

GLIMPSSES OF WORLD HISTORY

BEING FURTHER LETTERS TO HIS DAUGHTER,
WRITTEN IN PRISON, AND CONTAINING
A RAMBLING ACCOUNT OF HISTORY
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

By

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

VOLUME
ONE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Recent Essays and Writings

Letters from a Father to His Daughter

Whither India?

A Window in Prison and Prison-land

FOREWORD

After five and a half months out of prison my brother, Jawaharlal Nehru, was arrested on the February 12, 1934, for 'sedition' and was subsequently sentenced to two years' imprisonment. At the time of his arrest he asked me to take charge of these 'Letters' and to supervise their publication.

Since these letters were written the world has moved rapidly and already many important changes have taken place. Some alterations and additions seem to be indicated but in the absence of the author it was not considered desirable to make them. A few minor alterations and omissions have, however, been made.

Owing to the absence of the author in prison and the difficulty of communicating with him, delay has occurred in the publication of these 'Letters' and the responsibility for some decisions has fallen on me. My burden has been lightened, however, by the publishers to whom I am grateful.

The book is being published in two volumes. The volumes are of unequal size, the second volume being a bigger one than the first. The first volume ends with the Napoleonic wars; the second volume thus contains a survey of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which have been dealt with by the author in greater detail. The dividing line between the two volumes seemed a natural one from the historical point of view, although unfortunately it involved volumes of unequal size.

ALLAHABAD

VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT

May, 1934

P R E F A C E

I do not know when or where these Letters will be published, or whether they will be published at all, for India is a strange land to-day and it is difficult to prophesy. But I am writing these lines while I have the chance to do so, before events forestall me.

An apology and an explanation is needed for this historical series of letters. Those readers who take the trouble to go through them will perhaps find the apology and the explanation. In particular, I would refer the reader to the last Letter,* and perhaps it would be as well, in this topsyturvy world, to begin at the end.

The letters have grown. There was little of planning about them, and I never thought that they would grow to these dimensions. Nearly six years ago, when my daughter was ten years old, I wrote to her a number of letters containing a brief and simple account of the early days of the world. These early letters were subsequently published in book form and they had a generous reception. The idea of continuing them hovered in my mind, but a busy life full of political activity prevented it from taking shape. Prison gave me a chance and I seized it.

Prison-life has its advantages; it brings some leisure and a measure of detachment. But the disadvantages are obvious. There are no libraries or reference books at the command of the prisoner, and, under these conditions, to write on any subject, and especially history, is a foolhardy undertaking. A number of books came to me but they could not be kept. They came and went. Twelve years ago, however, when, in common with large numbers of my countrymen and countrywomen, I started my pilgrimages to prison, I developed the habit of making notes of the books I read. My note-books grew in number and they came to my rescue when I started writing. Other books of course helped me

*This appears at the end of the second volume.

greatly, among them inevitably, H. G. Wells's 'Outline of History'. But the lack of good reference books was very real, and because of this the narrative had often to be slurred over, or particular periods skipped.

The letters are personal and there are many intimate touches in them which were meant for my daughter alone. I do not know what to do with them for it is not easy to take them out without considerable effort. I am therefore leaving them untouched.

Physical inactivity leads to introspection and varying moods. I am afraid these changing moods are very apparent in the course of these letters, and the method of treatment is not the objective one of a historian. I am no historian. There is an unfortunate mixture of elementary writing for the young and a discussion at times of the ideas of grown-ups. There are numerous repetitions. Indeed of the faults that these letters contain there is no end. They are superficial sketches joined together by a thin thread. I have borrowed my facts and ideas from odd books and many errors may have crept in. It was my intention to have these letters revised by a competent historian, but during my brief period out of prison I have not had the time to make any such arrangement.

In the course of these letters I have often expressed my opinions rather aggressively. I hold to those opinions, but even as I was writing the letters my outlook on history changed gradually. To-day if I had to re-write what I have already written, I would write differently or with a different emphasis. But I cannot tear up what I have written and write afresh.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

January 1, 1934

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