

**THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS :
A RECONSTRUCTION**

VOLUME ONE : 1885-1918

TO ARUNA FOR MUCH KINDNESS



Group photograph of the First Indian National Congress, 1885

The Indian National Congress : A Reconstruction

Volume One : 1885-1918

IQBAL SINGH

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THE REASON WHY

Some time in 1981 a Bombay publisher vaguely mooted the idea of my writing a history of the Indian National Congress to be published during its centenary celebrations at the end of 1985. He was confident that he could muster the financial backing for the project. The proposition sounded at once tempting and forbidding. However, he was anxious for me to secure the approval of Indira Gandhi. This seemed to me a rather gratuitous proviso and one which I did not particularly relish. But India that is Bharat being what it is, I agreed to seek the opinion of the late Prime Minister of India. As it turned out, a few days later in Delhi I had the opportunity of seeing her in connection with another matter, and while about it, I also mentioned the Bombay publisher's suggestion. She was silent for a time and then said something non-committal. But I pressed the point and asked her whether or not she approved of my undertaking the task. "Of course," she said, "why do you think I do not approve?" But the wording and vehemence of her remark reflected some reservation and even a certain undertone of embarrassment.

I soon discovered why she was uncommunicative and would not give a direct answer to my question. Apparently, as the President of the Congress she had already given her blessings to another project, conceived on a much vaster scale than anything I had in mind, over which a veteran Congress scholar, Mr. B. N. Pande—currently the Governor of Orissa—was to preside and who was to be assisted by a host of distinguished Indian academics and other writers, each one contributing an essay on some segment or aspect of the Congress history on which he or she had specialized. Obviously, Indira Gandhi considered any individual effort covering the same ground both inadequate and

supererogatory, but did not say so, presumably to spare my feelings.

So the idea suggested by the Bombay publisher turned out to be without a tomorrow. All the same, on my return to London, moved partly by curiosity and partly by the nostalgic fascination of what Jules Laforgue called *les trains manques*, I embarked on a desultory exploration to find out what kind of histories of the Congress were already in print in English or other European languages. Inevitably, almost reflexively, my first port of call was the British Library—or rather the British Museum as my generation have known it during most of our yesterdays. If in the process no rewarding discovery was vouchsafed one, at least it provided a mild surprise. For it so happens that the Indian National Congress is listed in the general catalogue—a kind of Doomsday Book which until but recently, as it were by statute, carefully recorded and remembered much that was published in the English-speaking world, whether good, bad or indifferent—not as a separate entity in its own right. Instead, it qualifies for entry under the omnibus heading: India (Miscellaneous Societies, etc). Among the multitude of “Miscellaneous Societies etc.,” whose publications or material about which is catalogued under this heading, one finds such august bodies as the Indian Institute of Bankers, the Indian Library Association, to say nothing of the Indian Veterinary Institute and even an off-beat organisation like the Indian Progressive Writers Association.

But the surprise did not end there. No less surprising was the kind of published material on or about the Indian National Congress listed in that section of the catalogue. There were reports of the various Congress sessions, though the entries were not consecutive or complete. There were also collections of presidential addresses delivered at its annual sessions, but, again, these collections were by no means complete and up to date. In fact, most of them covered the earlier phase of the Congress and seemed to tail off after the outbreak of the First World War, and after that only a few individual presidential pronouncements can be traced and presumably little or no effort has been made to procure them. There were also photographic albums of the worthies who presided over the Congress during the early years, and for

good measure and to set them in their proper background, views of India and pictures of Indian flora and fauna are thrown in. But what struck one as remarkable was the dearth in the list of histories of India's foremost political organisation. Indeed, at the time—roughly about the middle of 1982—the only history of the Congress listed was the one by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in two volumes, but for some reason only the first volume was recorded in the catalogue.

Admittedly, the list was not intended to be exhaustive. Serious students of the subject were expected to look under the name of individual authors of historical works on the Congress as, for instance, the history written jointly by C.F. Andrews and Girija K. Mookerjee and published by George Allen and Unwin in the late 1930s. But a fairly extensive combing through of the catalogue did not yield any large harvest. As far as I recall, the number of histories of the Congress in English I could trace at the time could easily be counted on the fingers of two hands, with some fingers to spare. Nor is there any reason to suppose that writers in Indian languages, including Hindi, had till then been particularly prolific in this field of historiography, although the Congress centenary in 1985 has doubtless provided some incentive to historians in India to make good this strange deficit.

