

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NATIVE STATES

THE Native State is a sovereignty in which the Crown shares to a varying extent, but in every case the foreign relations of the State are the concern of the British Government. Also the internal administration of the State would at once become a matter of Imperial interference were it to be considered subversive to the interests of either British or native subjects, or were its tranquillity to be threatened either by bad government or turbulence. It cannot make war; it cannot bind itself to its neighbours. If its subjects are aggrieved against a foreign power, that is a matter for the British Government, not for the Native State. The protecting authority both of the subjects of Native States abroad and of those of Foreign States in the Native States is the British Government. The degree to which the Native sovereignty extends has been determined by no general principle, but by historical accident, the size and importance of the States themselves, the terms of the treaties made between the Imperial Government and the Native rulers, other agreements and usages.

The Nizam of Hyderabad is the first of these rulers and exercises the maximum of power. He issues his own coinage, has a free hand as to taxation, and has absolute powers of life and death. Some of the rulers of the smaller States have little more than minor judicial powers and immunity from British taxation.

As a symbol and embodiment of British sovereignty and its responsibilities, there are political officers and residents in every Native State, and cantonments of troops are stationed

at suitable places. These complicated relationships also necessitate judicial arrangements which vary considerably from State to State. On the other hand, the rulers have accepted obligations to provide a certain force of troops which could be used for purposes of Imperial defence. Before the war broke out there were about 22,000 of these troops and they were placed unreservedly at the disposal of the Imperial authorities.

Of these States there are nearly 700, they occupy territory of 675,267 square miles, or well over one-third of the whole country, and their population is 70,000,000 or about two-ninths of the total for India. Their population is in no way different to that of British India ; they are simply the remnants of the estates held by the rulers which for one reason or another we attached without annexing as we spread from the sea to the mountain barriers. Our friends we protected, our enemies we absorbed. The Dalhousie policy of annexation was heroic, but really neither side wanted it. It was in the interest of the Native ruler to make peace with us ; it was in our interest to leave him responsible for the administration of his State, provided he did not conspire against us and did his work of ruling tolerably well. We kept as a power in the background, and well in the shade out of sight. We had our representatives at the courts, and they were consulted by and advised the princes, reported to the Government and took instructions from it. But the dignity of the princes was maintained and their responsibility was real, even when they were too lazy and too self-indulgent to exercise it. That was a definite policy, and so, when the Queen assumed the title of Empress of India, Mr. Gladstone was particularly anxious to receive from Mr. Disraeli a pledge that the new regal dignity would in no way detract from that of the Indian princes, and the pledge was given.

The Indian prince did not always respond satisfactorily to the new conditions of luxurious security in which he found himself under our wing. Nothing drew from him energy

and activity. He was secure in his State, he had an ample income, he had prestige and authority amongst his subjects, he had a bad upbringing and a deteriorated and deteriorating *entourage*, he had no traditions of public usefulness to spur him. He did not belong as a rule to a very old family, and his State had come to him by conquest or favour. His conception of himself was that of a tax-receiver surrounded by plotters and schemers, by flatterers and traitors; that of a god ministered to by hangers-on. He could not understand that there was any difference between the income of his State and his own. It was his private possession managed by agents. His court was too often a maze of crookedness and sensuousness, in which women generally played the leading part, and through which he sank into physical, mental, and moral decay. The peace and protection of Britain brought the Native State to the condition of a fever-stricken morass where diseased nature was prolific and gorgeous to the eye, but rotten at the core and feeding on corruption. And British interests and influence not infrequently increased the corruption. Such was the parlous transition stage through which the Native State had to pass whilst its rulers were being taught their duties and responsibilities as the heads of their people and the vassals of British rule, and whilst we were deciding whether we should take it from them or teach them better ways.

Recently there has been a great change for the better. British policy has been directed to pressing the Chief to make himself responsible for the government of his State, and a new type of Native ruler is arising. In him there is still a love of the pomp and luxury of the past, but his mind has been moulded and his outlook changed by contact with the education of the West and its conceptions of the good ruler and good government. The Chiefs' Colleges at Ajmeer, Rajkot, Indore and Lahore have played their part (though on the whole a disappointing one), but of much more importance has been the general political atmosphere of India, the known views of the British Government, the personal contact between Delhi

and the Native rulers. Whoever looks at the reports of administration issued from such States as those of Hyderabad, Mysore and Gwalior will see on every page, not only the stamp of the West, but the hand and mind of the East.

