

THE FUTURE OF INDIA.

OF all the books that have been written about India in the last quarter of a century there are two that exhibit more than any others a sense of the gravity of the problem that faces Britain in that country. What Sir Alfred Lyall and Mr. Meredith Townsend foresaw yesterday there is no one but is aware of to-day. "Asiatic Studies" and "Asia and Europe" when they appeared were considered sombre books, their outlook unduly pessimistic. Was not India "the brightest jewel in the British crown"? Was not its administration the most efficient in the world? The voice of India's discontent, the gathering stir and tumult of its restlessness, was not yet loud enough to reach the ear of England, and few cared to heed the warnings of men who had heard and understood as they had. Both of them alike viewed the future of the British rule in India with serious foreboding. "After fifty years' study of the subject," says Mr. Townsend, "I do not believe that, with the possible exception of a single movement, Europe has ever permanently influenced Asia, and I cannot help doubting whether in the future it ever will." And, again, "The idea of the European tranquilly guiding, controlling and perfecting the Asiatic until the worse qualities of his organisation have gone out of him, though the noblest dream ever dreamed by man, is but a dream after all. Asia, which survived the Greek and the Roman and the Crusader, will survive also the Teuton and the Slav." No one who has read the sombre words in which, twenty-five years ago, Sir Alfred Lyall described the vision of India's destiny that the shadows of the future seemed to him to hide, can have forgotten them or can have failed to recall them in view of the disquieting outlook of to-day. "It may be that those are right who insist that Asia has always been too deep a quicksand for Europe to build upon it any lasting edifice of morals, politics, or religion; that the material conditions forbid any lasting improvement; that the English legions, like the Roman, will tramp across the Asiatic stage and disappear, and

"that the clouds of confusion and superstition will roll up again." To-day, in the face of the complex and perhaps insoluble problems that India presents to her foreign ruler, those gloomy vaticinations recur, and one wonders whether after all they are right, and whether the task England has undertaken is too great for her, whether "the one immovable figure" on the Indian landscape is that of the "Hindu ascetic and sceptic" who believes nothing, hopes nothing and fears nothing.

These are thoughts and forebodings that haunt one perhaps more in the mysterious East than elsewhere, and they will probably be dismissed with uncomprehending contempt by the confident Imperialist. Nevertheless, there are things, in India at least, that not those "civilising forces," the railway and the telegraph, nor equal laws, nor even the most scientific tariff is likely to compass. It was in an Eastern desert that the words were spoken, "Man shall not live by bread alone," and perhaps nowhere is their deep truth fully realised except when they are uttered, as they were then by Christ, and as they might be to-day by so many millions in India, from the midst of famine and of daily need. Less perhaps in India than anywhere is the gift of merely material prosperity likely to satisfy. But in India, whether or not the country as a whole, as some maintain, is growing richer, there can be little question that for the great mass of its inhabitants distress and hunger are no farther from them to-day than they were of old. Apart altogether from those subtler hindrances that seemed to Mr. Townsend and Sir Alfred Lyall, and that seem to many still, to make the task of Britain in India so baffling and so uncertain of success, there are concrete and insistent facts that it requires no insight to detect. It is not that we have not won the hearts of this people,—we have not even satisfied their hunger. The one aim that Britain sets before herself in the government of lands like India and Egypt is the bringing to them of a material content. If she has failed to accomplish that she can boast of no success. And certainly in India she has not succeeded. There is nothing more painfully evident than that in the midst of trials of every kind that seem year by year to increase in this distressful country, the power of resistance on the part of the people has shown no sign of growing greater. The statement that plague is due to poverty is one of those half-truths that is as misleading as a whole untruth. Better to call it a visitation of God. But plague and famine and all the many ills of India find still to-day, even after fifty years of British rule, a people the great bulk of whom, in the words of Mr. G. K. Gokhale, "go down the precipice" at the first touch of calamity.

