. At intervals they break into excursions and alarms, mainly under religious excitement, but as a rule they do not occupy the centre of the stage.

Turn now to the Indian peasants, the 80 or 85 per cent. of the population who live outside the towns and are engaged in a life-long struggle for a very spare living. They have been accustomed, for thousands of years, to captains and kings fighting over their heads and ravaging them impartially. To them politics mean nothing, nor do forms of government. All they want is enough to eat, cheap and ready justice, and fair dealing from their landlord, whether he be the State or a private owner. Any Government which will look after them in times of famine, protect them from rack-renting, listen to their woes and judge between them without unconscionable bribery, will have their passive support. There is no room for them on our stage, and they have no desire to appear upon it. But they form a dense crowd in the wings, and they are often available as a chorus for the chief actors. If we overlook this rôle we are apt to under-estimate the political importance of the masses.

We are often told that the educated or politically-minded classes are a microscopic fraction of the Indian people ; that they do not speak the mind of India ; that our British officials understand the peasantry better than they do ; and that the peasantry trust us rather than them. In this there are elements of truth, but there are great dangers in being over-confident about it. The fact that a Hindu politician wears Western clothes and quotes John Stuart Mill does not disable him from speaking a language which the Hindu peasant understands or from touching chords in the Hindu heart which we cannot reach. Race calls to race, and kind to kind ; and the emotions of the masses are always liable to be placed, for a time at least, at the command of the Hindu agitator who can appeal with knowledge to their religion or traditions or credulity.

## The Position of the Moderates.

Near the centre of the stage, but not often venturing up to the footlights, are our friends the Moderates. Ever since Mr. Gokhale left the Tilak camp they have had a difficult time. Torn between their intellectual loyalty to Western culture and their ingrained reverence for Hindu ideals, they have gradually drawn away from us, partly through mistakes of ours, partly through fear of the Extremists' vehemence, and partly because they dare not risk a complete breach with the Extremists in case the latter ultimately win. But I must return to the Moderates later, and come on at last to the chief figures in the scene.

These are the orthodox and demi-orthodox Hindus, and they represent all that is stable and persistent in the wonderful fabric of Indian life. They represent the force which bore down and absorbed Buddhism, the force which wore down and absorbed the Mohammedan invasions, the force which hopes similarly to live down and absorb the British occupation. And this force, incalculable in its strength, is based on ideals

entirely different from ours. We are not a little proud of our civilisation and its achievements: listen, however, to what an Indian philosopher and poet thinks of them:

"We have seen this great stream of civilisation choking itself from debris carried by its innumerable channels. We have seen that with all its vaunted love of humanity it has proved itself the greatest menace to man, far worse than the sudden outbursts of nomadic barbarism from which men suffered in the early ages of history. We have seen that, in spite of its boasted love of freedom, it has produced worse forms of slavery than ever were current in earlier societies,—slavery whose chains are unbreakable, either because they are unseen or because they assume the name and appearance of freedom. We have seen, under the spell of its gigantic sordidness, man losing faith in all the heroic ideals of life which have made him great."

So much for our ideal of liberty; it is only a mask for slavery such as Hinduism never knew. Our ideal of justice fares no better: it is not possible for man to dispense justice, that is God's work: and as for sin, we may condemn it, but we need only pity the sinner, because he will have to work out his punishment in lives hereafter. Happiness, which we try to promote,—that is an illusion: we are too materialistic to have any conception of what true happiness means. Material wealth is merely "gregarious gluttony", which must be fought and overcome; and what the culture of India seeks is "not to reform the finite, but to inform it with the infinite." (I quote from Mr. D. G. Mukerji). And so, all up and down the gamut of our ideals and our practice, Hinduism finds points of antagonism. It is here that we have the real conflict between East and West, with its roots deep down in the whole philosophy of life.

