

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CONCLUSION

WHEN the war burst upon Europe, India was in a state of great political unsettlement. The troubles with the South African and Canadian Governments had stirred up ugly feelings in India. "Anarchism" had become threatening. Centres of disaffection and revolutionary propaganda had been established in Europe and America, and the bomb had appeared. Political dacoities were prevalent in some districts, particularly in Bengal; youth was throwing off restraint, and students—now at this college, now at the next—showed an ominous ferment of conduct. But the forces making for creative change were to be found elsewhere. These incidents and signs only hampered those forces, filled the authorities with apprehension, but also with obstinacy, and confused the evolutionary tendencies native to Indian politics. A new generation had been born. The National Congress leaders found that a tide of opinion had risen outside which had submerged their old landmarks. "At first, as was human, they looked on with regret and unwillingly accepted the facts. But the circumstances were too strong for them. The Surat split was healed; the demand for "Home Rule" was taken up; the old programme for detailed reforms was merged in a general claim for self-government. Indian politics were about to take a quick march forward.

Upon this the war came and suddenly the whole world seemed to be transformed. Comradeship in danger promised to wipe out past divisions, and facing a common foe to dispel

lack of confidence in each other. Those critics of the Indian Nationalist movement who saw in its demands nothing but sedition and in themselves nothing but perfection, had long been misreading the signs of the times and misleading the British public at home and the British Administration in India; With the outbreak of the war, the mischievous errors of these critics were revealed.<sup>1</sup> India was proud to send soldiers to fight as companions with white troops on European soil<sup>2</sup>; rich and poor gave, each after his kind, to India's offering; at home we began to talk of turning over a new leaf and of governing India differently. By and by from the field came stories of Indian valour; coveted V.C. badges were pinned on Indian breasts; India felt that her blood was washing out her colour. She even talked of saving the Empire from ruin. The exploits of Japan had been giving the East courage; the employment of Indian troops in the war gave India pride. Then there was a lull and a back-set. India's enthusiasm was not encouraged; her recruits were not accepted; her ambulance corps were disbanded; the adminis-

<sup>1</sup> How grievously these people misread the nature of the Nationalist movement is known to everybody who has spent any time in mastering its purposes. The surprise felt when India demanded a share in the war only showed how little our people understood India. This sentence from a speech delivered in Bombay in March 1894, by Mr. A. O. Hume, the founder of the National Congress, is remarkable only for the accuracy of its description of what happened, not for the exceptional nature of what is said in it. "A great war will be India's opportunity—opportunity of proving that if in periods of peace she clamours—at times somewhat angrily—for equal civil rights, in the hour of war she is ever ready and anxious to accept equal military risks." The report records that this was followed by "prolonged applause."

<sup>2</sup> It is of some importance to note the precise direction in which the thoughts of Indians turned in those days, and that is shown in the speeches made in the Legislative Council on September 8th, 1914. Raja Sir Muhammad Ali Muhammad, Khan of Mahmudabad, said: "The decision [to employ Indian troops] has made the British Government more national than any measure of reform of recent years"; and Rai Sitanath Ray Bahadur said: "It has not only satisfied the just pride of the several martial races that inhabit India, it has not only enhanced their sense of self-respect, but has also established, and proved before the world at large, their common citizenship with the inhabitants of other parts of this great Empire."

tration became timorous at the spectre of an aggressive nationalism. The lips spoke good things; the eyes glanced suspiciously at the audience. There was a reaction towards the old views that the East was destined to be governed and to yield huge profits to Western capital—was a place where the childhood of the world still lingered as if protected by some magic—was unable to look after itself in the bustle and turmoil of this earth.

Suddenly in the midst of this came the Report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the conduct of the Mesopotamia campaign. It revealed neglect, miscalculation, lack of foresight and forethought; but above all, it revealed a broken machinery, an inelastic system of government, an effete political method. The problem of Indian administration was brought before the nation with a dramatic force and an insistence which could not be denied. A change of a fundamental character in Indian administration must take place. Mr. Chamberlain resigned an office in which his heart was never set, I believe, and Mr. Montagu succeeded and declared for a thorough reform in the Indian Government. He then proceeded to India to consult with the Viceroy and representative parties, and in due time the Report christened after the Secretary of State and the Viceroy appeared. The bulk of this book was written before the Report was published—indeed, long before the Mesopotamia blunders were revealed—but the conclusions come to in it have required no modification by what has happened or what has been published since. Without the Report my conclusions would have appeared to be extreme and might have remained for years, a desirable, perhaps, but certainly a distant goal. And yet, the Report dealt with a system of government spent before the war. The war revealed, but did not make, the cracks in it. Before Indian troops marched within sound of battle in Europe, the bureaucracy was shattered more completely than any anarchist bomb could do the work, but Indian Victoria Crosses and Mesopotamia Reports shortened its years of apparent utility.

