

# Indian Opinion

No. 24—Vol. XXVI.

Friday, June 22nd, 1928.

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.  
PRICE FOURPENCE.

## FAREWELL RECEPTION TO INDIAN TRADE MISSION

THE Indian Trade Mission which sailed for India last Monday was entertained on Sunday at tea by Mr. E. M. Paruk at 483 Currie Road. There were present about a hundred and fifty leading members of the Indian community, and the Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri presided. In the course of his speech Mr. Sastri said:—

“On behalf of Mr. Paruk, our host to-day, I am happy to welcome Dr. Meek and the members of the Trade Delegation from India. As you know, they are about to sail home after a short stay in this country. Before they came to South Africa they had been to other countries as well. Their object, as I understand it, is to examine what opportunities there are for extending trade facilities between India and the countries they have visited. The result of their labours will be known in due time. What they have done in South Africa I have no means of knowing yet; but I happen to know one thing, and that is that they have been received with the warmest welcome by all sections of the people of South Africa. From our own countrymen I need not say that they have received every mark of cordial friendship and welcome. There are people who think that between countries a lasting connection can be maintained solely by moral ties. That may or may not be so. But I should very much like to think that was the case here. Between South Africa and India in recent months, as you know, a great bond of friendship and goodwill has been brought into existence. We desire by every means in our power to give a lasting character to this bond so that it may be able to stand the strain of any differences that may arise similar to those that have held the two countries and people apart in the past. In that work of maintaining the goodwill and friendship that has been established we are bound to seek around for every possible aid, and it seems to me that the establishment of trade relations, the strengthening of material bonds of that kind would help in that great work, and I am full of hope that Dr. Meek and his colleagues of the Trade Delegation will be able to make a report upon their work here which will lead the two Governments in the future to strengthen those material bonds. It is in that hope that I welcome the Trade Mission from India. The direct effect of their work is important. It is not for me to say anything in depreciation of it, but Dr. Meek will allow me to say that this is one of those cases in which the indirect effect is quite as important and desirable as the direct effect. To you, Dr. Meek, and to your colleagues, we give you a hearty welcome and a humble entertainment in the name of Mr. Paruk. At the same time we wish

you good-bye and a happy voyage home and a delightful and profitable conclusion to your extremely useful labours.

Dr. Meek, speaking on behalf of his colleagues, said that it was a great pleasure for them to be present at the garden party and he thanked Mr. Sastri and Mr. Paruk for the very cordial welcome they had received. Dr. Meek added that not only in Durban had they been cordially received, but in every town in the Union which they had visited they had the heartiest of welcomes extended to them; and on the eve of his departure for India he would like to express the gratitude of himself and his colleagues for all the kindness—and he had met nothing but kindness—that had been shown to them by both Europeans and Indians. He would also like to take the opportunity of expressing thanks, not only on behalf of his colleagues and himself, but also on behalf of the Government of India, to the Government of the Union of South Africa for all the facilities that had been afforded to the delegation in travelling throughout the Union, for the help they had given in many other directions and for deputing Mr. A. T. Brennan, a member of the staff of the Union Board of Trade and Industries to accompany them round the Union. Mr. Brennan had rendered yeoman service and had done everything in his power to make their work a success. Dr. Meek spoke in high terms of the valuable help they had received from the various Chambers of Commerce throughout the Union. Wherever they had gone in the Union, commercial bodies had been of tremendous help.

Continuing, Dr. Meek said, “Had we toured the Union a few years ago, things would not have been so easy for us. We all know the wonderful change that has been brought about by the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, the wonderful atmosphere he has created and the work he has done for the Indian community. I trust that this atmosphere will remain calm and that when Mr. Sastri goes at the end of the year the Government of India will be able to find a successor worthy of wearing the mantle which he will then put aside.”

Dr. Meek then expressed the thanks they all felt for Mr. Sorabjee's help during their stay in Durban, and their regret at having to leave South Africa and so many friends.