It may be that this is inevitable,—that it is the judgment of heaven and not the fault of England. It may be so, but none the less she has failed in her purpose and must be content to bear the

blame. Without question, a great part of the Indian discontent has its root in this material need. The British Government has never claimed to supply its Indian subjects with spiritual consolations, and if it cannot bake their bread it can do nothing for them. The bonds that bind them to it are its power to protect, its power to feed. India does not realise that she is protected; she knows bitterly that she is not fed.

It would be a complete mistake to suppose that the discontent in India is either limited to certain classes or that it is the product of agitation. It is as widespread and as deep in the land as are its poverty and its hunger. No doubt in the educated classes the hunger is not for bread, but—a no less natural appetite—for place and power. The feeling of discontent that this produces is indeed largely unreasoning and unreasonable, but it exists and it is inevitable, especially when the Government that seems to send prosperity or adversity is one in which the people bear no share. Alien benefactors may be endured. If they are still alien and appear as well to be malefactors, their yoke becomes intolerable. Sympathy will not save us, for sympathy will not stay the pangs of appetite. To do this is England's *métier* in India. If she succeeds in it she may still fail, for deeper reasons, in her greater task. If she fails in it she fails in everything.

It is this fact that makes the discontent so wide-spread and so deep. There is no village so remote, no villager so humble, but there and on his bowed shoulders the burden presses heavier year by year, and as he feels it his heart is bitter against those who lay it on him. It would be the same whoever were his lords, Brahman or British. The difference is that what in other days was dumb has found a voice, and it is far other than it ever was before and far more formidable just because it is articulate. Those who have given to it speech and made this difference are the upper and the educated classes, aware of their rights and more than aware of their wrongs, chafing, as it is inevitable that they should, at their own helplessness. They have not created the discontent, but they, by the fact that they express it, have given it a power that cannot be neglected or ignored. They give the movement its direction and utter its demand. The British administrator may often feel, and truly, that he cares more for the common people and for their sorrows than do many of their Brahman champions. But his sympathy is of little avail so long as it does not make the harvest grow. He and not the Brahman is the author of their woes.

The dissatisfaction of the higher classes is of a less instinctive order than this unreasoned discontent. As has been said, they know all their rights and more than all their wrongs. Injustice, when it is done, as it is done even in British Courts, is no longer done in a corner. Every incident of the kind is fuel for a growing resentment.

And to be aware of one's rights but helpless to exercise them,—there is no situation in which ill-will rankles with so poisonous a wound. There are few who do not conceal scars from the coarse hand of some one of the ruling race, presuming on his power and on their subjection. One marvels often at their patience. It is comparatively easy for the British ruler to be a father to his people, to help them, to care for them in their trouble, to condescend to them. But to be a brother, to acknowledge their equality, and to share instead of bestowing rights,—that he finds far harder. *Noblesse oblige* has been, on the whole, the motto that has guided the Englishman in his relation with dependent races, and in that lies the secret of his successful rule. Even now the Anglo-Indian official is happiest when he can turn his back upon the strife of Brahman tongues, resolute as he moves among the common people to do justly and to love mercy. But the day of patriarchal government in India, which suited so well the temper of the ruler,—at once gratifying his pride and displaying the kindness of his heart,—that day is past in the case of a considerable proportion of the population. What he would bestow generously of his bounty he gives with a bad grace as a due. He finds it harder to be merely just than to be generous.

It is these two facts, the hunger of the common people and the hauteur of the foreign ruler, that have brought the administration of India to the present crisis. To diagnose its sources is not difficult; what is harder is to prophesy its development or to prescribe a remedy. The present direction, indeed, of that development one must be blind not to perceive. When last Christmas the National Congress broke up in disorder at Surat many people hoped and believed that that incident marked the opening of a new era in the political history of India. Surely, it was argued, the methods of Mr. B. G. Tilak and his fellow irreconcilables are discredited, and the National Congress will now be able to begin a new period in its history, purged of its violent and impracticable elements, as the recognised intermediary between the Government and the people. Those who thought so then are not so sure that that will be the result to-day. The months that have elapsed since the Surat crisis give no indication that the party of extremism is discredited in the eyes of the people, or that Mr. Tilak has become a spent force in the public life of India. On the contrary, one Provincial Conference after another has revealed the views he represents as an the ascendant. Energy and resolution are capturing on every hand the imagination of the people, while counsels of moderation leave them cold. Weary with uttering futile prayers to unresponsive gods, sick with hope so long deferred, the waverers, those who have taken hitherto a middle course, are being attracted in ever increasing numbers to what is able now to claim to be the popular party.

