

# CONSPIRACY AT MEERUT

*by*

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*Preface by*

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TO  
MY MOTHER

“Wee are all conceived in close Prison; in our Mothers wombes, we are close Prisoners all; when we are borne, we are borne but to the liberty of the house; Prisoners still, though within larger walls; and then all our life is but a going out to the place of Execution, to death. Now was there ever any man seen to sleep in the Cart, between New-gate and Tyborne? between the Prison, and the place of Execution, does any man sleep? And we sleep all the way; from the womb to the grave we are never thoroughly awake; but passe on with such dreames, and imaginations as these, I may live as well, as another, and why should I dye, rather than another?”

DONNE, *Sermons*

## PREFACE

THE Meerut trial, in which the author of this book was one of the leading figures, is a grim incident in the history of British India. Men were torn from civil life for long years whose only crime was to carry out the ordinary work of trade union and political agitation after the fashion of everyday life in this country. Not merely socialist opinion in Great Britain recognized that it was a prosecution scandalous in its inception and disgraceful in its continuance. If the responsibility for undertaking it lies at the door of a Tory viceroy, that for its continuance belongs to a Socialist Secretary of State. It is difficult, granted their very different outlooks, not to feel that the responsibility of the Socialist Minister was the more heavy; for, if the Viceroy acted with harshness, the Secretary of State sacrificed courage and conviction to *raison d'état*.

Mr. Hutchinson's reminiscences have great interest. It is not everyone who can emerge from an experience so profound as his and preserve a sense of humour and of proportion. The reader will find nothing here of that bitterness which, in the circumstances, would have been amply intelligible. He will find a straightforward account of how a young man, to whom ideas of social justice seemed important, became involved in conflict with the vast apparatus of governmental oppression in India, and of how nearly he was sacrificed (along with others as guiltless as he) to its insatiable appetite for power. If it is said that, at long last, a grave judicial wrong was, for some, at least, of the prisoners, righted, the answer is that years in their lives were unnecessarily wasted to placate an ignorant and relentless machine which, if it had been capable of elementary common sense, would never have dreamed of undertaking the prosecution. A government capable of such folly ought at least to have compensated its

victims. But, no doubt, a government capable of such folly is thereby fundamentally incapable of insight. We cannot expect it to be generous when it does not know how to be just.

I hope that Mr. Hutchinson's book will awaken some part of British public opinion to the sense of what is done in their name in India. A government which acts in this fashion indicts itself. It acts in fear; it operates by terror; it is incapable of that magnanimity which is the condition for the exercise of justifiable power. The Meerut trial belongs to the class of case of which the Mooney trial and the Sacco-Vanzetti trial in America, the Dreyfus trial in France, the Reichstag Fire trial in Germany, are the supreme instances. Because they are foreign, we regard them with pious horror. If we learn of what our government is capable, perhaps we shall learn also that we must refrain from criticism unless we are willing to prevent the occurrence of similar injustices amongst ourselves.

HAROLD J. LASKI

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Preface</i>	7
CHAPTER	
I. In Search of the Romantic	11
II. Genesis of a Conspirator	26
III. Prelude to Arrest	41
IV. Journey to Meerut	55
V. The Meerut Conspiracy Case	68
VI. At the General's Bungalow	83
VII. On Starvation Diet	98
VIII. The Black Year	113
IX. Journey to Allahabad	128
X. On Bail	144
XI. Hard Labour	159
XII. Flight from the Romantic	175

# CONSPIRACY AT MEERUT

## CHAPTER ONE

### *In Search of the Romantic*

SEVENTEEN days out of the port of Trieste the s.s. *Cracovia* steamed slowly into the beautiful harbour of Bombay. Standing on the second class boat-deck I gazed on the broken coast line in a state of subdued excitement; for India was to me then an unknown quantity, and in the discovery of the unknown lies romance.

My ignorance of the country, its customs, history and politics, an ignorance shared by most educated and semi-educated Englishmen, seems to me now almost incredible. All the knowledge I possessed consisted of a few colourful and romantic impressions culled from novels; a few misty memories of past history lessons in which the names of Clive, Warren Hastings and the wicked Surajah Dowlah had predominated; and a vague conception of the nationalist movement and of its strange and eccentric leader, Mahatma Gandhi.

But in my imagination I had visualized India as a land of colour, romance and perpetual sunshine; and in consequence I was disappointed at my first sight of it. We entered the harbour of Bombay in the early morning. The weather conditions were not those usually associated with the East, and did not by any means accord with my preconceived views of what India should be. There was a thin drizzle of rain from a grey sky, and the hills that loomed behind the island of Bombay were partially obscured by heavy mists. The few people we could see on land, including the policemen, carried umbrellas, and except for the damp greenhouse heat and the



brown skins of the inhabitants we might very well have thought ourselves at Liverpool.

As we glided slowly past the Gateway of India, a large arch erected at great expense to commemorate the arrival in India of the King and Queen in 1911, a fellow-passenger drew my attention to a large and ugly building, seemingly the product of a mid-Victorian architect, which stood immediately behind the arch. "That," he said, "is the Taj Mahal." This on top of the bad weather was disappointing. I had heard of the Taj Mahal as a magnificent tomb, built somewhere in India by one of the Moghul emperors, as a tribute and a memorial to his favourite wife. There could not possibly be any connection between this rambling building and the world-famous tomb; and I regarded my companion with suspicion until he explained that the building he had pointed out was the Taj Mahal Hotel, a vast caravanserai which was the centre of Bombay's European life, and to him of much more importance than an old tomb mouldering eight hundred miles away in Agra. He was a commercial traveller.

We drew up alongside the Ballard Pier. After seventeen days of excitement and novelty, I had at last reached my destination. I had embarked at Trieste on August 1, 1928. Since then I had explored the picturesque and dirty canals of Venice and had lunched amid the pigeons on the Piazza San Marco; I had walked the length of Brindisi, the scene of the death of Virgil; I had seen the rugged coast of Crete, the birthplace of European civilization; I had bought a box of vile cigarettes from a tattered and impertinent Arab at Port Said; I had sailed down the Suez Canal cutting through the historic sands of Egypt; I had thought of Moses and the slave traffic while gasping in the heat of the Red Sea; I had seen mermaids in captivity at Aden, and finally had crossed the Arabian Sea to the threshold of Hindustan, the great and mysterious. What more could an imaginative

youth of twenty-three desire to experience within seventeen days?

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We were boarded by the usual batch of port officials and policemen; the decks became crowded with passengers and baggage. In a little while, this group of people thrown together for the brief period of the voyage would be scattered and lost in the great sub-continent. India had presumably a place for each of them: the major, his wife and sister-in-law were bound for the Deccan, where they would swell the garrison of some dreary and dusty small town; the little drunken parson, attached to some remote mission, would preach the gospel to hopeful untouchables; the Swiss hotel proprietor would smoke his pipe as philosophically in the heat of Delhi as in the second class smoking-room. A little group of individuals, not one of them of more importance than the dust on the road, and each one claiming security and prosperity from India. I wondered what she had in store for me.

I was not very well equipped to test providence in a strange land, many thousands of miles away from security. My total wealth consisted of my clothes, a few books, a dilapidated typewriter and two five-pound notes. It was certainly not a fortune; but I was not unduly anxious. Many others had gone to India with less than I had, and had found prosperity; and although my capital was negligible, I had the prospect of a fairly good position on an Indian newspaper, and I had been invited to stay with friends for as long as I wished. I looked forward to the immediate future with confidence, and in those days I was not in the habit of looking far ahead.

Avoiding excited passengers, colliding with hurrying stewards and sailors, I found my way down to my cabin and collected my hand-baggage. This I deposited beneath an enormous picture of Benito Mussolini which hung as a sign

and a portent on the wall of the smoke-room. I did not like this picture. Throughout the voyage it had been a constant reminder that we were still on Italian territory, and that whether we liked it or not we were still subject to the autocracy of the Duce. It had also served as a reminder that it was not advisable to air one's political opinions; it hung as a blatant insult to one's democratic illusion of freedom. As I was still full of illusions, this picture was for me a constant source of irritation. It was provocative. Just as a man of unsteady nerves looking down from a height feels an urge to throw himself over the parapet, so I had an urge to throw something at the picture: an urge which at times came near to overcoming me. I was the more easily provoked because, not only was I profoundly anti-fascist in theory, but I had also a personal affront to avenge: an affront which had poisoned my memories of Venice. This is how it had happened.

After leaving Trieste the s.s. *Cracovia*, on its way to India, had stopped for a few hours at Venice, and almost all the passengers went ashore. I had landed somewhat later than the others and was standing on the dock waiting for a gondola to take me to the city. My foreign appearance must have attracted the notice of a wandering fascist, for he marched straight up to me, and with the air of Napoleon demanding the keys of Moscow, ordered me to produce my passport. This was unfortunate, as that precious document was in the hands of the ship's purser, who had informed me that I should not require it for the few hours that I should be in Venice. Unable to explain all this to my fascist, I affected not to understand him.

"Speak in English, French or even German," I told him in English, "and I will understand you. I do not understand Italian."

"Passaporto," he rasped out again in reply.

Upon my attempt to explain the situation to him in French, he drew his revolver and summoned another prowling fascist,

evidently under the impression that he had discovered an international plot against the fascist regime. The situation was becoming serious; I had visions of either being shot out of hand, or of spending the night in some filthy fascist dungeon. At this critical moment, vaguely looking round for help, I saw an old Italian and his wife who, bound for Port Said, were my fellow-passengers on the *Cracovia*. I remembered that I had exchanged a few words with him in French the previous night, and, regarding him as a saviour, I summoned him to my aid, briefly explaining the position to him in that language. He readily took up my defence, and after raising his hat made a long and apparently very polite speech to my blackshirted captors. After he had concluded, the two fascists went into secret conference, with the result that they asked my defender and his wife for their passports. Another long discussion ensued in which the wife joined rather heatedly: it appeared that their passports were with mine in the hands of the purser on board the ship. Finally a decision was reached: we were ordered to return to the ship and obtain our passports. Escorted by the fascists, who evidently did not believe our story, we were marched ignominiously back to the ship, through a crowd of sailors and dockers who seemed to enjoy our plight. My desire to see the splendours of Venice overcame my sense of humiliation, and after obtaining my passport, I triumphantly handed it over for inspection and was allowed to proceed without further let or hindrance; but the sense of injury remained. The old Italian and his wife, however, declined to leave the ship, vowing never to set foot again in Italy, where they had been so grievously affronted before a foreigner. When I urged my desire to see the beauties of Venice as an excuse for not following their example, the old man shook his head rather sadly.

"The most beautiful thing in Italy," he said, "is the sky; and that is because the fascists can't touch it."

It was a renunciation. I thought of Coriolanus. My old Italian and his wife would end their days amid the filth and dust of Port Said, among the barbarians.

Apart from other things the picture of Mussolini was a constant reminder of my humiliation at Venice. I was glad to see the last of it. As a farewell I whistled a few bars of the Italian communist song *Avanti Popolo* and went on deck.

It is not easy to land in India. The Government of India is very particular and takes many precautions to prevent undesirables and especially political undesirables entering the country. They are not more thorough at Ellis Island. Europeans suspected of moral or political turpitude are sometimes not allowed to land, and Indians returning from Europe are subject to a very careful scrutiny. A Russian or a Polish visa on the passport of an Indian is also a passport to police surveillance and often to jail. To visit Russia is regarded by the Government of India as a crime in itself, and many young Indians have been convicted on a charge of conspiracy on no other evidence. Passports are therefore examined with extreme thoroughness at Indian ports.

Before landing, it is necessary to appear before a police inquisition in the first class saloon. The passengers are lined up before a table at which sit three police officers, clad in white drill uniforms, giving the impression of supporting the whole white man's burden on their shoulders. If, after careful scrutiny and a few questions, your passport is found to be in order, it is stamped "Permitted to land," and, rather like a released convict, you are delivered into the rapacious hands of the officials of the Indian Customs.

Like their brothers in the police, the customs officials leave nothing to chance. Luggage is ransacked with a zeal and a disregard for convenience which most other countries would consider excessive. The zeal of customs officials in Europe and America is mainly directed towards the discovery of illicit tobacco, or perfume; Indian officials, however, regard

this as small game: they are chiefly inspired by a desire to discover unlicensed firearms and what they term pernicious literature. In spite of their fondness for the term "pernicious" as applied to literature, it should not be thought that Indian officials concentrate like their European and American brethren on the persecution of ordinary literary works denounced by the anti-vice societies; for although, to be in the fashion, they seize copies of so-called immoral literature, they are mainly concerned with the hunt after political literature of the kind known as seditious.

For their guidance the Government of India has issued an *index librorum prohibitorum* as an appendix to the Sea Customs Act; but this index is in no way intended to fetter the intelligent discretion of the customs officers. Unfortunately experience has shown that the ways of censors are mysterious and their designs inscrutable. For even as the Town Council of Belfast in its zeal for purity once ordered the destruction of Fielding's *Tom Jones* under the impression that it was contemporary pornography, so the officials of His Majesty's Indian Customs, in their crusade against sedition, condemn with the utmost impartiality all books, pamphlets and papers which are beyond the limit of their intelligence. A book in a language other than English is immediately suspect, and is detained for tests and experiments; but what really brings the glint of success to their eyes is the discovery of such words as *Red, Labour, Communism, Socialist, Russia, Marx, Moscow*. An Indian of my acquaintance returning from Germany had many of his books confiscated, including *The Red Lily* by Anatole France, *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx, *A History of Trades Unionism* by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* a hostile work by René Fülöp Müller, a book of reproductions of the drawings of Albrecht Dürer, a sixteenth-century German, and a novel in French entitled *Quand On Conspire*. Under these conditions it is difficult to maintain a modern

library in India, and the traveller to India would be wise to take with him in the way of literature only such books as have received the seal of imperialist approval.

Having appeared before the police tribunal and had my passport stamped, I was allowed to go down the gangway. The inquisition was not yet over: I had yet to pass through the hands of the familiars of the customs. And they are not merciful hands. My books were examined with great attention, and a *Life of Jean-Paul Marat* was only saved from condemnation by my inquisitor's ignorance of French history, which enabled me to satisfy him with a description of Marat as a religious reformer. My clothes were examined minutely, considerable interest being shown in my socks, which I was forced to unroll to convince the official, who seemed to regard me as a desperate criminal, that there was nothing concealed in them; finally after nearly twenty minutes of undivided attention my luggage was chalked and I was allowed to depart. I was more fortunate than some of my neighbours. Among the belongings of the lady standing next to me was discovered an ancient and rusty revolver which must have been out of date at the time of the first Afghan War. The inquisitor produced it with the air of unearthing a sinister conspiracy: where, he desired to know, was the licence for this lethal weapon? The lady explained that it was an old service revolver belonging to her husband, an officer in the Indian Army. The official did not believe a word of it. In this mild and protesting Englishwoman he saw a dangerous conspirator in the pay of Moscow, probably sent out to India to assassinate the Viceroy. He decided that it was his duty to detain not only the revolver but also its owner. In spite of her protests he marched her off, and they disappeared through the door of an imposing office. Interested to witness the conclusion of the affair I awaited their reappearance, but when a quarter of an hour had passed without the door opening, it became evident that the superior

officer was of the same breed as his subordinate, and that the lady would be detained indefinitely. Regretting her fate, I made my way towards the exit, where I was introduced to my new friends and garlanded. The garland is the hail and the farewell of India. To the uninitiated it is a trifle embarrassing to find a garland of jasmine and roses hanging round the neck, especially when you are expected at the same time to receive and hold a bouquet of flowers. The first time it happened to me I felt like a bride. It was not until later that I came to appreciate the garland as a token of esteem, and a delicate way of conveying more than words can express.

A car was waiting for us outside. We made our way carefully through narrow streets littered with filth and refuse. Hovering over the filth were innumerable crows, and black kites constantly swooped down from the skies. The streets were lined with hovels which were in process of being cleaned by brightly clad women, while outside, the men, squatted on the pavement or on crude cots made of bamboo and rope, smoked and spat, and the children naked and dirty played listlessly in the gutters. A stench of decay pervaded the atmosphere; on all sides squalor, dire poverty and death. This was not the Hindustan of romance; the land of plenty and beauty and pleasure. For one Taj Mahal there were millions of kennels built for human habitation; for a few memories of Moghul splendour, a few silks and brocades long since turned to dust, I had forgotten the millions of the present generation whose lives are a nightmare of hunger, misery and dirt; for whom death is welcomed as a relief from the evil of living and as a necessary step to reincarnation in a new and better life. I was informed that five hundred out of every thousand babies born in Bombay die at or shortly after birth. They are the lucky ones: the five hundred that survive are to be pitied. It is a cheerless land which seeks to forget the miseries of the present in the supposed glories



of the past and in the illusion of a reward for misery in the hereafter.

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Among the books which I had taken with me to India was a ponderous and worm-eaten volume entitled *A New System of Geography: or a General Description of the World*, which was published in 1764. During the voyage I had been particularly interested in that portion of it which purported to give "a particular and circumstantial ACCOUNT of Indostan, and of the manners, religion and customs of the Gentoos and the Mahometans." At an early stage of their geographical and historical description, the authors thought fit to insert the following warning:

"The pleasure of living in so delightful a country as India is much abated by the multitudes of troublesome insects and reptiles. The musketoes or gnats, and their bugs, immediately seize upon the Europeans on their first landing, and are so venomous, that in one night's time a man's face will be so swelled that his companions cannot know him; but when they have been some time in the country, though they are always pestered with them, they do not leave such swellings as at first. They are indeed so troublesome that every man who can afford it, keeps a servant to brush them off his person, and it is in vain to attempt to sleep with the face uncovered, without somebody to beat away the gnats, and as for the bugs they swarm among the soldiers and the common people. They have, however, one way of avoiding them, and that is by daubing the feet of the couch on which they lie with tar, which they have either an aversion to, or are stopped by their sticking in it."

When first reading this, I was not disposed to take the

warning very seriously, and as a result my first night in India was rather a shock.

I was to spend the night at the house of a young theosophist. This house, I was told, faced the sea and the Chowpatti beach. The journey to it by itself was sufficient of an adventure. Escorted by the theosophist, a handsome youth clad in spotless white homespun, I was induced to climb into a filthy tramcar, which hurtled recklessly through narrow and overcrowded streets. The crowds seemed to be celebrating something of more than ordinary importance. The atmosphere was thick with aromatic smells. Processions passed reverently bearing images representing the body of a man with the head of an elephant. The clashing of cymbals, the beating of drums and the wailing chants of the faithful in addition to the disharmonies of cheap harmoniums which reached us from the open windows of the houses evidently proclaimed it as a festival of rejoicing. The young disciple of Madame Blavatsky explained that the people were celebrating the festival of Ganpati, the elephant-god, the deity of prosperity and wisdom, and the patron of letters. He further informed me that these processions occurred annually and were initiated in Bombay during the last decade of the nineteenth century by Lokamanya Tilak, who had utilized them to arouse popular anger against the British and the Mahomedans, whom he represented as destroyers of Hinduism. The elephant-god looked sagacious as he sat astride a large, black rat of vicious appearance, the habitual steed of the divine champion of Hinduism.

After a journey of about half an hour, we left the tramcar and proceeded on foot, through a succession of narrow winding and crowded streets. The pavements, walls and steps were splashed with red: Paris must have had a similar appearance after the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day. These red pools were not of blood, but were due to the popular habit of chewing *pan*. This is a mixture of betel-nut, lime,

cardamums and cloves, and occasionally tobacco, all enclosed within a folded betel-leaf. A neat parcel is made, which when chewed attracts saliva, staining it red. After a time, the red saliva is spat out on to the pavement, wall or staircase or wherever the chewer happens to be, thus providing another crimson addition to the decoration of India.

We threaded our way through the crowds until eventually we reached the house, an untidy looking building from which plaster was crumbling. We entered and climbed a precarious and dirty wooden staircase, to a flat at the top. I was shown into a fairly large room facing the beach and the sea, and was finally left alone. I examined the room: there was a bed of the collapsible sort, draped with a mosquito-net, a wooden arm-chair and a pair of huge Indian clubs. Theosophy evidently included exercise.

I sat down in the arm-chair, smoked a cigarette, and reviewed the events of the day; then I arose and started to undress. Hardly had I removed my coat, when I saw on the wall near the head of the bed an enormous and hairy spider. It was nearly as big as my hand; it was the vision of a nightmare. My Western susceptibilities were shocked, and for a moment I stood as petrified as if I had gazed on the head of Medusa. Spiders could be extremely poisonous in India, I had heard: this one looked particularly so. Something had to be done; it would be impossible to sleep with such a potential enemy within a few inches of my head. Keeping a wary eye on the monster, I sank back into the chair in order to think out a plan of campaign. I decided to follow the principle of all good strategists that attack is the best means of defence. Accordingly I seized one of the Indian clubs that were in the room, and advanced cautiously on the enemy. I had hopes of crushing it against the wall, but my murderous intentions were frustrated. The spider with incredible rapidity dodged my blow, running along the wall to take up a position on the window sill. Having made the attack there was no

retreat: I raised the club and brought it down with a thud which knocked inches of plaster off the wall on to the place where the spider had been. The tense is correct: the spider was no longer there, having again nimbly avoided the blow. This time it evidently decided to follow the same strategic principle which had inspired my attack, and completely turned the tables. It raised its hairy body, ran down the wall and made a balaclava charge straight to where I was standing. This was as horrifying as it was unexpected. I lunged wildly with the club and succeeded in diverting it: within a few inches of my feet it swerved rapidly and disappeared under the bed. Further researches having failed to locate it, I was left an uncertain victor on the field.

After this battle, homeric in its intensity, I hastened to undress and extinguish the light lest I should have time to make other unpleasant discoveries. After some trouble with the collapsible bed which, to live up to its name, insisted on collapsing, I tucked in the mosquito-net and prepared to sleep.

It was extremely hot, and I sweated freely. Through the open window came the sound of people chanting on the beach; a continuous chant which I began to find irritating. Suddenly I became aware of things crawling on my body. I leaped out of the bed, turned on the light and investigated. There was a rather unpleasant smell attached to the bed; but this I had concluded to be one of the many natural smells of India, and had tried not to notice it. The cause of the smell was discovered when I lifted a fold of the blanket serving as a mattress, and disclosed a mass meeting of bugs: thousands and tens of thousands of little, evil-smelling brown bugs. My collapsible bed was their metropolis; by removing myself from the bed I was depriving a whole city of its food supply. There are extremely religious men among the Hindus, and especially among the Jains, who encourage bugs to feed upon their blood, and lie for hours, their bodies swarming with these disgusting insects, believing that by so doing they

acquire merit with the gods. For according to Hindu belief, even the most orthodox and respected of Brahmans might be reincarnated after death in the form of a brown bug. It all depends on a man's *karma*. All life must be preserved for it lies only with Shiva to destroy. It is on the same principle that the orthodox Jain wears a pad over the mouth and nostrils so that he may not inhale and destroy the insects and the microbes of the air. An uncomfortable religion. At that time, I knew nothing of this philosophy, which I am sure would have brought me no consolation. It would certainly not have inspired me to transform myself into a free soup-kitchen for countless bugs however respectable their avatars. With the callous materialism of the West, I contemplated trespassing on the domain of Shiva, and would have executed a wholesale destruction if it had been at all possible. But there were so many that it was manifestly impossible. It was equally impossible to sleep among them. I, therefore, after removing a few pioneers from my person, pushed the arm-chair as far from the bed as possible, and rolling my coat into a pillow, settled down in the chair to make the best of things.

I had counted without the mosquitoes. For sleepless hours they hummed in my ears; and the hum of the mosquito is maddening. I was tortured by their bites: my blood must have fed thousands. I had avoided Scylla to founder on Charybdis. The eighteenth-century geographers had written less than the truth: "The pleasure of living in so delightful a country as India is much abated by the multitude of troublesome insects and reptiles. . . ." My romantic conception of India hardly survived the first night: poverty, dirt, spiders, bugs and mosquitoes destroy romance, which exists only in the imagination of the well-fed and the comfortable. It has no place in reality.

Through the open windows came the ceaseless noise of multitudes. I had been warned of this. The faithful would

spend the night on the beach immersing the god, Ganpati, in the sea: an act which brings good fortune and prosperity for the coming year. I had evidently arrived in India under favourable auspices. Perhaps Ganpati would favour my enterprises: perhaps I would have a share in his distribution of good fortune and prosperity. It was a comforting thought.

In my ears the mosquitoes hummed their infernal song with sardonic persistence.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Genesis of a Conspirator*

A FEW days after my arrival, I accepted an invitation to stay with friends at Khar, a model suburb situated about fifteen miles from Bombay. During the governorship of Sir George Lloyd, a scheme was launched to reclaim land from the sea, and one of the few products of this scheme was the development of Khar. Once the reclaimed land had been drained and made fit for habitation, the Government offered easy terms for building houses, which encouraged a few prosperous clerks and business men to migrate from Bombay. Hideous bungalows and houses soon sprang up, from whose verandahs their owners could enjoy the fresh evening breezes from the sea, after a day spent in the damp heat of Bombay.

The sea breeze is the main advantage of Khar; but its purity is often tainted by the pungent smell of dried fish, which is a delicacy much appreciated locally. The intrusion of this fishy smell into the haunt of the respectable is unavoidable; for on the coast, about a mile from Khar, lies the village of Dandi, which is inhabited solely by fisher-folk, and is one of the main centres of supply for the Bombay fish market. It is a prosperous community: the men, wearing gay red caps like eighteenth-century pirates, go out to sea in the early morning, returning with fish of every description from the shark to the pomfret. The women then place the fish in baskets which they carry on their heads to the railway station at Khar, and thence to Bombay. Down the main road of Khar, leading from Dandi to the railway station, there is a daily stream of these fisherwomen, their saris tucked between their legs, balancing huge well-laden baskets on their heads, and smoking the cheap native cigarettes. They are a terror to the respectable suburban population: they shout and swear,

completely indifferent to public disapproval, and, although generally good-tempered, the person, European or Indian, who offends their susceptibilities is inviting trouble: a devastating torrent of abuse, interspersed freely with statements about the sexual habits of his parents, is the least he can expect. There is no sense of inferiority among these Mahratta fisherwomen: they are independent and in their homes are the supreme authority, controlling the family purse, from which they provide, as a concession to masculine weakness, a small daily allowance to the men for the purchase of liquor and tobacco. Dandi is a village of Amazons.

As a contrast, on the other side of Khar lies the great white beach of Juhu, within a semi-circle of graceful palms. It is the Indian Miami, thronged during the season with people of all types: bathers, coco-nut vendors, jugglers, magicians and snake-charmers. Here the aggressive red fez of the Mohammedan mixes amiably with the speckled helmet of the Parsee, the topee of the European, the red turban of the Mahratta, the absurd black pill-box which adorns the head of the Guzerati merchant, and the white Gandhi cap of the Congress volunteer. Women of all races congregate on the beach: European women on horseback, Hindu girls like animated flowers in their brightly coloured saris, and Parsee ladies treading the soft sand awkwardly in high-heeled shoes from Paris. As the sun sets the crowd begins to disperse: the wealthy climb into their motor-cars in which they are carried swiftly back to the heat and the smells of Bombay, and the poorer stream towards the nearest railway station at Santa Cruz. The moon rising behind the swaying palms reveals a deserted beach; and for a time the only sound is that of the roar of the Arabian sea breaking on the clean sands.

In spite of these natural advantages there were two considerable drawbacks to my stay in Khar. The land not being properly drained presents opportunities of multiplication which the local mosquitoes have not neglected. They are so



cunning that even a mosquito-net does not provide adequate security; for in the evening they congregate unobtrusively round the entrance to the net, so that when you go inside they go in with you. In the morning dozens of them are to be seen hanging in a stupor, swollen and bloated after their nocturnal banquet, on the inside of the net. This gives an excellent opportunity for revenge which should not be missed; for there is a certain satisfaction in arising in the morning with hands smeared with the blood of your enemies. As it is also your blood, you get your own back in more senses than one.

The other great drawback to my stay at Khar was the existence of a small Guzerati merchant, who imported fire-extinguishers and sewing-machines, and had what he termed "advanced views." No account of my life at Khar would be complete without a description of him. He was a greater affliction than all the mosquitoes. He introduced himself to me quite blatantly one day as I was returning from Bombay on the suburban railway. In the course of the journey I was accosted by a small man not more than five feet high, pock-marked and flourishing an umbrella to the public danger. He accused me of being a professor of Sanskrit at the University of Berlin, and in spite of my denial persisted in addressing me as Professor. He then commenced the first of a series of monologues by which he intended to instruct me in the social and political progress of his country. He had a theory that most of his country's misfortunes were owing to sex inequality: the new era would dawn only with the emancipation of women. It was not long before I discovered that he believed in translating theory into practice; for he was no arm-chair philosopher, and as a result he would make a thorough nuisance of himself. He would insist on travelling in the women's compartments on the train, in order to break down feminine inhibitions and sex barriers, and he continued to do this in spite of frequent ejections: sometimes by way of variety he would select of all the empty seats on the railway

station the one reserved for women, on which to await his train: he was the bugbear of the railway officials' lives. In addition he harassed the whole population of Khar, so that strong men used to tremble at the sight of him in the distance.

I soon became his chief victim. He once awakened me late at night to inform me that in the future he intended to ride a lady's bicycle, because he felt that there was no reason why bicycles should have different sexes. But I could have tolerated him had he not become interested in socialism. From that moment he poisoned my days; he would spend hours in the public libraries reading all the books on sociology and economics that he could find, learn large passages of them by heart, and then lie in wait to victimize me with his quotations and interpretations. He became a nightmare: a perpetual menace to my peace of mind even in absence. He would pounce on me like a panther from behind pillars and trees, and once captured there was no escape, for he clung like a limpet. I would take elaborate precautions to avoid him: before entering one of the suburban trains I would furtively examine every compartment, and if I saw him on the road I would hurriedly go the other way. My precautions, however, were all in vain: I was fated to hear his voice calling out "Professor" from some quite unsuspected place. I tried rudeness as a remedy. I once told him that if he were so interested in benefiting society he should commit suicide; but the only result of my rudeness was a never-ending lecture on social and race suicide as opposed to the individual kind, which he explained "was unsocial." He would have baffled a saint.

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I had arrived in India as a journalist with little experience but with great ambitions and some prospects. I had hoped to gain invaluable experience while working on the staff of a

newspaper in India, which would have improved my value on the journalistic market. I had not been in India long before I discovered that my hopes were built on sand.

Newspapers in India can be divided into two main categories: the stable and the unstable. To the first belong British-owned organs of imperialist opinion, and the pro-Government and subsidized Press: to the latter belong the vast majority of Indian newspapers, whether published in English or in the vernacular. These spring up like mushrooms in a night and vanish in a day; and their name is Legion.

The causes of instability are not difficult to discover. The policy of the Indian Government towards the Press has consistently followed the views of Sir Thomas Munro, that a free Press and an autocratic Government are incompatible. As a consequence Indian-owned newspapers, almost entirely anti-Government, have against them for a start the whole vast structure of repressive legal machinery, including the sedition sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Post Office Act. In addition the Indian Press has been restricted and controlled practically since its suppression during the Indian Mutiny, by a series of repressive Acts, some of which are still in force to-day. In recent years these fetters have been considered insufficient by Simla, and the Press has now been completely shackled by the Press Act of 1931, which has itself been amended and made more stringent by the all-comprehensive Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1932. These two Acts form the basis of the present Press Law, which reduces the Press entirely to the mercy of the Executive. The printer and publisher of a paper are made liable, on demand by a magistrate, to deposit large sums in cash, which may be forfeited by the magistrate if the paper should have printed anything which the Government may consider as disaffection. And the Government understand disaffection quite literally as lack of affection. Deposits have been forfeited because of the mildest criticism

of Government policy. Under these conditions it is surprising, not that the Indian Press is unstable, but that it survives at all.

Another cause of instability is the unbusinesslike way in which the Indian Press on the whole is conducted. The paper is usually owned or controlled by a financial or industrial magnate, who is often not content with paying subsidies, but insists on dictating the policy, and on acting as a super-editor. I knew one of these magnates, who, on the strength of his subsidies, converted the editor of a daily paper into his office boy, and personally edited in a most incompetent manner all the material before it went to press. These little Rothermeres also insist on economy. Their idea of economy is to choose a newspaper's staff not by the standard of efficiency but by that of willingness to accept low salaries; and these wages are usually paid in instalments and often not at all. The staff live from hand to mouth, which is not a condition conducive to conscientious or successful effort.

Owing to these conditions and the financial instability of the magnate who controlled the newspaper in which I had placed my hopes, all the fine prospects which had carried me to India vanished. My situation was unpleasant. Here I was thousands of miles away from home, with practically no money and very little chance of earning any. By diligent free-lance work, I managed to maintain a precarious livelihood; but if it had not been for the hospitality and encouragement given to me by friends, my condition would have been really desperate.

There is a story of the poet Simonides, whose sardonic wit enabled him to survive the age limit imposed by his countrymen. It is reported that he kept in his house two money-boxes, one labelled "For Myself" and the other "For Charity." To friends who expressed surprise that the former of these two boxes was always full and the latter always empty, he explained that he kept it so in order that he should always have friends.

