

*Councils and Communities*

THE revocation of the 'aggressive' programme in the non-co-operation campaign, whatever its justification from Gandhi's point of view, confused the Congress rank and file; it also divided its leadership. Some of the Congress leaders, including C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru and V. J. Patel, had never really favoured the boycott of the new legislatures brought into being by the Indian Reforms Act of 1919. Born lawyers and orators, they were in their element in legislatures. In 1920 they had allowed themselves to be persuaded by the Mahatma to agree to the boycott. Now that mass civil disobedience was no longer in the offing they felt that the only way of keeping up resistance to the Government was to enter the Central and Provincial Legislatures, not to work the new constitution, but to expose its limited and irresponsible character.

The Government of India 'under the reformed constitution' was not answerable to the Central Legislature. The upper chamber, the Council of State, had a majority of official and nominated members. In the lower chamber, the Central Legislative assembly, nearly one-third of the members were British officials or their Indian nominees. Hardly more than one-seventh of the budget was votable by the Central Legislative assembly. The Governor-General had powers to 'certify' as law measures rejected by the legislature.

The provinces were governed under a hybrid system known as 'dyarchy', which entrusted some departments to the control of ministers responsible to the legislature, and left others, including finance and law and order, in the charge of officials directly responsible to the Governor, who possessed the power of veto. The Swarajists (as the Congress leaders who were in favour of entering the Councils came to be known) acknowledged the limited utility of the legislatures. These legislatures were, according to them, masks put on by the British bureaucracy to deceive the world, and it was for Congressmen to tear off these masks. The legislatures could not bring real power to the people,

but they could be made useful instruments in political warfare; if Congressmen could muster sufficient strength in the legislatures to reject official bills and to refuse the supplies, the Government would either have to use its special powers or give in to the verdict of the legislature. Such a situation was in any case bound to expose to the world that the constitution under which the country was governed left the ultimate authority in the hands of an irremovable executive. Some of the Swarajists were influenced by the tactics which Parnell and his party had adopted with success in the House of Commons in the agitation for Irish Home Rule.<sup>1</sup> 'Continuous, consistent and persistent obstruction,' was intended to turn the councils from a tool in the hands of the Government into a thorn in its side.

Soon after Gandhi's imprisonment in March 1922, signs of a serious rift appeared among his followers.

C. R. Das, who had been making plans for a council-entry campaign in Alipore gaol, threw himself into this campaign after his release. In his presidential address to the Gaya session of the Indian National Congress in December 1922 he proposed that the councils should either be amended in a manner suitable to the attainment of Indian freedom or ended completely. He did not consider entry into councils as inconsistent with the non-co-operation movement. Boycott was in fact being carried to the precincts of the council chambers, to the very heart of the official citadel. The argument did not convince Gandhi's faithful followers, to whom council-entry was not a change of tactics but a violation of the principles of non-violent non-co-operation. As one of them observed: 'Ours is a purity movement, and as such is above diplomacy. To enter the councils with the object of making them a failure is not only diplomacy but it is also diplomatic duplicity which every non-co-operator should disdain'.<sup>2</sup>

V. J. Patel had declared that entry into legislatures was like smuggling oneself into the enemy's fort with a view to conquering it. His brother Vallabhbhai Patel retorted that the fortress of the enemy was not located in the legislatures, and that so long as it lay elsewhere the Government could continue to function for a hundred years without a legislature.

Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari and others who were opposed to changes in the non-co-operation programme came to be known as 'No-Changers'. Most of them were actuated by a sentiment of loyalty to their leader who was in gaol. In spite of the

<sup>1</sup> Patel, G. I.: *Vithalbhai Patel*, Vol. II, p. 540.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537.

support he received from Motilal Nehru, Srinivas Iyengar and V. J. Patel, C. R. Das could not secure a majority in the Gaya Congress. The policy of boycotting legislatures remained unaltered. Immediately after the session, Das resigned the presidency of the Congress and founded the Swaraj Party, with himself as its leader and Motilal Nehru as secretary. The breach between the two groups of Congressmen was now open.

Efforts at a compromise between the Swarajists and No-Changers were made. A special session of the Indian National Congress was convened at Delhi in September 1923 to take a final decision on the Congress attitude to the elections, which were scheduled to be held in November 1923. Maulana Mahomed Ali, the Khilafat leader, who had meanwhile been released from gaol, threw his weight in favour of the Swarajists; he created a stir in the Congress session by quoting a message he professed to have received from the Mahatma ('through some spiritual trick, maybe through telepathy') that the Congress was free to amend non-co-operation to suit the changed conditions in the country. The No-Changers decided to remain neutral on council entry, with the result that the Swarajists received the approval of the Congress to participate in the elections. The Swarajists had barely two months to fight the elections, but they succeeded in capturing a solid bloc of seats in the Central Legislative Assembly, a substantial representation in provincial legislatures and even a majority in the Central Provinces Legislative Council. Motilal Nehru led the Swaraj Party in the Central Legislative Assembly, while Das took up the leadership of the party in Bengal Legislative Council.

Meanwhile, on January 11, 1924 Gandhi had been transferred to Sassoon Hospital, Poona for an operation following an acute attack of appendicitis. His premature release on medical grounds did not please him; the illness of a prisoner, he argued, did not afford a valid reason for his release. The hundreds of telegrams of congratulation betrayed, he said, 'hopes of results from me which stagger me'. The wish which he had once cherished of release from gaol by the order of a 'Swaraj Parliament' had in any case been frustrated.

Lord Reading's judgment that Gandhi's energies after his release would be distracted by dissensions in the Congress was not far wrong. The Swarajists had fought the elections and secured a firm foothold in the legislatures. They were nevertheless keen to receive Gandhi's blessing. C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru paid a visit to Juhu, a seaside resort near Bombay,

where Gandhi was convalescing. They had long discussions, but were unable to convince Gandhi. The 'obstruction from within' which Swarajists advocated seemed to him a contradiction in terms; one could either co-operate or non-co-operate with the government; it was no use trying to sail under false colours. The councils, warned Gandhi, gave condiments not bread. Though unconvinced himself of the wisdom of council-entry, Gandhi decided not to stand in the way of the Swarajists and advised the 'No-Changers' to maintain an attitude of 'neutrality' towards legislative work.

Nehru and Das had gone to Gandhi to convince him and to get his powerful support for the Swaraj Party. In this they did not succeed. The events of the next few months, however, were to pave the way for domination of the political stage by the Swaraj Party. Gandhi realized that during his absence the political climate had changed. The non-co-operators were non-co-operating 'not so much with the government, but against each other'. Hindu-Muslim unity had gone to pieces. The constructive programme did not seem to appeal to the intelligentsia. He was anxious to prevent a split in the Congress; he knew the damage which had been done by the Surat split of 1907. He made a gesture to the Swarajists, which to many of his followers savoured of a surrender. After a visit to Bengal, where the Provincial Government had launched an offensive against the Swaraj Party by clapping its members into prison on charges of violence, he issued, jointly with Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, a statement recommending that the non-co-operation programme should be suspended, with the exception of the boycott of foreign cloth, and that the Swaraj Party should become an integral part of the Congress organization with powers to raise and administer its own funds. The constructive programme and the spinning franchise were to continue. The new policy was, however, a definite triumph for the Swarajists.

The Gandhi-Nehru-Das pact was ratified at the Belgaum Congress in December 1924. On the eve of the session over which he presided, Gandhi held informal talks with the leaders of the two groups to prevent an open rift in the Congress session. He made another gesture to the Swarajists by omitting from his Working Committee 'No changers' such as Rajagopalachari and Vallabhbhai Patel. He was now not only for tolerating the Swarajists, but for strengthening them. To some observers, including his faithful 'No-Changers,' it seemed that he had yielded too much ground to the Swarajists. The Viceroy wrote home:

'Gandhi is now attached to the tail of Das and Nehru, although they try their utmost to make him and his supporters think that he is one of the heads, if not the head.'<sup>1</sup>

If the rift in the Congress talks on council-entry was one disappointment to Gandhi after his release from gaol, the division between Hindus and Muslims was another and greater.

The Hindu-Muslim unity of the heyday of the non-co-operation movement was now a mere memory. Trust had given way to distrust. Apart from the riots which periodically disfigured several towns, there was a new bitterness in politics and in the Press. A number of Hindu leaders, such as Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Shradhdhanand, felt that the Muslim masses had received a dangerous awakening through the coalescence of the Khilafat and the non-co-operation movements, and that it was necessary for Hindus to adopt measures of self-defence against Muslim communalism, which was the more dangerous because it appeared to them to have the backing of the British Government. Many Muslim politicians who had been in the forefront of the Khilafat movement had also had second thoughts and felt that they had too readily joined hands with the Congress in fighting for a new order, in which the position of the Muslim community was not likely to be too secure.

In an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and fear every incident was twisted and every move of one community was suspect to the other. The Moplah outbreak in 1921, in which the Muslims of Malabar had wreaked their fanaticism on their Hindu neighbours was a painful memory to the Hindus. The *Shuddhi* movement for the conversion of non-Muslims to Hinduism and the *sangathan* movement for the unity of Hindus evoked counter-blasts from Muslims in the form of *tabligh* and *tanzim* movements. The new proselytizing twist to Hinduism was resented by the Muslim intelligentsia who, paradoxically enough, saw nothing wrong in the conversion of non-Muslim to Islam. But there was no room for logic in an atmosphere clouded by hazy memories and vague misgivings. The very Muslims who, as a gesture to their Hindu neighbours, had voluntarily given up cow-slaughter during the favourable climate of 1920-22, now insisted on ostentatiously exercising it as a religious obligation. The Hindus asserted the equally provocative right to play music before mosques while conducting their religious pro-

<sup>1</sup> Reading, Marquess of: *Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading*, Vol. II, p. 304.

cessions. Then there were the endless wrangles about discrimination in favour of one community or the other in the distribution of official patronage.

There were not a few who put down the new tension to the non-co-operation movement and its alliance with the Khilafat cause, and blamed Gandhi for having played with the masses and roused them prematurely. 'The awakening of the masses,' wrote Gandhi, 'was a necessary part of the training. I would do nothing to put the people to sleep again.' However, he wanted this awakening to be diverted into constructive channels. The two communities had to be educated out of the mental morass into which they had slipped. Through the pages of his weekly journals he gave his own diagnosis of the communal disease; a whole issue of *Young India* was devoted to the subject. He argued that Hindu-Muslim tension could never have taken the form it did if the country had understood his method; the doctrine of non-violence held the key not only to the political freedom of the country but also to peace between the communities. A civilized society which had given up violence as a means of settling individual disputes could also eschew violence for reconciling differences between groups. Disagreements could be resolved by mutual tolerance and compromise, private arbitration, and in the last resort by appeal to the courts. Hearts could never be united by breaking heads. To Gandhi, the points of friction between the two communities seemed a travesty of true religion. Was it religion that drove a group of Hindu worshippers to lead a procession noisily before a mosque just as the 'faithful' knelt for prayer? Was it a religious obligation laid on the Muslim to lead cows to slaughter to wound the feelings of his Hindu neighbours? And what was the use of proselytizing when the conversion was not a moral or spiritual uplift, but 'crossing from one compartment to another', with one thing on the lips and another in the heart? As for the competition for jobs, there were after all a limited number to go round. Gandhi was prepared to concede special educational facilities to communities which were relatively backward to qualify for higher appointments, but to make religion instead of merit the criterion of employment was to cut at the root of the administration.

By probing into the causes of antagonism, and by appealing to the good sense of the communities, Gandhi had hoped to restore sanity. But communal tension showed no signs of abatement. There were outbreaks at Sambhar, Amethi and Gulgarga. A riot in Kohat in September 1924 was particularly



serious: 155 Hindus were killed and practically the whole Hindu population was driven out of the town. This carnage hurt him deeply, the more so as he felt that the awakening which the non-co-operation movement brought about had run into destructive channels.

Out of his personal anguish, Gandhi sought a way in a fast: the country's reaction was instantaneous. A 'Unity Conference' was convened at Delhi and met within a week of the commencement of the fast. The 300 delegates included the Metropolitan of India, Dr Westcott, Annie Besant, the Ali brothers, Swami Shraddhanand and Madan Mohan Malviya. The conference affirmed freedom of conscience and religion, but condemned the use of compulsion and violence. It passed a number of resolutions designed to generate goodwill and to dissipate mutual suspicion. On the morning of October 8, 1924, twenty-one days after he had begun it, the Mahatma broke his fast in the presence of leaders of all the communities. As the chanting of verses from the *Koran* and the *Upanishads* mingled with Christian hymns C. F. Andrews noted that 'hearts were drawn together'.

But this harmony was not to last long. Within a few months Gandhi had to confess that bitter experience had taught him that those who took the name of unity meant disunion, that the leaders of the two communities were fighting not for loaves and fishes, but 'fighting like the proverbial dog, not for the bone but for the shadow'. In January 1927, he told a meeting at Comilla in Bengal that the Hindu-Muslim problem had passed out of human hands into God's hands.

Though in the pages of *Young India* from 1925 onwards Gandhi continued to devote occasional attention to the Hindu-Muslim problem, he had almost despaired of a solution. He saw the urban intelligentsia split into antagonistic groups but felt he could not react on it: 'Their method is not my method, I am trying to work from the bottom upward.'

## CHAPTER XXIII

*From the Bottom Up*

DURING the next three years Gandhi retired from the political scene; to be precise, he retired only from the political controversies of the day to devote his time to the less spectacular but more important task of nation-building 'from the bottom up'.

He toured the country extensively from one end to the other, using every mode of transport from railway trains to bullock-carts. He walked through bush, brier, mud and water to penetrate into the interior of the Indian countryside. Everywhere he met with a welcome, which is the prerogative in India of saints and prophets. To the thousands who flocked to his meetings in villages, most of whom knew little of modern civilization or Indian politics, he was an *Avatara*, an incarnation of God. He hated this deification and endeavoured to transmute it into something positive and constructive. He exhorted the people to shake off age-old social evils such as child-marriage and untouchability, and to ply the spinning-wheel.

In the later twenties it was usual for British observers to describe Gandhi as a spent force and for Indian politicians to speak of the retirement of the saint of Sabarmati. It was obvious enough that the politics of the day, the debates in the Central and Provincial Legislatures and the communal controversies in the Press did not excite Gandhi's interest. Political freedom was, in his opinion, dependent upon the social and economic regeneration of the country; this regeneration had to come through the efforts of the people themselves. 'The fact is,' he had written, 'that political emancipation means a rise of mass-consciousness. It cannot come without affecting all the branches of national activity.'

In his speeches and writings of these years two themes are recurrent: the spinning-wheel and untouchability. The spinning-wheel, or rather its product, *khadi*, had figured in the non-co-operation programme, but during these years of political lull Gandhi turned it into a cult. He spoke of the 'thread of destiny';



he suggested a 'khadi franchise' for the Congress organization, and even envisaged a 'yarn currency'. Western-educated Indians, even ardent Congressmen, wondered whether the khadi cult was not being overdone. To the Government, once the threat of civil disobedience was over, his emphasis on Khadi seemed only a bee in his bonnet. It was not until khadi again became part of an active political campaign in 1930 that the Government took it seriously, and then too as an economic weapon in a political struggle.

That Gandhi's almost emotional attachment to the spinning-wheel should have baffled both the British and the Western-educated town-bred Indians, is not surprising. They were both unable, the former from lack of will, the latter from lack of knowledge, to grasp the incredible poverty of the Indian village. Deeply religious as Gandhi was, he wrote: 'For the starving men and women, liberty and God are merely letters put together without the slightest meaning; the deliverer of these unfortunate people would be one who brought them a crust of bread.' Not only were the landless labourers steeped in poverty, but there were millions of peasants who spent nearly six months in enforced under-employment. Their pitifully low income, argued Gandhi, could be usefully supplemented by cottage industries. And there was no cottage industry so simple and natural to the Indian village as hand-spinning; people could spin and weave cloth in their own homes just as they cooked their food. True, the spinning-wheel could make only a meagre addition to the slender resources of the peasant, but, as Gandhi explained to the Rotary Club of Calcutta in August 1925, one-tenth of the population of India, which lived on one meal a day and could not earn on the average more than three rupees a month, was bound to consider even an income of five or six rupees from the spinning-wheel as a fortune. When Tagore expressed the fear that the emphasis on the spinning-wheel would bring about a 'death-like sameness in the country', Gandhi replied:

'I did not want the poet to forsake his music, the farmer his plough, the lawyer his brief, and the doctor his lancet. They are to spin only thirty minutes every day as a sacrifice. I have indeed asked the famishing man or woman, who is idle for work whatsoever to spin for a living and the half-starved farmer to spin during his leisure to supplement his resources.'

Thus while the spinning-wheel had an economic significance for the farmer, the labourer, or the helpless widow in the village, to the townsman its appeal was based on moral or, as Gandhi

would have put it, on spiritual grounds. India's towns had flourished at the expense of the villages, but now they had a chance to make amends for their past sins by buying cloth spun and woven in village homes, and thus to forge a link, economic as well as sentimental, between town and village.

The spinning-wheel gradually became the centre of rural uplift in the Gandhian scheme of Indian economics; round it were to be built up anti-malaria campaigns, improvements in sanitation, settlements of village disputes, conservation and breeding of cattle, and hundreds of other beneficent activities required for the resuscitation of the village. The economics of the spinning-wheel were thus the economics of a new village economy. Primarily advocated as a solution of chronic under-employment in the villages, the spinning-wheel became something more than a simple tool of a cottage industry. In his efforts to 'sell' the spinning-wheel to the people, Gandhi romanticized it. He put it forward, not only as a panacea for economic ills but also for national unity and freedom. It became a symbol of defiance of foreign rule, the 'livery of freedom', as Jawaharlal Nehru picturesquely described it.

There is no doubt that the spinning-wheel symbolized Gandhi's protest against industrialism and materialism. But it would not have meant so much to him if it had not become a means of his deep identification with the humblest and the poorest in the land. 'The more I penetrate the villages,' he wrote, 'the greater is the shock delivered as I perceive the blank stare in the eyes of the villagers I meet. Having nothing else to do but to work as labourers side by side with their bullocks, they have become almost like them.' These skeletons behind the bullocks haunted him day and night. When somebody suggested that the country could patiently wait for prohibition, he said, 'Ask the wife of a drunkard to be patient; see what she will think of you. I happen to be the wife of thousands of drunkards and I cannot be patient.' He was not only the wife of thousands of drunkards, but of millions of semi-starved villagers of India; with his imaginative sympathy he could enter into the thoughts and feelings of others. The consciousness of the poverty and misery of the villages of India had gone like iron into his soul. 'The moment someone asks me (about the spinning-wheel)', he said, 'a whole volcano surges up within me.' Often his words betrayed his anguish. He told a meeting at Jalpaiguri: 'India is dying . . . if you want to save India, do it by doing the little I ask for. I want you to take up the wheel betimes or perish.' And he

told the fastidious students of Chittagong that 'the pauperism of India is coarser than the coarsest Chittagong *khaddar*'.

He used his tours to liberate the people from an age-long inertia, fear and superstition. He frowned on gold and silver caskets in which addresses were presented to him and asked for something 'cheaper, local and artistic'. He auctioned the caskets presented to him and credited the proceeds to his *khadi* fund. He chided the people of a village for wasting money on garlands for him: 'For every rupee saved on these garlands you should give sixteen women one meal.' While in Southern India he condemned in no uncertain terms the evil of 'devadasis'. To a municipal committee in Mysore, which boasted of a project of three lakes for water supply and prospects of electrifying the town in six months, he offered his congratulations but with the question, 'Can you assure children of the town cheap and clean milk? So long as you do not take the broom and bucket in your hands,' he added, 'you cannot make towns and cities clean.'

## CHAPTER XXIV

*The Rising Tempo*

WHEN Jawaharlal Nehru returned to India in December 1927, after a twenty-month absence in Europe, he sensed a change in the political atmosphere. 'Early in 1926,' he writes, 'India was still quiescent, passive, perhaps not fully recovered from the effort of 1919-22; in 1928 she seemed fresh, active and full of suppressed energy.' Signs of discontent were visible in several sectors of society, particularly among industrial workers, peasants, and middle class youth. Trade unions were gaining strength and labour was restive. The All-India Trade Union Congress had become a militant and class-conscious body, and among those who took an interest in its affairs were Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. A number of strikes took place in the late twenties, the most notable being those which affected the textile industry in Bombay, the jute mills in Bengal, and iron and steel works in Jamshedpur. The labour movement was not directly connected with the political movement but it was at least against the existing order of things.

Apart from sporadic acts of political violence which gave the Government an anxious time, Youth Leagues sprang up all over the country. A number of youth conferences were held in which radical solutions for political, social and economic ills were put forth.

Agrarian discontent was brewing in several provinces, but it was in Bardoli *taluk*, under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel, in Gujarat in Bombay Presidency, that it came to a head. The Government tried to break the peasants' resistance. It offered concessions to those who would pay up; it tried to win over the richer or the weaker peasants; it sold crops for a song, and forfeited, in lieu of the tax, land, household goods, and cattle. Since no one from the villages would either carry or buy the confiscated property, Pathans were imported to do the dirty work. The peasants' weapon against weaker brethren or high-handed officials was boycott, and this weapon they used with

<sup>1</sup> Nehru: *Autobiography*, p. 170.

deadly effect. Gandhi was deeply interested in this large-scale experiment in Satyagraha to which he gave his support in public and private. A successful struggle after years of inertia was an uplifting experience for lovers of Indian freedom; the campaign was an index to the latent energy which was waiting to be harnessed to the national cause.

Meanwhile, Indian politics had been emerging out of the doldrums of the mid-twenties. The Swaraj Party had held the political stage since 1923. It had set out to create an atmosphere of resistance to the bureaucracy and to wreck the constitution. Founded by Pandit Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, it had counted amongst its members such outstanding men as Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malaviya. It had started well. In 1923 and 1924, in two provinces, it had made the system of dyarchical provincial government unworkable. In the Central Legislative Assembly it had delivered calculated blows at the prestige of the Government in spite of the communal franchise and the solid bloc of official and nominated members; it had thrown out budgets and demanded a round table conference for a new constitution. The early official impression of the Swaraj Party may be gleaned from a letter which the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State in London: 'For the present, the Swarajist has it all his own way; there is none to compare with him; there is none to attack him . . . The Moderate presents a very dull and dreary appearance as compared with the Swarajists.'

The high discipline of the Swaraj Party did not last long. The lack of an absolute majority in the legislatures made co-operation with other parties necessary, and this co-operation had sometimes to be purchased at a high price in terms of principles. The Government could lure the weaker members of the party by throwing crumbs of official patronage in their way—a provincial ministership or a visit to Geneva. Some of those who had been elected on the communal franchise could not escape the virus of communalism which was rampant in the country. The Muslim members gradually fell off, and the Swarajists from Maharashtra picked up the slogan of 'responsive co-operation'. The crowning blow came with the defection of Lajpat Rai, the Deputy-Leader of the party. The general elections in 1926 reduced the strength of the Swarajists both at the centre and in the provinces. Except in Madras they lost seats everywhere. In the United Provinces Motilal Nehru was the only Swarajist

<sup>1</sup> Reading, Marquess of: *Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading*, Vol. II, p. 283.

elected to the Central Legislative Assembly. 'It was a fight,' observed Nehru, 'between the forces of nationalism and a low order of communalism and the latter won.'

The Government now found it less difficult to have its way in the legislatures. In February 1926, before the general elections, Motilal Nehru had declared, 'We have no further use for these sham institutions.' His son records how he became more and more disillusioned and was driven to the painful conclusion that constitutional methods were ineffective and futile in India in the conditions which were then prevailing. The Swarajists' disillusionment with parliamentary methods was to prove an important factor in their return to the Gandhian fold.

In spite of the many undercurrents of discontent, Indian politics nevertheless seemed placid on the surface in 1927. Lord Reading had prophesied that his successor would have an easy interlude of eighteen months, which would be only a lull before the storm. The prophecy turned out to be true, but the storm was brought on by the British Government itself. On November 2, 1927, a number of Indian leaders including Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Ansari and Jinnah, were summoned to the Viceroy's House at Delhi and handed a document which announced the appointment of a Royal Commission. This was the only business transacted at this meeting: Gandhi, who had travelled a thousand miles, wondered why a postcard had not been used to convey the information. The document handed to the Indian leaders was not even news, as its contents had been correctly forecast by the Press. 'Never had Indian leadership felt itself to be so affronted,' writes the Viceroy's biographer.<sup>1</sup> The Indian Reforms Act of 1919, under which India was being governed, contained a clause for a review of the constitutional position after ten years. This provision had been regarded as a safeguard by the British Conservatives and as a lever for further advance by Indian nationalists. The appointment of a Royal Commission in 1927, two years ahead of the schedule, raised a spate of speculation. It was suggested that the Conservative Government in England were anxious to handle the Indian question itself rather than leave it to a Labour Government which might come into power after the general elections. Support for this view is lent by the observation in Birkenhead's *The Last Phase* that 'we could not afford to run the slightest risk that the nomination of the 1928 Commission should be in the hands of our successors'.

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, Alan Campbell: *Viscount Halifax*, p. 190.



Whatever may have been the motive behind Lord Birkenhead's move, it completely misfired. The members of the commission, with the exception of its chairman, Sir John Simon, were all 'second flight men'; the junior member of the commission (as Viscount Simon describes him in his *Retrospect*) was Clément Attlee, the future Premier of Britain, then a back-bencher in the House of Commons. What hurt Indian feelings most was that no Indian had been included in this 'all-white commission'. The argument that a Royal Commission answerable to the British Parliament could not draw its personnel from outside may have been sound constitutional practice, but it was a political blunder of the first magnitude. The commission came to be looked upon in India as an inquisition by foreigners into India's fitness for self-government; the Indian National Congress decided to boycott the commission 'at every stage and in every form'. Even moderate and Muslim politicians, whose co-operation Birkenhead had almost taken for granted, were unanimous in denouncing the commission. Black-flag demonstrations and shuttered shop-windows greeted the 'Simon Seven' in most of the towns they visited.

The boycott of the Simon Commission had raised the political barometer and brought together a number of parties which had otherwise little in common. A challenge from Birkenhead stung Indian leaders to seek an agreed solution of the constitutional problem. 'I have twice in three years,' declared Birkenhead, 'during which I have been Secretary of State, invited our critics in India to put forward their own suggestions for a constitution to indicate to us the form in which in their judgment any reforms of constitution may take place'. 'That offer,' he added, 'is still open.' As an answer to this challenge, a series of All-Parties Conferences took place and a constitutional scheme was drafted. The *Nehru Report*, as it came to be known, envisaged a parliamentary system of government, joint electorates and some complicated formulae for the protection of minorities. When it came up for approval before the last meeting of the All-Parties Conference in August 1928, the controversy on 'dominion status' v. 'complete independence' flared up. The *Nehru Report* had adopted dominion status as the basis of its recommendations to secure the lowest common measure of agreement among the Congress, the moderates and other political groups. The younger wing of the Congress did not like Indian freedom to be hedged in by any limitations. But Motilal Nehru was keen on carrying through the report, which bore his name, *in toto*.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose threatened to resign from the Congress; their resignations were not accepted, but they founded an Independence League to promote among Congressmen the ideology of complete independence. The annual session of the Congress was due in December 1928, in Calcutta, and it looked as if a head-on collision between the old guard and the younger group in the Congress was inevitable.

Gandhi had played little part in the All-Parties Conference or in the drafting of the *Nehru Report*. Nevertheless, he had commended the report for satisfying 'all reasonable aspirations'. He had taken little active interest in the Congress session at Gauhati in 1926 or at Madras in 1927. It is doubtful if he would have taken any more interest in the Calcutta session in December 1928 were it not for an urgent summons from Pandit Motilal Nehru. The Pandit, anticipating a crisis at Calcutta, had urged the Mahatma to attend the Congress session: 'You have made me sit in the Presidential chair and put upon my head a crown of thorns; but at least do not look at my difficulties from a distance.'

A rift at the Calcutta Congress was avoided by a compromise formula framed by Gandhi. The Congress passed a resolution accepting the *Nehru Report* on the condition that, if by December 31, 1929, it was not accepted by the Government, the Congress would demand complete independence and fight for it, if necessary, by resorting to non-violent non-co-operation. Gandhi would have preferred to give the Government two years to make up its mind and for the Congress to set its house in order. To those who talked glibly of independence, he said, 'you must take the name of independence on your lips as the Muslims utter the name of *Allah* or the pious Hindu utters the name of Krishna or Rama'. The British Government, he warned the Congress, was going to concede neither dominion status nor independence until the nation was ready to assert its rights, until 'the necessary sanctions had been forged.' If the Congress were to give a non-violent battle to the Government, it had first to close its ranks. The Congress roll was, he said, a 'bogus show'; what the Congress needed was a living register of members; if Congressmen were serious about the resolution they had passed, hard work lay ahead of them.

The Calcutta Congress opened the way for Gandhi's return to politics. If the British Government did not concede the demands of the Congress—and there was little prospect of their doing so—the Congress was committed to a non-co-operation

movement and it was obvious to all that Gandhi alone could conduct such a movement. In March 1922 he had been sentenced to six years imprisonment and premature release in 1924 for reasons of health had not pleased him. Not until March 1928 had he felt 'morally' freed from his term of imprisonment. Political as well as personal reasons were thus dictating an end of his retirement from active politics.

## CHAPTER XXV

*Year of Grace*

THE Calcutta session of the Congress (December 1928) had given the British Government, to use the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, 'an offer of a year's grace and a polite ultimatum'. If dominion status was not conceded by the end of 1929, the Congress was to launch a struggle with the Government. Gandhi had been toying with the idea of visiting Europe in 1929, but having piloted the main resolution of the Congress session, he felt it would be 'an act of desertion' to leave India. By giving a year's ultimatum, the Congress had thrown the ball into their opponent's court, and the next move lay with the Government. He knew that freedom was not likely to descend as a gift from the British.