Proceeding, Dr. Meek said, “I will now tell you what the objects of our mission were. First, to discover markets for our Indian goods, and particularly Indian cotton piece-goods. In those countries which we have had the pleasure of visiting we have also endeavoured to estimate the possibility of export trade to India, and to see if those countries produced

any articles which could be landed in India at a lower cost than they are being landed at present from other countries. In other words, we had been asked to examine and report on the possibility of the development of mutual trade in both directions between India and the various countries on the list which was given to us.

Our second object was to report on the desirability of appointing Trade Commissioners for India in certain countries we visited. So far as our tour was concerned we were limited to five countries, and of these South Africa was one. We have, therefore, to report on the desirability of appointing an Indian Trade Commissioner in South Africa.

We started in January by visiting Persia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt including the Sudan, Aden and down the East African coast as far as South Africa. We found in each case that India exports more to these countries than she imports from them. That is apart from South Africa. So in the case of these other countries the trade balance is in favour of India. Now in South Africa the position is different, for the export trade from South Africa to India is larger than the import trade from India to South Africa. In making that statement, however, I want you to understand that the main export trade of this country to India is gold and diamonds. Imports into this country from India are tea, jute, rice, timber, clothing, coir yarn and Indian piece-goods; these are the main items. Now as I have indicated to you, one of our aims was to find a new market for our cotton piece-goods. So far as jute is concerned, India sends to South Africa nearly one million pounds sterling worth of jute every year. We have examined certain difficulties in regard to this commodity that have been brought to our notice, especially regarding the quality of jute and the financing of purchases from India. We trust that these will be removed.

Regarding rice, this country imports on an average every year about £300,000 worth. In some places we have visited, we have received complaints regarding the quality of rice and also complaints regarding the high cost of freight and similar difficulties which prevent an increase in the export of rice from India.

The tea you get in South Africa is not altogether Indian tea as the bulk of it comes from Ceylon, but so long as South Africa takes the tea off the world's market, it leaves room for India to extend her export trade in tea to other countries.

The export trade in timber from India is mostly teak, and here we have had definite difficulties put before us, difficulties which—it has been stated—prevent the export of teak from Burma and allow teak to be imported from Siam and other countries. Once these difficulties are removed it may be possible to increase the import of teak into South Africa from India and Burma.

The most important item so far as our work is concerned is textiles—cotton piece goods from Bombay and other parts of India. These are only being imported into the Union to the extent of £40,000 annually. This is a comparatively small amount and an item which we should like to see very much

increased. That is one side of the picture—exports from India to the Union of South Africa. On the other side, as I have already indicated, the exports amount to much more. Exports from South Africa to India are wattle bark, wine and fresh fruit and a few other items; but the main exports are gold and diamonds. So far as wattle bark is concerned the trade has increased a good deal. Five years ago the amount exported to India from this country was £6,000. Last year it reached £81,000 sterling. Once trade is started with India it is generally found that it increases rapidly as these figures show. I do not see why this should not happen in the case of fresh fruits, for we have come to the conclusion that fresh fruits from this country can be exported at definite periods of the year to India and sold there at a profit. Being on the opposite side of the Equator, this country enjoys opposite seasons to those we get in India, and when we have little fruit in India, in this country it is to be had in abundance. So we could take quite large supplies. The want of cold storage on the British India boats is one that may be got over and if similar difficulties can be got over, it can be taken for certain that there is great room for expansion in this commodity. There are certain other definite lines in which it would appear that export trade between South Africa and India could be stimulated. Such, for example, as the export of dried fruits. Regarding the export of cotton from South Africa to India, as you know, India takes a very large quantity from Uganda, and while in India we have a very large crop, the quality of our cotton is quite different to the quality of the cotton grown in South Africa. The export trade of the raw cotton from South Africa to India, therefore, would certainly appear to have definite prospects and if the output was increased and the price was satisfactory, trade between the two countries would expand.