It can no doubt be argued that the deficit is more apparent than real. For, after all, while few historians of our day and season may have considered the Congress by itself as a fit subject for their undivided attention, it also remains true that nobody has been able to write about the evolution of modern India over the last hundred years without at some point having to grapple with it as a major, if often baffling, political reality. Even the historians and publicists of the Raj have had to take cognisance of it as a fact of life in India which they could not bypass. Some of them were and continue to be sincerely persuaded that the Indian National Congress as such had little to do with the ending of British rule in the subcontinent; that the transfer of power to the two succession states which took place in August 1947 was the logical, almost predetermined fulfilment of the constitutional process set in motion by Queen Victoria in her famous Declaration of 1858 even if not much earlier. This is at best a rationalisation in hindsight of what actually happened and more

often a beguiling mythology flattering to the self-esteem of the British ruling establishment and their national ego generally. It is contradicted by the long shadow of the Congress which extends over pages of imperial history first, as a domesticated political pet which could be safely patronised or called sternly to heel when it became too obstreperous, and later as an intractable negative force if not the evil genius of Indian politics which had somehow to be neutralised and exorcised by hook or by crook by those who had the best interests of India at heart. An undertone of denigratory intent, therefore, tends to run through even the more subtle works in this category when they come to treat of the Congress.

There has been, of course, another category of historical writing in vogue since the beginning of this century by scholars of varying talents, whether Indian or foreign. Histories of what is called Indian nationalism abound and provide abundant material on its anatomy, its chemistry, its sociological and economic roots. Inevitably, the Congress looms as large in these analytical works as the ghost of Hamlet's father if not the Prince of Denmark himself. However, they take us into an airy realm of abstraction and theoretical speculation which connects tenuously if at all with the living reality of flesh and blood which the Congress has been and remains for many of us who have lived through its defeats and triumphs over the past seven decades or more and who came to political awareness to a greater or lesser degree by what the Congress did or failed to. It is not easy for us to see it as some ectoplasmic emanation of what a distinguished historian belonging to the new Cambridge School which has been, and probably still is, rather *a la mode* has characterised, somewhat tautologically, as "the politics of the Associations."

But what has been even more surprising is that the Congress itself has shown no great eagerness to encourage scholars within its own ranks—and there were many—or those broadly sympathetic to it, to address themselves to the task of producing a more or less definitive history of its origin, growth and development within its own terms—that is not how outsiders have seen and judged it by applying extraneous theoretical touchstones and criteria barely relevant in the Indian context, but essentially building a structure of exegesis on its own archival

sources illuminated by the infinitely valuable testimony and insights furnished by the memoirs, biographies, autobiographies and other writings of men and women like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gokhale, Annie Besant, Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Subhas Bose, Abul Kalam Azad and others who not only led it but made it what it was and in some degree still remains.

Rather the reverse. It is pertinent in this context to recall that as early as 1924, K. M. Panikkar who had been sent to act as a liaison man between the Akali leaders and the A.I.C.C. had the bright idea of writing a history of the Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru who at the time was for all practical purposes the working General Secretary of the A.I.C.C. seemed to favour the idea in principle but did not want Panikkar to make any public announcement about it, partly because the Congress was at the time going through one of its periodic phases of internal divisions—between the Swarajists and the “No-Changers”. He wrote to Panikkar at the end of May that year :

I do not much like the idea of making a public announcement about your being entrusted with the task of writing a history of the National Congress movement. I would have preferred the announcement first to come after a formal resolution of the Working Committee [of the A.I.C.C.]. It is possible that a premature announcement may not be liked by some people... I am writing to the Provincial Congress Committees to send you any information that might help you. A more public announcement could come after the Working Committee meeting.

The public announcement never came. It could be that some people in the Working Committee objected to Panikkar or it could be that it was not considered a propitious moment to embark on the project at a time when Congress leaders were at sixes and sevens. At any rate Panikkar, who would have certainly turned out at least something readable, did not pursue the idea and turned his talents to other and more rewarding fields. One even wonders whether Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya would have undertaken and persevered with his informative if somewhat stylistically eccentric *The History of the Indian National Congress* if he had

not been spurred on by the thought that its Golden Jubilee was due in 1935 and that the occasion demanded that its labours over half-a-century be recorded and made available to the general public. Possibly the same consideration prompted Indira Gandhi to commission Mr. B. N. Pande some years before the centenary celebrations over which, alas, she was not spared to preside, to edit the massive historical volumes which are now on the market.