It was not part of the strategy of Satyagraha to plan moves months and years ahead. Meanwhile, the country had to be educated and disciplined. Gandhi toured everywhere, calling upon the people to spin and weave in their homes, and to boycott foreign cloth. He evolved a scheme whereby Congress organizations were to enrol volunteers to sell *khadi*, and to collect foreign cloth from door to door. Foreign cloth was to be publicly burnt and the foreign cloth shops picketed. Early in March 1929 he was at Calcutta when a large pyramid of foreign finery was ceremoniously consigned to the flames. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee received a notice that it was an offence to burn foreign cloth in or near a public place. Gandhi had as yet no intention of breaking the law. 'I am capable,' he observed, 'of breaking all the regulations that hurt my moral sense, but that time is not for me yet.' He had been advised; however, that Shradhdhanand Park at Calcutta, where the meeting was held, was not a public thoroughfare. As the bonfire was lighted he was placed under arrest. He refused to sign the bond requiring him to appear before the Chief Presidency Magistrate on March 5th. However, the case was postponed to enable him to fulfil his engagements in Burma, which he was visiting after fourteen years.

On his return from Burma three weeks later, he presented himself for trial and was fined one rupee. Someone paid the fine without his knowledge. The inevitable result of this prosecution was to give a fillip to the boycott of foreign cloth. The day of Gandhi's trial was celebrated by bonfires of foreign cloth all over the country.

The Government saw the growing signs of unrest. Apart from the ultimatum which the Congress had given, and the possibility of a clash early in 1930, there were other disquieting symptoms. Industrial labour was seething with discontent. There had been strikes in Bombay and Jamshedpur. In April 1929, when Speaker Patel rose in the Central Legislative Assembly to give his ruling on the Public Safety Bill, which sought more powers for the executive to curb the 'extremists', bombs were thrown from the visitors' gallery. Two young men, Bhagat Singh and B. K. Datt, were arrested; their intention, they deposed later, was not to kill anybody but 'to make the deaf hear'. Terrorist outrages occurred in several parts of the country, and groups of young men were rounded up and prosecuted for political violence in what came to be known as a series of 'conspiracy cases'. These anarchists became popular heroes; even those who deplored their method applauded their motive. Public feeling reached a peak when a number of them went on hunger strike as a protest against the treatment of political prisoners; one of them, Jatin Dass, died in gaol and was honoured as a martyr.

Official reaction to this heightened tension was to arm the executive with still greater authority. The Public Safety Bill, which Speaker Patel had ruled out of order, was nevertheless made law under the Viceroy's special powers. In March 1929 a number of trade union leaders, 'some of them communists, some near-communists and some trade unionists', were brought up for trial in what came to be known as the 'Meerut Conspiracy Case'. 'It seems to me,' wrote Gandhi, 'that the motive behind these prosecutions is not to kill communism but to strike terror.' He added that 'The Government were giving the usual periodical exhibition of its red claws which usually remain under cover'.

However, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, had no intention of trying strong-arm methods only. In the summer of 1929 he visited England and conferred with British statesmen. Lord Irwin's mission was facilitated by a change of government in England. Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State in the Labour Govern-

ment, shared Irwin's anxiety to reverse the process of estrangement of Indian opinion which had gone on since the appointment of the Simon Commission. Benn approved of Irwin's proposal for a Round Table Conference in London between the representatives of India and Britain to discuss the constitutional problem. He also approved of Irwin's idea of heralding the announcement of the conference by a declaration reaffirming that the goal of British policy in India continued to be dominion status. Neither Lloyd George nor Lord Reading—the two stalwarts of the Liberal Party—gave much encouragement to Lord Irwin. The Labour Government depended for its majority upon the support of the Liberals, but the Secretary of State was prepared to take the risk.

Lord Irwin returned to India on October 25, 1929. On October 31, came the issue of a 'Gazette Extraordinary' of the Government of India containing an announcement of a round table conference. The Viceroy's announcement was an ingeniously worded document which could mean much or little, but it had a favourable reception in India. The moderate leaders, to quote Lord Irwin's biographer, saw the conference as 'their supreme opportunity for the full exercise of their intellectual power and were henceforth Irwin's faithful allies'. The Congress leaders, scanning the horizon for a gesture which might lead to progress in self-government and prevent a clash with the Government, saw signs of 'a change of heart'. A 'joint manifesto' issued under the signatures of Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Patel, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Annie Besant, Jawaharlal Nehru and others expressed their appreciation of the sincerity underlying the declaration.

Lord Irwin's announcement was thus well received in India, but a storm broke over him and the Labour Government in England. The British Press and Parliament subjected the announcement to a protracted post mortem. The Labour Government, which did not have a clear majority in the House of Commons, was on the defensive. Wedgwood Benn explained the declaration as a 're-statement' and an interpretation of Montagu's declaration of August 1917, and thus made out that no radical departure had been made in British policy towards India.

The debate in the British Parliament disillusioned Indian leaders. Circumstances had compelled the Secretary of State to belittle in Britain what the Viceroy had tried to boost in India. The temporary bridge which the Viceroy's declaration had



thrown between the Government and the nationalists had been knocked down.

A last-minute effort, in which V. J. Patel and Tej Bahadur Sapru were the prime movers, was made for a reconciliation between the Congress and the Government. An interview between the Congress leaders and the Viceroy was arranged. The interview took place on December 23rd. That morning Lord Irwin had returned from a tour of South India, and as he approached the capital a bomb had exploded under the Viceregal train. Gandhi congratulated the Viceroy on his miraculous escape. There was not much progress, however, on the political plane. The Viceroy chastened by the recent debate in the British Parliament, was unable to give an assurance that the Round Table Conference would definitely discuss a scheme of reform on the basis of dominion status.

Soon after the abortive interview at Delhi, the Indian National Congress was to meet for its annual session at Lahore. The year of grace which the Calcutta Congress had offered to the British Government in December 1928 was drawing to a close; the Congress was pledged to a declaration for complete independence if dominion status was not conceded by Britain. The Congress leaders sought from the Viceroy something more than a vague indication of the direction of British policy to convince their party that India was assured of a sizable advance towards self-government. It was all very well for Lord Irwin to say 'that the assertion of a goal is of necessity a different thing from the goal's attainment', but such an approach could hardly help Gandhi and Motilal Nehru in carrying the rank and file with them at the ensuing Congress session. And the argument that it was impossible to prejudice the issue or encroach upon the constitutional responsibility of the British Parliament did not carry conviction to them. Had not the British Cabinet on several occasions committed itself to particular policies in anticipation of the Parliamentary verdict? The bland fact remained that the Labour Government had neither the courage, nor perhaps the conviction, to dismantle the imperial structure in India and to instal a self-governing dominion instead.

'All roads lead to Lahore,' Motilal Nehru had aptly summed up the political situation at the end of 1929 in a letter to V. J. Patel. The Lahore session was going to be a momentous one, as it was likely to declare a struggle which only Gandhi could lead. The choice of the Mahatma as President of the Congress seemed almost inevitable, but he declined the honour on the

plea that he could not devote the necessary time to the day-to-day work of the presidency, and that in any case he could continue to serve the Congress without holding office. At his instance the All-India Congress Committee elected Jawaharlal Nehru, who thus entered this high office, to use his own words, 'not by a main entrance or even a side entrance but by a trap-door'.

Politically, the election of Jawaharlal Nehru was a master-stroke of the Mahatma. Only a year before there had been a clash between crabbed age and youth at the Calcutta Congress. Youth had looked askance at the outmoded shibboleths of the old guard. A compromise ingeniously devised by Gandhi had prevented a split. The Congress, instinct with new hope and energy, needed a young man at the helm. The forty-year-old Jawaharlal, whom Gandhi described as 'pure as crystal . . . truthful beyond suspicion . . . a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*', was to be in the fullness of time the Mahatma's political heir. There was a bond of deep affection between the two men in spite of the twenty years and widely differing intellectual backgrounds which separated them. Gandhi had been unhappy with some of the activities of Jawaharlal since the latter's return from Europe at the end of 1927. 'You are going too fast,' he wrote to him early in 1928. 'You should have taken time to think and become acclimatized.' A few days later he confessed: 'The differences between you and me appear to be so vast and so radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us.' This intellectual gulf widened or narrowed from time to time; it was rarely bridged, but it did not affect their emotional affinity or their mutual loyalty.

In December 1929 events were on the march, there was a promise of a struggle, and Jawaharlal was in his element.

*Civil Disobedience*

THE Indian National Congress was meeting in the Punjab after exactly ten years. The Amritsar Congress was held in December 1919; the non-co-operation movement had followed in 1920. Was history going to repeat itself? There was little doubt that the Lahore Congress was going to be a momentous one. 'The year of grace' which the Calcutta Congress had granted was over. Dominion status had not been conceded; the offer of the 'minimum national demand' embodied in the *Nehru Report* would lapse; henceforth Swaraj would mean complete independence. At midnight on December 31, 1929, as the new year dawned, the Indian National Congress unfurled the flag of independence on the bank of the Ravi. The Congress called upon its members in the central and provincial legislatures to resign their seats and authorized the All-Indian Congress Committee to launch civil disobedience.

The significance of the Congress session was not lost upon the Government. According to Alan Campbell Johnson, Lord Irwin's biographer, the Viceroy seriously considered the banning of this session. Early in January, the Punjab Government advised the Government of India that, in the opinion of its legal advisers, Jawaharlal Nehru and S. D. Kitchlew should be prosecuted for speeches delivered by them as President-designate and Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Lahore Congress. The advice was not accepted, as events had already moved fast.

In an appraisal of the Congress position immediately after the Lahore Congress, the Viceroy reported to the Secretary of State 'the striking effect on the political situation made by the recent meeting at Lahore'. It had seemed clear, wrote the Viceroy, that the Lahore Congress would be the scene of a struggle between the two wings of the Congress which had clashed but compromised at Calcutta a year earlier; a split was avoided at Lahore by the 'capitulation' of Gandhi and Motilal Nehru to the left-wing Congressmen, consisting of 'revolutionaries' and 'irreconcilables' who were expected henceforth to provide the

driving force of the Congress. Though the decision to boycott legislatures could still cause a split, the Congress as a whole, by passing the independence resolution, had, in the Viceroy's opinion, declared itself as a body which intended to pursue 'an illegitimate aim by illegal and unconstitutional means'.

There was little doubt that in executing the decisions of the Lahore session, the Congress would be guided by Gandhi. His writings and speeches acquired the forthright frankness which had marked them ten years earlier. The people had the right, he wrote, to alter or abolish an unjust government. If the atmosphere remained non-violent, he promised to lead a civil disobedience campaign. He was conscious of the risks inherent in a mass movement. The lesson of Chauri Chaura, however, had not been lost on Congressmen. At the same time, Gandhi made it known that there was to be no easy reversal of the movement once it was launched; while every possible effort was to be made to restrain the forces of violence, civil disobedience would continue 'so long as there is a single resister left free or alive'. In 1920-2 Gandhi had proceeded cautiously, spent months in preparing the country, graduated the programme of non-co-operation and shown an obvious reluctance in embarking upon mass civil disobedience. In 1930 he proceeded with swifter and surer steps; it was as if his labours in the previous decade had not been wasted and he was picking up the thread where he had left it in 1922. 'The call of 1920,' he wrote, 'was a call for preparation. The call in 1930 is for engaging in final conflict.'

A struggle between the Congress and the Government was now inevitable. In January 1930, Gandhi told Tagore that he was furiously thinking 'night and day'. The first step he took was to call for the celebration of 'Independence Day' on January 26. On that day, in the towns and villages of India, hundreds of thousands of people took a pledge that 'it was a crime against man and God to submit to British rule,' and undertook to join a campaign of civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes if the Congress launched it. Independence Day revealed the latent enthusiasm in the country; Gandhi felt the country was ripe for a mass movement. He suggested inaugurating the movement with a breach of the Salt Laws. The Salt Tax, though relatively light in incidence, hit the poorest in the land; but salt did not quite seem to fit into the plan of a national struggle for liberation. Salt manufacture was confined to the sea-coast or salt mines, and even if a strike could be organized among the politically backward labourers engaged in the industry, the pros-

pect of launching a successful Satyagraha struggle did not appear to be bright. These and other doubts assailed Gandhi's closest adherents even as they followed his lead.

Gandhi announced that he would himself perform the first act of civil disobedience by leading a group of Satyagrahis to the sea-shore for a breach of the Salt Laws. He communicated his plans to the Viceroy in a letter, which was an indictment of British rule as well as an appeal for restoring to India what was her due:

'Dear Friend—before embarking on civil disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out. My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow-human beings even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold British rule to be a curse, I do not intend to harm a single Englishman or any legitimate interest he may have in India . . .

'I must not be misunderstood. Though I hold the British rule in India to be a curse, I do not, therefore, consider Englishmen in general to be worse than any other people on earth. I have the privilege of claiming many Englishmen as dearest friends. Indeed much that I have learnt of the evil of British rule is due to the writings of frank and courageous Englishmen who have not hesitated to tell the unpalatable truth about that rule. . . .

'In common with many of my countrymen, I had hugged the fond hope that the proposed Round Table Conference might furnish a solution . . . But when you said plainly that you could not give any assurance that you or the British Cabinet would pledge yourselves to support a scheme of full dominion status, the Round Table Conference could not possibly furnish the solution for which vocal India is consciously, and dumb millions unconsciously, thirsting.

' . . . if India is to survive as a nation, if the slow death by starvation of her people is to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief. The proposed conference is certainly not the remedy. It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interests by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve (non-violent) force enough to free herself from that embrace of death . . .

'I know that in embarking on non-violence, I shall be running what might be fairly termed a mad risk, but the victories of truth

have never been won without risks, often of the gravest character. Conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously preyed upon another far more numerous, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk.

'I have deliberately used the word conversion. For my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own. I believe that I have always served them. I served them up to 1919 blindly. But when my eyes were opened, and I conceived non-co-operation, the object still was to serve them. I employed the same weapon that I have in all humility successfully used against the dearest members of my family. If I have equal love for your people with mine, it will not long remain hidden. It will be acknowledged by them even as members of my family acknowledged it after they had tried me for several years. If people join me, as I expect they will, the sufferings they will undergo, unless the British nation sooner retraces its steps, will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts.'

The Viceroy's reply was brief: it expressed his regret 'at Mr Gandhi's contemplating a course of action which was clearly bound to involve the violation of the law and danger to public peace'.

Gandhi decided to lead the first band of Satyagrahis from Ahmedabad to Dandi on the sea-shore. The Satyagrahis were selected from Sabarmati Ashram, which had, according to the testimony of one of its inmates, reached 'its zenith in physical energy and moral strength'.<sup>1</sup> Sabarmati was now assuming the role which Phoenix and Tolstoy Ashrams had done in South Africa; it became the recruiting ground for the vanguard of freedom and a hub of political activities. Richard Gregg has recorded how a correspondent of a British-owned paper, who had been sent to Ahmedabad to report what was going on in 'the enemy's camp', instead of being turned away was accommodated, at Gandhi's instance, in the Sabarmati Ashram, treated as a guest, and allowed to see things for himself.

The prayer meeting on the evening of March 11th had a record attendance. 'Our cause is strong,' said Gandhi, 'our means the purest, and God is with us. There is no defeat for Satyagrahis till they give up truth. I pray for the battle which begins to-

<sup>1</sup> Mirabehn: *Bapu's letters to Mira*, p. 101.



morning.' That night perhaps the only person in the Ashram who slept was the Mahatma himself. Next morning, at 6.30, he began the 241-mile march to Dandi on the sea-shore. The seventy-nine Satyagrahis included scholars, newspaper editors, untouchables, weavers. The oldest was the sixty-one-year-old leader, the youngest a boy of sixteen. The people of Ahmedabad turned out in their thousands to cheer them. The roads were strewn with green leaves. Gandhi, although the oldest member of his volunteer band, walked so fast that younger men found it difficult to keep pace with him. He felt all the better for the exercise; he rose as usual at 4 a.m., conducted the morning prayers, addressed meetings in villages through which he passed, did his daily quota of spinning, wrote articles for his journals and letters to his correspondents. He announced that he would not return to Sabarmati Ashram until the Salt Tax was repealed.

Meanwhile, the authorities had been watching the movement with mingled anxiety and bewilderment. The British had no intention of liquidating their Indian Empire. Earl Russell, the Under-Secretary of State for India, had commented on the Congress demand for complete independence: 'None knows better than the Indians themselves how foolish it is to talk of complete independence. Dominion status is not possible at the moment and would not be for a long time.'

The first impulse of the Government, as of the Congress intellectuals, was to ridicule 'the kindergarten stage of political revolution', and to laugh away the idea that the King-Emperor could be unseated by boiling sea-water in a kettle. The experts of the Government of India did not take the breach of the Salt Tax seriously. Tottenham, a member of the Central Board of Revenue (the department which dealt with Salt Tax), described the breach of the Salt Laws 'as Mr Gandhi's somewhat fantastic project'. A committee of two senior officers reported early in February that salt did not appear to be a promising field for initiating a no-tax campaign; that the most that could happen was that small quantities of inferior salt would be sporadically produced in certain areas and consumed locally; that neither government revenues nor the price of salt were likely to be affected.

In the last week of March, the Government of India issued instructions 'based on past experience in handling such movements' to the local Provincial Governments, advising them to avoid situations in which they would have to make wholesale arrests or enter into a test of endurance with the Congress; it

was preferable to arrest only the leaders, whose imprisonment was likely to discourage or disorganize the movement. If it became necessary to arrest large numbers of Satyagrahis, it was advisable to use the minimum possible force: the use of force against those who were not violent tended to alienate public sympathy. The local governments were exhorted to exercise special care in avoiding congestion in gaols and in treating young boys and women. This was sound advice, but unfortunately, as the tempo of the movement grew, the temper of the authorities also rose. Vallabhbhai Patel had already been arrested on March 7th under the orders of the local officials, who had acted without consulting even the Provincial Government. Early in April Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested in Allahabad. From Dandi, where he had made the first symbolic breach of the Salt Laws, Gandhi sent a message that 'at present Indian self-respect is symbolized, as it were, in a handful of salt in the Satyagrahi's hand. Let the fist be broken, but let there be no surrender of salt'. No less than 60,000 Indians were gaoled. Among those convicted for breach of the Salt Laws were Rajagopalachari, Madan Mohan Malaviya, J. M. Sen Gupta, B. G. Kher, K. M. Munshi, Devadas Gandhi, Mahadev Desai, Bithalbhai Patel. Women from aristocratic and middle-class homes picketed liquor and foreign cloth shops.

There were stray cases of violence, such as in Chittagong, where some terrorists raided the arsenal to seize arms. But on the whole India remained non-violent. Those who had scoffed at Salt Satyagraha and failed to see any connection between salt and Swaraj had underrated Gandhi's knack for organizing the Indian masses for corporate action. The Government also at last did what it had been planning for so long and at the same time dreading. It decided to arrest Gandhi.

The arrest took place on May 5, 1930 at Kradi, a village near Dandi, under Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827, which was resurrected from the dusty covers of the state archives to detain him without trial. Just before his arrest Gandhi had planned a more aggressive phase of his 'non-violent rebellion' by 'raiding' and taking possession of the salt depots at Dharsana. The raid, which was led by the aged Imam Sahib, an inmate of the Sabarmati Ashram, took place on May 21st. The leaders were arrested and the rank and file beaten up; an account of this raid was given in the *New Freeman* by an American correspondent Webb Miller: 'In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes

as at Dharsana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi's non-violent creed.'

Meanwhile, the All-India Congress Committee had extended the scope of civil disobedience to include the breach (besides the Salt Tax) of forest laws, the non-payment of taxes in ryotwari areas, and the boycott of foreign cloth, banks, shipping and insurance companies. A series of 'ordinances' issued by the Viceroy conferred extraordinary powers on the executive to enable it to crush the Congress, or to use the official jargon, 'to cope with the emergency'.

Gandhi's arrest stimulated rather than slackened resistance to the Government. Though at the time official propaganda belittled it, the Government were aware of the hold Congress had acquired over the people. In his *Rebel India*, Brailsford has borne testimony to the influence of the Congress in several parts of India, and particularly in Bombay. A similar testimony is available in official records; for example, in a report given by the Director of the Intelligence Bureau to the Home Member, after a visit to Bombay in August 1930. The Congress, he wrote, was able to command whatever support it wanted in that town; its volunteers and picketers were fed free by the people; its 'stranglehold' on business of every sort was complete; many businessmen were prepared to continue in the movement, even though ruin stared them in the face; in short, the Congress was 'completely in command', with the initiative entirely in its hands.

## CHAPTER XXVII

*Truce*

SINCE his arrest in early May Gandhi had been making up arrears of rest in the Yeravda gaol in Poona, which he picturesquely described as 'Yeravda Mandir' (Yeravda Temple). In prison he maintained his routine of prayer, spinning and studies, and ceased to worry about the political situation in the country and the fate of the movement he had launched. He knew he had done his duty; he hoped the people would do theirs.

A week after his arrest, Lord Irwin published his correspondence with the British Premier and indicated that the civil disobedience movement had not deflected His Majesty's Government from its policy of constitutional reforms and the decision to hold a Round Table Conference in London. The Viceroy was at this time directing the sternest repression which nationalism had known in India, but he did not really relish the role. 'You know,' he had written to V. J. Patel as late as in April 1930, 'that no one wishes more fervently than I, that the affairs of India may speedily be again guided into smoother waters.' He did not discourage the efforts at conciliation made by George Slocombe, the correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, and the two moderate leaders Sapru and Jayakar.

George Slocombe, who had been distressed by the turn which events had taken in India, had gathered from an interview with Motilal Nehru that under certain conditions the Congress was prepared to call off civil disobedience. A little later, Motilal Nehru was arrested and lodged in Naini prison, where his son Jawaharlal had preceded him. The Nehrus were interviewed by Sapru and Jayakar on the possibility of a truce; since they would not commit themselves without consulting Gandhi, they were carried in a special train to Poona. The discussions revealed that there was little common ground between the Congress and the Government.

The Congress reaction to the peace feelers threw into sharp relief the gulf between the Congress and the British. In Britain,

Winston Churchill was carrying on a crusade against handing over the people of India to 'an oligarchy of lawyers, politicians, fanatics and greedy merchants'. 'We ought to make it perfectly clear,' he said, 'that we intend to remain rulers of India for a very long and indefinite period and though we welcome co-operation from loyal Indians, we will have no truck with lawlessness and treason'. Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Government continued in office with the support of the Liberals; it was in no position, even if it had the intention, to make a radical concession to India. In India, Lord Irwin's advisers were confident of crushing Gandhi's rebellion and carrying on the administration with the help of the moderates and the Muslims. The majority in the Viceroy's Executive Council and almost all the Governors and senior civil servants were for further tightening of the screws on the Congress.

Meanwhile the constitutional caravan had moved on. The report of the Simon Commission, published during the summer, made an elaborate survey of the Indian constitutional problem and meticulously catalogued the difficulties which hampered a substantial advance. Its recommendations were so low-pitched that they did not evoke the enthusiasm of even conservative opinion in India. The first Round Table Conference met in London in 1930. The Congress was not represented on it but some of the delegates, who had left their country in turmoil, were anxious to return with some tangible result and pleaded for a conciliatory policy towards the Congress. In his farewell address (January 19, 1931) Ramsay MacDonald expressed the hope that the Congress would participate in the next session of the conference. A little earlier, Lord Irwin's speech in the Central Legislature had included a surprisingly chivalrous reference to the 'spiritual force which impels Mr Gandhi to count no sacrifice too great in the cause, as he believes, of the India he loves'. Irwin had already decided not to interfere with a meeting of the Congress leaders in Allahabad. He released Gandhi and the members of the Congress Working Committee on January 25, 1931—the eve of Independence Day—to the accompaniment of a conciliatory statement.

The unconditional release of members of the Congress Working Committee had not by itself brought the Congress any nearer to the Government. The members of the Congress Working Committee as they congregated in Allahabad—where Motilal Nehru lay on his death-bed—saw no warrant to call off civil disobedience, but they withheld this decision from the

Press on receipt of a telegram from Sapru and Sastri, who were on their way back home and were anxious to give the Congress leaders first-hand impressions of the Round Table Conference. Gandhi was not impressed by the achievements of the conference; nor did he feel optimistic about the possibilities of an understanding with the Government. Nevertheless he wrote to Lord Irwin and asked for an interview. His argument was that as a Satyagrahi he had a moral obligation to make a response to the Viceroy's gesture in releasing the Congress Working Committee.

The Gandhi-Irwin parleys began on the afternoon of February 17, 1931. They lasted for a total of twenty-four hours, spread over eight meetings. There were long intervals during which hopes of a settlement alternately receded and revived, but finally, on the morning of March 4th, an agreement was reached. The Delhi Pact, or, to give it its popular name, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, provided for discontinuance of civil disobedience on the part of the Congress, and the revocation of the ordinances and the release of civil disobedience prisoners on the part of the Government. The amnesty did not cover political prisoners detained without trial or convicted for covert or open violence; nor did it cover the Garhwali soldiers who had declined to fire at an unarmed crowd in Peshawar. The restitution of lands sold to third parties and the reinstatement of those who had lost their jobs during the non-co-operation movement were also not included in the agreement.

There was a concession in a small way to poor people on the sea-coast, to manufacture salt, and the recognition of picketing of foreign cloth. There was to be no inquiry into the allegations of excesses by the police; this was a crucial point on which both the Congress and the Government were very sensitive, and negotiations nearly broke down on it. Gandhi did not insist on the inquiry when Irwin told him that though he had the right to ask for an inquiry, it was wise to let bygones be bygones and not rake up bitterness afresh.

On the constitutional issue the Delhi Pact accepted safeguards 'in the interest of India' for such matters as defence, external affairs, minorities and finance. This was the clause which dealt Jawaharlal Nehru a 'tremendous shock', and which seemed so obviously at variance with 'complete independence,' to which the Congress was pledged. The agreement did not even guarantee dominion status; its terms fell manifestly short of those which the Congress leaders had considered as the minimum for a



truce in August 1930 during the negotiations initiated by Sapru and Jayakar.

Alan Campbell Johnson was not wrong in reaching the conclusion that in the Delhi Pact Gandhi's gains were consolation prizes, and Irwin's only surrender was in agreeing to enter into negotiations. Lord Irwin's stock with Indian nationalists fluctuated from time to time. It was at its highest immediately after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, and touched its nadir a year later when the Pact had gone to pieces and the Congress was in opposition and outlawed. The impression among Congressmen was that the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been a clever manoeuvre, and that Irwin had led the Mahatma up the garden path of the Viceroy's House. A fellow-prisoner read to Gandhi, in July 1932, B. G. Horniman's description of Lord Irwin as 'an agile opportunist who endeavoured to cover his inconsistencies and change of principle and policy with a thick veneer of unctuous rectitude and hypocritical professions of sincerity'.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi's comment was that the description did less than justice to the Viceroy, who, though loyal to the British Empire, had meant well by India. Indeed it was his belief in Lord Irwin's sincerity that had made Gandhi give way during the negotiations on several points of detail. He saw in Irwin a kindred spirit. 'The two Mahatmas', Sarojini Naidu's epithet for the two negotiators, was apt in so far as it emphasized their religious make-up.

So far as Gandhi was concerned, there is little doubt that he took the Delhi Pact as the beginning of a new chapter in Congress-Government relations. In a letter dated March 6, 1931 from the house of his host at Delhi, Dr Ansari, to the Private Secretary to the Viceroy, he wrote:

'I must ask for one favour. I told you that it would be a point of honour with the Working Committee to see that there was a cent per cent fulfilment of the conditions obligatory on the Congress. You will help me to implement this obligation if you will draw my prompt attention by wire, where necessary, to any irregularity on our part, that may come under your notice . . .

'I pray to God that the friendship at which the settlement is an attempt will become a permanent fact.'

That Gandhi should have agreed to attend a Round Table Conference without any definite commitment from the Government, on which he and Motilal Nehru had insisted in December 1929, was itself surprising. Gandhi's reasons for signing the pact

<sup>1</sup> Mahadev Desai: *Diaries* (entry dated July 19, 1932).

should be sought, however, not in its clauses, but in the logic of Satyagraha. His speech at the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress gave a peep into the working of his mind.

'I have often wondered myself what we are going to do at the conference when we know that there is such a gulf between what we want and what has been as yet offered at the conference. But considerations of a Satyagrahi decided me. There comes a stage when he may no longer refuse to negotiate with his opponent. His object is always to convert his opponent by love. The stage of negotiation arrived when the Working Committee was released after the Premier's declaration. The Viceroy also made an appeal to us to lay down arms and to indicate what we want.'

To the suggestion that there was no need for a truce with the Government when the Congress was in a position to continue civil disobedience for at least another year, Gandhi's answer was: 'Well, for that matter, we might be capable of carrying on the struggle for twenty years, and a true Satyagrahi fights to the last, even if the rest are tired into submission. But the truce was made not because we were tired out, but because it was imperative. He who will fight on because he can fight on is no Satyagrahi but a conceited person guilty before God.'

The obvious inconsistencies in Gandhi's position can thus be explained only in terms of his own technique. The Satyagraha movements were commonly described as 'struggles', 'rebellions', and 'wars without violence'. Owing to the common connotation of these words, however, they seemed to lay a disproportionate emphasis on the negative aspect of the movements, namely opposition and conflict. But the object of Satyagraha was not to achieve the physical elimination or moral breakdown of an adversary but, through suffering at his hands, to initiate those psychological processes which could make it possible for minds and hearts to meet. In such a struggle a compromise with the opponent was neither heresy nor treason, but a natural and a necessary step. And if it turned out that the compromise was premature and the adversary was unrepentant, there was nothing to prevent the Satyagrahi from returning to non-violent battle. It is true that national feeling could not be made to reach a high watermark at will, but Gandhi did not set much store by political freedom on the crest of a passing wave of emotion; he believed that India would be independent when she

<sup>1</sup> Tendulkar: *Mahatma*, Vol. III, p. 109.

came of age, and then no Power would be able to keep her in bondage.

The Karachi Congress, held in March 1931, approved of the Delhi Pact, though it put an interpretation on it which seemed more consistent with the ideals of the Congress than with the clauses of the Pact.

In April Gandhi was in Bombay and bade farewell to Lord Irwin. The new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, was already in Bombay but did not send for Gandhi. The hard-headed officials at Delhi and in the provincial capitals, to whom the Delhi Pact had been a bitter pill, had now a sympathetic chief. The friction began within a few days of the signing of the Pact. *Young India* of July 9, 1931 came out with an editorial listing breaches of the Pact with the startling title: 'Is it crumbling?'