I have left to the last the most important item in trade from South Africa to India, namely, gold and diamonds. The gold imported direct from South Africa appears in quantity to be small, but if you remember that India is one of the countries in the world which absorbs the largest amount of gold, you will readily understand that although the gold does not go direct to India from the country, it must go to India finally, for it goes in large quantities from London to India. During the last five years, according to the records, India has absorbed 40% of the world's gold production. In actual figures it is this: In 1923—1924 India bought South African gold to the extent of 43% of the total production in South Africa; not all directly for some of it came through London. In 1924—1925, South Africa produced only eleven million ounces of gold; and India bought of South Africa 55% of the gold production of this country. That is definitely gold which is earmarked as the produce of this country sold directly to India in part, and indirectly to India in part from London. Since that year there has been a falling off. Our gold import in India depends on our export balance and we depend for a good export balance on a good monsoon. Since 1924—1925 our monsoons have not been so good and therefore the surplus balances have not been large; but if you take the five years ending

1926—1927 India absorbed 40% of the world's gold. Here, therefore, we have a definite link between the two countries—a link which shows India to be a great customer of South Africa. It is a gold chain which is increasing in strength and in value practically to the extent of twenty million pounds, that is on an average for the last five years. I trust the chain will get stronger and brighter. It is a definite bond between the two countries. As Mr. Sastri has said, we should like to follow on with other bonds between the two countries.

"I have spent a considerable time on this question of absorption of gold by India," said Dr. Meek, "because it appears to me most important, and it is an aspect of the trade with India which frequently receives somewhat casual treatment. A certain quantity of South African gold for India is shipped direct to India and I am glad to hear that the tendency in this direction is growing. Such a tendency will be stimulated by the establishment of a mint in the Union of South Africa and, from the information which I have been able to obtain, the mint in South Africa is able to cope with the minting of nearly forty million scvereigns per annum which in normal years would cover all the requirements of India."

Similarly with the prospective establishment of a diamond cutting industry in the Union it should be possible, as it would also be desirable, for India to import her South African diamonds direct in the cut state. It is a little difficult to give the exact value of the diamonds bought each year by India which come originally from the Union, but a conservative estimate would be in the neighbourhood of £400,000; and, although this is a small figure compared to the gold figures, it is not by any means an unimportant one when the values of the exports to India in other commodities are tabulated beside it for comparison.

Again India's imports of smelted copper are large yet none of the increasing copper exports from the Union go direct to India.

Similarly with tin and wool there is no direct trade from South Africa to India at present and although it is not easy to make definite statements as to the magnitude of the indirect trade this trade cannot be negligible.

The trade at present in both directions between the Union of South Africa and India is not sufficient to fill completely the regular service of ships plying between the two countries so that any developments in direct trade will be all to the good, as tending towards the reduction of transport cost from one country to the other. Such direct trade would also bring the commercial communities in the two countries into closer touch with each other, would result in the development of closer personal trading relations and would doubtless have beneficial repercussions in the wider diffusion of more intimate reciprocal knowledge of two neighbouring lands.

Other members of the delegation also made short speeches after which tea and light refreshments were served and the happy gathering terminated with three cheers for the delegation.

## Notes and News

THE following resolutions have been communicated to us as having been passed at a meeting of a body known as the Indian Vigilance Committee at Capetown at which Mr. H. Mia presided:—

(1) "That this mass meeting, representing every section of the Indian community in the Cape Peninsula and district, having carefully considered the explanation given by the Rt. Hon. S. Sastri, Agent-General for India, on the subject of condonation, resolves that the scheme of general condonation be opposed in every respect as the outcome would be to weed out the Indians from the Colony. It further resolves to empower the secretaries to forward a strong and urgent request to the right hon. gentleman to desist from accepting the scheme of condonation."

(2) "That this mass meeting records with appreciation the action of the Vigilance Committee in opposing and bringing before the public of the Peninsula the question of condonation and hereby empowers the committee to form a National Society to watch the general interests of the Indian community of the Cape Province, as the South African Indian Congress, having accepted the condonation scheme without first consulting the general Indian public, has forfeited the right to represent Indian opinion."

The above resolutions are, more than anything else, a reflection of the irresponsible character of the members of the so-called Vigilance Committee. We do not know what their purpose is in declaring that they do not accept the Condonation scheme. No one has asked them to accept it against their will. It is perfectly a voluntary scheme and the Government or, for that matter, the Agent of the Government of India is not forcing anyone to accept it. The Rt. Hon. Mr. Sastri has only taken the trouble of explaining the benefits of the scheme and has suggested to the community that it is in their own interest to accept it. Perhaps the members of the Vigilance Committee and their associates would rather suffer the penalty of being deported for their crime than have their crime condoned. Well be it. But would they wish that the community should also fall in with their lot? In that case, we fear, they are expecting just a little too much.

