

THIS INDIAN QUESTION

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"Freedom is the soul of deed"—Gruntvig.

FOR seven years now the right government of India has been debated. We have had the Statutory Commission, a parliamentary body, visiting India and, after long studies and enquiries, producing its Blue Books in result. We have had three Round Table Conferences in London with Indian princes, politicians and prophets coming to England to tell us their opinions. We have had a Joint Select Committee of important personages, both Lords and Commoners. And finally great debates in both Houses of Parliament on the Select Committee's Report, with big majorities recorded for the Government, and its promise of a Bill. If all goes well, say the rulers, 1936 may see the start of a new constitutional era with the Federation of all India an accomplished fact, and some kind of representative government in each of the provinces of what is known as British-India.

It has taken a long time, but we should not grudge the time, for the right ruling of a nation of three hundred millions and more is a vast problem ; and its consideration justly claims a spirit of patience. Not

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even the most ardent Indian patriot need complain of that.

And no one should say that Britain has not taken pains. The interminable Blue Books are the written witness perhaps to a genius for government, at least of that genius which consists in an immense capacity for taking pains. The British, like all the North Europeans, are strong because they combine a steady determination with a formidable enjoyment in taking pains. Ex-Viceroy and Governors, Lawyers and Politicians, and devoted Civil Servants have combined to work out an immense scheme of Constitutional Reform. None can deny it.

And no one should fail to see that it is a great and imposing scheme. For who before has federated an India, a world in itself of many independent States from Hyderabad with its twelve millions, the great principalities of Mysore and Travancore, the Central Indian and the Rajput States, to the scores of minor rulerships and the eleven great provinces of British India. Three hundred millions of people and dozens of languages and great dividing religions. One wonders at times how many of the millions of India have any real idea of the vastness and greatness of their nation.

And it cannot be denied that it is the British rule and ideas of free government

and the English language that have been important factors in bringing India to a sense of nationhood.

And so we come to the new Constitution which is to proclaim India one and indivisible and a nation.

The strange thing is that we have forgotten something, something without which there is no graciousness in these wonderful proposals that should create the enthusiasm and the inspiration rightly belonging to the birth of a nation. For alas, though this is India being made into a nation, it is not the Indians who are evolving a national constitution. It is not they who have thought it out and are now encouraged to implement their mighty thought. They have come before Commissions and Select Committees and have taken part in the Round Table Conferences, and certainly the principle of federation comes as a contribution from the Indian Princes. But this Constitution is none of India's planning. It is not even a joint effort, save in so far as the imperial power has taken into any account the representations *some* Indians have laid before it. It is not the idealism of England which has sought "to do a great thing in a great way, and, sitting by the side of India, to perceive with her the finer path of freedom, and deep affection, and the pioneer life of

great and generous races." These proposals are to be placed before the British Parliament by the British Government, as the fruit of British enquiry and British decision of what is good for India; and Parliament will debate them and Parliament will decide, and no assembly of Indians will be consulted at all about it.

And hence the proposals are hedged round with safeguards indicating the fears of what Indians may seek to do in their own country, and with what is none of their making or consenting. And hence what might have won a responding confidence and goodwill, on which the happiness of India as a free member of the Commonwealth might have been built, is spoilt by fear and invites antagonism.

All such imperialism negates the plain way of God, who, in the life of mankind, does not impose the right way, but persuades. That is a fundamental lesson that the "practical" people of the North seemingly cannot learn. It may be that we are wiser in the ways of government than the Indians. We have had more opportunity and we live in the cold and steady North. But God also is infinitely wiser than we are and he does not impose, nor does he ever work forward by safeguards. He even permits a Christian and civilized Europe to engage

in all the barbarous futilities of internecine war! His way is always one of persuasion and cooperation, for the Kingdom of God suffers no imperial rule. "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.*"

Yet in spite of all the cautious and opportunist politicians this is basic; and not as a general religious principle merely, but as the one practical method in the establishment of any political institution bearing within it the seed of stability.

This country so far has given no warm and intelligent welcome to the wonderful uprising of and steady advance into national consciousness of the Indian nation, the one and only thing that can justify new constitutional proposals.* Had it done so, persuasion, agreement and a hearty cooperation would have replaced all the "safeguards" so carefully designed, so destructive of faith, and so certainly productive of dangerous attempts at reprisals.

The sands of agreement are fast running out, but it remains a truth that the British Islanders are not a merely domineering and unintelligent race. Relative to the rest of Europe it may well be a question whether

* Mr. Stanley Baldwin's admirable tribute to the advance of the women of India in the Commons Debate on December 12th is an outstanding exception.

any other imperial people would have produced so grandiose a scheme of constitutional development. Let them be not only intelligent, but what is far harder, imaginative, putting themselves in the place of Indian patriots, of people longing for *self-government*, people who have come to believe in the great dictum of the British Prime Minister of thirty years ago, when this country had to decide upon its course in South Africa: "Good Government can *never* be a substitute for self-government."

And even at the eleventh hour there may be a reconciling welcome to Indian desire, and a casting out of the spirit of fear and limitation, and a new and potent friendship take its place.

These proposals may then be seen as a mere beginning and India's right to evolve her own life be frankly and eternally recognized. For India can never again surrender her just claims to an independent existence. And here it may be said that that most abused term *Dominion Status* has, in reality, a very simple meaning—the right of a people to rule themselves. It is not a claim of detachment from the Commonwealth, but of freedom for each people within that Commonwealth to decide its own evolution. And today this is accorded to all the great States of the Commonwealth *except India*.

There will be no peace until it is so accorded.

Three things urgently claim recognition in this new Constitution :

- a. The Soul of India demands that, the building of an Indian Federal State within the Commonwealth should mean the building of a free and independent Nation. There is no peaceful future for a vast, imperial dependency whose evolution is determined by an alien Power.
- b. The Poverty of India calls for a much greater Indian control of India's finance. No free people can with any contentment leave a military taxation in the hands of an alien government. All British history is against such a thought.
- c. The Mind of India claims that a way be found for the collective expression of a reasonable Indian criticism upon, and a genuine consent to, any proposed new Constitution before it is implemented. The constitutional fabric needs to have the Mind of India stamped upon it from the beginning.

For this problem of *consent* is fraught with the utmost consequence for the future. What has become the free State of Canada

was established by the British North America Act of 1867 in days when Great Britain and its Imperial Parliament still ruled the whole Empire. There were at that time no Dominion States. But since then things have utterly changed. We live in days when the free independence of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Irish Free State has been reached in each case by agreement and consent. These, with Canada, are now, all of them, *free* States in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Their freedom is secured by the Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference of 1926; by the Statute of Westminster of 1931; and by their separate and independent representation in the League of Nations.

This is the politic of peace and unity within the Commonwealth, and the one and only way to bind free peoples.

In this great project of a federal Constitution for India the specific inclusion of these principles of political justice and appeasement are of far greater import than all the voluminous detail of departmental organisation. For, in their acceptance lies a future of contentment, and in their rejection one of perpetual strife and destructive suffering.

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