The Government accused the Congress of having acted in a spirit contrary to the Delhi Pact, which thus verged on repudiation by both sides. Negotiations were resumed, however, and a compromise—the second settlement—was patched up. It was agreed that the Congress would participate in the Round Table Conference, and that its sole representative would be Gandhi.

A special train was arranged from Simla to Kalka, and other trains were held up to enable Gandhi to reach Bombay in time to sail on August 29th, in the *ss Rajputana*.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*The Round Table Conference*

'He is perhaps the best sailor on board the *ss Rajputana*,' wrote Mahadev Desai, the Mahatma's secretary. Gandhi, who travelled second class—the lowest—on the ship, spent most of the day and the whole of the night on deck, rose and retired at his usual hours, and followed the Ashram routine of prayers, spinning and studies. Little boys and girls of the home-going English passengers became his friends; they watched him ply the spinning-wheel, and when they peeped into his cabin in the morning or in the evening they were rewarded with armfuls of grapes and dates. At Aden the Indian community presented him an address. Messages of good wishes came from Madame Zagloul Pasha, the widow of the Egyptian patriot, and from leaders of the Wafd Party. At Marseilles he was greeted by Madeleine Rolland, the sister of the French savant, and was given a warm welcome by French students, who hailed him as the 'spiritual ambassador of India'.

On September 12, 1931, he arrived in London. He had accepted Muriel Lester's invitation to stay in Kingsley Hall in the East End, in order to be 'among the same sort of people to whom I have given my life'. Friends had pleaded with him that his residence was inconvenient for his fellow delegates and colleagues attending the Conference. He agreed to have an office at 88, Knightsbridge, but every evening, late though it was, he returned to sleep in Bow. Sometimes he returned from committee meetings after midnight, but the light still appeared in his room at 4 a.m. for the morning prayer. He had his morning walk in the mean streets of the east end; he visited his neighbours in Bow; he made friends with the children. 'Here I am,' he would say, 'doing the real round table work, getting to know the people of England.'

Gandhi was the sole representative of the Congress at the Round Table Conference. The British Press and politicians made out that Gandhi, however eminent as an individual, was only one of the Indian delegates, and the Congress was just one

of the numerous parties of which a cross-section had been brought together at the Conference. All the delegates were nominees of the Government; they had a sprinkling of able individuals, but the majority of them were drawn from the princely order, the landlords, the titled gentry and the leaders of communal groups and vested interests, big and small. Many delegates were only too willing to become pawns in the political intrigues, the jockeying for position, the scramble for jobs and seats in legislatures and in services, to which the Conference gradually reduced itself.

What with its composition and what with its procedure, which the British Government controlled, the Conference side-tracked its energies into secondary issues and particularly the communal problems. Gandhi saw through this game and did some plain speaking in public as well as in private. Surely, he asked, the British Government had not invited the Indian delegates from six thousand miles to London to settle the communal question. He pointed out that the various communities had been led to place an undue emphasis on the communal question as a condition precedent to constitutional advance; this had turned them virtually into hungry wolves prowling about for prey under the new constitution. The problem had been presented to the Conference in an inverted way; it had been called upon to divide a cake the size of which was not known. 'Let us know what we are going to get,' he demanded, 'so that on that basis I might endeavour to bring about unity even in the present ill-assorted group. I could tell them they are dashing a precious thing to pieces.'

He pleaded for an honourable and equal partnership between Britain and India, held not by force but 'by the silken cord of love'. The Congress had accepted the principle of federation, as also the principle that there should be 'safeguards', but the safeguards had to be devised in the interest of India and not to reduce self-government to a mockery. If all the safeguards which were being proposed were incorporated in the new constitution, the responsible government which India would enjoy could be no better than 'the responsible government prisoners have in their cells; the prisoners too have complete independence immediately after the cell door is locked up'. He admitted that the British had more organizing ability, but Indians knew their country better. He was against any special treatment for European business interests, but he assured them that there would be no discrimination against them either. He advocated adult

suffrage, a single-chamber legislature and indirect elections. He even envisaged the possibility of British troops remaining in India for some time after the grant of independence; he explained that it was for the British to initiate Indians into the mysteries of defence. 'Having clipped our wings it is their duty to give us wings wherewith we can fly.'

All this homely eloquence was wasted on the Conference. There was a financial crisis and a change of Government in Britain; in the new Government the Conservatives were heavily represented. The British public was preoccupied with domestic issues; for it the financial crisis was a more urgent issue than the niceties of an Indian Constitution. Inevitably, even if imperceptibly, there was a change in emphasis. Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Secretary of State, told Gandhi that he sincerely believed that Indians were unfit for complete self-government. Meanwhile, the Round Table delegates were busy with the bargains and counter-bargains of the communal problem. In these squabbles they were encouraged by the vested interests from India and the 'diehard' elements from Britain to expose to the world that it was Indian disunity and not British reluctance which barred the path to Indian self-government. Gandhi was prepared to give a 'blank cheque' to Muslims and other minorities to remove all their legitimate fears, provided they were willing to press the national demand for freedom. The Hindu delegates were not ready for this generous gesture, and the Muslim nationalists were not represented at the Conference. Gandhi realized that he had underrated the forces arrayed against him and the Congress. It was almost with a sense of relief that he saw the Conference tail off to a formal conclusion. The British Premier, Ramsay MacDonald, in his concluding address promised to impose a solution of the communal problem, and to appoint a committee to go to India for further investigation so that an 'all-embracing statute' could be framed.

In London's East End, among the poor of London, 'uncle Gandhi' had become a popular figure with the children. He answered their innocent and often penetrating questions. He told them stories of his childhood. He explained to them why he had chosen to stay in the East End and why he wore his meagre dress. He advised them to return good for evil. There was an interesting sequel to this advice when the father of a four-year-old girl told the Mahatma that he had a bone to pick with him. 'And what is it?' asked Gandhi. 'Well my little Jane comes every morning to me, hits me and wakes me up and says, "Now, don't



you hit back, for Gandhi told us not to hit back." On October 2nd, his birthday, the children presented him with 'two woolly dogs, three pink birthday candles, a tin plate, a blue pencil and some jelly sweets'—gifts which he especially treasured and took to India. 'Thousands and thousands of children in England will have seen Gandhiji,' wrote Mahadev Desai, 'before he leaves the English shores. And who knows, it may be this generation with whom we may have to settle accounts?'

One of the most pleasant surprises of the tour was the courtesy and even affection Gandhi received from the cotton operatives of Lancashire, which had been hit the hardest by the Congress boycott of British goods. He listened with obvious attention and sympathy to the tale of woe of those who were jobless. Many of them saw the background of the boycott which he had sponsored when he told them: 'You have three million unemployed, but we have nearly 300 million unemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is seventy shillings. Our average income is 7s 6d a month.'

Some of his English friends felt that by staying in the East End he was ignoring the middle and upper classes of England, who really determined the political future of India. So they arranged for him to meet the best minds of Britain in politics, religion, science and literature. He met George Bernard Shaw, who found in him 'a kindred spirit'. He addressed Members of Parliament in committee rooms. He met Bishops and Church dignitaries. He spoke to the boys at Eton and to the students of the London School of Economics. At Oxford, where he stayed at the invitation of Dr Lindsay, the Master of Balliol, he had talks with Dr Gilbert Murray, Gilbert Salter, Professor Coupland, Edward Thompson and others, and spoke at a meeting organized by the Indian students. He went to see Lloyd George; Charlie Chaplin, of whom he had never heard before, came to see him.

It is difficult to assess the results of these informal contacts. The Englishman's courtesy to the distinguished guest often concealed the real impact of his personality. It was apparent that the gulf between Congress aims and the prevalent British view was almost unbridgeable; only a tiny minority was prepared to go the whole hog with the Mahatma in his claim for an equal partnership between India and Britain. He was unable to carry immediate conviction; it appeared to most British statesmen and thinkers that he wanted India to travel too far and too fast on the difficult road to self-government. Nevertheless, the homely

logic and the transparent sincerity of the man left an indelible impression on some of those whom he met. They formed clearer impressions of him than the loin cloth and goat's milk version with which the popular Press regaled them. While his opinions might appear utopian or revolutionary, he could no longer be dismissed as 'humbug', the appellation with which *Truth* had heralded his arrival in England.

The news from India was far from reassuring. The compromise which had been patched up between the Congress and Government, just before his departure for England, had virtually broken down. The Mahatma was anxious to return home; he declined invitations to prolong his itinerary in Europe and to visit America, but he decided to spend a few days with Romain Rolland in Switzerland on his way back to India.

Accompanied by Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal, his secretaries, Mirabehn (Miss Slade) and his son, Devadas, Gandhi arrived at Villeneuve on December 6th. In his book *Mahatma Gandhi*, published soon after the first non-co-operation movement in the early nineteen-twenties, Rolland had interpreted Gandhi's life and message with remarkable insight, and expressed the hope that the message of non-violence and self-sacrifice might yet save violence-ridden Europe from self-destruction: 'One thing is certain; either Gandhi's spirit will triumph or it will manifest itself again, as were manifested, centuries before, the Messiah and Buddha, till there finally is manifested in a mortal half-god the perfect incarnation of the principle of life which will lead a new humanity on to a new path.'

Gandhi and Rolland were closeted together for hours daily. A glimpse into their conversations, which ranged over a wide field, has been given by Rolland's sister:

'My brother describes for Gandhi the tragic situation of Europe; the sufferings of the people oppressed by dictators: the drama of the proletariat, who in their desperate effort to break the shackles of an anonymous ruthless capitalism and pushed forward by their legitimate aspiration for justice and freedom see only one way out, that of rebellion and violence. For man in the West is by education, by tradition and by temperament unprepared for the religion of *ahimsa*.

'... Gandhi listens; reflects. He reaffirms his unshakable faith in non-violence. Yet he understands that to convince sceptical Europe the concrete example of a successful experiment in non-violence would be necessary. Will India furnish it? He hopes so.'

<sup>1</sup> Shukla (Editor): *Incidents of Gandhiji's Life*, p. 294.

Gandhi's visit to Switzerland evoked a good deal of local enthusiasm. The Syndicate of the Milkmen of Lemen telephoned Gandhi's host that they would like to supply milk to the 'King of India'; a Japanese artist hurried from Paris to make sketches of the Indian leader; a young musician played a violin under his window. Correspondents from Italy asked the Indian saint to indicate the ten lucky numbers for the next drawing of the national lottery; school children brought him flowers. He addressed private gatherings of pacifists.

Gandhi had planned to spend a day in Rome on his way back. Romain Rolland warned him to be on his guard against the wiles of the Fascists and arranged for him to stay with a friend whose integrity was beyond doubt. In Rome he walked through the Vatican galleries; in the Sistine Chapel he was spell-bound: 'I saw a figure of Christ there. It was wonderful. I could not tear myself away. The tears sprang to my eyes as I gazed.'

The Pope did not grant him an audience, but Mussolini did. Of the latter, a prison official said in Yeravda gaol five months later that he was an attractive personality. 'Yes,' said the Mahatma, 'but he looks like the executioner. How long will a rule based on bayonets last?'

After he had boarded the Italian liner *Pilsna* for Brindisi, Gandhi learnt that the *Giornale d'Italia* had published an interview with him in which he was supposed to have announced that he was returning to India to resume the civil disobedience movement. He had given no interview in Rome and cabled to London that the report was a complete fabrication. In spite of this denial several British papers and politicians persisted in the insinuation that Mr Gandhi was lying. It seemed as if the *Giornale d'Italia* provided just the excuse for which diehard politicians in England and British bureaucrats in India were looking to revert to the time-honoured policy of 'no truck with the Congress', to which the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been a temporary aberration.

## CHAPTER XXIX

*Total War*

GANDHI landed at Bombay on December 28, 1931. Within a week he was in gaol and civil disobedience was resumed; the Indian National Congress was practically outlawed and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had gone to pieces. The explanation for this swift and somewhat unexpected turn in the political scene is to be sought not only in the incidents of that crucial week which spanned Gandhi's return and rearrest, but in the undercurrent of antagonism between the Congress and the Government which the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had failed to eradicate.

The Government had already perfected its plans for an offensive against the Congress. For months the Government of India and the Provincial Governments had been working out the details of the special powers with which executive officers were to be armed to deal a knock-out blow to the Congress if civil disobedience was resumed. The ordinances had been drafted and circulated to Provincial Governments; civil disobedience 'manuals' had been drawn up. On December 19, 1931, when Gandhi was on the high seas, the Government of India by a circular letter alerted the Provincial Governments regarding the anticipated struggle with the Congress. The temper of the official world may be gauged from a letter which the Bombay Government addressed to their superiors in Delhi on December 21st, pointing out the inconvenience of lodging Mr Gandhi in gaol in Bombay Presidency: 'If the Government of India still consider it essential that the place selected should be on the mainland of India . . . Coimbatore might be a suitable place. I am, however, to say that the Governor-in-Council considers that the moral effect of Mr Gandhi's internment would be far greater and that it would have a more valuable effect in showing the determination and power of Government to crush the civil disobedience movement, if Mr Gandhi were removed to the Andamans, or possibly Aden might be considered in order to place him beyond reach of political exploitation.'

The proposal was not considered a practical proposition by

<sup>1</sup> Diaries of Mahadev Desai. (Entry 26th May, 1932.

the Government of India, but Gandhi's arrest under Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827 was a foregone conclusion. Lord Willingdon had evidently decided not to repeat that hesitation which his three predecessors, Lords Chelmsford, Reading and Irwin, had exhibited in arresting the author of civil disobedience. Many senior officers in the Central and Provincial Secretariats believed that Gandhi's movements of defiance of authority had thriven on the initial indecision or leniency of the Government and that a more resolute policy could have nipped the evil in the bud. For many of them the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been a bitter pill; the Pact did not alter the basic fact that the Congress was pledged to liquidate the Indian Empire, which the servants of the Crown had sworn to serve and defend. The fact that the Congress, under Gandhi's leadership, eschewed the use of force did not seem to make much difference to those who considered non-violence a mere mask. Those British officials who did not doubt Gandhi's bona fides questioned his ability to control the popular feeling once it had been worked up.

When Gandhi landed at Bombay on December 28, 1931, after four months absence from India, he was far from being optimistic but he certainly did not expect to be confronted with a first-class political crisis. The arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the promulgation of ordinances in the United Provinces and the North-West Frontier had brought matters to a head. 'I take it,' Gandhi told a mass meeting of the citizens of Bombay, 'that these (ordinances) are Christmas gifts from Lord Willingdon, our Christian Viceroy.' The Congress Working Committee came to the conclusion that the Government had decided on a showdown and that the only answer to the Government was a revival of civil disobedience.

Gandhi was anxious, however, to ascertain the Government's point of view and to seek a peaceful solution so long as there was a single ray of hope; he could not lightly plunge the country into another ordeal. Gandhi telegraphed to the Viceroy seeking an interview. He offered to go to these two provinces to study both the official and the popular versions of recent events, and, if the enquiries proved the Congress to have been in the wrong, to correct his colleagues and co-workers. It is true that the Congress Working Committee had already sketched a plan of civil disobedience; but this plan was not to be enforced until Gandhi had explored with the Viceroy all avenues of maintaining peace. The Viceroy's reaction was sharp: he accused Gandhi of holding out threats of civil disobedience and warned him that

he and the Congress would be responsible 'for all the consequences which may follow from the action which the Congress have proclaimed as their intention of taking'. Only the intervention of His Majesty's Government could possibly have staved off the crisis. Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State, had impressed Gandhi during the Round Table Conference with his extreme frankness; he had warned Gandhi that if the Congress tried to force the pace by 'direct action' the Government would crush it with all the force at its command. Gandhi had begged him to reconsider his position: 'It would be such a tremendous strain on both the communities, yours and ours, if you set yourselves to do it . . . But Sir Samuel, what do you mean by a rebellion like this? Rebellion is not so terrible when it is completely peaceful.'

Sir Samuel knew how unhappy Gandhi had been with the results of the Round Table Conference; Gandhi had assured him, however, that after his return to India he would strain every nerve to avoid a breach with the Government. The fabricated interview with Gandhi which Signor Gayada of the *Giornale d'Italia* had broadcast from Rome had surprised Sir Samuel, but he had sought and obtained a repudiation from Gandhi while he was still on the high seas. Sir Samuel may have preferred peace to hostilities with Gandhi, but he had neither the will nor perhaps the strength to oppose the combined weight of official opinion in India; already he had approved plans for an offensive against the Congress; now he gave permission to press the button that was to unleash a *blitzkrieg* against the Congress.

'In the last fight,' Gandhi warned a mass meeting in Bombay soon after his return from England, 'the people had to face lathis, but this time they will have to face bullets.' He had sensed the mood of the Government, even though he did not know the thoroughness of its preparations to crush the Congress. Lord Willingdon had the reputation of a firm and hard-headed administrator, and had every intention of living up to it. The Governors in the Provinces shared his resolution to put trouble-makers in their proper places; many of them were ready, even impatient, to teach a lesson to an organization which they believed had flourished on half-hearted measures by the Government. The plans for dealing with civil disobedience were pulled out of the 'top secret' pigeon-holes of the Secretariat and put into execution with lightning speed. Within a few hours of the arrest of Gandhi and the members of the Congress Work-



ing Committee on January 4, 1932, a series of ordinances were promulgated. Not only the Working Committee, but the Provincial Committee and innumerable local committees were declared illegal; a number of organizations allied with or sympathetic to the Congress, such as Youth Leagues, National Schools, Congress Libraries and Hospitals were also outlawed. Congress funds were confiscated; Congress buildings were occupied and almost every possible measure was taken to prevent the Congress from functioning. That the Ordinances were drastic and severe and covered almost every activity of Indian life was admitted in so many words by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons in March 1932.

By skimming off its leadership and freezing its funds, the Government hoped to demoralize the Congress. The powers acquired through the Ordinances included those which permitted the administration to control or forfeit any funds 'which were suspected of being held or used for the purposes of an unlawful association'; officials were authorized to examine account books, make inquiries or order searches. The Government went so far as to seek the intervention of the Secretary of State for India to stop the payment of royalties from Columbia Gramophone Company to the All-India Spinners Association for the sale of a record of a talk given by Gandhi during his stay in England.

Gaol administration hardened perceptibly. The first Congress campaign in 1930-1 had received a great impetus from the participation of women. In the second campaign (1932-4) treatment in gaols seemed almost to have been designed to scare away women. Mirabehn, Gandhi's disciple and the daughter of a former Admiral of the British Fleet, gave an account of the conditions in Arthur Road gaol which was a severe indictment of conditions in women's prisons. She noticed that women political prisoners were allowed to interview their children through iron bars. Her neighbours in this gaol were three criminals, two thieves and a prostitute; these criminals were not locked up for the night, while the political prisoners were.

One of the greatest anxieties of the Government during the truce period had been the penetration of Congress influence in the countryside; difficult as it was to fight middle-class nationalism in the towns, the possibility of disaffection spreading to the peasantry seemed to the Government a more sinister threat. This is the most plausible explanation of the severity with which 'no-tax campaigns' in the rural areas were handled. These

campaigns were conspicuous in Allahabad and Rae-Bareilly districts of the United Provinces and a few districts of Bombay, Bengal and Bihar and North-West Frontier Province.

A similar firmness guided the Government in its dealings with the Press. The initial success of the Salt Satyagraha campaign in 1930 was partly attributed in official circles to the publicity it had received. In 1932, by a series of drastic measures, the freedom of the Press was curtailed. Apart from the prosecution of Press correspondents, the forfeiture of securities from newspapers was used as a deterrent. On July 4, 1932, just six months after the resumption of civil disobedience, the Secretary of State for India stated in the House of Commons that action had been taken under the Press Laws against 109 journalists and 98 printing presses.

Gandhi had meanwhile been lodged in the Yeravda Prison in Poona. The Bombay Government had not been able to persuade the Government of India to deport him from the Indian mainland nor to transfer him to some other province. Two of his closest colleagues, Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahadev Desai, were lodged with him. The latter's diaries are a very full and lively record of Gandhi's life in gaol. The Mahatma knew enough to gauge the scale of the official offensive against his movement. Repression, he wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare, 'was crossing all legitimate limits'. Suffering, however, was an essential part of Satyagraha, to purify those who invited it and to convert those who inflicted it. If the ordeal through which the country was passing was fiery enough, Gandhi hoped it would only burn out the dross. If people remained true to their pledge of resistance, no repression, however severe, could possibly crush them. From the new constitution that was being forged in England by British experts and Indian observers, Gandhi did not expect much. 'Why don't you accept half the loaf today?' asked Thomas, Home Secretary to the Government of Bombay, who came to see him in gaol. 'I would,' replied the Mahatma, 'if it was bread and not stone.'

Gandhi was as busy in gaol as he had been outside. Prayers and spinning figured in the daily routine. He washed his clothes, dictated or wrote his heavy mail—one day he wrote as many as forty-nine letters—most of it to his 'family' in the Ashram. He warned his correspondents not to give publicity to his letters from gaol, which were to be treated as private. He read copiously, developed a keen interest in astronomy, and often gazed into the sky to decipher the 'mysterious universe'. He had his moments

of relaxation, particularly when he exchanged sallies with the irrepressible Vallabhbhai Patel, whose barbed wit made him a delightful companion.

The Government had acted with lightning speed not only in applying its carefully planned repression but in blocking publicity, which alone could sustain popular morale and boost a nationalist movement. In spite of this initial handicap, no less than 61,551 convictions for civil disobedience took place in the first nine months of the movement in 1932; this figure was a little higher than that of the campaign in 1930-1. For the first four months the movement functioned with vigour; after that the number of convictions declined and except occasionally, such as in April 1932, when Congress attempted to hold an annual session with Pt Malaviya as president, the stream of civil resisters became a mere trickle.

By the end of 1932 the Provincial Governments and the Government of India were exchanging mutual felicitations on having attained victory over Congress; they would not, however, shed the special powers assumed under the ordinances earlier in the year. There was to be no drawn battle this time, and for years to come Lord Willingdon was resolved not to accept from Gandhi and the Congress anything less than an unconditional surrender. He had decided to keep the Mahatma under a political quarantine. At the end of 1932, when Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar were returning from the constitutional discussions in London, the Secretary of State suggested to the Viceroy that they should be allowed to see Gandhi in gaol. In a long cable dated January 4, 1933 the Viceroy opposed the suggestion:

'We (Governors and the Executive Council) recognize that the chief object of such an interview would be to show that we are not unreasonable and that we are giving Gandhi and the Congress every opportunity of co-operating in the new constitution; but we are of the opinion that such an interview could not fail to have very embarrassing results and would tend to destroy the favourable position achieved partly by the consistent policy followed during the last year and partly by the success of the last Round Table Conference.'

The Viceroy's view of Gandhi's personality and politics did not err on the side of generosity. In a letter dated July 1, 1933 to the Secretary of State, he wrote: 'The leadership of Gandhi is being openly attacked both from the left and from the right, as having led Congress after fourteen years of constant struggle to a position perilously near failure. There are profound dif-

ferences in Congress ranks as to the policy to be pursued and a general sense of despondency. The only man who might pull the Congress together is Gandhi. He realizes very clearly that his influence depends virtually on his relations with the Government. If he could produce the impression that the Government are prepared to treat with him, his influence will rise at once one hundred per cent.'

The idea of Gandhi as a Machiavellian politician with the Congress as his pliable tool, extending his influence over the ignorant Indian public by contriving an interview with the Viceroy, was an incredible misreading of the Mahatma and the millions who obeyed his slightest nod. In his *Nine Troubled Years*, Sir Samuel Hoare (later Lord Templewood) rightly observes, 'If I made any criticism, it would be that Lord Willingdon did not, like Irwin, understand Gandhi's personality and on that score underrated his power.' Lord Willingdon's past experience as an administrator seems to have been more of a liability than an asset to him in his role as Viceroy. The Indian problem struck him primarily as an administrative one, requiring timely and judicious use of coercion to crush trouble-makers. He was almost incapable of understanding the deep intellectual and emotional roots of the movement for political liberation: the enthusiasm it evoked struck him as a variant of ignorant fanaticism. Little as he understood the springs of Indian nationalism, he understood Gandhi even less. Civil disobedience was a part of the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha, which sought to achieve changes in political as well as social spheres by organizing the masses non-violently, by offering resistance without retaliation, and non-co-operation without hatred. To Gandhi the non-violent basis of the movement was its most significant one; to Willingdon not only was the conscious moral superiority of Gandhi and his followers irritating, but a non-violent movement was the more insidious for the odium it brought on those who had the responsibility for keeping law and order.

Gandhi was often driven to the verge of despair by the wall of prejudice behind which British statesmen entrenched themselves. When he criticized their actions he was denounced as a demagogue; when he claimed to be their friend he was accused of hypocrisy. When he applied for an interview he was suspected of out-manoeuvring the Government; when he launched a campaign he was irreconcilable; when he circumscribed its scope or withdrew it he was alleged to have lost credit with his followers.

It was the object of Satyagraha—of which civil disobedience was one form—to penetrate this wall of prejudice. When reasoning failed voluntary suffering at the hands of the opponent was intended to melt his heart and to release the springs which hindered understanding. In practice this method of 'attack' on the opponent was not always easy, nor quick in producing results. With their moral defences exposed, the British officials answered the challenge to their position with increased assertion and self-complacency. The successive civil disobedience movements, however, furthered the cause of Indian nationalism at least in two ways. They lifted the spell of fear which had enveloped the Indian masses for nearly a century and a half, and they wore down, however slowly, British rigidity into scepticism and scepticism into fatigue. Administering a sub-continent in the best of conditions was for many civil servants an arduous enough task; in the face of tenacious opposition from vocal sections of the population, the task ultimately became almost an impossible one.

But we are anticipating events. By August 1932 Lord Willingdon and his advisers felt that under the hammer-blows of the Government civil disobedience had wilted. The announcement of a fast by Gandhi, as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to untouchables, was to stir public opinion powerfully, but it was to divert it into non-political channels.

## CHAPTER XXX

*Harijans*

ON September 13, 1932, newspapers all over India carried a sensational announcement: Gandhi, still a prisoner in Yeravda Gaol, had decided to fast to death from September 20th, as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to the depressed (untouchable) classes in the new constitution.

When the Communal Award was published on August 17, 1932, it confirmed Gandhi's worst fears. In spite of the double vote given to the depressed classes, for their own separate constituencies as well as for the general (Hindu) constituencies, the fact remained that separate electorates were to be set up for these classes. Gandhi immediately wrote to the British Premier that he would embark on 'a perpetual fast unto death', which could only end 'if during its progress the British Government, of its motion or under pressure of public opinion, revised their decision and withdrew their scheme of communal electorates for the depressed classes'. The fast was to continue even if he was released.

The British Premier and his advisers were unable to appreciate Gandhi's deeply emotional and religious approach to the problem. Their first impulse was to scent a political motive in the fast: Gandhi was trying a stunt to recover the prestige he had lost through the decline of civil disobedience. If the British ministers failed to fathom the depth of Gandhi's feeling on this subject they were even less able to see the ethics of fasting for the solution of what was to them a political problem. Fasting struck them as a thinly-disguised method of coercion. The British reaction to Gandhi's fasts was well exemplified in Low's cartoon as a 'Prophecy for 1933', in which Lord Willingdon was shown going on hunger strike at the instance of 10 Downing Street 'to force Mr Gandhi to admit the new constitution as touchable'.

Gandhi, however, did not have to justify his fast to anybody except to his own conscience, or, as he put it, to his Maker. Fasting had a definite place in his discipline of life. A fast was



sometimes the only way out for the agony of his soul. It could not be used without the deepest searching of the heart; not until 'the still small voice' had spoken in clear, unmistakable accents. But was it not possible that he could be mistaken? Could not his own conceit masquerade as an inner voice? Gandhi did not deny that he might be mistaken, but if he was, his death from voluntary starvation would be, he argued, a good riddance for those who had fallen under his false spell.

Was not the fast a form of coercion? Gandhi was aware that his fast did exercise a moral pressure, but the pressure was directed not against those who disagreed with him but against those who loved him and believed in him; he sought to prick the conscience of the latter and to convey to them something of his own inner anguish at a monstrous tyranny. He did not expect his critics to react in the same way as his friends and co-workers, but if his self-crucifixion could demonstrate his sincerity to them, the battle would be more than half-won. The fast dramatized the issue at stake; ostensibly it suppressed reason, but in fact it was designed to free reason from that mixture of inertia and prejudice which had permitted gross social iniquities to exist for centuries.

The news that Gandhi was about to fast shook India from one end to the other. September 20th, when the fast began, was observed all over India as a day of fasting and prayer. At Santiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore, dressed in black, spoke to a large gathering on the significance of the fast and the urgency of fighting an age-old evil. There was a spontaneous upsurge of feeling; temples, wells and public places were thrown open to the depressed classes. A conference of leaders of caste Hindus and depressed classes was summoned to devise alternative electoral arrangements to replace those provisions of the British Award that had provoked Gandhi to offer the supreme sacrifice.

Meanwhile, the sands of time were running out. The Government were willing to remove Gandhi to a private residence in Poona under certain restrictions; but Gandhi preferred to fast in gaol. He took his last meal of lemon juice and honey with hot water at 11 a.m. on September 20th; an hour later the fast began.

The Hindu Leaders' Conference met at Bombay. The leaders, who included Madan Mohan Malaviya, Tej Bahadur Sapru, M. R. Jayaker, Rajagopaladhari, N. C. Kelkar, Rajendra Prasad and Moonje, were anxious for a quick solution. They had to carry with them, however, the leaders of the depressed classes, particularly Ambedkar, who was not only a stubborn advocate

of separate electorates but fully conscious of his pivotal position: no solution to which he did not agree was likely to commend itself to the Government. What with the progress of the fast and the strain of the negotiations, Gandhi's strength began to ebb quickly. Ambedkar bargained hard; he was reluctant to give up separate electorates, which the Communal Award gave to his community, unless he received some counter-balancing advantages. Eventually an agreement, popularly known as the Poona Pact, was reached; it doubled the representation of the depressed classes in the provincial legislatures but revised the electoral system. Voters from the depressed classes were to hold a primary election and choose a panel of four candidates for each seat; these four candidates were then to submit to a joint electorate of caste Hindus and untouchables. Reservation of seats was to continue until it was ended by mutual agreement. But the method of primary election was to lapse after ten years.

