

INDIA'S CONNECTION WITH BRITAIN

Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India?¹ It makes one think of Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, of B. D. Basu's *Rise and Consolidation of the Christian Power in India*, of the Cambridge History of *British India*, and *The Indian Empire*. The title is entrancing—and not a little enigmatic: for the authors never tell the reader in so many words what exactly they mean by 'fulfilment.' Whatever it be, this History of the British Raj is as lively as the Cambridge tomes are stodgy, and as impartial as Major Basu is partizan: it refutes its own motto—a saying of the Iron Duke—'that the public mind cannot be brought to attend to an Indian subject.' Nothing is more needful to-day than that the British mind should thus attend: it will henceforth be able to do so, thanks to Messrs. Thompson and Garratt, without tears, though perhaps not without a good deal of mortification.

'It is often said,' observe our authors (p. 273), 'that Britain acquired her Indian Empire in a fit of absent-mindedness: the epigram has been overworked. From Clive's time onwards, British India never lacked minds seeing and planning far ahead.' True, the Empire began as a mercantile adventure—and 'of all the European interloping nations we were the last and most reluctant to draw the sword, even in defence' (p. 5). Yet already in 1618 Sir Thomas Roe said: 'Assure you, these people are best treated with the sword in one hand and caducean in the other' (p. 17); and by 1641 the East India Company had fortified its factory at Masulipatam. The twin policy of sword and caducean was duly pursued for a couple of centuries: its success being rendered possible by the existence at Delhi of a shadow-emperor, whose vassals possessed the real power that he lacked, and were thus able in his name to give free rein to their blood-lust and cupidity.

¹ By Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt. London, 1934; (Macmillan; 21/-).

Of these vassals the East India Company became one, when in 1765 it obtained from the Emperor the *diwani* rights over Bengal: and from that period onward, until the Mutiny a hundred years later ended *de jure* as well as *de facto* the Mughal Empire, 'John Company,' in fighting, buying and selling its fellow-*Nawabs*, only conformed to the actual procedure of the time. These native 'Kingdoms' were 'merely the range within which the Chief normally pillaged; their boundaries were liable to sudden extension or retraction, according as the pillagers' nomad power waxed or waned' (p. 269). Such were Indore and Gwalior, for instance; others, like Oudh, resembled 'a still living carcase on which thousands of bloated insects were batten- ing' (p. 298). The measure of this dual system's iniquity, when exercised by aliens, who were here to-day and to-morrow already had gone, taking their extorted wealth with them, is surely the dreadful fact that the state of the people in those principalities which had maintained their independence, was less wretched than of those in the parts of India where the Company was supreme. Even in Mysore, under a Tipu Sultan, 'the British officers, grown accustomed to the wretchedness and servility of the peasants in their own province of Madras, were astonished by the flourishing condition of the country' (p. 206).

Yet, from the time of Warren Hastings another current can be distinguished: the moral realization that 'the Investment was unimportant in comparison with the happiness of a people become the Company's subjects' (p. 123). People in England 'were growing vaguely aware that it was idiotic to expect India to be administered either ably or honestly by the scum of Great Britain, or by boys shoved in by influential relatives' (p. 171). Mr. Thompson and Mr. Garratt discern this current in India towards the close of the eighteenth century: one regrets that they have not established its connection with the revival of religion in England through Wesley and the evangelical movement in general. The fact that a Governor-General like Sir John Shore on his retirement (in 1798) devoted the rest of his

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days to the Bible Society is stated: it would have been useful to show how such a thing had been rendered possible by the new hold that the Christian religion had obtained over the British nation. The authors unfortunately—whatever their moral earnestness and ardour—show little sympathy for institutional religion: 'the Holy Inquisition at Goa was a mighty builder-up of the English Empire,' they gleefully observe (p. 35), without asking themselves whether this burning zeal for Truth—however mistaken the method—was after all not a far higher motive of a colonizing Power like Portugal and Spain, than the naked and unashamed greed, which inspired the adventurers—merchants and pirates too—of others to the exclusion of any other sentiment.

Yet it is religion, and the Christian religion at that, which fundamentally changed the course of the British connection with India: it was in 1799 that Carey opened his Baptist Mission in Serampore, and in 1813 that British India was thrown open to missionary enterprise, which, however, until the Catholic Emancipation of course was restricted to Protestants. It was the missionary who went east of Suez, not for the sake of filthy lucre, not even for that of an honourable career, but consecrated to a lofty task laid upon him by a heavenly call. This is the spirit which in the last resort produced the magnificent temper and work of the succeeding period, of men such as Munro and Bentinck, and their 'immense reforms in moral and social practices' (p. 301); it is thus that 'the English began to believe that they had a moral mission in India, that they represented a higher civilization, a better religion' (p. 318). In the succeeding generation this produced, alas! the superiority complex of the 'Panjab mentality'—'after thirty years of work such as extirpating thuggee and suttee, infanticide and slavery, we need not wonder that respect for Indian civilization was low' (p. 418). It is here that the authors themselves acknowledge that such work 'could only have been carried through with such unflagging passion by men imbued with deep evangelical religion, con-

vinced that they were there to fill their hasting day from dawn to sunset with service to an ever-watching King' (p. 376).

