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Mr. Sastri's Attack on the
Simon Report.

BY

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THE Rt. Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri, C.H., is undoubtedly the ablest and most outstanding of the Indian "Moderates" to-day. We may therefore regard him as an authoritative exponent of the aims and policy of that party. On the 22nd July, Mr. Sastri read before the East India Association a detailed criticism of the Report of the Simon Commission. His arguments (as reported in the *Times* of 23rd July) were promptly challenged by several experienced and well-informed members of the audience, and with such force that, in summing up the discussion, Mr. Sastri is reported to have admitted that he had expressed a great many opinions in print to which he did not necessarily mean to adhere.

The claims put forward by him, on behalf of the Hindu Intelligentsia, are so extraordinary that a few of the more extravagant should be exposed for the enlightenment of that section of British opinion which thinks that the Indian problem can be solved by a friendly understanding with the "moderate" section he stands for.

To clear the ground, it should be stated that Mr. Sastri allows "for the most part" the Simon Commission's claim that they "have carried the development of Self-Government in the Provinces to the furthest practical point." He admits the necessity for the special powers

reserved to the Governor for the protection of minorities and for the safety and tranquillity of the Province; but, as might be expected from a "Moderate," he emphatically dissents from the discretion given to the Governor to appoint to his Cabinet one or more officials, whether British or Indian. In other words, he would deprive the Governor, who will often be without previous Indian experience, of the power of selecting among his advisers one or more men trained in Indian administration. What does the welfare of the masses matter compared with the ambitions of the Intelligentsia?

But the fact that the Simon Commission have gone to lengths which many regard as dangerous, notably in the proposed transfer of Law and Order to the control of the local Legislatures in the Provinces—which by the Government of India Act of 1919 were to be the primary ground for the experiment in self-government—makes little appeal to Mr. Sastri. He and his friends are after bigger game. Their aim is the control of the Central Government by the Hindu Intelligentsia, dominated by that oligarchy of clever Brahmins, moderates and extremists, of which Mr. Sastri, the two Nehrus, the Iyengars, the Pandit Malavaya, Sir Hari Singh Gaur and Sir T. B. Saprú—the recent intermediary with Mr. Gandhi and the Nehrus—are the shining lights, with Mr. Gandhi, the two Patels and a few other non-Brahmins as their satellites. Hence, Mr. Sastri violently attacks the Simon Commission Report because it exposes, by the cogent argument of present facts and past history, the futility of their claim for Dominion Status in existing conditions. His line of argument is as follows:

(a) India has been promised Dominion Status by Great Britain and will be content with nothing less;

(b) The right of secession is "accepted" as an essential element of Dominion Status, and India must have that right like the other Dominions;

(c) The Simon Commission, by emphasising the necessity of maintaining an Imperial army, under Imperial control, for the external defence of India as the most vulnerable part of the British Empire, have deprived India "of the means of defending herself, have denied her the power of exercising the right of secession, and thus ruled out the possibility of her ever attaining Dominion Status";

(d) Mr. Sastri therefore condemns the Report for "refusing the greater part of the demands made by educated Indians," and says, in conclusion, "To flout the Intelligentsia, while satisfying the Princes, the British, the Minority communities and the Services, is to involve Britain and India in strife of which no one can see the end."

The obvious reply to this scarcely-veiled threat is that to antagonise the Princes, the British, the Services, the Minority Communities (including Muslims and Sikhs, who, with the British, are the main pillars of India's defence, providing three-fourths of the army raised in India) in order to satisfy the arrogant demands of an urban and unmartial Intelligentsia, a fraction of one per cent. of the population, would be the surest means of again exposing India to the horrors of civil war and foreign invasion, which were chronic prior to British rule.

But to take Mr. Sastri's arguments in order:

(a) The contention that Dominion Status has been actually promised is based on certain ill-judged utterances of the present Viceroy and Secretary of State. Even assuming that they made such a promise, they had no power to do so, and their pronouncements were at once challenged in both Houses as an infringement on the authority of Parliament and contrary to the express provisions of the Act of 1919. The late Mr. Montagu was the Secretary of State who carried through that legislation

The present Secretary of State, as quoted by Mr. Sastri, stated that the "declaration was a restatement and an interpretation of Mr. Montagu's policy." Mr. Sastri quotes the Prime Minister as saying, "I am not sheltering myself behind others; it is the Government's decision." But why has he failed to quote the categorical questions of Mr. Baldwin, and the Prime Minister's equally categorical reply? On the 12th of November, 1929, the *Times* published the following letters which had passed between Mr. Baldwin and the Prime Minister:

House of Commons,

November 11th, 1929.

