

INDIAN POLITICS

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INDIAN POLITICS

A SURVEY

BY
J. T. GWYNN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LORD MESTON
K.C.S.I.; LL.D.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I AM deeply indebted to the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian* for giving me the opportunity in 1922 of making the survey of Indian conditions on which this book is based, and for permission to use the material reproduced from that newspaper.

I should add that the book was written before peace was made with Turkey at Lausanne. I have not thought it necessary to delete or alter the references made to the state of Indian Mohammedan feeling as it was before the Treaty. For the present attitude of the Indian Mohammedan can best be understood if we remember the past.

INTRODUCTION

THERE could not have been a more opportune moment for the publication of the letters which form this book. The situation in India to-day bewilders the ordinary Englishman, and not least those who thought they understood the country ten or even five years ago. It is not so much the manœuvres of non-co-operator or Swarajist or Khilafatist, the endless wheeling and reforming of the discontented forces, that puzzle the observer; kaleidoscopic intrigue is familiar enough in India. Our anxiety goes deeper. The questions we ask ourselves are: What is behind the anti-British movement? Is it a passing and superficial emotion, or has it come to stay? Is it economic discontent or a national upheaval? Is it confined to the permanently irreconcilable elements in the country, or has it permeated the masses? What is to be done to meet it? Can we carry on our policy and live it down? Or is drastic change inevitable?

On all these questions Mr. Gwynn throws a flood of light. He went to India equipped with a knowledge of the country under the old régime, but with an open mind. He has brought back exactly that which we needed and have not found elsewhere—a picture of what the average Indian is saying and thinking. In his letters we have no rodomontade or propaganda; we have only the talk of the plain

man—the busy merchant in the town, the village worthies over their evening pipe, the doctor and the schoolmaster, the petty official and the student, Hindu, Moslem and Sikh. Mr. Gwynn also takes us up and down the country, through the vastly diverse racial areas, and shows how the popular attitude to our administration varies with local conditions. Incidentally he makes it clear how complex a business it is to get at the mind of India as a whole. But he gives us the broad outlines of the picture, and we can fill them in for ourselves.

Before we try to do so, let us remember the frame into which the picture has to be fitted. Four years ago, Parliament said to India in effect: "We are going to give you an apprenticeship in the art of governing your own country. All business of Imperial moment we shall at first keep in our own hands, managing it through our permanent Civil Service as before. With certain provincial business, particularly the maintenance of law and order, we shall do the same. But the residue of the provincial departments will be handed over to Indian Ministers, and will form your training-ground. Your legislatures will be elected, but by a very small electorate, for the people as a whole have as yet no idea of using a vote. And if your new parliaments go seriously wrong in any matters of moment, our Governors will have a power of over-riding them. In 1929 we shall send out a Commission to enquire how you have got on; and upon its report we shall decide whether to prolong your apprenticeship or to give you a larger measure of home-rule. We mean you to have self-government ultimately, but only when you prove that you are fit for it."

This is the setting which Parliament provided for the political development of India. For its caution there were of course excellent reasons—the lack of administrative experience in the Indian leaders, the inability of the great mass of the people to control their representatives, the absence of any real democratic feeling, and other obvious considerations. On the whole, the settlement was accepted in this country as reasonable, and a strong body of moderate opinion in India was pledged to support it. But from the outset there was another section of opinion which rejected it, and demanded nothing less than an undertaking that the British Government would evacuate India at a given date, ten years hence, five years or even sooner, according to the fervour of the individual claimant. Headed by that irresistible idealist, Mr. Gandhi, this extreme section swept the country in 1920–22, and is now definitely committed to a policy of breaking up the constitution. Non-co-operation was the first weapon of the extremists; but its inherent weakness and ultimate failure are clearly brought out by Mr. Gwynn. They are now ready to seize on any other weapon, and one of incalculable potential strength is being forged in the discontent and restlessness with which they are inoculating the masses.

As practical people, who are still responsible to the world for the well-being of India, besides having no mean record of past service to our credit, we cannot let the situation run away with us. It has recently shown signs of getting out of control; for such episodes as the Akali muddle and the mismanagement of the Bengal flood relief, both vividly sketched by the writer, could not have happened

if our officers were surer of their position. To check further drift and deterioration, three courses are open to us. One is to put down by force the ebullient nationalism which is assailing the whole fabric of our government. Another is to give India home-rule at once, and let her take the consequences. The third is to stick to our plan of training India in the practice of democracy, and to stand by her until she gains reasonable experience. Of these three the first may at once be ruled out. Except to repel force, we are never likely to use force ; and the resort of the Swarajists to organised violence is so remote a contingency that we may reduce our alternatives to two : surrender to the demand for home-rule, or adherence to the slower progress of the present constitutional machinery.

The choice between these two involves a decision the most momentous we have ever had to take in India. It is a decision which cannot be postponed, and it is a decision for which every thinking man and woman in England must share the responsibility. The data are complex and entirely different from those on which our old colonial policy led to disastrous failure in one half of North America and to signal success in the other. There are no precedents to help us, and all analogy is illusory. In this book, however, each of us will find some assistance in forming his own judgment. Here he will catch a glimpse of the tremendous social problems which India has to solve before she can come as an equal partner into the society of British nations ; he will see the distance that indigenous political thought has to travel before it reaches the bracing uplands of true democracy ; he will judge whether the home-

rulers have an adequate programme of national advancement to substitute for ours when they get rid of our administration and its western nostrums. It is the last issue which is by far the largest and the most vital. If the Swarajist were to get his wishes to-morrow, would he pursue that blend of East and West towards which all our constitutional reform is tending, or would he plunge back into the archaic ideals of some imaginary golden age, on which, in other lands, so many reforms have foundered and the happiness of so many millions been shipwrecked? We English are a cautious people; we like to see and choose our path, and neither Mr. Gwynn nor any other enquirer has yet discovered what path the Swarajist means to take, or to what goal he aspires.

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