The British Cabinet accepted the Poona Pact and Gandhi broke the fast. The Poona Pact substituted one scheme of electoral representation of the depressed classes for another. The fast had at least one good result; it did away with separate electorates for the depressed classes. The insidious influence of this mode of representation as a wedge in Indian politics was to become fully visible in the next decade, and it was well that at least one crack in national life was closed in time. But more important than these constitutional arrangements, which incidentally did not come into force for nearly four and a half years, was the emotional catharsis through which the Hindu community had passed. The fast had been intended, as Gandhi had avowed, 'to sting the conscience of the Hindu community into right religious action'. The scrapping of separate electorates was only the beginning of the end of untouchability.

One of the greatest campaigns of social reform in history was thus launched by a state prisoner. Nobody knew better than Gandhi that an ancient tyranny could not be blasted overnight and that the results of the fast had to be followed up by work in the field and by propaganda. Under his inspiration an all-India organization was established with G. D. Birla as President and the indefatigable A. V. Thakkar as Secretary. From his prison cell Gandhi issued a series of Press statements and a stream of letters to his numerous correspondents to educate the public on the evils of untouchability. He arranged for the publication of a weekly paper, *Harijan*, to promote this campaign.

*Harijan* means 'Children of God'; it was Gandhi's name for the untouchables.

As Gandhi threw himself into the movement, he discovered that the evil was of much greater magnitude than he had thought at first. The task of the reformer was stupendous. How was he to fight this age-old evil? How was he to convince his co-workers that he was in dead earnest? How was he to acquire greater application and dedication for this great mission? Gandhi's anguish was brought to an end by 'a call from within' to embark on a twenty-one day fast from May 8, 1933.

The civil disobedience movement had been suspended for six weeks immediately after Gandhi's release and on his advice. As soon as he recovered some strength, he telegraphed to the Viceroy a request for an interview 'to explore the possibilities of peace'. Lord Willingdon's reply was a polite rebuff. Gandhi was again arrested on August 1st, and sent back to Yeravda prison. He was released three days later but confined within the limits of Poona City. He defied the order, was rearrested and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. Back in gaol, he commenced a fast on August 16th, to protest against the denial of facilities for the promotion of the campaign against untouchability which he had been receiving during his earlier incarceration. His condition deteriorated rapidly and he was released.

He was now faced with a curious dilemma. If he went back to gaol, the Government was likely to refuse him facilities for Harijan work; if he undertook a fast the Government might release him. This was a 'cat and mouse' game, to which he decided not to be a party. He announced his intention not to offer civil disobedience during the unexpired portion of his sentence of a year's imprisonment.

With this self-denying ordinance on his political activities, his energies were directed exclusively towards the abolition of untouchability. In September 1933 he moved to Wardha and announced the gift of the Sabarmati Ashram to the Harijan Sevak Sangh. On November 7th he set out on a countrywide tour to promote the Harijan cause. During the next nine months he covered 12,500 miles, penetrating into some of the remotest parts of the country, which were off the beaten track of national leaders. He called on caste Hindus to purge themselves of prejudice against the Harijans, and he urged the Harijans to shake off the vices (drugs and drink) which hindered their absorption into Hindu society. He pleaded for the opening of temples to Harijans: 'Temples are for sinners, not for saints;

but who is to judge where no man is without sin?' He ridiculed the superstition that anybody could be unclean by birth, or that the shadow or touch of one human being could defile another human being. Bathing was all very well, he told a village audience, but even buffaloes had long daily baths.

He wore himself out in making his collections for the Harijan Fund. In ten months he received eight lakhs of rupees. He could, if he had wished, have obtained this amount as a gift from a Maharaja or a millionaire, but he did not set much store by money as such. The millions of men, women and children who contributed to his begging-bowl became fellow-soldiers in the campaign against untouchability.

The Harijan tour was by no means a triumphal progress. Gandhi was attacking an age-old tyranny and long-established vested interests, which did not stick at anything to preserve themselves. The *Sanatanists* (orthodox Hindus) accused him of a dangerous heresy: they organized black-flag demonstrations; they tried to heckle him and disrupt the meetings he addressed. On June 25th, while he was on his way to the municipal hall in Poona, a bomb was thrown at his party; seven persons, including the chief officer of the municipal committee, were injured, but Gandhi was unhurt. He expressed his 'deep pity' for the unknown thrower of the bomb. 'I am not aching for martyrdom,' he said, 'but if it comes in my way in the prosecution of what I consider to be the supreme duty in defence of the faith I hold in common with millions of Hindus, I shall have well earned it.'

Even though the opposition of the *Sanatanists* died hard, and even though militant Harijan leaders were critical, Gandhi succeeded in piercing an ancient sore. In an article entitled 'The Revolution is Over', Rajagopalachari, the well-known Congress leader from Madras, wrote: 'Untouchability is not yet gone. But the revolution is really over and what remains is but the removal of the debris.' This was probably an optimistic verdict, but there is no doubt that the reformists had made a good beginning. The Congress Ministries in 1937-9 removed some of the legal disabilities of the Harijans, and untouchability itself became illegal in the constitution of free India. A social tyranny which had deep roots needed a continuous war on all fronts, legal, social and economic, and for many years to come.

## CHAPTER XXXI

*Rural Economics*

THE civil disobedience movement was at a low ebb even in the autumn of 1932 when Gandhi's fast on untouchability diverted attention from it. The Harijan work opened safer channels for activity, which not a few Congressmen were glad to use. The temporary suspension of mass civil disobedience in May 1933 nearly killed it; the revival of individual civil disobedience was to the Government little more than a minor nuisance. The harsh repression by the Government had temporarily numbed the country, but many Congressmen felt that if their leader's strategy had been determined less by moral and more by political considerations, the Government could have been embarrassed to a greater extent. Congressmen had accepted non-violence as a policy for wresting self-government from the British; they had agreed to eschew the use of physical force, but they chafed at the innumerable limitations with which the Mahatma encumbered himself. In May 1933 he had unambiguously condemned secrecy as inconsistent with Satyagraha. Yet so pervasive was the repressive apparatus of the Government that the alternative to functioning secretly was not to function at all.

The conviction grew upon Gandhi that some of his followers had tired of his methods and views and that they pretended to accept policies with which they really differed; that his personality was unfairly dominating the Congress and interfering with its democratic spirit. He felt that he owed it to himself and to his followers not to strain their loyalty unduly. The suspension of civil disobedience was not the only issue. There were other differences of outlook which were glossed over or bridged temporarily during the mass struggle against the Government. His renewed emphasis on the spinning-wheel as 'the second lung of the nation' seemed as misplaced to many as was his moral and religious approach to the removal of untouchability. He himself viewed with misgivings the nascent Socialist group, which he described as a body of 'men in a hurry'.

It was on the crucial issue of non-violence, however, that he

felt most deeply the difference between himself and the intelligentsia in Congress. After fifteen years of preaching and practising non-violence, it almost hurt him to see how little it was understood by those who professed to follow him. Mass civil disobedience had struck the imagination of Congressmen, but this was only one aspect of his non-violent technique. There was another aspect, the constructive programme, which he now stressed, and which seemed strangely unpolitical to many Congressmen.

It was this divergence in outlook that drove Gandhi to retire from Congress in October 1934. 'I do not leave the Congress in anger or in huff nor yet in disappointment,' he wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel. He was restoring freedom to the Congress; he was also regaining freedom of action for himself. Henceforth, at least for the next three years, not politics but village economics were to be his dominant interest.

The Bombay session of the Indian National Congress in October 1934, which formally registered Gandhi's retirement from that organization, also authorized the formation, under his guidance, of the All-India Village Industries Association. This Association, 'unaffected by and independent of the political activities of the Congress', was to work for the revival and encouragement of village industries and the moral and physical advancement of the village. The resolution was an index of the new orientation that Gandhi was giving to his own activities and those of Congress.

Ever since Gandhi had entered Indian public life in 1915, he had been pleading for a new deal for the village. The acute pressure on land and the absence of supplementary industries had caused chronic unemployment and under-employment among the peasants, whose appalling poverty never ceased to weigh upon Gandhi's mind. His advocacy of the spinning-wheel derived from its immediate practical value as a palliative. The All-India Spinners Association, to which he had given a good deal of his time during the years of political quiescence, had in a period of ten years extended its activities to 5,300 villages, and provided employment to 220,000 spinners, 20,000 weavers and 20,000 carders, and disbursed more than two crores of rupees in Indian villages. These figures may not seem impressive today in the context of large-scale state-sponsored planning, but they represented solid work on the part of an organization often against heavy odds.



Nobody knew better than Gandhi that the All-India Spinners Association had only scratched the surface of the problem of rural poverty, but he began to think and plan for the revival of the village economy as a whole. His Harijan tour had revealed to him how, with the decay of village industries, Harijans had sunk deeper and deeper into poverty; the reform of untouchability was thus linked with the economic amelioration of these unfortunate people. The revival of village industries thus acquired a new urgency. The *Swadeshi* cult, which insisted on the use of articles made in India and had swayed the country during periods of intense political excitement, received a new twist in the nineteen-thirties. It was not enough, argued Gandhi, that an article should be of Indian origin; it was equally important that it should be made in a village. He appealed to town-dwellers to examine each article of daily consumption which was manufactured in India or abroad, and to find a substitute for it from the village. The broom could do duty for a brush; a 'kikar' tooth-stick for a tooth brush; hand-pounded rice for factory-polished rice; 'gur' for factory sugar, and hand-made paper for the products of the paper mills. Village products might sometimes cost more, but they distributed wages and profits among those whose need was the direst. For nearly 150 years, the cities had drained the villages of wealth and talent. 'For the city dweller,' wrote Gandhi, 'the villages have become untouchable. He does not know them; he will not live in them, and if he finds himself in a village he will want to reproduce city life there. This would be tolerable, if we could bring into being cities which would accommodate thirty crores of human beings.'

Since eighty-five per cent of the population of India lived in villages, their economic and social resuscitation was a *sine qua non* for freedom from foreign rule. Gandhi described the exploitation of the village in the interest of the town as a species of violence. The growing gap in economic standards and social amenities between village and town had to be bridged. This could best be done by volunteers from the towns, who would spread themselves in the countryside to help revive dead or dying rural industries and improve standards of nutrition, education and sanitation. Gandhi expected these public-spirited men and women to support themselves on 'a village scale'; if they put on their work a price which villages could not sustain, village economy would face bankruptcy.

It was not Gandhi's habit to preach what he did not practise;

\* Gandhi, M. K.: *Cent per Cent Swadeshi*, p. 18.

he decided to settle in a village. His choice fell upon Segaoon, which was also situated near Wardha but had only a population of 600 and lacked such bare amenities as a *pucca* road, a shop and a post office. Here, on land owned by his friend and disciple Jammalal Bajaj, Gandhi occupied a one-room hut. Those who came to see him during the rains had to wade through ankle-deep mud. The climate was inhospitable; there was not an inhabitant of the village who had not suffered from dysentery or malaria. Gandhi himself fell sick, but was resolved not to leave Segaoon. He had come alone; he would not allow even his wife to join him. He hoped he would draw his team for village uplift from Segaoon itself, but he could not prevent his disciples, old and new, from collecting round him. When Dr John Mott interviewed him in 1937, Gandhi's was the solitary hut; before long a colony of mud and bamboo houses grew up. Among its residents were Prof. Bhansali, who had roamed the forests naked and with sealed lips, subsisting on *neem* leaves; Maurice Frydman, a Pole, who became a convert to the Gandhian conception of a handicraft civilization based on non-violence; a Sanskrit scholar who was a leper and was housed next to Gandhi's hut so that he could tend him; a Japanese monk who, in Mahadev Desai's words, worked like a horse and lived like a hermit. No wonder that Vallabhbhai Patel called Segaoon a 'menagerie'. Gandhi referred to it as the 'House For Invalids'.

Sevagram, as Segaoon was renamed, was not planned as an Ashram; Gandhi never conceived it as such and did not impose any formal discipline upon it. This motley group of men and women of vastly dissimilar temperaments and attainments, bound to him by varying degrees of respect or affection and by the common ideal of service to the village, constituted a human laboratory which gave him, in the words of Mahadev Desai, 'enough exercise in the practice of ahimsa (non-violence) in the domestic field. Its successful practice would mean its automatic extension to the political field. That is why he always longs to get back to his laboratory in order to be free for more self-examination and more experimentation. The difficult instruments make his immediate task more difficult it is true, but it is also true that they make him all the fitter for the larger task'.

Before long, Sevagram became a centre of the Gandhian scheme of village welfare. A number of institutions grew up in and around it to take up the various strands of economic and social uplift. The All-Indian Village Industries Association, with its headquarters at Maganwadi, supported and developed such in-

dustries as could easily be fostered in the villages, required little capital and did not need help from outside the village. The Association set up a school for training village workers and published its own periodical, *Gram Udyog Patrika*. There were other organizations, such as the Goseva Sangh, which sought to improve the condition and breed of cows, and the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, which experimented in Gandhi's ideas on education.

To rid India's seven hundred thousand villages of poverty, disease and ignorance was a colossal task and required a multi-sided effort. Fostering village industries could create employment and pump purchasing power into the villages; it could also shake the villagers out of their lethargy. 'The 400 adults of Segaoon,' wrote Gandhi, 'can easily put ten thousand rupees annually into their pockets if only they would work as I ask them. But they won't. They lack co-operation; they do not know the art of intelligent labour, they refuse to learn anything new.'

Nutrition was a problem on which Gandhi wrote and spoke frequently. Ever since his student days he had experimented on himself with food and fasting. Nutrition took on a new urgency as a problem of the Indian masses when he realized, with something of a shock, that apart from their poverty their food habits were responsible for their undernourishment. The deficiency in vitamins was inexcusable when green leaves were available for the picking. He appealed to Indian scientists to pursue research into Indian diets in the context of Indian conditions. 'As a practised cook,' he wrote on the modes of cooking which did not destroy the nutritive value of foods and on the superiority of hand-ground wheat and hand-polished rice to the factory products. 'The textile mills,' he explained, 'had brought unemployment in their wake, but rice and flour mills have also brought in undernourishment and disease.'

It was obvious to Gandhi that rural India could not be transformed without the help of the urban intelligentsia. To make the country village-conscious he advised Congress to hold its annual sessions in villages. The first to be so held was the Faizpur Congress; Gandhi noted that the session was free from the scramble and hustle inevitable in big towns, that village hedges could do duty for barbed wire, and exhibitions of village handicrafts could entertain as well as instruct.

He interpreted every problem in terms of the needs of the village. The educational system had always struck him as inadequate and wasteful. The vast majority of people had been de-

nied the rudiments of education; but even those who went to village primary schools soon unlearned what was taught them because it had little to do with their daily lives and environment.

The medium of a foreign language at the high school standard had created a barrier between the millions in the villages and the few thousands of the upper crust of society. It was to evolve a system of education which suited the real needs of the people that Gandhi summoned a meeting of educationists and the education ministers from the Congress-governed provinces. The system of 'Basic Education' which evolved from these discussions was to evoke much controversy, but it definitely provided a corrective to the stereotyped ideas along which education departments were working in India.<sup>1</sup>

Work in the villages was an arduous and slow affair; it was 'plodder's work', as Gandhi put it. It did not earn banner headlines in the Press and did not seem to embarrass the Government. Many of Gandhi's colleagues did not see how this innocuous activity could help India in advancing to the real goal—that of political freedom. Gandhi was accused of sidetracking the main political issue; his answer was: 'I do not see how thinking of these necessary problems (of village uplift) and finding a solution for them is of no political significance and how any examination of the financial policy of the Government has necessarily a political bearing.'<sup>2</sup>

A more serious criticism of Gandhi's village work was that he was turning his back on science and industry and advocating a primitive economy which would perpetuate poverty. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi had mercilessly criticized machinery, mills and industrial civilization, but during the next forty years of his life he further elaborated his ideas on machinery, relating them to his fundamental doctrine of non-violence. His principal objection to mechanization was that it tended to concentrate the production of wealth in a few hands. In a country where the hands were too many and the work too little, machinery could only add to unemployment and poverty. 'I would favour,' he had written in 1921, 'the use of the most elaborate machinery if thereby India's pauperism and resulting idleness could be avoided.' There was a distinction in his mind, however, between mass production and production for the masses; the former under free enterprise often made the rich richer and the poor poorer. He was not opposed

<sup>1</sup> For details of Basic Education, see the following chapter, 'Congress in Office'.

<sup>2</sup> *Harijan*, January 11, 1936.

to machinery as such. Even his beloved spinning-wheel was machinery, but it was 'machinery reduced to the terms of the masses'. He welcomed simple tools and instruments which 'lightened the burden of the millions of cottages' without atrophying the limbs of man. He also recognized that some of these comparatively simple machines, such as sewing machines, required factories for their manufacture. 'I am socialist enough to say,' he added, 'that such factories should be nationalized or state-controlled. They ought only to be working under the most attractive and ideal conditions, not for profit but for the benefit of humanity, love taking the place of greed as motive.'

Gandhi's picture of the ideal Indian village was of a 'republic', independent of its neighbours for its vital wants, yet interdependent in other ways, growing its own food and cotton and if surplus land was available, money crops. As many of its activities as possible were to be on a co-operative basis; it was to have its own theatre, school and public hall; elementary education was to be free and compulsory; an elected 'panchayat' was to decide disputes; guards selected by rotation from a register were to police the village.

The image of this 'perfect democracy based on individual freedom' could be dismissed as utopian, but to Gandhi it was the only form a non-violent society could take. He did not care what label was applied to his ideas. Indian socialists, who by 1935 were a strong wing within the Congress, sometimes criticized him. Gandhi claimed that he was a socialist long before many Indian socialists had avowed the creed. 'But my socialism,' he wrote, 'was natural to me, and not adopted from any books. It came out of my unshakable belief in non-violence. No man could be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice wherever it occurred.'

He did not accept the inevitability of class war or of violence; he believed his non-violent technique could end social injustice no less than foreign rule. By eschewing force, his socialism did not become a pious futility; in spite of its humanitarian and ostensibly gentle methods, it had revolutionary implications. How were the propertied few to be persuaded to subordinate their own greed to the good of the community as a whole? The first step was to reason with the rich; if argument failed non-violent non-co-operation was to be invoked. Just as no government could survive for long without the co-operation, willing or forced, of the people, economic exploitation was impossible without the active or passive acquiescence of the exploited. Gandhi

did not seek refuge from hard realities in the safety of a rigid doctrine. His ideas were evolved in response to the social and economic conditions around him.

The central idea in Gandhi's mind was to relieve the grinding poverty which stalked the villages; he shrank from the idea of further pauperizing the village for the greater prosperity of a few big towns. Rather than turn the wheels of a few gigantic plants, he wished the hundreds of thousands of cottages in the countryside to hum with activity, to cater for their needs, as well as to send their wares to the towns. If in Switzerland and Japan work and wages could be carried to thousands of cottages, why could it not be done in India?

In one important respect conditions in India differed from those in other countries; an alien government had neither the incentive nor the organization to undertake radical changes in the country's economy. When Gandhi had torn himself away from politics to work in the villages, the Government even suspected him of an astute and deeply-laid plan to prepare the rural masses for a country-wide civil disobedience campaign.

Two and a half years later, the wheel was to come full circle; the new constitution was scheduled to come into force from April 1, 1937. Gandhi had seen the new constitution being beaten into shape and had never had a high opinion of it. But as the elections drew near, he wondered whether this constitution, its limitations notwithstanding, could not be used to improve the lot of the people.



*Congress in Office*

IN 1937, with the coming into force of the new constitution in the provinces, a new field opened for constructive work for the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's inspiration.

The new constitution, which was enacted by the British Parliament in 1935 and came into force in 1937, embodied the policy of self-government for India by measured stages. The Indian Reforms Act of 1919 had contained a provision for a review of the constitutional field after ten years. Though discussions were initiated two years earlier than scheduled, with the appointment of the Simon Commission in 1927, nearly a decade was to lapse before the next instalment of reforms was actually granted. For ten years Indian politics were rocked by nationalist discontent and witnessed two major civil disobedience campaigns, while a series of official conferences and commissions hammered out the details of a constitution.

In Britain the 'Indian Question' aroused fierce political controversy. Winston Churchill led the opposition to Indian self-government, which he denounced not only as a betrayal of the British Empire but of the Indian peoples, whose future was, in his view, safer in the hands of British officials than those of Indian politicians. He had poured scorn on Lord Irwin for parleying with Gandhi. Lord Willingdon's strong-arm policy pleased him, but he wanted the Government to consolidate its 'victory' over the nationalists by refusing to relax the Imperial authority in India. Sir Samuel Hoare, who as Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet had to pilot the new constitution through Parliament and bear the brunt of Churchill's opposition, had analysed its springs: 'The splendid memories gathered round the Indian Empire blinded him to the changes that had come about since the days of Clive, Wellington, Lawrence and Kipling. The India that he had served in the Fourth Hussars was the India of polo and pigsticking, of dashing frontier expeditions, of paternal government freely accepted and

the great white Empress revered as a mysterious goddess."

The India of the nineteen-thirties was not the same as the India of the eighteen-nineties, not only because of the passage of time but because of the imprint of Gandhi's personality on Indian politics. This was something that Churchill with all his sense of history could not understand. The reasons are not far to seek. Gandhi's religious make-up and doctrines of truth and non-violence sounded only hypocritical nonsense to Churchill, the military strategist and politician, while Gandhi's challenge to Britain's moral right to govern India touched him in a particularly tender spot.

Faced with a solid bloc of opposition in the Press and Parliament, spokesmen of the British Government had in England to defend the very features of the new constitution which were most repugnant to Indian opinion: the 'safeguards' or the overriding powers retained in the hands of the Viceroy and the Governors to prevent Indian democracy from running amuck. The British dilemma was aptly summed up in a comment by the *Manchester Guardian*, that since the British could neither govern nor get out of India, it was necessary 'to devise a constitution that seems like self-government in India and at Westminster like British Raj'.

The new constitution, as it finally emerged, was as impressive for the powers it conferred on the elected representatives of the people as for those it withheld. It was as if a motor vehicle had been set in motion in low gear with the brakes on. The Indian Federation, when it came into being, was to incorporate Provinces as well as Princely States. The latter were allotted nearly one-third of the total seats in the federal legislature, and since their representatives, because of the absence of elective bodies, were likely to be nominees of the princes, who in turn were dependent for their very existence on the British Government, Indian nationalists viewed the new constitution with a feeling bordering on dismay. The powers of the federal legislature were circumscribed; a substantial part of the budget, that relating for instance to the military, the services, the interest charges, etc., was outside its purview. In the Provinces a wider field was permitted to ministers responsible to elected legislatures, but even here their powers had been restricted in financial and other matters, on which the Governors had been invested with overriding and preventive authority.

These limitations led Jawaharlal Nehru to describe the Indian

<sup>1</sup> Templewood, Lord (Sir Samuel Hoare): *Nine Troubled Years*, p. 98.

Reforms Act of 1935 as 'a Charter of Slavery'. At the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress he declared that the new constitution offered Indians responsibility without power. The Congress decided, however, to contest the elections under the new constitution. The Congress election manifesto reaffirmed the rejection 'in entirety' of the new constitution, and demanded its replacement by another constitution based on political freedom for India and framed by a constituent assembly. However, the decision to contest the elections was taken partly because it was considered unwise to leave the field clear to anti-national elements, and partly because there was a powerful wing within the Congress which saw possibilities of constructive work in the Provinces even within the limited framework of the new constitution.

The results of the general election were known in February 1937. The Congress won clear majorities in U.P., Bihar, Orissa, C.P., and Madras. In Bombay it won nearly half the seats, and with allied groups could form a government. It was the largest party in the N.W.F.P. and Assam.

The Congress Manifesto had not given any clear lead as to what Congress was to do if it won majorities in the provincial legislatures. The subject was one on which opinion was sharply divided. Those who opposed the formation of ministries felt that nothing could be got out of the new constitution, that Congress would have to bear all the odium for the apparatus of imperialism without securing real relief to the people, and, worst of all, Congress would go the way of 'moderate' parties by ceasing to be a militant organization and getting out of touch with the masses from whom it derived its real strength. Those who favoured the assumption of responsibility for administering the provinces recognized the limitations of the new constitution, but were unwilling to yield any vantage point to the Government or to the political parties subservient to it; many of them were also convinced that the new constitution could be used for the service of the masses. As a compromise between these two opposing views, it was decided by a convention of Congress members of provincial legislatures, and of the All-India Congress Committee in March 1937, that Congress would agree to form ministries, provided the leader of the Congress party in the provincial legislature was satisfied, and was able to state publicly that the Governor would not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of the ministers 'in regard to their constitutional activities'.

Gandhi's own attitude to legislatures and to office acceptance was ultimately to prove crucial. In 1937, when the controversy on office acceptance was at its height, he wrote: 'The boycott of legislatures, let me tell you, is not an eternal principle like that of truth and non-violence. My opposition to them has lessened but that does not mean that I am going back on my former position. The question is of strategy and I can only say what is most needed at a particular moment.'

The need of the moment was constructive work. Since the suspension of civil disobedience, Gandhi had been preoccupied with activities which though non-political in common parlance were nevertheless important, such as a clean water supply, a cheap and nutritious diet, a sound educational system and a healthy and self-sufficient economy for Indian villages. He wondered whether, with all its deficiencies, the new constitution could not further this programme of village uplift. There was no reason why Congress ministries in the provinces could not encourage village industries, introduce prohibition, reduce the burdens on the peasantry, promote the use of home-spun cloth, extend education and combat untouchability.

The Congress offer of March 1937 to accept office, provided the Governors gave assurances of non-interference in day-to-day administration, was thus influenced by Gandhi's desire to glean something constructive out of the new constitution and not lay traps for the Government. Official spokesmen at first took the line that any such assurance, or 'gentleman's agreement' would do violence to the constitution. Lord Linlithgow had told an Indian visitor in August 1936 that he could not change even a comma of the Government of India Act.<sup>1</sup> The debate on the assurances from the Governors was brought to an end by a long statement issued by the Viceroy, which was so phrased as to allay the fears of Congress without surrendering any constitutional ground.

The formation of Congress ministries in six provinces—Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, Orissa and Madras—was a significant event; a political party which was committed to the liquidation of the British Empire had agreed to run the administration in these provinces. The experiment was not as explosive as it was feared. The Congress ministers were preoccupied most of the time not with the best means of precipitating crises, but with those of fulfilling the social and

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, May 1, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Birla, G. D.: *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, p. 207.

economic programme enunciated in the Congress Election Manifesto. It was in this programme that Gandhi was interested and by which he judged the work of Congress ministers. He advised them to set an example of simplicity and frugality in their personal lives in line with the poverty of the people whom they governed; he urged them to cultivate 'industry, ability, integrity, impartiality, and an infinite capacity for mastering details'.

Two items in the legislative programme of the Congress ministries appeared particularly important to Gandhi; these were prohibition and education. Himself a total abstainer, Gandhi's advocacy of prohibition derived not only from his own puritanism, but from solicitude for the half-starved peasants and industrial workers who dissipated part of their meagre earnings on drink, which would have been better spent on milk for their children. On education, Gandhi had ideas based on his own experience. At Phoenix and Tolstoy farms in South Africa, he had helped run schools for children. The conviction grew upon him that the value of academic instruction had been over-rated and that character-building and the acquisition of practical skills had not been given due recognition. In October 1937, Gandhi placed his ideas before an educational conference which met at Wardha and included, besides the Congress ministers, a number of prominent educationists. A detailed scheme of elementary education based on these ideas was prepared by a committee of educationists headed by Dr Zakir Husain.

The Wardha Scheme of Education, as these proposals came to be known, stirred the stagnant pools of Indian education and stimulated administrators and educationists to think along new and progressive lines. The scheme had its critics. Did it not sacrifice academic training to manual work? Were teachers in schools to be turned into slave-drivers? Gandhi explained that the object of the scheme was not primarily to produce craftsmen but to exploit for educative purposes the resources implicit in craft work. Nor was mass production of shoddy articles in schools intended; a certain degree of skill, however, was inevitable, and it was enough if the sale of handicrafts covered the teachers' salaries. The idea was to substitute a co-ordinated training in the use of hand and eye for a notoriously bookish and volatile learning which most village children unlearned after leaving school, or found of little use in their daily lives.

When the Congress ministries accepted office, neither the Congress leaders nor the Government knew exactly how the new partnership in the provinces would actually work out. It

was not easy for either side to leave the history of its long conflict behind, but association in day-to-day problems seemed to break some barriers. 'Fancy,' wrote Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, to G. D. Birla, 'Garret, the Commissioner of Ahmedabad, now going to the station to receive Minister Morarji and travelling a fair distance with him in third class.' Of the I.C.S. officers serving in the provinces nearly half were Europeans. Though their salaries were a charge on the revenues of the provinces, and their careers were protected by the constitution, many of them tried to adapt themselves to provincial autonomy and to their new bosses. The tempo seemed to have quickened all round; in the provincial secretariats, the new democratic structure made increasing demands upon the time of the executive officers. There was some meddling in day-to-day administration by local politicians. The British officers had been able to adapt themselves to dyarchy during the twenties; in the thirties they tried to adjust their step to provincial autonomy, even if it required a visibly greater effort. The régime of the benevolent despots in the districts, conferring titles and lands and jobs for loyalty to the British *Raj*, was no longer unquestioned. Here was something that was not easy to accept by those who had been reared in the Imperial tradition. As Philip Mason, a former member of the I.C.S., sums it up, 'it is hard to serve where you have ruled'.<sup>2</sup>

A breach between the Congress and the Government may have been inevitable in the long run, but it might have been postponed, if not averted, in the ardour of Congress for social and economic reform and the anxiety of the Government not to disturb stable administration in the provinces in a period of acute international uncertainty.

The outbreak of war precipitated the crisis and brought the brief partnership between the Congress and the Government to a sudden end. It would be well at this stage to refer to the communal problem, which was in a sense to dominate and even distort Indian politics during the war and post-war years.

<sup>1</sup> Birla, G. D.: *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Woodruff, Philip: *The Guardian*, London, 1955, p. 244.



