

7. PRACTICE OF THE NEW PROGRAMME.

The Partition of Bengal convinced the politicians that mere public meetings and protests would not do. The overwhelming pressure of verbal agitation left the Government cold. Action was necessary, not mere words; action which may adequately give expression to the tense state of excitement of the public mind, and which may rouse the Government to a more vivid sense of the reality of the situation. The whole character of political life changed with the change of the character of nationalism behind it. The old political formulæ and methods—the methods of petition and protest—proved bankrupt. The people had an object lesson before them of the utter ineffectiveness of the political agitation on the old prescribed lines of the Liberal Party. The old leaders were simply dragged into new situations by the force of circumstances, but they felt themselves very uncomfortable in the new environment. Their policy was "Safety first": but if you place safety in the forefront of your programme, you generally achieve nothing especially when new and unprecedented situations make new and unprecedented calls. But the popular unrest instead of proving a stimulus to the Moderate politician proved a drag: the Moderate leader found himself more and more one with the authorities and more and more estranged from the popular feelings. He was accustomed to see the vision of a unified nation in the Congress-hall or small meeting-halls of big cities. He could not face the vision of this new nation,—excited, moving, demanding action. Here was a first-class opportunity for great leaders to shape and mould in their own way into lasting forms this new life, which made itself felt in the nation. But the Congress leaders were not made of the heroic mould: and they allowed the leadership of the country to pass into the hands of the Extremists.

The Partition brought together on a common platform poets like Tagore, Judges like Sir Gurudas, and distinguished noblemen and landlords like the Maharajas of Mymensingh and Kasimbazar. Yet Lord Curzon had the audacity to say that the agitation against the Partition was "manufactured."

The limit then was reached of the possibilities of this type of constitutional agitation; and the demand for action—prompt and effective action—spontaneously arose in the public mind. On the 7th of August, 1905, a large public meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall under the presidency of Maharaja of Kasimbazar declared "a general boycott of British goods as a protest against the proposed partition". On the 16th of October, 1905, the Partition came into force. On that day, "immense numbers of people in the two divisions of the partitioned province abstained from lighting their kitchen fire, went about barefooted, performed ceremonial baths in rivers or sacred tanks, and tied on one another's wrist the sacred *rakhi*, a piece of silk or cotton thread, as a symbol of fraternal unity".

The idea of boycott was a radical departure in Indian politics. There was the idea at first to adopt it as a temporary measure, as a protest against the arbitrary imposition of the Partition, with a view to bring pressure upon the British public opinion. The Chinese were just then organising a successful boycott of American goods as a protest against the exclusion of the Chinese immigrants into the U. S. A. It was at first decided to abstain from the purchase of British manufactures so long as the Partition Resolution was not withdrawn. But the pledges sent from Calcutta came back duly signed by large numbers of people, with the condition "until Partition is withdrawn" scored through.

The idea of Swadeshism was in the air : and it was felt that boycott should be used not merely as a political weapon against a political wrong, but also as an economic weapon against an economic wrong. It was meant to give that measure of protection which indigenous enterprise badly required against the economic exploitation of the country by the foreigner.

It is the volume of public feeling behind this movement that made it a success. Boycott and Swadeshi told immediately and effectively—both in the way of disturbing the demand for British manufactured goods, and creating both the demand and the supply of India-made goods. The '*Englishman*'—an Anglo-Indian Calcutta paper—wrote: "It is absolutely true that Calcutta warehouses are full of fabrics that cannot be sold. Many prominent Marwari firms have been absolutely ruined, and a number of the biggest European import houses have had either to close down their piece-goods branch, or to put up with a very small business where they previously had a large one...In boycott the enemies of the Raj have found a most effective weapon for injuring British interests in the country..." "The question is, however, what is the Government going to do about it? Boycott must not be acquiesced in, or it will more surely ruin British connection with India than an armed revolution." The '*Statesman*'—another English paper—wrote: "It would be unwise for the Government to assume that the whole movement is mere froth and insincerity. On the contrary, it has been apparent that the people of the province are learning other and more powerful methods of protest. The Government will recognise the new note of practicality which the present situation brought into political agitation."

