

Gandhi and British India

By CLAIR PRICE

INDIA is one of the wonders of the world, and one of the wonders of India just now is a saint in politics. The fact that he is a saint, however, does not make him popular with the British. For he has made India more uncomfortable for them than it has been since the great mutiny in 1857—and India is the very core of their empire. The structure of the British Empire is such, in fact, that British imperialism would be compelled to evacuate Great Britain itself before it would willingly evacuate India. The Government of India—in its own country the most powerful Government in the world—has met and overcome many an obstacle in one way or another, but today it is up against an obstacle of a sort which is brand new in its experience. It is up against Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a dark little wisp of a man, who looks as if he could be picked up in one's arms and carried off like a child. In point of personal following, he is far and away the greatest man living in the world today.

He is a philosophic anarchist, a new Tolstoy without Tolstoy's past. He specializes in reducing his wants. He has fasted so long and so often that he is physically a mere shadow of a man. He is an Idea, living for the moment in a frail and brittle body. At home, he sits cross-legged on a mattress with his disciples. He dresses in a pair of coarse white trousers and a convict's cap of the sort which is known throughout India as "the Gandhi cap." When he is traveling, thousands of his followers throng to the stations through which he is to pass and if he only appears at the door of his third-class carriage, they are content to have seen him. When he leaves the train, they drop to their knees and press forward to kiss the hem of his garment.

Christians, including one or two New York clergymen, have frequently compared him with Christ. He was born 52 years ago in the Gujarat province of Bombay presidency. He was the son of a low caste Hindu merchant who brought him up for the law. He finished his legal training in London where he donned European dress, read law in the Middle Temple and brought his young Eastern mind into its first contact with our Northern civilization. Here he stopped taking dancing lessons when he read Ruskin's "Unto This Last." He read Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of Heaven Is Within You" and began to shrink from Northern industrialism.

His shrinking developed into a bitter hatred, a hatred which all Eastern minds feel toward a civilization which defies the Factory Chimney, a hatred in which a larger part of the future history of the world is bound up than is generally believed. Still in European dress, he was sent from London to South Africa 20 years ago to defend an Indian who had been arrested under the new anti-Indian labor legislation. He led an Indian rights campaign and the Transvaal and Natal jails began to fill with his followers. He and his entire family were thrown into jail, an act against which he protested in one of the first of the hunger strikes. He was kept in jail for two years and his health has never completely recovered. In all, he was jailed three times and once he was ambushed by friends for suspected treachery and left for dead. But his long campaign of passive resistance finally compelled General Smuts to negotiate with him and the Smuts-Gandhi legislation is still on the statute books at Cape Town. By this time, he knew that the problem of white men vs. brown men is the biggest problem in any empire which attempts to rule both; he knew that Indians would never receive their full "rights" in any white dominion until they had first won them in India. Still in European dress, he

went back to India to fight for Indian home rule.

Now India is a continent in itself. It is as big as all Europe outside of Russia. A third of its area consists of some 700 native States varying in size from Hyderabad, which is as big as Italy, to Lawa, which is as big as a farm. These are controlled by the Government of India through the typically Indian Army device of the political officer, but in theory they are independent, their rulers being entitled to the Seventeen Guns which the Government of India's Salute Sheet accords to independent Asiatic sovereigns. The remaining two-thirds of India is administered by the Government of India direct.

India's population of 330,000,000—one-fifth of the population of the world—is three times as big as the population of the United States and all its dependencies. British India proper numbers 250,000,000, a population more intricate in its complexities of race, religion and stage of civilization than is found in any other country on earth. This population consists of a vast lower stratum of peasantry and a very small educated and propertied class, neither of which is accustomed to playing an official rôle in the Government of India; for the tradition of democracy is the invention of our Northern civilization and is unknown in the East.

Cutting across these strata are many other lines of social cleavage, of which the chief cuts off the Hindus from their former conquerors and traditional enemies, the Mohammedans. The Hindus number about 200,000,000 in all India, and their outlook on life is colored by pantheism and passivism. The Mohammedans, who number only 60,000,000, are of a strong, aggressive sort, who find in warfare the very essence of their religion.