This story illustrates the cynicism with which friends have been regarded throughout the centuries. It is similar to that of Metternich who, after a visit to revolutionary France, remarked: "I am so sick of the word fraternity, that if I had a brother I would call him cousin." I too have been taught by experience to wash all protestations with cynical acid; but I have neither reason nor inclination to underrate the sincerity of my Indian friends, who helped to the best of their ability and without reservation a penniless stranger, who moreover belonged to the race which had oppressed their country for nearly two centuries.

They belonged to a distinguished family. At the beginning of the century there lived in the city of Hyderabad, the capital of the Nizam's territory, a Bengali brahman by the name of Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadyaya, who was known and respected by all sections of the population. A graduate of Edinburgh University, a scientist of no mean order, Dr. Chattopadyaya in his ideas was far ahead of his time. Although a brahman of the highest caste, he scorned the taboos of Hinduism, and strove to break down the barriers of caste and to abolish untouchability in Hyderabad. His children received at his hands a very progressive education, in which their natural abilities were given full scope. Hospitable to excess his house was open to all, and many of the most prominent citizens of Hyderabad owe their present position to the generosity of this wise and tolerant old man. Many anecdotes concerning him still survive, and Hyderabadis are never tired of hearing of his tolerance and humour, of his opposition to all forms of oppression, and of how he succeeded in discovering the philosopher's stone. And there are to-day persons in Hyderabad and elsewhere who proudly exhibit lumps of pure gold, which they claim were made in their presence by Dr. Chattopadyaya out of base metals provided by them. Or at least they did this before the recent "Gold Rush."

It is not surprising that the children of this remarkable

man should all possess recognized talent. His eldest daughter, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, has achieved international fame as a poetess of considerable merit and as a politician. The second daughter, Miss Mrinalini Chattopadyaya, after acquiring distinction at Oxford University, returned to India, and is now the principal of the New High School for Girls in Bombay. Apart from her educational work, she is well known for her efforts to produce modern plays in India, and as the editor of a magazine of art and culture. Another daughter, Mrs. Sunalini Rajam, is respected as an accomplished exponent of the great Indian arts of dancing and singing. The youngest daughter, Mrs. Suhasini Nambiar, a lady of great culture and charm, has found scope for her talents as an actress and in the political movement. One of the sons, Harindranath Chattopadyaya, is justly celebrated as a poet and playwright. To Mrs. Suhasini Nambiar and Miss Mrinalini Chattopadyaya in particular I owe a very great debt of gratitude.

It was under the auspices of Miss Chattopadyaya that I made my *début* on the stage as an actor. This was my second offence in this direction, the first occurring many years ago at Edinburgh, where I had been induced to take the part of St. Michael, hot and uncomfortable in a complete suit of armour, in a pageant of Peace arranged by an energetic lady from Bath. I have always thought it regrettable that although our object had been to promote peace and goodwill among men, our pageant ended in a riot. On the second occasion, however, in Bombay, I found myself taking part in a real play, an activity which was to have very serious consequences in the future as it was to form an item in a grave charge made against me. It was an English translation of a Bengali play, *Red Oleanders*, by Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. It may have been the fault of the translator, whose knowledge of English was not even rudimentary, but I was never able, either before or after the performance, to understand what the play was about; it seemed to me quite meaningless. I had for instance

to speak a line which ran something like this: "With sails full spread will you sail full-tilt into the bosom of my solitude." There was no indication, as far as I could discover, who was invited to sail full-tilt into the bosom of my solitude. Fortunately I was able to mouth this gibberish from behind the scenery, because the part I was playing was that of a king who had taken a vow of solitude, and so the audience was spared my blushes.

Because the play was completely incomprehensible, it was received very well by the audience. Incomprehensibility is regarded as a virtue in India. In that unfortunate country, if you can manage to remain not understood you stand a chance of reaching the very pinnacle of fame. The incomprehensible is almost at one with the divine; the land is littered with philosophic charlatans who capitalize the people's ignorance and attraction for the unknown. This worship of the incomprehensible is probably the secret of Mr. Gandhi's success; for his metaphysical explanations of his political actions seem designed to mystify and confuse. Rabindranath Tagore has also proved himself a master of the unintelligible, as he too follows the principle that simplicity, clarity and reason are all devices of Satan, and are fit only for the materialists.

As an essay in incomprehensibility *Red Oleanders* was worthy of the Nobel prize. It was such a masterpiece of its kind that when one of the performers forgot his part, and was already in the third act when the rest of the cast was still in the second, it caused no comment either among the audience or by the critics. Although the play contained no reference to oleanders of any colour, the title subsequently interested the police. They were at once attracted by the word *Red*. The word *red* has only one meaning for the Indian police: after studying the play and finding it unintelligible, they came to the conclusion that *Red Oleanders* must be communist propaganda.

In the opinion of the police, as revealed during the trial in Meerut, I entered into a conspiracy to overthrow the King from the moment I took part in Tagore's *Red Oleanders*. It seems a pity that with a whole rainbow of colours to choose from Tagore had to select red: after all there are yellow and blue oleanders.

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I had arrived in India towards the end of the great strike of the Bombay cotton workers. The strike had lasted for six months, and was unprecedented in the history of the Indian working class. It had been declared against an attempt by the mill-owners to introduce what they euphemistically called a "Standardization Scheme." The results of this scheme would have been the doubling of the amount of labour for each operative, reduction in wages and a big increase in unemployment. The existing wages were already so low that a further reduction in them meant that the economic conditions of the cotton workers would be desperate. Faced with such an attack on living and working conditions a strike was inevitable.

With the declaration of the strike it became evident once again that in industrial disputes the interests of the employers and the State are one. There are very few strikes that have taken place in India without the police acting as the hired thugs of the employers. Violence and intimidation constitute the official order of the day: leaders are arrested, pickets are thrown into jail, workers beaten, processions and meetings charged and fired on until the whole working-class area is under a reign of terror. That this is no exaggeration from the Left is shown by a resolution of the very moderate All-India Trade Union Federation, passed at its annual session held at Madras in 1932:

"This Federation condemns the indiscriminate support which the Government accords to capitalists in resisting



the legitimate demands of the workers by the use of various sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and other repressive measures.”

The conduct of the police towards the workers is more graphically described by Mr. V. V. Giri, a well-known trade-union leader of the Right, in a speech made at Madras :

“The moment a trade dispute is apprehended the police and the magistracy rush to the rescue of the employer, while the workers are left to their own wits in their fight against oppression. The Intelligence Department of the police has a special fancy for Labour leaders and also, as stated by the Whitley Commission, the whole information concerning a dispute is obtained more through the police than direct contact with the workers’ organizations.”

The protest of Mr. Shiva Rao, a representative to the International Labour Office at Geneva in 1930, against the employment of convict labour to break strikes, as was done during the 1930 strike of the G.I.P. railway workers, is another revealing commentary on the attitude of Indian Governments towards strikes.

This attitude was immediately adopted in Bombay in 1928. At the beginning of the strike, a small party of workers were returning home after leaving their work at the Gold Mohar mill, when they were met by a *posse* of police. The latter ordered them to disperse, and followed the order by opening fire. One worker by name Parasram Jadao was shot dead, and another seriously wounded. This was the beginning of police terrorism: a beginning which the cotton workers never forgave. Parasram Jadao became a hero and a martyr.

Shortly after the strike had been declared, a serious split took place among the leaders of it, which led to the establishment of a new union, the Girni Kamgar Union. This new body by its activity and militancy soon absorbed nearly all

the workers from the other unions, and became the undisputed leader of the strike. Under this leadership the strike lasted till the beginning of October, when it was suspended pending the findings of a Committee of Inquiry.

In my capacity of journalist, I attended the meetings of this Committee and there met several of the strike leaders, including an English trade unionist, Mr. B. F. Bradley, who was a vice-president of the Girmi Kamgar Union. My sympathies were entirely with the workers, and I began to investigate their conditions. In the course of this investigation, I naturally came into contact with members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party and many of the trade union leaders. In the company of Mr. Bradley and the General Secretary of the Union I went a tour round the working-class area, and attended a few workers' meetings. This was too much for the police. Linked with my appearance in *Red Oleanders* my sympathies towards the workers led them inevitably to one conclusion: I could be nothing else but an agent of Moscow. I began to receive hints and warnings from friends connected with high places that the Government was suspicious of me, and was contemplating action under the Public Safety Bill, as soon as the Bill became an Act.

The Public Safety Bill was to be brought up in a Legislative Assembly, early in the next session. It was to enable the Government to deport undesirable European British subjects from India, and to confiscate money sent to them from abroad. As the law existed, an Englishman could not be deported from British India without his consent in writing. The Government had once exceeded its powers, when it had deported Mr. B. G. Horniman, a prominent English journalist with sympathies for Indian nationalism. By a piece of clever manœuvring, Mr. Horniman made his way back to India, and succeeded in landing, in spite of police attempts to prevent it, by threatening to take the matter to the courts. Mr. Horniman is still in India.

The Public Safety Bill was intended to prevent such defiance. Its introduction into the Legislative Assembly had met with strong national opposition: the nationalists feared that the Government would not keep its promise to use its new powers only against communists. On the other hand the Government spokesman strained the arts of rhetoric and invective in an attempt to persuade the nationalists that the whole fabric of Indian society was being menaced by underground communist agents. Indian nationalism, although fearing communism as much as the Government, was not convinced, and combined in the Assembly to defeat the Bill. Political India was divided between those supporting the Bill and those opposed to it: communism became the question of the hour. The fight in the next session of the Legislative Assembly was eagerly anticipated.

Although I was warned that I was likely to become one of the first victims of the Public Safety Bill, I did not take it seriously enough to be disturbed. I went on my way studying the conditions of the working class, attending meetings and prying into tenements.

The living conditions of the Indian working class are among the worst in the world. Whole families live in one-room *chawls*, which can only be described as hovels hardly fit for cattle. Hundreds of people are huddled together in tenements, which are as ugly as they are insanitary. There is a scarcity of water, and one tap only is supplied for about a hundred families, and several families have to use the same latrine. Of drainage nothing can be said for it is non-existent, and the lanes, the waste land in front of the tenements, are littered with filth of every description, from carrion to excrement. And amid the filth and the stench, naked little children play and tumble; they have nowhere else to go. Hunger, misery and disease are supreme in the working-class quarter; and the great epidemics find easy victims among the thousands of famished people closely packed together. Labour is cheap

and life is cheaper; and as long as disease does not spread to the pleasanter parts of the city, who cares?

It was about this time that I became interested in the Youth Leagues. These are organizations, connected with the Indian National Congress, composed of students and young men of the lower middle class. In 1928 and 1929 the Youth Leagues were a power in Bombay; but in the turmoil of the succeeding years they have been on the wane, until at present they are no longer of political importance. It was under the auspices of the Bombay Youth League that I delivered my first public lecture in India. I spoke for about an hour and a half on the reaction of international events on the Indian movement for freedom. There were six police reporters present. I was invited subsequently to address several of the suburban Youth Leagues, and wherever I spoke there was always a police reporter present.

Owing to this connection with the Youth League, I became acquainted with a few young men, who formed a study circle, of which I was asked to be the guide, friend and philosopher. One of the most interested and diligent of these young men was the son of a Mohammedan nobleman of Hyderabad, of whom I shall say more later. The study circle settled down to study the theory of communism, doing so from a purely academic point of view. Minutes recording the amount of study completed were carefully kept, and in case these minutes should fall into the hands of mischievous persons, the members were referred to by pseudonyms; for it is dangerous in India to allow the knowledge that you are studying progressive political literature to become public property. Every autocracy regards free thought as a dangerous form of heresy.

It is to be presumed that the police were by this time thoroughly convinced that I was a dangerous conspirator. My letters were opened and sometimes withheld in transit, two police watchers dogged my footsteps and slept on my

doorstep; my servant was interrogated; and I was altogether made to feel like a desperate criminal.

One day I stood watching a brahman dispense holy water to the faithful, from a sacred well in the centre of Bombay. I was meditating on the relation of dirt and disease to religious piety, when I was accosted by an acquaintance who had connections with the Government. For some time we discussed the holy well, and he informed me that nearly all these wells were full of guinea worm, and that the pious drinkers of the water frequently suffered from the worm, which is yards long, causes a nasty festering sore and is difficult to extract. We had a very interesting discussion. At the end of it he remarked casually that he had heard many unpleasant things about me lately. I replied in the words of Simonides: "Be so good, my friend, as to cease defaming me with your ears."

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Prelude to Arrest*

IN the early morning of March 20, 1929, I was disturbed twice: once by the milkman, and a few minutes afterwards by the police. Indian milkmen commence the distribution of their milk from midnight onwards, and it was one of my daily afflictions to be disturbed by the clatter of a milk-can just before sunrise. The first disturbance therefore, although annoying, did not surprise me. It is not however usual even in India to be visited at sunrise by the police, and I was therefore astonished, on opening my door in response to a thunderous knocking, to find a *posse* of armed police headed by a European inspector and an Anglo-Indian sergeant in occupation of my front garden.

The inspector apologized, and then, as if to excuse his visit at such an inconvenient hour, produced a warrant, issued by the district magistrate of Meerut, empowering the police to search any property, either mine or under my control. I invited him inside; but before doing so he informed me that I could be a searcher as well as a searchee, and generously invited me to examine the contents not only of his own pockets but those of the sergeant and two pirate-like individuals whom he introduced to me as witnesses. Considering this far too great a task at such an early hour, I declined with thanks, and thereupon we entered the house in procession. The two witnesses were accommodated with chairs, the inspector and the sergeant removed their coats, and I retired to my bedroom to dress.

Although inconvenient, there is something romantic in having your house searched by the police at sunrise. A search would lose all its glamour while retaining all its inconvenience if conducted at noon or at five o'clock in the after-

noon. But the dawn carries with it a sense of unreality, of romance and of tragedy in the best vein. It is a time when the world is at its most beautiful, when, man being asleep and evil usually dormant, every prospect pleases. It is probably by way of contrast that man has always shown a partiality for choosing this peaceful hour of illusion for putting his fellows to death; for sunrise has always been associated with executions. The reason is possibly social sadism: society seems to take a perverse pleasure in forcing its victims to leave the world when it is most beautiful and most desirable. On the other hand, the dark hours of night are sacred to murder, theft and adultery and must not be disturbed.

It is an established convention that no one should be arrested, except in case of *flagrante delicto*, or have his house searched between sunset and sunrise. This convention, as illogical as most conventions, has often given rise to complications. There is a story concerning a friend of the great Balzac, who refused military service to the State. In consequence a warrant for his arrest was issued periodically, which caused its object more amusement than inconvenience. Knowing the convention, he would go into hiding in the day-time, and emerge swollen with satisfaction after sunset to join his friends and mix with his fellow-citizens in complete security until sunrise, when he would disappear again. In this way he avoided military service and the consequences of desertion for many years, successfully judging the hours of security from an almanac issued annually by a reputable firm of publishers. His cleverness and foresight were much admired until there came a year when he fell a victim to Nemesis. He left his house as usual in the evening, smiling complacently at the police agents whom he met on his doorstep, and was horrified and indignant when the latter arrested him. It subsequently transpired that the almanac contained an error of two minutes in the time given for sunset. It is consoling to know that the victim of the error, after serving his

term of imprisonment, sued the publishers of the almanac and received heavy damages.

Such were the reflections which passed through my mind while I was dressing; but, realizing that it was not a time for philosophy, I hurriedly finished my dressing and joined the search party.

I found the inspector examining the drawers of my writing-desk, while the sergeant was seeking to solve the riddle of my blotting-paper by holding it in front of a mirror, taking, I noticed, the opportunity to estimate the dimensions of a boil that he had on the temple. The two witnesses were looking more piratical and more forlorn than ever; as though they had arrived at Execution Dock. My servant, his eyes popping with excitement, was watching their proceedings from the door. He was probably thinking that he had taken service with a master-criminal, and was afraid of being involved. The inspector sought to enliven the proceedings with an elaborate and slightly indecent account of a short and sharp love affair he had once had with a Burmese girl. He recommended the race. The sergeant sniggered, the witnesses looked shocked and twisted their ferocious moustaches, and I dispatched my servant to the kitchen to make some tea for myself and for my uninvited guests.

The search took about three hours, and by the time it had ended the sun was already hot and half the inhabitants of Khar had gathered in a semi-circle at my front door. Henceforth I was to be notorious: Khar had been nursing a viper in its bosom. Eventually the police departed, taking with them as spoils of victory about a third of my worldly possessions, leaving me amid the debris and confusion of a ransacked house. My fellow-citizens of Khar looked at me with suspicion and awe before melting away to attend to their own affairs. I had, as I consoled myself, at least the satisfaction of being at last officially recognized as a conspirator.

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Wild rumours were current in Bombay, and it was some time before I ascertained the facts. At the same time as the police had descended upon me, they had raided the residences of all the prominent labour leaders who had not only had their belongings carried off but had been carried off themselves. The warrants in each case had been issued by the district magistrate of Meerut. No one seemed to know anything at all about Meerut, where it was situated or for what it was noted; yet from this mysterious city the bolt had been shot which had paralysed Bombay by its suddenness and unexpectedness. In Parel, the working-class quarter, the excitement was feverish; for it had been occupied during the arrests and searches by troops and armed police. It was evident that a great plot against the State had been discovered.

The evening newspapers, carried away by their delight in the sensational, were on the verge of hysteria. Their information, although too dramatic to be entirely reliable, removed the veil of mystery from the proceedings. The arrests were not confined to Bombay but had been carried out simultaneously all over India, including Calcutta and Allahabad. In all thirty-one arrests had been made, mainly of those who were connected with the militant trade union movement or were members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. All the arrests had been effected under Section 121*a* of the Indian Penal Code, which provided a maximum punishment of transportation for life for "conspiring to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over British India." On this charge, those arrested were to be taken to Meerut to stand their trial.

The reporters soon succeeded in locating Meerut; and it turned out to be a small town with a large military garrison about forty miles from Delhi in the north of the United Provinces. It had been forgotten except by the military authorities since the days of the Indian Mutiny, which broke out there: it was now to be put on the map again. Among

those arrested or about to be arrested were a member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces, a homoeopathic doctor from Gorakhpur, an Indian seaman, a few unattached intellectuals, the principal office-bearers of the big trade unions of Bombay and Calcutta, and two Europeans: altogether a very catholic choice. It was the most sensational news for some time, and the newspapers made the most of it.

The next evening I attended a packed meeting of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, held to protest against the repressive policy of the Government. The chairman was Mr. Jamnadas Mehta, one of the most prominent Congress leaders in Bombay, a member of the Legislative Assembly and an insurance broker. Although chairman, Mr. Mehta proceeded to make a long speech, in which he ignored the recent arrests and concentrated on the arrest of Mr. Gandhi at Calcutta for attending a bonfire of foreign cloth: an offence for which Mr. Gandhi was subsequently fined the equivalent of one shilling and sixpence. The meeting was restless and discontented; the audience were beginning to be of the opinion that they had been lured there to listen to a speech of Mr. Jamnadas Mehta, on false pretences. His speech was punctuated by cries of "Sit down," and "What about Meerut?" until finally he was forgotten altogether by the appearance on the platform of K. N. Joglekar, against whom a warrant had been issued from Meerut. The policemen in the hall immediately made a dive for the platform in order to arrest him, but were prevented from doing so by the audience. The result was indescribable pandemonium and excitement. No sooner had the excitement died down than it started again; and this time I was unfortunately the centre of it. My speech had degenerated into a heated argument between myself and Jamnadas Mehta, who was still trying to assert himself as chairman, as to whether I should make reference to the arrest of Joglekar at that meeting or not, and also as to what constituted the repressive policy of the Government. The meeting

as a whole took my side in the quarrel, and after a good deal of shouting and fighting I was allowed to proceed with my speech. I left the meeting more notorious than ever.

After attending a few more meetings, I felt the need of a change, and accepted the invitation of some friends in Madras. When I arrived there after a journey of twenty-four hours, it was only to find that my notoriety had preceded me. I was met at the station by a squad of police and a couple of reporters to herald my arrival in the land of Hindu orthodoxy.

Madras is totally different from any other part of India. The language is chiefly Tamil, which is unintelligible to anyone outside the Presidency. English is spoken more commonly than in any other part of India; but it is spoken with such an appalling and risible accent that it is almost impossible to listen to it seriously. The women wear saris of bright colours, but the men seem content with an inadequate dhoti round their loins, and a threefold sacred thread worn like a bandolier. The sacred thread is of cardinal importance in Madras; it is the alpha and omega of twice-born orthodoxy; it is more than a religious symbol of caste, it is the criterion of social status. But the sacred thread is not enough: the caste Hindu must advertise his orthodoxy and put it beyond doubt; and for this purpose he smears over himself wide streaks of ash-coloured paint, so that he leaves his house in the morning bearing on his forehead, breast and paunch a choice collection of the phallic symbols of Shiva.

But the stronghold of orthodoxy thrives amid the misery of the millions of untouchables. The untouchables in Madras quite clearly show their racial origin: black-skinned and totally devoid of Aryan features, they are remnants of a by-gone civilization. The Hindus originally came from Central Asia, entering India, as many other races have entered subsequently, as conquering invaders. The conquered Dravidian population were made slaves, without social or political rights; for Hindu civilization as all early civilizations had its

roots in chattel slavery. To perpetuate this slavery the Hindus devised the caste system, which was a cunning attempt to find religious justification for social oppression and economic exploitation; and it is so efficient a social system that it has survived the Mohammedan conquest and British annexation: it has now become a case of the big flea being tormented by the smaller flea: the Hindus from conquerors have become slaves, but they still retain the satisfaction of preying on their own slaves. Modern civilization, with the growth of industrial capitalism, has made terrible inroads on the caste system: knowledge is no longer the monopoly of the brahman, and the machine-gun makes the untouchable the military equal of the kshatrya warrior; for the machine-gun has no respect for caste distinctions. Power now lies with the vaishya trader, banker or moneylender: the Gujerati bania (a sub-caste of the vaishyas), Mr. Gandhi, the spokesman of rising Indian industrialism, has taken the place of the great Mahratta kshatrya, Shivaji.

During my visit to Madras, I paid a visit to Adyar, the headquarters of the theosophical movement, and until recently the home of Mrs. Annie Besant, now unhappily in the process of reincarnation. At Adyar, the theosophists have established a little world of their own amid glorious natural surroundings. But the natural surroundings are somewhat disfigured by numerous little stucco bungalows erected to house the transient souls and bodies of the faithful. The great merit of Adyar lies not in its spiritual philosophy but in its library; this contains an unrivalled collection of ancient sanskrit manuscripts written with marvellous penmanship on smooth and polished reeds, concealing within their fragile layers the secrets and wisdom of the ancients. Sanskrit scholars are busily engaged in copying and translating these messages from the past. Theosophy makes many converts from among the lower middle class; it contains all the essentials of Hinduism and a delightful vagueness which prevents disillusionment by

understanding. From the gardens of Adyar, haunted by the ghosts of Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, the drug goes forth finding its addicts among the thousands of modern youths, dissatisfied with the crude mythology of Hinduism, but clinging to Hindu mysticism which persuades them that this life is only a passing phase, and that hope lies only in reincarnation. Theosophy is Hinduism brought up to date.

Madras is saturated with religion. Images of the gods stand like milestones along the sides of the roads, and I remember the driver of a public bus in which I was a passenger, reeling obliged to stop the bus in order to offer up a prayer at each wayside shrine, with the result that it took him two hours to cover a distance of five miles. The Christians have also their stake in Madras; for that unfortunate city was the scene of the evangelical activities of the Apostle Thomas. The local Hindu Rajah was sufficiently ignorant to confuse the spiritual message of St. Thomas with subversive propaganda and put him to death; for in those days the Gospel was not supported by gunboats. It is consoling to know that the martyr has been fittingly revenged; for to-day thousands of Hindus are converted to Christianity in his name, whereas the name of his executioner has been forgotten. Truly the ways of the Lord are inscrutable.

My visit to Madras lasted a week. On my return to Bombay I was rapidly engulfed in the political and trade union movement. The textile workers, in spite of the arrest of their leaders, had again declared a strike. All the mills were closed and about a hundred thousand workers were on the streets. The strike had been declared because of the victimization of many workers who had been most prominent in the 1928 strike, and against the findings of the Fawcett Committee, which supported the attempts of the mill-owners to impose the Standardization Scheme which had caused the strike of 1928. I was soon elected a vice-president of the cotton workers' organization, the Girni Kamgar Union.

About this time also, I was invited to attend the annual general meeting of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union at Chalisgaon. I arrived at this dreary place, after an excruciating journey in a third class compartment, between five and six in the morning. I had to amuse myself by wandering up and down the deserted station platform until about nine, when the conference opened. The conference was held in a barn-like building, decorated for the occasion with red flags and banners bearing appropriate inscriptions. The delegates squatted on the floor, and at the head of the room were two tables and a few chairs for the office-bearers and fraternal delegates. The proceedings opened with the presidential address, delivered for a considerable time by Mr. F. J. Ginwalla, a Bombay lawyer and president of the union. The address lasted well over an hour, which I thought unnecessary as it had already been printed and circulated among the delegates beforehand. My chair was hard, the atmosphere was oppressively hot, the orator's eloquence seemed interminable, and as Mr. Ginwalla was suffering from a cold, he exhaled an overpowering smell of eucalyptus. But much worse was to follow. After I had added my modest contribution the meeting was abandoned to an endless stream of incomprehensible oratory in Mahrathi and Hindi. For two days I sat and sweated on my hard chair listening to lengthy speeches of which I did not understand a word; it was a punishment which Dante forgot to include in his *Inferno*. In the end, however, I was rewarded. Towards the end of the second day the dispute between the Right and the Left which had been simmering since the beginning, came to a head on the question of the election of office-bearers. After a very heated discussion and a great deal of shouting, the members of the Right walked out in protest, whereupon the Left settled down to the business of electing its own office-bearers without opposition. I was elected vice-president of the union.

I now found myself vice-president of the two largest trade unions in India, one of which was already involved in a great

strike and the other one actively preparing to take similar action. My position was all the more difficult in that I had had no experience in trade union work; for as the *Times of India* pointed out in an indignant editorial I was neither a railwayman nor a cotton worker. In my own defence I can only plead that I did not seek either of these positions, but having had them thrust on me I can honestly claim that I did my best for the cause which I had adopted. I was busy day and night making speeches, organizing, taking part in demonstrations, negotiating until I was actually able to persuade myself that I had become a passable trade unionist. In any case at the end of a few weeks I no longer considered myself a charlatan.

I can now look back on those few weeks I spent encouraging and trying to lead the cotton workers of Bombay in their gallant struggle against overpowering odds, with satisfaction. I felt that I was justifying the confidence placed in me by thousands of oppressed men and women. In daily contact with their suffering, I began to hate the cause of it with almost fanatical intensity. In particular I detested the native oppressor: I detested his fat sleek body, clothed in spotless white homespun, with a Gandhi cap on his head and nationalist patriotic slogans on his lips, living in luxury on the sweated labour of his fellow-countrymen. I found consolation in a remembered line of Gustave Flaubert: "Hatred of the bourgeoisie is the beginning of virtue." I was not then sufficient of a philosopher to ask what is virtue.

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It was at about this time that *The New Spark* was born. I was its parent; but it was in direct descent from *The Spark* which had been edited by a young Indian journalist named M. G. Desai, at that time languishing in Meerut jail because of his editorial capacity for combining facts with his socialist opinions. Mr. Desai modestly described his paper as "A

Socialist Weekly"; but when a large Anglo-Indian daily described the socialist weekly as a rag, he could not refrain from retorting that it was a rag "soaked in Marxian oil." This and similar witticisms resulted in Mr. Desai's arrest as a conspirator against the sovereignty of the King-Emperor. With the arrest of Mr. Desai *The Spark* came to a sudden end; and it died with a notoriety which would have sent up its sales by millions had it managed to survive.

On my return from Madras it was suggested that I should revive *The Spark*. I thought over the suggestion and decided to bring out a weekly paper, rather different from Mr. Desai's production, but maintaining the name *Spark* as a tribute to Mr. Desai and in order to take full advantage of the publicity which had attended the death of *The Spark*. To make clear the independence of my paper from the old one I added the word *New*.

At the beginning of May the first number of *The New Spark* appeared, and received a very favourable reception from the public. Before it could appear I had to go before the chief presidency magistrate in order to convince him that I was the printer, publisher and responsible editor of this new addition to Bombay newspapers. I was forced to declare myself the printer, because the actual printer was not prepared to take any responsibility for the publication: he pointed out that the owner of the press was already in prison on a charge of printing seditious matter, and he, as chargé d'affaires, was not inclined to follow his principal. He did not consider it an honour to print *The New Spark*; instead he thought it a dangerous nuisance which would end by getting everybody connected with it into trouble. He had reason if not honour on his side.

*The New Spark* did not improve my general popularity. My chief collaborator was an arm-chair hero who used to contribute diatribes under the signature "X-ray." He insisted on remaining anonymous, explaining that publicity of any sort always upset his inherent modesty; but I privately



suspected that by modesty he meant policy. The diatribes of "X-ray" were not well received by the general public, as they were directed chiefly against Mr. Gāndhi and his lieutenant Vallabhbhai Patel. It would not have been so bad had "X-ray"'s attacks been political; unfortunately "X-ray" laboured under a sense of personal grievance and was therefore rather inclined to indulge in personal vituperation, and as he shared the editorial work I had no opportunity to amputate the offending portions of his articles. It was unfortunate that the public identified "X-ray" with me, with the result that I was inundated with letters of protest. Open letters addressed to me appeared in the nationalist Press, urging me to abandon my wicked ways, to follow the example of C. F. Andrews and become a disciple of the Mahatma. Threats of violence were sent to me from Congress organizations, oblivious to their cardinal principle of non-violence; and a citizen of Khar was so indignant that he sent me a letter informing me that although once he had had a high regard for me, he now "did not care a straw." "X-ray," while congratulating himself upon his anonymity, was rather pleased at this popular protest, regarding it as a tribute to the excellence of his articles. But the main drawback of "X-ray"'s excursion into polemics was that it detracted from the value of well-considered and objective political attacks on Indian nationalism. In one way or another you have always to pay for collaboration.

The editorial office of *The New Spark* was a small room situated at the top of a tall building, overlooking the square in front of the main railway station. It was very central; too central as it turned out, for the office became generally regarded as a convenient port of call, where those who had nothing else to do could while away an hour or so in light conversation and drink the editorial tea and soda-water. Before long the office of *The New Spark* became a caravanserai where all those who were weary or bored could retire for a while from the world. In a sardonic mood, having been

infuriated by hours of aimless conversation with uninteresting acquaintances, I once stuck on the door above my signature a notice bearing the scriptural text: "Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." As I should have expected, this notice was taken literally, and the office of a revolutionary newspaper was rapidly converted into a Salvation Army rest-home.

A newspaper or journal lives by its advertisements. In this way is the Press chained to the interests of wealth. Business men and owners of property are not naturally inclined to advertise in a paper which advocates their expropriation. It would be unreasonable to expect it. The adventures of *The New Spark* in search of advertisements would be too numerous to relate. I engaged canvassers on commission; but these agents developed an unpleasant habit of persuading would-be advertisers to pay a month in advance to them and then, decamping with the proceeds, they would be swallowed up amongst India's millions. Eventually I succeeded in obtaining two regular advertisements: one, in praise of a School of Indian music, was never paid for; and the other was inserted by that little Gujerati merchant who had poisoned my days at Khar. The latter was then doing business in second-hand fire extinguishers, and for the remainder of its issues *The New Spark* was compelled to offer fire extinguishers for sale. Among a superstitious people this was thought an ill-omen: it was regarded as a portent that the spark was to be extinguished before it became a flame. The advertisement must have caused many grim smiles in Government circles.

Distribution was also a difficulty. The newsagents, or at least those of them who could be persuaded to handle it at all, would not display it on their stalls, but either concealed it under other papers or kept it beneath the counter. They refused to consider displaying posters. Private helpers there were many, but as the majority of these never troubled to account for the copies they had disposed of, they did not help to put the paper on a sound financial footing. The only

regular income was from the steadily increasing number of annual subscribers and from private donations.

Everything considered, *The New Spark* represented a brief struggle against the overwhelming forces of orthodoxy. Its opponent was Goliath, but it was by no means a David; its pebbles would have been better fired if its sling had been kept in better repair. That it was eventually killed by the forces of orthodoxy did not make it any the less clear that the germs of its dissolution were in itself. It had too many friends. That was at once its tragedy and its epitaph. It died heavily in debt.

One afternoon as I sat in *The New Spark* office composing an editorial on the prisoners at Meerut, word was brought that the Right-wing elements of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, who had walked out of the conference at Chalisgaon, had commenced a programme of disruption and sabotage within the union. My presence was urgently required at Nagpur in the Central Provinces to help to consolidate the union in what had formerly been one of its strongest centres. I sent a message that I would leave at once, and abandoning my composition I was about to leave the office. I opened the door and found a photographer there complete with camera. He explained that he had been sent to take my photograph by his firm, the largest of its kind in the city, and which specialized in Press photographs. I was too surprised at this honour to resist, and it was only later on reflection that I thought it sinister.

