

## INDIA AFTER THE WAR

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THE generosity of Indian Princes and peoples in offering their services on the European battlefields and contributing royally towards the prosecution of a European war came with some shock of surprise to the British nation. That India, throughout her whole extent, should show herself loyal was never doubted : that she would lend herself with a certain recklessness of enthusiasm and a total disregard of personal advantage to the furtherance of England's interests carried with it implications of a feeling which had not been recognized or even suspected. The results of the co-operation of Indian with British and Colonial troops in the field is bound to have its effect for good within the Empire : it is bound, also, to bring to the fore many grave issues, the settlement of which might otherwise have been retarded. But, before all, we count with confidence upon that closer fellowship, that franker understanding which comradeship in time of stress must bring about, more especially when that comradeship is founded upon feelings so spontaneous and human as loyalty and gratitude. The occasion is unique, and, speaking for the moment exclusively from the English point of view, carries with it, like all the good gifts of Heaven, the responsibility of worthy acceptance. If India's "splendid response," and "wonderful wave of enthusiasm" have, to such an extent, astonished the country, does this not indicate the duty of discovering

wherein the popular estimate was at fault? The trivial view is bound to find expression, even at times of the truest solemnity, so we must not be surprised if, now and again, we hear it said, "Here is a well-earned tribute to the justice of British rule in India": but the trivial view is not bound to find general acceptance. Fair-minded men will instinctively resent an explanation which does little credit to the quality of emotion aroused by the event. The plain fact is that India, by her action, has placed the Imperial Government under a heavy debt of obligation; not in any spirit of deep-seated calculation, but with a courtesy and chivalry which can only be recognized by a response in the like terms. In order to understand the situation and its needs we must ask ourselves two questions: "What are the motives, conscious or unconscious, which promoted India's outburst of generosity?" and "What is the debt of honour to which England is pledged by her acceptance of India's aid?"

The first question might, in its literal sense, be answered briefly; but its larger implications demand a much more detailed consideration. What, in truth, is India fighting for? Clearly not for any reasons connected with the rights or wrongs of the war, however her sympathies may be affected. European disagreements do not touch India, except indirectly, and the creed of militarism, to which the Allies are opposed, would not in itself so gravely scandalize the fighting races of India as to prompt them to take up arms in a Holy Crusade. Add to this that Indians have no grievance of their own against Germany, a country which has treated them with kindness and regard, whose scholars, moreover, have shown at least as much appreciation of ancient Indian culture as any in Europe. Again, admitting that British rule in India aims at being just and equitable, and that British administrators succeed, in proportion to their ability and understanding, in discharging their duties fairly and conscientiously, there is still much in the relation

between government and people that needs readjustment. "Unrest" is not the equivalent of disloyalty, and the wisest of British statesmen are not less concerned with the legitimate problems of nationalist claims than are the nationalist representatives themselves. Beyond this there has been, by custom, if not of necessity, so little social intercourse between the British official classes and the Indian people that the suggestion of a strong personal devotion inspiring India's proffer of help—rather, let us say, imperative demand to help—cannot be accepted by anyone who is acquainted with the conditions of life in India. What other motive remains? Policy? Yes—if one may use the word to describe that instinctive sense which governs a man's actions, even where no conscious thought is involved, in the most vital issues of life. Such a "policy" has inspired India at the present crisis, uniting in a common impulse communities and associations, religious, political, and social, of all classes and creeds, individuals of high standing, rulers of native states, extremist leaders, and even the handful of seditionists whose notoriety has usurped an amount of attention so much out of proportion to its importance. India has but one object—that is, to show her loyalty, and to prove what that loyalty is worth. The comment of the Secretary of State for India on Lord Kitchener's announcement gives the truth of the matter in a very few words: "It has been deeply impressed upon us that the wave of wonderful enthusiasm and loyalty which is passing over that country is, to a great extent, based upon the desire of the Indian people that Indian soldiers should stand side by side with their comrades of the British Army. . . ." A phrase used by Sir Gangadhar Chitnavis in the Viceroy's Legislative Council makes the exact meaning of that loyalty still more clear when he speaks of Indians' "joy at the opportunity which had been given to prove their claim to be regarded as worthy members of the noble fellowship of the Empire." Indian loyalty has indeed been vindicated beyond any manner of doubt. The tone of

enthusiasm is not to be mistaken: the figures speak for themselves. Through the Indian Government England is receiving 70,000 men of all arms, fully equipped. Very numerous are the private offers, made by independent chiefs, of personal service, troops, and aid of every kind, and contributions of money by subscription or private donation have made a substantial difference to England's financial position in the war. Most significant of all is the insistent claim of India to bear the whole cost of her own expeditionary force—an offer happily accepted by the British Government, although its acceptance meant the setting aside of a provision of the India Act of 1858. The numbers of the Indian expeditionary force are far in excess of those supplied by any of the Colonies (*relatively* less than those of Australia, only because Government has purposely restricted the size of the Indian Army), and India is the only one of the Overseas Possessions which is making any direct contribution of money. India has, in fact, taxed her utmost resources with a zeal which shows how vital to her is the issue at stake, in the effort to prove her point to demonstration.