*The Genesis of Pakistan*

THE session of the Round Table Conference in 1931, which was attended by Gandhi, failed to bring about a solution acceptable to the motley group of delegates whom the Government had assembled in London. Since constitution-making seemed to founder on lack of agreement, the Government decided to impose a solution. The British Premier issued a Communal Award to determine the quantum and mode of representation in legislatures, and the new constitution based on this Award came into force in April 1937. The Award had conceded the principal demands of Muslim spokesmen. The perpetuation of the communal franchise (separate electorates) in the Award was repugnant to the Indian National Congress, but Congress decided not to reject it until some better solution, acceptable to all the communities, could emerge. Whatever the shortcomings of the Communal Award as a 'package solution' of the communal problem, it might have been expected to end the communal controversy and to release the energies of the people for more constructive work.

Events were to show that the communal controversy, far from being suppressed, was to rage like a hurricane during the next ten years and pull down many familiar landmarks. The history of this decade cannot be understood without reference to the personality and politics of Mr M. A. Jinnah. That communal antagonisms should have reached a new peak in the closing years of British rule was perhaps natural; it was, in political terms, a war of succession. However, it is doubtful if the communal problem would have dominated Indian politics in the way it did without Jinnah's impact on it.

Six years younger than Gandhi, Jinnah had also studied law in England, but unlike Gandhi his main interest outside legal studies had been in politics and not in religion. Jinnah had in his youth come under the influence of Dadabhai Naoriji; he was a friend of Gokhale and took to law and politics in Bombay. In his early forties he was a front-rank politician and took a promi-

nent part in the conclusion of the Lucknow Pact in 1916, which brought the National Congress and the Muslim league on to a common platform. These were the years when he was described as 'the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.'

Whether in the Imperial Legislative Council, of which he was an elected member, or outside Jinnah's stand on most political problems reflected a spirit of nationalism. He joined the Home Rule movement and supported the demand for Indian self-government as a condition precedent to wholehearted Indian support to the British Government in the war against Germany. In 1919 Jinnah condemned the Rowlatt Bills, which had hastened Gandhi's conversion from a loyalist into a rebel. He criticized the Government for its policy in the Punjab and towards Turkey, but he did not join Gandhi's movement; in fact he left the Indian National Congress just as Gandhi began to dominate its counsels. Like many another 'moderate' leader, Jinnah would have liked Congress to remain an unofficial parliament of the Indian intelligentsia in which well-educated—and well-dressed—gentlemen debated current affairs in the King's English, and passed resolutions for the information of the Indian Press and the British Government. Jinnah had once (December 1918) led a demonstration to foil a public meeting in honour of the retiring Governor of Bombay, Lord Willingdon. But this was perhaps the solitary lapse from that lofty, almost Olympian, dignity with which Jinnah loved to play the game of politics in those years. When Gandhi broadened the scope of his movement to embrace the illiterate millions in towns and villages, Jinnah feared that the march to disaster had begun. 'What the consequences of this may be,' he wrote, 'I shudder to contemplate.'

It was not only Gandhi's politics which jarred upon Jinnah. Gandhi's religious frame of mind, his habit of self-analysis, his emphasis on such abstractions as truth and non-violence, his conscious humility, his voluntary poverty—all these were alien to Jinnah's own make-up and struck him either as a political irrelevance or as downright hypocrisy. There are indications that Jinnah even suffered from a feeling that he had been unfairly edged out of the forefront of the political stage by Gandhi. Louis Fischer records that Jinnah told him: 'Nehru worked under me in the Home Rule Society. Gandhi worked under me at the time of the Lucknow Pact.' It is doubtless true that in 1916 Jinnah was in the limelight and in 1920 he had almost ceased to be a political force. Several other leaders had a similar experience, which is to be attributed to the intensity with which Gandhi's

personality and doctrines appealed to millions of Indians who had so far been little affected by politics.

In the nineteen-twenties, Jinnah headed an independent group in the Central Legislative Assembly, where he held the balance between the Government and the Congress. This was a role which he could play with masterly skill. He did not align himself with the Government or the Congress, and though he pleaded for communal unity his price for co-operation continued to rise. His opposition to the solution of the communal problem in the Nehru Report went a long way to kill it in 1928. To Gandhi's civil disobedience movements in the early thirties he took no more kindly than he had done ten years earlier to the non-co-operation movement. At the Round Table Conference he ploughed a lonely furrow; as Sir Samuel Hoare puts it, 'he never seemed to wish to work with anyone'. After the Conference he almost bade good-bye to Indian politics and settled down in England. But as the time came for the general elections under the new constitution, he returned to India and led the Muslim League to the polls. The League did not get more than five per cent of the Muslim vote, but within four years of this disastrous defeat Jinnah was able to build up his position so skilfully that he was accused of placing a veto on India's constitutional progress.

We have already seen that Congress had agreed, with Gandhi's blessing, to form governments in the summer of 1937 in provinces where its adherents commanded majorities in the legislatures. Congress decided not to form coalition ministries; it had comfortable majorities and did not require the support of other parties to remain in office. Congress leaders were also influenced by the fear that coalition cabinets might lead to compromise and conflict and thus weaken Congress, which had yet to win political freedom for the country. Against these considerations was the fact that out of the 450 Muslim seats in the provincial legislatures, Congress had contested only fifty-eight and won twenty-six. Congress did take Muslim legislators into the cabinets, but only after they had signed the Congress pledge. Whatever the justification for this decision, which was taken against Gandhi's advice, it cut the leaders of the Muslim League, particularly Jinnah, to the quick. The separate electorates on which they had banked all these years had only helped to keep Muslims out of Congress and failed to bring them an effective share in political power.

From 1937 onwards a new exacerbation enters Jinnah's

speeches and writings; a new desperation leads him from one tactical position to the other until he reaches the edge of the abyss. The Congress ministries without representatives of the Muslim League offered him the handiest pegs on which he could deposit all the grievances of Muslims, real or fancied. 'The fact is,' he declared, 'the Congress wants domination of India under shelter of British bayonets.' The Congress was he alleged, 'encircling' the Muslim League and trying to 'break up its solidarity'. He ridiculed the Congress proposal for a Constituent Assembly, which Gandhi had endorsed as a solution of the political and communal problems. 'It is puerile to ask the British Government in the first instance to call a Constituent Assembly of another nation and afterwards have the honour and privilege of placing the constitution framed by this supreme assembly of India on the statute-book of British Parliament.' Gandhi was Jinnah's chosen target. He was the 'sole dictator and interpreter of the Congress'. Light had 'not yet dawned within the territories of Segaoon'; Gandhi was trying 'to subjugate and vassalize the Muslims under a Hindu Raj and annihilate the Muslims'.

Jinnah's campaign against the Congress steadily rose in tempo. In the spring of 1939 he declared that the provincial part of the new constitution had utterly failed to safeguard Muslim rights. A few months later he questioned the suitability of a democratic system of government 'in such a vast country with different nationalities'. He blamed the Governors and the Viceroy for not exercising their special powers to protect the interests of the Muslims in Congress-governed provinces. When the Congress ministries resigned in November 1939, as a protest against India's participation in the war without her consent, Jinnah announced the celebration of 'a day of deliverance' of Muslims 'from tyranny, oppression and injustice' during two and a half years of Congress rule, in which Muslim opinion was alleged to have been flouted, Muslim culture destroyed, Muslim religious and social life attacked, and Muslim economic and political rights trampled upon.

Under the constitution, the Governors had special responsibilities for the protection of the minorities. One of them, Sir Harry Haig (Governor of the United Provinces), wrote after his retirement: 'In dealing with communal issues, the Ministers in my judgment normally acted with impartiality and a desire to do what was fair. Indeed towards the end of their time they were seriously criticized by the Hindu Mahasabha on the ground that

they were not being fair to the Hindus, though there was in fact no justification for such a criticism.<sup>1</sup>

Early in 1940 the Congress President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, wrote to Jinnah suggesting that the charges against the Congress ministries should be investigated by a judge of the Federal Court. Jinnah turned down the suggestion and called for a Royal Commission. A Royal Commission in wartime and for raking up such a controversy was hardly likely to be appointed, but it looked as if Jinnah wanted to keep the controversy alive as long as he could. His propaganda was directed not so much at the Congress or the British Government as at his own community; it was, to use a contemporary phrase, 'for home consumption'. Anything which widened the gulf between Hindus and Muslims and indicated that the differences between the two communities were irreconcilable proved his thesis that a democratic set-up was impossible for India.

Jinnah began to develop his two-nation theory; the differences between Hindus and Muslims were not just confined to religion, but covered the whole range of their social, cultural and economic life. In March 1940, the two-nation theory was officially accepted by the All-India Muslim League, which declared that no constitutional plan for India would be workable or acceptable to Muslims unless it was based on a demarcation of Muslim majority areas in the north-west and the east as independent states. Pakistan, which Muslim spokesmen had dismissed during the Round Table Conference as a 'students' scheme', had now become the goal of the Muslim League.

Gandhi's first reaction to the two-nation theory and the demand for Pakistan was one of bewilderment, almost of incredulity. Was it the function of religion to separate men or to unite them? He described the two-nation theory as an untruth; in his dictionary there was no stronger word. He discussed the attributes of nationality. A change of religion did not change nationality; the religious divisions did not coincide with cultural differences. A Bengali Muslim, he wrote, 'speaks the same tongue as a Bengali Hindu does, eats the same food, has the same amusements as his Hindu neighbour. They dress alike. His (Jinnah's name) name could be that of any Hindu. When I first met him, I did not know he was a Muslim'.

To divide India was to undo the centuries of work done by Hindus and Muslims; Gandhi's soul rebelled against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represented antagonistic cultures and

<sup>1</sup> *Asiatic Review*, July 1940.

doctrines, and that eighty million Muslims had really nothing in common with their Hindu neighbours. And even if there were religious and cultural differences, what clash of interests could there be on such matters as revenue, industry, sanitation or justice? The differences could only be in religious usage and observances, with which a secular state should have no concern.

'Vivisection before you vivisection India,' was Gandhi's anguished comment; but however strongly he felt on Pakistan, he was the last man to force his views down the throat of a single individual. 'I know,' he confessed in *Harijan*, April 6, 1940, 'no non-violent method of compelling the obedience of eight crores of Muslims to the will of the rest of India, however powerful the majority the rest may represent. The Muslims must have the same rights of self-determination that the rest of India has. We are at present a joint family. Any member may claim a division.'

This was the only possible attitude for a man of non-violence, though it may have encouraged Jinnah in the belief that if the Muslim League persisted in its demand and could carry Muslim public opinion, Pakistan would become a reality. Until almost the last stage, Jinnah did not define the boundaries or fill in the outlines of his Pakistan proposal; each of his followers was thus free to see Pakistan in his own image. The orthodox dreamed of a state reproducing the purity of pristine Islam, a community living in conformity with the teachings of the holy Prophet. Those with a secular outlook hoped for tangible benefits from their 'own' state.

Though it came like a bolt from the blue to Indian nationalists, the Pakistan idea sold fast with the Muslim community, particularly with its middle class. There were several reasons for this development. The Muslim middle class, which for historical reasons had been left behind in the race for the plums of government service, trade, and industry, was attracted by the idea of a Muslim state. In a competitive society anything which promised a short-cut to success was welcome. Muslim landlords in Bengal and Punjab saw the prospects of deliverance from the 'progressive politicians' who indulged in dangerous talk of abolishing *zamindari*. Muslim officials were glad of the new vistas which were expected to open to them a new state, without Hindu seniors hovering over their heads. Muslim traders and industrialists began to cherish visions of free fields for prosperous ventures without the intrusion of Hindu competitors.

Pakistan seemed to fulfil a psychological need of the Indian Muslims. As W. C. Smith explained in 1946:



"The Muslim League, then, has been becoming the organ of a surging nationalism; at its centre a hard core of business interests intent on power, but beginning to be supported also by an awakening peasantry and surrounded by a nationalism's complete paraphernalia, of poetry, and a whole cultural renaissance of youthful idealism and open-hearted devotion."

The outbreak of the world war helped the propagation of the separatist ideology. The resignation of the Congress ministries allowed the League to occupy the political stage. If the Congress ministries had remained in office, the atrocity stories against them could not have been repeated without being challenged. As it was, the Governors could hardly be expected to give a 'clearance certificate' to those who had now become their political opponents. The war itself was an important consideration for not alienating the Muslim League. The Viceroy and his advisers were anxious not to do anything which would offend Jinnah. The demand for Pakistan probably surprised the British Government as much as it surprised Congress. Initially, its significance in British eyes was that it confirmed their stock thesis that constitutional progress in India was barred not by British hesitation but by Indian discord. The declaration in August 1940 that 'it goes without saying that they (the British Government) could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life' was the first tacit recognition that the British Government were prepared to consider even such drastic solutions as Jinnah had propounded. The Pakistan resolution of the All-India Muslim League had only been passed in March 1940. But for the war, it is doubtful if even an indirect endorsement of the Pakistan proposal would have been publicly made so soon. The war, however, was dictating the pace of events, which neither the British Government nor the Indian leaders could entirely foresee or control.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

*India and the War*

IN the two decades between the first and second World Wars, Gandhi's faith in the British Empire had been irrevocably shaken; but his own belief in the power of non-violence had grown with greater reflection and experience, and the people of India, thanks to three major Satyagraha campaigns and his extensive countrywide tours, had become familiar with the cult of non-violence. Such was the emphasis which Gandhi had placed on non-violence in the struggle for political freedom that it sometimes looked as if he regarded the means as more important than the goal. In November 1931 he had gone so far as to say: 'And I would like to repeat to the world, times without number, that I will not purchase my country's freedom at the cost of non-violence.'

As the threat of war grew in 1938 and 1939, and the forces of violence gathered momentum, Gandhi reasserted his faith in the efficacy of non-violence. He felt more strongly than ever that at that moment of crisis in world history he had a message for India and India had a message for bewildered humanity. Through the pages of *Harijan* he expounded the non-violent approach to military aggression and political tyranny. He advised the weaker nations to defend themselves not by seeking protection from better armed States, nor by increasing their own fighting potential, but by non-violent resistance to the aggressor. A non-violent Abyssinia, he explained, needed no arms and no succour from the League of Nations; if every Abyssinian man, woman, and child refused co-operation with the Italians, willing or forced, the latter would have to walk to victory over the dead bodies of their victims and to occupy the country without the people.

It may be argued that Gandhi was making a heavy demand upon human endurance. It required supreme courage for a whole people to die to the last man, woman and child, rather than surrender to the enemy. Gandhi's non-violent resistance was thus not a soft doctrine—a convenient refuge from a dangerous situation. Nor was it an offer on a silver platter to the dictators

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Wilfred Cantwell: *Modern Islam in India*, London, 1946, p. 275.

of what they plotted to wrest by force. Those who offered non-violent resistance had to be prepared for the extreme sacrifice.

Non-violence, moreover, was not merely a method of meeting aggression; it represented a way of life. The motive power of Nazi and Fascist militarism was the desire to carve new empires, and behind it all was a ruthless competition to annex new sources of raw materials and fresh markets. Wars were thus rooted in the overweening greeds of men, as also in the purblind tribalism which enthroned nationalism above humanity. If the world was to get rid of this recurring menace of war, it had to shake off not only militarism, but the competitive greed and fear and hatred which fed it.

In an article in the *Aryan Path* in September 1938, John Middleton Murry described Gandhi as the greatest Christian teacher in the modern world and wrote: 'Assuredly I see absolutely no hope for western civilization except the kindling of a vast and consuming flame of Christian Love. The choice appears to be between that or a mass-murder on a scale at which the imagination sickens.'

In fact there was no kindling of a flame of Christian Love. The lights went out one by one until the war broke out.

On September 3, 1939, the Gazette of India carried the grave announcement: 'I, Victor Alexander John, Marquess of Linlithgow, Governor-General of India and ex-officio Admiral, therein being satisfied thereof by information received by me, do hereby proclaim that war has broken out between His Majesty and Germany.'

One man, and he a foreigner, writes Jawaharlal Nehru in the *Discovery of India*, plunged four hundred million human beings into war without the slightest reference to them. Since the federal part of the Government of India Act of 1935 had not yet become operative, and ultimate responsibility for the governance of India was vested in the British Parliament, the declaration of Lord Linlithgow was unexceptionable from the constitutional point of view; but tactically it was a great blunder. That this should have happened was the more unfortunate because the sympathy of the Indian National Congress was overwhelmingly in favour of the Allies. The 'foreign policy' of Congress was largely shaped by Nehru, whose opposition to totalitarian régimes admitted of no compromise. Gandhi, too, briefed by Nehru in international affairs, naturally sympathized with the victims of aggression.

There was thus a great reservoir of sympathy for the Allied

cause on which the British Government could have drawn. The Viceroy had failed to take Indian leaders into his confidence before declaring India a belligerent, but he endeavoured to make up for this omission soon afterwards. He telegraphed to Gandhi to see him. Gandhi took the first train to Simla. He told Linlithgow that his sympathies were with England and France. As a man of non-violence, the utmost he could offer to the Allied cause was his moral support. As he discussed the war and pictured the possible destruction of the House of Commons and Westminster Abbey he broke down. Violence seemed triumphantly on the march.

His heart, under the first impact of war, was heavy: 'I have become disconsolate. In the secret of my heart I am in perpetual quarrel with God that He should allow such things to go on. My non-violence seems almost impotent. But the answer comes at the end of the daily quarrel that neither God nor non-violence is impotent. Impotence is in men.' He saw the futility of violence in countering violence. His line was cast: 'Whether I act as a guide of the Working Committee, or if I may use the same expression, without offence, of the Government, my guidance will be for the deliberate purpose of taking either or both along the path of non-violence, be the step ever so imperceptible.'

The Indian National Congress, however, was not a body of pacifists; it had accepted non-violence in the struggle for freedom, but not as a creed for all times and in all situations. Prominent Congressmen, including Motilal Nehru, had interested themselves in the Indianization of the officers' cadre of the British Indian army, and few of them had imagined that an independent India would be able to dispense with the police and the military. Most Congressmen viewed the war, not from the angle of non-violence, but from that of Indian self-government. In the First World War, Tilak, Annie Besant and other ardent nationalists had demanded political freedom as a condition precedent to India's unreserved participation in the war effort. A quarter of a century later, with greater awakening in the country, it was scarcely to be expected that nationalists would ask for less. There was an obvious contradiction in Indians fighting to hold aloft the banner of freedom and democracy in Czechoslovakia or Poland, while their own country was in bondage. There was yet another consideration which weighed with those who felt keenly for the Allied cause. Wars were no longer bouts between professional armies in distant battlefields; whole nations

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, September 30, 1939.

had to be mobilized as workers or soldiers; unless Britain released India's energies by treating her as an equal partner in a common fight, it was hardly possible for her to play her full part in the world struggle.

In its resolution of September 14, 1939, the Congress Working Committee expressed its sympathy for those who were resisting Nazi aggression and offered its co-operation in the war against Nazism. Co-operation however, was to be 'between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider to be worthy'. The committee invited the British Government to declare in unequivocal language its war-aims in regard to democracy and imperialism, and in particular how these aims were going to apply to India: 'The real test of any declaration is its application in the present, for it is the present that will govern action today and give shape to the future.' Congress thus posed two basic problems to Britain: to define the shape of the order for which the war was being waged, and to give India a foretaste of that freedom and democracy for which she was being called upon to fight.

In the summer of 1940, Nazi armies overran Western Europe. The spectacle of the island of Britain, fighting single-handed against heavy odds, evoked widespread sympathy as well as admiration in India. It was also evident that if Britain failed to stem the German tide of conquest, nothing could stop Hitler from dominating the Mediterranean and marching into India. The imminence of the peril dictated a new approach, and the Congress Working Committee declared that if the British Government made an unequivocal declaration of Indian independence after the war, Congress would immediately join in a provisional National Government for the effective defence of the country. That Congress was in dead earnest is shown by the fact that in making this offer of co-operation to the British Government it agreed to part company with Gandhi. In spite of his detestation of the regimentation and violence which Nazism represented, in spite of his sympathy for the Allies, Gandhi believed that violence could only be effectively neutralized by non-violence; he wished Congress to declare that it would meet even armed aggression with non-violent resistance. When Congress offered to enter a provisional government for the better prosecution of the war, Gandhi felt he could not associate himself with a policy in which he did not believe.

## CHAPTER XXXV

*The Widening Rift*

THE Congress leaders believed in that critical summer of 1940 that they had brought down their terms for co-operation with the Government to the lowest pitch. They had gone the length of foregoing the leadership of Gandhi. In return, they expected a bold and imaginative gesture by the British Government—a pleasant psychological shock—which would wipe out past suspicion and generate a new enthusiasm among the people.

They looked in vain for this gesture in the announcement which the Viceroy made on August 8th on behalf of His Majesty's Government. The view that the framing of the new constitutional scheme should be primarily the responsibility of the people of India was conceded, but with the qualification that this could not be undertaken at a time when Britain was engaged in a struggle for existence. There were the familiar references to the responsibilities which Britain's long association with India had imposed upon her and of which she could not divest herself. There was the significant statement that the British Government 'could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements to such a government'. An affirmation of this kind was hardly called for; nobody expected the Government to coerce 'large and powerful elements' in the country's national life. To use such phraseology, whether its authors willed it or not, was calculated only to increase the intransigence of the Muslim League, and to make more difficult a Congress-League concord, which the Government professed was a *sine qua non* for the transfer of substantial authority to Indians.

The immediate constitutional changes included the expansion of the Viceroy's Council to include some 'representative Indians', and the establishment of a War Advisory Council consisting of representatives from the Provinces and the States and other interests 'in the national life of India as a whole'.



The 'August Offer' was the maximum which the British Government felt able to make to India in the summer of 1940, but it fell short of the minimum which Congress was prepared to accept. That even in a supreme crisis the Government should fail to respond to appeals for co-operation stung Congress leaders. Their disappointment was all the greater because many of them were really anxious to co-operate in the emergency which faced the Government and the country.

Gandhi was genuinely anxious not to embarrass the Government during the war, and Congress leaders were so apprehensive about the fate of the Allied cause that a mass movement at this stage was not on the cards. Nevertheless, such was the profound frustration among Congressmen at the attitude of the Government as disclosed in the 'August Offer' that there was a powerful impulse for action of some kind.

An eloquent expression of this frustration was given by Jawaharlal Nehru in an article entitled 'The Parting of the Ways'. 'The declaration of the British Government,' he wrote, 'means the final breaking of such slender bonds as held our minds together.' The All-India Congress Committee met in September 1940 at Bombay and affirmed its total rejection of the Government's proposals. Since there was no prospect of co-operation with the Government in furtherance of the war-effort, the argument as to whether this co-operation could or could not be based on non-violence became irrelevant. There was now no occasion for Gandhi and the Congress to pursue divergent ways; Congress therefore called upon him to resume its leadership. Congress wanted to lodge a protest against the policy of the Government and looked to Gandhi for guidance.

It was a political issue—the refusal of the British Government to give adequate assurances of Indian freedom in the future, and practical evidence of its intentions in the present—which had widened the gulf between the Government and the Congress. But it was not on a political but a pacifistic plank that Gandhi initiated his campaign of protest. His argument was that if the British could not grant or guarantee independence to the people of India, they could at least grant the right of free speech, including the right to preach against India's participation in the World War, and indeed against all wars.

Gandhi resisted the pressure exerted by some of his colleagues and left-wing Congressmen for the launching of a mass movement. He decided to confine civil disobedience to selected individuals. The instructions which he issued for the Satyagrahis and

sportingly communicated to the Viceroy ruled out public excitement and harassment of the authorities. The movement began on October 17, 1940 with an anti-war speech by Acharya Vinoba Bhave at Paunar, a village near Wardha; he was arrested four days later. Jawaharlal Nehru had been chosen to follow Vinoba Bhave on November 7th, but he had been arrested a week earlier on his way to Allahabad and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. In the middle of November the second stage of the campaign began, with what Gandhi called the 'representative Satyagraha'. Satyagrahis were selected from groups such as the Congress Working Committee, the All-India Congress Committee and the Congress members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures.

By the end of the year nearly 400 Congress legislators, including twenty-nine ex-ministers, were in gaol. Early in January 1941 the third stage in the campaign was initiated, with lists of Satyagrahis prepared by the local Congress Committees and approved by Gandhi. The fourth stage of the campaign in April 1941 witnessed the enrolment of rank and file Congressmen. By May 15, 1941, according to official records, 25,069 convictions had been made for individual civil disobedience. There was very little excitement, however, thanks to the manner in which Gandhi had conducted this 'symbolic' campaign; he would not agree to its extension into a mass civil disobedience movement: 'There is neither warrant nor atmosphere for mass action. That would be naked embarrassment and a betrayal of non-violence.'

When the *Hindu* pointed out that the movement had produced no appreciable impression on the war-effort, Gandhi replied that it was not intended to hamper the war-effort. The Secretary of State for India, Mr Amery, said the movement was 'as regrettable as it is irrational', and described it as proceeding 'languidly and without evoking much interest'. Three days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Government of India, to quote from the official communiqué, 'confident in the determination of all responsible opinion in India to support the war-effort until victory is secured', announced that it had decided to release those convicted for individual civil disobedience.

The entry of Japan into the war brought it almost to India's door. With the American fleet crippled, the Japanese swept quickly through the Western Pacific. On February 15, 1942 Singapore fell and the Bay of Bengal lay exposed to the Japanese

fleet. The British command of the sea had gone. The tide of Japanese conquest, after overwhelming Malaya and Burma, threatened to engulf eastern and southern India. The rapidity with which the Japanese advanced was evidence not only of their superiority in numbers and strategy, but also of the lack of will to resist in the countries invaded by them.

Gandhi had condemned the Japanese slogan of 'Asia for Asiatics' and even favoured the boycott of Japanese goods as a mark of sympathy with China. Nehru's sympathy for China was well known. The danger, therefore, was not so much of active collaboration by sections of Indians with the Japanese, as of defeatism and passivity on the part of the people, which might enable the Japanese to consolidate themselves if they managed to land and win an initial battle or two. The demand of the Indian National Congress that the people should be given a stake in an all-out resistance to the Axis Powers acquired a new urgency.

Gandhi's first reaction to the Viceroy's gesture in releasing prisoners convicted for individual civil disobedience at the beginning of December 1941 had been far from enthusiastic; it did not, he declared, 'evoke a single responsive or appreciative chord' in him. Events, however, moved fast, faster than anticipated by Congress and the Government. In the winter of 1941-2 the war situation was as critical for the Allies as it had been in the summer of 1940 after the fall of France. Once again, a section of Congressmen led by Rajagopalachari favoured an immediate settlement with the British Government for a united front against the Japanese. Most of the Congress leaders were prepared to throw the weight of Congress against the Japanese peril, provided the Government made a reciprocal gesture.

Meanwhile, the war situation had made its impact upon the British Government. Prime Minister Churchill's views on Indian independence have already been discussed;<sup>1</sup> in 1941 they were no different from those he had held in 1931. In December 1941, when Churchill visited Washington, President Roosevelt referred to the Indian problem. 'I reacted so strongly,' Churchill has recorded, 'and at such length that he never raised it verbally again.' It was not only American pressure but the pace of the Japanese advance which was to persuade Churchill to seek a way out of the Indian political deadlock. On February 25th, ten days after the fall of Singapore, he appointed a sub-committee of the War Cabinet to study the Indian problem and to suggest a solu-

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XXVII.

tion. Of the members of this study group Simon and Attlee had been members of the Statutory Commission, James Grigg and John Anderson had held high office in India, Stafford Cripps was well acquainted with Indian leaders and politics, and Amery was the Secretary of State for India. On March 11th Churchill was able to report to the House of Commons that the war Cabinet had come to a unanimous decision on the Indian question, and that Stafford Cripps, the leader of the House of Commons, was proceeding to India to discuss the proposals with Indian leaders.

No better choice could have been made than that of Stafford Cripps for this momentous mission. His sympathies with the cause of Indian freedom were known and he personally knew the front-rank leaders of Indian opinion. He had thus good reason to be optimistic when he arrived at New Delhi on March 22nd. The 'Draft Declaration' which Cripps brought with him and discussed with prominent officials and leaders contained the British Government's proposals for the solution of the Indian political problem. Immediately after the war elections were to be held to provincial legislatures, and members of the lower houses of these legislatures were to elect a constitution-making body. The Indian States were to be invited to nominate representatives to this assembly, which was to be charged with framing a constitution for a 'Union of India', a full-fledged Dominion 'with the same full status as the other Dominions'. The Union of India was to have the right to opt out of the British Commonwealth. The British Government undertook to implement this constitution subject to '... the right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.' Mr Attlee has recorded in his memoirs that the Draft Declaration was a bold plan, and 'reflected credit on those members of the Government who were not sanguine as to the feasibility of Indian self-government and especially upon the Prime Minister whose views were very strong'.

Against this exuberant confidence of the British leaders may be set the grave misgivings with which the plan was received by Indian leaders. Gandhi, whom Cripps had summoned from Wardha by telegram, after reading the proposals advised Cripps to take the next plane home. Jawaharlal Nehru confessed to a 'profound depression' when he read the proposals for the first time; the more he read them and pondered over them, the more

depressed he felt. It was true that India's right to self-determination had been definitely conceded by the British Government for the first time, and both the time and the machinery for exercising this right had been clearly specified. But the right of non-accession reserved to the Provinces and the Indian States threatened to convert the country into a political chequerboard containing scores of 'independent states', which could make short work of India as a political and economic entity. The right of non-accession was evidently given to the Provinces to meet half-way the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. 'If you want,' Cripps said in one of his broadcasts 'to persuade a number of people who are inclined to be antagonistic to enter the same room, it is unwise to tell them that once they go in there is no way out.' Congress leaders felt that the Cripps' offer in 1942 had gone one step further than Linlithgow's August offer of 1940 to encourage Jinnah to persist in his separatist line. In March 1940 Pakistan had seemed a phantom; by March 1942 it had become a political possibility.