The name Moderate and the temper it describes bring no appeal to the young and to the ardent. Such a watchword may satisfy the middle-aged, the prudent, the far-seeing. It will not stir enthusiasm; it will not rally the people to its cause. Neither party can indeed truly claim to be democratic in the Western sense of the word. A recent vernacular publication in enumerating the basal principles of Hinduism repudiates the "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" of the French Revolution, and represents it as distinctly opposed to the levelling teaching of Christianity. There is no social system more haughtily aristocratic than that of Hinduism, no religion bound up so intimately with class distinctions. As has been already indicated, in the case of the great body of the people their political views are as yet mainly negative. They have no theory as to how their condition may be bettered, but they cherish a scarcely articulated resentment against those who seem to them to blame because it is so bad. The party to which the nearest approximation to the term democratic can be applied in India is that which voices most energetically this resentment, which identifies itself with the people's grievances and denounces most unsparingly the supposed oppressor. Statesmanship and a positive and practical policy are rather hindrances than a help in accomplishing this end. Crude denunciation in the columns of a vernacular newspaper has more effect than many a weighty appeal in the Viceroy's Council. The astute and far-seeing politician has little power over the people's hearts compared with the martyr who has languished in their cause in British gaols.

When the Surat Congress was shattered the "Bande Mataram," the leading extremist organ in Calcutta, broke forth into a pæan of triumph over what it claimed as the vindication of the popular cause. Ransacking his memory in search of anything in English literature that might convey his feelings, the editor lighted upon these lines:

"Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea,
Jehovah hath triumphed, His people are free."

The strange "Jehovah" of this popular deliverance is Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who typifies the extremist attitude in its strength and in its weakness, as Mr. G. K. Gokhale does that of the Moderates. While both are Brahmans of the purest blood, the one is a demagogue, the other a statesman. To call Mr. Tilak a demagogue is not to depreciate his ability, which is great, nor the courage and energy of his character. He owns and edits the vernacular newspaper that has by far the widest circulation and the most commanding influence in Western India. He is not the only one of the extremist leaders who has sealed the sincerity of his convictions by going to prison for them. He is at all times open and accessible to

any one who cherishes a grievance, and the great stores of his sorely-earned legal knowledge are at their disposal. Among his own people in Poona he is absolutely supreme, and when they are stirred the cry of "Tilak Maharaj-ke jaya" is even oftener upon their lips than that in honour of the old Maratta hero, Shivaji, of whom many of them would say that his successor to-day is an incarnation. Brahman as he is, Mr. Tilak commands the people's hearts because he is a man of impulse and of enthusiasm, and because, it has to be added, he shares, or appears at least to share, in their prejudices and their superstitions.

