

CHAPTER XV

INDIA AND THE EMPIRE

THE Indian is proud to belong to the British Empire. Its greatness appeals to his love of pageantry, and its very remoteness from him endows it with a majesty which in all soberness does not belong to it. We pride ourselves on the peace and justice we have given to India, but they form only a barren soil for gratitude. The Empire appeals to the Indian's imagination and creates in him the spirit of loyalty. To be a citizen of such an Empire supplements and modifies his ideas of nationality. But to him British citizenship means more than the circumstances warrant. He regards the Empire as a homogeneous whole, governed from a centre, with common liberties, and rights of citizenship. South Africa and Australia, he thinks, ought to be as much his native political soil as Madras or Burma. I was in India during the troubles between Indians and the Union Government of South Africa in 1913, and I found that this assumption of Imperial homogeneity, with Parliament as the supreme authority, was universally made. It not only did service on platforms, but in private conversation. To try to correct it seemed to be robbing the Indian of one of his most treasured possessions and wounding him in his most sensitive parts. Immediately after the Indian trouble in South Africa came the high-handed deportation from that country of certain labour leaders, and the revelation of the impotence of the House of Commons in protecting the liberties of white men in the Dominions made an understanding of the constitutional position easier to Indians. Up to then there was a widespread opinion in India

that the Home Government was careless of Indian rights and shared the prejudices of South Africa, but the deportations showed that a mere neglect of Indian interests and a disregard of Indian sensitiveness were not the cause of Imperial impotence in the control of Dominion policy. The Indians were taught that British citizenship was not what they imagined it to be.

That Indians wish to claim a full Imperial citizenship is shown by the case of the *Komagata Maru*. This ship was dispatched with 400 Indians on board from Shanghai in 1914 to deposit its passengers at Vancouver and thus challenge the validity of the Canadian immigration laws and test the right of Indians as British subjects to land in Canada. The promoters of the expedition were characterised by the Viceroy in the Legislative Council¹ as "culpably responsible," but, whether that is so or not, this is surely a case where motives count for everything, and here the motive was wholly reasonable and praiseworthy. It was precisely the same motive as was making India at the time rally to the Empire's standard in the European war. The Canadian Courts upheld the law, the Indians were deported, and after suffering and trouble got home aggressively discontented.

The self-government enjoyed by our Dominions limits the scope and meaning of British citizenship. Economic and geographical circumstances have led the Dominions to adopt certain protective policies directed to securing the purity of the white race and a high standard of living, and this double intention has produced a series of immigration laws which must offend the Indian.

I was in British Columbia shortly after the first batch of Indian emigrants—mostly Sikhs—landed there in 1905, and I remember the disturbed feelings which then existed. But it was said they would not be a success. They were manual labourers chiefly engaged, if I remember aright, as wood porters, and it was supposed that the work was too hard for

¹ September 28th, 1914.

them. But they stayed, and their numbers reached 6,000 in about a year. They became agriculturalists too, and began to 'amass property.' By 1907 British Columbia became alarmed, and pressed the Dominion Government to take action. Next year, Mr. Mackenzie King, the Deputy Minister for Labour, at Ottawa, came to London to discuss with the Imperial authorities the question of further Indian immigration. The points he urged were that Indians were not suited for Canada, and could not really settle there without much suffering and privation, and that their presence in Canada as low-paid workers might reduce white standards of living and lead to trouble. In the end, in 1910, Orders in Council were issued prohibiting the landing of Asiatics in Canada unless they possessed of their own right 200 dollars, and had come direct and on a ticket issued in the country of their birth or citizenship. This is one of those politically crooked ways of doing something which one does not wish to do straightforwardly. There is no direct communication between India and Canada, so the effect of the Orders was to prohibit further Indian immigration. The wives and children of emigrants already settled in Canada were subject to the Orders. The result has been that the Indian population has fallen from 6,000 to 4,500. Whilst this has been going on, Chinese and Japanese have entered Canada under treaty rights and less restrictive legislation. The Japanese can enter if possessed of 50 dollars; the Chinese, on paying a tax of 500 dollars. They can take wives and children with them, but only three Indian women have been allowed in as an act of grace. The position is summed up by a writer in an Indian review as follows: ¹ "The result is that the Japanese and Chinese, who are the subjects of a foreign Government, are admitted on easy terms, while Indians, who own allegiance to the same King-Emperor, are in practice entirely excluded. It is a cruel irony of fate that British citizenship should be a disqualification in Canada." Out of these circumstances arose the *Komagata*

¹ *The Indian Review*, February 1915.