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

It will be within your recollection that the Debate on Thursday last in the House of Commons was concluded without any answer being given by the Secretary of State for India to my second question—namely, "whether this statement (*i.e.*, the Viceroy's declaration) implies any change in the policy hitherto declared, or in the time when this status may be attained."

It is true that this question was answered in the House of Lords, but I feel that the answer should equally be given by the Prime Minister in his capacity as leader of the House of Commons.

I am, very sincerely yours,

STANLEY BALDWIN.

The Prime Minister.

10 Downing Street,
Whitehall,

November 11th, 1929.

MY DEAR MR. BALDWIN,

I am grateful to you for your letter. The answer to both parts of the question "whether the Viceroy's

declaration implies any change in the policy hitherto declared or in the time when this Status may be attained is "No."

The policy, as you will remember, is set out in the preamble of the Government of India Act, 1919, and it stands unchanged, unless and until, Parliament decides to amend that Act.

I am, very sincerely yours,

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.

So far, therefore, from the Prime Minister supporting Mr. Sastri's contention, his statement clearly brings us back to the Act of 1919, the preamble of which, repeating the announcement of 1917, declared the policy of Parliament to be "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in British India as an integral part of the Empire."

The whole controversy turns on the interpretation to be given to those words. Mr. Sastri—wisely, perhaps—has not quoted them, for they say nothing about his Dominion Status. He falls back on the present Secretary of State's declaration; and the Secretary of State, as explained above, justifies himself as merely re-stating and interpreting Mr. Montagu's policy. Fortunately, we are able to ascertain that policy: not only from the preamble to the Act itself and the Prime Minister's letter of 11th November, but also from the direct testimony of Lord Chelmsford, who was Viceroy from 1916 to 1921, was a party to the Announcement of 1917, and was joint author with Mr. Montagu of the Reforms scheme embodied in the Act of 1919. No one alive to-day is in a better position to tell us what was the intention of the Announcement of 1917, and of the preamble quoted above. Lord Chelmsford was unable to be present at Mr. Sastri's address, but had received an advance copy. He wrote to say that "the last seven words [as an integral part of the

Empire]. were inserted in the Announcement of 1917 at the instance of his Government [the then Government of India], and their meaning was clear. If, then, the right of secession 'was implicit in the terms Dominion Status,' as the lecturer suggested, the latter term was not a synonym for 'Responsible Government' [the term used in the Announcement of 1917 and the Act of 1919], as the right of secession was deliberately excluded from the Announcement of 1917. This and the other principles [that Parliament would be guided by the spirit of co-operation and the sense of responsibility shown by Indian politicians—matters on which Mr. Sastri was discreetly silent] set forth in the preamble to the 1919 Act must serve as a 'yard stick' by which to measure all proposals, whether those of the Simon Commission or of its critics. Parliament could alter them, but until it did those principles held the field."

This authoritative pronouncement completely refutes Mr. Sastri's first contention: that Parliament is pledged to give Dominion Status.

(b) It also shatters his second argument. For even if Parliament had pledged itself (as it clearly has not) to the grant of Dominion Status, as understood in 1919, it never intended that even when India attained the ultimate goal of "responsible government" that would give her the right to secede. The last seven words in the Announcement and the Preamble clearly preclude any such right, and not even Mr. Sastri and his friends would then have dreamed of making such a ridiculous claim as they now put forward.

Again, Mr. Sastri calmly tells us that "for some years" the right of secession has been "accepted" as an essential element of Dominion Status. He gives no grounds for such an assumption. Perhaps Mr. Sastri was unduly influenced, during his deputation to South Africa, by the

views of the Dutch Premier, General Hertzog. But General Hertzog, in his statement about secession, was appealing to racial prejudice, and did not claim it as a legal right, but as a contingency which would probably not meet with effective resistance. Anyhow, we have yet to learn that General Hertzog was speaking on behalf of the great British Commonwealth of Nations, of which the Union of South Africa is one of the lesser units. Without embarking on subtle discussions, it may be confidently affirmed that the right of secession by any dominion is denied by the highest constitutional authorities, and that Mr. Sastri's statement that it has been accepted for some years is a misleading and unwarranted assumption which does credit neither to his intelligence nor to his loyalty as a subject and a Privy Councillor of the King-Emperor.