Mr. Gokhale, on the other hand,—and in this he largely represents his party,—is too far aloof from the people to be able ever greatly to influence them. He may sympathise with their distress, but his sympathy never dominates him. His methods are not the familiar Oriental ones of his rival. They are the methods of the West, and are those best adjusted to move an authority so cold and passionless as the British bureaucracy. Mr. Gokhale certainly sees farther than Mr. Tilak, and wisely adjusts his means to ends that are practicable and attainable. No one who realises the seriousness of the Indian situation can question for a moment that it would be infinitely for the better alike for India and England if both would hearken to this mediator and the party of compromise that he represents, and cease either on the one hand crying for the moon or on the other endeavouring to sweep back a tide that the moon alone controls. The way of wisdom for the over-lord in India surely is to strengthen in every just and honourable way the representatives of reason and of moderation. The way of folly is that of a Government that wraps itself in its haughty isolation and, believing itself to be moved only by a desire for the people's good, is indifferent to what the people think. It is not enough that we should be convinced that we are governing in the interest of the Indian population. Before it can be in the fullest sense their interest they must be convinced. The best of Governments falls short of good if it is government in despite of the people. If Britain is content to fill this rôle let it go on its way strengthening, as it is doing, the party of intransigence and of Mr. Tilak. Or, if not, ere it is too late, let it grapple to itself by generous concession the party of statesmanship and of moderation. Delays and hesitations and half-heartedness in this matter are peculiarly dangerous. No one who knows the spirit of the present time in India can fail to realise that events are precipitating themselves with continually increasing speed towards a crisis, and that the opportunity that now offers is in imminent danger of being lost. As Mr. Gokhale warned the Imperial Council a few weeks ago, the moving finger writes.

If this opportunity is lost and that crisis comes, there will, of course, be no serious outbreak. There may be no token at all to

the uninstructed that anything untoward has occurred. But will Britain be content to rule with strong hand over a sullen and resentful people? There is, it is true, a scheme of contemplated reforms at present before the country and about to be submitted for his final decision to the Secretary of State. But it has failed to satisfy in any degree the popular demands and aspirations. The main principle on which it rests at once arouses suspicion. It is believed, however unjustly, that its aim is to intensify the prejudices of class and of religion that in the divided house the foreigner may rule. The whole spirit and desire of awakened India is to weld its diverse peoples into one. And further, reforms can awaken no interest and no enthusiasm that bestow, with however much parade, only the shadow and not the substance of authority. Unlimited liberty to advise, when advice is despised and ignored, will never satisfy those who covet the reality of power. Nor are such half-measures likely to serve any fruitful or effective purpose. The Government will only cease to be alien, and so to be distrusted, as a responsible share in its entire administration is given to the people of the land. A frank and generous recognition of this is what is peremptorily needed. Lord Cromer has warned us that in no circumstances can a feeling of loyalty be awakened to a foreign government. But without loyalty there can be no true citizenship, no established State. The wise course to be followed in such circumstances surely is to make plain at every moment that the alien authority is provisional, and to keep every door open to indigenou capacity wherever that may be found. It must be made possible, as far as may be, for the Indian to feel increasingly in regard to the government that makes or mars his lot that, even if it is a poor thing, it is his own.

That is the direction in which Mr. Morley should advance "with firm, courageous, and intrepid step," for it is the direction indicated at once by the honour of England and the safety of India. There is a great tradition in the land, not yet wholly lost, enjoining reverence for the *guru*, the spiritual teacher, and it is some such feeling that successive generations of educated Indians have had for Mr. John Morley. It is pathetic now to see that reverence fading, and to forecast how soon, unless he hastens the philosophic leisure of his pace, the idol of their ancient worship will be cast to the moles and to the bats. While he muses the fire in India burns. We may be sure that he finds it no light burden that he has to bear upon shoulders not "Atlantean," and that as he looks this way and that, choosing the road to take, he has many sombre visions. He has seemed to himself to hear "through the dark distances the roar and scream of confusion and carnage." We may have no such sinister forebodings even if the strong, controlling hand of Britain were withdrawn. But we know that the welding of the peoples

has scarcely been begun, and that India a nation is still a far distant goal. If it is ever to be reached it must be in large measure by their own efforts and not by those of any stranger. It should be Britain's aim to give them every opportunity to exercise their growing capacity, not grudgingly nor of necessity, but thrusting the responsibility eagerly upon them. We may then catch glimpses of the future of a people, not any longer drawn aside by the bitterness and the clamour of political warfare from their own peculiar calling, but attaining to be in a higher degree than ever in the past the *Guru* nation. And we can hear them repeat the words of their old prophet, Nanak, "I am neither Hindu nor Mohammedan," from the experience of a far more deeply unifying faith than the "Din-i-Ilahi" of Akbar.

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