It was the beginning of the monsoon. The heat was oppressive, and the sky like lead, and, as I arrived at the station to take the train for Nagpur, a few heavy drops of rain began to fall. The gloom of the weather rather affected my spirits; I felt that I too was about to enter a period of clouds and storms. They say that coming events cast their shadows before.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Journey to Meerut*

THE train to Nagpur was crowded, and I was fortunate in obtaining a corner seat in a second class compartment. I composed myself to take a rest from politics and trade unionism, and settled down to enjoy a detective story which I had bought on the station. Concentration, however, was difficult. Politics to man is like blood to the tiger: once tasted nothing else can satisfy. For the politician everything outside politics is paltry and uninteresting; he is first a politician and then a man. Deception is part of his trade, and with practice he becomes so skilful at it that he ends by deceiving himself. "I have become such an expert politician," wrote Machiavelli, "that I no longer believe a word I say." This was probably the reason why I could not forget myself in my detective story: I found myself out-scheming the villain and doing the detective's job for him.

Besides the disease of politics there was another reason why I was unable to concentrate on fiction: my fellow-passengers. One of these, a well-dressed Parsee, showed signs of contemplating a conversational attack; a young Hindu perched on one of the upper berths was making the day hideous by wailing one of those interminable love lyrics so popular among Indians; two Gujerati merchants were shouting amiabilities to each other diagonally across the compartment; and a wealthy brahman in the opposite corner, having divested himself of nearly all his clothes with the exception of the threefold sacred thread and loin cloth, was passing the time by spitting all over the floor. The noise in the compartment drowned even the noise of the train. Noise is one of India's specialities; its inhabitants exceed even the Germans in their love of shouting: they are like the Jews

of Pilate's day, "if you are not noisy they think that you are ill." I think this love of noise must be owing to an inferiority complex: it seems prevalent among subject races, who seem to hope that a loud noise will make them equal to the oppressor. The Germans must have acquired their love of noise after their defeat and humiliation: the apotheosis of noise is the psychology of the Nazi movement, and this is probably why Wagner, the noisiest composer of them all, has been appointed the official bandmaster of the Nazi regime.

I arrived at Nagpur the next morning, and was met by the President of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, Mr. R. S. Ruikar. Unlike Chalisgaon the station at Nagpur was a respectable one, and I decided to take up my quarters in the second class waiting-room. I was not the only one to have this idea; for when I arrived at the waiting-room it was to find my Parsee fellow-passenger spreading his bedding on one of the benches. He did not look up when I entered, and I took no further notice of him. I had a bath and changed, and then left the waiting-room in search of breakfast. At the door, as though on guard, stood a disagreeable-looking individual with a club: I recognized him immediately as my police shadow, and reflected that the Nagpur police had lost no time in welcoming me to their city. The police watcher in India can never be mistaken for anybody else. He is badly paid, illiterate, and so unintelligent as to be unable to make any secret of his profession. They all conform to type in dress and appearance: their dress is rakish and their appearance would justify their being mistaken for one of the criminal tribes. Before I had come to Nagpur I had been accustomed to being shadowed by the police, and had reached the stage where I should have missed my shadow. Some of them were excessively agreeable; they would camp on my doorstep, greet me affably on going out, and one or two have even asked me for my programme in advance in order to save themselves the exertion of following me. The Nagpur

specimen, however, had an altogether different temperament: he was stupid, surly, aggressive and almost impertinent; whenever I came out of the waiting-room he would take a tight hold of his club as though he were dealing with a homicidal maniac, and then proceed to dog my footsteps, coming so close that I could smell the garlic in his breath. Compared to this man the much maligned English village constable is a model of courtesy and a prodigy of intelligence.

I spent my time at Nagpur in organizational work and in addressing meetings, snatching a meal here and there at the station restaurant and sleeping in the waiting-room. On the third day I was tired of it and regarded the prospect of returning to Bombay by the night train with pleasure. Unfortunately Clotho had spun my thread differently.

Before departing, I had arranged to address a meeting organized by the Nagpur Youth League at the Town Hall. Before going there I had tea with the local notabilities at Mr. Ruikar's house, and we left in a group for the meeting. We walked towards the Town Hall, engaged in amiable conversation, until we were accosted by a large Sikh accompanied by a pale and weedy European. The Sikh announced himself as the city superintendent of police, and after a great many apologies broke the news that he had a warrant for my arrest. The local notabilities on hearing the sinister word "arrest" took to their heels, and the dust raised by their departure covered their retreat. I was left alone with the superintendent, his furtive accomplice, Mr. Ruikar and the leader of the Youth League. I read the warrant and discovered that I had been arrested under Section 121*a* of the Indian Penal Code, on a charge of "conspiring to deprive the King of his sovereignty over British India." The superintendent was apologetic: he assured me that he had nothing to do with it, and I gathered from his remarks that the warrant had come up with me from Bombay. I remembered the ubiquitous Parsee. The warrant was issued by the District

Magistrate of Meerut, this being the second time he had honoured me with his attentions, and the superintendent informed me that on the next day I should be taken to this mysterious city, there to stand my trial with the thirty-one others who had been arrested three months previously on the same charge. To create a diversion from an unpleasant subject the superintendent decided to introduce me to his European companion, who was hovering shyly in the background. He was Inspector Derojinsky of the Bombay Criminal Investigation Department. As it may be surmised from his name, he was not English by birth, but a White Russian *émigré*, who, after a series of adventures, had arrived in India and had been given a job in the political police by the hospitable Bombay Government.

On the way to the lock-up in the superintendent's private car, Inspector Derojinsky, who spoke broken English with an attractive lisp, entertained me with his personal opinions of Soviet Russia and communism in general: he did not approve of either, and described Stalin as a combination of Landru and Cesare Borgia. His conversation, although not altogether tactful in the circumstances, covered the period of the drive to the police lock-up. It was only when he stopped talking that I realized that I was no longer a free man.

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The police lock-up in the city of Nagpur is neither large nor salubrious. It is a small brick building, situated within the police lines, and consisting of two cells separated by a guard-room for the police. An unpleasant smell of bad drains hung about the place. On entering the building I had to submit to a formal search executed by the superintendent. I was deprived of my money, pipe, cigarette case, knife and pocket book; but I was permitted to retain my cigarettes and a box of matches, on the understanding that I did not attempt

to emulate Guy Fawkes. These formalities and negotiations being concluded, I was asked "to choose my room," and after I had chosen what appeared to be the less revolting of the two cells, the barred gate was shut and locked with a clang. There was something final about that clang; I felt that I had already entered my tomb. The superintendent and Derojinsky peered at me through the bars until I told them that they were not visiting the zoo. My temper was a bit frayed by this time. It had no effect, however, on my captors, who wished me a pleasant good-night and departed, leaving me in charge of a Mohammedan sub-inspector.

As a concession to my white skin, I had been accommodated with a crude cot made of rope and bamboo, but had been refused a lamp and a mosquito net. By way of explanation it was pointed out that criminals in the past had been known to use a mosquito net for the illegitimate purpose of hanging themselves, and this sort of thing gave a lock-up a bad name. I retorted that in the past many criminals must have died of malaria for want of mosquito nets, and that in any case a police lock-up was bound to have a bad name among those interested. But force is superior to logic, and I was condemned, because of the inconsiderate behaviour of former prisoners, to serve as a feast for all the mosquitoes of Nagpur.

I was more insistent on obtaining a lamp. It was becoming dark, and, while lying on my bamboo cot, I had observed the shadowy form of a rat scurrying across the floor. As I watched the singular became plural, and the rats, entering through the open drain from the surrounding fields, seemed to be quite at home in the cell. The Indian rat is inclined to be aggressive in the dark, but it is afraid of the light. I remembered that while sleeping on a verandah one night in Bombay I had been awakened by a rat hanging on to my big toe. Rat-bite fever is one of India's most common diseases. I called the sub-inspector and asked him for a lamp to protect me from



the invaders. He was sympathetic but helpless. His attitude was that if a man could hang himself with a mosquito net, he could do quite a lot of things with a lamp. He feared that if he supplied me with a lamp I might proceed to set the place on fire, get drunk on paraffin, and conclude my performance by cutting my throat with the sharp edges, and that if I did any of these things it would get him into trouble. I pointed out that if I were eaten alive by rats he would also get into trouble. I told him in support of my argument gruesome stories about the German bishop who was eaten in his castle on the Rhine, and about the two Prussian officers who were devoured by patriotic rats in the catacombs of Paris after the Franco-Prussian War. He was impressed, and after further negotiations we reached the compromise of a lamp being placed on the floor outside the barred gate of the cell. And with this I was forced to be content.

Shortly after this compromise had been effected, a waiter from the station restaurant, sent by Mr. Ruikar, arrived with my dinner. Under the vigilant eye of the sub-inspector I was allowed to eat it. I then returned to my cot and thought over the position.

Conspiracy against the State is a very serious charge. In the past many people had lost their heads for it, or had been hanged, disembowelled, and quartered to provide a public holiday. No Government has ever looked with favour upon treasonable conspiracy, and the most ingenious forms of torture and butchery have been devised to discourage it. This has been necessary because no Government has ever been secure in the affection of its people. An unsuccessful traitor must be made a hideous example of; for once the disease starts it might speedily become a dangerous epidemic. There has never been a successful traitor; for as John Harrington pointed out:

Treason doth never prosper; what's the reason?  
For if it prosper, none dare call it treason.

Traitors belong to the category of the defeated. Cromwell was proclaimed a traitor by King Charles; but after Cromwell's victory it was King Charles who was tried and executed for treason. In treason as in everything else the only crime lies in failure. In the struggle of political life a man is judged loyal or treacherous according to who wins. The only ethical standard is the personal one; a man should remain loyal to the cause of his adoption, which is not necessarily that of the majority or of the strongest.

It is difficult to think peacefully with mosquitoes humming in your ears and with rats scampering in the vicinity. From the guard-room came the snores of the vigilant sub-inspector, dreaming no doubt of the houris in the Seventh Heaven of Islam. Sleep for me, however, was out of the question. I passed the night, as all conspirators should, without shutting my eyes; but this was not owing to an uneasy conscience but to the acute discomfort of my surroundings.

At about six o'clock in the morning, when I had almost finished my cigarettes, a policeman brought me a mug of watery tea and a thick chunk of bread which he described as my breakfast. About an hour later the same policeman deposited a dirty bucket full of dirtier water in the cell, in order, as he explained, that I might wash myself, if I felt so inclined. It was like washing in a sewer. I spent some time in making myself as clean and as presentable as I could in the circumstances, and I had hardly finished before a large lorry drove up, from which descended two European police sergeants in full uniform; it was the escort which was to take me to Meerut.

I entered the lorry with the two sergeants, feeling very pleased at escaping from the lock-up. We drove to the station and retired to the restaurant, where I ate a civilized breakfast. In the meantime several friends, sympathizers, and reporters had arrived at the station, and by the time we returned to the platform a considerable crowd had gathered, whose

attentions, although well meant, I found rather embarrassing. It is no easy thing to sit on a station platform and be stared at by a crowd; it gives you an impression of being a new species of animal on the way to a zoo. Eventually after what seemed an interminable wait the train arrived; amid shouts of approval I was garlanded with jasmine and roses and pushed into a second class compartment. I was asked to make a speech, but that I felt would be too absurdly heroic. I felt rather in sympathy with the late King of Saxony, a monarch who had a philosophic disregard for the conventions. Shortly after his abdication, he was travelling by train through his former kingdom on his way to a health resort in the south; the train stopped at the station of a small town, and the population, hearing that their former king was on board, went to the station in procession accompanied by a brass band to welcome him. For some time the king could not be induced to show himself to his former subjects in spite of the cheering and the band. Eventually, at the earnest request of the station-master, he pulled down the window and surveyed the cheering multitude coldly through his eyeglass, lifted up his hand for silence, and then said, "You're a bloody fine lot of Republicans!"

After five minutes' acute discomfort the train fortunately started, and to the accompaniment of working-class slogans steamed slowly out of the station. I had commenced the journey to Meerut.

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At about noon the next day we arrived at Delhi, where we had to change. From the train it looked like a vast Moham-medan tomb, which of course it is. The capital of the Indian Empire is a necropolis. The city died with the Moghuls, and is maintained chiefly as a historical monument. It contains many buildings wonderful in their beauty, several narrow and dirty bazaars and a special collection of bad smells. Nearly all the graceful palaces and tombs were erected by the

cultured, splendid, but politically incompetent Emperor Shah Jahan, the creator of the Taj Mahal, at Agra, whose white beauty stands as a perpetual reproach to European barbarism. Shah Jahan could have employed with justification the boast of Shelley's Ozymandias.

I had not, however, come to Delhi to admire the buildings of Shah Jahan. I had almost forgotten that I was a dangerous conspirator on the way to jail. It was not long before I was reminded of the realities. After a wait of about two hours we entered the train for Meerut, and left the dead culture of Delhi for the wilderness. The landscape was totally different from that of Bombay or Madras, where there is always plenty of vegetation. Here, on the contrary, there were few trees, and the earth was bald and yellow, dotted here and there with cactus bushes. Crows were plentiful, and large white kites swooped after their prey. We seemed to be heading straight for the jungle. After a journey of two hours we arrived at a station labelled "Meerut City." We had arrived at last at the scene of the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny, and of the trial of the Meerut conspiracy case.

Judging by newspaper reports we were expecting to be met on our arrival by at least a platoon of infantry. The station, however, was deserted. After a conference it was decided that I should be deposited at the local lock-up, and after inquiring our way we entered a *tonga*. The *tonga* is the taxi of the provincial towns of Northern India; it consists of a padded box on two wheels pulled by a small and half-starved horse. There was just room in it for the two sergeants, myself and my suitcase, the driver having perched himself on the shafts. We set off in good style under the broiling sun, rumbling through the dirty narrow bazaars, until we came to the city lock-up. Mounted policemen were exercising their horses in the courtyard; for the next day was the Mohammedan festival of Mohurram, and rioting was expected. After a search we discovered an old man seated at a table, placidly sipping rose-

water out of an earthenware pot: he was the jailer. He was very polite, invited us to sit down, and sent for a further supply of rose-water and three more pots. He was evidently glad to have somebody to talk to, and he soon inveigled me into a political discussion. At the end of twenty minutes my escort showed signs of restlessness, and asked him whether they could now be off. He looked at them with surprise, and told them that if they wanted to go they would have to take me with them, for he had no orders to receive me.

We climbed back into the *tonga*, the two sergeants swearing hard. They were anxious to leave that evening for Nagpur, a proceeding which conferred on them some obscure financial benefit. Accordingly they spoke feelingly about the mental attributes of the city jailer, and then we proceeded to the bungalow of the district superintendent of police for advice. It took us half an hour to reach the bungalow, only to be informed that the superintendent could do nothing except advise us to go to the district magistrate. With more curses we climbed back in the *tonga*, and after some time reached the bungalow of the district magistrate. Here we were informed that that official was in bed asleep, having not yet recovered from his usual Sunday siesta. After a lot of argument the sergeants, by this time nearly desperate, persuaded the butler to take the great man a note. And a few minutes later the reply was brought that the district magistrate did not work on Sundays. The next five minutes were devoted to an orgy of bad language, at the end of which one of the sergeants wrote another note which the butler, by dint of menaces, was induced to take to his master. This time they obtained more satisfaction: the note was returned bearing the inscription in blue pencil, "Remanded until June 24th." The signature was illegible.

Once more we entered the *tonga*, and instructed the beaming driver to drive to the district jail. After riding for about twenty minutes we saw a long mud-coloured wall. It was our destination.

We stopped outside a huge gate, and my escort entered into negotiations with the gate-keeper for our admittance. During the negotiations I watched the convicts who were coming to and fro through the wicket-gate of a huge studded wooden door about sixty yards inside from the gate. They were a woebegone crowd, dressed for the most part in a rough cotton shirt and shorts ornamented with blue or red stripes. One or two of them were dressed differently in a red pill-box hat, trousers too short for them, and yellow jackets of the same coarse cotton. All, with the exception of the latter who wore slippers, were barefooted. A few carried fetters and made a noise like Marley's ghost as they dragged themselves and their burden over the stone floors. My observation was cut short by the arrival of a plump Hindu in European clothes; he screamed at the gate-keeper, who opened the gate and allowed us to enter. As I entered I thought of the inscription over the gates of Hell: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here."

We were ushered into a small room and asked to take a seat. "The Jailer Sahib" we were informed would attend to us presently. I took the opportunity to smoke another cigarette. After about five minutes "the Jailer Sahib" arrived; he looked as if he had walked straight from the pages of the *Arabian Nights*, a reincarnation of Hassan. He was a little round tub of a man, with a fat good-humoured face, clad in baggy white pyjamas and something that was not quite a frock coat. Perched at a jaunty angle on his head he wore an aggressive fez. He sat down at his table, and gave me a beaming welcome to his domain, assuring me that I should be quite comfortable during my stay. In the meantime there were one or two formalities to be attended to, and then he would show me personally to the barrack, where the other thirty-one conspirators were. Would I mind if someone examined my suitcase? While his deputies were engaged in this task, he signed a receipt acknowledging the due delivery of my person, and gave it to my escort, who, after an exchange of greetings and good wishes, then took their departure.

Would I mind having my finger-prints taken? Without giving me time to reply my hand was seized suddenly, my thumb and fingers covered with a revolting black liquid and pressed on the open page of a book. The jailer then struggled to his feet, adjusted his fez to the right angle, gripped a staff taller than himself, and with the air of a Grand Vizier announced that he would now guide me into the interior.

After ducking through the wicket-gate we came on to an open space, dotted here and there with buildings. The jailer pointed out one of these buildings as the condemned block. In this block there were twelve cells, of which eight were occupied by men awaiting execution. The jailer took pride in relating that one of these men was once a prosperous local doctor, with a European degree, who had had the bad taste to dissect his wife, afterwards sending the bits in a trunk to a friend of his in a neighbouring town. Thanks to the heat and the consequent rapid decomposition, the trunk never arrived at its destination but was stopped and examined en route, and the doctor was now awaiting the time when he would rejoin the bits in the next world. The doctor was looked upon by the jailer as a valuable acquisition which gave his jail prestige.

By this time we had arrived at our destination. A warder opened a gate and I found myself in a courtyard in the middle of which stood a fairly large building. Clustered at the gate of this building were my fellow-conspirators. I received from them an enthusiastic welcome.

Besides myself there were two other Europeans in the barrack: Philip Spratt, a young Cambridge graduate, and B. F. Bradley, an engineer and a member of the A.E.U. whom I had already met before. I was introduced to many I had never met before, including D. R. Thengdi, an old man of sixty-five and a former president of the All-India Trades Union Congress; Mr. Kishore Lal Ghosh, a lawyer and journalist from Calcutta; V. S. Mukerjee, a homoeopathic doctor of Gorakhpur, who cultivated a beard in the style of

Lenin and a paunch like Falstaff's; Sohan Singh Josh, a gigantic Sikh from Amritsar, the ferocity of whose exterior belied his mild disposition; and Kedar Nath Sehgal, a middle-aged politician from Lahore, who had spent most of his life in prison, and who wore black habitually as a sign of mourning for his country's slavery. The others were mostly trade unionists or members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, the majority of whom I had never previously met. It was an international gathering of Hindus, Mohammedans and Europeans. The Sikhs were in a minority of one, and there was one Parsee, S. H. Jhabvalla, who was fond of describing himself as "the father of fifty trade unions." Mr. Jhabvalla's appearance was carefully eccentric: he was extremely thin and invariably dressed in a white frock coat and tight white trousers; his lanky grey hair reached to his shoulders and he decorated the tip of his nose with silver-mounted spectacles. He was accustomed to say that his sole object in life was to acquire the "true Christ-like spirit," and besides being an active trade unionist he was also a poetaster.

The welcome and the introductions over, I had an opportunity of examining my new surroundings. I found myself in a large-sized building, supported by numerous arches which formed a cloister on each side of the building. At each end were two large iron gates, and there was a glassless window behind nearly every arch. The walls and the floor were thickly coated with a mixture of mud and cow-dung, the plaster of the East. There was no ceiling to the roof, which formed an apex of broken and loose tiles, and served as a residential hotel for birds and bats. Flies were present in millions, and as I walked along the floor they rose on each side like black waves. Round the barrack ran a large open drain connected with the drains of every barrack in the jail.

After my survey I thought of the Persian inscription on the marble wall of the palace of Shah Jahan in Delhi: "If there is a Paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this."



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Meerut Conspiracy Case*

LONG imprisonment can be made tolerable only by one of two expedients: philosophy or the use of smuggled narcotics. In Indian jails narcotics are plentiful, and many of the convicts, who have concealed money, are able to forget grim realities with the help of opium, *charas* or *bhang*. The two latter are products of hemp; *charas* usually being inhaled with tobacco smoke, and *bhang* either drunk with milk or water or swallowed in the form of a solid ball.

Smuggling illicit articles into Indian jails is carried on with astounding facility; the whole jail system is undermined by it. The first thing to be smuggled, of course, is money, which is done either during interviews with relatives or friends, or by the good offices of the warders, who supplement their meagre pay by acting as intermediaries between the prisoner and his friends outside, on the generous commission of six annas to the rupee. Money having been obtained, the convict can buy drugs, tobacco, liquor, and the service of catamites. His greatest difficulty is to conceal the money from his fellow-prisoners; for were he robbed he could obviously not complain. He invents therefore many devices for hiding his treasure, the most common and remarkable being that of the throat pocket. Incredible as it may seem, he hollows out with weights a pocket on the inside of his throat, in which he keeps his precious rupees, coughing them up when required. He apparently suffers no discomfort except a slight wheeze, especially when laughing, and as the Indian jail system does not encourage laughter, he very rarely betrays himself. Besides smuggling the luxuries which make hell endurable, the convict with money can also employ another convict to do his daily task, and purchase immunity from the usual brutality of the warders.

Graft and corruption flourish in Indian jails; but although indefensible from the ethical standpoint, graft, since it enables the convict to snatch a few crumbs of comfort to help his progress through an arid wilderness of cruelty and misery, serves a reasonably good purpose. And the convict has need of all the crumbs he can gather.

He arises at five in the morning, and is given a handful of dried peas for his breakfast. Then, after a short time allowed for the latrine parade and for bathing, he begins work. At eleven o'clock he has "lunch," consisting of boiled cabbage or vegetable stalks, served with *chapathis* (bread), which are made out of a mixture of flour, sand and dirt, and are unfit for human consumption. After lunch, work continues until four, when an hour is given for bathing and exercise, and then the prisoners are locked up in their association barracks for the night. The evening meal is served before they are locked up, and consists of boiled vegetables and bread. Only a little over an anna is allowed per head for food—about 1½d.

The daily task allotted to each prisoner is usually extremely hard. Rope-making, weaving, office-work, cleaning grain are considered in the category of light labour; hard labour includes quarrying, raising water, carrying loads, pressing oil, grinding corn, and pounding grain. To work at the oil mill and the grind mill is a punishment in itself: the prisoner takes the place of the bullock and turns a huge millstone pressing pounds of oil, or grinding large quantities of corn. At this work the prisoners are often beaten by convict-overseers—usually the worst characters in the jail, promoted to supervise their fellow-convicts after having qualified as stool-pigeons—exactly as if they were beasts of burden. For short work and for trifling acts of insubordination, ingenious punishments are devised. These start very reasonably with forfeiture of remissions and privileges, and the compulsory wearing of sackcloth; for more refractory prisoners other measures are prescribed, including standing handcuffs, bar fetters, solitary

confinement, and finally flogging. Standing handcuffs is a punishment whereby the prisoner is handcuffed, standing on tiptoe, to a tree for hours at a time; and bar fetters, link fetters, and cross bar fetters are devised to give the wearer the maximum amount of discomfort day and night. Beating of prisoners is prohibited except when ordered by the superintendent; but this rule is observed only in the breach. The warders and even the convict-overseers entertain themselves through the long hours by striking and torturing prisoners, and the jailer often holds what is known in the jails as a blanket parade: the prisoner against whom the jailer has a grievance is placed flat on the ground and covered with blankets; he is then beaten through the blankets with bamboo rods wielded by the jailer's trustworthy minions, so that although he receives all the pain of the beating, he has no wounds to show the superintendent to justify his complaint. And indeed it is not wise to complain; for complaints do not lead to rectification of evils, but to further punishment and torture.

Even when the prisoner is shut up for the night he receives no peace. In every barrack there is a night-watchman, whose duty throughout the night is to tap and count the prisoners every fifteen minutes. He then communicates his total to the convict overseer outside, who in his turn goes to the gate of the enclosure and sings out at the top of his voice a serenade to some unspecified "sahib," informing him that the prisoners are secure, and that the locks, bars and bolts are in good order. This performance taking place in every barrack of the jail makes the night hideous with human catawauling. Living in such conditions, quite as bad as those of the Roman *ergastula*, it is not surprising that the prisoner seeks to forget his misery by means of a little yellow or green pill.

My own condition in prison was not by any means as bad as those described above. We, the alleged conspirators, were not condemned to so rigorous a regime; but even if we had had all the luxuries and comforts to satisfy a wealthy

epicure, imprisonment would still have been a gnawing evil. No luxury or comfort, and we did not have much of either, can reconcile a prisoner to the loss of his liberty. The sense of confinement tears down man's defences, and affects both his nerves and his body. The monotony alone has a devastating effect. "This alone kills many a man," observes Robert Burton, "that they are tied to the same still, as a horse in a mill, a dog in a wheel, they run round, without alteration or news, their life groweth odious, the world loathsome, and that which crosseth their furious delights, what? still the same?" There could be no better description of the mental reactions to the endless monotony of the prison regime. To counteract this weariness of the spirit one of the two expedients is necessary.

Always willing to experiment I first tried the drug. Shortly after my arrival I was writhing on my bed one afternoon in the agonies of toothache. One of the prisoners took pity on me, and offered me a round green ball about the size of a marble, which, he explained, if swallowed, would put an immediate end to the pain. It was *bhāng*. I took the ball and with difficulty swallowed it. Part of it stuck in my throat and the taste was "bitterer than bitter hellebore." For a time my throat burned, and then it passed off without any further effect. About an hour later I had my usual evening bath, and afterwards I was suddenly seized with an insane desire to laugh, at anything, at everything, at nothing. My eyes felt as though they were bursting from their sockets, and I could not bear the light. My laughter was without mirth; feeling gloomy and having no desire to laugh yet I was unable to refrain. Those who in the ancient world were forced to eat Sardinian celery of which men died with the *risus sardonicus* must have felt as grimly jocular as I after my ball of *bhāng*. My eyes ached, my head was heavy, my heart pounded, and my tooth tortured me with redoubled fury: I lay on my bed and giggled miserably to myself.

My first experiment with *bhang* was my last. I swore never to touch the disgusting stuff again; but I do not regret the experiment; for, although on a later occasion I once inhaled *charas* through a cigarette with the same melancholy results, my unpleasant experience has cured me of any desire to experiment further in narcotics. After the failure of the first expedient I had no alternative but to fall back on the second. I therefore sought solace among the philosophers.

✓ I have read somewhere of a stoic, who, when cast into prison, passed the time enjoyably in calculating the amount of money he was saving. I am inclined to believe that this man must have been cast into prison after the siege of Jerusalem. I could not, however, emulate his example because I had no money inside or outside to save. But poverty itself, I reflected, contains the germs of consolation. I remembered the words of Socrates, at the banquet reported by Xenophon, approving Charmides who had declared that he valued himself most on his poverty: "Very well; you have made an excellent choice: it is indeed in itself of an admirable nature; nobody will be your rival; you may preserve it with care, and even negligence is its security. These are not small reasons, you see." The thought has been a favourite one among the philosophers, from Horace to Thomas de Quincey, although its value lies more in theory than in practice. I, however, found some consolation in it; for who could be poorer than a prisoner? Before I was arrested I had nothing to lose but my liberty, and robbed of that I could be robbed of nothing else. I had no longer anything to fear; having fallen on the ground I could fall no further. I had not even a reputation to lose; for, although a good reputation is as brittle as glass, a bad one clings more than the limpet. Having nothing to lose I could regard the future with equanimity; and having experienced the worst I could look forward to better things. I found comfort in the Law of Averages, and consolation in the philosophy of Heraclitus. Everything, I reflected, is in a

constant state of change; nature has no place for the static; and thus employing dialectics subjectively I was led into the error of expecting that a change for the worse would be immediately followed by a change for the better. But as time went on, my faith wavered; it seemed to me that the Law of Change was working in reverse; from bad it changed to worse, and from worse to worst. And this was the harder to bear because of the long intervals between the changes; when even a change for the worse is better than the endless monotony of the bad. My error soon became clear; in my attempt to reconcile dialectics with subjective hopes, I was confusing it with the superstition of luck, which reduced my philosophy to the same level as that of Mr. Micawber; like that unfortunate opportunist I was waiting for something to turn up.

But my philosophy, poor as it was, was at least better than opium.



Those in high places who conceived and engineered the prosecution at Meerut have no reason to congratulate themselves. And I make this comment with complete impartiality. From the Government side the whole business was bungled from beginning to end. The officials responsible evidently adopted as their motto the creed of Tennyson's Life Brigade, with particular emphasis on the line "Theirs not to reason why." Indeed reason played a very small part in the drama enacted at Meerut. It was conceived in fear and hatred, and its parents substituted neurotics for reason. It was a product of the Government of India's chronic anti-Bolshevik neurasthenia; for the giants of Simla find it quite impossible to remain cool and collected in face of what they consider a communist menace, by which they mean any serious attempt by the Indian working class to organize itself for its legitimate political and economic struggle. There was a note of hysteria

in the Meerut case from the opening address of the prosecuting counsel to the judgment at the end of the Sessions Trial.

The trial at Meerut was only the latest of a series of communist conspiracy trials, starting as far back as the Russian Revolution. Russia has always been regarded as Britain's traditional enemy in India, from the time of the Napoleonic Wars, when Napoleon conspired with the Emperor Alexander to send a joint expeditionary force into India. Some time later the Russian emperor actually did send an expedition into India, which lost itself in the Pamirs and met with catastrophe. Because of these czarist ambitions British foreign policy throughout the nineteenth century was one of undisguised hostility towards Russia, and this policy survived almost until the outbreak of the War. With the Russian Revolution, the hostility was placed on a new basis. The great danger was no longer that of a Russian military expedition through Afghanistan, but of the invasion of ideas, which cannot be opposed by fortifications and armed strength. Revolutionary ideas, penetrating through the frontiers and the ports, constituted a far greater menace to British rule in India than the imperialist aspirations of the Czar had ever done. And these ideas did not fall on stony ground.

During the War India had remained comparatively loyal and tranquil, except for the growth of the terrorist movement in the Punjab and Bengal, owing to the bribery of the Indian middle class with promises which were afterwards not fulfilled. The Indian middle class on the whole supported imperialism during the War, its representative, Mr. Gandhi, actually taking upon himself the role of recruiting officer. The dislocation of British industry, owing to the War, provided the Indian middle class with its opportunity for the development of its own native industry: a development which had been consistently opposed and obstructed by imperialism, anxious to preserve India as a British monopoly. This attempt at native industrialization was tolerated by imperialism which,

in the hour of its need, made lavish promises of further industrial concessions to the Indian middle class after the War. In return the Indian middle class popularized the War, discouraged seditious and popular movements, and agreed without protest to the contribution of troops and money to the cause of the Allies.

The conduct of the British Government after the War, however, soon shattered the hopes of the Indian middle class; the latter realized that imperialism had not the slightest intention of keeping its wartime promises, and that on the contrary it had returned to the former policy of using the weapon of economic and political control to prevent the growth of native industry. At the same time, the world economic crisis and the slump in agricultural prices had led to great economic distress and discontent among the peasantry; the impoverished lower middle class was turning to terrorism and extreme nationalism; and the young industrial working class was forming itself into trade unions, declaring strikes and beginning to think politically. India was ripe for a revolutionary movement. In the years following the War there had taken place what is popularly known as the Awakening of the East; the colonial and semi-colonial peoples, hitherto so docile and long-suffering, had become restive and discontented. China had led the way by declaring war on imperialism, and the tide of revolt had spread rapidly from China to India, Egypt, Arabia and Java: the whole of Asia was seething with revolt.