Maru case, and then the war stifled the agitation for the time being.

The South African case was the most famous, as it not only brought the Indians of South Africa into serious conflict with the Government, but called for the employment of great diplomatic and official skill in its settlement. Indians went to South Africa first of all in 1860 as indentured labourers on Natal sugar plantations, and when their indentures expired they settled in the country and began to engage in petty trade. They were not only made welcome, but it was recognised that without them important Natal industries could not be carried on. The opposition which, however, speedily grew up against them was both racial and economic, the first being most conspicuous in the Transvaal, where the most degrading requirements were demanded of them, and where they were "classed with thieves, prostitutes, and other undesirables." The economic opposition was the moving impulse in Natal. When I was in Durban in 1902, complaints were loud against their presence, and invariably the reason given was that they were ousting their white competitors in trades like those of dealing in fruit and fowls. Similar complaints made in the Transvaal were used to justify the passing of the restrictive legislation of 1885, which was held up to our ill-informed people at home as one of the justifications for the Boer War.

In the autumn of 1906 the passive resistance movement began in South Africa owing to the introduction of a grievous Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance, and over 2,500 Indians were speedily sent to prison. Devastation seemed to have fallen on the community. Men of substance cheerily suffered ruin, women stood by the men, families were broken and homes destroyed. But with a courage and determination which have not yet received due praise, the Indians stood to their oath and their fellows. Europeans who backed them shared in their prosecutions. Then negotiations opened, promises were made by the Government, and the Indians consented to resume their usual avocations and wait a redress of

grievances. The promises were broken. A Bill embodying them was drafted but never passed. There were squabbles as to the conditions of the promise. Then Mr. Gokhale visited South Africa, and there were again squabbles as to what had been said to him. The Immigration Act of 1913, to which the Indians took strong exception, reopened the conflict, and there was nothing for it but that the Indians should again resort to resistance. The usual prosecutions and persecutions followed and serious rioting broke out. The scandal was too disgraceful to be borne. South Africa was carrying its right of self-government to lengths which were offensive to British notions. A brave and opportune pronouncement on the subject by Lord Hardinge, much censured at the time in some quarters and certainly employing a freedom of criticism hitherto unknown, allayed the feeling in India, and a Commission was appointed to report upon the whole matter.¹ Ultimately legislation was carried, aided by the changed feelings which came with the war, and there is now peace.²

Australia also prohibits the free entry of Indians.³

The exclusion policy of our Dominions was felt all the more keenly by Indians because it was also being pursued by the United States, and the Imperial Government could not object to a foreign Government doing what its own Dominions were doing.

Just as the last century was closing, Indian labourers appeared on the American Pacific Coast. They had wandered eastwards through Burma, the Malay Straits, China, and the

¹ *Report of the Indian Inquiry Commission*, Cd. 7265, 1914.

² As this book goes to the press, it looks as though the trouble were to break out again. The European competitors in trade never accepted the settlement, and in June 1919 a Bill was introduced into the Union Parliament, making it illegal for Indians to acquire gold-properties unless they held them on May 1, 1919, and also extending the provisions of the Oppressive Act of 1885 so that not only individual Asiatics were forbidden to hold real property, but companies in which Asiatics "have a controlling interest." The second provision was in the end omitted, but the whole controversy, including the question of the good faith of the Government, has apparently been reopened.

³ In round figures there are 3,000 Indians in Canada and 5,000 in Australia; 8,000 were annually recruited under indenture for colonies.