Whatever other defaults might be ascribed to it as a political collectivity, it cannot be said that the Congress suffers from an excess of Narcissism or even self-regard. If anything, from the very outset it has been inclined to be self-deprecatory. It seems at once curious and significant that even after the attainment of independence and becoming the ruling party, with all that it implies in terms of command of material and human resources, it continued to labour under some inhibition in this regard. Instead of sponsoring its own history, the Congress Government under Nehru chose to sponsor an ambitious project embracing the Indian freedom movement as a whole in which, certainly the Indian National Congress figures as the main protagonist, but which nevertheless has broader terms of reference, casting the net much wider. That is not necessarily a defect. However, the wide angle camera, as it were, tends to a certain diffuseness of focus. At any rate, the volumes published under that auspices, much as they have to offer us, are not exactly a substitute for a history of the Congress as such.

So the deficit remains—even after the spate of publications during the centenary year and since. It cannot be said that a point has already been reached in historical literature about the Congress when enough is enough and non-proliferation would be in order. On the contrary, that point is unlikely to be reached even if there were scores of writers devoting themselves exclusively to the Congress organisation, its various phases and campaigns, and the remarkable personalities it drew to itself and their interaction, for the next half-a-century or more. That may sound like a justificatory plea for this work. Actually it is more by way of an apology. For having accepted to write a "brief" history of the Congress, I discovered that not only in this case brevity would not be the soul of wit—in the original sense of the term—but

that neither by aptitude nor by training I can aspire to the kind of discipline in which historians live and move and have their being. It would, therefore, have been the height of presumption and folly on my part to attempt trespass into the vast labyrinth of primary and secondary source material which has become available in recent years and through which sure-footed historiographers alone can find their way to points of significance.

Nor have I tried to erect any theoretical or ideological framework into which the Indian National Congress can neatly be fitted, tempting though that seems since it makes everything simpler and more intelligible than living reality can ever be. As for the narrative form in which the story has been "reconstructed" here, I can only say that to a very large degree that has been dictated by the very nature of material itself with which one had to deal. Whether or not it is an appropriate approach, it is for others to judge. But it seemed to be the best way of doing justice to a great movement which has been rather superciliously treated and at the same time well suited to a work which is intended, not for the specialist reader, but the laity.

Equally, it is worth stressing, perhaps, that the Congress tactics and policies, especially during the earlier phase, evolved under conditions not of its own choosing, but constraints and compulsions of the adversary's choice—an adversary, moreover, who at the time and, indeed, till the outbreak of the First World War, virtually commanded strategic political initiative to say nothing of a strong physical armature for imposing its will. A kind of Fabian strategy as such was unavoidable for the Congress to adopt given the balance of forces. It is hard not to be impressed how over this period the Congress leadership succeeded slowly, almost imperceptibly, in shifting the terms of Indo-British litigation and debate sufficiently where it became possible to postulate *Swaraj*, however vaguely defined, not as a distant goal of the Indian people but as the next imperative step.

This was by any historical standards a remarkable achievement, the more remarkable because this turning of the tables was brought about almost entirely through an effective battle of wits. It is only fair to admit, however, that this success was made possible, partly at any rate, by the fact that the British imperialist establishment was also functioning under certain self-imposed

compulsions and constraints flowing from its own public pledges given under duress or embarrassment to tide over particular crises of British power in India, or in expansive moods of imperialist condescension.

True, these pledges to the Indian people were often evaded. All manner of semantic ambiguities were insinuated into them to circumscribe their scope and import when the time came to redeem them. There were even traumatic occasions when the local instruments through which the British governed and managed their vast Indian Empire took the bit between their teeth and not only ran away with it but ran berserk, forgetting constitutional niceties and resorted to the ultimate sanction of "frightfulness" to put down political refractoriness and resistance on the part of the ruled. Nevertheless these constitutional inhibitions, combined with the checks and balances built into the British system itself, in some measure operated as a kind of moral and psychological brake on prolonged and exclusive reliance on the use and abuse of naked force. This is what, perhaps, lends a certain fascination and almost an historical uniqueness to the encounter—at times confrontation—between the Indian National Congress and British power in India which in some ways set the pattern of development for the rest of Britain's Colonial Empire.