The Revolution in Russia had played no small part in this awakening. The abolition of feudalism and the establishment of autonomous Soviet republics in what had been Russian Turkestan, and the anti-imperialist doctrines of communism gave rise to general interest and sympathy in India, particularly among the students and the lower middle class generally. Actual contact with Russia was established by the Hijrat movement, in which many young Mohammedans, stating that



they refused to stay in India under a Government which was oppressing their co-religionists in Turkey, marched through Afghanistan into Turkestan. Some of these young fanatics fell by the wayside, others joined forces with the Muslim mullahs and chieftains against the Soviet forces, while a few, interested in the improvements they saw, supported the Soviets and were afterwards sent to study at the universities at Tashkent and Moscow. Some of these young men returning later to their homes from Russia through Afghanistan were arrested at the Indian frontier, thrown into prison and charged with "conspiring to overthrow the King-Emperor." This case was followed by several others, in which the sole evidence to support a conviction on such a serious charge was that the accused had been to Russia. It was not, however, until 1924 that one of these cases aroused national attention. In this year five persons were arrested and charged with conspiracy against the King at Cawnpore, where after a trial lasting several months one apologized and was acquitted, and the other four were sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment. The sole evidence against these men was that they were interested in the theories of socialism and communism. The only result the Government achieved by this prosecution was an intensification of the public interest in communism; and when the convicts were released after serving their sentences they were received with acclamation by the public as national martyrs. But the realization that its prosecution of ideas had only resulted in propaganda for those ideas in no way deterred the Government from contemplating further follies inspired by its anti-communist mania. Events were soon to provide the Government with an opportunity to excel itself in foolish repression.

In 1928 a great wave of working-class unrest rolled over the country. This unrest expressed itself in organization and militancy. The working class rejected the tepid and unenterprising leadership of the moderate labour leaders and the

unemployed lawyers who honoured the movement with their patronage, and resolved, in co-operation with the radical Workers' and Peasants' Party, to fight its own battles against its class enemy under a working-class leadership. The slogan *Lal bauta ki jai* (Long live the Red Flag) replaced that of *Bande Mataram* (Hail Motherland) so dear to Indian middle-class hearts. The slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!" was shouted in Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and Tamil, and the Red Flag took the place of the nationalist tricolour; international revolutionary songs were translated into the vernacular, and the workers composed some of their own in which references to "fat capitalists" and "the workers' blood" predominated. The wave of unrest spread from the cotton workers at Bombay to the jute workers in Bengal, and to the railwaymen of the various big lines. Large-scale strikes took place, paralysing for months at a time the jute and cotton industries. Indian capitalism became panic-stricken and petitioned the Government, for action against the trade unions. The Government, equally panic-stricken at the rapid spread of revolutionary thought and expression, prepared to strike.

At the end of 1928 it introduced into the Legislative Assembly a Trades Disputes Bill which was passed into an Act in 1929. The provisions of the Act were a direct attack on working-class organization. The Act is divided into three parts: the first provides for the appointment of compulsory Courts of Inquiry and Conciliation Boards for the settlement of industrial disputes; the second makes it illegal to withdraw labour from the public utility services, such as the Railways, Postal Service, Water and Light Supply and Public Conservancy, unless each individual going on strike gives one month's notice in writing to the Administration; and the third part declares illegal strikes which have any object other than or in addition to the furtherance of a trade dispute within the trade or industry in question, or those strikes

which inflict hardship upon the community, or are intended in the opinion of the Government to coerce the Government. The Act also prohibits sympathetic strikes and the workers of one industry supplying funds to strikers in another.

The introduction of the Trades Disputes Bill into the Legislative Assembly met with the opposition not only of the Left but of the Right in the labour movement. The Government labour nominee, Mr. N. M. Joshi, the most moderate of trade unionists, announced his opposition to it in the following terms: .

“ . . . The second part of the Bill which deals with strikes and lock-outs in the public utility services is the most controversial as well as objectionable. . . . I want to emphasize that the Government of India is attempting to pass legislation which is more drastic than the old British legislation of 1875. . . . Even eminent judges in England have admitted that although the law regarding the relation between master and servants provides for penalties for master as well as servant, the law has hardly been used against masters. Moreover, in a state of society where capitalists dominate the Government, the law is bound to be used against workers. . . . I shall have to oppose the whole Bill.”

In his statement Mr. Joshi was only expressing moderately what the whole of the working-class movement was thinking angrily.

Not content with the Trades Disputes Bill the Government introduced the Public Safety Bill, of which the provisions have already been described. It was first introduced into the Legislative Assembly in September, 1928; but it was defeated by a concerted effort of the nationalist groups, who were not only influenced by popular pressure, but were also opposed on principle to conceding drastic powers to the Government for the repression of anti-Government political movements,

fearing that the Government was quite capable of using those powers against their own organizations. The speeches of Pandit Motilal Nehru and other leaders of the Swaraj Party combined vehement denunciations of communism with polemics against the autocracy of the Government and pleas for the constitutional rights of the subject. The Government was defeated by the casting vote of the President of the Assembly, Mr. Vitalbhai Patel, owing to the negligence of a member of the European group who arrived too late to vote; and the Public Safety Bill acquired even greater importance as the subject of a nationalist victory over the Government. The latter announced its intention of re-introducing the Bill at the next session, and both sides settled down to a campaign of propaganda for and against. The "Communist Menace" became the obsession of the pro-Government Press; a menace of which the existence was vigorously denied by the nationalist organs. Interest in the Public Safety Bill, which was rightly regarded as another attempt at draconian legislation, mounted high with the approach of the next session of the Legislative Assembly; and protest meetings against the Bill were held in every political centre throughout the country.

The Bill was set down for discussion in the Assembly on March 21, 1929: on March 20th the Government struck, and labour leaders in nearly every province were arrested as communists, charged with conspiracy against the State, and thrown into prison at Meerut in the United Provinces. The Government had crossed the Rubicon into a settled policy of repression: the Meerut conspiracy case was the first shot in a campaign of intimidation.

It seems more than coincidence that the Government launched the prosecution, in what became known as the Meerut conspiracy case, on the eve not only of the findings of the Fawcett Mill Strike Inquiry Committee, but also of the second debate on the Public Safety Bill in the Legislative Assembly. It is not always possible to penetrate into the dark

recesses of the mind of the Government of India: it works in a mysterious way, its wonders to perform. But the reasons of the Government in launching the prosecution at Meerut are not far to seek. Apart from its general fear of communism and its determination to check its growth, there were also particular reasons of policy which inspired its decision. In the first place, it was necessary to smash the revolutionary organizations of the working class, which in Bombay were openly preparing to strike should the findings of the Fawcett Committee be unfavourable. It is to be presumed that the Government was aware of the findings before they were actually published, and, realizing that another big strike in Bombay was inevitable, decided to behead the movement by arresting the leadership. The prosecution was to be conducted with the utmost severity and publicity, in the hope of intimidating the working class and frightening it away from revolutionary leadership; and to drive the lesson home, two actual cotton workers were included in the charge. In the second place, it was intended to bring home to the nationalists, who had consistently obstructed the passage of the Public Safety Bill, that the communist movement was directed as much against their interests as against those of imperialism; and it was also hoped that the Legislative Assembly would be intimidated by this action into passing the Public Safety Bill. In the third place, it was intended to deter European communists from giving any help to the revolutionary movement in India. Finally, it was intended to obtain a legal finding which would justify the outlawry of communist organizations or of working-class political parties. A legal finding was required by which a person would be guilty of conspiracy against the State by membership alone of one of these organizations.

These were the Government's aims in launching the Meerut conspiracy case. They were not entirely successful. It was far more expensive than the Government had foreseen;

it has been estimated that the prosecution cost at least £160,000, although the probabilities are that the sum total was much higher. The arrest of Englishmen with Indians on the same charge not only attracted the critical attention of the world, but was also an object lesson in international working-class solidarity. What had been intended as propaganda against communism had turned into propaganda for communism. The inordinate length of the case, which lasted four and a half years from the arrests to the final judgment and appeal, and the confinement of most of the prisoners in jail for the whole of that period, as well as the denial of trial by jury, drew protests from nearly every quarter, including indignant statements from such international celebrities as the Archbishop of York, Mr. H. G. Wells, Professor Einstein, Romain Rolland, Professor Laski and Mr. R. H. Tawney. President Roosevelt himself is reported to have interested himself in the case, although this, in view of the notorious prosecution of innocent men in America, is an example of the pot calling the kettle black. In any case the Government of India, having reserved for itself the role of the saviour of India from the communist monster, rather unexpectedly found itself actually playing the part of the villain of the piece amid the hisses and boos of the audience. It was, however, too late to turn back, and the prosecution could not have been withdrawn without considerable detriment to Government prestige and the enhancement, in India at least, of that of the revolutionary movement. Men were kept in prison without having been convicted until it became a public scandal, lawyers waxed fat, the world changed, men died and were born, and the Meerut conspiracy case went on its futile way as if seeking to rival Tennyson's brook.

The highest note of drama, whether in life or on the stage, is the climax, and good dramatists accentuate it by the moderation of the beginning. For it has been observed that events which begin with a bang are apt to end in a whimper. The

Meerut conspiracy case had all the makings of a good drama; but the dramatists who constructed it wasted their material. The climax was lost in the high tension of the beginning; it began as sensational melodrama, and proceeded, with long, monotonous pauses while the curtain was down, until the actors were exhausted and the interest of the audience had waned. And although the climax was obscure, the interval between the climax and the end was so long that bathos was inevitable.

It was as though an attempt had been made to dramatize the Sahara.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *At the General's Bungalow*

ABOUT a week after my arrival at the district jail, Meerut, the Inquiry, which had been adjourned until my arrest was effected, recommenced. The Indian Criminal Procedure Code requires that before the actual trial of an offender, the case against him shall be fully inquired into by a magistrate. In order to inquire into the case against us, a special magistrate had been appointed by the Government, who had already opened his inquiry two days before I was arrested.

Accordingly, after we had breakfasted, we were all bundled into two police lorries, and, surrounded by armed policemen, were driven down at a reckless speed to the special court. This was held in the main room of a private bungalow, which had originally been named after General Gordon, but, owing to difficulties of pronunciation, was now widely known as "The Garden House." It was also known locally as the "General Sahib's Bungalow"; for previously to our arrival it had been inhabited by General Sir William Ironside, the officer commanding the division. There was a certain irony in the thought that we were to be tried in what had been the private residence of General Ironside, who had commanded the allied forces at Archangel, in the War of Intervention against Soviet Russia, on a charge of trying, according to the story of the prosecution, to replace the "Government of His Majesty by that of Mr. Stalin." The General must have had some satisfaction out of this arrangement, which he doubtless regarded as a minor compensation for his ill-fated Russian expedition.

When we arrived at the bungalow, we were ushered into the court-room, and induced to take our places in a dock, built to give the court a more convincing appearance. In the



centre of the room stood the magistrate's desk, perched precariously on an improvised dais, in front of which were the tables and chairs placed to support the weight and wisdom of the counsel for the prosecution and defence. In the other corner of the room a few benches were reserved for those members of the public who had been graciously permitted to attend the trial.

The inquiring magistrate was a long time in making his appearance, and I passed the time in speculating on what he would be like when he did materialize. Hitherto I had not had much to do with magistrates, judges or the Law, and they then possessed for me all the attraction and the uneasiness caused by the unknown. I had heard very little to the credit either of the Law or its administrators; for even in those days I had come to the conclusion that justice, far from being absolute and blind, was the instrument of the dominant class, for the suppression of those threatening its property or other interests. I remembered the only remedy against judicial oppression and injustice suggested by Anatole France to his character Crainquebille: "*Soyez le plus fort, Crainquebille.*"

I thought of a remarkable passage from Sheridan's speech against Warren Hastings, which seemed to apply very closely to our present position:

"'Talk not to us,' said the Governor-General, 'of their guilt or innocence, but as it suits the Company's credit. We will not try them by the Code of Justinian, nor the institutes of Timur. We will not judge them either by British Laws, or their local customs. No; we will try them by the Multiplication Table; we will find them guilty by the Rule of Three; and we will condemn them according to the unerring rules of—Cocker's Arithmetic.'"

I had a suspicion that we also would be tried by the Multiplication Table, rather than by the Code of Justinian or the

institutes of Timur; for had not our offence consisted in attacking property and financial interests?

It seems only natural that, having to administer a biased justice, judges should never have been popular. Non-political in theory, in practice they cannot be other than the instrument of political forces; and they have often been the victims and scapegoats of these same political forces to which they were faithful. The character of Jeffreys was well known to his masters, as is shown by the description of him by Charles II as "A man without learning, law or good manners, but with as much impudence as ten carted whores"; but the knowledge did not prevent Charles or his brother James from employing him as a subservient tool to effect their purposes. The responsibility for the Bloody Assize lies with James II; for Jeffreys was merely carrying out his royal master's instructions as a good and faithful servant. Jeffreys and James's other judges, instead of being praised for their fidelity, have been execrated for the crimes committed by their master; and after his flight they were left as scapegoats to allay the popular anger. Because of their fidelity to James, they were impeached in the Parliament of William and Mary, and Mr. Harbord, a good and faithful servant of the new regime, with regrettable lack of foresight, earned popular applause by his following contribution to the debate: ". . . As for the judges, it is said eleven consented. For present example confine them to a little Number. The head Justice was hanged at Tyburn in Richard II's time. I wonder not they are so ill men, for no others would serve them. I move that two of them may be hanged at Westminster Hall Gate." I fear that Mr. Harbord was no worse a servant and no better a man than Jeffreys.

With my mind running on Judge Jeffreys, I awaited the arrival of the inquiring magistrate with gloomy expectation. When he at last arrived I was rather disappointed to see a small, mild-looking man who looked at us quite amiably. But appearances, I reflected, are often deceptive: Jeffreys, too,

was a small, inoffensive man, and doubtless would have been quite amiable had he not been constantly intoxicated. But in comparing Mr. R. Milner-White to Judge Jeffreys I was doing him an injustice.

Mr. Milner-White as a servant of the Government had a job to do. Apart from that he was most reasonable and in minor ways helpful. His attitude seemed to be one of *laissez-faire*, on the understanding that he was allowed to accomplish his task fairly smoothly. He was a shrewd man, possessing both tact and humour; he was an exception to the general rule in that he did not have the soul of a bureaucrat, smoked incessantly while holding court, and was accompanied on the Bench by his wife. He was an adept at avoiding trouble, relying upon his tact and humour to get him out of any difficulty, whether big or small. In this connection I am reminded of the story of the white ants.

The property confiscated by the police during the house-searches on March 20th, was now kept in The Garden House under the control of the court. One of the accused, Mr. D. R. Thengdi, who was an old man and therefore sometimes inclined to be irascible, on looking through his part of the property, was horrified to discover that many of his books, pictures and papers had been attacked by white ants. White ants are one of the pests of the East, possessed of such voracious appetites that they will eat clothes, papers, books or anything which comes their way, and they naturally regarded the big dump of material deposited by the police in The Garden House, as manna from heaven. But Mr. Thengdi was justifiably annoyed, and delivered himself of an indignant speech about it in the court. The magistrate having asked him to send in a written application, Mr. Thengdi with burning pen composed his complaint: he started with a description of the ravages wrought on his property by the white ants, which he implied were employed for that purpose by the police, and concluded by demanding to know who

would be responsible should his property be destroyed, rounding off the question with a gigantic and aggressive question mark. Mr. Milner-White carefully read the application, and replied to it by drawing a line from Mr. Thengdi's question mark to the words "white ants" which he underlined. I am sorry to record that Mr. Thengdi failed to appreciate the point, and considered that he had had insult added to injury.

Although I have very little for which to thank Mr. Milner-White, I nevertheless liked him as an individual. He performed a disagreeable task as pleasantly as possible, and he was never petty nor indulged in the pin-pricks so dear to the heart of the vainglorious bureaucrat. Invariably courteous, he knew how to preserve his dignity by not insisting on it. In short he had qualities quite unusual in a good and faithful servant of the Government of India.



The proceedings opened with a lengthy address by the senior counsel for the prosecution, Mr. J. Langford James. Mr. James was a former president of the European Association of Calcutta, a body well known for its reactionary policy; and he was a crusader against communism. He was a tall, thin man, walking with a limp, having sparse sandy hair and sporting a monocle. It is impossible to describe his face. Clever, quick-witted, an able lawyer, he possessed a sardonic humour, a generous disposition and an inexhaustible fund of invective. He was the type of man who would dominate any environment in which he found himself, and who was capable of inspiring great affection in his intimates, and great hostility in his opponents. He had enthusiastically accepted the Government brief in the Meerut case, and thoroughly enjoyed attacking the monster of communism, revelling in the chance to introduce political oratory into a legal case. And I do not

suppose that he was indifferent to his remuneration of more than £100 a day, Sundays and holidays included. He was supported by the complainant, Mr. R. A. Horton, a deputy inspector-general of police, who represented in his portly person the majesty of the Government of India; by Mr. J. P. Mitter, a young Bengali of English education, who can only be described as Mr. Langford James's junior; and by Mr. Khairat Nabi, who, as broad as he was tall, barely concealed amid his many double chins a vast sense of his own importance. These, together with a few clerks and many policemen, completed the prosecution's line of battle.

In those early days the defence had also an imposing array, in the persons of about twelve lawyers of different ability and status. Most of them, as is usual with lawyers in India, were ardent nationalists, and they therefore brought a degree of sincerity into their attacks on the prosecution case.

But, generally speaking, sincerity is probably the least important of the qualities necessary in a successful pleader. It is indeed often a handicap; for it tends to conflict with the intellectual flexibility without which a lawyer can never rise in the profession. The forensic art consists in not convincing your hearers of the truth as you yourself understand it, but in forcing them to believe what you yourself have privately rejected as false. When in Court the lawyer's opinions must be those of his clients, and change in proportion to the number of his briefs. The Methodist must be prepared to argue in favour of atheism, the Roman Catholic in favour of birth control, the Jew in favour of the Teutonic Revival, and the Fascist in favour of democracy. It is probably for this reason that the lawyer is not as a rule held responsible legally, socially or politically for the opinions which he expresses in Court.

And, above all, he must never fall into the error of reason. Reason is at once suspect. It is the brand by which materialists and Marxists are known, and it strikes at the very roots of

the Family and the State. Foolish indeed is the advocate who seeks to appeal to the reason of judge or jury; he is appealing to a vacuum, and his case is already lost. Instead he must play on their emotions and skilfully invoke the social, political, and personal prejudices which influence all our actions. He must be prepared to state with St. Augustine: "I believe because it is absurd; I believe because it is impossible." And he will be applauded. He must drown all objections in a torrent of words, which need not necessarily have a meaning provided they sound well; he must be expert at reconciling the sublime and the ridiculous; and he must cultivate a Machiavellian cunning in throwing out hints and innuendos sufficient to blast the character of any witness, prisoner, or other person who is unfortunate enough to be in opposition to him.

By following these rules a lawyer can achieve an eloquence which no jury could withstand, although few ever succeed in reaching the heights attained by one of the persecutors of Dreyfus, who opened his denunciation in the following excellent style:

"When Iscariot had taken the thirty pence, the price of the Just One's blood, he went and hung himself in a field, his belly burst asunder, and his bowels gushed forth upon the ground.

It was the Imminent Justice of things which thus manifested itself."

In this way the scales are balanced.

The opening address of Mr. Langford James is unique in legal history. From the beginning to the end it was nothing but propaganda, pro-Government propaganda, anti-communist propaganda, anti-Russian propaganda. To Mr. Langford James the main criminals were the Russian Government and the Communist International. He denounced Marx, Lenin and Stalin with equal impartiality, and expressed

opinions upon the Russian Revolution which even Lord Rothermere would consider exaggerated. He excelled in lurid and gory descriptions of what had occurred in his own imagination, and some of his comments on the Revolution are worthy of quotation, if only as proof of the propaganda nature of his address: ". . . These (to me) fantastic theories of Marx were pushed to the logical conclusions with a ruthless brutality which must make everybody in the world shudder"; and ". . . Now of course we cannot come to that conclusion without thinking that this is the chimera for which some two and a half millions of men, women and children have been butchered by the O.G.P.U. at the dictation of these doctrinaire desperadoes"; these are two good examples of his legal style. He obviously enjoyed making his speech, and whenever he thought he had made a point, or had unravelled some dark plot hatched in Moscow, he would leer at us in the dock, regarding us as the nearest approach to his cherished "doctrinaire desperadoes." Although his speech was based on grotesque distortions as grim and absurd as the visions of a fascist nightmare, he spoke well and succeeded in being both interesting and amusing. He emphasized his points with gestures and grimaces, and took pleasure in distorting the ordinary pronunciations of such names as Stalin, Wili Muensenburg, Snooks and Snievlit in such a way as to suggest something either comic or sinister. He would have made an excellent nursery companion. His address lasted about a week, and during that time he was in turn amusing, indignant, sarcastic, facetious and malicious. Sometimes his malice was that of the street urchin. Whenever any noted nationalist leader visited the court, he would hunt through all the exhibited documents and collect every uncomplimentary reference we had previously made to that particular leader, which he would make a point of quoting in his speech. In this way he once embarrassed even the great Motilal Nehru, who, having come to help us in our defence, was not too well

pleased to hear a recapitulation of what we had once said about him. But there was method in his malice: it was intended as part of the scheme to force the nationalist leaders to dissociate themselves from communism and the working-class movement. And as the economic forces behind nationalism were essentially opposed to the development of an independent working-class political organization, the Government scheme worked to perfection. At the beginning of 1930, the nationalist Meerut Defence Committee of which Pandit Motilal Nehru and his son Jawaharlal were members was dissolved, and the prisoners were left to their own devices. Mr. Langford James lived just long enough to witness this consummation he had so devoutly wished.

When Mr. Langford James had concluded his address, the Court adjourned to enable the accused to move the High Court of Allahabad for a transfer of the case to another province. The defence contended that the venue of the trial at Meerut was both unjustified in law and unsuitable in practice. It was pointed out in the High Court that the majority of the accused had conducted their activities either at Bombay or at Calcutta, and had never visited Meerut; and that if the trial were to be held at Meerut, it would be almost impossible for the accused to obtain proper legal assistance, owing to the distance of Meerut from Bombay or Calcutta where the interests of the accused lay and where their friends resided. It was also pointed out that no lawyer of standing could leave his practice at Bombay or Calcutta to attend a lengthy trial, more than eight hundred miles away in the wilderness; nor could the friends and advisors of the accused afford the enormous railway fares necessary to keep in touch with them. These were the reasons advanced by Pundit Motilal Nehru and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru who moved the application for transfer; and their case was so reasonable that it seemed difficult to refute it. Mr. Langford James in reply, however, calmly appropriated the reasons offered in



support of the transfer application, as his own reasons why the application should not be granted. He pointed out, as he had often done previously, that Meerut was convenient to the Government because, being near Delhi, it was central. He had apparently forgotten the retort of one of the accused, Mr. M. G. Desai, who had once wanted to know why, if the only justification for holding the trial at Meerut was because it was central, the Government had not chosen the mathematical centre of India. Mr. Langford James airily dismissed all the other objections with a generous if somewhat inadequate offer to place his legal library at the disposal of the defence. Sir Edward Grimwood Mears thereupon dismissed the application, and threatened a journalist with contempt of court for publishing a few comments on his order. It then seemed that we were to be confined to Meerut for the term of our natural lives, eating the bread of pain and drinking the water of sadness.

The transfer application took about three weeks to decide, and then the inquiry was resumed just as though it had never been interrupted. Witnesses came, testified to the seizure of documents and to the identity of the accused, drew their expenses and returned to their homes. The exhibited documents were proved and printed; arguments took place daily on points of legal procedure; objections were raised and over-ruled; questions were asked and evaded; the magistrate covered sheet after sheet of foolscap in recording the evidence; complaints were made, recorded and forgotten; applications for bail were made and summarily rejected; the weather grew hotter and then gradually cooler; and one of the witnesses fell asleep in the witness-box: the Meerut conspiracy case was well under weigh. At the end of September, one of the defence counsel satirically remarked that the case of the prosecution was still "in the womb of darkness." "But it will be born in due course," retorted Mr. James grimly. Unfortunately when it was actually born, it

became clear that the mountain had once again given birth to a mouse.

The evidence tendered was neither exciting nor stimulating, nor were the witnesses themselves, with one or two exceptions, particularly interesting. One of them interested me personally; for he was no other than the aristocratic Hyderabadi who had been a member of my ill-fated study circle. He had been well tutored by the police, and he allowed his imagination to run riot. He told a hair-raising story of secret conspiratorial meetings in a lonely cottage at Khar, during which, at my instigation, violent revolution had been the sole topic of discussion. The circle had justified its name by studying *Leninism* by Stalin, and that this was not merely theoretical study was shown by the heading of one of the chapters which was "Tactics and Strategy." He made it clear that he had seen the evil of his ways, and had abandoned the study of progressive politics in order to prepare himself to enter the Indian Civil Service. By the time his dark story of conspiracy was finished he had well earned his thirty pieces of silver.

Another witness was also interesting and much more refreshing. This was the assistant commissioner of police at Pondicherry, the capital of French India. He was an Indian; but except for the colour of his skin he was as French as the Parisian. Short, fat, excitable, he was clad in an ornate but dirty white uniform of which, because of his girth, he was unable to fasten all the silver buttons. He only spoke French and Tamil, and as the Tamilian interpreter was temporarily absent from the court, I attempted to cross-examine him in French. He was, however, a difficult witness to cross-examine: his replies were made in the form of torrential and lengthy speeches, and soon my cross-examination degenerated into a heated political debate on the question of the right of asylum in France for political refugees. Like most Frenchmen when once wound up he was most difficult

to stop. Langford James objected in vain, the accused laughed, the magistrate shouted and banged his table, but nothing could stop that flood of Gallic invective; and his gesticulations were so far-flung and vehement that they led to the belief that he was contemplating assault and battery on the person of Mr. Khairat Nabi, who was nearest to him. He brought a touch of vaudeville to a case which was becoming dreary.

But he was only one out of three hundred prosecution witnesses; and the others were not amusing, including the several officers from New Scotland Yard sent out from England to prove the existence of persons who were not actually accused. For, after all, a Court, even in India, is not a place of entertainment.

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In spite of the tact of Mr. Milner-White, the inquiry did not run altogether smoothly. Clashes and incidents took place which were unavoidable. The first of these was caused by a sudden desire on the part of the police to search us when going to and coming from the Court. The search was a mere formality, but it was objected to by one of the prisoners, Mr. Dharamvir Singh, M.L.C., who adopted as his battle cry the Hindi equivalent of *Noli me tangere*, and announced that the police would have to be satisfied with his word that he was not carrying any contraband articles. The police, however, adopted the motto of Sebastian of Modena, *Quod tango, credo*, and the result was a deadlock. We naturally took the part of our fellow-accused, and declined to allow ourselves to be searched. To clinch the matter, we refused in a body to attend the Court until we had obtained satisfaction on this point. A day was wasted in fruitless negotiations, before a compromise was arrived at, that the search should consist only of a formal tap on the shoulder, which was also dispensed with after a few days.

Another incident occurred when a friend of ours from

Bombay, Mr. B. T. Ranadive, who had come to Meerut to help us with our defence, was arrested by the police on the order of the complainant, in the Court premises, on a charge of trespass. But the incidents were few and far between, and except for one event which will be related later, were only of a minor character.

When all the witnesses had been heard, the magistrate passed on to the examination of each individual accused. Most of us, foreseeing the magistrate's final decision, refused to make any statement at that stage; but one or two of the accused elected to explain away their conduct. Of these the most entertaining was Mr. S. H. Jhabvalla, the only representative of the Parsee community among the accused. Mr. Jhabvalla showed that he understood the value of dramatic effect: he entered the witness stand with his defence in one hand and a Bible in the other, because the magistrate being a European, he rightly supposed him to be a Christian, and therefore more likely to be favourably impressed by the Bible, than by the Koran, the Mahabharata or the teachings of Zoroaster. He cut a very eccentric figure as he stood there in his strange white outfit, lanky grey hair floating in the breeze from the fan, spectacles adjusted on the very point of his thin and elongated nose, the comic effect of the whole being emphasized by his air of moral indignation. And if his figure was comic his statement was more so. Declaring himself to be the father of fifty trade unions, which in itself was a striking example of the need for birth control, he proceeded to describe himself as a seeker after Truth, striving to acquire the "true Christ-like spirit." He declaimed his statement over a period of two or three days, during which he kept all present in a state of continuous hilarity. The evidence he explained away more amusingly than convincingly, and he concluded with a pious hope that the magistrate, whose "poor little fingers" he hoped were not tired, would be included in the New Year Birthday Honours. As it turned

out, however, the speech did not save Mr. Jhabvalla from being committed for trial; but this was sheer bad luck; he deserved a much better fate if only because he had made everybody concerned in this dreariest of all trials laugh; and the art of creating laughter should cover a multitude of sins.

At the conclusion of the examination of the witnesses, the prosecution was called on to sum up its case, and the Court looked forward to being further amused by Mr. Langford James. There was general disappointment when it was learned that Mr. James had been inconsiderate enough to take to his bed with acute phlebitis, and the case for the prosecution was therefore entrusted to his junior, who was neither very interesting nor effective, although there was no danger of the prosecution's arguments, however bad, affecting the decision of the magistrate. Mr. Mitter did his best to put forward a convincing case for the prosecution for the sake of appearances, although sometimes his arguments were more astounding than logical. He was never deterred by lack of evidence: in outlining the prosecution case against one of the Bengali accused, who had been misguided enough to grow a large and bandit-like moustache, Mr. Mitter finding that there was a dearth of evidence, directed the attention of the Court to the dock, saying: "Just look at the accused, Your Honour, just look at him." With all his forensic defects, Mr. Mitter possessed an admirable presence of mind which ought to carry him far in his profession.

When the case for the prosecution had finished, nothing could prevent the defence counsel from addressing impassioned speeches to the Court. From the large number of defending lawyers present at the opening of the inquiry, we were now reduced to five; but these made up in verbosity for all their absent colleagues. They contended, justifiably enough, that the prosecution had not made out a *prima facie* case against any of the accused, and exhorted the magistrate to release them forthwith, assuring him, on their own guaran-

tee that if he did so, his name would be "written in history in letters of gold." I had a feeling at the time that the magistrate had no intention of emulating Abou Ben Adhem; at least, had I been in his place, a hypothetical gold-lettering in the distant future would have held no attraction for me.

When counsel on both sides had had their say, the Court adjourned to enable the magistrate to celebrate Christmas and to put the final touches to his order. And here I must record a friendly act on the part of the local authorities. The commissioner of the division, and the district magistrate of Meerut, provided a special festive lunch for the three European accused, Bradley, Spratt and myself, at the Garden House on Christmas Day. Accordingly, on Christmas Day, the three of us were taken down under escort to the Garden House, which had been converted from a court into a dining-room. Here we were regaled all the afternoon at the expense of the opposite party, and we returned to the jail feeling that we had spent a very pleasant Christmas. Unfortunately the affair caused comment, and surprise was expressed in interested quarters that we, who professed to be anti-religious, should celebrate a religious festival. We were therefore at pains to explain that there was nothing religious in having a good meal after nine months of prison fare, and that we had accepted the invitation on purely material and sensuous grounds. But I do not think that the critics were quite convinced.

The next time we visited the Garden House was towards the end of January, to hear the magistrate's decision. This was a foregone conclusion, and there was therefore very little excitement. Mr. Dharamvir Singh, M.L.C., having given an undertaking and what amounted to an apology, was the only one to be acquitted, while the rest of us were committed for trial. Let justice be done though the heavens fall.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *On Starvation Diet*

“WHO has renounced appetites for the sake of approbation by men,” wrote Sa’di, “has fallen from licit into illicit appetites.” But although the works of Sa’di are well-known and often quoted by the Urdu-speaking population, his wisdom has evidently fallen on deaf ears; for nowhere more than in India has it been the custom to renounce licit appetites in the hope of securing the approbation of men. Ever since Gautama retired to the Himalayas in order to contemplate his navel, thus becoming one of the world’s major prophets, the renunciation of carnal appetites has been the *sine qua non* of piety and greatness. Nor has the twentieth century with its materialism made any appreciable change in this worship of the unnatural. To the Indian mind, the material is transient and of no permanent importance, whereas the spirit is eternal; the flesh is a snare and a pitfall, the lair of evil spirits, who must be chastened and subdued by denying them their fleshly subsistence. India is the last stronghold of faith and idealism against the iconoclastic and merciless onslaught of reason. And it is the natural paradise of the swarms of charlatans and religious mendicants, *swamis*, *sanyasis*, *faqirs*, *brahmacharis*, and the other branches of the parasitic tree, whose only claim to public tolerance and support is their vaunted but doubtful renunciation of worldly pleasures and carnal appetites. In India, as everywhere else, a saint is he who succeeds best in concealing his manifold vices under the cloak of spiritual asceticism; yet asceticism itself should be included among the greater vices, for at the best it is a perversion of nature, and is usually deceptive and socially parasitic.

Public approbation in India is most easily won by fasting;

but the fasting should, let it be well understood, be voluntary, for no sympathy is wasted on those, the majority of the population, who fast by necessity, their labour not providing them with sufficient to eat. The hungry peasant is merely atoning for some misdeeds committed during a previous existence; but the person who can obtain as much food as he requires and who deliberately does without it, is not only acquiring merit with the gods, but receives applause and sometimes veneration from the people. Reputations in India are won on an empty stomach.

Towards the end of September, 1929, our reputation, that is to say the reputation of the prisoners in the Meerut conspiracy case, soared high, for it was then that we declared a fast, although as a concession to Western materialism we called it a hunger-strike. And as there is no effect without a cause, it is necessary to explain the reasons why we thought it our duty to enter on a diet of starvation.