In the inevitable reconstruction we must be guided by a fundamental fact. The system of Indian government which has come to an end was a historical growth, arising out of conquest and subjection. The Indian was inferior and had to be governed ; in so far as he took part in his government it was as a subordinate with very limited powers. Nominally, the ideal of self-government as a goal was always before us, but in the transition from a subordinate to a self-governing state there must be a break, because the conceptions of the one, even when liberally held, are different in kind to those of the other. An administration like that of India may be reformed ; its civil service thrown open to its sons ; a generous infusion of native members upon all the governing authorities made. But there still remains the citadel of the foreign Government, limited in its proud authority and narrowed in its empire maybe, yet untaken and dominating all else. When that citadel opens its gates a revolution, however peaceful and constitutional, has taken place, and it is just that last event in the evolution of liberty which it is so hard to bring about. The fundamental fact to which I have referred is that no mere reform of the existing system will be of avail because the conception of India's place in the Empire which that system embodied has changed and now no longer exists.

We must now begin with self-government set clearly before us as our definitely pursued goal, and in reconstructing Councils and Civil Services we must grant powers which give Indians a responsible share in their own government. When that break is made, the future can be left to look after itself, but until it is made we shall be creating administrative systems which will not evolve, and applying confusions which will keep us in the dark.

The most important of the changes required are indicated in the preceding chapters, and both their necessity and the difficulties attending them are discussed. Regarding them, a word of warning is necessary. The change cannot be made without great risks, some unsettlement, and the exercise of

the most commanding statesmanship. It is a task of enormous magnitude and its ultimate success will depend as much upon the spirit in which it is done as upon the first fashioning of details. It must be approached in no niggling frame of mind. Whoever does it will be faced by an array of paralysing facts, failures, disappointments. In countless secret documents there are records of how unsatisfactory Indian commissioners and magistrates have been ; in countless hearts there are secret fears of consequences kept alive by many tales of troubles ; in countless psychologies there are racial antagonisms. These ought not to be pooh-poohed, nor ought they to befog the minds of those who wish to do justice to India.

Part of them are the products of the present system, and if they are to set bounds to our future policy that system will remain stifling and contorting the genius of India ; if, however, we regard them as evil effects and courageously set about removing their causes, they will disappear, and happier experiences and more generous appreciations will take their place. Part of them may be put down to "human nature," and will continue to trouble us. During the readjustment, Indian administration may have to suffer in certain respects, for you cannot teach a people a subordinate mentality and expect to find that the fruits of that mentality are those of a responsible self-governing race. We have done all we can *for* India ; we must now carry on our work *with* India.

I therefore lay the greatest stress upon the personality of the Viceroy and the Governors sent out from home. Those, in the reconstruction years, ought to be men of the highest political intelligence, who will associate with themselves the best Indian capacity available, who, believing in liberty, will not be frightened should its first appearance be threatening, and who understand that liberty, and not repression, is the safeguard of both rulers and States. When the first storm bursts, he who runs away will desert the nation, he who stands firm will save it.

The first points to attack are the Legislative Councils and the Viceroy's Council. The former must have more authority—especially in finance—the latter must be made more representative. A Viceroy more distinctly the eyes, the ears, and the mouth of India, Councils more authoritative and representative—that is the foundation of everything. But I repeat here, to emphasise it, what I have already written: we must remember that the democratic forms of the West are not the only forms in which Democracy can take shape, and in the Indian reconstruction it will not be enough, after considering, say, Western constituencies as a basis of representation and discovering that such cannot exist in India, to conclude, therefore, that representative government is impossible.<sup>1</sup> India is not a nation of equal citizens so much as an organisation of co-operating social functions. So that I doubt, even if in India every adult was educated, and the vast majority took an intelligent interest in what business is transacted at Delhi or Simla, whether a General Election after the British manner is the only way to give a mandate to the Imperial or Provincial Councils, and elicit what Indian public opinion, is. The forms of Democracy which we use and the methods we adopt to keep them going presuppose not only general education and political interests, but two other things—a population compassable in numbers and a land compassable in size. And even as I write our old assumptions regarding Democracy and its expression by elections and through Parliaments are being assailed by critical attacks more formidable and better armed by reason and experience than we have been accustomed to think were possible.

<sup>1</sup> Some grave defects have already shown themselves in the way elections are conducted in India and in the results of the unimaginative transportation of our democratic machinery to India. On these, *The Hindu Review* for February 1913 makes this sensible comment. "The failure of these new institutions [District and Local Boards] is due to the fact that they did not grow naturally from within the people themselves, but were imposed upon them from without. This failure does not prove our incapacity for self-government, but only the unsuitability of these to our genius and traditions."