Now, why did Indians feel the need of proclaiming their loyalty, of vindicating their status, by arguments so conclusive—the most lavish of material contributions and the voluntary hazarding of life upon a distant battlefield? Because they felt that either loyalty or status was called into question? Let us examine the facts. Queen Victoria, in the Royal Proclamation made after the Mutiny, expressly stated that her Indian subjects were to be held in equal regard with all other of her subjects throughout the Empire. The same proclamation was repeated by King Edward on his accession, and again, only recently, by King George. Has this principle been literally upheld in practice? Without the slightest wish to disparage existing institutions, or to question the integrity of motive of responsible statesmen, one is compelled to admit that it has not. To take an example. The Government of India, for reasons which

it considered no doubt adequate, has chosen to disarm the people. India is the only part of the Overseas Empire in which citizens are not allowed to have any military training or to take measures for their own protection. In Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the people may practise rifle-shooting, form defence corps, and so on, but in India even the most scrupulously law-abiding citizen comes under the provisions of a stringent Arms Act, unless he is exempted as a European, a title-holder, an official, or by name as an individual exception. The scope of the Indian Arms Act is so wide that it embraces every sort of weapon, including rusty old swords of no more than sentimental or ceremonial value. Indians realize that they may be attacked; the *Emden*, for example, if she had had sufficient support, might have landed marines at some point and effected a raid; yet for protection the Indian people is dependent, not on its own efforts, but on a Government in which it has no voice. The reason is given that there has been agitation for reform in India, that seditionists incite to extreme and unlawful measures. But Indians can object that there is agitation for reform in every progressive country. They may retort by asking if there has been no "unrest" in England of late years, if extremists have not used the most lawless and violent of arguments without their fundamental loyalty being thereby called into question. Or, again, when Imperial Conferences take place, as they customarily do every four years in London, India alone is not represented. Vital measures concerning the welfare of the Empire and its defences, questions of tariffs, naturalization, etc., are discussed, but India has no voice even on matters relating to her own internal affairs. The Press Act, the Cotton Excise, Deportation without Trial—whatever view individuals may take of their wisdom or expediency—are all so many instances of political disability which place India in a position of unquestionable inferiority when compared with other units of the British Empire.

Furthermore, what is the relation existing between India and the sister-dependencies of the British Crown? In Natal, which owes its prosperity mainly to Indian labour, life has been made more and more difficult for all classes of Indian settlers. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, have all placed a definite ban upon Indian immigration. The case of Gurdit Singh and his effort to test the law on this point is of recent memory. He chartered a vessel—the *Komagata Maru*—and set sail for a port in British Columbia: permission to land was refused, and he and his companions, two or three hundred of them, had to return without satisfaction to India. Such are instances of the disabilities under which Indians suffer in point of status. They have no remedy and no redress: there is no Imperial Court to which they can appeal, and the Indian Government, as already mentioned, has no standing at Imperial Conferences. Looking to the autonomy of the various Colonies of the Empire, can we be altogether surprised if India feels that her powers are restricted in a manner scarcely in keeping with the intention of the Royal Proclamation?

Such facts as these must be frankly faced if we are to arrive at an understanding of the temper and feelings of the Indian people at the present crisis; and this brings us to the second consideration. What is the moral obligation which the British Government has incurred by its acceptance of India's aid? That England owes a debt of gratitude to her Indian subjects is clear, and that this debt must be acknowledged with a like spontaneity of sentiment belongs to the nature of the debt. In other words, this is not a question of bargain or contract, since India's demonstration of loyalty was, neither in manner nor intention, a bid for material gain. Her contribution was a free gift, with no conditions attached,—only the unspoken claim of being permitted to show herself worthy of trust. The true courtesy which prompted England's acceptance of the gift upon India's own generous terms cannot fail to respond to this implied appeal by an admission of its truth. If confidence has not always been

felt or shown, it must now proclaim itself; if opportunity has been withheld, from motives however sincere and well-intentioned, it can be withheld no longer. True as it is that neither official England nor Nationalist India wishes to rush upon reform or precipitate inevitable changes, it is also true that the path to progress and development may not be blocked indefinitely. Delays, which an excessive caution might seem to suggest, can scarcely now be urged from the one side without the consent and co-operation of responsible members of the other. It may or may not be that India will soon show herself ready for political self-dominion. Problems must arise in her evolution which forethought and prudence can no more forestall than they can avert. There are many who hold that the ordeal of industrialism must be met and faced before India can become adult; that economic and political measures applicable to England are in advance of India's needs. This may be so, but we cannot assume it. No necessity has forced such an experience upon Canada, for example—to this day a land of crops, or Australia, a land of mines and pastures—both self-governing dominions with full legal powers to manage, or mismanage, their own affairs. No individual or community is exempt from the human frailty of making mistakes, and the freedom to do so is a right which the responsible human being is justified in claiming as a condition of his growth. The best of human institutions have still their full measure of anomalies, all pointing back to some unnoticed blunder in conception, and the British Empire itself is rich in such instructive examples. The instinct of a competent administration to show a certain grandmotherly solicitude, lest its protégés should fall and hurt themselves, may be protective in intention, but is, none the less, cramping in effect. In any case the ideals of India can be worked out in her own experience alone, and none can deny her the right to that experience, or achieve its results vicariously. Certain it is that many problems in India's government and status will present themselves for solution

so soon as the present crisis has ceased to occupy our energies and tax our strength ; and it cannot be doubted that these problems will find their proper solution when all parties meet on a common ground of goodwill and respect. If India has shown that she can give with devotion and generosity, England has also shown that she can accept with a becoming grace ; and no one will forget that in the giving and the accepting a relation has been established which can only be incurred with honour between friends and equals.