The Vigilance Committee further asserts that the South African Indian Congress having accepted the condonation scheme without first consulting the general Indian public, has forfeited the right to represent Indian opinion. South African Indian public represented by the South African Indian Congress will have to reply to that, and well has it done so at each of the gatherings under the auspices of the Congress. The so-called Vigilant Committees, the National Societies and Federations are like dissatisfied spirits constantly rising from their graves. It would be a blessing to the general public if they could only rest in peace in their respective graves. Pray what sacrifices would they like to be made so that they would not be loitering.

We congratulate Mr. A. Christopher, Barrister-at-Law, for having passed the Union Statutes and Procedure and thus qualified himself to practice as an advocate in Natal. Mr. Christopher will be formally admitted at the full bench of the Supreme

Court which sits next August. We wish Mr. Christopher every success in his practice which we understand he will shortly begin.

Mr. K. P. Kichlu and Miss Gordon after having visited Rhodesia and after spending some time in inquiring into the conditions of Indian education in the Transvaal have returned to Durban and before they leave for India on July 2 they will be given a fitting reception by the community which the Congress officials are at present engaged in organising.

We call the following two notes from the June number of the *Parishioner* (Johannesburg) :—

The Rev. Bernard Sigamoney is to be congratulated on the speed with which he has got St. Anthony's Church and St. Anthony's Hospital opened in Vrededorp. The opening of the Hospital by the Rt. Hon. Mr. Sastri was a great occasion, and it was delightful to see the Cathedral congregation so well represented. Work among the Indians goes right back to the very earliest days of Dr. Darragh, and in a very real sense the work for body and soul now carried on at St. Anthony's is another erection on the foundations laid by that man of great vision, the first Rector of St. Mary's.

It was the happiest inspiration to ask the Right Hon. Srinivasa Sastri, P.C., to lecture after Evensong on Sunday evening, May 20th. Mr. Sastri spoke for an hour on "The Influence of Christianity on the World," and it was a great thing for us to hear "a Hindoo and a Brahmin at that," as the lecturer described himself, pay such a magnificent tribute to the influence of Christianity in general, and to the value of missionary work in India in particular. The Church was packed in every part, and we hope it will not be the last time that we shall have Mr. Sastri in our midst.

The monthly meeting of the Aryan Benevolent Home took place in the usual order when a full muster of Trustees and Committee men were present. The new plan for the intended building was submitted which will approximately cost £1,000. It has been decided by the Committee to institute a collection amongst the Indian population for this humanitarian object. Various amounts have been received from donors for this worthy object, totalling over £100, prominent amongst which was a donation from the Durban Indian Printers' Union this week of a sum of forty-three pounds four shillings and ten pence. Gifts of blankets, underwear and other clothing have been received from the Indian merchants and will prove a boon to the inmates during the cold weather. A quantity of foodstuff was also received from the stallholders of the Indian market. The Committee wishes to place on record its sincere thanks for the many donations and gifts, and hopes that all assistance will be rendered by the Indian community in the fulfilment of its endeavours.

The sad death after a lengthy illness took place last Saturday night of the eldest son of Mr. L. Panday of Durban. The late young Mr. Panday whose funeral took place on Sunday and was attended by many Indian friends leaves behind him a widow and three little children to mourn their sad loss. We tender our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family.