This conflict used to be content with literary form and occasional puzzling outbursts, until the war came and set the ferment working in India as it did in all countries where idealism dominates men's minds. It then generated, with startling rapidity, a revolt against our administration and ourselves. Mr. Gandhi

led the revolt, but he was too honest, too outspoken, and, in some ways, too logical in his idealism; for example, in his zeal for the outcastes; so he was virtually discarded by his own people. The revolt has passed into sterner and astuter hands, and behind the façade of the new Constitution the powers of reaction are being marshalled against us. In the lyrical language which they know how to use, they tell us that India is being exploited in the name of British liberty; that, until we go, India cannot recover herself; that, in all we have done or attempted, there has been no service to India, but only a tightening of the fetters which bind her spirituality to the modern barbarism of Europe. In plain prose, their object is to get us out of India as soon as possible, and to take the political machine into their own hands. They distrust our theory of progress, and they have a particular horror of democracy and its spirit.

Criticism will be directed against the view that any section in India, except a few irresponsible hotheads, think seriously of severing the British connection. It is true that no responsible section would acknowledge such a purpose, and that most of the thinking men in every section, if a final choice were presented to them, would press us to stay rather than to go. But this I maintain quite clearly, that (whatever lip service may be paid to it) there is, fixedly set in the average orthodox Hindu mind, a deep dislike of the political ideal which we have put forward; that every stratagem will be employed to wreck it, and that to those who really control the reaction our continued association with India is endurable only in so far as it is necessary for the policing and defence of the country. Hinduism is naturally a tolerant creed; but if we are to stay in India we must accept its standards and cease to undermine them by our Western theories of liberty and equality.

It is this attitude of mind which has, consciously or unconsciously, deflected the Moderate leaders. They

will bring a dozen excellent reasons to show that the fault is ours. If anyone can spare a week or two to read the speeches delivered at the last meeting of the body known as the "National Liberal Federation of India", he will find one Indian gentleman after another, some of whom had worked—and worked well—as Ministers in their own provinces, getting up to explain, laboriously and with obvious discomfort, why they are joining the agitation against the scheme of 1919. Clear as crystal is the fact that they are merely bowing before a storm of which they were afraid. And that storm, when you get down to the root of the matter, you will find to be a definite intellectual rejection of our whole scheme of reform by an eager and determined school of Hindu thought. Nothing less will adequately account for the vehemence of the opposition to our reforms in detail.

This view of the situation enables us to put recent events into their proper perspective. It explains the bewildering success of the non-co-operation movement among the masses. It explains the alacrity with which Mr. Gandhi adopted the Caliphate agitation as his own, and with which Hindu leaders preached patriotism from Moslem pulpits. It explains equally why non-co-operation was dropped and replaced by a policy of entering the councils in the hope of destroying them from inside, with the ruthless sequels that it has had in two of the Indian provinces.

And finally it explains the uncomfortable position into which the Moderates have been driven. Their head is with us, their heart with their compatriots. We urged them to form a political party, and they did so; but the Extremist pressure is now so great that they see no way of keeping their party together except by extracting some dramatic concession from the British Government, which will prove to the Indian public that their methods are more efficacious than those of the Swarajists. Hence their insistence on our failures and our bad faith. They hope that it

may have the result of urging the British people, with their imperfect knowledge of the facts and their scanty leisure, into some sort of blundering decision in favour of another big move forward, just to show that they mean well by India. If it fails, the Moderate leaders will at least have to their credit a great patriotic scheme, and its rejection will ensure them much popular sympathy in India. That the scheme in question is fundamentally opposed to the spirit of the policy enunciated by Parliament in 1919, they would admit. But they are no longer choosers, and if Swaraj becomes their spiritual home, they must save their self-respect by pretending that it is we who have hurried them back to it. One can understand their position and feel for their difficulties, but what they imminently need is to be helped against themselves.

**The Real Crux.**

Thus, after several detours we arrive at the real crux of the situation. If the argument leading up to it has been a little prolix, its purpose has been to enable us to face the organic cause of the trouble in India before we attempt to prescribe for it. To get drawn off into side issues is so easy. Much of the irritation which, all observers assure us, is felt to-day by British officials in the provinces against the central Government at Delhi is due to the fear that it is playing with great issues; attaching far too much importance to forensic triumphs in the legislature, to petty negotiations and adroit concessions, it seems to be shutting its eyes to the graver conflicts that are inevitable.