Philippines, and when they came to America at last, they found an anti-Chinese and -Japanese agitation on foot. The American workmen regarded the first Indian arrivals as the pioneers of a new invasion of cheap labour and low living standards. For years opposition grew, inspired by the Trade Unions, and at length in 1907 rioting broke out in the State of Washington, and attempts were made to rule Indians out of the benefits of American citizenship. This has been practically done.

Elsewhere, as in Trinidad and British Guiana, Jamaica and Fiji, an utterly pernicious system of indentured coolie labour has prevailed, devastating to the bodies and the souls of Indians, attended in particular by wholesale prostitution. This has been the subject of several important official and unofficial reports which have roused the greatest resentment in India, with the result that indentured emigration has now been prohibited.

These impediments and prohibitions are, as a matter of fact, and are keenly felt by Indians to be, a grievous insult to their race. Since the war began, certain colonial newspapers have been writing in a more reasonable tone about Indian immigration, but I doubt if the prejudices and the arguments against it have been allayed in any great measure in consequence of anything that has happened during the war. The emotion of a white Australia, the fears of highly paid labour, racial antagonism, are all likely to persist and to make themselves felt in the future as they have done in the past. If India had a sufficient power of self-government to deal with the matter itself, it would settle it in its own way and would probably devise some scheme of economic retaliation against offending States, whilst prohibiting emigration under improper conditions. The whole question, however, broadens itself out into a conflict between the Asiatic and the European races, and the champion on the Asiatic side will be Japan and not India—the actual problem will be the Chinaman and not the Hindu. Into what proportions it is to develop, who can say ?

Regarding the conflicts which it is to raise, who can prophesy? This, however, no one who knows the facts can doubt. Asia will not submit to exclusion from the North American Continent and the islands of the Pacific Seas, and therefore exclusion is as short-sighted as it is unjust. It is accumulating a weight of resentment which will one day be let loose and perhaps be the signal for the greatest conflict which the world has ever known.

So far as our Empire is concerned, the recognition of India as a partner in Imperial Conferences¹ and the grant of a measure of real self-government are the first steps toward a solution of this problem. It will never be solved by "the good offices" of Downing Street, but by the independent authority of an India which enjoys in the Empire the same dignity and respect as one of the British-populated Dominions. That it must enjoy such a position is inevitable from one fact alone. So long as the Imperial governing authority was the ancient Home Country and the historical British Parliament, India might have been consoled in its subjection because it held in high honour the sovereign power. But so soon as there was an Imperial partnership of Home Country and Dominions, India felt the change in its heart. It has grievances against the Dominions;² it will not pay homage to them. Subjection to Great Britain in the Empire was tolerable; subjection to the Empire is intolerable. So India must be a partner, must sit on the Board of Directors, must have a voice and a vote in Imperial Councils.

Thus the British Empire expands in its significance. The alliance with Japan since 1902 began the new order of inter-racial agreement on terms of equality, and now the Empire

¹ India was represented in a consultative capacity at the Imperial Conferences of 1907 and 1911, and more fully at the various Imperial War Conferences held since 1914, and also at the Paris Peace Conference.

² For instance, much evidence was given by Indian leaders before the Commission on the Indian Public Services appointed in 1913, that Colonial born British subjects should, owing to the treatment of Indians in the Dominions, be disqualified for service in India.

itself, begun and long existing as a combination of people of one nationality, is to become a federation of diverse races enjoying within the bounds of a common allegiance liberty for self-expression and self-development. It is a new conception for which at present but few minds are prepared, but the impelling force of events drives us into new conditions, and the change will be made before we know its meaning. 'The Dominions have not said their last word to India, nor India its to the Dominions. The policy of mere exclusion will, however, have to be abandoned, and some agreement reached which, whilst giving the Dominions the legitimate protection they desire, will not be insulting to India.

One conspicuous badge of emancipation I should give to India. I should try it with the responsibility of being tutor to some of the East African peoples under the care of the League of Nations. It would be a great experiment. If it failed, the failure would soon be detected, and would produce no great harm ; if it succeeded, as I believe it would, it would stamp India with an authority which would command for it a position of unquestioned equality amongst the federated nations of the Empire.