The Industrial revival followed : and a new impetus was given to the indigenous enterprise in India. New

factories sprang up: new insurance companies were started: and the industrialisation of the country on modern lines went forward. It was hard for the people to go in for the rough and costly Swadeshi articles in preference to cheap refined foreign goods. But once the great national impulse was roused, it worked wonders. The Swadeshi sentiment became the greatest constructive force in all departments of thought and life. The students in schools and colleges refused in many cases to touch the examination books made of foreign paper. To appear in a class in foreign dress became very dangerous. Women surpassed men in their national enthusiasm. Surendranath Bannerjee refers to the case of his grand-daughter of five returning a pair of shoes sent by a relative of hers, because they were of foreign make. In some districts, the Government officers could not get a piece of Manchester cloth because the cloth-dealers would not sell it, unless they had permission from the local leaders.

The most remarkable thing about the movement is not the greater demand for indigenous articles; but the birth of a new sentiment, seeking expression in concrete ways, and making itself felt in all departments of life. It became a period of general renaissance. A new literature sprang up. The cry "*Bande Mataram!*" ("Hail Mother!") became the symbol of the new movement, not only in Bengal but all over India. The greatest contribution of this movement is the spirit of creativeness which it released in the nation. "When the public is roused by any stirring event, its hidden springs touched, and its slumbering forces set in motion by some great calamity or by the passionate desire to work out a cherished ideal, promising to unfold a new chapter in a nation's history, the moral atmosphere becomes fruitful under the pressure of the ideas: for the mind of the whole community is at work, and makes its contribution to the sum total of national thought."

National schools and colleges sprang up to receive students, who were thrown out of the Government schools under the disciplinary rules and regulations adopted with a view to check the manifestations of the new spirit both in and out of educational institutions, and to give them a training suitable to the new demands. The papers like the *Samdhya* and the *Bande Mataram*, started by the Extremist leaders, began to effect a rapid revolution in people's minds.

The Government found that its prestige was at stake, and began to take vigorous measures to combat this new mentality. In the Barisal district, the Superintendent of Police and the Collector could not buy a piece of Manchester cloth, because there the orders of Ashwini Kumar Dutt were better obeyed on these matters than the wishes of the officials. Sir William Bamfylde Fuller found that even in his presence as a Lieutenant-Governor, the people continued to give ovations to the national leaders, and at one Railway Station, it is said that even the railway porters refused to touch his luggage. He resolved to use force. The Gurkha troops were sent to Barisal to crush the movement: outrages on the people by the troops were reported: and the people had to maintain calm under grave provocation. The Bengal Provincial Conference was broken up by the order of the magistrate. Thus repression began, the press was gagged to some extent, and a regular tug of war began between the Government and the nationalist forces. In 1907 came the deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai—a Punjab leader. The cry of Bal-Pal-Lal was heard everywhere. These were the national heroes of the hour: B. C. Pal of Bengal, B. G. Tilak from Poona and Lala Lajpat Rai from the Punjab. Arobindo Ghose was in a way the greatest intellectual and spiritual exponent of the movement: B. C. Pal gave an intellectual formulation of the underlying ideals of the movement,

Lala Lajpat Rai gave us a more realistic analysis, both political and economic, of all the outstanding issues in the terms of this new nationalism, while Lokmanya Tilak remained the head of the Party: for his was the courage, the capacity for martyrdom, and the strong will-power which would not yield or bend to the opposing forces, however formidable they might look.

8. APPEAL TO THE GOLDEN PAST.

The prophets of this new nationalism started with a definite reading of the past Indian history. For them, Indian history did not begin with 1757 and 1857: neither the Battle of Plassey, nor the reconquest of India after the Mutiny and the assumption of the sovereignty of India by the King in Parliament, were the starting-points of the rise of the Indian people. The Moderates looked not to the past, but to the future: to them the past was a thing to be forgotten, and the sooner it was forgotten, the better. This attitude was not shared by all the Moderates: but the summary way in which they have generally disposed of the past almost implies it. But the new nationalists looked not only beyond the British period of Indian history, but also beyond the Mahomedan period of Indian History to a very great extent. The grandeur of the historic past was occasionally invoked by orators like Surendranath Bannerjee; but on the whole the tendency of the Indian Liberals was to dwell mostly on the present and the future rather than on the past. But this new Party went much deeper into history: and connected the Hindus of to-day at least in historic imagination with the Hindus of the Vedic times, of the age of the Mahabharata, of the age of Asoka and Chandra Gupta. It was largely under the influence of these nationalists that a new school of Indian history arose, which has been concentrating its attention upon the glories of the Golden