The economic discontent of the lower middle class has always expressed itself in anarchy. In Germany the anarchy takes the form of Naziism, which gave the lower middle class the opportunity to vent its discontent by smashing something; and in India the same anarchy takes the form of individual terrorism. During the years 1928 and 1929, the terrorist groups of the lower middle class received great impetus from the wave of economic and political unrest that swept the country, and from the general dissatisfaction with the policy of the leadership of the Indian National Congress. In December, 1928, a European police officer and a Sikh constable were shot dead in the streets of Lahore by several young men, in retaliation for the police assault on the late Lala Lajpat Rai, who was struck while leading a demonstration against the Simon Commission a few months previously. At the end of March of the next year, after the arrests in the Meerut conspiracy case had been effected, a bomb was thrown from the gallery of the Legislative Assembly



while that august body was discussing the fate of the Public Safety Bill. The two young men who threw the bomb, Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt, were arrested in the Assembly, subsequently tried and convicted for this offence, and then included with several others in another case at Lahore on a charge of conspiracy to murder, with particular reference to the assassination the previous December of the Lahore police officer. Some time later, Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt declared a hunger-strike against their treatment in prison, and their example was followed later by the rest of the prisoners in the Lahore conspiracy case, this time with the object of improving generally the condition of all political prisoners in Indian jails. In September, one of these prisoners, Jatindranath Das, died as a result of fasting.

The death of Jatindranath Das caused a tremendous outburst of public anger. Hartals were proclaimed throughout the country, huge crowds of mourners demonstrated in every town, hysterical speeches were made, Jatindranath Das became a popular martyr, Bhagat Singh and his co-accused were acclaimed as heroes, and the cult of terrorism, based on the traditional semi-religious spirit of self-sacrifice, grew by leaps and bounds. That these tragic events and the surging popular emotion should have their reaction amongst us in Meerut Jail, was inevitable. We were faced with the prospect of losing public sympathy by not taking any action; as it was the Meerut conspiracy case had almost been forgotten in the emotional upheaval caused by the Lahore hunger-strike; and our only strength and protection lay in the support of the public. We therefore decided that we too would go on hunger-strike.

The Lahore prisoners had announced as their objective the improvement of the conditions of political prisoners: we went one better and demanded from the Government of India a complete reform of the Indian prison system. We might as well have asked for the abdication of the Government of

India. Having come to our decision, we addressed a long and weighty memorandum to the Governor-General-in-Council, in which the iniquities of the jail system were defined, and our demands stated in numerical order. We further announced that until our demands were met we should do without our food. As I appended my signature to this document, I remembered that I used to laugh at the story of Don Quixote charging the sails of the windmill.

With the dispatch of our memorandum to the Government, the die was cast and we were now committed to a regimen of starvation until we had a satisfactory reply. It was a gloomy outlook. I was unable to make the most of my last meal through speculating on when I should have another. It was the evening meal, and if there had been present a Christ and a Judas, it would have been a good imitation of the Last Supper. I was told, by way of encouragement, that I should only suffer from hunger for the first two or three days, and then, as I grew weaker, my outlook would become more and more ethereal, until finally I should fade entirely away in a state of blissful content. I was not enthralled by the prospect.

The realities of the hunger-strike were brought home to me early the next morning when I arose, by finding that I was to breakfast only on air. After this unsubstantial meal we proceeded to the Court, where we sat all day getting hungrier and hungrier. By the time we returned to the jail in the evening, the ardour even of the most enthusiastic was considerably cooled. We then sat in a dismal circle in the barrack compound, thinking of our favourite dishes; I nearly drove myself to the verge of desperation by encouraging visions of prawn curry, while others expressed preferences for mutton, roast chicken and vegetable curries. We fed on our imaginations like the camel feeds on his hump. To make matters worse the prison authorities had instructed the cooks to prepare our food as usual and to deal it out to each of us on a tin plate. This food which we should ordinarily have

regarded as unpalatable now seemed to us fit for a patrician banquet; and the smell of it caused our nostrils to quiver and our mouths to water. But I am thankful to say that we all successfully resisted temptation.

The next morning we were visited by the secretary of our Defence Committee, an insurance broker of Delhi, by the name of Lala Girdarilal. While we were behaving quite normally, Mr. Girdarilal had not been particularly interested in us, and had spent his time basking in the reflected glory of the Lahore prisoners. But as soon as he heard the news that we were also on hunger-strike, he rushed off post-haste to Meerut in order to be in at the death.

He was one of those persons who like to be martyrs by proxy; he felt exalted at the spectacle of others suffering "for the Motherland." Freedom and victory could only be obtained by heroism and suffering, and as he himself was too busy attending to his affairs he was unable to do much himself, and so he found satisfaction in being both a martyr and a hero vicariously. To me he seemed, as I saw him sitting complacently in the jailer's office, obviously having just enjoyed a good breakfast, rather like a ghoul; but then hunger was giving me a jaundiced outlook. And the advice he gave us merely added to my irritation. He first of all surveyed us with melancholy satisfaction, rather like a mourner at an old-fashioned funeral, struggling to maintain a fitting sadness while looking forward to the funeral tea. He then proceeded to exhort us to be strong and to be prepared to make "the ultimate sacrifice"; by which he meant that he would be grievously disappointed if we did not starve ourselves to death. As far as I was concerned I was resolved that he should be disappointed. After he had repeated this advice a few times, he took himself off in order to send a statement to the Press, in which he foretold our eventual demise and announced that our souls were already "soaring high." His departure was not regretted.

On the third day of our fast I was hungrier than ever, in spite of the assurance I had previously received that after the first two or three days I should no longer feel a craving for food. On the contrary, I became obsessed with the idea of food. To distract my mind I tried to read; but every book I picked up seemed to specialize in descriptions of food. The torment was so great that I began to long for the ethereal period. And the atmosphere was not of the most cheerful. Some of the prisoners who were physically weak had already taken to their beds out of sheer weakness, and the rest of us sat about amid general gloom. Without food there seemed to be no purpose in life. Previously, a meal had been a welcome break, even if you had no appetite, in the monotonous routine. At this stage my dreams were no longer of prawn curry, but had descended rapidly to cravings for toast and marmalade, and afterwards for dry bread. I felt myself gradually becoming weaker; it soon became an effort to move, and I could see myself sinking into a drowsy stupor. A hunger-strike seemed to me then the best way of getting your own back on yourself: as a pointless and silly procedure. And the worst of it was, that having once started there was no possible retreat. I began to visualize myself making Mr. Girdarilal's "ultimate sacrifice." I lay on my bed and composed suitable epitaphs for myself. The one that pleased me the most was "Here lies one who starved himself to death in an unsuccessful attempt to reform the Indian prison system." Strangers passing my grave would read this, shake their heads pityingly and say "At least, the poor fellow was an optimist"; and Mr. Girdarilal would feel that his hopes had been fulfilled, and would conduct visiting parties to my grave and say to them: "Here lies a hero and a martyr, who took my advice."

But I was not destined to be either a hero or a martyr, for on the fifth day of the fast we suspended it. For this happy event we had to thank the leadership of the Indian National Congress. The All-India Congress Committee, which was

then in session, being of the opinion that these various hunger-strikes had gone on long enough, passed a resolution taking the burden of the fight for prison reform on its own shoulders, and calling on both the Lahore and Meerut prisoners to abandon their fasts as they were no longer necessary. We thereupon dragged our famished bodies to the centre of the barrack, held a meeting which nobody felt inclined to prolong, and passed a resolution, suspending the hunger-strike in accordance with the Congress appeal; but reserved to ourselves the right to start it again in the future should we think it necessary. Our announcement suspending the hunger-strike appeared in the Press, immediately above an impassioned statement by Lala Girdarilal to the effect that nothing would induce us to eat again until the Government had capitulated. Mr. Girdarilal took a strong dislike to us from that day; which was after all one advantage of going on hunger-strike.

It seems to me now, for we are all apt to be wise after the event, that our hunger-strike was a mistake. A hunger-strike is a great weapon in the hands of a prisoner and should not be used lightly; but only as a last resort of self-defence. It is not and should not be regarded as a method of outside political action; nor should it be used in ordinary circumstances for political propaganda; for it appeals rather to emotions than to reason, and is apt to obscure the main issues. This is why fasting is such a tremendous weapon in the hands of those who for political reasons wish to deceive or to side-track public attention. Our aim on going on hunger-strike was reformist; we wished to reform the prison system, not realizing at the time that the prison system is so bad that there is no room for reform; it is necessary to change it radically and this can only be accomplished by a social change, and not by passive demonstrations of personal sacrifice. Prisons are not intended as health resorts or as places of entertainment; but are meant to deter persons attacking the property and social

interests of the dominant class; and as long as that class is in power to defend its interests, the prisons will continue to serve that purpose, and that in spite of the reformers. The Lahore and Meerut hunger-strikes certainly directed the attention of the public to the condition of prisoners, but the public attention is not centred for long in one comparatively minor direction. The storm in September, 1929, did not last, and the tragic hunger-strike of certain terrorist prisoners in the Andamans in 1932, during which several prisoners died, was passed over by the public in comparative silence: the wave of public interest in jail conditions had passed.

The Lahore and Meerut hunger-strikes together with the public protest, produced, however, what the Government called a reform. It resulted in the classification of prisoners into A, B, and C classes. This system introduced class divisions into the jail: the peasant, the worker and the poor man, that is to say the bulk of prisoners, political or ordinary, were unaffected by the reform and were classified as C; those of wealth and social status, with certain exceptions for political prisoners, were given better treatment in A or B class, according to the degree of their wealth. In other words wealth and social status became the only criterion by which the judges and the executive classified prisoners. The political prisoners who had made the protest for the most part remained in C class. And it was for this that Bhagat Singh and his fellow-prisoners suffered, and Jatindranath Das gave his life.

There are times when nearly all of us feel the need to protest against the conditions in which we are forced to live; but we do not all choose the same manner of protest. Nevertheless, we all pass, to a greater or less degree, through a stage of masochism, when we are liable to offer ourselves up as passive victims in expiation of the world's sins. It is a sign of immaturity. It is a pity that during this stage few of us show the foresight of Mr. Gandhi, who before beginning

the first of his fasts "unto death" ordered a new set of false teeth.

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One of the results of our fast was that it attracted the attention of the greatest specialist in the art, Mr. M. K. Gandhi. Mr. Gandhi in common with the other nationalist leaders had not been very helpful as far as we were concerned. He had washed his hands of us in the beginning on the pretext that, as it was against his creed for political prisoners to defend themselves, he could not be associated with our defence. But then Mr. Gandhi has never been of the militant working-class movement, although he himself was the founder and patron saint of the Ahmedabad Labour Association, which is his conception of what a trade union should be. The Ahmedabad Labour Association is the nearest approach in India to a company union. Based on the principle of co-operation between millowner and worker, the inevitable result is that in practice its destinies are controlled by the millowners; and it is not entirely without significance that the sister of the biggest millowner in Ahmedabad is the president of the Association. The final arbiter in cases of dispute is the Mahatma himself, whose decisions are foregone conclusions, since Mr. Gandhi receives considerable support in his activities from the millowners of Ahmedabad. There is one incident which throws light on Mr. Gandhi's attitude towards disputes between labour and capital.

During the textile strike of Bombay in 1928, the strikers being hard-pressed by famine and oppression, sent a deputation to Mr. Gandhi at Ahmedabad to solicit the Mahatma's moral and material support. His reply was rather disconcerting: he called on the wives of the strikers to refuse to have anything to do with their husbands until they went back to work. It was a reply which the millowners very much appreciated, but which led to the Mahatma being regarded in working-

class circles as a strike-breaker. Since that incident Mr. Gandhi's reputation has never been high among the Bombay workers, who were one of the few sections of the Indian population to remain indifferent to the civil disobedience movements of 1930 and 1932.

In these circumstances there could not be much sympathy between Mr. Gandhi and ourselves, nor did we expect him to look upon us with approval. Our hunger-strike, however, must have induced him to believe that we were approximating nearer to his own creed, and therefore we received intimation after intimation that the great man proposed to honour us with a visit. We received in fact so many intimations that we became rather sceptical, and when at last the Mahatma actually appeared in our midst we were for a time speechless with surprise.

He was welcomed by the jail authorities with as much pomp and ceremony as if he had been a ruling prince. The superintendent of the jail even abandoned his afternoon siesta in order to do honour to the Saint of Sabarmati, and personally to conduct him and his suite to our barrack. He entered the barrack surrounded by his obsequious followers, and smiling benevolently, made his way to the centre of the building and squatted down on the floor. He had brought neither his goat nor his spinning-wheel. We were as hospitable as circumstances permitted, and the Mahatma was offered a cup of tea which he declined and a handful of raisins which he accepted but carefully refrained from eating. As I stood there and watched him I could well understand his hypnotic attraction for the mentally weak.

His ugliness alone convinces them of his holiness; for the pious are aware that ugliness is an indispensable quality of holiness, whereas beauty, other than that of the soul, is a snare and delusion created by the Devil to lure man into temptation and sin. But ugliness is not his only qualification: he is an ascetic, having renounced worldly pleasure in order



to concentrate on the spirit; and his private life in its simplicity is beyond reproach. He is convinced of his own infallibility as the chosen messenger of God, and claims the sole right to interpret the Divinity's intentions. He is a master of the divine art of obscuring simple phenomena in a cloud of metaphysics, and in converting the obvious into the incomprehensible. With these qualifications he could not fail to be a saint; nor would anyone quarrel with him for being one. But unfortunately very few saints can resist the temptation to become minor prophets, and Mr. Gandhi is not one of the few.

Now when a minor prophet intrudes into politics he becomes a danger; and particularly so when he is adopted as the political instrument of the economic and political interests of a class interested in exploitation. This fate befell Mr. Gandhi. The only organized expression of political aspirations at present in India, is that of the Indian middle class. Through its organization, the Indian National Congress, it controls the political expression of the nation. It naturally employs this control in its own interests, which are those of developing its own industry in face of the hostility of an all-powerful imperialism interested in preserving the British monopoly. The only weapon of the Indian middle class in this struggle is that of mass pressure, and it therefore seeks to mobilize behind its banner the discontented peasantry, the exploited industrial workers, and the impoverished and emotional lower middle class. But it also realizes that the weapon of mass pressure has some of the qualities of the boomerang, and it was therefore found necessary to inculcate in the masses respect for private property and class privilege, while leading them in a passive demonstration against imperialism for the sole purpose of extorting political and economic concessions for the development of native industry.

In this environment it was perhaps only natural that Mr. Gandhi should confuse the word of God with that of Indian

capitalism. In any case he soon proved himself to be an excellent instrument in the hands of the Indian middle class. His well-advertised holiness, personal magnetism, and strange doctrines of the efficacy of "soul force" over "brute force," enabled him both to lead and to emasculate the mass movement. His betrayals, which would have caused other leaders to be execrated, were called "Himalayan blunders" and were excused as being the vagaries of a saint. His saintliness had the additional advantage of enabling him to place the whole responsibility for his actions on God, whom he takes care to consult beforehand.

Knowing this background to his personality, I was impressed not by his saintliness but by his material and political craft, which to me as I looked at him seemed transparent. And my impression was supported by his conversation with us. He showed himself to be shrewd, expert in parrying inconvenient questions and evading issues, and possessed of a disarming and lively sense of humour, which led me to the belief that his followers take him even more seriously than he takes himself. He talked with us for about three quarters of an hour, without saying anything of value or importance. He confined himself to evading with consummate skill our numerous questions, and sensing our scepticism refrained from playing the oracle. He announced that the nation was approaching a crisis, and that early in the next year he would either have us out of jail or go to jail himself. With these words of hope he rose to his feet, his followers scrambled to theirs, and after a genial farewell, the mahatmic procession took its departure. And with him went the odour of sanctity.

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By the middle of October, the weather had already become cool. We began to put on thicker clothing and to purchase blankets and eiderdowns; for the winter in North India is comparatively cold. As the days passed into weeks the weather

became increasingly cold and unpleasant. The blue sky became heavy and grey, the mosquitoes were replaced by bugs, and a number of the ordinary prisoners died of pneumonia. The weather was freakish: torrential rains flooded the drains and the compounds, and increased the cold. Having by this time accustomed myself to the tropical heat, I now thought that I had never been colder in my life. Besides we had very little protection from the cold. Locked in the barrack at night, swathed in blankets, we tried in vain to protect ourselves from the icy winds from the Himalayas, which swept unchecked by glass or door through the barrack. The ordinary prisoners, however, were in a worse plight than we were, for unable to buy warm clothes, they had to content themselves with two jail blankets made out of cotton waste and a jacket made out of the same material, their summer cotton clothing being otherwise unchanged.

It was about this time that the fashion developed amongst us of visiting the dentist. This fashion had unfortunately started with me. At the beginning of November, I had decided after a particularly bad bout of toothache to put an end to what had almost become a chronic torment. I therefore requested the jail authorities to send me a dentist. When he arrived I almost regretted my temerity in sending for him, for he turned out to be a tall, powerful, black-avised Mohammedan, whose sole qualification, as I discovered later, was that of practice. There being no dignified retreat, a cane chair was placed in the centre of the jail compound, on which I sat surrounded by a semi-circle of inquisitive fellow-prisoners. The dentist, whose eyes gleaming with anticipatory delight, examined my tooth by hammering on it, pronounced an abscess, advised extraction, and after assuring me that the process when carried out by him was entirely painless, took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and set to work. It was like a public execution. It was also anything but painless. After he had finished with me, he proceeded to examine the teeth

of others, and drew up a long list of those of us who required dental attention. The Government sanctioned the expenses of the treatment, and we were regularly taken to his surgery under police escort.

The surgery was like an ordinary shop situated among the bazaars, and decorated on the outside with horrible enlarged photographs of people with advanced pyorrhoea; inside were two consulting rooms in one of which the dentist himself operated, and in the other his son. The dentist's shop was not very attractive even for bored prisoners; but next door to it was a gramophone shop, and, after you had taken your turn on the surgical chair and had your teeth filled, scraped or extracted, it became the custom to await the dentist's other victims in the gramophone shop, where the obliging attendant played for you all the latest tunes. The dentist was kept busy throughout the months of November and December; but his prosperity was not due so much to his skill as to his good fortune in being the pretext by which a few bored political prisoners could escape for a few hours from the deadly monotony of prison and court-room. A glimpse of the normal outside world was well worth some minutes of pain.

Owing to this new passion for dental attention, surprising changes were made in some of the prisoners' appearances. One had two large front teeth extracted, to be replaced by four small false ones; and another who had had all his teeth removed took on the appearance of an aged crone. The greatest tragedy, however, befell Gopal Basak. He was a young Bengali prisoner with only one eye. Deciding one day that all his physical misfortunes arose from the condition of his teeth, he complained to the superintendent, who sent him for examination to the military dental surgeon. The dental surgeon drew a chart of Mr. Basak's teeth, carefully marking those which were to be extracted. The authorities to save expense sent Mr. Basak armed with his chart to our old friend in the bazaar, who, after studying the chart, care-

fully extracted all those teeth which should have been left untouched, leaving Mr. Basak only with the decayed and diseased ones. The only way to rectify the error when discovered was to take out all the teeth that should have been originally extracted, with the result that Mr. Basak's reward after weeks of pain was to have no teeth at all. After a series of indignant protests to the authorities, he was eventually compensated with two sets of false teeth, which being made by the same bazaar dentist, naturally did not fit properly, and Mr. Basak soon developed chronic dyspepsia, as he was not able to masticate his food successfully. As was to be expected he conceived a dislike for his new teeth, which he used to leave about all over the place, sometimes in drinking mugs, and sometimes neatly wrapped up in paper, labelled "The false teeth of Gopal Basak." It was a tragedy.

The weather grew colder and colder, Christmas came and went, there was an attempt on the life of the Viceroy and on the life of the Governor of the Punjab; the Indian National Congress meeting at Lahore proclaimed a mass civil disobedience movement for the attainment of complete independence: stormy clouds announced the new year. And we of the Meerut conspiracy case, committed for trial, prepared to face another year of imprisonment and monotony.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Black Year*

AT the end of January, 1930, about a fortnight after the inquiring magistrate had signed his Committal Order, the actual trial began. During this intervening fortnight there had been great activity in order to change the Garden House from a mere Magistrate's Court into a more dignified Sessions Court: the judges's platform was raised, the dock was lowered, thick blue carpets were spread on the floor, and curtains hung on the walls, so that when we arrived to attend the opening of the trial we were amazed at the transformation.

We entered the dock as usual and there awaited the arrival of the judge, just as seven months previously we had awaited the arrival of the magistrate. Apart from the changes effected in the decoration of the Court-room everything was the same as before. Mr. Langford James, dressed for the occasion in a stiff white collar and a flowing black robe and looking a very sick man, arrived with his three henchmen—Messrs. Horton, Mitter and Nabi; the clerks and readers who served the magistrate arrived to serve the judge in the same capacity; and the district superintendent of the police made a brief appearance apparently in order to give us a lesson in deportment. It was quite obvious that we were to undergo a full-dress repetition of what we had had before. We therefore prepared ourselves for boredom; and we were not to be disappointed.

There was, however, one minor change: behind the judge's desk and chair stood five empty chairs, and these, it was whispered, were intended for the accommodation of the assessors who were to be chosen before the Court got down to serious business.

The judge arrived punctually, striding to his desk with as

much ferocity as though he were about to order a wholesale massacre. I have previously described the magistrate as a quiet and subtle man, possessing a pleasing personality; I regret that I cannot pay the same compliment to the judge. There is unfortunately a law of libel. I shall therefore content myself with describing his person.

Mr. R. L. Yorke was tall and thin, bald and wearing gold-rimmed glasses; his clothes were old and shabby, and his nose would have made a good second to that of Cyrano de Bergerac. In addition I may add that he was an officer of the Indian Civil Service, and I have no doubt that he had always been an industrious and painstaking servant of the British Raj.

In the beginning he adopted towards us the attitude of an old-fashioned schoolmaster, and I suspect that his main regret during the trial was his inability to use the birch to check breaches of discipline or decorum. Under his aegis the court-room rapidly took on the atmosphere of the school-room, and the only thing missing was a blackboard. On the first day he bewildered us with a number of irritating and petty restrictions, until some of us were firmly of the opinion that he had passed the previous night with paper and pencil thinking out ways and means of harassing us. Friction developed on the very first day.

The proceedings opened as usual with a few speeches from the dock which the judge rather rudely tried to suppress; but nothing can stem the eloquence of the Indian politician. Then after grievances, complaints and requests had been ventilated and ignored, the judge gave a signal, and immediately a troop of piratical-looking men of all descriptions poured into the Court, headed by a ruffian in a green night-cap. These were the assessors. Out of this motley group the judge chose five men, who appeared to him to have a rudimentary knowledge of English, and who looked less desperate than the others. The others were thereupon dismissed almost with a caution.

We were more amused than interested in the choice of the assessors. We had recently applied to the High Court at Allahabad for a trial by jury, but the Chief Justice had rejected the application, mainly on the ground that a jury could not be expected to follow the evidence of a lengthy complicated political case. Presumably, the Chief Justice considered that assessors would be more intelligent. In any case they would be more reliable; for assessors in India, in spite of their impressive title, have not a shred of power: their verdict is not binding on the judge, who can completely disregard it and usually does. The official explanation is that the assessor-system is intended to train Indians gradually towards the jury-system; but it cannot be denied that in the meantime the assessors remain mere dummies, an unconvincing camouflage for autocratic justice, decorations of as much use and influence as the carpet that covers the Court-room floor. No; we did not place any hopes in the assessors.

Once the assessors had seated themselves, which they did rather sheepishly behind the judge, and the hilarity had died down, Mr. Langford James arose to deliver his opening address. This was practically identical with the one which he had delivered before the magistrate, except that when he remembered the existence of the assessors he would translate his material into baby-language for the benefit of "the five intelligent ones" as he was pleased to call them. He spoke for about ten working days, with less interruption than before because we now had only one defence lawyer, whose legal tactics mainly consisted of staging a dramatic walk-out whenever he felt inclined.

This was Mr. Langford James's last appearance in the trial. A few days after the conclusion of his address he was again taken ill, and when in an extremely weak state was removed from Meerut by train to a hospital at Dehra Dun at the foot of the Himalayas. On the journey he contracted pneumonia. And on March 28th, when the Court had assembled, we



were informed by the judge that Mr. James had died that morning.

His death was regretted on both sides. The judge, the prosecution, and the accused paid tribute to his personality, and it was generally felt that the trial would have been a much brighter affair had Mr. James lived. We realized that he had been a bitter enemy not only to ourselves but to our cause, and although we would have fought him as fiercely as he fought us, there was no personal animosity on either side. The known is better than the unknown, and Langford James had been an amusing and vivid personality. We did not then know what his successor would be like, but we thought it unlikely that he would compare favourably either in wit or interest with Langford James. We had lost a great entertainer, and had gained nothing in return.

There followed months of almost unendurable monotony. The same witnesses who had bored us before came and bored us again; but this time at greater length. Lengthy examination was followed by lengthier cross-examination, at the end of which the whole had to be read out by the Court reader, in English and in Urdu, before the witness could be dismissed. The weather grew hotter and hotter, the fans only circulated hot air, tempers became frayed, and the judge, who had hoped to have finished the case in three months, looked more harassed with each passing day. After months of tapping the evidence down on his portable typewriter, he lost his aggressive manner and seemed resigned to spend the rest of his life presiding over this interminable trial.

Day after day we sat and sweated in the dock, unable to read or sleep with comfort, while the witnesses droned and the evidence was recorded. There really seemed no end to it all. After six months we were not half-way through the number of prosecution witnesses, with about two hundred more to follow; and then would come the examination of each of the thirty-one accused, and then the defence witnesses and then

lengthy arguments for the prosecution and for the defence. The Meerut conspiracy case had become a war of attrition, a trial of endurance. And when we were not sweating aimlessly in the Court, we were stewing in the jail barrack. Thus we stagnated in this Gehenna, weary and inactive, while the whole of outside India was in a blaze.

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The Lahore session of the Indian National Congress, held the previous December, had resolved upon a campaign of civil disobedience for the attainment of complete independence for India. Mr. Gandhi had been made the dictator of this movement, with full powers to decide and carry out the programme. He thereupon retired to his *ashram* to formulate his programme in peace and to the tune of his favourite hymn *Lead, kindly Light*. In these holy surroundings he devised a programme, which was as astonishing as it was futile for its declared object. Civil disobedience implies the breaking of the law, and therefore Mr. Gandhi decided that the only law to be broken by his followers should be the salt law. This decision was astonishing in that the salt laws are the least oppressive of all imperialist laws. It is true that the Government has the salt monopoly in India, but the tax on that necessity can hardly be called a gabelle: the Simon Commission estimates it at approximately 4d. per head per annum. But Mr. Gandhi decided that it was an easy and not a very dangerous law to break: it was easy because of the large salt deposits on the Gujerat coast which were ready to hand for his purpose; and it was not very dangerous, as would be breaches of the sedition laws, the Arms Act, the Trades Disputes Act, the Rent Acts or other really repressive imperialist laws, for it would not endanger the property and political interests of the Indian middle class by encouraging the class struggle or the revolutionary movement.

Mr. Gandhi's programme was altogether a masterpiece of deliberate ineffectiveness. The activities of the *satyagrahis* were confined only to breaches of the salt laws, the harmless boycott of foreign cloth (which naturally sent up the profits of Indian millowners), and the peaceful picketing of shops dealing in foreign cloth and liquor. Imprisonment became an end in itself, and as it was forbidden to offer up legal defence the Government had no difficulty in confining the more dangerous elements in the Congress within four walls. But although Mr. Gandhi's programme of civil disobedience was calculated to sidetrack into a harmless channel the political and economic discontent of the peasantry and lower middle class, the movement, in spite of all the precautions taken, began to get out of hand. Serious riots broke out, the peasants became restive and began to demand the initiation of a movement for refusing to pay rents and taxes, a movement which would have changed the whole basis of Indian nationalism, from that of economic bargaining by the Indian middle class to that of the class struggle between famished peasants and oppressive landlords. And the lower middle class, the student population in particular, was also dissatisfied with Mr. Gandhi's programme for complete independence, and as a result the terrorist movement began to grow rapidly: assassinations and attempts followed each other in rapid succession, culminating in the famous raid on the Armoury at Chitagong.

From March 12th, when Mr. Gandhi initiated his conception of the civil disobedience movement by a dramatic march to Dandi, for the purpose of making salt, the political fires which had been smouldering since 1928 sprang into a blaze which set the whole country alight. Hundreds of thousands participated in demonstrations of passive resistance, workers, peasants and students, braving police *lathis* and rifles; women joined the demonstrations with as much enthusiasm as the men, were equally beaten in police charges and helped to fill the jails; peasants walked miles from their

villages to the nearest Congress quarters to participate in the struggle which they hoped would put an end to their misery; merchants closed their shops in obedience to the frequent *hartals* (days of mourning) proclaimed by the Congress; the workers of the G.I.P. Railway went on strike and lay down on the tracks to prevent the passage of trains manned by Anglo-Indian blacklegs; people of all descriptions and of both sexes went in procession to the squares of the various towns and villages carrying buckets of salt water, which was boiled as symbolic of making salt and defying the salt laws; enthusiastic young men believed that they were helping the country to independence by pulling the communication cords and stopping trains, by persuading people not to buy foreign cloth or to drink beer, by acting as the unpaid salesmen for Indian mill cloth, and by going to jail as quickly as possible. And even when in jail, in spite of the leadership's advice to the contrary, they carried on the fight against the Government by breaking jail discipline, by shouting Congress slogans and by passive resistance.

The district jail, Meerut, had its full share of the prisoners of the civil disobedience movement. Within a few months of Mr. Gandhi's march to Dandi the jail was so overcrowded that accommodation could not be found in the barracks, and the superfluous prisoners had to sleep in the compounds chained together. With their arrival a new nocturnal noise was added to those already caused by the night-watchmen and the jackals: after the Congress prisoners had been locked up for the night they used to chant their slogans in unison for hours at a time, in direct violation of the jail rules. For the first few months the favourite slogan was "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" (long live Mahatma Gandhi); but it was changed later rather significantly to "Inquilab Zindabad" (long live Revolution). The jail authorities tried in vain to suppress this shouting of slogans, but the offenders were too many to be easily victimized, and the subordinate officials

therefore had to conceal their chagrin and rage while awaiting a more favourable opportunity for revenge. The most enraged of all the officials was the jailer. There had been a change of jailers; the benevolent if stupid Abdul Aziz who had welcomed me into the jail had been transferred and his place taken by a Hindu, who was also transferred after the superintendent had discovered that he was using the jail wood and the jail labour for his own private purposes. The latter's place was taken by a low type of Mahomedan, whose brutality to the ordinary prisoners knew no bounds. This man regarded these breaches of discipline by the Congress prisoners as a personal affront, and was determined to have his revenge. He therefore set himself out to provoke trouble by every means in his power, and on the last day of August succeeded even beyond his expectations.

It happened that early in the morning of that day I was having an interview at the jail gate with a friend who had come from Bombay to see me. The interview was being supervised by the deputy jailer, and everything was going peacefully and smoothly. Suddenly a rifle was fired off with a report that was all the more deafening because it was unexpected; the alarm bell rang and whistles blew; the deputy jailer shaking like a jelly with fright and excitement pushed my friend outside the gate and urged me to return with all possible speed to my barrack. Before I could move, however, the inner door was flung open and the superintendent, the jailer, and a rabble of warders rushed through at the double. I asked the flurried deputy jailer what all this performance was about, and he, willing to give me any information to get rid of me, told me that a mutiny had broken out among the Congress prisoners. More than that he could not say. As I went through the inner door I saw the long bamboo staffs, known as *lathis*, issued out to the warders, and a posse of armed police with rifles, who had been waiting to escort some dacoity prisoners to the Court, were requisitioned to

suppress the riot. I could see nothing of the alleged mutiny: far away in the centre of the inner circle of the jail came a dull roar of angry voices, and occasionally shouts of *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* could be heard above the frenzied peals of the alarm bell.

When I arrived at the barrack, I found everybody at the gate agog with excitement. I passed on the information I had extorted from the deputy jailer, and told them of what I had seen. The excitement grew higher. Glimpses were caught of armed police running towards the inner circle, and soon the shouts of *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* were broken with cries of pain. We felt that it was time to show our solidarity with the oppressed, and so we began to shout our own slogans together with a few choice comments on the moral and physical peculiarities of the jail officials. In a short time we were making almost as much noise as the Congress prisoners, and after they had been beaten into silence, we continued on our own, taking the whole quarrel on our own shoulders. In these circumstances we could not continue to be ignored, and before long, the district magistrate, the superintendent of police, and the superintendent of the jail arrived fresh from the slaughter at our gate. We were ordered to retire inside the barrack, to which we replied by further slogans. The triumvirate were in a quandary: they did not wish to resort to drastic measures lest they create a major scandal, and it was obvious that we were not then inclined to listen to argument. So the three of them stood before us, a picture of uncertainty and hesitation. The superintendent of police made a last attempt to maintain his dignity by poking his stick through the gate, a futile proceeding which merely increased our anger, but the district magistrate, the only one to remain cool, then gave the order to retire, and the triumvirate, deaf to our shouts, marched back the way they had come. It was certainly the better part of valour.