Even though Cripps had presented his proposals as a 'package deal', and even though the long-term proposals were the 'bold' part of the plan, Congress leaders suggested that the long-term proposals be shelved for the time being and an agreement sought on immediate arrangements for the defence of India. There were a series of discussions between the Indian leaders on the one hand and Cripps and the Viceroy on the other, regarding the functions of an Indian Defence Member of the Viceroy's Council. These discussions, in which Colonel Louis Johnson, the personal envoy of President Roosevelt, also joined, broke down not on the demarcation of duties between the Indian Defence Member and the British Commander-in-Chief, but on a much wider issue—the nature and authority of the interim government as a whole.

On his return to England, Cripps asserted that from the outset he had made it clear to all those whom he had seen that it was not possible to make any constitutional changes—except of the most insignificant kind—prior to the new constitution, which was to come into operation as a result of the labours of the constitution-making body after the war. This may have been Cripps's intention from the outset, but the Congress leaders nevertheless received a contrary impression. During the negotiations he had used such terms as 'National Government' and 'Cabinet', which had led Congress leaders to hope that the new Government would function, by convention if not by law,

as a Cabinet with full powers, and with the Viceroy as constitutional head. The misunderstanding may have been due to assumptions which the Draft Declaration did not justify; as Nehru wrote later, the Congress leaders' eagerness for a settlement may have fed their optimism.

The comment of an Indian paper, the *National Herald* of April 24, 1942, that 'the Cripps mission was the result of American pressure. It was a stage-managed show to buy off world opinion and to foist preconcerted failure on the people of India' was an index to Indian frustration at the failure of the Cripps Mission, but did less than justice to the British Government. For the first time that Government had recognized unequivocally India's right to self-government, and this, coming from a Government led by a Premier who made no secret of his distrust of Indian nationalism was certainly a step forward. Unfortunately, the constitutional proposals were framed as a half-way house between two irreconcilable objectives, the creation of a free and democratic India and its fragmentation into endless segments in deference to Muslim separatism and the vested interests of the Princes. Thanks to Jinnah's ideology and tactics, the Indian political problem had become too complicated to be solved by a formula hurriedly hammered out in London by a sub-committee of the War Cabinet. The fact that the proposals were not subject to any major amendment—the 'take it or leave' condition attached to them—made chances of success still more remote.

Such was the gravity of the war situation that in spite of serious objections to the long-term constitutional proposals, nationalist India was willing to put that complicated problem into cold storage and concentrate on the immediate task of mobilizing the country against the Japanese peril. Unfortunately, the critical war situation which had provided the main impulse for the despatch of the Cripps Mission was also responsible for wrecking it. Congress leaders, who had parted company with Gandhi on the non-violent defence of India, were thinking in terms of a last ditch fight against the Japanese, of building up new armies, militia and home guards.

Roosevelt, who had been anxiously watching the progress of Cripps's negotiations and was receiving first-hand reports from his personal envoy at New Delhi, sent a message to Churchill through Hopkins that the American public could not understand why, if there was willingness on the part of the British Government to permit the component parts of India to secede from the



British Empire after the war, the British Government was unwilling to permit Indians to enjoy during the war what was tantamount to self-government. Roosevelt suggested that another effort should be made to set up a nationalist government 'in essence similar to our own form of government'. 'I was thankful,' writes Churchill, 'that events had made such an act of madness impossible.' Cripps had already left for India.

'To us and to all Indians,' the Congress President had written to Cripps 'the dominant consideration is the defence and safety of India.' Paradoxically, the consideration which made Congress leaders call for a National Government weighed with the British in their determination that there should be no substantial transfer of power to Indian political parties during the war. Many senior officers in the Government of India and the provinces felt, to quote Philip Woodruff<sup>1</sup>, that 'not another shell, not another pair of boots, not another recruit,' could be contributed by Congress support of the war-effort. As early as January 1942, Churchill had written that the idea that the British Government could get more out of India by putting Congress in charge at that juncture was ill-founded. 'Bringing hostile elements into the defence machine,' he added, 'will paralyse action.' In March 1942 the British Premier had been persuaded to agree to the Cripps proposals as a long-term solution of the Indian political problem, but his distrust of Congress—and Congress's distrust of him—persisted. Turning down President Roosevelt's last-minute plea for yet another effort by Cripps for reconciliation with Congress, Churchill recorded that he could not take responsibility for the defence of India 'if everything had again to be thrown into the melting pot at this critical juncture'.

On his return to England Cripps blamed the failure of his mission on Gandhi. He went so far as to suggest that the Congress Working Committee had passed a resolution accepting the Cripps proposals, but that Gandhi had intervened and the resolution was reversed. Gandhi had been reluctant to come to Delhi. He had agreed to meet Cripps at the latter's insistence. He had made no secret of his misgivings; but he had left Delhi at an early stage of the negotiations. The final decisions were taken by the Working Committee; its members were aware of Gandhi's unfavourable reactions, but the Committee also knew that Gandhi would not stand in the way of any decision it took.

Gandhi had been quoted as having remarked that the Cripps

<sup>1</sup> Woodruff, Philip: *The Guardian*, p. 305.

offer was a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank. 'I had of course', Gandhi told a friend, 'said nothing of the kind. But the criticism on the score of its being a post-dated cheque is absolutely correct.' The whole approach, the reluctance to rectify the present and the emphasis on the future left him cold. And he had his own way of judging a policy by its results in the present. If the British had really accepted India's right to freedom, or, to use Gandhi's terminology, if they had undergone a change of heart, he expected to see it not only in state documents but in day-to-day administration. Of this he saw no sign.

*Quit India*

GANDHI had taken little interest in the Cripps Mission, but its failure was a great disappointment to him. That even a friend of India like Stafford Cripps could have misunderstood or misinterpreted the position of Congress was something of a shock. It was clear that there was little prospect of a political settlement as long as the war lasted. The Government were preoccupied with the critical war situation. The Indian army was being rapidly expanded and reinforced with troops and military equipment from Britain and America.

What defence in depth could do in a vast sub-continent had been learnt, at heavy cost, by Japan in China and by Germany in Russia. India was also a vast country, not easy to occupy quickly. In India, however, unlike China and Russia, the war had not evoked an upsurge of patriotism. There was hardly any unity of purpose between the Government and the people. The distrust of the British had become almost pathological. While the Government were in touch with the small minority which had thriven on the new avenues of employment and contracts opened by the war, Gandhi's hand was on the pulse of the people. He noted that their mood in the face of grave peril was not one of resolute defiance, but of panic, frustration and helplessness. If India was not to go the way of Malaya and Burma, something had to be done and done quickly. Gandhi became convinced that only an immediate declaration of Indian independence by the British Government could give the people a stake in the defence of their country.

Lord Hardinge, who was Viceroy of India during the years 1910-16, has recorded in his memoirs that on one occasion he had asked Gokhale, 'How would you like it if I were to tell you that all the British officials and troops would leave India within a month?' 'I would be very pleased to hear that news,' replied Gokhale, 'but before you had all reached Aden, we would be telegraphing you to return.' Public opinion had advanced much since the days of Hardinge and Gokhale, but a

total British withdrawal in the midst of a global war was certainly a startling suggestion. Gandhi was asking not for the physical withdrawal of every Briton from India, but for the transfer of political power from British to Indian hands. To those who said that the time was inopportune for such a step, his answer was: 'This is the psychological moment for recognition (of Indian independence). For then and then alone can there be irresistible opposition to Japanese aggression.'

For more than twenty years Gandhi had argued that the independence of India was impossible without Hindu-Muslim unity. However, he had seen communalism raise its ugly head higher and higher, and was driven to the conclusion that only in a climate of freedom could the antagonistic claims of the communities be reconciled. 'Quit India' was thus Gandhi's solution for the two perils of Japanese invasion and internal disunity which confronted India in the summer of 1942. The charge that this solution was 'defeatist' and a homage to the rising sun of Japan arose from a complete misunderstanding of his views. In February 1942, when the Japanese were advancing in the Far East with lightning speed, he had publicly discounted fears of a British collapse. Britain had, he wrote, suffered reverses in several wars, but she had a knack of surviving them and turning them into stepping stones to success. In unambiguous language he declared himself against a change of masters: 'I have no desire to exchange the British for any other rule. Better the enemy I know that the one I do not. I have never attached the slightest importance or weight to the friendly professions of the Axis powers.'

Clearly, if the Axis Powers had any collaborators in India, actual or potential, Gandhi was not one of them. It was pointed out to him by some foreign correspondents that the sudden withdrawal of British troops would have the inevitable result of exposing India to a Japanese invasion and of immeasurably weakening the defence of China. He recognized that he 'could not guarantee fool-proof non-violent action to keep the Japanese at bay'; subsequent discussions with Jawaharlal Nehru led him to elaborate the proposal for the withdrawal of British power, so as to fit it into the realities of the international situation. He agreed that Allied troops should remain on Indian soil during the war, and one of the first acts of a National Indian Government should be to enter into a treaty with the United Nations for defensive operations against the Axis Powers. This was a

striking departure from the position Gandhi had consistently held since September 1939.

Ever since the outbreak of war, Gandhi had been commending to his countrymen non-violent resistance even to an invading army; he wished Congress to adhere to the same method for the defence of the country which it had employed in the struggle for freedom. Twice he had parted company on this issue with the majority in the Congress Working Committee. When, therefore, he agreed to the whole-hearted participation of Congress in the Second World War, he did something which went deeply against the grain. Only the critical turn which the war had taken, and his passion for Indian freedom, reconciled him to this deviation from a principle which was dearer to him than life itself.

'British Rule in India must end immediately,' the Congress Working Committee declared after a meeting at Wardha on July 14, 1942. The Committee pointed out that the failure of the Cripps Mission had resulted in a rapid and widespread increase in ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms. In order to make India 'a willing partner in a joint enterprise', the Committee considered it essential that Indians should feel 'a glow of freedom'.

If there was no response to the appeal for the immediate withdrawal of British Rule, the Committee forecast a civil disobedience movement 'which would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi'. The final decision on this momentous issue was taken by the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on August 7th.

In August 1942 the mood of the Government of India was no less desperate than that of Congress. From his own point of view, Lord Linlithgow had been patient for three long years; in December 1941 he had made a gesture to Congress by releases from gaol, but he had failed to win its co-operation. The 'Quit India' proposal had already raised the political temperature; if a mass civil disobedience movement was actually launched, it might paralyse civil administration and endanger the war-effort. For strong preventive action the Viceroy had the full support of the British Cabinet.

Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and other Congress leaders were arrested in the early hours of August 9, 1942. The news of these arrests produced violent reactions. In several provinces, particularly in Bihar, U.P., Bengal and Bombay, the fury of the people burst the dykes and turned on the instruments

and symbols of British rule. Post offices, police stations and courts were burnt; railway lines, buildings and rolling stock were damaged, telephone and telegraph wires were cut. In his last speech before the All-India Congress Committee Gandhi had stressed non-violence as the basic premise of the struggle which he proposed to launch, but this advice remained unheeded between the frenzy of the people and the hammer blows of the Government. Though many British officials and non-officials recalled the Mutiny of 1857, the outbreak in 1942 was the result of a violence as spontaneous as it was suicidal. The Government hit back with all its might; mobs were dispersed by firing and even machine-gunned from the air.

'The Congress Party,' Churchill told the House of Commons, 'has now abandoned the policy in many respects of non-violence which Mr Gandhi has so long inculcated in theory and has come into the open as a revolutionary movement.' In India and abroad official propaganda attributed violence to a plot carefully laid by Congress leaders. Within a week of his imprisonment in the Aga Khan Palace at Poona, which had been improvised as a gaol for him, Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy complaining of the 'slaughter of truth' in the official version of the sequence of events. He would have strained every nerve, he said, to reach a settlement with the Government if he had not been arrested; neither he nor his colleagues had at any stage envisaged violence as part of the campaign. He charged the Government with precipitating the crisis by the wholesale arrests of the leaders. Gandhi was arrested before he could unfold his detailed plans to the All-India Congress Committee. He had been trying hard to balance his passion for Indian freedom with his desire not to embarrass the Government during the war. If he had not been arrested it is likely that his programme would have been conditioned by the latter consideration. It is certain that his weight would have been thrown against any violent outbreak. He knew how to bring unruly mobs to order; when appeals failed he could bring them back to sanity by undertaking a fast.

Responsibility for the '1942 disturbances' formed the subject of a long and somewhat acrimonious correspondence between Gandhi, still a prisoner, on the one hand and the Viceroy and his advisers on the other. That Lord Linlithgow, whom Gandhi considered a friend, should have questioned his *bona fides*, and even his belief in non-violence, was more than the Mahatma could bear. He sought 'a soothing balm' for his pain in a twenty-one



day fast which began on February 10, 1943. The fast, which the Government of India had dreaded so long had come, but it is an index to their hardened attitude that they took a risk which they had never taken before—that of Gandhi's death in prison. There was an emotional upheaval in the country, as the doctors' bulletins grew gloomier; three members of the Viceroy's Executive Council resigned; leaders of various parties, whatever their other differences, united in appeals to the Government to release Gandhi and save his life. But the Viceroy, backed by the authorities at home, did not budge an inch; he described the fast as 'political blackmail'; whatever satisfaction such an epithet may have given him, it only stung Indian public opinion the more.

That Gandhi 'put the match to the train carefully laid beforehand by himself and his colleagues. That he was forced to do so prematurely was not his fault but our fortune'—this charge by Sir Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, was part of the official indictment which represented Gandhi and the Congress as saboteurs of the Allied struggle against Japan. This propaganda held the field for a time, but not for long. 'It is sheer nonsense,' Field Marshal Smuts told a Press Conference in London in November 1942, 'to talk of Mahatma Gandhi as a fifth columnist. He is a great man. He is one of the great men of the world.' The attempt to erase him from political life by excluding his photographs and even mention of his name from the Press was doomed to failure. The courage with which he stood up to the Government, the indomitable faith which he asserted in non-violence at a time when violence seemed to have triumphed all round him, the tenacity with which he attacked the cobwebs which official propagandists spun round the events of 1942—all this raised him further in the esteem and affection of millions of Indians. He became the symbol of a nationalism bloody but unbowed.

Now that the deep emotion aroused by the events of 1942 have somewhat faded, it should be possible to see those events in clearer perspective. When we recall the emphasis which Gandhi had placed on the training of the people for non-violence since 1934, when we recall his anxiety at the growth in the pre-war years of indiscipline and the spirit of violence, and his studied restraint in conducting the individual civil disobedience movement of 1940-1, we wonder how he could have permitted what was certainly a dangerous plunge in the surcharged atmo-

sphere of that period. He knew the risks inherent in a mass movement in the midst of a global war which had brought the Japanese to the gates of India. But he also saw the passivity of the people and the possibility that they might succumb to the Japanese invader. To rouse them to a final assertion of their national self-respect without hatred or violence required a miracle, but miracles had happened before. Within a few months in 1930 Gandhi had succeeded in electrifying political India, with remarkably little racial bitterness and violence. Twelve years later, however, the conditions were different; both the people and the Government were keyed up to a high pitch of tension. With the fortunes of the war trembling in the balance, the Government were less inclined to wait on events, while large sectors of the population were seething with discontent. The political situation in 1942 bore greater resemblance to that of 1919 than to that of 1930. In 1919, as in 1942, Gandhi had sensed the temper of the people, but he was hopeful that he could purge it of hatred and violence through a Satyagraha movement. Satyagraha, however, had no chance in the face of the popular terrorism and official counter-terrorism which followed the arrest of Congress leaders.

Gandhi had no right to expect the Government to play the game according to his rules, but the Government equally had no right to blame him for the consequences of the policy it adopted. Lord Linlithgow had acted in accordance with the viewpoint common among experienced British Administrators, that the only means of mastering Gandhi's movements was to deliver telling blows in the initial stages. This was the policy which Lord Willingdon was believed to have adopted with signal success. The ostensible gains of such a policy, however, tended to be transient; repression, with its resultant bitterness, recoiled on those who practised it. In 1932 Lord Willingdon inflicted what he believed to be a crushing defeat on Congress; five years later Congress swept the polls in the first elections under the Government of India Act of 1935. In 1942 Lord Linlithgow won what was, from his point of view, a decisive victory over Congress; in 1947 British rule came formally and finally to an end. It is a strange irony of history that Lords Willingdon and Linlithgow, who dealt the strongest blows to the Indian National movement, unwittingly served as catalytic agents in the political liberation of India.

From the nationalist point of view, the events of 1942 were to prove an embarrassing legacy. It was almost the first large-scale

outbreak in which wrecking and burning were indulged in in a spirit of misconceived patriotism. It lowered the standards of mass behaviour and set a dangerous precedent when in 1946-47 communal feeling replaced patriotism as the principal ingredient in the popular ferment.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

*No Defeat*

WITHIN a week of his imprisonment in the Aga Khan Palace, Gandhi lost his private secretary, Mahadev Desai. Competent, industrious and modest, the ever-smiling 'M.D.' had been for twenty-five years the Mahatma's inseparable assistant. 'Son, secretary and lover rolled into one'—this was how the Mahatma once described Mahadev, who had joined him in 1917, after graduating in law from Bombay University and trying his hand at a few odd jobs. Mahadev's fine handwriting, alert mind, and undivided loyalty made him an efficient secretary; but Gandhi's secretary had to be something more than an amanuensis. In the years preceding the first non-co-operation movement, when Gandhi was not so well known, Mahadev Desai was often his sole companion during his country-wide tours; he made his bed, cooked his food and washed his clothes, besides performing secretarial functions. As public life increased its demands on Gandhi, Mahadev Desai's burden grew too; he sorted and dealt with an enormous mail, received and looked after guests, warded off unwelcome visitors, kept accounts, pored over railway guides and maps to arrange itineraries, recorded speeches and conversations and edited journals. As a good deal of his writing was done in third-class compartments of moving trains, he carried candles with him so that if lights failed in the compartment the dispatch of the 'copy' to the press was not held up.

He constituted a perfect one-man secretariat, expounding and implementing Gandhi's instructions, keeping in touch with hundreds of public workers, and doing all that he could to save the Mahatma from any avoidable strain. He drove himself too hard in the process; his sudden death in August 1942 was due not only to the terrific strain of the months which preceded the passage of the 'Quit India' resolution, but also to a gnawing fear that the Mahatma would fast unto death in gaol.

Another shadow fell upon the Aga Khan's Palace. Kasturbai's health had been causing concern for some time; she was treated

by the 'family doctors', Gilder, Dinshaw and Sushila Nayar, and then by Sriv Sharma, an Ayurvedic physician from the Punjab, but she did not rally. On February 22, 1944 she passed away in the lap of her husband. 'I am going now,' she said to him, 'we have known many joys and many sorrows.' One of her last wishes was that she should be cremated in a sari made from yarn spun by him.

'We were,' wrote Gandhi in reply to a letter of condolence from Lord Wavell, 'a couple outside the ordinary.' The sixty-two years of their married life had been a period of continual growth. In spite of the immense intellectual gap between them, he had learnt to respect her opinions and to let her take her own decisions. In South Africa she had chosen to go to gaol in the last phase of the Satyagraha struggle. In India she had sought imprisonment during the civil disobedience movements; but her last imprisonment was to end with her death.

It was not in the political field, however, that her real work was done. To a vast circle of disciples and co-workers of her husband she was 'Ba', the mother; they were her family and the Ashram was her home. She was the picture of contentment when she sat in her husband's hut, fanning him while he ate his lunch, or when she massaged his feet as he dozed off to sleep. She could read and write in Gujarati and had picked up scraps of spoken English in South Africa, which she occasionally practised with more innocence than expertness. 'I know my husband,' she told a European Superintendent of Prisons when he protested that Gandhi himself was responsible for his under-feeding, 'he always mischiefs.' In the Aga Khan Palace, Gandhi resumed his efforts to fill up gaps in her education. It was amusing to see this lady of seventy-four pace up and down her room committing elements of geography and general knowledge to memory. But when the time came for the lessons her memory played her tricks. 'Lahore,' she would say, 'is the capital of Calcutta.'

After the death of his beloved secretary and wife, the Aga Khan Palace had sombre associations for Gandhi. His health began to cause concern to the Government early in 1944. He had contracted malaria and had been running a high temperature. The tide of the war had already turned in favour of the Allies, and the risks of his release seemed to the Government immeasurably less than those of his possible death in gaol. His release on May 6, 1944, did not please Gandhi; he even felt ashamed that he should have fallen ill in gaol. He was taken to

Juhu, a sea-side resort near Bombay. It turned out that he was suffering not only from the after-effects of malaria, but from hookworm and amoebic infections, which had resulted in acute anaemia. He ascribed all illness to lack of faith in God, the 'Master-Physician'; his known antipathy to drugs did not make it easy to treat him. Nevertheless, before many weeks were over he was well enough to attend to the problems which faced the country.

Gandhi knew that his stock in official circles was not high, that his own *bona fides* and those of the Congress were questioned, that with a British Cabinet presided over by Churchill the scales were heavily tipped against him. In spite of this he took the initiative in an attempt to break the political deadlock between the Government and Congress. On June 17, 1944, he wrote to Lord Wavell seeking permission to see members of the Congress Working Committee. The Viceroy turned down this request; nor did he see any advantage in a meeting with Gandhi 'in consideration of radical differences' in their view-points. In an interview with Stuart Gelder of the *News Chronicle*, Gandhi suggested the formation of a National Government at the centre, chosen by the elected members of the Central Legislative Assembly; this proposal was described by the Viceroy as 'quite unacceptable to His Majesty's Government'.

Having failed to break the deadlock between the Government and the Congress after his release from gaol, Gandhi sought an accord with Jinnah. The Mahatma did not accept the two-nation theory, but he was prepared to recognize the psychology which had commended this theory to the Muslim intelligentsia. The basis on which he proposed to negotiate with Jinnah was the 'Rajaji formula', devised by Rajagopalachari, the ex-Premier of Madras, and one of the keenest intellects in Congress. Rajagopalachari had suggested that if the Muslim League endorsed the Congress demand for national independence and for the formation of a provisional government during the war, Congress would agree to a demarcation of contiguous Muslim majority districts in the north-west and north-east of India, and to a plebiscite of all adult inhabitants in these areas to decide whether they would prefer to remain in a free United India or in separate states. And if ultimately separation was agreed upon, the two states were to devise mutual agreements for defence, communications and other essential matters.

The Gandhi-Jinnah talks began on September 9, 1944 and concluded on September 27th. The optimism which they aroused at



the time did not derive from any real prospects of an agreement between the two leaders, but only reflected public weariness of the political deadlock, and an almost universal desire for concord between the League and the Congress. On his return from the first interview, Gandhi was asked if he had brought anything from Jinnah. 'Only flowers,' he replied. The subsequent meetings registered no more tangible gains. Jinnah questioned Gandhi's credentials; it was true that the Mahatma since 1943 had ceased to be a member of Congress, but Jinnah knew very well that Gandhi's weight in the counsels of Congress did not depend upon a membership card or on the holding of any office. The Muslim League leader's approach was doctrinaire. He wanted Gandhi to recognize that the All-India Muslim League had the exclusive right to speak on behalf of Indian Muslims. He wanted the principle of Pakistan to be conceded before he would define its geographical boundaries or discuss its details. He would not hear of non-Muslims in Muslim majority provinces participating in the plebiscite which was to determine their future; the right of self-determination in these areas could only be exercised by Muslims.

Gandhi suggested that while the principle for the demarcation of boundaries and the plebiscite could be decided in advance, the actual partition, if it became inevitable, should follow and not precede the transfer of power from Britain to India. He hoped that after the departure of the British the communities would learn, in the bracing climate of freedom, to make mutual adjustments, and the need for partition of the country might never arise. What was Gandhi's hope was Jinnah's fear; the Muslim League leader did not want to take any risks and so made partition the pre-condition of Indian independence. Jinnah also rejected the proposal for treaty arrangements between the two states for defence, communications and foreign affairs as affecting the sovereignty of the new states. To Gandhi the prospect of two states carved out on the basis of religious affiliation, 'with nothing but enmity in common between them', was disconcerting; the search for cultural and economic autonomy was legitimate enough, but some safeguards were necessary to prevent an armament race and an armed conflict between the two states.

While these conversations were no more than a kind of re-education for Gandhi, to Jinnah they brought an accession of political strength. The fact that Gandhi had knocked at his door raised Jinnah's prestige. For four years the Muslim League leader had not swerved an inch from the position he had adopted

in March 1940; events had shown that intransigence paid dividends. The 'Rajaji formula', which had formed the initial basis of the negotiations, did not concede all that Jinnah demanded, but at least it recognized the possibility of the partition of the country. The fact that the Mahatma, who had once described the division of India as a sin, had relented so far as to discuss the machinery for the exercise of the right of self-determination was a feather in Jinnah's cap. Viewed in the long-term strategy of the campaign for Pakistan, the Gandhi-Jinnah talks were another milestone, marking further progress from the offer of Lord Linlithgow in August 1940, and the Cripps Mission in March 1942.

In the summer of 1945, Lord Wavell, who had recently returned from England with the concurrence of the British Cabinet to a proposal for the reconstitution of his Executive Council in consultation with Indian leaders, convened a conference in Simla to discuss the Viceroy's proposal. Gandhi was not a delegate to the Conference, though he was consulted by the Viceroy and the Congress Working Committee. Lord Wavell had suggested parity of representation in the Executive Council between the 'caste Hindus' and Muslims, but by the time the conference was over Jinnah was demanding parity between Muslims and all the other communities. The conference actually broke down on the insistence of Jinnah that the Muslim League should have an exclusive right to nominate Muslim members of the Viceroy's Executive Council. This was something which Congress could not concede without repudiating its national composition and outlook. The conclusion is inescapable that at this time Jinnah was not interested in a compromise; he did not think the time for agreement was opportune; in any case, an understanding with Congress had little attraction for him when he hoped to get better terms from the Government.

As the war drew to a close, the need for a fresh move in India was keenly felt. The Simla Conference was a recognition of this need. The war in Europe had ended in May and Japan surrendered in August. The first post-war elections in Britain returned the Labour Party to power. The new Secretary of State for India, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, spoke of equal partnership between Britain and India. The Viceroy had already announced that elections would be held 'as soon as possible' to the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provincial Legislatures, which had been in existence since 1934 and 1937 respectively. In September 1945, after a visit to London, the Viceroy announced that in the

spirit of the Cripps offer the Government proposed to convene a constitution-making body. The announcement did not arouse much enthusiasm. The Labour Government decided to send an all-party British Parliamentary Delegation to study the situation in India and convince her people that self-government was within their grasp.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

*The Coming of Independence*

IN January 1946, when Gandhi visited Srinivasa Sastri, the veteran Liberal leader, the conversation turned to the British Parliamentary Delegation which was touring India. 'We know,' commented Sastri, who was on his death-bed, 'nothing can come out of it. Labour or Conservative, so far as India is concerned, they are all one and the same.' That this melancholy judgment should have been passed at a time when the transfer of power was about to take place, and by one who had always been considered a friend of the British connection, was significant and showed that the representatives of the British *Raj* in India gave hardly any inkling of an early departure.

On a superficial view, the British position in India at the close of the Second World War could not have been stronger. There had never been more British troops on Indian soil. The Congress organization was banned and with the exception of Gandhi almost all nationalist leaders were in gaol. The Muslim League was campaigning for Pakistan, but its target was Congress, not the British Government. In six provinces constitutional government was in abeyance; in the remaining five provinces ministries more or less friendly to the Government were in power. The repressive measures adopted in 1942 had brought a welcome respite to the British officers who had slogged at their desks for six years. The civil servants were hard-working men who did their duty according to their lights, but, as Gokhale put it, 'their lights are dim. And even as regards efficiency my own conviction is that it is impossible for the present system to produce more than a certain very limited amount of efficiency and that standard has now been reached'. Gokhale had spoken in 1905; forty years later the dynamics of national awakening and economic change had accentuated these deficiencies. Few of these conscientious civil servants could see in 1945 that the old order, which they had known and shaped and loved, had been largely, even if imperceptibly, eroded.

The war had accelerated this process of erosion. It had

brought easy money to a few, but in the minds of millions of Indians it was synonymous with scarcity and high prices. A terrible famine, to the making of which man and nature conspired, had ravaged Bengal; the people did not know and perhaps did not care how far the tragedy was due to ministerial neglect and corruption in Bengal and how far to the constitutional propriety or inertia which prevented timely intervention by the Central Government. Shortages of food and cloth were endemic almost throughout the country, and efforts to control and ration supplies had brought corruption in their wake. The war had lowered moral standards; it tempted too many people to make hay while the brief sun of war-time prosperity shone.

In any case, the transition from war to peace was going to be a necessarily slow and painful process. The demobilization of an army which had swelled in number from 189,000 to 2,250,000 was a stupendous task. The Indian soldier was no longer the raw peasant whom the recruiting officers had picked up from the village; he had fought in the battle-fronts of Malaya, Burma, the Middle East and Italy; he had seen empires topple and he had learnt to ask awkward questions.

It must be stated, however, that whatever their difficulties the morale of the majority of the British officers in India was high, and that they had not lost confidence in their ability to govern India for many years to come. If within a year of the end of the war, large strides had been taken towards Indian independence, it was due not so much to any weakening on the part of representatives of the *Raj* as to the change of political climate in Britain, and the determination of the Attlee Government to come to terms with Indian nationalism.

British historians are inclined to regard the events of 1947 as a logical climax of the policy outlined in the declaration of August 1917. Lord Chelmsford, who as Viceroy of India had pleaded for this declaration, had himself suggested that 'it should be accompanied by a very clear declaration that this is a distant goal'. One is reminded of Morley's comment on his talks with Gokhale: 'He made no secret of his ultimate hope and design—India to be on the footing of a self-governing colony—I equally made no secret of my conviction that for many a day to come—long beyond the short span of time that may be left to us—this was a mere dream.' 'Not in my lifetime', seems to have been the verdict on Indian independence of Lloyd George and Montagu, MacDonald and Benn, Baldwin and Hoare, Churchill and Amery. British statesmen were conscious of the long process of conflict

and evolution through which parliamentary government had passed in Great Britain, and of the time taken by Canada and Australia to attain political maturity. That this process should have taken even longer in an Oriental country, with its variety of creeds and cultures, was axiomatic to them.