Saving for a short relapse during Lord Curzon's viceroyalty, the Native rulers are being encouraged more and more to do their own work, in accordance with the spirit of the British sovereignty no doubt, but as people sharing that spirit and believing in its wisdom. In this connection, Lord Minto said some pacificatory things to undo the evil that Lord Curzon had left behind him, but his successor Lord Hardinge widened the Minto declarations into principles of policy. At Jodhpur, for instance, when, as almost one of the last acts of his rule, he invested the Maharaja of Jodhpur with ruling powers, he said: "We have recognised that if a State is to be ruled justly and well, and to be a source of real help to the British Empire, it is only through the ruler himself supported by his sardars and people that these results can be obtained. Irsome restrictions on the exercise of sovereign powers are apt to chafe and irritate a proud and sensitive spirit, with results disastrous not only to the ruler and his people, but also to the Empire at large. We have, therefore, made it our aim to cultivate close and friendly relations with the ruling princes, to show by every means that we trust them and look on them as helpers and colleagues in the great task of Imperial rule, and so to foster in them a spirit of responsibility and pride in their work which no external supervision can produce. Trust begets trust and I rejoice to say that in my dealings with the ruling princes in India I have never found my confidence misplaced."

These are wise words, and they indicate the policy which has been pursued quite definitely since Lord Curzon left India. One of the reasons why Lord Hardinge was attracted to Delhi as his capital and why in the building of the new Imperial city he urged plans and expenditure on what seemed to be a scale of only too characteristically oriental extrava-

gance, was that he might be nearer to the Native States and thus be more frequently in their minds, and that the seat of government might appeal to them as truly Indian in its grandeur. One has only to look at a political map of India to see how Delhi lies in the midst of what is still native in India, and that when the British Government went there it seemed to cut itself off from the alien settlements of British race and merge itself in the dreams, in the ruins, in the traditions that to the great mass of the people are India. It may be that the bureaucracy will defy the dreams, spoil the ruins, and enslave the traditions; but this in any event is certain, that, supposing by some miracle there were established in India an Indian Government sensitive to the thoughts of the people and wishful to regenerate them, it could not make the great coast cities its home: from its very nature it would seek prestige, authority, and appropriateness in Delhi or in some similar place where the spirit of India still broods—though it be amongst tombs.

The problem presented by these States is not an easy one to settle. Some, like Hyderabad, are as large as a European State; some, like Mysore and Baroda, are almost as enlightened in their government; some, like Gwalior, show a complete identification of ruler and people on a liberal basis equal to that of not a few Western Governments; some, like the Rajput States, are far more ancient than any existing European monarchy and have preserved a dignity and a pride which bankrupt those of any reigning European house.

Obviously, whoever tries to piece into a system the whole administration of India must begin his work by endeavouring not only to preserve these States, but to make their autonomy more complete. The very widespread British opinion that the Native State is a backward and inefficient Government is sheer vanity. In Hyderabad, a Mohammedan shows how to reconcile Mohammedan and Hindu loyalty, and in Gwalior a Hindu ruler does the same; in Baroda, Bikanir, Travancore, and elsewhere, we have magnificent pioneering

work done in education ; in Mysore, experiments in education and popular government have outstripped our own. Some have more enlightened marriage laws, some have gone farther than we have in protecting the judiciary from undue executive influence, some have shown us the way to establish a flexible system of Income Tax. All teach us wisdom in land taxation, the patronage of the arts (whatever their mistakes may be, they have not made the unpardonably fatal one of crushing or starving out the arts), industrial progress. None of any consequence are opposed to political progress (except in one instance or two where the rulers are old, and I know of no case where their successors will be adverse to change)—certainly none will resist a good British example in this respect ; and the most enlightened of them very justly complain that we have held them back. All, within recent years, have shown great advances in the purity of their administration. It is certainly a profound mistake to identify the survival of a gorgeous ceremony and a court ritual of dazzling trappings with the politics of the times when personal power and tyrannical wills expressed themselves in that way. This truth was borne in upon me with great force one day whilst staying at one of these courts. I had seen much of the ruler and we had discussed every Western political movement from women's suffrage to Socialism. He was interested in them all and held opinions upon them which showed that none of them were new to him. But one fine morning there was a State ceremony. The velvets and the jewels, the gold and the silks, the scimitars and the headgear were brought out, and the mind which was discussing Socialism the night before was animating a body clothed in the pomp of ancient days, ancient authority, and ancient ideas. This is the incongruity of India, but let no cynical or superficial mind imagine that the incongruity goes very far below the surface.