Finding nobody to shout at we soon stopped shouting,

and peace re-descended upon the jail. We were then summoned to attend the Court, and as we passed through the jail vestibule on the way to the lorries outside, we saw, crouched in a corner, no less a person than the Inspector-General of Prisons, who had chosen that particular time to carry out his annual inspection of the jail. That he was not entirely satisfied with the condition of the jail was shown by the revolver which he held in his hand.

As it happened the trial was adjourned that day for some reason or other, but we were allowed to stay at the Garden House for the purpose of examining the exhibits. At lunch-time a few of us expressed a wish to return to the jail, and were taken back. They arrived just in time to witness the flogging of thirteen Congress prisoners, alleged to be the ringleaders of the "mutiny." The authorities were having their revenge. Each of the thirteen prisoners was in turn chained to a tripod and given thirty lashes, while the jail and civil authorities sat at a table to watch their order being executed. Not relying on the efficiency of the usual warder, an Anglo-Indian police sergeant had been chosen for the job of executioner, and he rained down the blows with a gusto of which no Indian would have been capable. Most of the victims were mere boys in their teens, and were probably experiencing for the first time the might and justice of the British Raj. Young flesh was lacerated, blood flowed, and pain inflicted so that law and order could be restored without loss of prestige. Discipline was restored, and a boy of about seventeen was thrown into a cell in a state of complete collapse, so that for several days his life was despaired of.

That evening we received accurate information about the "mutiny." It appeared that the jailer by a series of petty acts of tyranny had eventually succeeded in provoking a passive demonstration of protest by the Congress prisoners, who by crowding round the gate of their compound had pushed the gate off one of its hinges, which must have been faulty in the

first place. It was alleged by several that the jailer had timed the whole affair, particularly with regard to the loose gate, for when the superintendent should be visiting the barracks, so that it could then be represented that the Congress prisoners had mutinied and were attempting to escape. However this may be, it was certainly a very strange coincidence. The superintendent, on the whole a decent man but easily unbalanced, hearing the cries and on being told by the jailer that the prisoners were attempting to break down the gate, had not stopped to investigate, but had ordered the alarm to be sounded and the police to be called, believing that he was faced with a serious mutiny. I do not know whether or not he afterwards discovered the true circumstances of the affair; but even assuming that he did his own impetuous conduct would have prevented him from taking action against the jailer. As for the latter, innocent or not, he was naturally delighted: the flogging of the Congress prisoners alone must have seemed to him like Heaven's revenge for the wounds inflicted on his vanity. As a result his complacency knew no measure; he would stride round the jail with a horse-whip until everybody's fingers were itching to take him by the throat. He was not a pleasant man. Fortunately he was powerless as far as we were concerned; but hardly a day passed without some friction taking place between us and him.

The consequences for us of our participation in the "mutiny" were slight: our exercise at volley-ball in the evening was stopped, and the privilege of smoking was taken away from a few of us, who continued to smoke just the same. But on the other hand we had not gained very much. Our participation in the affair by increasing the anger of the authorities had certainly something to do with the ferocity of the punishment awarded to the leaders of the Congress prisoners; we had also lost the esteem of the superintendent who had previously helped us in many ways; but it was all the same a great satisfaction to have received the gratitude of the Con-



gress prisoners for our demonstration of solidarity with them, while their own leaders, comfortable and secure as A class prisoners, had supported the jail authorities.

On the night of the "mutiny" an armed police guard was posted outside our barrack, and as they chattered and smoked and banged their rifles, we were engaged in preparing a memorandum of our views on the affair for the Government of India, to be sent the next day together with an indignant protest against the maltreatment of the Congress prisoners.

I find it impossible to look back upon the year 1930 without a feeling of sadness, without a slight trace of the indescribable hopelessness and futility which pervaded our whole environment. It was a black year. Others, it is true, have suffered much more and for far longer periods, and I remember that I found strength in reading the *Memoirs* of Vera Figner, who bore her terrible incarceration for nearly twenty years with stoical resignation, supported throughout the period by her revolutionary idealism. With us it was not suffering or discomfort, but the indefinite nature of our imprisonment which was a cancer slowly devouring our resistance. We felt that it would have been much easier to have undergone a long but definite term of imprisonment; but to proceed as we were proceeding, vaguely and interminably, month after month, year after year, on trial, with the mental strain of imprisonment and persecution, and with the knowledge that the end, the pre-determined end, was so far away as to be completely out of sight: an end which was only a beginning, for when we were worn out with the years of confinement while on trial, we would be then be called on to serve a long sentence. The end of the trial would only be the end of the prelude: the drama would only then begin. With such a prospect before us it seemed unlikely that many of us would live to see the actual end.

Gloom and depression advanced with the year, although it is to our credit that, despite the prospect and our low

spirits, no one even thought of surrender: anything was better than treachery to our principles, or cowardice in face of the enemy. I doubt if one of us would have had the temerity to surrender; for although he might have recovered his liberty by those means, he would never have been able to face the scorn and cruelty of those who have never suffered, except in imagination. Apart from all other considerations, and there were many, including personal pride and loyalty, the fear of incurring the sneers of arm-chair heroes forbade the slightest weakness.

At a much later stage of the trial, one of the accused was charged with having attempted to secure his release by offering an undertaking to the Government. I do not know whether the allegation was true or not. But his treatment is an example of the point. This man had been a sincere fighter in India from his early youth, and had spent many years in jail without having displayed the slightest weakness. When he was arrested in the Meerut case he had already undergone imprisonment for about six years, and after a year's break, before he had time to recover either his physical or mental strength, he found himself in prison with us, involved in a long trial with the certainty of another long term of imprisonment to follow on at the end of it. After nearly four years of the strain of trial and imprisonment, in addition to what he had already undergone previously, it is not amazing that he should be guilty of a weakness—if he were guilty of such a weakness; for as there is no direct evidence it is a moot point. Then he received his punishment. His name and reputation became meat for the jackals. The whole crew of arm-chair heroes, who tell each other what they would do in certain circumstances, but who actually see to it that they are never in such circumstances, raised a howl of execration and denunciation of which the echo has not yet died down. In their righteous indignation they did not trouble to remember that their victim had suffered more than they could possibly

conceive of for years; that his health and spirit were shattered as a result of this suffering, or that the cause of his torment and subsequent weakness had been his fidelity to those principles for which he had so bravely fought in the past, and which his traducers defend—theoretically. But, although as a principle it must be remembered that past service is not an excuse for criminal weakness in the present, I cannot help but feel that such weakness in this case could have been prevented had they displayed a little sympathy, a little understanding, a little more honesty and a little less hypocrisy, and they would have preserved for their cause a fighter who in the past had been a source of pride to the movement.

The time passed slowly and heavily on our hands. As an escape from it I read anything that I could get hold of: histories, novels, old periodicals, classics and political literature. The one bright feature of our imprisonment was that there was no restriction on our reading. We had been allowed to form a small library of proscribed literature to enable us to prepare our defence, but which also served the more useful purpose of enabling us to increase our political and general knowledge. The library was under close supervision in case any of the "poison" should escape into the outside world, and it was periodically inspected to see whether any books were missing. But it was of inestimable value not only to our defence but to our own educational development.

In addition I used to receive books regularly from my mother and friends in England, which were often held up for months on end in the post, but usually arrived. Friends from Bombay sent me books, and of course I could always borrow the books received by my fellow-prisoners. I thus had an orgy of reading. A great deal of it was an escape from reality, and I certainly pity the prisoner who is deprived of, or who is unable to enjoy the incomparable escape of reading.

Where general reading is not allowed even religion has its uses, for the Bible is never denied, and I know an old political

prisoner, a confirmed atheist, who is regarded in learned circles as an authority on the Scriptures, and who reads and enjoys the Holy Book daily. If the prison authorities had the slightest knowledge of what a great collection of literature the Bible is, packed as it is with ferocity, sensuality, hatred and in parts with almost revolutionary inspiration, the Holy Book itself would speedily be proscribed.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Journey to Allahabad*

At the beginning of the new year, it was decided that one of the accused, R. S. Nimbkar, and myself should enliven the proceedings by applying to the sessions judge for bail. We had no hope of obtaining bail, our previous applications having been invariably rejected, but we thought that our present applications would give us an opportunity of ventilating our grievances. When we filed our applications, the prosecution of course suggested that we intended merely to encroach further on the time of the Court; they, it seemed, claimed the monopoly of this form of encroachment.

On the day appointed for the hearing of our applications, we arrived at the Court weighed down with ponderous legal volumes, our heavy artillery with which we hoped to batter down the strong defences of the prosecution. We both made long and eloquent speeches in which we briefly reviewed the evidence, flung the law at the head of the lawyers, and exposed to our satisfaction the irregularities of the trial and procedure. Mr. Langford James's place as senior counsel to the prosecution had been taken by a European lawyer from Bombay by the name of Kemp, who looked vaguely like the Duke of Wellington, and who earned his princely fee in silent dignity. He was one of those strong silent men whose strength depends on their silence; but I am afraid that Mr. Langford James would not have quite approved of his successor. As was to be expected, the strong silent man hardly condescended to reply to our arguments beyond condemning them as frivolous. The judge in his wisdom rejected both applications, and, in my case, rejecting one of my arguments that I should have bail in order to prepare my defence, observed that I should have prepared my defence before I was arrested. We appealed

as a matter of form to the High Court at Allahabad, and then forgot all about it.

In February there were great rumours of impending events. The Mahatma came out of jail to negotiate with the Government, demanding the release of all political prisoners, and we were visited by several of the Congress leaders who assured us that we would be included in the amnesty. Some of us were sceptical, others began to pack their belongings, and M. G. Desai, an incurable optimist, steadily built up a theory in which he conclusively proved that we would be released before the end of March. Apart from his theory he had the authority of his family astrologer for his confidence.

There was another of the accused, Dr. Mukerjee, the homoeopathic doctor from Gorakhpur, who was also convinced of his approaching release, having recently associated himself with the Congress by means of a dramatic gesture. The Congress prisoners in the jail had been placed in C class, the lowest of the three categories for prisoners, and were only provided with the C class diet, whereas we as political undertrials were getting special class food. Dr. Mukerjee was shrewd enough to realize that his best defence consisted in having Congress rather than revolutionary affinities, and he found in this differentiation of diet an excellent opportunity of displaying his sympathies with the Congress. He therefore wrote to the jail superintendent asking that he should be given C class food of the same quality as that which his brothers of the Congress were receiving; and, on the superintendent explaining that he could not do this without orders from higher authorities, Dr. Mukerjee declared a hunger-strike.

Now the doctor was accustomed to do all things homoeopathically: he bathed homoeopathically by sitting on his bed with a bucket of water by his side and rubbing his body with a wet flannel by degrees so that too much water should not reach the body at once; he spoke homoeopathically in so far

that he only made his meaning clear after long and gradual stages; and of course now he had declared a hunger-strike he must fast homoeopathically. His method of doing this consisted of going on hunger-strike by degrees, that is to say by gradually reducing during the course of the homoeopathic hunger-strike, the amount of his food. Owing to these precautions the hunger-strike was carried to a successful conclusion, and Dr. Mukerjee was provided with C class food, which he carefully refrained from eating, having made other arrangements for his nourishment; and yet another incident was ended peacefully.

At the beginning of March, a truce was signed by the Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi, by which the Government agreed, to Mr. Gandhi's satisfaction, to release only those political prisoners who were in jail for participating in the civil disobedience movement for offences not involving violence, and all our hopes of amnesty toppled to the ground. The day following the truce, Mr. Gandhi sent to us one of his trusted lieutenants, the late Mr. J. N. Sen Gupta, to explain and apologize to us for leaving us out of the amnesty, and to assure us that perhaps later something might be done. For some of us who had built up hopes this was a great disappointment, but others realized that there were greater victims than we of Mr. Gandhi's generosity. And shortly after the truce had been signed, the youth whom Mr. Gandhi had promised to save, Bhagat Singh, was hanged with two companions at Lahore jail.

The Congress prisoners whom we had pitied and supported left the jail in triumph, and Dr. Mukerjee threatened to declare another homoeopathic hunger-strike unless he was given the special diet again. For us the amnesty had proved to be a mirage, and we settled down again to the serious business of being tried.

When we had applied to the High Court at Allahabad for bail, we had also sent a formal application requesting the

High Court to hear our arguments in person as we did not wish to be represented by lawyers. After a considerable time we received an order by Mr. Justice Boys, in which he stated that he did not think it necessary for us to go to Allahabad, and that the position could be met and justice served if the applicants and the Crown each sent an affidavit stating his case. This was an opportunity too good to miss. With the zeal of amateur lawyers we pointed out that we could not obey the order of Mr. Justice Boys because it would be illegal for an accused person to swear an affidavit, and that the only way out was for their lordships to send for us and hear our arguments personally. We were delighted at this opportunity to read a lesson in law to the High Court; but we never expected that our application to argue in person would be granted. It was enough for us to have scored. Our amazement therefore was all the greater when at the beginning of April we received an order signed by two judges of the High Court ordering the authorities to produce us in their Court at Allahabad on April 21st.

Nimbkar and I were excited at the prospect of the adventure. After so long a confinement the journey itself to Allahabad seemed next door to freedom. We had almost forgotten what a railway looked like, and we were thrilled at the thought that in a few days' time we should be in the train mixing with free people and seeing the world outside Meerut. Some of our co-accused, without the intoxication of a train journey at hand, were rather pessimistic about our reception at the High Court. Mr. Justice Boys, they said, would be sure to take his revenge for our impertinence in correcting his knowledge of law, and there were many who prophesied that we should speedily come to grief and probably be ignominiously thrown out of court. These jeremiads, however, did not depress us, mainly for the reason that we could at the moment see no further than a thrilling journey to Allahabad, and if unpleasantness were to follow, well, the novelty of the journey



would be worth it. "*Pour un plaisir, mille douleurs,*" wrote François Villon; but although we appreciated the warning, in our circumstances one real pleasure was well worth a thousand pains.

The next few days were spent in feverish preparation of legal arguments. With books borrowed from the prosecution library, we studied the law in all its aspects, even in those aspects irrelevant to our purpose, such was the extent of our new enthusiasm. After a few days the results of our intensive legal study became manifest: we began to quibble and split hairs on the slightest provocation, and our speech became choked with Latin tags and weird legal phrases. For the amateur the law is a disease; it is a blight, a creeping paralysis of the mind. The layman who opens a law-book usually becomes its victim in the same way as does the hypochondriac poring over a medical textbook. The disease got a good grip of us, and according to the reports of our fellow-accused we argued and quibbled even in our sleep.

At the end of a week we felt we had gathered enough material to confound not only the High Court, but the Privy Council and the House of Lords. Our ammunition to hand, we eagerly awaited an opportunity to fire it off. Whether or not we should hit the target was, to use a favourite expression of William IV, "quite another thing."

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Early in the morning of the day appointed we arrived at the railway station at Meerut, accompanied by a sergeant and a large escort of armed police. We entered a second class compartment together with the sergeant and a couple of policemen, while the rest of the escort found accommodation elsewhere on the train. Whistles blew, the train started and we had begun our adventure.

The Anglo-Indian sergeant was a tolerant and good-humoured fellow and treated us like ordinary travelling

companions. The next in command, a tall melancholy Hindu head constable, in addition to his haversack, rifle, and bayonet, had burdened himself with two empty whisky bottles which he intended to fill at Allahabad with holy water from the Ganges.

Allahabad is for the Hindus one of the holiest of cities; for it is there that the two great rivers, the Jumna and the Ganges, meet, the white waters of the holy river, springing direct from the foot of Vishnu, mixing amicably with the deep blue of its great tributary. The Hindus do not recognize the name Allahabad, but call the city by its ancient name of Prayag. At Allahabad there is held at long intervals the Kumbha Mela, the holiest of holy Fairs, where millions of pilgrims from all over India gather on the bank of the Ganges to combine religious devotion with carnal pleasures. Here can be seen many strange things: holy men rivalling each other in feats of physical endurance, one lying on a bed of sharp nails and another allowing his finger-nails to grow with the years through the palm of the opposite hand; yogis display their mysterious arts, saints are two a penny, thousands of religious charlatans, obscene beggars and picturesque thieves reap harvests which keep them in comfort for the rest of the year; and of the millions who attend the Fair, thousands never return to their homes, stricken down by cholera or plague which almost invariably attends these immense celebrations; but those who die have the consolation of knowing that their charred remains will be thrown into the Holy River for the good of their spirit and for the delectation of the innumerable crocodiles. Knowing the holiness of Allahabad, I admired the foresight of the head constable: two whisky bottles filled with the white water of the Ganges would secure for him the favour of the gods for quite a considerable time.

It was an agreeable journey. Strangers entered our compartment, and discussed with us topical questions with the

deference due to political martyrs; and we basked in the sun of their approval and delivered ourselves of oracular and sometimes sweeping statements. Thus we talked, smoked, ate and drank until the evening, when the train drew up alongside the station platform at Cawnpore. Here an accident befell us. The sergeant and I left the train to get a little refreshment. So engrossed were we in the care of our bodies that we failed to hear the train bell, and were consequently horrified when a station official rushed into the restaurant to inform us that the train had left. We ran at a breakneck speed down the stairs on to the platform, just in time to see the rear lights of the train, bearing Nimbkar and the escort, disappearing round the bend. It was a catastrophe. The sergeant would certainly get into serious trouble, and I would miss my opportunity of confounding the judges of the High Court with my newly acquired legal knowledge. The sergeant was philosophical. He shrugged his shoulders, and said it was unfortunate, but we must make the best of it and amuse ourselves at Cawnpore. I was more than ready to agree; but, as we turned to leave the platform, a group of people informed us that the train had stopped outside the station. We therefore jumped off the platform and followed by an excited crowd of porters ran along the track until we came to the train and entered our compartment, much to the relief of the badly scared escort. The mystery was then solved. When the train left the station without us, Nimbkar with great presence of mind pulled the communication cord, in spite of the protests of the head constable. We congratulated Nimbkar and settled down in our seats waiting for the train to start again. But there was to be a further delay.

A procession of officials now descended upon us, headed by the indignant station-master. The latter wanted to know who had pulled the cord, and by what right. Secure in his own righteousness he rebuked the sergeant for neglecting his duties, wished to take the names and addresses of every-

one present, and thus precipitated himself into a violent quarrel with the sergeant. They exchanged abuse for quite ten minutes until the station-master departed, baffled but breathing vengeance, and the train, already delayed by fifteen minutes, was allowed to proceed on its way.

The journey from Cawnpore to Allahabad was uneventful, except for the arrival of a Hindu gentleman who packed the carriage with luggage and seven small children, and was accordingly given a lecture by Nimbkar on the value of birth control. It was already late when we arrived at Allahabad, where we were met at the station by a huge police lorry and an additional escort. The Allahabad authorities had evidently taken us seriously. We were told that we were to spend the night at the European lock-up, and were bundled into the lorry together with our luggage and the numerous volumes of legal lore, brought to impress the High Court.

We did not see much of the lock-up that night. We were cordially received by the sergeant in charge, who called himself the "governor," and led by him to a square block of cells, enclosing a space. We elected to sleep outside rather than be confined in the small hot cells, and we were accommodated with cots. The "governor" then took his leave after inquiring what time we would like breakfast. But he had hardly gone before he was back again to warn us that sleeping in one of the adjacent cells was a raving madman. "If he makes a row in the night, tell him to shut up," said the "governor"; "he won't take any notice, but on the other hand it won't do any harm." And on that cheerful note he finally left us to the stars, the mosquitoes and the madman.

I slept well until the early morning when I woke to see a horrible, bloated and bewhiskered face with popping eyes looking into mine. It was not a pleasant sight immediately on awakening, but I concluded it was the madman, and waving him away turned over on the other side. But the madman was not so easily frustrated. He began to whistle,

then to sing snatches of bawdy songs, concluding his performance by asking at the top of his voice several rhetorical questions. From these questions it would appear that he had suffered recently in his vanity at the hands of judges and magistrates; for the favourite item of his questionnaire consisted of: "Who made you a judge? How did you come to be a magistrate?"; and he would answer the questions himself in a most definite manner: "You're not a judge, you're not a magistrate. I'm your social superior"; and by way of variety he would introduce other matter into his monologue of question and answer such as: "Why marry? — 'em all." He was really rather tiresome. After a while he spied Nimbkar still peacefully asleep, whereupon he exclaimed: "Saul among the prophets. Hail smiling morn, a nigger is amongst us." He then began to tug at my arm evidently in order to direct my attention towards his new discovery. This was too much. In a rage I sprang from the bed, swore a couple of full-blooded oaths and put the poor fellow to flight. It was one of the few triumphs of reason which I know.

An old, tottering Eurasian then brought our breakfast. It was uneatable. We asked him where we could bathe, and were informed that there was no water. After many representations he eventually led me through a series of gates to an old shed, thick with cobwebs and filth of all descriptions, where a tap was dripping drop after drop into a dirty bucket already half full. I was told I could bathe there, sharing the water with my companion. As there was no alternative I complied, poured a few cans of dirty water over myself, and shaved in a cup of Nimbkar's drinking water.

When we had finished dressing, a visitor was announced, a friend of Nimbkar. The "governor" was mysteriously absent and as there seemed nobody in charge of the lock-up we settled ourselves down in the office. Our conversation was only once disturbed by a European who came into the office,

## *Journey to Allahabad*

approached the table where I was sitting, and asked me whether I was the officer in charge. I replied blandly enough that on the contrary I was a prisoner, and as he continued to hover about in a flabbergasted sort of manner after the receipt of this information, I waved him out of the office by remarking that we were engaged in a private conversation. I discovered later that the European I had treated so cavalierly was the City Magistrate of Allahabad, who on leaving the lock-up had driven at full speed to the bungalow of the District Magistrate, where he had lodged an indignant complaint against me, asserting that I had usurped the command of the jail.

The police were due to take us to the High Court at ten, but at half-past when they still had not put in an appearance we became alarmed; for we were due to argue in the Court at that time. Just before eleven, the sergeant and the escort arrived, all flustered and nervous, bundled us into the lorry and drove off towards the High Court at a reckless speed. On arrival we were greeted by Mr. Khairat Nabi, the acting complainant, who was dancing with impatience; he pushed us up the stairs, observing that the Court had already been kept waiting half an hour, and went off to deliver the joyful tidings of our arrival. An official of the Court soon appeared to sponsor our introduction to the Court, and rather nervously we followed him, uncertain of our fate.

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The Court was crowded. Of the spectators, the majority were black-gowned advocates, who seemed collectively like a black pall covering the yellow benches. High above the rest sat the two judges, divided by a large and atrocious painting of the King-Emperor, the opposite party. On the left of the portrait sat Mr. Justice Boys, who favoured us with a grim stare as we entered; on the right sat the senior judge, Mr. Justice Mukerjee, who looked at us mildly over

the top of his horn-rimmed spectacles. Mr. Justice Mukerjee had the reputation of being the fairest and the least subservient to the Executive of all the judges of the High Court.

We were given seats at the table reserved for counsel, and we were delighted at the visible impression caused by our vast volumes, under whose weight a succession of policemen staggered as they carried them into Court. Sitting next to us on the right were Mr. Kemp, Mr. Khairat Nabi and a few Government lawyers.

When the sensational stir caused by our arrival had subsided, Mr. Justice Mukerjee gave a preliminary cough, and very courteously asked me to begin. As I arose, possibly a little uneasy at the sight of our volumes, he suggested that we should not go into our cases in full detail. I spoke for an hour without interruption, even succeeding in arousing interest in Mr. Justice Boys, who took on a much less grim appearance. At one o'clock the Court adjourned for lunch, and Mr. Justice Boys had so far relented that he provided us with lunch at his own expense. By about half-past two, both Nimbkar and I had concluded our arguments, and Mr. Kemp was called on to reply for the prosecution.

Mr. Kemp made two serious mistakes. In the first place he was over-confident, being sure that the Court would decide in his favour whatever he said, and secondly, he obviously irritated Mr. Justice Boys by the patronizing way in which he laid down the law. Mr. Kemp had once acted as a judge of the Bombay High Court, and his attitude suggested that he regarded the Allahabad High Court in the same way as the Londoner regards the country bumpkin. Looking more like the Duke of Wellington than ever, he was condescending to explain the law to this provincial court, when Mr. Justice Boys put him completely out of his stride by contradicting him flatly and without ceremony. From that moment Mr. Kemp was lost. Wounded in his tenderest part, he strove vainly to conceal his anger, but his confidence had gone, and

he received the final stroke when Mr. Justice Mukerjee, who had asked him point-blank to state the overt illegal acts alleged against us, received a hesitant reply that the prosecution could not allege any such acts. In vain Mr. Kemp argued that it was not necessary for an accused person under this charge to have committed any illegal act to be convicted; it was sufficient to prove the ultimate object of the accused to be illegal. And as our avowed object was to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over British India, it did not matter whether all our preliminary steps were perfectly legal. But he was arguing against the stream. When he finally sat down we hardly troubled to reply; and Mr. Justice Mukerjee announced that the decision of the Court would be given later.

The journey back to Meerut was agreeable but uneventful. We were both pleased with ourselves, realizing that we had made a good impression; but we still had not the slightest hope of being released on bail. Our applications would be dismissed as a matter of course, but we had had a pleasant excursion, and a very welcome break in the monotony of our lives since we were arrested. We arrived back at Meerut the next morning in time to attend the Court. The interlude was over, and we prepared to resume our parts in the normal routine.

Two days later, after breakfast, a convict brought me the daily newspaper which the Government permitted us to have. I opened it idly, caught my own name in the headlines, and had read nearly half a column about myself before I realized its significance. Nimbkar and I had been granted bail by the High Court at Allahabad. The news was regarded in the nature of a miracle. It was our first victory over our opponents, and we naturally rejoiced. Nimbkar and I were also excited at our impending release; and it was then naturally supposed that the others would be released in the near future as soon as their application had been heard. We were too sanguine;



it was soon made clear that the Government was furiously angry at our release. The order of the High Court had seriously minimized the gravity of the charge. Wires were pulled, harassed officials got to work to restore the prestige of the prosecution and to rehabilitate the trial. Mr. Kemp lost his pose of the strong silent man, made wild and angry statements in Court and sought to efface his ignominious failure by a display of zeal and industry. Mr. Khairat Nabi lost weight, and the judge could hardly contain himself. In a long and bitter order he declined to regard the High Court order as binding on him, and of all the bail applications of the other prisoners he only allowed three. He was also indiscreet enough to include in his order a few sarcastic remarks about Mr. Justice Mukerjee, for which he was subsequently publicly rebuked by a full Bench of the High Court.

As for Nimbkar and myself, the District Magistrate of Meerut demanded very high securities for our release. As a consequence we went down to his Court and argued for a substantial reduction, a reduction which was opposed by Mr. Kemp who was also present. We declared to the magistrate that the securities he demanded were prohibitive and were intended to frustrate the order of the High Court, and we threatened that we would take the matter of securities to the High Court. The magistrate forthwith substantially reduced the securities, releasing us immediately on our own personal guarantee and giving us fourteen days to find two other sureties. It was not Mr. Kemp's lucky week.

After an imprisonment of two years we were now free, and felt like fish out of water. On the evening of our release we went with some friends to the local cinema, and were thunderstruck by the talkies. Before our arrest the world was still in the era of the silent films, and the talkies had been introduced while we were in prison. It made me feel like Rip Van Winkle.

I took two rooms in the building of a general provision

store, owned by a family of *baniyas*, and hired a Mohammedan cook and some furniture. The next day being Sunday, I took the train to Delhi and wandered over the marble floors and beautiful gardens of Shah Jahan. In the afternoon I was driven through the vast desolate thoroughfares of New Delhi, the new city of the Imperial Government. It has cost millions of pounds to build; but the money spent has not given it life. Historians are wont to describe Delhi as the tomb of the Moghul Empire: there are prophets who see in the white and isolated splendour of New Delhi the tomb of the British Raj. Several dynasties, from Asoka to the House of Timur, have found in Delhi the burial place of their hopes and existence: each dynasty has raised its own Delhi on the foundations of the old; and it seems ominously significant that, at a time when British imperialism is losing its iron hold over the Indian Empire, its leaders should erect another New Delhi, a city as artificial as the deserted rose-red city of Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri.

The New Delhi of the British has been well built in the best Moghul tradition. The white palace of the Viceroy and the new buildings of the central legislature are austere and beautiful in their simplicity. The gardens are well laid out, and the roads are broad and well built. It is a city where every prospect pleases and only man is absent. New Delhi has no permanent population: it exists as the winter resort of Government officials. In the summer it is at one with Nineveh and Tyre.

While wandering in Delhi, I had forgotten the troubles of the Meerut case; but it was unfortunately necessary to return to them. For a month I was tied to Meerut, attending the Court all day as usual, and returning to freedom in the evening. At last at the end of the month there came a welcome break. It was the Mohammedan festival of Mohurram, although festival is hardly the right word; for it is intended to commemorate the murder of the Prophet's grandson.

During these days, the Mohammedans demonstrate their detestation of this horrid crime by carrying in procession replicas of the victim's tomb, constructed of tinsel, which are buried at the end of the ceremony. It is a time when communal feelings run high, and the authorities usually take precautions to avoid clashes between Hindu and Mohammedan hooligans.

Caring little about the Prophet's grandson, Mohurram was for me only a holiday, and an opportunity to leave Meerut and all its gloomy associations behind for a few days. On the very day the Court closed I took the train for Bombay, arriving there the next morning. The few days spent in Bombay gave me the illusion of real freedom. They were hectic days. A succession of fêtes, receptions and garlanding ceremonies. The workers of Parel, to show that they had not forgotten us, arranged a large reception which we attended, and were very much encouraged by the warmth of their feeling. But it was distressing to notice the change in their conditions. The great days of their unity and strength had passed with the collapse of the textile strike of 1929. Since then they had become divided among themselves by the unscrupulous activities of groups of adventurers and *agents provocateurs*, and were at the mercy of opposing factions. But their enthusiasm at our reception showed that this was only a temporary phase, and that it would not take long for them to unite again in face of an attack, and present as strong if not a stronger front than that with which they had astonished the world in 1928.

But all good things come to an end. After a few busy and enjoyable days, it was time to return to Meerut. I was seen off at the station by thousands of workers, who, shouting their militant farewells, drowned the religious slogans of a party of Mohammedan merchants, who were seeing a visiting *mullah* off on his return journey to Peshawar.

The *mullah* and I occupied the same carriage, and as the

As the train began to move we both leaned out of the window to receive our respective salutations; but the cry *Allahu akbar* (God is Great) seemed effete and dead when followed by the roar of the modern industrial working class, *Inquilab Zindabad* (Long Live Revolution). And with the vast station resounding to the most popular slogan of the twentieth century, the train gathered speed and passed into the night.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *On Bail*

No one who has not been imprisoned can appreciate the luxury of liberty. Generally speaking, pleasure consists in experiencing something of which for a long time we have been deprived. We can become as tired of liberty as of any other indulgence; but deprive us of it and it assumes the aspect of almost unattainable joy. I speak of liberty only in the strictest relative sense; for there is no liberty if the term be examined objectively. "We are all prisoners," observes Robert Burton. "What is our life but a prison? We are all imprisoned in an island. The world itself is to some men a prison, our narrow seas as so many ditches, and when they have compassed the globe of the earth, they would fain go see what is done in the moon. In Muscavy, and many other northern parts, all over Scandia, they are imprisoned half the year in stoves, they dare not peep out for cold. . . . What is a ship but a prison? And so many cities are but as so many hives of bees, anthills; but that which thou abhorrest, many seek: women keep in all winter, and most part of summer, to preserve their beauties. . . . Art in prison? Make right use of it, and mortify thyself. . . ." Add to this that we are all subject to the laws of nature and man, that free will exists only in the imaginations of idealist philosophers, and we cannot but perceive the very narrow limits of the liberty which is permitted us.

Imprisonment had taught me to value that little liberty which we were permitted: I rejoiced in the freedom of eating when I pleased, walking out when I pleased, the power of seeing my friends when I pleased, in short, of being free in some measure of the irritating and pettifogging interferences in the daily course of my life, which I had been forced to

tolerate while in jail. But while I was free of the jail for the time being, I was by no means free of the Court of Mr. Yorke. Every day the Court sat except for holidays; I had to attend from half-past ten in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon. I was thus only permitted to enjoy my liberty in the evenings, and as I usually became sleepy about nine o'clock I had but little time to make the most of it. Nor did I have much opportunity, for Meerut is not a city of pleasure, and I was handicapped anyway by having no companions with whom I could have found amusement. Acquaintances I had in plenty, but I found no one with whom I could share my tastes. I was naturally boycotted by the European community as well as by the Anglo-Indians and the Indian officials. The number of my acquaintances, with whom I had nothing in common, only served to emphasize the extent of my loneliness.

At first owing to the novelty I was not concerned by my solitary state: in fact, having lived day and night with thirty-one others in one barrack, I was rather disposed to regard my loneliness as a blessing. But as the weeks rolled by the need for companionship grew more acute: I sometimes thought that I was in an arid wilderness without a friend, and I began to regret the days of my imprisonment when I had companionship to excess.