For the last ten years India has been the scene of a rising nationalist movement conducted as a Hindu religious revival, a movement from which the Mohammedans sharply dissociated themselves. Bengal Province greeted it with such vigorous demands that the Hon. E. S. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, went to India from London in 1917 and formulated the Montagu reforms, which were designed to give propertied Indians a very restricted rôle in the government of India. At the same time the Government gave itself added powers to put down "disorder" in Bengal by passing the Rowlatt act, an act whose provisions encountered widespread resentment.

After the signing of the armistice, two terrific influenza epidemics, the unusually high cost of living, the fear of famine, due to the failure of the rains and a rapid succession of lightning strokes, which had hitherto never been heard of in India, combined with the Rowlatt act to produce a situation in which anything might happen. Rioting broke out in Calcutta and Delhi and spread throughout the Punjab like wildfire. Five hundred Indians were killed and 2,000 injured in the Amritsar massacre, and still it grew. Finally the Punjab was put under martial law, and in accordance with the provisions of the Rowlatt act thousands of Punjabis were scooped into "preventive detention" and held without trial.

But it was not these things which sent the greatest flame of anger over India. What India smarts under today is the memory of the "crawling orders" which British officers admitted at the subsequent Government investigation into martial law in the Punjab, orders which were designed solely to humiliate. The Punjabis are a proud and fighting race who have furnished famous regiments to the Indian Army, and Bengal province, itself a famous storm centre, is still jeering at the Punjab: "We went down fighting, with a bomb in one hand and a revolver in the other, but you 'mar-

tial races' lay down in the streets to be spat upon."

What happened in the Punjab killed the Montagu reforms. When India's first elections were held last year under the Montagu scheme, whole races, classes and religions stayed away from the polls. As the time neared for the Prince of Wales to embark last Winter to open India's first native legislative bodies at Delhi his trip was suddenly canceled and the Duke of Connaught, an older man, was sent out in his place. In opening what there was to open of the Legislative Assembly he said he felt "the bitterness and estrangement of India"; "the shadow of Amritsar" had "lengthened over the land"; he knew "how deep was the concern felt by the King Emperor at the terrible chapter of events in the Punjab"; he appealed to "Indians and Britons alike to bury the past and forgive." In all the history of modern imperialism no member of a European royal family has ever so apologized to an Eastern people, but the royal apology fell on closed ears. The Rowlatt act was still in force and some of the Punjab prisoners were still in jail. The Duke of Connaught had disembarked at Madras into empty streets of closed shops and he embarked at Bombay for England amid a similar silence.

In the meantime the Treaty of Peace with Turkey had cut down the Mohammedan Sultan Caliph to the merest shadow of the power with which Mohammedan law had invested him for thirteen centuries, and the Mohammedans of India were not pleased. On top of the Turkish Treaty came the Esher committee's report to the War Office in London, recommending the continued use of the Indian Army in former territory of the Caliph, and Indian Mohammedans were ready to hurl themselves to Paradise in an immediate holy war against the British Government which had written the Turkish Treaty and which was represented by the Government of India. According to Mohammedan law, any country inhabited by Mohammedans is either Dar ul Islam or Dar ul Harb; i. e., the land of the faithful or the land of the unbeliever, and Mohammedans living in the land of the unbeliever are required either to fight or to emigrate. From the moment the Turkish Peace Treaty was signed Indian Mohammedans began to emigrate, trekking across the frontier into Afghanistan in answer to the same sort of impulse as once moved the Pilgrim Fathers to emigrate to America. Those Mohammedans who remained behind in the hope that the British Government could be made to rewrite the Turkish Treaty put off taking up the sword of Mohammed and attached themselves to a powerful figure who had arisen outside the ranks of Mohammedanism.

That figure was the new Gandhi, clad in coarse white trousers and a convict's cap, who was crying up and down the political wilderness of India the new gospel of "Back to the Vedas!"