From 1917 the policy of successive British Governments towards India was 'self-government by stages'. The trouble about this mode of advance was that each instalment tended to become out of date by the time it was actually granted. The Reforms of 1919 might well have appeased political India in 1909; the Reforms of 1935 would have evoked enthusiasm in 1919, and an equivalent of the Cripps offer in 1940 could have opened a new chapter in Indo-British relations, and halted the process of estrangement between Congress and the Government and between Hindus and Muslims.

To this step-by-step advance Gandhi dealt a mortal blow in 1920. His promise of 'Swaraj in one year' was no make-believe; since slavery was in his view essentially a state of mind, a nation began to liberate itself the moment it resolved to be free. Satyagraha, his technique of non-violent resistance posed a difficult problem for the British. If they ignored it, it gathered momentum. If they attacked it, it enlisted sympathy in India and abroad. Repression was not only ineffective in the long run; it was also repugnant to the democratic conscience of England. The British people took only a fitful interest in Indian affairs, but they were too proud of their liberal tradition to agree to 400 millions of Indians being governed against their will. As each successive Satyagraha campaign revealed the strength of the nationalist opposition in India, it weakened the plea of the official apologists that only a minority of malcontents was against the *Raj*.

It was World War II which helped to mature British public opinion on India. The war changed the map of the world and the balance of power, but it also changed the minds of men. The intellectual and social ferment, of which the Labour Party's triumph in 1945 was an expression, helped in reassessing the merits of the traditional policies. Ideologically, the Labour Government was prepared for a new policy, but the facts of the Indian situation also drove it in the same direction. Speaking on March 6, 1947 in the House of Commons on the condition of India in November and December 1945, Mr Alexander, a member of the Labour Cabinet who was closely associated with the process of transferring power, observed: 'It might be said that the



Indian authorities were literally sitting on the top of a volcano, and as a result of the situation which had arisen after the war, the outbreak of revolution might be expected at any time.'

The opening months of 1946 confirmed the correctness of this estimate. Such was the irascibility of the popular temper that there were violent outbreaks at the slightest provocation, and sometimes without any provocation. In February 1946, a Muslim demonstration at Calcutta against a court-martial verdict on a Muslim officer of the Indian National Army degenerated into general lawlessness, in which shops were ransacked and tramcars and buses burnt. There were instances of indiscipline in the Air Force and a major naval mutiny in Bombay. In several Provinces there were signs of disaffection spreading to the police. The instruments of law and order, on which British rule ultimately depended, were proving broken reeds.

In face of this diminishing respect for authority what was needed was an immediate strengthening of the administration, but the war had, from the British point of view, led to a lamentable dilution of the 'superior services'. There had been a tremendous expansion in the sphere of governmental activity, while recruitment to the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police Service had been kept in abeyance during the war. Not only were there fewer Europeans to man key jobs; their ranks were likely to thin yet further in the next few years as the senior officers retired.

That the run-down condition of the administration should have figured prominently in the explanations of British ministers was only to be expected; but the emphasis on this factor seems to have derived from the habit of empiricism, which makes the British stress the practical rather than the ideological aspect of a solution. The transfer of power from Britain to India would not, however, have been a significant event in world history if it had been only a recognition of a political necessity. Not merely the compulsion of events, but a measure of idealism went into the policy which Prime Minister Attlee initiated and carried through during the years 1946-7. And in so far as the British Government was impelled by this idealism, by a desire to open a fresh chapter in Indo-British relations, it was a victory for Gandhi, who had pleaded for nearly thirty years for a transformation of the relationship between the two countries. Among the advocates of this transformation were several English men and women, Hume and Wedderburn, C. F. Andrews and Horace Alexander, Brailsford and Brockway, Laski

and Carl Heath, Muriel Lester and Agatha Harrison, who never wavered in their sympathy for the Indian cause. In their own day they represented a tiny and not-too-influential minority, but in the fulness of time their opinions became the national policies of their country.

Whatever the reasons for the change in British policy, the arrival of the Cabinet Mission in March 1946 went a long way to convince India that the British Government was in earnest. Of the three Cabinet Ministers of the Mission, Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps were well known to Gandhi. The Mission consulted him frequently during their stay, both formally and informally. They interviewed no less than 472 'leaders', though it was clear from the outset that the only parties which mattered were the Congress and the Muslim League, and the crucial question was whether India was to remain united or to be split up. Congress was opposed to partition of the country but was prepared to go to the farthest limits in conceding cultural, economic and regional autonomy. A conference at Simla failed to resolve the Congress-League differences. The Cabinet Mission then offered a compromise plan in their statement of May 16th. They sketched a three-tier constitutional structure for India. At the top was to be a Union of India embracing British India as well as the Indian States, but dealing only with foreign affairs, defence and communications. The bottom tier was to consist of Provinces and States, in which were to vest all residuary powers. The intermediate tier was to comprise groups to be formed by Provinces, if they chose, to deal with certain common subjects. It was laid down that the Constituent Assembly (consisting of representatives of Provinces and States), after a preliminary meeting, was to divide up into three sections; Section A consisting of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa; Section B comprising Punjab, Sind and North-West Frontier Province; and Section C consisting of Bengal and Assam. Each section was to decide whether the Provinces covered by it were to form a group, and if so, what were to be the subjects which were to fall within the jurisdiction of the group executive and legislature.

To understand the shifting and somewhat confused political situation which developed after the departure of the Cabinet Mission, it is useful to sum up briefly the attitudes of the British Government and the two major parties on the eve of the transfer of power. Mr Attlee was anxious to retain the initiative he had so boldly taken; his one anxiety was to make the transfer of

power not only speedy but smooth. To the British Government the Indian constitutional problem was a political problem which was capable of solution by compromise and a spirit of 'give and take'. They were thus committed to no one solution; they were prepared to accept any workable arrangement on which the Congress and the League could agree.

Gandhi's view was different; the transfer of power was not a problem of expediency or power politics, but one which called for and admitted of a just and moral solution. He wanted the majorities to go far to meet the anxieties of the minorities, but he was not prepared to be stampeded into partition, which in the long run might do more harm than good to India and the two communities themselves. He was disturbed by the understandable anxiety of the British Government not to alienate Jinnah. He advised Congress not to accept any arrangement in a hurry which they might have to repent at leisure; at the worst, Congressmen were to be prepared to go once again into the wilderness. This advice did not appeal to Congress leaders, who like the British, tended to judge the situation in terms of political necessity, and feared a drift to civil war through vacillation or delay.

It seemed to Gandhi that, the declaration of the British Government notwithstanding, quite a few people in India seemed to think and behave as if the British were really not going. Only a dramatic gesture, such as the immediate withdrawal of British troops, or the immediate revocation of the Paramountcy of the crown, from the States, could jolt the various political parties and interests out of the grooves in which they had moved too long. Ever since it became apparent to him that the British had decided to quit, the one question which had exercised Gandhi incessantly was: how would the people of India, after centuries of servitude, react to the shock of freedom? He told Brailsford, a British journalist, in April 1946: 'This time, I believe the British mean business. But the offer has come suddenly. Will India be jerked into independence? I feel today like a passenger who has been hoisted in a basket chair on a ship's deck in a stormy sea and has not found his feet.'

Gandhi was worried at the growing indiscipline, which was partly a hangover from 1942 and partly a symptom of the post-war malaise. In February 1946, in an editorial in *Harijan* on 'How to canalize hatred', he wrote: 'Hatred is in the air and the impatient lovers of the country will gladly take advantage of it if they can through violence further the cause of independ-

ence.' The prime dangers, as Gandhi saw, were hatred and violence, which were finding expression in anti-British feeling or in the communal riots that were again beginning to disfigure the towns. For the riots the Hindus blamed the Muslims, the Muslims blamed the Hindus, and both blamed the hooligans. 'Who are the hooligans?' Gandhi asked and replied, 'We are the makers of the brand.' It was when the intelligentsia spilled venom and whipped up excitement that the hooligans got their chance. He revived the suggestion he had made in the late thirties for the formation of 'peace brigades', consisting of men sworn to non-violence and ready to die in the noble task of restoring the rioters to sanity. Meanwhile, the one thing which was needed was restraint in speech and writing, so that the great changes which were imminent could be ushered in peacefully.

Unfortunately, the very reasons which impelled Gandhi and Congress to seek a lowering of the political temperature led Jinnah and the Muslim League in the opposite direction. For the latter it was a question of 'now or never'. The long negotiations with the Cabinet Mission had revealed that not only was Congress opposed to Pakistan but the Labour Government seemed to prefer a solution which kept the Congress and the League within the framework of a single constitution. Only a civil war, or the threat of a civil war, seemed likely to beat down the objections of the Congress and the scepticism of the British Government towards partition. The Cabinet Mission plan was a compromise, but it did not really bring the two parties together. The result was that questions presumed to have been settled by the Cabinet Mission were reopened soon after the return of its three members to England.

Controversy rose to fever pitch on two crucial questions, that of the grouping of Provinces and the composition of the interim government. On July 27, 1946, the Muslim League Council withdrew its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan, decided to boycott the Constituent Assembly and announced a programme of 'direct action' to achieve Pakistan. Jinnah declared that Muslims had bid good-bye to constitutional methods. 'We have forged a pistol,' he said, 'and are in a position to use it.' When asked whether the movement would be violent or non-violent, he refused to 'discuss ethics'. Some of his lieutenants in the League were even more forthright. Angry words and impatient gestures, however, were a poor preparation for 'direct action', if the object was a peaceful agitation.

At a time when tension was mounting it was imperative that

the country should have a strong and stable government at the centre. The Cabinet Mission had failed to secure the formation of a national interim government. In July the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, once again took the initiative and asked Nehru to form the Government. Jinnah, who was approached by Nehru but refused to co-operate, was bitterly critical of what he described as 'the caste Hindu Fascist Congress and their henchmen' who sought 'to dominate and rule over the Mussalmans and other minority communities of India with the aid of British bayonets'.

This bitterness boded ill at a time when exemplary restraint was necessary to pull the country through a critical period. The 'Direct Action Day' which was celebrated by the Muslim League on August 16th touched off a chain reaction of violent explosions which in the succeeding twelve months shook the country.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

*Quenching the Flames*

THE Muslim League observed August 16, 1946, as 'Direct Action Day'. On that day Calcutta witnessed a communal riot the scale and intensity of which had never been known in living memory. For four days, bands of hooligans armed with sticks, spears, hatchets and even fire-arms, roamed the town, robbing and killing at will. The 'Great Calcutta Killing'—to use the grim epithet coined by the *Statesman*—took a toll of more than five thousand lives besides the fifteen thousand or more who were injured.

Bengal was ruled by a Muslim League ministry led by H. S. Suhrawardy. 'In retrospect,' wrote the *Statesman* 'it is the Muslim League's conduct before the riots that stands open to inference—not only by its political opponents—that it was divided in mind on whether rioting of some sort would be good or bad.' Charges were in fact levelled against the Provincial Government that it did not provide against the outbreak, which it might well have anticipated, and that Suhrawardy deliberately prevented the police from acting promptly and impartially when the riots broke out.

If, as was suggested at the time, the outbreak was intended to serve as a demonstration of the strength of Muslim feeling on Pakistan, it proved a double-edged weapon. The non-Muslims of Calcutta reeled under the initial impact, but then, taking advantage of their numerical superiority, hit back savagely. The prevalent impression was that, in spite of a Muslim League ministry in Bengal, the Hindus had won in this 'trial of strength' in Calcutta. Two months later reprisals followed in the Muslim-majority district of Noakhali in East Bengal where, taking advantage of poor communications and encouraged by fanatical priests and ambitious politicians, local hooligans burnt the Hindus' property, looted their crops and desecrated their temples. A shocking innovation was the forcible conversion of Hindus and the kidnapping of Hindu women. Thousands of Hindus fled from their homes. In that year of growing lawlessness, East Bengal did for rural India what Calcutta had done for the towns; it showed



what inhumanities could be practised in the name of religion and ostensibly for political ends.

Gandhi was in Delhi when the news from East Bengal came through. He was particularly hurt by the crimes against women. He cancelled all his plans and decided to leave for East Bengal. Friends tried to dissuade him. His health was poor; important political developments on which his advice would be required were imminent. 'I do not know,' he said, 'what I shall be able to do there. All that I know is that I won't be at peace unless I go.'

At Calcutta he saw the ravages of the August riots and confessed to a 'sinking feeling at the mass madness which can turn man into less than a brute.' The atmosphere in East Bengal was charged with fear, hatred and violence. In a statement, Gandhi declared that he found himself in the midst of exaggeration and falsehood: 'I am unable to discover the truth. There is a terrible mutual distrust. Oldest friendships have snapped. Truth and *Ahimsa*, by which I swear and which have, to my knowledge, sustained me for sixty years, seem to fail to show the attributes I have ascribed to them. To test them or better to test myself I am going to a village, Srirampur . . .'

Of the 200 Hindu families of Srirampur village in Noakhali district, only three had remained after the recent disturbances. He dispersed his entourage in the neighbouring villages. Pyarelal, Sushila Nayar, Abha, Manu Gandhi and Sucheta Kripalani—each of them settled in a village. At Srirampur Gandhi's only companions were his stenographer Parsuram, his Bengali interpreter, Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, and Manu Gandhi. For the next six weeks a wooden bedstead, covered with a mattress, served as his office by day and his bed by night. His working day extended to sixteen and sometimes twenty hours. He slept little and ate little, mended his bed, mended his clothes, cooked his food, attended to his enormous mail, received callers and visited local Muslims. For several years he had been maligned in the Muslim League Press as the 'enemy number one' of Indian Muslims. He let the Muslims of Srirampur judge for themselves.

The restoration of confidence between the two communities was, however, a slow and difficult process. Nevertheless, Gandhi's presence acted as a soothing balm on the villages of East Bengal; it eased tension, assuaged anger and softened tempers. His success would have been more spectacular were it not for the sustained propaganda against him in the Muslim Press, which continued to suspect a 'deep political game' in his mission. Under

pressure from local party bosses, and perhaps from the League High Command, Premier Suhrawardy became critical of Gandhi's tour, and joined the outcry that Gandhi should quit Bengal. Gandhi was not dismayed by this perverse opposition; he argued that, if he could not command the confidence of the Muslim League leaders, the responsibility was his own. He was in a mood of self-examination, almost of self-castigation. An entry in his diary dated January 2, 1947, reads: 'Have been awake since 2 a.m. God's grace alone is sustaining me. I can see there is some grave defect in me somewhere which is the cause of all this. All round me is utter darkness. When will God take me out of this darkness into His light?'

The same day he left Srirampur on a village-to-village tour. At Chandipur village he discarded his sandals, and like the pilgrims of old, walked bare-foot. The village tracks were slippery and sometimes maliciously strewn with brambles and broken glass; the fragile bamboo bridges were tricky to negotiate. He saw gaping walls, gutted roofs, charred ruins and the remnants of skeletons in the debris—the handiwork of religious frenzy. A song from Tagore that he liked to hear expressed some of his anguish:

#### Walk Alone.

If they answer not to thy call, walk alone;  
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,  
O thou of evil luck,  
Open thy mind and speak out alone.  
If they turn away and desert you when crossing the wilderness,  
O thou of evil luck,  
Trample the thorns under thy tread  
And along the blood-lined track travel alone.  
If they do not hold up the light when the night is troubled with storm,  
O thou of evil luck,  
With the thunder-flame of pain ignite thine own heart,  
And let it burn alone.

On March 2, 1947, he left for Bihar, where the Hindu peasants had wreaked terrible vengeance on the Muslim minority for the events in Noakhali. Gandhi had first heard of the Bihar riots when he was on his way to Noakhali in the last week of October 1946. He made it known that if peace did not return at once

<sup>1</sup> Pyarelal: *Mahatma Gandhi, The Last Phase*, Vol. I, p. 470.

he would embark on a fast unto death. This warning, coupled with the stern measures adopted by the Bihar Government and a visit by Jawaharlal Nehru, helped in restoring order quickly.

In Bihar Gandhi's refrain was the same as in East Bengal; the majority must repent and make amends; the minority must forgive and make a fresh start. He would not accept any apology for what had happened, and chided those who sought in the misdeeds of the rioters in East Bengal a justification for what had happened in Bihar. Civilized conduct, he argued, was the duty of every individual and every community irrespective of what others did. Conditions in Bihar began to improve; they would have improved more quickly but for the fact that communal tension in 1946-7 was a reflection of the political situation, which continued to oscillate continually and violently.

While Gandhi had 'buried' himself in the villages of East Bengal and Bihar, the political landscape had undergone bewildering changes. The Cabinet Mission's Plan, prepared with such infinite patience and skill had, soon after its departure failed to work. The Muslim League withdrew its acceptance of the Plan, and launched a 'direct action campaign' to achieve Pakistan. The savage rioting in Calcutta touched off a chain reaction in East Bengal and Bihar. Minor riots went on in most provinces. Alarmed by this increasing lawlessness, Lord Wavell brought the Muslim League into the Interim Government, but the formation of this coalition—which for seven years had been talked of as a panacea for India's political ills—fanned political controversy instead of putting it out. The Constituent Assembly was summoned to meet on December 9th, but the Muslim League had declared that its representatives would not participate. The constitutional impasse looked complete when, in the last week of November 1946, in an eleventh-hour bid to bring the parties together, the British Government invited the Viceroy, Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, and Baldev Singh to London. The discussions proved abortive, but the British Government issued a statement on December 6, 1946 to clarify the disputed clauses about the grouping of provinces in the Cabinet Mission Plan. Though this clarification largely met its objections, the Muslim League did not remove its boycott of the Constituent Assembly.

The year 1947 dawned with the darkest possible prospects on the political horizon. India seemed to be sliding into an undeclared, albeit confused, civil war, with the battle lines passing through almost every town and village. The Central Govern-

ment, split from top to bottom, was unable to set an example of cohesion or firmness to the governments in the Provinces. The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, seemed to have been completely outplayed in the face of divergent pressures which he could neither reconcile nor control; he even suggested the desperate expedient of a British evacuation of India province by province. To check the drift to chaos, Premier Attlee came to the conclusion that what was needed was a new policy and a new Viceroy to carry it out. He announced in the House of Commons on February 20, 1947 that the British Government definitely intended to quit India by June 1948, and if by that date the Indian parties had not agreed on an All-India constitution, power would be transferred to 'some form of Central Government in British India or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments or in such other ways as may seem most reasonable and in the best interest of the Indian people'. Simultaneously, it was announced that Lord Mountbatten would succeed Lord Wavell as Viceroy.

'Wise and courageous' was Jawaharlal Nehru's comment on the statement of February 20th. Jinnah, however, was impressed not so much by the bold sweep and the abounding faith which inspired this historic declaration as by the possibility envisaged in it of transferring power in June 1948 'to existing Provincial Governments'. Apparently the Muslim League could, by staying out of the Constituent Assembly, frustrate an All-India constitution, and get power for the Provinces in the east and west which it claimed for Pakistan. Of these Provinces, Bengal and Sind had already Muslim League ministries and Baluchistan was centrally administered. There were Congress ministries in Assam and the North-West Frontier Province, and a Congress-Akali Unionist coalition in Punjab; the immediate Muslim League strategy was to dislodge these three ministries and replace them by Muslim League governments. 'Direct Action' campaigns were launched or intensified in these three provinces. The results, particularly in the Punjab, were disastrous. The Hindu and Sikh minorities in the West Punjab went through the same horrors as those suffered by the Hindu minority in East Bengal and the Muslim minority in Bihar.

Gandhi was in Bihar when he received news of the trouble in the Punjab. Since October 1946 he had been wandering from one Province to another in a vain attempt to stem the tide of violence. While his work was unfinished in one Province, there was an outbreak in another. There were some who shrugged their shoulders and said that anarchy was only to be expected

with the departure of the British, who alone had prevented Hindus and Muslims from flying at each other's throats.

To Gandhi the violence of 1946-7 was a shocking and even a bewildering phenomenon. All his life he had worked for the day when India would set an example of non-violence to the world. The chasm between what he had cherished in his heart and what he saw was so great that he could not help feeling a deep sense of failure. His first impulse was to blame himself. Was his technique faulty? Had he been unobservant, careless, indifferent, impatient? Had he failed to detect in time that while the people had, on the whole, refrained from overt violence in the struggle against foreign rule, they had continued to harbour ill feeling against the British? Was communal violence only an expression of the violence which had smouldered in the breasts of those who had paid lip service to non-violence?

It was only natural that he should have sought an explanation of this tragedy in terms of his own philosophy and of his part in India's political struggle. In retrospect, it would appear that he was exaggerating his own responsibility and the failure of non-violence. It would have been too much to expect that even in thirty-one years one single leader, however great, could have purged completely the hate and violence of 400 million people inhabiting a vast continent. It was remarkable enough that in the several Satyagraha campaigns he had led, violence had been reduced to negligible proportions, and India's millions had received a nationalist awakening without that dose of hatred which is usually associated with resurgent nationalisms.

While it is possible that the lawlessness which followed the arrests of Congress leaders in August 1942 lowered standards of mass behaviour, the real explanation for the violence of 1946-7 is to be sought in the tensions which the movement for Pakistan aroused, both in its protagonists and antagonists. The basic premise of this movement was that Hindus and Muslims had nothing in common in the past, present or future. Large sections of the population were seized with vague hopes or equally vague fears. No one could say with certainty whether India would remain united or be divided into two or more states, whether the Punjab or Bengal would retain their boundaries or be split, whether Indian states would be integrated into an independent India or become autonomous. The Adivasis of Central India and the Nagas of Assam found champions for an independence which they had never claimed before; there was talk of a Dravidistan in the south and a thousand-mile corridor

to link the two wings of future Pakistan. The 'balkanization of India', once an ominous phrase, had become a real danger. All this excited popular fantasy; the turbulent elements in society saw in the coming transfer of power a period of vacuum, such as had occurred in the eighteenth century during the twilight of the Mogul Empire.

In the face of these perils, the Central Government was a house divided against itself, and the Provincial Governments were facing increasing demoralization. The impending termination of their careers had embittered some British officers; moreover, few of them had the will or the ability to cope with the volcanic violence which erupted everywhere. Indian officers, when themselves free from prejudice, were not always able to restrain their subordinates from petty tyranny. The growth of private armies, the Muslim League National Guards, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and others, showed that popular faith in the instruments of law and order had been shaken.

Gandhi had sensed the explosive possibilities of this situation. 'We are not yet in the midst of a civil war,' he had commented on the Great Calcutta Killing, 'but we are nearing it.' From the end of October 1946, when he had left Delhi for Noakhali, he had made the assuaging of communal fanaticism his primary mission. He knew as well as anybody else that a settlement between the political parties could help in restoring stability. But he also saw that not only was political settlement not in sight, but violence might influence the nature of the political settlement. He wondered whether the people might be persuaded to agree, if their leaders could not. His tours of Bengal and Bihar succeeded in re-educating the masses, but he was handicapped by the fact that his voice did not carry the weight with the Muslim middle classes which it once had done. The Hindus were also restive and critical of what they believed to be his policy of 'unilateral disarmament', but he could still sway them. If Jinnah had toured East Bengal or West Punjab, he might have helped in stopping the rot. Such a suggestion, however, would have been simply laughed away by the Muslim League leader, whose political instinct rebelled against fasts and walking tours.

Lawyer and parliamentarian as he was, it is difficult to believe that Jinnah could have believed in force. But he seemed to have believed in threats of force. After the 'Great Calcutta Killing' and the disturbances in Bengal and Bihar, communal violence became the strongest argument in his brief for Pakistan; if



India was not divided, he warned, worse things would happen. Though he obliged Wavell and Mountbatten by signing appeals for peace, he did little to restrain his bellicose lieutenants; he himself issued doubled-edged statements which extenuated the violence they purported to condemn.

## CHAPTER XI

*Victory of the Vanquished*

FROM Mr Attlee's window in Downing Street, the darkest aspect of the Indian horizon was the threat of civil war. He has recorded in his memoirs that though he did not think the chances of an orderly change-over were very good he felt there was one man who 'might pull it off'. The man was Rear-Admiral Lord Mountbatten, who succeeded Lord Wavell in March 1947.

One of the first acts of the new Viceroy was to invite Gandhi for a discussion. The Mahatma interrupted his peace mission in Bihar and travelled by train to New Delhi. He advised Mountbatten to dissolve the Congress-League coalition government and to ask Jinnah to form a cabinet. Evidently, Gandhi's object was to disarm Jinnah's suspicion of Congress and the Hindus with one supreme gesture. To the British Government, however, the suggestion looked far-fetched. The Congress leaders had lately seen enough of their Muslim League colleagues in the Interim Government not to want to give them *carte blanche*; the time for gestures was past. When Jinnah met Mountbatten he reiterated his demand for the division of India.

The Viceroy's task was made easier by a reorientation of the Congress attitude to partition. Hitherto Congress had insisted that partition should, if at all, follow and not precede political liberation, that—to use a famous expression of Maulana Azad—there could be no divorce before marriage. But a few months of stormy courtship in the Interim Government had cured Congress leaders of all desire for a closer union. In the spring of 1947 the choice seemed to them to be between anarchy and partition; they resigned themselves to the latter in order to salvage three-fourths of India from the chaos which threatened the whole.

The stage was thus set for the June 3rd Plan, under which power was to be transferred by the British to two successor states on August 15, 1947. The final proposals, which took the Viceroy ten weeks of tireless negotiation and taxed to the full his ingenuity and diplomatic skill, represented the lowest common denominator of agreement between the Congress and the

League; though they left the ultimate decision to democratic processes—voting by members of provincial legislatures or by referendum—the partition of India, as also the partition of the Punjab and Bengal, were foregone conclusions.

What Gandhi had feared had come to pass. India was to be divided, but partition was not to be imposed; it had been accepted by Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and a majority of the Congress Working Committee. Gandhi had no hand in the final negotiations, but his opposition to partition was an open secret. His reasons were the same as those he had given several times before: 'We are unable to think coherently whilst the British power is still functioning in India. Its function is not to change the map of India. All it has to do is to withdraw and leave India, carrying out the withdrawal, if possible, in an orderly manner, maybe even in chaos, on or before the promised date.' The very violence which in the opinion of his Congress colleagues and that of the British Government provided a compelling motive for partition was for him an irresistible argument against it; to accept partition because of the fear of civil war was to acknowledge that 'everything was to be got if mad violence was perpetrated in sufficient measure'.

With such strong views on partition, it might well have been expected that Gandhi would oppose the Mountbatten Plan. The Viceroy had indeed some anxiety on this score. Gandhi had no intention, however, of blocking a settlement which was accepted by leaders of the Congress and the League as well as by the British Government. At the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee which debated the Mountbatten Plan he made no secret of his own misgivings, but threw his weight in favour of its acceptance. By this act of self-abnegation he saved a split in Congress at a crucial moment, without compromising his own independence.

Partition having been decided upon, Gandhi's efforts were henceforth directed to mitigating its risks. He welcomed Jinnah's promise of equal rights and privileges to the Hindu minority in Pakistan, and urged the future Indian Union, as 'the major partner', to set an example to its neighbour in treating the minorities not justly but generously.

A becoming pageantry was to mark the transfer of power from Britain to India on August 15, 1947, but Gandhi was in no mood to think of bands and banners. The day for which he had longed and laboured had come, but he felt no elation. Not only was India's freedom being ushered in at the cost of her unity, but

large sections of the population were uneasy about their future.

Early in August, after a brief visit to Kashmir, Gandhi passed through West Punjab and saw the havoc which the recent disturbances in that province had wrought; then he left for East Bengal, where the Hindus of Noakhali feared a fresh wave of disturbances after the establishment of Pakistan.

On arrival at Calcutta he found the town in the grip of communal lawlessness, which had been its lot for a year. With the exit of the Muslim League ministry and the transfer of the majority of Muslim officials and police to Pakistan, the tables had, however, been turned. It seemed as if the Hindus of Calcutta were determined to pay off old scores. Suhrawardy, now no longer Premier, and therefore somewhat chastened, met Gandhi and urged him to pacify Calcutta before proceeding to Noakhali. Gandhi agreed on condition that Suhrawardy would stay with him under the same roof in Calcutta and also use his influence with Muslim opinion in East Bengal to protect the Hindu minority. The Mahatma's choice fell upon a Muslim workman's house in Belighata, a part of the town which was considered unsafe for Muslims. Hardly had he moved into his new quarters when, on August 13th, a group of young Hindus staged a demonstration against his peace mission. He explained to them how he had been trying to end the fratricidal strife, and how hate and violence would lead them nowhere. His words fell like gentle rain on parched earth, and the young men returned to their homes converted. Calcutta was transformed overnight. Rioting ceased. On August 14th, the eve of independence was jointly celebrated by the two communities. Hindus and Muslims collected in the streets, danced and sang together. The incubus which had pressed down upon the heart of the town since August 1946 was suddenly lifted. On 1d day Hindus exchanged greetings and gifts with Muslims. The scenes were reminiscent of the halcyon days of the Khilafat movement in 1920-2. Three to four hundred thousand people attended Gandhi's prayer meetings, where the flags of India and Pakistan flew together. Gandhi was pleased. 'We have drunk the poison of hatred,' he said, 'and so this nectar of fraternization tastes all the sweeter.'

This cordiality had hardly lasted for a fortnight when the news of the massacres and the migrations from the Punjab caused a fresh flare-up. A Hindu mob raided Gandhi's residence in Belighata on the night of August 31st; it was angry, abusive, violent; it smashed the windows and forced its way into the house. The Mahatma's words were drowned in a violent din; a

brick flew past him; a *lathi* blow just missed him. Concurrently Calcutta relapsed into rioting.

This was a serious set-back to Gandhi's efforts for peace. His answer was the announcement of a fast from September 1st, to be broken only when peace returned to the town. 'What my word in person could not do,' he said, 'my fast may.' The announcement electrified Calcutta; the Muslims were moved, the Hindus shamed. Not even the hooligans of Calcutta could bear the thought of having his blood on their conscience; truck-loads of contraband arms were voluntarily surrendered by the communal underground. The leaders of all communities pledged themselves to peace and begged Gandhi to break the fast. Gandhi consented, but with the warning that if the pledge was not honoured he would embark on an irrevocable fast.

The Calcutta fast was universally acclaimed as a miracle; in the oft-quoted words of the correspondent of the *London Times*, it did what several divisions of troops could not have done. Henceforth Calcutta and Bengal were to remain calm; the fever of communal strife had subsided.