## Illegally Obtained Certificates

### Important Supreme Court Judgment

#### Registrar Of Asiatics vs. Ismail Salajee

The following is the text of the judgment given in the above case by the Supreme Court (Transvaal Provincial Division) on 30th October, 1924, referred to by us in our leading article on Condonation in the issue of May 25 :—

STRATFORD J.—This case was argued on the assumption that a fraudulent statement had been made by one Salajee Fakir on the 18th April 1921, in an application he made under Act No. 20 of 1907 (Transvaal) for the registration of the respondent, then a boy of 16 years of age, in terms of section 4, sub-section 2 (b) of the Act. The statement, a vital one for the purposes of the application, was that the respondent was the son of the said Salajee Fakir. It is because of this admittedly false and fraudulent statement that the present application is made to have the certificate of registration cancelled. Had the respondent himself been guilty of fraud in obtaining the certificate I would have no hesitation in adopting both the reasoning and conclusion of Mason J. P., in the case of Ismail Moosa vs. Registrar of Asiatics (1922 T.P.D. p. 65.) The learned Judge against whose judgment this appeal is brought decided the matter entirely on the wording of section 10 which reads: "Every certificate of registration shall be accepted as conclusive evidence in all places that the lawful holder thereof, notwithstanding anything in the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1903 contained, is entitled to enter and reside in this Colony; provided always that this section shall not apply to persons who have, under section 10 of the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1903, been ordered to leave the Colony."

But to say that a certificate is to be conclusive proof of the facts to which it speaks is not the same thing as saying that the certificate cannot itself be attacked on the ground of fraud in its procurement. This deduction is, I think, clearly brought out in the case of Rex vs. Parbhoo (1914 T.P.D. 110) where full effect was given to the words of the section without deciding that the certificate was immune from attack.

But the Registrar had expressly admitted that the respondent was innocent of the fraud and this Court is bound to accept and give full effect to that admission. The late Judge-President in dealing with similar facts in Ismail Moosa vs. Registrar of Asiatics *supra* disposed of this aspect of the case as follows :—

"The only other question is whether the respondent stands in a better position than if he had himself been responsible for this fraudulent attempt to circumvent the Act. If the interests of private individuals in private property were alone concerned, the argument drawn from the analogy of the innocent purchaser of property being entitled to protection even although his vendor secured it by fraud would be of some weight, but I do not think that this is a tenable contention where public interests are concerned."

But when once it is admitted that the respondent was no party to the fraudulent statement, all arguments based upon fraud as a ground for annulling the certificate seem to me to have no application. It was argued that Fakir was the agent for the respondent and that the latter must suffer the consequences resulting from such agent's fraud. This civil liability of the principal in cases of contract is

undeniable, but it rests upon imputed liability, not imputed guilt, and on the assumption we must adopt in this case the respondent is entirely guiltless of fraud. This is not a case of contract, and in my opinion the contractual responsibility of a principal for the fraud of his agent affords no ground for setting aside the certificate held by the respondent. A judgment can be set aside on proof that it was obtained by the fraud of one of the parties but I think it is well established that the false and fraudulent testimony of one of the witnesses would not afford a ground for *restitutio in integrum*. The analogy of one who holds a judgment in his favour cannot perhaps be applied to the position of the respondent holding a certificate under the Act, but the parallel is far more just than to regard the respondent's rights in the light of contract. I am far from being satisfied that Fakir should be regarded as the respondent's agent. I consider that question, however, of no real importance. The moral guilt of Fakir clearly cannot be imputed to the respondent. The fraud of the latter in obtaining the certificate would prevent his being the lawful holder in my opinion within the meaning of section 10 and for this reason the certificate should be cancelled when that fraud is proved. But on the present facts the case for cancellation is in my view no stronger than if an innocent mistake had been made, such as would result if Fakir honestly believed the respondent was his son when in fact he was not. If on such facts the Court is prepared to set a certificate aside, then the course is justified in the present instance, but not otherwise. It is said that the respondent took the benefits resulting from another's fraud and therefore his position is no stronger than if he himself was guilty of fraud. I cannot appreciate this argument; it leads inevitably to the conclusion that the real guilt of the certificate holder is not the test of his position, and that his certificate is liable to be withdrawn because of the *mens rea* of the person who originated the mistake.