But Mr. Sastri, after his arguments had been severely handled by various speakers, was good enough to reassure his audience that "India was not going to exercise the right of secession *if* it (Dominion Status) were reached." Can *he* give any guarantee? At the recent Lahore Congress the then President, Pandit Jawahir Lal Nehru, declared that their goal was "a Socialist republic." He went on to say that "the ruling Princes are relics of a bygone age, and their vicious system must go." Mr. V. Patel, the next President of the Congress, has repeatedly stated that there is to be unceasing war against the British while a British official is left in India. Who are we to believe—the "moderate" and persuasive Mr. Sastri or the Brahman President of the most powerful political organisation in India, which has already declared war on the British Government in India and even stirred up frontier tribes to invade British India? Moreover, the right of secession is a double-edged weapon. Once conceded, where is it to stop? The American Civil War is one warning; the threat of Western Australia to-day to secede from the Commonwealth is another. Mr. Sastri, conscious of the danger, for, referring to the present

All-India Federation, he says that "the Provinces of India are large and populous, and might tend to fall away, by virtue of the notoriously fissiparous tendencies of the Indian character, unless held together by a strong central government." The strong central government has hitherto been the British Government, with the Empire behind it; that which he contemplates is one from which the British element has been eliminated: one dominated by the Hindu majority, controlled by a Hindu high-caste oligarchy, and imposing its will on the Provinces and States forming the Federation. He therefore attacks the Simon Commission's scheme of federation as giving too much power to the Provinces, and to the Princes, though the latter are now masters in their own houses, subject to British paramountcy. But he has the candour to admit that the Muslim minority is attracted to this extreme type of federation as "they expect under it to control several Provinces along the north-western border, and thereby acquire the means of exerting pressure in emergencies on the Government of India. If this is so, it is a consideration more against than for the Commission's proposal."

Here at last Mr. Sastri has got down to realities, and shown the fallacy of his claim that India is a nation and that "all the parties in India and all the communities, even the Princes, are united in the demand for responsible government." The fact is that, if the strong central government, responsible to the British Crown and Parliament, disappears or is seriously shaken, each province, each community and each native State naturally desires to secure itself against the danger of what has been aptly called "Brahman Domination Status." One may ask how long would the martial Muslim provinces of the north-west be content with the rôle of protecting the unwarlike races of Bengal, Madras and Central India from the inevitable invasions from the north-western frontier. Owing

to the recent weakening of British rule, those invasions are being attempted to-day along a frontier of 300 miles, from the Swat river to the Gumal.

(c) That brings us to Mr. Sastri's third ground of attack. The Simon Commission, knowing India's past history and the lessons to be drawn from it—which Indian politicians habitually ignore—have realised that, if invasion is to be repelled and internal security—so seriously menaced to-day—maintained, there must be an army in India with a strong British element and under British control. To enforce this argument it is only necessary to state two historical facts: (1) *Prior to British rule no invasion of India ever failed*; (2) *Since British rule no invasion of India has ever succeeded, and only two have been attempted*. Remove the British, or British control, and the old conditions of frequent foreign invasions and simultaneous internal anarchy will inevitably recur. Take away the British garrison at Peshawar to-day, and to-morrow all Northern India will be in a panic. The eloquent politicians of Bengal, Madras and the Deccan perhaps fail to realise this menace because they are two thousand miles away from the frontier. But history shows that once the invader had penetrated the passes, Delhi was an easy prey; and Delhi has always been the key of the sub-continent. That key is now in the safe keeping of Whitehall; remove it to Delhi or Simla, and the history of the invasions from the tenth to the eighteenth century will soon repeat itself. If Indian politicians, blinded by vanity, cannot see this, surely the Labour Government here cannot shut their eyes to it.

Mr. Sastri and his friends would lightly sacrifice the security of 320 millions of people, for whom Great Britain has for 150 years been the reliable trustee, to the ambitions and "amour propre" of a small Hindu Intelligentsia which, whatever its intellectual and professional gifts, has never in the past proved its power to protect the

Indian sub-continent from external invasion or to maintain internal security, and in the Great War could only raise a single battalion to send to the front.

The chapter in the Simon Report showing by Provinces the constitution of the army in the Great War illuminates the situation like a flashlight. The truth is unpleasant, but Indian politicians gain nothing by shutting their eyes and ears to it. Indirectly, Mr. Sastri's paper has been of service by the publicity it has given to the pretensions of a section of Indian opinion to which undue weight has hitherto been attached in this country. Doubtless Mr. Sastri's arguments, in spite of his admission that he was prepared to give up many of them, will form the "brief" of an influential section in the approaching Conference. How one would wish to see them challenged in that gathering by the luminous and penetrating intellect of Sir John Simon! Perhaps it was to prevent such an exposure that the present Government have been at such pains to exclude Sir John from the Conference. But the Conference cannot get away from the incontrovertible facts in his Report.