'Profoundly religious, in a manner compounded of Cromwell, the Thirty-nine Articles and the Public Schools' (p. 376), the British became, 'unlike any previous invaders, more aloof, the longer they stayed, more foreign, more efficient, incapable alike of being assimilated or expelled' (p. 462). Followed the Mutiny, which made 'the British community to consider itself as a garrison occupying a country which might always break out in a sudden rebellion,' and which 'elevated racial discrimination into a form of loyalty' (p. 464). More than ever, ruling the country became the prerogative of the white man, bearing that burden for India's good. The Bureaucracy exercised a paternalism, not untinged by the asperity of a parent who thinks himself wronged by an ungrateful son, and therefore it excluded both the ancient ruling classes of the land and the bourgeois intelligentsia, which the new learning had called into being—recking naught of Indian national self-expression, let alone self-determination.

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 provided the Indian classes with the means of making known, not only in India, but in Britain, both their grievance and their determination not to play for ever the rôle of zeros behind the British *one*. The Bureaucracy since that time has been on the defensive: its foolish endeavour to keep its cake and yet to present it to Indian nationalism has only 'organised for itself a perpetual opposition with no function but to criticize, no chance of ever taking office, and no real responsibility to the rather vague electorate which it was supposed to represent' (p. 583). Is it a wonder that in the first thirty years of the Congress's existence Indo-British relations steadily worsened? Yet when the War broke out in 1914, India, far from proving the heavy liability that the German Staff had anticipated, showed itself one of the most important assets of the British Empire. The Bureaucracy had always put off all Indian partici-

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pation in the government of their own country on the plea of 'efficiency' and 'security': here was the occasion for Indians to show their mettle—and they cheerfully and magnificently made the most of it. 'The general goodwill made it possible to denude the country of British troops and to allow many British officials to join the army and do special war work. The garrison at one time included only 15,000 British soldiers; the ordinary administrative services were almost entirely in Indian hands. Tacitly the British had conceded two important points for which Indian politicians had been agitating for many years: the British garrison had been reduced and the higher ranks of the civil services had been Indianized' (p. 600).

Yet when the War was over, the British returned, more cocksure of themselves and more race-proud than ever. The War had finally disposed of the myth of European superiority: the Peace added the conviction that the fine words of 'granting self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire' (Declaration of August 20th, 1917), were so many promises made of pie-crust. Since then, Indians have ceased to believe in Britain's *bona fides*: some have tried to obtain a maximum result by working the dyarchy established in 1920, some have found vent for their feelings in the various fantastic campaigns staged by the Mahatma, some finally have tried the assassin's bomb—but for all the possibility of a true partnership, based on the free consent and mutual goodwill between the two nations, such as in pre-War days had fired the aspirations of Congress, has become a dream, and perhaps not even a pleasant one. A strong government, of course, can keep the peace outwardly, as Lord Willingdon has shown. The trouble is that what can be done in peace-time would become impossible if ever another war broke out. As things stand at present, there can be no doubt that in that event the last links keeping India and Britain together would immediately be snapped.

A sombre outlook indeed—rendered all the more poignant by the *insouciance* with which the average Briton

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fondly believes that the latest White Paper with its 'safeguards' can prevent the flood. Alas! that scheme is not even the proverbial sticking plaster to cure an earthquake: it is a final attempt to rivet an ignominious indirect rule by creatures of Britain upon an India madly struggling to be free. Its realization is execrated by Indians of all shades of opinion as the supreme injury to be inflicted by Britain upon India. Is it too late to prevent such dreadful 'fulfilment' of British Rule in India? It really must not be: the first Round Table Conference under the Irwin régime was so near success in evolving a true Indo-British partnership, that I for one refuse to despair of a return to such saner counsels, which would indeed fulfil British Rule in India in the only manner redounding alike to Britain's glory and India's greatness.

The book presented by Messrs. Thompson and Garratt is a very timely and important aid to a true understanding of the actual position: the authors realize that it cannot 'be anything but unacceptable to those who do not believe in the proximity of a deluge or the necessity of an ark' (p. 655). The present reviewer at least is not amongst these, and he is grateful for a history of India's connection with Britain which comes as near impartiality as is humanly possible. For him the words of Gokhalé, modern India's greatest son, still ring true—that this connection, 'ordained in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence, is for India's good'; and he hopes that in the mutual interest of both countries that connection may neither be ruthlessly smashed nor just simply fade out, but yet be nobly fulfilled, by grafting the political genius of Britain on Hindusthan's ancient civilization.

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