This may be so, or not; do not let us, at any rate, make the same mistake in this country, for it is in this country that the ultimate issue must be decided. Do not let us dispute over non-essentials. If the Act of 1919, or the regulations made under it, are being worked in any way contrary to the spirit of the programme which Parliament laid down, let us not hesitate to put the matter right: this is a subject on which

we are to have recommendations from a Committee now sitting under the presidency of Sir Alexander Muddiman. If dyarchy is conclusively shown to be intrinsically bad as a device for training ministers in administrative responsibility, let us get rid of it and search for some other system which will better fulfil that purpose.

Some writers talk vaguely of a generous concession to Indian sentiment, though it is not quite clear what they have in mind, unless it is the immediate grant of responsible government in provincial matters; and the exact operation of such a measure they have probably not thought out. Other authorities lean towards the idea of a Royal Commission. Though it may be a device to gain time, a Royal Commission is hardly likely to tell us much that we have not already heard. If, however, the Viceroy insists on a Royal Commission as the only means of bringing up to date the elaborate constitutional enquiry which Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford conducted in 1917-1918, by all means let him have it. Let us, in short, keep our own conscience absolutely clear of anything that may, wittingly or unwittingly, obstruct the course on which India has been launched.

But whether we change our procedure, or replace dyarchy by some other system of training, or embark on a further enquiry into India's discontents, do not let us for a moment imagine that we shall be placating the radical opposition to our remaining in India. Conferences, commissions, enquiries:—the Swarajists will join us in all these, but only as means to a greater end. For them there is no final settlement except one; and nothing must ever close our eyes to the fundamental issue which we must inevitably tackle, and the sooner the better. Are we to continue to press upon India our political ideals, with such guarantees and control as may be necessary to secure their attainment? Or are we to allow India to settle her own political future in her own way?

## III.

It is a momentous question. As Liberals, our *prima facie* impulse would be to give any nation the political freedom of choosing its own form of government, to admit its right to draw up its own Constitution without guidance from outside. On the other hand, we ought to recognise quite unmistakably that to give to India in her present frame of mind a freedom of choice is to toll the bell for the democratic principle. That India is unsuited for democratic institutions is a commonplace with competent observers, and it is quite probably the conclusion at which a Royal Commission would arrive if it had all the facts before it. It would be just as true to say that a mediæval town was unsuited for modern sanitation, in the sense that it had none of the apparatus on which modern sanitation insists.

India has none of the apparatus of democracy, and few dawnings of the democratic spirit; and consequently the ballot box and Parliamentary methods are not spontaneous growths in its political life. But just as a mediæval city could have been sanitated on modern lines (we have seen this miracle achieved with very little difficulty in that typical mediæval survival, Benares), even so can democracy be grafted in time and with patience on India's ancient social system. The method of grafting may have to be different from anything in our former experience: the fruit, when it is yielded, may be strange. But whether we are, or are not, to make the attempt is the question we have to decide.

Why, it may be asked, need it be assumed that India, if left to herself, would not adopt a democratic constitution? The answer is threefold. In the first place, although Mohammedan society is in theory, and to a considerable extent in practice, democratic, the exact reverse is true of Hindu society. It is stratified, with a clear-cut division of functions, with no equality

of opportunity, and with great rigidity in those social relations which in Western countries go far to mellow class distinctions.