The people I knew outside were not very interesting. My neighbours were a family of Indian Christians, striving hard on an income of next to nothing to preserve the appearance of being European. The family consisted of the father, an impoverished auctioneer, the mother, who bore no resemblance either to Aphrodite or to Pallas Athene, and their daughter-in-law and her brood from two marriages. The daughter-in-law was the indirect cause of many breaches of the peace: she was what John Knox would have called "a honey-pot." Pretty, of voluptuous shape, she attracted all the male wasps in the neighbourhood, to the disapproval of

her father-in-law who, as his business was dead, used to spend all his time chasing them out of his compound. Soldiers from the garrison similarly attracted would wander down and get drunk with the irate father-in-law, and the family life was spent in a succession of brawls, noisy quarrels and drinking parties. Through it all the lady, at least as far as I could tell, kept her virtue.

There is a large Eurasian community in Meerut, whose roots go back to the Indian Mutiny. Since the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, those of mixed parentage are no longer Eurasians but Anglo-Indians, even if their parents were Indian and Portuguese. After what little contact I had with them, I was not impressed. Aping the European on the salary of the Indian, they have the racial virtues of neither. They are despised by Indian and European alike and are employed chiefly on the railways and in the police. Acutely suffering from an inferiority complex, they are loud and superficial, arrogant to the Indian whenever they dare and servile to the European. Their attempts to preserve their status as a section of the ruling race in spite of poverty are often pathetic; in these attempts the girls of the community take their share and often supplement the family income at the expense of their chastity. They are an unfortunate community, without position, intelligence or integrity. For the most part products of the casual lust of sex-starved Europeans they live a precarious existence, riding without anchor in turbulent seas: an artificial community in danger of being abandoned by their contemptuous progenitors and protectors.

Among the Anglo-Indian community of Meerut there were a few old ladies of property, each possessed of several bungalows in the Cantonment, originally acquired by some long-forgotten sire in the Mutiny days, which they let to Army officers at exorbitant prices. They passed their days in gossip and in waging never-ending guerilla warfare against the Cantonment authorities on questions of rent, repairs and

taxes. It was my privilege to be slightly acquainted with a few of these ladies, whose proceedings were for me a never-failing source of amusement. One old maid, otherwise remarkable in no respect, claimed direct descent from King James I; a contention which she maintained in the Courts, when bringing a case against several individuals for putting her into a vat of colour during the Hindu festival of Holi. Another old lady provided by her death a scandal which nearly caused another schism in the Christian Church: she decomposed so quickly after death that the hearse which contained her coffin had to be driven to the cemetery at the gallop, so that the coffin inside bounced up and down, to the great indignation and amazement of the spectators. This unfortunate event became the sole topic of conversation for several days, during which time the scandalous memory of the Anglo-Indian lady of Meerut who died of sunstroke in the Central Prison at Allahabad, after successfully poisoning her husband and her lover's wife with a compound of powdered glass and arsenic, and who has the same place in the history of Meerut as that of Catherine de Medici in the history of France, was temporarily forgotten. For these good dames, if a scandal did not exist it would be necessary to invent one, lest they should die of complete mental paralysis.

The Cantonment of Meerut, under the control of the military authorities, is vastly different from the City, which is a packed collection of bazaars, incredibly narrow and constantly choked with people of all descriptions. Each bazaar is flanked by two open drains, used impartially by the inhabitants for every purpose, and the resultant smell can be imagined better than described. The houses and shops are heavily coated with cowdung, and the sugary displays of the confectioners are invariably black with flies, although that does not seem to discourage people from buying. In spite of the ravages of cholera, dysentery and enteric, the Indian unlike the European is not distressed by the sight of



flies on food. The foodstuffs in the bazaar are exposed without any covering, and when the Indian pauses to buy his favourite sweetmeat he is not deterred by the horrible smell of sewage surrounding the sweet-shop, and merely contents himself with brushing away the flies from his own particular portion before enjoying it. It is difficult to make your way through the throng of people who congregate in these narrow bazaars; and in addition to the people your way is often impeded by the sacred cows, which wander aimlessly to and fro or lie down in the middle of the lane ruminating as peacefully and as unconcernedly as if they were in a field. At night the bazaars are deserted by the people, and their place is taken by swarms of large rats, whose prosperity is assured by the open drains, constructed on the same model as that prevalent in the reign of Asoka.

Meerut also abounds in monkeys, which do considerable damage to the houses by playfully hurling the tiles at each other. They can be amazingly human. I remember one family who used to take their evening stroll on the jail wall, until they were captured and deported by the jail authorities for undermining the strength of the prison by pulling the wall to bits. The father of the family, a huge buck-monkey with fangs like sabres, would walk with masculine dignity and superiority a few feet ahead of his wife and child, who would play together behind the paternal back as quietly as possible to avoid attracting the masculine wrath. The male monkey possessed all the domestic conceit and the same tyrannical attitude towards his womenfolk as the orthodox Hindu, while the female and her offspring showed the same timidity and submissiveness as the Hindu wife, who is taught by her religion that her husband is the direct representative of God. It is small wonder that Hanuman, the monkey-god, is one of the most popular and intelligent of all the gods.

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I had not been very long on bail before I found it necessary to dispense with the services of my Mohammedan cook. He departed quite cheerfully, and it was perhaps only a coincidence that shortly after his departure I missed a gold pencil, an extra mosquito-net, two silk shirts and a white suit. His place was taken by a smart-looking Hindu named Hiralal. Despite his smart appearance, his light skin and regular features, I discovered later that he was an untouchable by caste; but that of course made no difference, as Europeans usually find that untouchables make good servants. Hiralal had a malicious sense of humour: relying on his light skin and general smartness, he would take delight in putting on a sacred thread, the hallmark of caste purity, and then dining at restaurants reserved exclusively for the twice-born brahmans, thus polluting them almost beyond hope of redemption. He undoubtedly took a great risk in thus satisfying his malice; for had he been discovered as an untouchable, whose very vicinity is pollution, he would probably have been torn to bits.

Some time later I left my rooms and rented half the bungalow belonging to a deputy magistrate, who lived with his family in the other half. It was a spacious building surrounded by a very large compound. Situated in the compound were several outhouses, one of which served as my kitchen. I had often noticed, when I returned from Court rather earlier than usual, a motley gathering of ruffians round the kitchen, to whom Hiralal was dispensing hospitality at my expense. Although I did not much like the looks of this collection, I did not interfere as I myself was not inconvenienced, and I therefore saw no reason to check Hiralal's social ambitions. A little later I received a letter from a European resident complaining that Hiralal had terrorized his servant with threats of physical violence. When questioned, Hiralal was all innocence; and unable to elicit any further information I let the matter drop. But I began to have my doubts of

Hiralal's respectability, and these were confirmed one day when returning from Court, hot and tired, I found no tea awaiting me and that Hiralal had disappeared.

I sat fuming with impotent rage until a small boy arrived, announced himself as Hiralal's son, and informed me with becoming gravity that his father had been arrested and was languishing in the local lock-up, on a charge of beating a woman. Guided by the small boy I walked to the police station, and demanded particulars about my servant. The sub-inspector in charge became most helpful after I had given him a couple of rupees, produced the somewhat sheepish Hiralal, and conducted us down to see the victim of the crime. This turned out to be a comely young woman, who, to my great embarrassment, removed her bodice in order to show me on her back the proof of Hiralal's brutality. I sternly reprimanded Hiralal, gave the woman a few rupees as compensation, and she then withdrew the charge. I then returned home followed by my cheerful and quite unrepentant servant. The only explanation he offered of his brutality was that the woman had slandered him.

For a few weeks after this incident I had domestic peace, until I was sent for one day by the deputy magistrate who was also my neighbour and landlord. He, alleging that Hiralal was the head of a gang of dacoits, requested me to discharge him as he was afraid of being robbed. I replied to the effect that if Hiralal were really a dacoit, the police should have arrested him and brought him to trial, and as they had no evidence to do this, I saw no reason why I should inconvenience myself for a mere rumour, adding that I had found Hiralal to be perfectly satisfactory as a servant. As a matter of fact, as soon as I realized that the authorities regarded my servant with hostility and suspicion I determined to keep him. I considered that to discharge Hiralal, who was obviously at war with the police on his own account, might result in my employing a police spy as his successor. As it turned out

I was wise. I found out later that Hiralal had been closely connected with both a dangerous gang of outlaws and the police; in this position he had cheerfully double-crossed both sides until the police, aware of his deceit, had discharged him from their service, whereupon he had become the adviser of all the notorious characters in the district. In this dangerous pursuit he had been extremely clever, and the police had continually failed to discover any evidence on which to convict him. After he had entered my service the police had approached him suggesting that he should report on my movements and activities. He declined, reported the proposal to me, and the police determined to revenge themselves.

One afternoon while I was having my tea several policemen, headed by a sub-inspector, descended on my bungalow, demanding to search the kitchen and Hiralal's quarters. I attended the search in my capacity as householder, and in order to see that my property was not touched. The police rummaged for about half an hour, but found nothing except a piece of iron which they carried away in triumph alleging it to be a jemmy. Hiralal attended the search of his belongings in a spirit of compassion, pitying the stupidity of the police, and maintained a jaunty and nonchalant manner throughout the whole affair. He occasionally deigned to exchange a sympathetic glance with me; for he made no secret that he regarded me as a master criminal, and therefore as a natural ally in the fight against the forces of law and order. It is doubtless owing to this allegiance of Hiralal's that my house was immune from theft or depredation throughout the period he was in my service. There was no need for me to employ a guard and I could leave my doors wide open when going out, secure in the knowledge that no thief would dare to brave the displeasure of my invaluable cook. He was an Indian prototype of Jonathan Wild.

The only other member of my household and the companion of my solitude, was a fox-terrier bitch who had been

given to me as a puppy. She was called Proly, being short for Proletariat; for she had originally been found in a ditch, hungry, cold and abandoned. As she grew up she became my only real companion, and I grew as much attached to her as if she had been a human. She soon developed a remarkable intelligence as well as a very strong instinct for mischief. Possessed of all the arts of her sex, she knew how to wheedle her way out of any dangerous situation: threatened with punishment for some particularly heinous offence she used to disarm wrath by simulating an apologetic and affectionate submissiveness. She became in time the undisputed mistress of the house, with as much attention and care lavished on her as though she had been a beautiful lady of fashion. For she was really beautiful with her white smoothness and arched chest; but she was not respectable; her morals were deplorable and she had all the cunning and wantonness of a prosperous harlot. Many were the nights I was kept awake chasing her favourite lovers off the premises: lovers for whom she had acquired a special technique of enticement; but as soon as I arose with all the wrath of an outraged father intent on preserving the chastity of a wayward daughter, she was clever enough to join in the pursuit of the offender, thus concealing her complicity with a great display of outraged virtue.

Her greatest and most understanding friend was a little female monkey kept by Hiralal. Early every morning Proly would visit the monkey, lie down and allow it to pull out all the ticks and vermin which she had gathered during the course of her previous day's activities. The monkey would make a thoroughly good job of it, its expert fingers exploring Proly's white body with remarkable precision, and then when the cleaning had been effected, it would claim its reward. This consisted of a ride round the compound, Proly acting as the steed with the monkey sitting astride holding on to her neck. It was great sport, and it attracted several admiring human spectators; indeed people used to come specially every

morning to witness the performance. I might easily have imposed an entrance charge. But all good things come to an end: the sport ceased when Proly rather unexpectedly became a mother of triplets. She was not a satisfactory mother, neglecting her offspring with an almost human callousness, until they all three one by one died. And shortly after that came the tragedy.

Hydrophobia is the scourge of the animal world. It rages in the hot weather. The jackals who creep at night into the villages from the jungle, usually the timidest of creatures, are liable to become bold and savage; and if a jackal attacks it is time to take care for it is a sure sign that it is mad. The pariah dogs that lie about the roads, maimed and covered with sores, suddenly become a menace, and the monkeys too, although protected by Hanuman, easily become victims to the disease and are responsible for the deaths of many men. Now it so happened that the favourite recreation of Proly was fighting. In this pursuit she would combine cunning with strength, and often, having started a free fight among all the local dogs, she herself would unobtrusively retire and watch the fun in comfort from the verandah of the bungalow. But it was unavoidable that she should occasionally be bitten. The bites were never serious, and came to be taken by me as a matter of course. Suddenly she showed signs of restlessness, and her behaviour became eccentric. Her protective instinct became excessive; no one could approach me without being savagely attacked. Then she took to wailing and howling all night long, and by the time I had secured a veterinary surgeon, Proly was frothing at the mouth and biting at everything and everybody. She was beautiful even in her madness.

For more than ten days she was kept under observation chained in one of the outhouses, in the hope that it would not be hydrophobia and that she would show signs of recovery. During this period I ignored all the protests of the neighbours, who naturally objected to the howling by night, intent on

saving the life of my only companion. After the ten days it became certain that Proly's life was finished, and reluctantly I agreed to her condemnation. She was induced to enter a wooden box and then chloroformed out of the world. And the house seemed empty.

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I had throughout the period of the trial maintained good health. I had steadily lost weight and strength, mainly owing to the heat and confinement, but had kept free of actual illness. And while I was priding myself on my good constitution, I was stricken down at the beginning of August, 1931.

The month of August is an unpleasant one in Meerut. It is one of the monsoon months; but although the sky is heavy with clouds, and the atmosphere incredibly hot and damp, it rains very seldom. Throughout the whole of India the season of the monsoon is a dangerous one. Disease is rampant, the black hordes of flies generated by the rain carry the germs of cholera and dysentery all over the land; the mosquitoes multiply and inject malaria into the blood of millions; the water of the flooded rivers is filthy with refuse gathered on the way; and the cobra together with other things of evil, flooded out of its home, glides over the land, feeding on the innumerable frogs in the ditches and seeking warmth and shelter in the houses.

Realizing the dangers of August I was neither alarmed nor surprised when, returning from the Court one day, I found I had a slight fever. I was rather pleased than otherwise, for it gave me an excuse to have a holiday from the Court. The next morning, therefore, I obtained a medical certificate, dispatched it to the judge, and settled down on my bed to enjoy a quiet and comfortable day. I had recently hired an electric fan, and stripping myself of my clothes I allowed the fan to play on me. The fever did not subside either that day or the next or for many days after. The doctor became seriously

alarmed and brought in a couple of colleagues for consultation, who, having first declared themselves in favour of typhoid, subsequently proceeded to treat me for pneumonia. The civil surgeon, who was also the superintendent of the jail, was sent for and he confirmed the diagnosis of pneumonia. It was decided that I should be sent to hospital, the only difficulty in the way being to find the hospital. The only good hospital in the district was that controlled by the military authorities, who, seldom in favour of admitting civilians, were the less likely to open their arms in welcome to a prospective convict, a traitor and a conspirator. The authorities, however, were alarmed; for my condition was reported serious and they had no desire to be burdened with the responsibility of another martyr in the cause of liberty. Telegrams had also been dispatched to England, and my mother and other friends immediately brought pressure to bear on the India Office, In short, owing to this pressure and at the urgent insistence of the Government, the military authorities agreed to admit me into their hospital.

While I lay with an ice-bag on my head awaiting the military ambulance, I received many visitors, among whom was a prominent lady doctor. She looked me in the eyes, felt my pulse, and announced in a loud and cheerful voice that I should not live till morning. She never forgave me for subsequently recovering. Soon the ambulance arrived and I was placed on a stretcher, and, encircled by friends holding oil-lamps, for it was late at night, I was carried out to the ambulance by two orderlies. I thought of the burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna.

I was treated extraordinarily well at the hospital, receiving at the hands of the military doctors and orderlies every comfort and attention, until I finally left at the beginning of September, a pale and unsubstantial ghost, but nevertheless cured. I was given a month's leave in order to recuperate, and went down to spend it with friends in Bombay. A few



days after my arrival I was caught in a shower of rain, with the result that I got another and more serious attack of pneumonia with the additional complication of pericarditis. For weeks my life was despaired of, but thanks to the unremitting care of my friends and the efficiency of a Parsee doctor, who refused to take payment, my unfortunate career remained uninterrupted by death.

I arrived back in Meerut at the beginning of the cold weather. For more than three months the trial had continued without me; but very little progress had been made. Three months had no significance in the progress of the Meerut conspiracy case.

Towards the end of November I attended a great religious fair held on the banks of the Ganges at Gurumukteshwar. After the Kumbha Mela of Allahabad, the Gurumukteshwar fair is the most important event in the United Provinces. It takes place only once in six years, and I was fortunate that it should occur the year I happened to be free in Meerut; for it is a sight well worth seeing.

Gurumukteshwar is situated at about twenty-five miles from Meerut. Millions attend the fair coming from every part of the United Provinces; and as the festival continues for several days the people build themselves a huge temporary city, composed of more than a million tents, with bazaars, restaurants and theatres. Rising above the tents stand here and there tall watch-towers, to enable the police to survey the assembled multitude and observe from afar any signs of trouble. But there is usually very little trouble; everybody is in a happy mood, combining religious devotion with high spirits. To this isolated spot come bullock-carts from nearly every village in the United Provinces, carrying sturdy peasants and their families, all intent on enjoying the great holiday for which they have saved for six years. The peasant girls are a delight to watch: dressed in all their finery, a blaze of colour, and with ankles, arms, necks and hair heavily decorated

with beautiful barbaric ornaments of encrusted silver or gold, they run, sing and chatter, their wired skirts swinging with every movement, as if proclaiming that for these few days they have not a care in the world. And they are physically beautiful: light-skinned, large brown almond eyes, with breasts like mangoes, pointed and firm, and the carriage of goddesses; they are a revelation to the tired European. All day people amuse themselves and bathe in the Holy Ganges, and as night falls each person places on the water a little flat earthenware lamp, of the same shape as that celebrated in the story of Aladdin, until the surface of the river is covered with tiny flames, which float with the current into the night. Hinduism has many defects; but no one can deny that it is a pretty religion giving scope to art and imagination.

I went down to Gurumukteshwar in the company of two of my fellow-accused, both Hindus, who were also on bail. Another accused, a native of Meerut, who always claimed that he had been arrested only in order to give jurisdiction to the trial, was already at Gurumukteshwar occupying a tent with his wife and relations. We arrived in the morning by lorry from Meerut in a cloud of dust. I saw an immense ocean of tents, covering many miles. On the day I was there I was told that there were three million people present and I can quite believe the figures. It was difficult to walk in the soft yielding sand, forcing a way through the good-humoured crowd, and it was still more difficult to find one tent among so many, like seeking a needle in a haystack. Fortunately our search was cut short by colliding with the very man we were looking for, who it seemed was also looking for us, and we were conducted to his tent for refreshments. Afterwards we walked for miles through the camp, and along the bank of the Ganges, stopping here and there to watch jugglers, magicians, snake-charmers, and other interesting spectacles. I was surprised to notice that the crowd greeted me with particular respect, making way for me with many polite

gestures. I felt that I was being received with more than ordinary politeness, and was at a loss to know why. The mystery was solved when I heard someone behind point me out as the District Magistrate; and it amused me to receive the homage due to that exalted officer of the King-Emperor against whom I was accused of conspiring.

In the evening, after watching the devotees launch their little lamps in honour of the Holy Mother, my friends insisted on me accompanying them to a marionette show. Squatting on the dirty floor of a large tent, jostled by an enthusiastic audience, we witnessed many of the most remarkable exploits of the gods, represented by gaily coloured marionettes. The stories of the loves of Krishna, a god rather similar to the Greek Hermes, with the beautiful milkmaid Radha, and that of the sufferings of Sita abandoned by her husband Rama, were performed with great skill and provoked prolonged applause. But in spite of this enthusiasm I was glad to escape; for I was tired out with the day's sight-seeing, having tramped miles in the soft sand. Outside the atmosphere had become almost intolerable with the acrid smoke from burning cakes of cow-dung, which is the fuel on which the peasant cooks his meals. We therefore made haste to leave this city of a week, found the lorry about to depart for Meerut and climbed in.

And as the lorry sped on its way towards Meerut at a breakneck speed, we passed many bullock-carts on their way to Gurumukteshwar rumbling as slowly and philosophically as they had rumbled three thousand years ago. And the silence of the night was broken by the voices of peasant women singing an ancient love-lyric of their country.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Hard Labour*

To all things there is an end; although the end usually signifies another beginning. The sessions trial which began in January, 1930, concluded its slow progress through the evidence of defence and prosecution in August, 1932, when the five assessors were called on to deliver their verdict. More than three and a half years had passed since that memorable day of March, 1929, when the case had been initiated by the arrest of the accused. The end had for so long been inconceivable that when it arrived it found us incredulous. And we were rightly incredulous: the verdict of the assessors was only the beginning of a very protracted end.

On the day appointed for the assessors' verdict we displayed but a mild interest. The assessors, however, were highly excited. It was their great moment. Having sat for so many years, more bored than anyone else concerned, because they never really understood what it was all about; completely ignored by the judge, the prosecution and the defence, as though the five chairs on which they sat were empty, they at last felt that they were about to be for a brief moment the centre of attraction. If they had one regret it was that their brief moment of glory coincided with the stopping of their daily stipend of about ten shillings. But like everyone else concerned with the case except the accused they had had a good financial innings: one of the assessors at least was heavily in debt at his appointment, and he not only liquidated this before the end of the case, but saved up a nice little sum for himself. Only on one occasion had the assessors asserted themselves: when they were first appointed they only received the equivalent of seven and sixpence a day, but after a few months they threatened to go on strike unless

this sum was raised to ten shillings, thus showing that they had followed at least the evidence of our trade-union activities and had picked up a few tips.

They were called upon by the judge, one by one, to give their verdict, or rather to answer two questions put to them by the judge. Firstly, were they of the opinion that a conspiracy to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty over British India existed? Secondly, if such a conspiracy did exist, which of the accused if any took part in it? Four of the assessors were quite convinced that there had been such a conspiracy and found all the accused guilty with the exception of five; and it was surprising that their separate lists were almost identical in every point; it would, however, be uncharitable to suppose that these lists had been supplied to them from one and the same source. The fifth assessor proved a tougher nut to crack. He astonished the Court by moving an amendment to the main resolution. When asked whether a conspiracy had existed, he replied in the affirmative; but added that it was not a conspiracy to deprive the King-Emperor of his sovereignty: it was he explained a conspiracy only against the capitalists, and therefore if the judge would agree to substitute capitalists for King-Emperor then he would bring in a verdict of guilty. The judge was pardonably annoyed. He explained to the erring assessor that the accused were either guilty of the charge made against them or not guilty, and that there was no room for amendments in the Indian Penal Code. The assessor then turned nasty and said that, as the judge refused to accept his amendment, he had great pleasure in bringing in all the accused not guilty.

I was very fortunate as far as this verdict was concerned: along with four others I was found not guilty by all the five assessors. The verdict telegraphed by Reuter to England and broadcasted in the wireless news, was taken seriously there. As a result I received several telegrams congratulating me and inquiring by what boat I was returning home. In England

they had made the mistake of supposing that the verdict of the assessors was equivalent to the verdict of an English jury. They could not be expected to know that this verdict is purely ornamental, or that Indian assessors have no power whatsoever. The judge alone decides irrespective of the verdict of the assessors who is guilty and who is not guilty when he gives his sentences.

Having recorded the verdict of the assessors as in duty bound, the judge then adjourned the Court until the middle of December, saying that he would require that time to write his judgment. But he added that before we who were on bail could leave the station we must produce before him our sureties, so that he could satisfy himself that the sureties were sound. One of my sureties, a lawyer of whom I had long been suspicious, took this occasion to withdraw his security without giving me any notice. Fortunately, I had anticipated this action, knowing that the police were anxious to have my bail cancelled, and I was therefore able to produce almost immediately another gentleman willing to stand surety. As the latter was of high social status and was known to possess great wealth, the judge was unable to make further difficulties, and I was free to depart.

The next few days I spent in preparations for this departure, paying my debts, packing, visiting friends and in coming to terms with my landlord. As for Hiralal he had proved himself so invaluable that I decided to take him with me. Then, early one morning while Meerut was still asleep. Hiralal and I boarded the Frontier Mail and were carried rapidly towards Bombay.

The next few months were spent between Bombay and Madras, just passing the time until the judge should summon me back to Meerut to receive my sentence. That I would be sentenced I had no doubt; but I regarded the prospect with indifference. At this time, quite apart from the trial, I was immersed in a sea of troubles; there did not seem a bright

spot anywhere, and I thought that like Schopenhauer I should soon be unable to see the sun. I was rapidly approaching a state in which I should be dead to all feeling, and the prospect of imprisonment was to be welcomed as affording relief from almost intolerable conditions.

The judge, busy composing his judicial masterpiece in the cool air of the hills, was apparently enjoying himself so much that he twice postponed the re-assembly of the Court. Finally, I received a notice requiring me to be present in Court at Meerut on January 15, 1933. On the evening of the 13th I left Bombay, and arrived at Delhi the following night. Here I took a room in a hotel, in the hope of snatching a few hours of amusement on my last day of freedom. The next morning I once again visited the palace of Shah Jahan, and this time discovered in an obscure corner of the museum a beautiful little miniature of Zinut Mahal, the lovely intriguing wife of Bahadur Shah, the last of the Moghuls, who died in exile after the Indian Mutiny. The painting of miniatures was an art much favoured by the Moghuls, and some of the best miniatures, from Baber to Bahadur Shah, have few rivals either in delicacy or beauty. I there and then resolved that if ever I were rich I would make a private collection of Eastern miniatures, a record of all the fine ladies who graced the Moghul courts; a resolution which I have not as yet been able to put into practice; but there could be no better way of spending wealth than to purchase the consolation of beauty pure and undefiled.

In the evening after spending a very quiet and pleasant day, I said farewell to Moghul memories and took the train to Meerut. The weather was very cold, for we were still in mid-winter. Hiralal, I had left behind in Bombay, and as I had already given up my bungalow I found accommodation in the only good hotel in the town. There sitting comfortably before a fire I spent many of my last hours of freedom in reading a highly exciting detective story bought at the station.

The next morning, fortified with a good breakfast, I left my luggage at the house of a friend, and took a *tonga* to the Court. It was less like a court than an armed camp. The roads approaching it were lined with armed policemen, standing six feet apart, and a chain of policemen surrounded the whole building of the Garden House, less than two feet apart. It seemed as if the authorities were expecting a popular insurrection. When I was within five hundred yards of the Court the *tonga* stopped before a chain of police drawn across the road, and I was forced to get down and proceed on foot; all conveyances were forbidden that morning in the area where justice was about to be dispensed. At the entrance of the Court, I came across a further obstacle: the police sergeant commanding the picket-guard at the entrance declined to allow me to go in unless I was searched. Equally obstinate I refused to be searched. I pointed out that I had a proprietary interest in the trial, and that if he continued to refuse to allow me in then the judgment could never be delivered; not that I minded, for as I assured him I would just as soon stay out. After a lot of discussion, and after the sergeant had appealed to me not to get him into trouble, we reached a compromise: I agreed to show him what I had in my pockets and he agreed to accept my word that I was not concealing any pistols, bombs or missiles which might disturb the serenity of justice. After I had shown him what I had in my pockets, he expressed a desire to confiscate a box of matches, lest I should be tempted in a moment of pique to set fire to the Court. He had no objection to my cigarettes, but on the question of matches he was adamant, despite my argument that cigarettes without matches were not of much value. Eventually I was allowed to enter; it was as if I had been graciously permitted to attend my own funeral.

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This time it was the judge's great day. For three years he



had toiled, tapping down the evidence on his little typewriter, and his task had not been always easy. Hardly a day had passed throughout the three years without a "breeze" with one or other of the accused. His powers for contempt of Court were too inadequate to be impressive, and it was useless to fine an accused for contempt when it was quite certain that he would not pay; nor could he send an accused to prison since he was already in prison. Yet although he must have realized that his powers were so limited, he often seemed to go out of his way to provoke trouble unnecessarily by seeking to impose petty restrictions, and by occasional outbursts of rudeness.

His conduct in this respect was unfortunate; for, although he was not always to blame, he usually came out the worse, and his attempts to maintain his dignity frequently ended in humiliation. I remember one occasion when he provoked trouble with Kishorilal Ghosh, one of the Bengali accused, a lawyer and politician with the Gladstonian manner who was distinguished by a ponderous but scrupulous courtesy. After the judge had snapped at him on several occasions, Ghosh lost his temper and remarked in his best Victorian manner: "It would appear, Your Honour, that after working so hard for three years someone's brain is softening, and it is not mine." The Court gasped and the judge going white asked him to repeat his comment. But Ghosh was too wary to drive things to extremes, and without betraying himself by the movement of a muscle he retorted: "I said, Your Honour, it would appear that after working so hard for three years someone's brain is softening, but it may be mine." And with this slight alteration Ghosh, combining prudence with dignity, had saved the judge and himself from what might have been a very difficult and unpleasant situation. There were times when I was almost sorry for the judge.

Kishorilal Ghosh, however, was not present for the judgment. While in jail he had contracted blood poisoning, which

he had been unable to cure after his release on bail. When the Court was closed after the verdict of the assessors, he had gone to Calcutta where he had been sent to hospital suffering from acute septicaemia, and had languished there all the time the judge was sifting the evidence at Simla. Naturally a fat man, those who had seen him reported that he was now nothing but skin and bone, and that the doctors had given up all hope of his recovery. The judge acquitted him, but his acquittal was nearly posthumous, for a few days after the judgment Kishorilal Ghosh died at Calcutta, and his ashes were scattered on the white surface of the Ganges.

There was another absentee on the day of judgment. This was the grand old man of the accused, D. R. Thengdi. He was an old man of sixty-five when he was arrested, and throughout the two years of his imprisonment he had astonished all by his vitality. He was irascible as most old men are, and was prone to make long speeches in Court on the subject of his constipation, whenever the Court sat beyond the appointed time for rising. Shortly after his release on bail, he began to lose his vitality, and one day he collapsed in the street on returning from Court. He was a difficult man to treat medically. I remember on one occasion, I went with him to see his doctor. The doctor being exceedingly busy kept us waiting for more than an hour in the waiting-room, to the intense rage and disgust of Thengdi, for whom patience was an unknown word. When at last he was ushered into the consulting-room, he complained of a violent pain in the back: the doctor carefully examined his back, could find nothing wrong, but gave him a prescription for some embrocation. Still fuming Thengdi returned home, nearly dismissed his servant for being late in obtaining the embrocation, had his back carefully rubbed and massaged and went to bed. On the following day the doctor, feeling rather repentant at having kept Thengdi waiting, went to visit him. Once again the back was examined without result. The doctor was puzzled:

Thengdi was quite obviously unwell, but there seemed to be nothing at all wrong with his back. Eventually as the doctor was about to go, Thengdi, mollified by the doctor's visit and his apologies, confessed that the pain was not in his back at all, but in his belly, and that he had only complained about his back out of revenge for being kept waiting so long in the doctor's ante-chamber.

When Thengdi was released on bail he discovered that during his imprisonment he had been cheated out of all his money and property by his friends. He never recovered from this blow. He soon lost his vitality, became apathetic and a victim to all the tiredness and disillusionment of old age. With his vigour went his health; he soon became seriously ill and after some difficulty obtained a month's leave from the Court to enable him to have treatment in his native town of Poona. The month was extended to two months; but justice is inexorable in her vindictiveness, and when the two months had passed Thengdi was summoned to return to Meerut.

He had to be carried into the Court. It was obvious to all that he was a dying man, and the judge who had brought him all the way from Poona was forced to allow him to return and to die in peace. We never saw him again. A few weeks after he had left Meerut he died.

He was the third casualty in the Meerut case, not counting the witness who had died following a snake-bite shortly before the opening of the sessions trial. First Langford James, then Thengdi, then Kishorilal Ghosh. They had all three played a prominent part in the case, and now that they were reduced to dust the case proceeded as though they had never existed. In dust alone the prosecution and defence were equal.

"The knife, the marble, the skinne, the body are ground away, trod away, they are destroy'd, who knows the revolutions of dust? Dust upon the King's high-way, and dust upon the King's grave, are both, or neither, Dust Royall,

and may change places; who knows the revolutions of dust?"

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Feeling that his labours were now at end, the judge was in a merry mood as he entered the Court on the day of judgment. He began by apologizing for the unconscionable time he had taken in preparing the judgment, which he added, long as it was, would provide most of us with reading matter for quite a long period of our imprisonment. He then proceeded to read the judgment to an appalled audience. One of the accused was sentenced to transportation for life; several to transportation for twelve, ten or seven years; some to transportation for five years, and others to rigorous imprisonment for four, three or two years. Only three were acquitted: one of them was on the point of death, and of the other two, homoeopathic Mukerjee was acquitted because the strongest evidence in his favour, said the judge, was "his obvious lack of ordinary intelligence." I was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for a period of four years. The period of imprisonment we had already undergone was not taken into account.