India may not accommodate itself to our conditions. But it has its governing organs from the village panchayet to the Viceroy's Council, graded up through District and Municipal Boards and Provincial Legislatures. It has its men of political experience and ability, and though they may be confined rather much to landowning and the law, every one who knows them must admit that their outlook is a civic one and that their political ambitions are based upon thoughts of their municipality, their Province, and their country. Growing up around them is a class of successful manufacturers and men engaged in commerce and industry, and these, when the interest and honour of public life are presented to them, will appear on the representative bodies. The same class of man as was available for Parliament in England in 1832 is available now in India, and, if it be that only the blinded optimist sees no dangers and difficulties ahead, it is equally true that only the paralysed pessimist can refuse to admit that all the risks must be taken and the Indian trusted with a distinct measure of self-government.

Moreover, the first buds of a new democratic epoch also appear in two characteristic forms. The first is the Social Reform movement, which takes many shapes, from the Servants of India to the societies for raising the depressed classes. The second is the growth of the economic conflict between Capital and Labour. Whoever has visited the industrial districts of Bombay or Calcutta with their slums and filthy tenements—slums and tenements which make the very worst I have seen in Europe desirable dwelling-places—or whoever has studied factory conditions in the jute mills of Bengal or the cotton mills in Bombay, must have seen that, if this conflict is not soon organised and produces comprehensive programmes of legislation, municipal administration, and trade-union action, India is doomed to pauperism, disease, and degradation. But the trade union has appeared and the strike is known—the strike which has evoked the loyal support of great masses of workpeople both men and women,

which has been conducted with persistence and determination and been rewarded with success.

Equally hopeful and essential to a self-governing India is a social reform movement, and that now exists with vigour. The best of the reform societies is the Servants of India, founded in 1905 by the late Mr. Gokhale and inspired by him. The society is frankly Nationalist, but seeks to serve India by the disinterested work of its members in everyday concerns, and particularly those which relate to the downtrodden classes. Its membership is small because it calls for much sacrifice and renunciation, but its spirit is far spread.

In Bombay, too, there is a very promising Social Service League which has organised free travelling libraries of books meant to be read by working people, evening classes, and lantern lectures. Its libraries are done up in boxes of from twenty-five to fifty books, the custodians of the boxes make provision for their use, and where there are illiterate people in the chawls, literates are encouraged to gather them round and read aloud to them—a familiar Indian scene. A genuine educational work is carried on by the book-box campaign. The books are in Marathi and Gujarati, and are used most encouragingly by members of the depressed classes and by women. The subjects of the lantern lectures range from “Co-operative Stores” to “The Human Body,” from “Temperance” to “Astronomy.” University extension lectures are also given, and teaching in hygiene, first aid, nursing, household management undertaken. Co-operative Credit too is a cardinal work of this League. I have seen that part in operation, and the financial benefits it has conferred upon those who have converted their debts into indebtedness to it, have been most striking. For the first time in their lives some of its members know what it is to be practically free of usurious extortion. I pause to give these details because this Society is one of many, and I wish to give assurance that the work done is well thought out and of a practical kind.

All a drop in the bucket of Indian life! That is so. But



where the drops have fallen the muddy waters are already clearing, and those who work and watch are encouraged to go on, whilst those engaged in the wider fields of politics know they have reliable allies.

Thus political India evolves. No people can be freed from chains unless it has done something to strike them off unless it feels their weight and their dishonour in its heart, unless its attainments in intelligence and in the things which create and uphold dignity have won the sympathy of men. India has met these tests.

Since the early days of the war when many felt that

not less than Gallic zeal  
Kindled and burned among the sapless twigs  
Of my exhausted heart,

there has been a retrogression, and

history, time's lavish scribe, will tell  
How rapidly the zealots of the cause  
Disbanded—or in hostile ranks appeared.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report has been scrutinised and its flaws discovered. Slowly there has gathered an opposition to it; manifestos against it have been issued by officials and ex-officials; in an unfortunate hour the Legislative Council has passed Acts grievously menacing liberty and still more grievously destroying confidence and good feeling. As I write these last sentences, eyes shade themselves from the light, hearts harden, and the minds of men long accustomed to wield authority return to their old moods, their old fears, their old narrowness. But the way of Britain is clear; the war has illuminated it. Heavy will be the responsibility and terrible the fault of those who obstruct or darken it; bountiful will be the reward and ample the justification of those who respond to the more generous and trustful emotions which possessed them when Indian troops rode into Flanders.