Immediately, Gandhi felt free to turn to the Punjab. In a sense the flare-up in that Province in the middle of August 1947 was only a continuation of the earlier riots in March 1947; the villages and the towns of the Punjab, seized with fantastic hopes or strange fears, had been dreading and at the same time preparing for a battle of the barricades. The administrative paralysis caused by the reshuffling of cadres on a communal basis, and the infiltration of communalism into the police and military had, by the end of August, led to a situation in which it was impossible for the Hindus to stay in West Punjab and Muslims to stay in East Punjab.

The sum of human misery involved in the movement of five million Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab to East Punjab, and in the movement of an equal number of Muslims in the opposite direction was appalling. The danger, however, was that as the refugees arrived at their destinations with their tales of woe, violence might spread. This is indeed what happened in Delhi in the first week of September. Gandhi found the capital of India paralysed by one of the worst communal riots in its long history. He felt there was no point in his proceeding to the Punjab when Delhi was aflame. The Government had taken prompt and energetic action. But Gandhi was not content with a peace imposed by the police and the military; violence had to be purged from the hearts of the people. It was an uphill task.

The town had a number of refugee camps, some of which housed Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan, while others sheltered Muslims fleeing from Delhi for a passage across the border.

The Hindu and Sikh refugees were in a difficult mood. Many of them, uprooted from their homes, lands and occupations, were going through unfamiliar pangs of poverty; some had been bereaved in the riots and all were bitter. They were anxious to wedge their way into the economy of Delhi; their eyes were riveted on Muslim houses and shops to replace those they had left behind in Pakistan. They could not understand the Mahatma's advice to 'forget and forgive' and to bear no malice in their hearts for those at whose hands they had suffered. They even blamed him for the division of India; his non-violence, they said, had been outclassed by violence. When he suggested that one day they would return to their homes in Pakistan, they smiled incredulously: he had not seen what they had seen; he had not suffered as they had suffered. He wore himself out in an effort to re-educate the people of Delhi; he heard grievances, suggested solutions, encouraged or admonished his numerous interviewers, visited refugee camps, remained in touch with local officials. It was an exhausting and sometimes a heart-breaking routine.

Gandhi had a half-serious and half-humorous way of saying that he aspired to live for 125 years, which, according to Hindu tradition, was the full span of human life. He was so unhappy, however, at the communal riots which began with the 'Great Calcutta Killing' that he repeated time and again that he did not want to 'be a living witness of the fratricidal strife'. Congratulated on his birthday he asked, 'Where do congratulations come in? Would condolences be not more appropriate?'

One wonders whether he had a presentiment of an early end, or whether these remarks were no more than occasional glimpses of the torture of mind and spirit which he suffered during this period. 'Life and death' he once described as 'the faces of the same coin'. He spoke of death as an 'incomparable friend'. There were several occasions when his life had hung by the slenderest thread. He was only twenty-seven when he was nearly lynched in the streets of Durban; eleven years later he was belaboured in Johannesburg by a rugged compatriot; in 1924 a bomb narrowly missed him while he was on his way to the Poona municipal hall. Several of his fasts brought him to the verge of a collapse; in at least two of them his survival seemed a miracle. As a soldier of non-violence, he had probably run more hazards than many a general had done on the battlefield.



pistol and fired three shots in quick succession. Gandhi fell instantly with the words '*He Rama*' (Oh, God).

It was a strange irony that the apostle of non-violence should have met a violent end. The dark forces of hate seemed to have won; but theirs was a pyrrhic victory. The bullets which passed through Gandhi's chest reverberated in millions of hearts. The very wickedness of the crime exposed, as if in a flash of lightning, the fatuity and futility of communal fanaticism. The flames which reduced the Mahatma's body to ashes on the banks of the Yamuna on the evening of January 31, 1948, proved to be the last flicker of that conflagration which had enveloped the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent since August 1946. Gandhi had fought this fire with all his strength while he lived. His death was finally to quench it.

## Epilogue

THOUGH his role in the political liberation of India inevitably loomed large in the eyes of the world, the mainspring of Gandhi's life lay not in politics but in religion. 'What I want to achieve,' he wrote in his autobiography, 'what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal.' His deepest strivings were spiritual. Finding him in a political deputation, Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, had exclaimed, 'How have you, a social reformer, found your way into this crowd?'

Gandhi explained that participation in politics was only an extension of his social activity: 'I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do so unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, and purely religious work into watertight compartments.' He did not know, he said, any religion apart from human activity; the spiritual law did not work in a field of its own but expressed itself through the ordinary activities of life. To be truly religious one did not have to retire to the Himalayas nor shrink into the security of the home or a sect.

The dissociation between politics and religion, between statecraft and ethics has lasted so long, however, that neat minds revolt against any mixture of the two. Truth, charity, and love are considered virtues applicable only in the domestic and social spheres. In politics expediency seems to be the prime mover. Gandhi's whole career was a protest against this double morality. He did not divorce the sacred and the secular. His interest in politics derived from the fact that he developed a technique—*Satyagraha*—which sought to introduce the spirit of religion into politics. The question was often asked by western observers whether Gandhi was a saint or a politician; he was a saint who did not cease to be one when he entered politics. Gandhi himself considered the word saint too sacred to be applied to him. He was 'a humble seeker after truth', who had caught 'only the

faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence'. He made no claims to infallibility, and let all the world know when he was groping in the dark. If he thought or spoke of himself as if he were an instrument of God, it was not as a chosen instrument with a special revelation of God's will. 'My firm belief is,' he said, 'that He reveals himself to every human being, but we shut our ears to the still small voice within.'

His humility was not a cultivated virtue, but sprang from a ceaseless struggle for self-mastery in which he remained engaged from his childhood till the last day of his life. 'For him,' wrote his secretary Mahadev Desai, 'the struggle with the opponent within is keener than with the opponent without.' He described himself as an average man with less than an average ability. 'I admit,' he remarked, 'that I am not sharp intellectually. But I don't mind. There is a limit to the development of the intellect but none to that of the heart.'

Since he was continually elaborating his ideas on every subject, it was easy to confront him with his own earlier pronouncements on caste, machinery or *khadi*, and point out the discrepancies. In the glare of the ruthless publicity in which he lived, every one of his gestures and words was public property, but he willingly shared with the world even an ignoble thought if it happened in a dream to flash across his mind. What he wrote of Tolstoy is equally true of him: 'Tolstoy's so-called inconsistencies were a sign of his development and passionate regard for truth. He often seemed inconsistent because he was continually outgrowing his own doctrines. His failures were public; his struggles and triumphs private.'

Rabindranath Tagore once aptly described Gandhi as essentially 'a lover of men and not of ideas'. Though he loved to reduce all problems to his moral algebra, Gandhi did not ram his opinions down anybody's throat. 'Never take anything for gospel truth,' he warned, 'even if it comes from a Mahatma.' *Hind Swaraj*, his first political testament, included a scathing attack on modern civilization and all its appurtenances of schools, railways and hospitals, but Gandhi no more tried to foist this philosophy on his followers than to compel them to adopt the loin-cloth.

Gandhi devoted the best part of his life to one crucial problem: how to perfect and extend *ahimsa* (non-violence) in human relationships. For him, the validity of non-violence was independent of his own success or failure. His criticisms of Western materialism and militarism in *Hind Swaraj* were made five years before

the outbreak of the First World War, when Europe was at the zenith of its prestige and power. These criticisms may have appeared quixotic fifty years ago; today, as the world trembles on the brink of a Third World War, they seem prophetic. By spurning material progress at the cost of moral values, and by irrevocably renouncing violence, Gandhi took a line in direct opposition to the two dominant ideologies of the twentieth century, capitalism and communism. He visualized and worked for a society which would provide for the essential needs of the community (and no more), and in which the decentralization of economic and political structures would minimize the incentives for exploitation within and conflict without. Such a society could, he believed, dispense with the coercive apparatus of the modern state, and depend upon non-violent techniques not only to maintain order but to protect itself against external aggression.

It is difficult to say whether Gandhi's dream will come true. Nations, like individuals, are tempted to continue along the beaten path, even though it may end in a blind alley. Gandhi knew the difficulties of translating his non-violent dream into the world of reality. But he refused to compromise on what he held to be the fundamentals. To the last he affirmed that even good ends do not justify dubious means; that our real enemies are our own fears, greeds and egotisms; that we must change ourselves before we can change others; that the laws of the family, of truth and love and charity, are applicable to groups, communities and nations; and above all, that 'non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute.' To those who are charged with the destinies of nations, all this may sound a very desirable but a very distant ideal. Yet, in the thermo-nuclear age, if civilization is not to disintegrate into a mass of torn flesh and molten metal, the premises of Gandhi have an immediate relevance.

# INDEX

Abdulla, 32, 34, 35, 46  
 Abhar, 250  
 Adivasis, 254  
 Afghanistan, 129  
 Ahimsa, 75, 86, 117; *see also* Non-violence  
 Ahmedabad, 85, 102-4, 110, 118, 131, 165, 166  
 Ajmal Khan, Hakim, 114  
 Alexander, Mrs, 47  
 Alexander, Superintendent, 48  
 Alexander, A. V., 243-4  
 Ali, Mahomed, and brother, 95, 96, 114, 115, 129, 130, 131, 142, 146  
 Ali Khan, Liaquat, 252  
 Aligarh university, 114  
 Allahabad, 120, 185  
 All-India Spinners Association, 195-6  
 All-India Village Industries Association, 195, 197-8  
 All-Parties Conference, 154-5  
 Ambedkar, 190, 191  
 Amery, L. S., 221, 223, 242  
 Amritsar, 110-12, 128  
 Anarchism, 83, 94, 123, 158, 253-4  
 Anderson, Sir John, 223  
 Andrews, C. F., 79, 87, 111, 135-6, 146, 244  
*Arjuman Islamia*, 26  
 Ansari, Dr M. A., 153, 172  
 Army, the, 242, 255  
 Arnold, Sir Edwin, 26, 53, 55  
 Ashrams, 85  
 Asiatic Registration Bill, 63-6, 68, 69, 70, 72, 76, 82  
 Attlee, C. R., 154, 223, 242, 244, 245, 253, 257  
 August Offer, 220, 224  
 Azad, Abul Kalam, 95, 96, 114, 115, 131, 230, 257

Bajaj, Jamnadal, 197  
*Bande Mantram*, 94  
 Banerjee, Surendranath, 91, 96  
*Bania* caste, 22, 29  
 Banker, Shankarlal, 137, 138  
 Bardoli, 132, 133, 134  
 Becharji, Swami, 22  
 Belgaum Congress, 143  
 Benares university, 117  
 Bengal, 93, 143, 242, 249, 254, 255, 258  
 Besant, Annie, 97-8, 117, 125, 146, 159, 217  
*Bhagavad Gita*, 53, 55, 59, 66, 67, 73, 82, 86

Bhansali, Prof., 197  
 Bhatt, Shamlal, 53  
 Bhawe, A. V., 221  
 Bhavnagar, 21, 22, 25  
 Bible, the, 26, 59, 66-7  
 Bihar, 100-2, 118, 125, 251-2, 255  
 Birkenhead, Lord, 153-4  
 Birla, G. D., 191, 205, 207  
 Boers, 34, 42  
 Boer War, 42, 48, 49-52, 62, 64  
 Bombay, 29-30, 34, 44, 50-1, 89, 92, 93, 109, 110, 118, 130-1, 135, 168, 181, 182  
 Bonnerjee, W. C., 93  
 Booth, Dr, 49  
 Bose, Prof. N. K., 250  
 Bose, S. C., 124, 133, 151, 155  
 Brailsford, H. N., 168, 244, 246  
 Bright, John, 91  
 Brijkishore, Babu, 101  
 British, in India, 30-1, 207, 241-3  
 Broomfield, C. N., 137  
 Buddha, 53  
 Buller, Gen., 49, 50  
 Burns, Sir Alan, 62

Cabinet Mission Plan, 245, 247, 252  
 Calcutta, 45, 131, 157, 249, 250, 259-60  
 Canning, Lord, 90  
 Carlyle, Thomas, 54  
 Cartright, Albert, 69, 70, 71  
 Caste system, 29, 56, 57, 85, 87; *see also* Untouchability  
 Chamberlain, Joseph, 51  
 Champaran, 100-2, 104, 117, 119  
 Chauri Chaura, 133-4, 136, 137, 163  
 Chelmsford, Lord, 102, 114, 115, 119, 122, 129, 182, 242  
 China, 222, 229  
 Chirol, Valentine, 94, 95  
 Christianity, 54, 55, 56, 82  
 Churchill, Winston, 126, 170, 202, 203, 222, 223, 225, 226, 231, 237, 242  
 Civil disobedience, 131-2, 134, 136, 162-8, 169, 171, 181, 183, 186, 187, 188, 192, 194, 220-1, 230  
 Colour prejudice, 32-3, 42, 43  
 Communalism, 94, 176, 177, 189-91, 208, 211-12, 229, 247, 249-56, 259, 260  
 Congress, *see* Indian National Congress  
 Cotton industry, 92, 122, 178  
 Craddock, Sir R., 98, 102

# INDEX

269

Cripps, Sir S., 223-6, 228, 230, 243, 245  
 Curtis, Lionel, 43, 62  
 Curzon, Lord, 93

Dandi, 165, 166, 167  
 Das, C. R., 112, 121, 126, 131, 133, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 152  
 Dass, Jatin, 158  
 Datt, B. K., 158  
 Dave, Mavji, 21  
 Dayananda, Swami, 14, 91  
 Delhi, 109, 260-2  
 Delhi Pact, 171-2, 174, 181, 182  
 Dharsana, 167-8  
 Desai, Mahadev, 17, 56, 103, 115, 167, 172, 175, 178, 179, 180, 185, 197, 207, 235, 266  
 Dole, Joseph J., 60, 66-7, 70  
 Dufferin, Lord, 93  
 Durban, 32, 36, 38, 40, 46, 48, 51, 57, 58, 59, 77  
 Dwarkadas, Kanji, 97  
 Dyarchy, 140, 152  
 Dyer, General, 110, 111

Education, 58-9, 75, 121, 123, 199, 206  
 Elgin, Lord, 93  
 Elphinstone, Mountstart, 89  
 Escombe, Harry, 46, 47

Faizpur, 198  
 Famines, 91, 242  
 Fischer, Louis, 209  
 Frydman, Maurice, 197

Gait, Sir Edward, 102  
 Gandhi, Ava, 263  
 Gandhi, Devadas, 167, 179  
 Gandhi, Harjivan, 13, 14  
 Gandhi, Karamchand (father), 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21  
 Gandhi, Karsandas (brother), 18, 21, 22, 25, 29  
 Gandhi, Kasturbai (wife), 18, 57, 59, 60, 77, 86-7, 106, 235-6  
 Gandhi, Lakshmidas (brother), 30  
 Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma), birth, 15; marriage, 18; visits to England, 22, 105, 175-80; to South Africa, 31, 32; as lawyer, 30, 34-5, 51, 57-8, 81; as politician, 36-7, 39, 45, 81-2, 84, 89, 99, 117, 265; his personality, 13, 14, 16-17, 19-20, 57, 58, 60, 65, 73, 75, 82-3; his arrests and imprisonments, 69, 78, 79, 128, 137-9, 156,

Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma)—*continued*  
 157, 167, 168, 169, 181, 182, 185, 192, 230, 231, 235, 236; his fasts, 103, 110, 131, 146, 189-91, 192, 232, 260, 262; his attitude to British, 97, 99, 112-13, 116-17, 118, 119, 120, 123, 164, 165, 187; as seen by others, 60, 99, 101-2; and health, 50-1, 75, 106-7, 236-7; as the Mahatma, 125-8; retires from politics, 147, 156; and Nehru, 161; his assassination, 263-4  
 Gandhi, Manu, 250, 263  
 Gandhi, Putlibai (mother), 15, 16-17, 21, 29  
 Gandhi, Tulsiidas, 15  
 Gandhi, Uttamchand, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21  
 Gelder, Stuart, 237  
 Ghose, Aurobindo, 94, 96  
*Giornale d'Italia*, 180, 183  
 Godse, Nathuram, 263  
 Gokhale, 44, 45, 50, 51, 76, 77, 79, 83, 84-5, 96, 99, 123, 228, 241, 242  
 Goseva Sangh, 198  
*Gram Udyog Patrika*, 198  
 Gregg, Richard, 165  
 Grigg, J., 223  
 Gujarat, 14, 105  
 Gupta, J. M. Sen., 167  
 Gurukul, Kangri, 85

Haig, Sir H., 211  
 Haq, Mazharul, 26  
 Hardinge, Lord, 79, 83, 228  
 Harijan Sevak Sangh, 192  
 Harkishan, Lal Gaub, 26  
 Hartal, 109  
 Heycock, W. H., 101  
*Hind Swaraj*, 83, 108, 109, 116, 118, 121, 199, 266  
 Hinduism, 26, 54-6  
 Hindus, and Muslims, 82, 115-16, 121, 130, 143, 144-6, 177, 208-14, 225, 229, 247, 249, 250, 254; *see also* Communalism  
 Hindustani Talimi Sangh, 198  
 Hoare, Sir Samuel, 177, 183, 184, 185, 187, 202-3, 210, 242  
 Home Rule League, 97-8, 99, 129, 209  
 Horniman, B.G., 172  
 Hoyland, John, 18  
 Hume, A. O., 92-3, 244  
 Hunter, Sir W. W., 40, 111-12  
 Hussain, Dr. Z., 206

Libert Bill, 92  
 Imperial Legislative Council, 76, 108, 209



- Indentured labour, 40-1, 42, 45, 62, 63, 76, 77-80  
 Independence Day, 163  
 Indian Civil Service, 91, 207, 244  
 Indian National Congress, and Indians in Africa, 37, 38, 64-5; foundation of, 92-6; and Gandhi, 98-100, 174, 187, 194-5; and non-violence, 115, 124-5, 131, 133-4, 162-3, 168, 169, 170, 182, 184, 186, 231; and boycott of legislatures, 122, 140-4; and Nehru Report, 154, 155, 157; and Nehru, 160-1; and Muslims, 208, 209, 212, 214, 241, 247, 257, 258; in office, 204-7; and the war, 216, 217, 218, 220, 222, 226, 230, 232; mentioned, 112, 176, 181, 198, 233, 237  
*Indian Opinion*, 59, 66, 68, 94, 118  
 Indian Reforms Act, 1919, 112, 140, 153, 202, 243  
 Indian Reforms Act, 1935, 202-4, 243  
 Indigo industry, 100-2  
 Industrialization, 199-200  
 Iqbal, 95  
 Irving, Washington, 54  
 Irwin, Lord, 158, 160, 162, 165, 169, 170, 171, 172, 174, 182, 187, 202  
 Islam, 54, 95; *see also* Muslims  
 Iyengar, Srinivas, 142  
  
 Jameson, Sir Leander Starr, 49  
 Japan, 201, 221-2, 225, 229, 233, 239  
 Jayaker, M. R., 112, 169, 186, 190  
 Jinnah, M. A., 14, 105, 108, 122, 125, 153, 208-14, 224, 225, 237-9, 246, 247, 248, 252, 253, 255-6, 257, 258  
 Johannesburg, 33, 46, 51, 57, 60, 65-6, 69, 70, 74  
 Johnson, A. C., 153, 162, 172  
 Johnson, Col., 111  
 Johnson, L., 224  
 Junagadh, 15  
  
 Kallenbach, Hermann, 74, 75  
 Karachi, 174  
 Kathiawar, 14, 31  
 Kelkar, 125, 190  
 Kesari, 94  
 Khadi, 147-50, 157; *see also* Spinning  
 Khan, A. G., 182  
 Khaparde, 105  
 Kheda, 104, 106  
 Kher, B. G., 167  
 Khilafat movement, 114-15, 120, 129, 134, 142, 144, 145, 259  
 Khimaji, Rana, 14  
 Kitchlew, S. D., 162  
 Kohat, 145-6  
 Koran, 54  
  
 Kripalani, S., 250  
 Krishandas, 127  
 Kruger, S. J., 42  
  
 Labour Party, 239-40, 243  
 Lal, Madan, 263  
 Loughton, 47  
 Law courts, 121-2  
 Lawrence, Sir Henry, 89  
 Lefroy, Bishop, 79  
 Legislatures, boycotting of, 122, 140, 141, 142, 205  
 Lester, Muriel, 175, 245  
 Lewis, W. A., 101-2  
 Linlithgow, Lord, 205, 216, 217, 219, 224, 230, 231, 232, 233  
 Lloyd, Sir Geoffrey, 128-9  
 Lloyd George, D., 159, 178, 242  
 Low, David, 189  
 Lucknow Pact, 98, 209  
  
 Macaulay, Lord, 21, 91  
 MacDonald, Ramsay, 93, 170, 177, 242  
 Madras, 45  
 Maganlal, 85  
 Mahomed, Nawab Sayed, 95  
 Makanji, Gokaldass, 18  
 Malaviya, Madan Mohan, 91, 121, 129, 131, 144, 146, 152, 167, 186, 190  
 Malegaon riots, 135  
 Manu, 55-6  
 Maritzburg, 32, 33  
 Masani, R. F., 37  
 Mason, Philip, 207  
 Maxwell, Sir R., 232  
 Meerut Conspiracy Case, 158  
 Mehta, Sir P., 28, 30, 44, 45, 65, 96  
 Mehtab, Sheikh, 18-19, 25  
 Mill, J. S., 91  
 Miller, Webb, 167  
 Milner, Lord, 39  
 Minto-Morley Reforms, 94  
 Mirabehn, 165, 179, 184, 262  
 Mir Alam, 70, 72  
 Mohammed, Prophet, 54  
 Montagu, Edwin, 99, 242, 265  
 Moonje, B. S., 190  
 Moplahs, 135, 144  
 Morley, Lord, 94, 242  
 Mott, John, 197  
 Mountbatten, Lord, 253, 256, 257, 258  
 Muller, Max, 91  
 Munro, Thomas, 89  
 Munshi, K. M., 167  
 Murry, J. M., 216  
 Muslim League, 95, 98, 114, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 219, 224, 237, 238, 239, 241, 245, 247, 248, 249, 252, 253, 259

- Muslims, 94-5, 114-15; and Hindus, 82, 115-16, 121, 130, 143, 144-6, 177, 208-14, 225, 229, 247, 249, 250, 254; *see also* Communalism  
 Mussolini, Benito, 180  
 Mutiny, the, 89-90, 95, 111  
  
 Nagappa, 73  
 Nagas, 254  
 Nagpur, 122, 125  
 Naidu, Sarojini, 172  
 Naoroji, Dadabhai, 28, 37, 38, 81, 94, 208  
 Natal, 36-42, 45-8, 49, 51, 62, 81, 82  
 Natal Indian Congress, 38-9, 48, 81, 124  
 Natesan, G. A., 55, 99, 105, 122  
 Nayyar, Sushila, 250  
 Nehru, Motilal, 112, 121, 126, 133, 140, 142, 143, 144, 152, 153, 154, 155, 159, 160, 162, 169, 170, 172, 217  
 Nehru, Jawaharlal, 125-6, 136, 149, 151, 155, 157, 159, 161, 162, 167, 169, 171, 182, 203-4, 216, 220, 221, 222, 223, 225, 229, 230, 248, 252, 253, 258  
 Nehru Report, 154, 155, 162, 210  
 Noakhali, 249, 250, 251  
 Non-co-operation, 115, 121, 122, 123, 125, 127, 129, 134, 137, 138, 141, 143, 145, 165  
 Non-violence, 18, 49, 55, 75, 119, 123, 130, 135, 136, 164, 179, 187, 194-5, 200, 215-16, 217, 218, 230, 231, 232, 254, 264, 266, 267  
 Nutrition, 198  
  
 O'Dwyer, Sir Michael, 111  
 Olcott, Col., 91  
 Orange Free State, 34, 36, 42, 43  
  
 Pakistan, 212, 213, 214, 224, 238, 239, 241, 247, 253, 254, 255, 258, 259, 262  
 Paramahansa, Ramakrishna, 91  
 Parnell, Charles Stewart, 141  
 Parsuram, 250  
 Passive resistance, 66, 121; *see also* Non-violence, etc.  
 Patel, Bithalbhai, 167  
 Patel, Vallabhbhai, 106, 126, 141, 143, 151, 158, 159, 167, 185, 186, 195, 197, 258  
 Patel, V. J., 104, 108, 140, 141, 142, 160, 169  
 Pearson, 79  
 Persia, 95  
 Pethick-Lawrence, Lord, 239, 245  
  
 Phoenix settlement, 23, 59-60, 74, 77, 85  
 Polak, Henry S. L., 59  
 Polak, Millie Graham, 60, 73  
 Poona, 44  
 Poona Pact, 191  
 Porbandar, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 84  
 Prasad, Rajendra, 106, 126, 190, 212  
 Press laws, 185  
 Pretoria, 33-4, 76  
 Princely States, 90, 117, 203, 223, 224, 225  
 Prohibition, 206  
 Public Safety Bill, 158  
 Punjab, 253, 254, 258, 259, 260  
 Punjab Wrong, 110-13, 128  
 Pyarelal, 179, 250, 251  
  
 Quakers, 54, 82  
  
 Rae-Bareilly, 185  
 Rahim, Abdur, 26  
 Rai, Lala Rajpat, 96, 133, 144, 152  
 Rajagopalachari, C., 109, 126, 141, 143, 167, 190, 193, 222, 237  
 Rajkot, 15, 16, 29, 30, 44, 84  
 Raychandbhai, 54-5  
 Reading, Lord, 116, 129-32, 137, 142, 143-4, 152, 153, 159, 182  
 Ripon, Lord, 92  
 Rolland, Madeleine, 175, 179  
 Rolland, Romain, 136-7, 179, 180  
 Roosevelt, F. D., 222, 224, 225, 226  
 Round Table Conferences, 159, 160, 164, 169, 170, 171, 172, 174, 183, 186, 208, 210  
 Rowlatt Bills, 107, 108-9, 119, 209  
 Roy, Ram Mohun, 90  
 Ruskin, John, 59, 73, 82, 83  
 Russell, Earl, 166  
 Rustomji, Parsi, 47, 58  
  
 Sabarmati Ashram, 23, 85-8, 102, 106, 137, 165, 192  
 Sahib, Imam, 167  
 Salt, Plea for Vegetarianism, 23, 25  
 Salt Satyagraha, 163-8, 185  
 Sanatanists, 193  
 Santiniketan, 84, 85, 190  
 Sapru, T. B., 108, 159, 160, 169, 171, 186, 190  
 Sarabhai, Ambalal, 102-3, 106  
 Sarabhai, Anasuyabehn, 103  
 Sastri, Srinivasa, 84, 121, 123, 171, 241  
 Satyagraha, 66, 99-100, 103, 104, 108, 109, 119, 125, 136, 165, 173, 188, 233, 243  
 Satyagraha sabha, 109

- Segson, 197, 198  
 Servants of India, 84, 99, 104  
 Setalvad, Sir C., 110  
 Sevagram ashram, 23, 197-8  
 Shafi, Muhammad, 26  
 Shaw, G. B., 98, 178  
 Shibli, 95  
 Shraddhanand, Swami, 144, 146  
 Shukla, Rajkumar, 100  
 Sikhs, 253, 260, 261, 262  
 Simla Conference, 239, 245  
 Simon, Sir John, 154, 223  
 Simon Commission, 154, 170, 202  
 Singh, Balder, 252  
 Singh, Bhagat, 158  
 Sinha, Sachchidanand, 24, 26  
 Slocombe, George, 169  
 Smith, W. C., 213-14  
 Smuts, General, 63, 69, 70, 71, 72, 76, 79, 80, 232  
 Socialism, 194, 200  
 South Africa, 16, 28, 31, 32-4, 36-43, 51, 54, 62, 64, 76, 79, 81, 137  
 Spinning, 148, 149, 195  
 Srirampur, 250  
 Standerton, 32, 33  
 Stent, Vere, 50  
 Strangman, Sir J. T., 137  
 Suhrawardy, H. S., 249, 251, 259  
 Swadeshi, 122, 196  
 Swaraj, 105, 124, 128, 243  
 Swaraj Party, 140-4, 152, 153  
 Swift, Jonathan, 56  
 Switzerland, 180, 201  
 Tagore, Rabindranath, 84, 85, 91, 111, 121, 139, 148, 163, 190, 251, 266  
 Tendulkar, 173  
 Textile industry, 102-4  
 Thakhar, A. V., 191  
 Theosophical Society, 53, 97  
 Thoreau, Henri, 73  
 Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, 44, 45, 94, 96, 98, 99, 105, 217  
 Tolstoy, Leo, 54, 57, 67, 82-3, 266  
 Tolstoy Farm, 23, 74-5, 77, 78  
 Tottenham, 166  
 Trade unions, 151, 158  
 Transvaal, 33, 34, 42, 43, 51, 62, 63, 64, 68, 72, 73-6, 77, 78, 82  
 Turkey, 95, 96, 114, 115, 119  
 Tyabji, Abbas, 112, 126  
 Tyeb Sheth, 34, 35  
 Untouchability, 56, 87, 189-93, 196  
 Vaishnavas, 18, 25  
 Vegetarianism, 18-19, 22-4, 25-6  
 Vijayaraghavchariar, 125  
 Vikramjit, Rana, 15  
 Vincent, Sir William, 128  
 Vivekananda, Swami, 91  
 Volksrust, 78, 79  
 Wales, Prince of, 130-2  
 War Conference, 1918, 114, 117, 119  
 Wardha, 192, 230  
 Wardha scheme of education, 206  
 Wavell, Lord, 236, 237, 239, 248, 252, 253, 256, 257  
 Wedgwood Benn, 158-9, 242  
 West, Albert, 59  
 Westcott, Dr, 146  
 Willingdon, Lord, 174, 182, 183, 186, 187, 189, 192, 202, 209, 233  
 Women, status of, 55-6  
 Woodruff, Philip, 207, 226  
 World War I, 95, 97, 104-6, 217  
 World War II, 214, 215, 216-18, 219, 220, 241-2, 243  
 Yeravda gaol, 85, 138-9, 169, 180, 185, 189, 192  
*Young India*, 127, 135, 137, 145, 146, 174  
 Youth Leagues, 151, 184  
 Zulu Rebellion, 63