With the passage of the Rowlatt act, he had laid aside his European dress forever. He had become a mahatma, a saint who has transcended the flesh and the world. For him, India had found its soul in the fiery furnace of the Punjab ordeal. By "soul-force," India would purge itself of every vestige of the British and their "satanic" civilization, and would return to the ancient Vedic wisdom and the peace which antedated the British conquest. And if a purged and purified India should fail in the eyes of the North to progress, that would be its virtue, its proof that it is still sound and healthy at the core.

This was the gospel he was preaching: Let all Indians refuse to serve the British Government. Let those who are now serving give up their positions and their titles. Let all



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

teachers and pupils quit the Government schools and start Indian schools in shaded groves where Indian pupils may gather about Indian teachers, after the manner of the ancient Vedic schools. Let all Indians quit wearing British cotton and return to Indian homespun. Let all Indians quit the use of alcohol and return to Indian food. Let all Indians quit the use of tea and sugar, since Great Britain monopolizes both. Let all Indians quit bearing children into this dark age of British industrialism. Let all Indians refuse to vote at Government elections. To vote is a worse sin than to kill ten holy cows. Let all Indians quit suing in Government courts. Let all Indian lawyers quit practicing in Government courts. "If the lawyers leave off their law and the legal profession is considered as low as that of a public woman, British rule will totter and fall in a single day."

Gandhi's program was arranged in four stages:

1. Refusal to accept Government titles and positions.
2. Refusal to attend Government schools.
3. Refusal to serve in the Government police or the Indian army.
4. Refusal to pay Government taxes.

Thus far he has used only the first two stages. If necessary to rid India of the British, he says he will utilize the third and fourth stages. If all four stages should fail, if "soul-force" fails, 10,000,000 Hindus are to leap to the sword. India is to be purged of the British within three years.

With Gandhi stand the two Mohammedan leaders, Mohammed and Shaikat Ali—huge, bluff men richly clad in green cloaks with tall white astrakhan caps bearing the gold crescent of Mohammedanism. Back of this trio stand the Indian National Congress and the All-India Mohammedan League; back of the congress and the league, Mohammedans are sacrificing goats instead of cows and Hindus are permitted to enter the Great Mosque of the Mogul Emperors at Delhi—both religions joined apparently in such union as India would never have deemed possible.

They are a strange trio, this tiny frugal Hindu vegetarian and pacifist and the two enormous Moham-

medan meat eaters and warriors. Were the British not too busily occupied with far more serious matters, they might conceivably permit themselves a smile at the spectacle of these two Mohammedans looming beside Gandhi. For the British have had a long and richly varied experience in Asia and they have met at one time or another nearly all the tricks in Asia's repertoire; the British Army has had many a taste of the sword of Mohammed and has abundant reason to respect it. But the spectacle of two Mohammedan fighters talking of "soul-force" and engaging in a passive resistance movement is a new one.

Concerning Gandhi, however, not even the British are able to cast the slightest aspersions on the high sincerity of the man. He belongs to the Jain sect of Hinduism, which is distinguished by the sanctity with which it invests all life. Even the Duke of Connaught received a letter from Gandhi immediately after his disembarkation at Madras, assuring him that no attempt would be made on his Highness's life during his stay in India, since India regarded all living things as sacred.

Although Gandhi is the Government of India's greatest foe, the Government is forced to refrain from arresting him; for it is Gandhi, and Gandhi alone, who has directed not only Hindu resentment at the Punjab atrocities but the more explosive wrath of India's Mohammedans over the Turkish Peace Treaty into the silent channels of passive resistance. Take Gandhi away and the Government of India might see at once the dawn of that red day which all white men in the East dread but which they never talk about, the day when the East "breaks loose."

Although he is the most powerful enemy the Government of India has ever encountered, the Government is forced to treat him as a friend. In fact, one of the first official acts of the new Viceroy of India, Lord Reading, was to summon the dark little Hindu in the convict's cap to a long conference at Delhi. All afternoon Gandhi talked to the new Viceroy. He talked more in pity than in anger. There is no anger in him. The anger is rather in the rattling cries of "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" (to Gandhi the victory), which are resounding throughout India today.