The head of the Native State is just as likely to be progressive nowadays as the British bureaucracy, but, quite apart from that, the advantages of indigenious government are so

apparent, and the freedom and confidence which indigenous administration enjoys—things, for instance, can be done by Indian rulers which would not be tolerated at the hands of a foreign authority—are so useful that not only ought the Native State to be preserved, but, were that at all possible, it ought to be multiplied, and, subject to their administration responding in a general way to the changes that must be made in Indian administration, the existing States should have more powers of self-government. In any event, far greater care should be taken in selecting Residents—those representatives of the Imperial authority who reside in the capital cities of these States and act as tutors and guardians, as well as mere advisers, to their Chiefs. These men too often are devoid of the qualities which fit them for the delicate and difficult office which they fill, and their influence tends to stifle both initiative and sense of responsibility in Chiefs who perhaps at best have but little of either, but who under certain types of Residents lose what little they have.<sup>1</sup>

It is quite absurd to say that self-government is incompatible with the status of Chiefs in these States in view of the oft-expressed views or practices of the rulers of Mysore, Baroda, Alwar, and others. Indeed, Indian self-government would receive the hearty support of these personages. What, then, ought to be the relation between these States and the Indian Government, between the Chiefs and their Durbars and Councils on the one hand, and the Viceroy and the Indian Legislature on the other ?

The States are at different levels of political evolution, and that for the moment bars a uniform treatment. But considering how much the Indian Legislature influences Native State policy—the States, for instance, have no tariff liberty, no separate system of posts and telegraphs,

<sup>1</sup> “The attitude of the political officer, while ordinarily deferential in form (though even that is sometimes lacking), is the attitude of a servant who directs his nominal master, haughty, polite, impertinent, and ironical” (Chailley, *Problems of British India*, p. 259).

and so on—the States should be represented, at any rate for advisory purposes, on the Imperial Indian Legislature as federated communities, and, where they have Legislatures and Councils themselves, these Legislatures or Councils should select the representatives.

It would be a mistake to put the Chiefs into organic relations with the Indian Government. That could only be done by either lowering their dignity or confusing the nature of the Government. Rather, the Chiefs together with the Governors of Provinces should meet in consultative Council, say once a year, to discuss matters of common interest and co-ordinate policy, so far as that is advisable, but not to come to any binding decisions. Their meeting should be like that of the crowned heads of Europe, and every encouragement should be given to individual Chiefs to meet and consult at other times. This should be done without waiting for representations on the Imperial Legislative Council, as that for the moment may not be practical. Full recognition should be given to these rulers in all matters of Imperial concern, and their status of dignity and responsibility should be put in an unquestionable place in the minds of the Indian Government.

Two important matters arise, however, in connection with these proposals. The first is, that they modify the theory that these States secure their independence only by refraining from interfering in the affairs of British India; the second is a presupposition that the States are sufficiently large and important to justify the distinction proposed for them and their Chiefs.

The first point is really not one of substance. The Government of India cannot do anything without influencing these States, and it is far better to recognise the fact formally. The Imperial Legislature will not deal with strictly Provincial matters, and the presence upon it of several State representatives will increase rather than confuse its efficiency for the work it has to do, even if it may be desirable to withhold the power of voting on certain classes of subjects from these



representatives. It would be impracticable for each State to be represented, but the States could form an electoral college for the choice of a certain number of representatives for the life of each Legislature.

The second point is one of greater difficulty. The status of States now varies enormously. Some have direct access to the Government of India, some have not; the relations of some are with the Indian, of others with the Provincial, Government; some are clearly independent, others are as clearly not; there is the Old India party and the New India party; Chiefs who still live in the Middle Ages and Chiefs up to date in habits, dress, religion, and political ideas; there is Udaipur and Baroda, there is the State of Nabha and the State of Gwalior; there are rulers educated at English Universities, and rulers educated in the female quarters. Obviously there must be a classification and grading of States. This, indeed, ought to be made in any event, and should be done by a Committee upon which the States are themselves represented—by a Committee which will be directed to pursue the federal idea and to improve the status of States, wherever that is possible. When this is done—and not until this is done—many of the fears which disturb the minds of the ruling Chiefs that they are to lose their authority, that the strained interpretations put upon treaties by the Indian Government when dealing with weak rulers may be extended to all, and similar suspicions which are now perfectly justified, will be removed for good. The continued liberty of the Native State and of its ruler does not depend upon a loose connection, but upon a constitutionally defined relationship within a federated India.