In the second place, very little practical sympathy has been shown with any democratic movement by those who now wish to dispossess us. There were, of course, luminous exceptions like Mr. Ranade and Mr. Gokhale, and scattered groups of the younger men who have inherited their spirit show a genuine enthusiasm for social service and the spread of education among the lower orders. But the solid mass of orthodox Hinduism has hardly at all been leavened; we cannot forget its attitude to the Age of Consent Bill, or more recently the vehemence with which it assailed Mr. Basu's attempt to legalise inter-caste marriages. The whole basis of its philosophy of life is hostile: "the doctrine of Karma," writes Dr. Gilbert Slater, "politically is an anti-democratic force, as it tends to blunt indignation and nullify protests against social injustice. What valid objection is there to the privileged position of the Brahmin and the social degradation of the pariah, if the Brahmin was born a Brahmin because of his previous virtue, and the pariah a pariah either by way of promotion from a non-human existence, or as a penalty for sins committed as a member of a higher caste?"

The third part of my answer is that, among the manifestos and programmes of the Swarajists, one cannot find a breath of true democracy. "Back to the Vedas and the simple life" is a picturesque battle-cry; but it is more suited for an historical pageant than for the rough-and-tumble of modern conditions, and the Vedas do not, so far as one can remember, bestow on the proletariat anything beyond the duty of obedience. There can unfortunately be little doubt that the great majority of those who, if we retire from the task, would have

the framing and the working of a Constitution for India, would not approach the work with any predilection for democratic methods.

## Hindu Psychology.

It is of the first importance not to drift away from realities. To some it may appear that the foregoing argument gives too much attention to Hindu psychology and tradition, assumes too rigid a reaction to the complicated problems of to-day, forgets the solvent influences of one and a half centuries of British rule, and half a century of intensive Western education. That is precisely what would be unhelpful and un-Liberal. One has to dip, however, into Hindu psychology—one of the most ancient and unshaken racial characteristics in the world—in order to realise the intellectual foundations for what would be the political future of India if we ceased to take a hand in shaping it.

Also, it goes some way to explain the violence of the present reaction against us and our standards. It helps us to understand why the section of Indian leaders who originally co-operated with us, who believe in Western enlightenment, and who would still co-operate with us if they could, have found it increasingly difficult to withstand the pressure of the reactionaries and have been forced, under the guise of negotiations for a further advance, to put forward amendments of the Constitution which they know as well as we do, would be entirely destructive to its purpose. The British rule has effected profound changes in the Indian mind. It has made possible the school of progress which Mr. Gokhale led when he seceded from the National Congress. But progress, in the sense in which we understand it, is a tender plant, and it runs every risk of being strangled by older and more indigenous growths, unless we continue to foster it. If we do this in sincerity and good faith, the vehemence of the present reaction will in

time abate, and the more progressive instincts in the country will find their natural home at our side.

My first pillar, therefore, in a Liberal policy for India, is that we should stick to our work and not be cajoled into supporting any scheme, however plausible, which aims at bringing it to a premature conclusion. For we have not only to save what we have built up in India, but also to save India from a relapse into an unhappy past. If she breaks loose now, she will not head for the Golden Age of which her rhapsodists sing, but for disorder and terrible discomfort. To stand by and help, will not for us be wholly pleasant work. We have to live down this period of reaction and racial animosity; to overhaul our methods, it may be, and certainly our manners; and to be punctiliously careful of the exaggerated national consciousness and susceptibilities which have emerged from the recent turmoil. But all this will be forgotten in the consuming interest of the problems which we shall have to help India in solving.

## Outstanding Problems.

Let me enumerate very briefly some of those problems, with apologies to the many who are familiar with them. There are problems social, economic, and political: but the greatest of these are social. Take India's political difficulties first; it will suffice to mention only three. Foremost among them is the difficulty of building up national unity in a country with such a vast diversity of races and languages. At every possible point the difference between the mild, graceful Madrasi and the tall swashbuckler of the North is greater than between any two races in the length and breadth of Europe. The pressure of British domination and the use of English as a *lingua franca* have done most for unity hitherto; but, obviously, some of the less artificial ingredients of nationalism have yet to be developed into a more binding cement.

