

INDIA: A FOREIGN VIEW

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BY
ANDRÉ PHILIP

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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INTRODUCTION

AMONG the problems of the world to-day there is assuredly none more inscrutable—I had almost said intractable—than that of India, and it is pleasant to find India dealt with in so lucid and definite a way as it is by M. André Philip. He stresses the fact that in India, as elsewhere, it is the economic conditions that count for most, for, although you cannot under-rate the influence of social and religious forces, it is the economic state of the sub-continent that accounts for the greater part of the troubles which beset the governments of India to-day.

Agriculture is the paramount industry of India, and the peasant population lives in not less than 700,000 villages, so that the heavy fall in agricultural prices has had a very serious and disheartening effect upon the minds of the tillers of the soil. It is a good thing that all who read and think about Indian affairs should be reminded of the extent of the economic depression, for which the British Government is in no way responsible. M. Philip dwells on what he calls the tragedy of the cultivating class in never being able to obtain a return from their holdings sufficient for adequate nourishment, as compared with the agricultural production of other countries. He does justice to the colossal work of irrigation which the governments of India have carried out, although his information is by no means up to date; but he does not point out that, over the whole of India, twelve million acres are now cultivated for varieties of the staple crops—rice, sugar, millets, and, above all, cotton and wheat—which have been improved out of all recognition by long and patient research and experiment at the hands of the Indian Agricultural Service.

The truth is that the irrigation schemes, even though they be much the most striking and splendid examples of British administration, are only one side of the continuous and increasing beneficence of the agricultural policy of the Indian governments, with their technical schools and demonstration farms in every province. If these were not started earlier it was only because the regular appliance of scientific methods to agriculture all over the world is of comparatively recent date. Considering the growth of the population of India in this century, since the administrative machinery for dealing with famines and the police system have been so vastly improved, it is very remarkable that there has not been a greater shortage of food crops in lean years. No doubt it is principally due to the better use of irrigation, which has, according to M. Philip, increased in area from 29 million acres in 1890 to 57 millions in 1921. To give only one outstanding example, the greatest irrigation system in the world, the Lloyd Barrage in Sind, which, although contiguous to Baluchistan, forms part of the Bombay Presidency, was declared open on January 13th, 1932, by the Viceroy, the Earl of Willingdon, and it now extends its fertilising waters to a cultivable area equal to the whole of cultivated Egypt. Sir Samuel Hoare expressed the conviction that "the barrage would prove to be one of Great Britain's greatest contributions to the welfare of India." No wonder that one of the Ruling Princes told Sir John Simon that it was a stream not of water, but of gold. According to the Indian Year Book (1931), the average area irrigated by Government works of all classes was in 1928-9 just under 31 million acres, so that it is not easy to explain M. André Philip's last figures. They must include a large amount of land under irrigation from wells and reservoirs. The Indian Statutory Commission, speaking with authority, says in the first volume of its Report :

The total area artificially irrigated in 1926-7 was nearly 48 million acres, of which over 21 million was from Government works, and the total capital outlay on these works at the end of 1927-8 was over Rs. 111 crores (83¼ million). Many of the irrigation works in India were constructed as a protection against famine.

It seems to be a pity that a book of real interest and value should be disfigured by inaccuracies, which could easily have been corrected.

What British irrigation has done for India can be appreciated from a comparison of the Punjab as it was when there was nothing left but the crumbling remains of the Mogul system and what it is to-day, since it has become one of the great wheatfields of the world. On April 16, 1847, Lord Hardinge, then Commander-in-Chief in India, wrote to Henry Lawrence as one of the five Commissioners : *Edwards, Nicholson, and your brother George [afterwards Lord Lawrence], each in the district he has visited, give a wretched account of the natural impediments which must, under any government, however ably administered, render the Punjab a poverty-stricken acquisition.* Lyallpur, "rescued," as M. Philip says, "from the desert and made into one of the most fertile regions in India," is the best example of the change that has been wrought.

M. André Philip is not inclined to give Great Britain credit for much more than a shrewd sense of self-interest in her Indian policy, and some of his statements have little to support them in the actual facts of the case. It is not true to say, as he does, that the Congress campaign of non-co-operation nullified in the various provinces the laws which fixed the inferior status of the "untouchables." There are no such laws ; it depends upon immemorial custom. The creation of separate electorates for Moslems was only conceded to communal clamour, which would accept nothing less, and was vehemently opposed, first by Lord Morley,

and later on by Lord Chelmsford and Mr. Montagu. The so-called "massacre" of Amritsar was by no means an act of brutal violence, but followed upon a series of criminal outrages against Europeans in the city, including a woman who was nearly beaten to death. For his assertion that British industry was founded on the "rack of India" there is not much justification; and, again, the prophecy that India would have arrived at the stage of self-government and national unity if the British occupation had not brutally interrupted her natural evolution towards economic capitalism is pure surmise. None the less, the conclusion that the Indian revolution will follow much the same course as the Russian revolution is interesting, even if one cannot accept the arguments that lead up to it. To talk of want of good faith or goodwill in not introducing Home Rule into India is almost absurd, considering the extent to which provincial self-government has been carried, and the general agreement as to its being made into a complete system.

It cannot be too often repeated that India is not, and has never been, a nation, and that Indian problems in themselves are not national but international. In spoken languages, even omitting dialects, India is a veritable Tower of Babel. To bring India into unity with herself, and to eradicate the last remains of racial and religious strife, which flares up at every turn and on every provocation, would be a task beside which the troubles of the Hapsburg Emperors of Austria sink into insignificance. Only a miracle can do it, and the age of miracles is past, at any rate in regard to the nature of man. We are asked to trust to the power of academic education on an intellectual class, which protests against the learning that it has acquired without assimilating, to make all things possible.

BURNHAM.

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