The judge did not stop to explain. As soon as he had read the sentences he tucked up his gown and hurried out of the Court, not stopping even to answer a question put to him by one of the lawyers about classification. He was then driven off to his bungalow in a car crowded with policemen. His haste and precautions were no doubt owing to his fear of terrorist reprisals. During the trial, the terrorists had made no secret of their ambition to "remove" the officials concerned in the Meerut case, and as the terrorists are men of action rather than of words, the authorities took all possible precautions. It is a pleasure to record that Mr. Yorke was not shot down by terrorists, but sailed safely to England and doubtless there enjoyed his long leave of eight months.

The sentence of transportation is now more traditional than accurate. Several years ago it meant a voyage across the Bay of Bengal to the penal settlement in the Andamans; but this penal settlement has now been officially abolished. That is to say that whereas previously prisoners sentenced to transportation automatically went to the Andamans, nowadays prisoners may go there if they wish, except of course for terrorist prisoners, who are now being imprisoned there much against their will. Parties of convicts from the Andamans are frequently sent round the Indian jails, on a propaganda tour to induce other long-term prisoners to volunteer to go there. The sentence of rigorous imprisonment corresponds to the English hard labour.

After our conviction, we each received a copy of the judgment, consisting of two large volumes, each containing six hundred printed foolscap pages. This judgment had not been arrived at cheaply: to obtain these two volumes the Government of India had spent more than £160,000. Armed with this ponderous document, we entered once again the police lorries which ran the gauntlet between two lines of armed police all the way to the jail. Here we were received with delight. The jailer and the deputy jailer could hardly contain the satisfaction which our sentences had given them. We were formally searched and conducted not to our old barrack which had been our home for so many years, but to another one which had been stripped bare for our reception. Here we walked up and down, with nothing to do, all the afternoon, waiting for something to happen. Above all we awaited news of our classification, for we were expecting to be placed in A class; but here again we were doomed to disappointment. In the evening the district magistrate arrived with the superintendent of the jail and announced that the judge had classified us in C class because "we claimed to represent the working class." Perhaps this was a sample of Mr. Yorke's judicial humour. Neither the district magistrate

nor the superintendent approved of Mr. Yorke's classification, and in their comments almost forgot the limitations of professional etiquette; but they could do nothing to alter it, and advised us to appeal to the local Government.

Our first night as convicts did nothing to improve our spirits. C-class prisoners are not permitted to sleep on beds, and therefore we were provided with a thin straw mat about a quarter of an inch thick, and, as it was winter, with three blankets made out of cotton waste. We were also provided with jail clothing, which was expressly designed to make anybody wearing it look ridiculous. But worse was to come.

Our real misfortunes began when we settled ourselves down for the night. We then discovered that the jail blankets were full of lice, and the night for me at least was spent in scratching. In India you are never free from some insect pest or another. If it is not flies, it is mosquitoes; if it is not mosquitoes, it is ants; if it is not ants, it is fleas; if it is not fleas, it is bugs; and it is not not bugs, it is lice. Frequently the pests combine. But of all of them the worst is lice. The louse is difficult to catch; it is loathsome both in colour and habits; it lays innumerable little eggs in the seams of garments, and is impervious to ordinary disinfectants. It took me more than two months in spite of all my efforts, which included boiling my clothes until they had shrunk to such an extent as to be more ridiculous than ever, to free myself of them. And as I had never had lice before I appreciated them less. The horror, after exploring an itching surface of your body, of bringing to light a dirty grey little insect with a red blob of stolen blood in its middle can only be experienced and not described.

But although the main, the lice were not the only, trouble which beset me during my first night as a convict. After trying to sleep for a considerable time on my thin mat I suddenly received a sharp bite from beneath. I sprang up to

investigate the new enemy attacking me, lifting up the mat and discovered a colony of white ants, which had burrowed their way through the mud floor, and then had penetrated through the mat until they had reached my person, which they were preparing to tackle in the same way. I crushed the colony with my foot, shook the pioneers out of the mat, and discouraged further sorties by pouring on the ground a liberal quantity of paraffin from one of the two oil lamps which were allowed us. Then I settled down to sleep again.

In spite of the lice I was just dozing off when I received a sharp tap on the head, and a hoarse voice shouted in Urdu the number six. My language was varied and profane. I realized that we were being subjected, on the orders of our enemy the jailer, to the indignity of being counted like cattle every quarter of an hour by a convict night-watchman. But thanks to the violence of my expressions of resentment, I did not receive any further taps on the head, and was thus able to concentrate on ignoring the lice and snatching a few hours sleep. I was glad when it was morning.

For the next few days there was little to do except read Mr. Yorke's judgment, which was neither literature nor amusing. We also found employment for our idle hands in washing our own clothes, an occupation which provided us with exercise and pleasure. We would go down to the trough of water in the barrack compound, soak our shirts in water, cover them with soap and then beat them against the stone with all our force until we had beaten out both the dirt and the soap. Additional pleasure was derived by imagining the stone to be Mr. Yorke or the jailer. If after this vigorous treatment the shirts were frayed and worn we felt no concern for they were Government property. The only restraint put on the pleasure of washing was the shortage of soap. The authorities refused to supply us with washing soap, and instead presented us occasionally with a few handfuls of soil which they alleged had the properties of soap. We therefore not

only had to buy soap out of the money lodged with the superintendent but also to guard it, for soap inside jail is a very valuable commodity and like all valuable commodities liable to be stolen.

After a few days the jail authorities decided that as we had been sentenced to hard labour it was about time we did some. They therefore had brought to us one morning a huge pile of *ban*, a special kind of coarse grass rather like hemp, with instructions that we should twist it into rope. They also sent down a bevy of convicts expert in the art in order to teach us how to do it. It appeared that you had to wind the ends of the grass round your big toe and then twist it together with a special movement of the palms of the hands into a thin but tough cord. We were warned that at first it would take all the skin off our hands; but a little thing like that did not matter and we would soon learn to make enough rope to hang half the population of India. On the first day we experimented a little with the raw material, but finding the task both hard and monotonous we decided not to do any more. Each morning the raw material was brought down, and carried away untouched each evening; and soon the quantity brought to us grew less and less each day until at last a great part of the daily supply was stolen by birds for the purpose of building their nests. Those who talk nobly of the productive urge in man should notice this strange unwillingness on our part to work for nothing.

It was not as though we had anything else to do; it was simply an instinctive revolt against forced labour for somebody else's benefit. But this time the shortage of intellectual occupation and recreation was becoming very trying. To prevent us smuggling messages outside the jail we had each been given an exercise-book of which the pages were numbered and signed by a jail official. These notebooks were given to us for the purpose of preparing our appeal; but they were used for other purposes as well. I began to make a thorough



study of Hindi, and soon covered many pages of my notebook with exercises in that language: others started to learn French and German, and quite a number suddenly developed a desire to learn Bengali. In the evenings our barrack was transformed into a Berlitz School.

It was a memorable day for me when I discovered in the jailer's office a copy of *East Lynne*. Normally I would not have been able to read the effusions of Mrs. Henry Wood, but as the only alternative reading matter was Mr. Yorke's judgment, I read *East Lynne* with as much avidity and sentimental pleasure as would have been aroused in the chaste bosom of a late Victorian spinster. I sorrowed over the dreadful fate of the Lady Christabel; I admired the nobility of Archibald Carlyle; and I raged with impotent fury at the black-avised villain who robbed the beautiful Christabel of her chastity, her husband, her children, her happiness and her health. In short I revelled in the slush; but I should much have preferred Petronius. Soon, however, books began to arrive from England, and the period of intellectual starvation was at an end.

When filing our applications of Appeal at the High Court at Allahabad, we had also sent an application to the Government requesting that we should be transferred to Allahabad pending the Appeal. The other accused had also filed applications for bail pending the Appeal; but I was sick and tired of the life of a semi-prisoner and therefore did not even apply for bail. After about six weeks we received a reply from the Government to another of our applications requesting to be placed in A class; it was rejected, but we were promoted from C to B class. We were also informed that the Government had agreed to transfer us to Allahabad for the Appeal. But some time elapsed before we were actually transferred.

The month of March saw us still at Meerut, and we celebrated there the fourth anniversary of our arrests. There also took place about this time the Hindu festival of Holi,

during which certain liberties are allowed even to prisoners. On this occasion we were provided with a concert in our barrack by a party of convicts, which in the circumstances we found sufficiently amusing.

On the day following Holi, the superintendent did not make his usual visit to the jail; he had been called away to a village in the district to effect a post-mortem on the bodies of seven people butchered with a sword in the temple of Kali. It appeared that someone else had been celebrating Holi. On the next day a new prisoner entered the jail charged with the murder of seven people. As he sat disconsolately in the main compound of the jail, we had plenty of time to observe him and even to speak to him. He was a slightly built man of gentle demeanour, wearing long hair and a beard. It was difficult to imagine such as he slaughtering women and children with the sword, and indeed he loudly proclaimed his innocence; but I caught in his eyes the gleam of the religious fanatic, and realized that we were talking to a homicidal maniac. Incidents of violence of this nature are unfortunately only too frequent in India; but before we condemn it is necessary to understand. And the key to this understanding is provided by Macaulay in his essay on John Milton. "The violence of those outrages," he writes, "will always be proportioned to the ferocity and the ignorance of the people; and the ferocity and ignorance of the people will be proportioned to the oppression and degradation under which they have been accustomed to live." And Macaulay was writing this of the English of the seventeenth century.

When at last the order was received to transfer us to Allahabad, I was like Simon's wife's mother "sick of a fever." I was threatened with the prospect of being left behind, and was only allowed to go with the others after I had signed a statement that I accepted full responsibility for the journey. We left in two batches, and I was included in the second. We were so glad to go that we even shook hands

with the jailer, and thought he was not a bad fellow after all. For four years the district jail of Meerut had been the centre of our world, and for a long time the circumference as well; and as it is a strange human weakness to become attached to the things we hate the most, provided we are given sufficient time to hate them in, although we were pleased to go, we did not leave the jail without a pang.

It was my second journey to Allahabad under police escort: the first journey had resulted in my release on bail, and the result of the second lay with the future; but whatever happened, we were bound for new surroundings, having at last severed our connection with the gloomy and depressing city of Meerut.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Flight from the Romantic*

THE central jail of Allahabad is situated not in Allahabad but in the village of Naini about five miles away. It is a huge jail covering many miles. We were accommodated in what was called the Old Female Ward, because it had once served for the accommodation of female prisoners. Some of us were rather offended at being referred to as the prisoners in the Old Female Ward: the appellation we felt contained a trace of derision. The Ward consisted of three buildings enclosed within a large compound, quite apart from the rest of the jail. One building served as our dormitory, another as our dining-room and workshop, and the third, which was a block of punishment cells designed for the purpose of housing recalcitrant females, served as our kitchen.

We were much better off here than we had been in Meerut jail; everything was clean, we received brand new clothes, ate decent food and slept soundly on comfortable canvas cots. The superintendent of the jail, a large Mohammedan named Salaamitoolah, devoted his whole time to the direction of the jail, with the result that there was very little petty tyranny from minor officials, and the business of the jail was done efficiently. A weak or easy-going superintendent is the worst misfortune that can befall prisoners, who are thus abandoned to the tender mercies of ignorant and barbarous subordinates. Major Salaamitoolah knew how to keep his subordinates in order, and thus protected the interests of the prisoners, among whom he had the reputation of being a hard but a just man. And the best compliment that could be paid him was that he was both feared and hated by the jail officials.

The trees in the compound of the Old Female Ward harboured innumerable parrots, whose bright plumage added

a touch of colour to what were otherwise drab surroundings. One young parrot abandoned by its parents, and lost in a hostile world, took refuge in our barrack, and was promptly adopted as a pet. One of the accused constructed a cage for it out of branches, and it was given the name of Popot and made much of, but was relegated to the lavatory whenever the superintendent paid a visit. I believe that it grew to like us; for although it once made a bid for liberty by flying out of the barred door after we had been locked up for the night and could not pursue it, it returned of its own accord on the next day: it had met with a hostile reception from the other parrots.

We were served by several cooks and sweepers, in the charge of a herculean convict officer, who looked exactly like a gorilla, and who was serving a sentence of seventy-five years. Such amazing sentences are quite common in the United Provinces, and I met many prisoners at Naini who had been sentenced when they were boys and who were now middle-aged men with no prospect of release before them. But the convict with such a long sentence is treated with circumspection by the officials and warders; for having very little to live for he is liable to run amok on very slight provocation.

In one other respect we were much better off at Naini than at Meerut. The jail possessed a well-stocked library, very different from that at Meerut jail which consisted only of *East Lynne* and the works of Samuel Smiles; and we were also permitted to become members at our own expense of the Allahabad Public Library. With these facilities we were never short of reading matter.

Unfortunately we could not spend all our time in reading and study; we were also supposed to work. In our dining-room, which was also the factory, looms had been erected, and some of us were given the task of weaving; the rest of us including myself were set to making envelopes. This was a very easy task: the envelopes were provided already cut and

all we had to do was to stick them together, for which purpose two large pots of paste were supplied. We did this work collectively: some would put the paste on the envelopes, others would stick down the flaps and others would collect and count. But in the hot weather which had now arrived, with your body itching with prickly heat and sweat running into your eyes, even envelope-making is a difficult and irritating task. In consequence our production was not great, despite the efforts of the superintendent to increase it. One day he paid us an unexpected visit, examined our work-tickets, expressed horror at the small quantity of envelopes we were producing, and began to threaten us with reprisals unless our production increased. He was immediately confounded, however, when one of us asked him whether he preferred quality or quantity, and invited him to examine the exceptional quality of our envelopes.

At the beginning of April the High Court announced that it would commence to hear the Appeal in the last week of July. At the same time it heard the arguments of those who had applied for bail, releasing some and rejecting the applications of others. To everybody's amazement, my name was included among those released although I had not even applied. The High Court justified its action by pointing out that although I had not applied for bail there was nothing to prevent me doing so in the future, and to prevent me doing this and to save further trouble they had decided to release me pending the Appeal there and then, particularly as they had released other accused with higher sentences.

But I was not anxious to take advantage of the High Court's generosity, and I made no effort to secure my release; and it was not before the end of June that, in response to appeals from my friends and with a desire to attend to the details of my Appeal, I left the jail.

For a few days I stayed at Allahabad as the guest of Pandit Sham Lal Nehru, a nephew of the late Motilal Nehru, and

of his wife Mrs. Uma Nehru, a lady prominent for her nationalist and social activities. Their daughter Shyam Kumari Nehru was one of India's few women lawyers, and had been engaged as a junior for our Appeal. Pandit Sham Lal Nehru was a remarkable old man, intelligent, hospitable and kind to all. His only weakness was a tendency towards mysophobia. One day he took me for a drive in his car round Allahabad to show me the places of interest, including the spot in the Alfred Park where the terrorist leader Chandra Shekar Azad had been shot dead by the police in 1930. He stopped the car in one of the bazaars and proceeded to buy some mangoes from a passing fruit-seller. He paid for the mangoes, placed them loose between him and me, and was about to drive on when he was struck with a dreadful suspicion: perhaps the man had leprosy. The poor fruit-seller was immediately subjected to a detailed physical examination, and Pandit Nehru observed with growing consternation that the man had a twisted hand and scars on his thigh. He was by this time quite convinced that the man had leprosy. He gathered the mangoes, pitched them out of the car and drove off to the nearest doctor. The doctor told him that there was nothing to be afraid of because leprosy was not infectious but contagious; Pandit Nehru thereupon drove straight off to another doctor, who told him exactly the same thing. But the Pandit was not satisfied. He stopped at a chemist's and bought a large supply of disinfectant and a cake of very strong carbolic soap; then, alleging that the mangoes had also touched me, he compelled me to throw away a tin of cigarettes and my hat, and when we arrived at the house I had to creep into my bathroom, take all my clothes off so that they could be boiled, and wash myself thoroughly with the carbolic soap before I could again mix with my fellows. Before this drastic treatment was concluded I began to feel that I actually had leprosy, and was only prevented from going about shouting "Unclean! Unclean!" by my sense of decorum.

I spent the next two weeks in Bombay, and returned to Allahabad only a few days before the Appeal was due to start. On the day appointed I went together with the other accused on bail to the High Court, where we were accommodated with a bench immediately behind the lawyers. The Appeal was heard by two judges: the Chief Justice, Sir Shah Mohammed Sulaiman, and Mr. Justice Young. Mr. Kemp supported by the inevitable Khairat Nabi represented the prosecution, and Dr. Katju was the senior counsel for the defence. It was expected that the hearing of the Appeal would take at least two months. It took exactly ten days.

The heavy sentences passed by Mr. Yorke had raised a storm of protest not only in India but in England. With the passing of the months, the storm had increased in intensity rather than abated. The India Office was inundated with resolutions of indignant protest sent from organizations all over the country; the Secretary of State was bombarded with questions in the House of Commons; my mother increased her campaign for our release, touring the country and compelling prominent personages to leave their arm-chairs and register their protests; and statesmen in foreign countries made sarcastic comments on British justice in theory and in practice. All this agitation necessarily made a deep impression on the Government of India; it was realized that the extremely heavy sentences passed by Mr. Yorke on persons who had only been engaged in ordinary trade-union and political activities, had defeated the Government's object in initiating the trial; the Government of India by these sentences had forfeited every vestige of public support so necessary to successful persecution. International interest in the trial had been aroused, and the much-vaunted traditions of British justice were shown to be hollow, and public opinion was alarmed. It was quite useless for British politicians to castigate the judicial methods pursued in foreign countries, when on British territory thirty-one trade unionists had been kept



in jail for four years on trial and then sentenced to long terms of transportation and rigorous imprisonment. Foreigners merely shrugged their shoulders at this further example of British cant and hypocrisy. If the illusion were not to be shattered once and for all, British justice had to be rehabilitated; and this pleasant duty was left to the judges of the High Court at Allahabad.

The work of rehabilitation was done very well. The ponderous judgment of Mr. Yorke, which had taken that gentleman five months to write, was almost ignored; Mr. Kemp, who had prepared to overwhelm the Court with at least a month's oratory, was cut short and told to confine himself to the immediate issues; Dr. Katju had only to reply to the questions put to him by the Bench; and Mr. Justice Young enlivened the proceedings with humorous interjections and sarcastic comments. After a few days of these proceedings it became apparent even to the most sceptical that the hearing of the Appeal would soon be over and the judgment delivered.

The Appeal passed off practically without incidents. There was only the affair of Mr. B. F. Bharucha, a Parsee gentleman who was a delegate to the Appeal from the Bombay Defence Committee. There is a rule of the High Court to the effect that everyone attending the Court must either be bare-headed or wear a turban. Mr. Bharucha arrived and sat in Court wearing a misshapen Gandhi cap, to which the Chief Justice took exception, and wrote to Mr. Bharucha pointing out the rule and asking him in future to observe it. Mr. Bharucha denounced this move as an encroachment on the liberty of the subject, and as a further example of the oppressive policy of British imperialism. He accordingly prepared a scathing reply in which he sought to prove rather unconvincingly that the peculiar head-gear he was wearing was that sacred to the Parsee community, and could not be removed without showing disrespect to the Court. Having framed this reply

he showed it to me for my approval: I asked him why he had spelt "bare" "bear," and he replied that he knew it was wrong but the Chief Justice in his letter had spelt it "bear" and he thought that it would be discourteous on his part if in his reply he appeared to correct the Chief Justice. The latter replied to this that Mr. Bharucha's head-gear belonged to no recognized community, and that if Mr. Bharucha persisted in flouting the rules of the Court he had better stay outside. Mr. Bharucha stayed outside, after threatening to send his complaint to the newspapers.

There was a large crowd assembled to hear the judgment. I was present after having packed my belongings expecting to return to jail in the evening. The two judges came in both looking as solemn as if they were about to sentence us to death. But as the Chief Justice read the judgment, the general feeling of depression was changed to one of utter astonishment. All the sentences had been sensationally reduced. The sentence of transportation for life was reduced to three years; those who had been sentenced to twelve years with the exception of two who had previously been convicted on the same charge had their sentences reduced to two years, the two exceptions having each three years; those who had been sentenced to ten years had their sentences reduced to one; and all the rest including myself were either acquitted or released on the imprisonment they had already undergone.

Thus after being imprisoned for two and a half years, and after attending a wearisome trial for four years, and after being convicted and sentenced to four years' imprisonment, having been forbidden to earn my living for nearly half a decade, I was now blandly told that I had committed no offence against the law, and was expected to feel jubilant about my acquittal, and to admire the impartial workings of justice. Rather ungratefully, my only thought as I left the building a free man was that I was now unemployed. I had been a Meerut accused so long that I had begun to regard it

as a profession; but now having lost my job, I was faced with the prospect of trying to pick up the threads of my life where they had been violently broken five years before. I thought again of Anatole France's *Crainquebille*.

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The first thought on freedom of a released prisoner is that he is once again liable to arrest. As soon as he leaves the jail the police begin to concentrate on putting him back there. The Allahabad police, who had practically ignored me for some time, suddenly showed a renewed interest: my letters were intercepted, my movements watched, and once again a couple of shabby detectives decorated the front of my residence. These attentions, however, did not embarrass me. For one thing I was used to them, and for another I had become temporarily indifferent to everyone and everything.

It was chiefly because I had to go somewhere and do something that I accepted an invitation to visit the Hindu University at Benares. The University is a town by itself, with its hostels, bungalows, spacious colleges and shops, situated at a distance of seven miles from the infected air of Benares.

I stayed at the Guest House in the company of a Punjabi lawyer named Tek Chand, the son of Lala Dunichand the Congress leader of the Punjab. In the company of Mr. Tek Chand I called on the presiding deity of the University, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. He is the most orthodox of all the orthodox Hindus, and never fails to do penance for his every breach of the religious laws. But he was an agreeable old man, always dressed in spotless white *khaddar*, and remarkably unassuming for one who is to the Hindus very much as the Pope is to Roman Catholics. After an exchange of compliments he insisted on my making use of his car, and we drove round Benares, peering into temples and evil-smelling lanes in the hope of catching the odour of the Holy City. We did and it smelt of sewage. We dismounted and

walked through the lanes, examining the wonderful enamelled brass-work for sale, and watching the worshippers about their devotions. Everywhere in the temples and on sale in the shops are representations in stone or in brass of the *linga* and the *yoni*, the male and female organs of generation, the symbols of Shiva, the Creator and the Destroyer. The most prosperous temple of all seemed to be one which contained a huge figure of a bull cast in gold. The priests of this temple seemed fatter and more sleek than their brethren elsewhere; and they showed a certain business ability by selling flowers and grass to the faithful, the flowers to be hung round the neck of the god, or the *linga*, and the grass to feed the innumerable sacred cows which the worshipper could meet on his way to and from the temple. I was conducted by one of the priests to a small balcony from which I had a clear view into the temple and was able to watch the worshippers at their work; my priestly guide assured me that His Majesty the King-Emperor had once peered into the temple from this same balcony; but if this information was given in the hope of obtaining an extra fee, the priest must have been sadly disappointed, because Tek Chand would only give him four annas.

As soon as the students discovered that there was a Meerut prisoner among them, the Guest House was besieged by deputations. On the first night an informal meeting was arranged and I was bombarded with questions from about a hundred eager youths, until I was quite exhausted by trying to answer them. I was invited by them to give a lecture the next day in one of the University lecture halls, and I had hardly consented before they all hurried off to obtain the necessary permission and to make arrangements. The next morning, however, I was visited by a very doleful deputation to inform me that the authorities had refused to give facilities to hold my lecture in one of the colleges. They had appealed to Pandit Malaviya himself, but he also had refused, observing

that except for the principle of private property he was a socialist himself; but he could not give facilities to a man who was out to abolish private property; for otherwise the generous donations by the big Hindu landlords might be curtailed.

In spite of the official veto the students were determined to hold the lecture; and as they were refused the use of the buildings, then they would hold the meeting in the open air, and be damned to the vice-chancellor and all his minions. As a result of this determination, an old broken-down car arrived at the Guest House in the late afternoon, for the purpose of carrying me to the meeting. This was held in a wide open space in front of one of the colleges. It was remarkably well attended, several of the professors being present, one of whom presided. I spoke for about an hour, answered questions, received my applause and then left with Mr. Tek Chand in order to explore the Ganges.

A few miles up the river from Benares we took a small boat, and were rowed down the river in the direction of the city. Benares always looks its best from the river; there you are not afflicted by the smells and crowds which distinguish the Holy City and detract from its beauty. On one side of the huge river stands the palace of the Maharajah of Benares, and on the other side Benares itself which is administered by the British. Seen from the river, especially in the evening, Benares has a weird beauty all its own. The ancient buildings rising straight out of the water, the grotesquely carved temples, the people bathing from the steps, and the blaze of a funeral pyre, once seen can never be forgotten. Benares then seems a city of another world, veiled in mystery and populated by the ghosts of the pious millions who have come there to die.

I was rowed down the river in a dream, which was, however, rudely shattered by a huge fish springing out of the water near the boat. I was told that this large fish was one peculiar to the Ganges and quite inedible; but I was not concerned so much with its edibility as to whether it might consider

us to be edible. The fish made me think of another sinister menace of the river: the crocodile. The Ganges is thick with crocodiles, although they do not come in the water near the city, because of the noise and traffic, but prefer to wait further up the river for the charred bodies of the dead to be carried to them by the current for disposal. The crocodile has an aversion to fresh meat, and after drowning its prey it buries the body in the banks of the river until it is in a very decomposed state, when the crocodile satisfies his depraved taste. They are extremely ferocious and aggressive reptiles, and have been known to raid villages on the banks of the river and to carry away the inhabitants. Near all reservoirs, ponds and other places where crocodiles flourish there are notices warning people not to approach too near the edge; for it has often happened that when a person has gone near the water a crocodile has suddenly sprung out and within a few seconds has dragged its victim beneath the surface. Their strength is prodigious, and about this time I remember reading in the Press how a crocodile had seized a sleeping tiger on the bank of the river, and after a tremendous struggle dragged it into the water, in the sight of some foresters whom the animal's roars had attracted. But the Benares crocodile has no need to be adventurous: it is kept plentifully supplied with food in the shape of well-cooked dead bodies thrown into the river by the relatives.

We left the boat on the landing-stage near the burning ghat, where the bodies of dead Hindus are consumed by fire, and walked up and examined the obscene carvings which decorate the exterior of the Nepalese Temple. We left the temple and entered a very narrow lane, which was littered with corpses, lying in a row on crude biers awaiting cremation. The smell of decomposition was overwhelming. So many Hindus come to Benares to die that the corpse-burners are overworked and in consequence the corpses lie about in various stages of decomposition. Herodotus records that in

ancient Egypt the bodies of high personages and young maidens could not by law be brought to the embalmers before they were in an advanced state of decomposition; for it had previously been observed that the embalmers were inclined to violate fresh and attractive corpses. There would be no need for such a regulation in Benares, even if such violation was possible, because the smell of decomposition which hangs over the whole city would deprive the least fastidious of men of his sexual appetite. The same authority informs us that in ancient Egypt there were three tariffs for embalmment; but the Indian funeral contractors exceed the Egyptians in the number of tariffs. Apart from the splendid funeral pyres of rich sandalwood on which the wealthy are reduced to ashes, it is an expensive business to burn a body even in the ordinary way. The wood required alone would cost more than a pound, which is a great deal more than the poor man can afford; the latter therefore only has the corpse of his relation charred, or partially burned, and then thrown in the Ganges, which is holy enough to cover a multitude of sins. The ashes of those who are completely burned are also scattered on the Ganges together with their navels which never burn. In either of these ways the Hindus ensure a happy reincarnation.

Except for a small caste in South India, burning is the only way in which the Hindus dispose of their dead. The reason for it has been explained by Marco Polo, probably correctly, who attributes it to the Hindu dread of destroying life: "When they die, their bodies are burned, in order that they might not breed worms, who in time would die, and the spirit of the body would bear the sin of their death." For the same reason the Parsees expose the bodies of their dead on Towers of Silence, where they provide food and therefore life to vultures, kites, crows and all other carrion birds. Only the Mohammedans insist on burial, and they must furthermore be buried with their feet to the west, towards the tomb

of Mohammed, so that when they receive the call on the Day of Resurrection they can rise up straight without having to turn round. To the Mohammedan the body cannot be destroyed by fire without jeopardizing the soul's entry into Paradise: a belief which has often been of service to the Government of India in its dealings with the unruly Mohammedan tribes on the frontier. When these tribesmen declare a *jihad* or holy war against the British infidel they are difficult to suppress, believing that to die fighting the infidel is a passport direct to Heaven: in these circumstances the Government once finding the bayonet and machine-gun ineffective in suppressing the risings, proclaimed that the corpses of all rebels which fell into its hands would be burned and not buried: peace was restored almost immediately.

A dead body in law has no value. It is therefore all the more strange that civilized beings should attach so much importance to the ceremony of disposal. Men seem to draw some sort of consolation for death in the reflection that after death they will be an intolerable nuisance to all their relatives and friends. There is a story reported by Diogenes Laertius of the philosopher Diogenes, who, when asked who would bury him after his death as he persisted in living alone, replied "Whoever wants my house." But it would appear that the wisdom of Diogenes died with him.

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The Commissioner of Police of Bombay looked relieved when I asked him to obtain a passport for me. He readily agreed and dispatched my application with a recommendation. An undesirable Englishman willing to leave the country must be speeded on his way: one less trouble for the police to worry about. And I had no desire to stay. There was no point in my staying: the period of my utility to the cause which I had supported in India was over, and the sensible man knows when to retire. The Bombay I had come back



to was in many respects very different from the Bombay I had left; and in addition I was in no condition to take up the threads of an active public life. I was tired both mentally and physically, and my health and powers of endurance were by no means what they had been. Life had gone and left me five years behind, and it would not have been fair to my friends and associates if I had held them back while trying to catch up. I was besides a marked man and would have been a great handicap to the progress of anything or anyone I was associated with. I had played my small part in the great historical drama of India, but for me now the curtain was down and the only thing left was to make a graceful exit.

And it was easy to make such an exit because it suited my own inclination to do so. I had come to India five years before full of romantic illusions and a novice in the game of life. I had lost these illusions, but had gained many things in their stead. I had been caught in a wild current of conflicting forces and had managed to keep my head above water; I had been given the opportunity to study India from a new angle; and I had shared the misfortunes and slavery of a great people. And all my experiences are the grim realities of the everyday life of a vast and oppressed population. The romantic usually consists of that which we have not experienced. It is a chimera of the young and the ignorant, who seek to escape from the realities of their everyday existence into a new world created by their fancy. I have no doubt that had I read of the events, which had happened to me, happening to a third person before I went to India, my sense of the romantic would have been stimulated. But experience provides a certain cure, and as we learn by experience to face and even to appreciate realities, the further we are away from the self-deception of romanticism. I was leaving India definitely cured.

I booked my passage on an Italian liner, the s.s. *Conte Rosso*. There was much to be done before the liner left. I was summoned to the small town of Chalisgaon, which I had

visited before my arrest to attend the annual conference of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union. A strike was taking place there of the textile workers, whom I addressed in the pouring rain; and it was there that the workers paid me the greatest compliment I had received, by insisting on my sleeping in their temple; and I passed the night in these sacred premises next to the god Hanuman. From there I proceeded to Dhond, where another strike was in progress, and here I was paid the very different compliment of being followed everywhere by eight rascally detectives on bicycles. From Dhond I went to Sholapur, returning from there to Bombay.

There were now only a few days before I was due to sail. I had obtained my passport, the original one being still impounded in the Courts, and it bore the sinister inscription inside: "Valid only for three months for the purpose of enabling the holder to return to England." To add injury to insult, I was made to pay double the usual amount for it. It was a passport which I did not feel inclined to flourish in Italy.

I spent the next few days in taking leave of my friends and in attending farewell meetings. These meetings were in the nature of an ordeal. On the night before my departure I had to attend at least eight of them. The procedure of the usual meeting consisted of a few complimentary remarks by the chairman, who would follow his remarks by placing a garland of flowers round my neck and giving me a glass of sherbet; then it would be my turn to express a few well-chosen sentiments, after which I would shake everybody in the vicinity by the hand and hurry away to the next meeting. After about the sixth successive meeting I was so full of sherbet and so weighed down with flowers that I was very nearly speechless. But in spite of the discomfort, I shall always remember with pleasure these expressions of the genuine appreciation of the working class towards a white stranger who had shared their struggle.

A large crowd of workers and friends came to the docks to see me off. Once more I was garlanded, once more I said goodbye; and then, sad at heart, I forced myself up the gangway, leaving India probably for ever. The s.s. *Conte Rosso* was a large ship, and as I stood on the deck looking over the side my friends beneath seemed very small. I suddenly felt that I did not want to leave them or India; and feeling miserable I took my last look of the land in which I had lived for five years, and of the friends whose lives had been so closely linked up with mine. My melancholy train of thought was broken by the piercing scream of the ship's siren: the blowing of whistles and the rattle of the donkey-engine proclaimed that our voyage was beginning.

The ship drew further and further away from the pier, and sailed between the islands towards the open sea. Soon my friends were but specks on the shore, and the outline of India began to blur. Before we had passed through the channel of islands evening was rapidly approaching; but as we sailed towards the glory of the setting sun we seemed to be leaving the darkness behind.

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