Second, if not equally complex, is the secular theme of Hindu *versus* Mohammedan, so well worn that I must not dilate on it. Here again the chafing against us brought about a temporary union, but among the leaders only. Nothing has yet been discovered which will keep the rank-and-file from periodical outbursts of riot and bloodshed. To subordinate to the common interest, on the one hand, the Moslem's contempt for the Hindu as an idolator, and on the other, the Hindu horror for certain of the Mohammedan religious rites, must be a slow process, coming from the people themselves, and not imposed from above. It means the spread of an educated public spirit in local affairs.

Third of the major political problems I would place the relations between British India and the Indian States. Dormant at present under the uniform rule of the Viceroy, this thorny question must grow in exact proportion as the provinces acquire independence of central control. It will ferment also in the States, for ideas have a habit of leaping political boundaries, and the old personal autocracy of the Ruling Princes may be profoundly affected by the changes in the adjoining areas of British India.

The economic group of problems can only be sketched in the barest outline. They include the relative inefficiency of India in labour, agriculture and industry,—relative in the sense that it must be radically modified before India can take its place with the Dominions or face foreign competition in the conversion of its raw products. Labour suffers from the miserable conditions of housing and nourishment among the workers, and from malaria, hookworm and other destructive diseases which ensue. Agriculture suffers from vicious tenures, from wasteful habits of tillage and manuring, and from the extraordinary fashion in which the individual holding is scattered, patch by patch, over the *Commune*. Industry suffers because the people have no habit of

saving, and there is the most rudimentary organisation of capital. A catalogue of the minor causes under all these heads would occupy a whole volume, and the remedy which chiefly obsesses the Indian politician at present is a high protective tariff. That is accordingly the next of the problems, and akin to it is the inveterate affection of almost every Indian in power for indirect, as opposed to direct, taxation. Most prominent in the municipal sphere, where it bears very hardly on the poorer classes, this prejudice is bound to give serious trouble in national finance.

In touching on the social problems, one is anxious not to say anything that would jar on Indian feelings. Every country has sides of its social life of which it is not proud; and it is not for us to throw stones. Similarly, prudence counsels us against the exaggeration with which superficial criticism is apt to condemn such archaic complexes as caste, the joint Hindu family, or the laws of inheritance. All of these have virtues, which we do not so readily identify as their more obvious defects; and the most that need be said is that, without altering the fundamentals, India has a wide field for reforming the incidentals in those ancient institutions. A less ancient institution—dating no further back, as all authorities agree, than the Mohammedan conquests—which even more urgently needs reform, is the treatment of Indian women.

There can be no hesitation in saying that nothing is more fatal to progress, more detrimental to the stamina of the race, or more injurious to a healthy social life, than the *purdah* system, or seclusion of women. In those areas and among those classes where it prevails, its adoption is regarded as a passport to respectability, so that there is a constantly growing vicious circle, if one may use such a word, of dysgenics. I have left to the last the question of education, because much that is wrong in the educational system is our own fault; but the problem of educating an

electorate into political intelligence is so vast that for present purposes the mere stating of it must be sufficient.

## The Driving Power of Democracy.

Having glanced at this formidable catalogue, or skeleton of a catalogue, of the obstacles which lie in the path of India's progress, let us ask ourselves whether any other spirit but that of democracy can bring light if it moves over the face of those dark and turbid waters. There can be only one answer. Whether Hindu and Moslem are to be reconciled, or the conditions of labour are to be ameliorated, or the lot of women to be brightened, the driving power must be the will of the people themselves, based upon a reasoned conviction that there is wrong which can be righted.