It being admitted then that the statement of the respondent's parentage was untrue and that he was entirely innocent of the matter, the question remains whether on these facts the certificate can be challenged. That question, in my opinion, must be determined by reference to the Act under which it was granted, and the first thing of importance to notice is that the Act makes no provision whatever for the setting aside of certificates on any ground whatsoever. One must presume that the law-giver had in mind the possibility of errors and irregularities in the grant of these certificates and it was a simple matter to provide for these results or their remedies. Though silent on this matter the enactment makes the certificate of the very first importance to the holder. Its possession entitles him to remain in the country, to make it his home, to carry on business and to marry. In short the whole structure of his life rests upon the grant of this certificate. Could it have been the intention of the Legislature to make the holder liable to deportation because of flaw of its grant? If so, very great hardship would result. The present respondent obtained his certificate nearly fourteen years ago. He might well be the father of a family now and have established a prosperous business; and harder cases than this can easily be supposed. The late Judge-President considered that the public interest justified the conclusion that the certificate was attackable on facts identical with those in the present case. He seems to me to have been almost entirely influenced by the fact that the fraud was perpetrated by the father of the holder, and with respect I think he did not fully appreciate how little bearing the fraud of another has to do with the rights of the innocent holder of the certificate. Nor, when regarding the public interest, did he consider the harsh consequences which would result from his view. In the absence

of any provision in the Act to that effect, in my opinion a certificate once granted in proper form cannot be annulled unless the holder is proved to have been guilty of fraud in its procurement. In my judgment this appeal fails.

TINDALL J.—I have come to the conclusion that the Legislature did not intend in section 10 of Act 2 of 1907 to place registration certificates "beyond the reach of the direct attack"—to quote the words of Mason J. in *Ismail Moosa vs. Registrar of Asiatics* (1922 T.P.D. 60)—in cases where the certificate was obtained by fraud to which the applicant himself was a party.

The question whether the respondent's certificate is immune because he was not a party to the fraud is a difficult one. In approaching the matter it is necessary to bear in mind constantly the hypothesis on which, owing to the admission on the record, the Court is constrained to decide this case, namely that the respondent honestly believed that Salajee Fakir was his father. Though that hypothesis was pure fiction, it must be given its full effect for the purposes of the question of law to be decided in the present appeal.

On behalf of the appellant the doctrines of agency were invoked. It was argued that Salajee Fakir was the agent of the respondent to make the application of registration, that the respondent obtained his certificate by the fraud of his agent and that therefore the respondent should not be allowed to retain it. I have some difficulty in seeing how Fakir can be said to have been the agent of the respondent. He was neither his father nor his guardian though the application form is headed "application made for registration on behalf of an Asiatic minor" and was signed by Fakir as guardian, it was also signed by the respondent, and I gather that both signatures were affixed in the presence of the official who received the application on behalf of the Registrar of Asiatics. As the respondent had reached the age of 16 years, it was his application, not the application of Fakir, and although Fakir assisted the respondent, the latter made the application personally, not through an agent. In my opinion the relationship of principal and agent is no more applicable than it would be in the case of a person who makes an application and in support of it uses, innocently, a false statement by a man whom he believes to be his father.

But apart from the above difficulty I do not think that the doctrine in regard to the responsibility of a principal for the fraud of his agent, in cases of contract or tort, should be applied to the present case. The *actio de dolo* may lie against a principal for the amount by which he has benefitted by the fraud of his agent. See Digest (4-3-15), voet (4-3-9). But the present application, in my opinion, is not the *actio de dolo* which is directed towards obtaining restitution of property lost through fraud or for the payment of damages. The legal position created by the facts of the present case is peculiar and it is not easy to define exactly the principles applicable. Where an applicant himself was a party to a fraud by means of which the certificate was obtained, it is against the policy of our law to allow him to retain the certificate no matter what interests he may have acquired in the country in the meantime. The Legislature could not have intended in section 10 of the Act to make a certificate immune from attack in such a case. But there is not the same reason for limiting the construction of section 10, and declaring the issue of the certificate to have been a nullity where there has been no moral turpitude on the applicant's part. In the case of *Ismail Moosa*, Mason J. took the view that under similar circumstances the fact that public interests were involved affected the position of the holder of a certificate. This consideration of public interest, at first sight, may make one reluctant to hold that a certificate obtained

by a false statement, though the applicant believes such statement to be true, can be allowed to stand. My view however is that the Legislature, when it enacted section 10, did not contemplate that a certificate should be liable to be cancelled under such circumstances. If the contrary view were correct, what would be the limits to the grounds on which a certificate could be set aside and what would become of section 20 of the Act? But if the public interest does not enter into the matter, I think that in considering what is in the public interest it is permissible to bear in mind the harsh consequences which might ensue if certificates wrongly issued to Asiatics under circumstances which involve no dishonesty on the applicant, were liable to cancellation. For, if that were the law, an Asiatic, who had resided here for many years and established his family and acquired large interests in this country, might find himself liable to deportation,—a result so inequitable that it must not be lost sight of in considering what is in the public interest and whether the Legislature intended that a certificate should be liable to cancellation under such circumstances.

