

HOW INDIA WROUGHT FOR FREEDOM

THE STORY OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS
TOLD FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS

BY ANNIE BESANT

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DEDICATED

WITH PROFOUND DEVOTION TO THE

MOTHERLAND

AND WITH RESPECTFUL ADMIRATION TO HER NOBLE SON

DADABHAI NAOROJI

BY HER SERVANT

ANNIE BESANT

NOTE

I offer most grateful thanks to a Fellow of the Theological Society who has made the splendid Index which adds quite indefinitely to the value of the book.

ANNIE BESANT

FOREWORD

LITTLE is needed to explain the purpose of this book. It is a plain story of India's constitutional struggle for Freedom, a story so pathetic in its patience, so strong in its endurance, so far-seeing in its wisdom, that it is India's justification—if any justification can be needed for asserting the right to Freedom—for her demand for Home Rule.

The younger generation are impatient under the repetition of disregarded demands, and they are right. The time has come for the definite agitation for Home Rule, to continue till it is granted. But they are wrong if they fail to recognise that these thirty years of work alone make it possible that the full demand for Freedom can now be effectively made. And they are doubly wrong if they are not grateful to these builders of the Indian Nation, who, when all was dark around them, believed in the dawning of the Day. They have laid the foundation on which their youngers can build. Homage then to the veterans, living still with us here,

and living in the world beyond. That the younger generation may know how splendidly they wrought, this book is written.

I fearlessly place this volume before the public, as a proof of India's fitness for Home Rule. The grasp of the questions dealt with, the sagacity of the remedies proposed for poverty and misrule, the sobriety of the claims urged, the knowledge of, and the sympathy with, the sorrows of the people, prove how much better off India would be under Self-Rule than under Other-Rule. Let any unprejudiced student turn over the Resolutions passed by the Congress during thirty years, and see how it laid bare the popular suffering, and how it pointed with unerring finger to the causes of that suffering—the drain of Indian wealth to England, the exorbitant cost of the alien rule, the ever-increasing military expenditure, the sacrifice of Indian industries, the land-tax ever rising and condemning the peasantry to perpetual indebtedness, and to a hopeless poverty and semi-starvation that have no parallel in any other civilised Nation. It is these facts, covered up by officials, but laid bare by the Congress, which make Home Rule necessary, if a catastrophe is to be avoided.

The daily insult of the Arms Act, the constant oppression of the Press and Seditious Meetings Acts, the exclusion of Indians from the higher grades of the Army, the Police, the Educational Service, and a score of other wrongs, while bitterly felt by a high-spirited people, have not in them the immediate menace that lies in the grinding poverty of the masses of the population. People become more or less accustomed to the "atmosphere of inferiority," and oppression, long submitted to, at last dulls pride and weakens self-respect. But people never become accustomed to Hunger, and they become desperate when they see no hope of relief for themselves, nor for their children after them. The danger to British Rule lies far more in the misery of the masses than in the discontent of the educated. To call attention to that danger before it is too late, this book is issued.

The Historical Introduction is the background of the story. It is the testimony of 5,000 years to India's success in ruling herself. Let Indian history be set side by side with European history—with what there is of the latter—century by century, and let us see whether India need blush at the comparison. Take but the

sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth centuries, to go back no further. Compare Akbar's tolerance with the persecution of Protestants by Mary, of Roman Catholics by Elizabeth, and of Puritans by James and Charles. Read the Penal Laws against Roman Catholics in Ireland, and ask if the English, who enacted and enforced them, were fit for Self-Government. See the misery and starvation of France in the eighteenth century ending in the Revolution, review the Peasants' War in Germany, the constant Wars in Italy, the turbulence of Hungary and Poland, the royal murders and revolutions in England, and say if all these countries were more fit for Self-Government than India. Yet they, unworthy, took it, and have purified themselves by it, becoming more fit in the using of it. India, more worthy than they to take it, is deemed unfit. The only argument against India's fitness is her submission.

May this book help Britain to understand the shame of her autocratic rule in India, her broken pledges, her selfishness, her preference of her own to India's interests. May it help India to realise her duty to Herself.

ANNIE BESANT

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