My second pillar in a Liberal policy is, therefore, that we must resolutely pursue our policy of teaching India democratic methods, in the hope of generating the democratic spirit. Here again we must be vigilant against plausible imitations which aim at a wholly different goal. Such is, it seems to me, the Constitution of Mysore, which Lord Ronaldshay described sympathetically in the *Nineteenth Century* of July, 1924. With a profession of consulting the people, it hands over the ultimate legislative power to experts, which is probably a synonym for Brahmins. In preference, therefore, to any of the alternative schemes thus far advanced, we Liberals should do well to press for at least the maintenance of the 1919 structure until we have the results of the Parliamentary enquiry which is due in 1929. That enquiry will tell us if, and where and why, the democratic principle has failed. Personally, I have never concealed the fear that it is handicapped by the vast size and complexity of the areas which, for haphazard historical reasons, are at present the units of administration. An enlightened democracy is an ideal for which we can cheerfully

work in a homogeneous area like Sindh or Orissa ; it is a very difficult proposition in an area like the province of Bombay with at least four, or Madras with at least three, distinctive racial and linguistic divisions. That, however, is only one indication of the many issues to be explored, as experience is gained, in the search for a simpler inlet for the living waters of democracy.

The erection of the two main pillars on which we are to build—a steadfast co-operation with India in the cause of progress, and the pursuit of that progress on democratic lines—leaves us an easy task in completing the arch of a Liberal policy. The stones of the arch are the various measures of advance in which we can usefully take a part. Allusion has been made to some of them and, with rare exceptions which must be left to the people themselves, there are very few in which our experience and impartiality will fail to be of great practical use, particularly in such matters as the fair treatment of minorities and the development of a rational system of education.

The cement which connects the different parts of the structure must continue to be the public services, carrying out in a reasonable spirit the policy, sometimes a little crude and impetuous, of the new executives, sheltering the masses from the mistakes of their legislators, and helping them to realise their power as voters. This will be mainly the work of the younger men, who come to it without memories of the earlier, strenuous but pleasant days of service in India, when the permanent officials virtually ruled. And to this end we must get the best material that either England or India can provide, while for at least a generation we must have an adequate ingredient of first-rate Englishmen.

And for the keystone of the arch, what shall we have ? What but a spirit of sympathy with India in her difficulties, and a sincere and unselfish desire to help her through them ? After ages of fierce discord

and patient suffering, she put her destinies in the hands of Britain, and we have now promised to endow her with the machinery for creating a government chosen by the people and responsive to the people's needs. It is for us Liberals, who believe that such a government is the best, to see that the machinery is made effective. But we can do more. By co-operating with those who are willing to man the new machinery, we can convince them that we are genuinely working for a time when they will be able to control it without our assistance.

To come down from the abstract to the concrete, and thus to conclude the argument, what I recommend is that the Liberal Party should now mark out a clear line of policy, and seek an early opportunity of defining it publicly. For what India needs at the moment as badly as anything is a frank statement of Great Britain's attitude and intentions, something more precise than the well-meant but indeterminate message recently sent out by the present Prime Minister.

In such a statement we should include at least the following essentials: We adhere to the policy defined and embodied in the Act of 1919. We shall reject any attempt to vary the main structure of that policy before the statutory enquiry of 1929 matures, though we are ready in the meantime to consider sympathetically any modification in detail or in procedure that may be advisable to give better effect to the spirit in which that policy was conceived. Meanwhile we must assent without hesitation to the free employment of the special safeguards which the 1919 Act provided against such efforts as are now being made to render the policy unworkable. All questions of form apart, we mean to assist India in working out a democratic basis for her own future, and we cannot regard any other basis as sufficient justification for a further advance towards self-government. We support the *modus vivendi* for the public services

which is proposed in the unanimous report of the Commission over which Lord Lee of Fareham presided. We support every measure for removing racial privilege in India, and for encouraging the new-born self-respect of her people. And our help and experience are at her command in tackling the many problems that must be solved before she can fall into comfortable line with the other Dominions of our Empire.

Given a definite pronouncement on those lines, the Liberal Party can render great service to India by using its influence with the more moderate Indian leaders—and as a party it still has much influence with them—and inducing them to throw their weight into the scale of common sense, to drop the vain quest for an immediate millennium, to undertake the duties which the Constitution offers them, and thus to qualify themselves for the increased responsibilities which we all hope are awaiting them.

*Address given by* LORD MESTON K.C.S.I., *at the Liberal Summer School at Oxford, August,* 1924.