For the above reasons I am unable to agree with the conclusions arrived at in Ismail Moosa's case. On the compulsory assumption of the respondent's good faith, however extravagant that assumption may be, I think that the correct view is that the appellant is not entitled to the order asked for and that the appeal must fail.

## The Story of My Experiments With Truth

[BY M. K. GANDHI]

### Part IV, Chapter XVIII.

#### THE MAGIC SPELL OF A BOOK

The black plague enhanced my influence with the poor Indians and increased my business and my responsibility. Some of the new contacts with Europeans became so close that they added considerably to my moral obligations.

I made the acquaintance of Mr. Polak in the vegetarian restaurant, just like that of Mr. West. One evening a young man dining at a table away from me sent me his card expressing a desire to see me. I invited him to come to my table, which he did.

"I am sub-editor of the *Critic*," he said. "When I read your letter to the press about the plague, I felt strongly moved to see you. I am glad to have this opportunity."

Mr. Polak's candour drew me to him. The same evening we got to know each other and we seemed to hold very closely similar views on the essential things of life. He liked simple life. He had a wonderful faculty of translating into practice anything that appealed to his intellect. Some of the changes that he had made in his life were as prompt as they were radical.

*Indian Opinion* was getting more and more expensive every day. The very first report from Mr. West was alarming. He wrote: "I do not expect from the concern the profit that you think there would be. I am afraid there may be even a loss. The books are not in order. There are heavy arrears to be recovered, but one can make no head or tail of them. Considerable overhauling will have to be done. But all this need not alarm you. I shall try to put things right as best as I can. I remain on, whether there is profit or not."

Mr. West might have left when he discovered that there was no profit, and I could not have blamed him. In fact, he had a right to arraign me for having described the concern as profitable without proper proof. But he never even once uttered a word of complaint. I have, however, an impression that this discovery must have led Mr. West to regard me as credulous. I had simply accepted Mr. Madanjit's estimate without caring to examine it, and told Mr. West to expect a profit. I feel that a public worker should not take things on trust and should not make statements of which he has not made himself sure. Above all, a votary of truth must exercise the greatest caution. To allow a man to believe a thing which you have not fully verified is to compromise truth. I am pained to have to confess that in spite of this knowledge, I have not quite conquered my credulous habit for which my ambition to do more work than I can manage is responsible. This ambition has often been a source of worry more to my co-workers than to myself.

On receipt of Mr. West's letter I left for Natal. I had taken Mr. Polak into my fullest confidence. He came to see me off at the station, and left with me a book to read during the journey, which he said I was sure to like. It was Ruskin's *Unto this Last*.

It was impossible to lay the book aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me. It was a twenty-four hours' journey from Johannesburg to Natal. The train reached Durban in the evening. I could not get sleep that night. I determined to change my life in the light of the book.

I had not read a single book of Ruskin's before this. During the days of my education I had read practically nothing outside textbooks, and after I launched into active life I had very little time left me for reading. I cannot therefore claim much book knowledge. I believe I have not lost much because of this enforced restraint. On the contrary, the limited reading may be said to have enabled me fairly to digest what I did read. Of these books, the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was *Unto this Last*. I translated it later into Gujarati entitling it *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all).

I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin and that is why the book so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for every one is not evolved in an equal measure.

This is how I understood the teachings of *Unto this Last*:

1. The good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. A lawyer's labour has the same value as the barbar's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their labour.
3. A life of labour, i.e. of the tiller of the soil and handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realised. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto this Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I awoke with dawn, ready to reduce these principles into practice.

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