Finally, whether or not this work can claim any other merit, it has at least been for me a course of self-education. If it even fractionally serves the same purpose for those who may chance to read it, the effort involved in writing it would have been amply worthwhile. Meanwhile it only remains to own up to my debts which can be done the more wholeheartedly because there is no other way of repaying them. I am most sensible of the kindness and courtesy I have at all times received from all those who are connected with the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Having been a life-long freelance uncommitted to any academic institution, I felt some trepidation in accepting an assignment at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. But this proved groundless. This institution is a rare island of civilisation in Delhi permeated by the benign spirit of one of the most civilised human beings of our epoch—Jawaharlal Nehru—whose memory it so fittingly enshrines. Among those who have taken infinite pains with

reading the proofs and checking the references, it would be rank ingratitude not to mention the names of Dr. N. Balakrishnan, Miss Deepa Bhatnagar, Miss Amrit Varsha Gandhi and Mr. Yog Raj Kapoor. I owe a special debt of gratitude, of course, to Professor Ravinder Kumar, Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and its Deputy Director, Dr. Hari Dev Sharma, for their help which made my work not only easy but pleasant. The latter, indeed, was kind enough to go through the manuscript of the present volume, and with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Congress history correct many errors of detail. Any errors of fact—and even more, interpretation—that remain are my own responsibility.

Les Cicadas, Menton.

Easter 1987

CHAPTER I

COMING TOGETHER

"This 'National Liberal' Union," wrote Florence Nightingale on November 27, 1885, in a letter marked "Personal and Confidential" from 10 South Street, Park Lane, London, to Sir William Wedderburn in Bombay, "if it keeps straight, seems altogether the matter of the greatest interest that has happened in India, if it makes progress, perhaps for a century. We are watching the birth of a new nationality in the oldest civilisation in the world. How critical will be its first meeting at Poona. I bid it God-speed with all my heart."

The legendary Lady with the Lamp had never been to India. Yet, as we know, she was deeply interested in seeing improvements in the way in which Indian hospitals were being run and in introducing new nursing methods and techniques. She also advocated highly original if obvious ideas on provision of cheap rural sanitation which were not very unlike those which Mahatma Gandhi developed later. What is not so well known, perhaps, is that she had an equally deep, if not deeper, concern for the social and political advancement of the Indian people. At any rate, her comment on the forthcoming meeting of what she called "this 'National Liberal' Union" showed her to be a person of uncommon perceptiveness and proved prophetic even though she had got the name a little wrong and, due to her native caution, projected a somewhat longer time-frame for the attainment of full nationhood by India than turned out to be the case.

The error, or rather the confusion, over the name was by no means of her making. "The Indian National Union" was in fact the name that figured in the more or less "private and confidential" circular document which Allan Octavian Hume had earlier in the year sent out to a number of kindred spirits in various parts of India informing them of the "Conference" to be

held at Poona from the 25th to the 31st December and giving them a broad outline of the agenda to be discussed at the gathering which, he believed, "will form the germ of a Native Parliament and, if properly conducted, will constitute in a few years an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions."

And it was from Hume himself during his visit to Britain between August and mid-November that year that Florence Nightingale had learned of the coming event in which she was to read a most promising and hopeful augury for the future of India. For Hume, as she told Wedderburn, "was so good as to give me a good deal of his time." More: he had also brought her a letter from C.P. Ilbert, Law Member of the Viceroy's Council at the time, who was responsible for piloting the famous Bill amending the Criminal Procedure Code in order to make racial equality between Indians and Europeans before the law a degree more real than the official declamatory fiction that it was, the Royal Proclamation of 1858 notwithstanding; and which, in turn, had outraged Anglo-India of the day to so high a pitch that they clamoured for Lord Ripon's head and eventually succeeded in largely emasculating, if not aborting, the proposed legislation.

Hume could hardly have failed to brief Florence Nightingale fully on the political situation in India and on the purpose of his visit to Britain which was to consult with political personalities broadly sympathetic to India, among them John Bright, Joseph Chamberlain, John Morley, James Bryce, Sir James Cairde, R.T. Reid, John Slagg and, of course, Ripon who, after his return from India, was staying at Studly Royal. Her labelling of the Indian National Union as "Liberal" must have been through association of ideas and her personal knowledge of some of its leading lights. Nor was this an inaccurate description. Almost to a man—and there were no women yet on the Indian political landscape—they were of liberal convictions in the 19th century sense of the term and quite a few of them were at one time or other to be card-holding members of the National Liberal Club, London, which, for a long time to come, was the political and intellectual Mecca of Indian Liberalism.

Obviously, Hume had given her no hint that a change of name was being considered—and for the good reason that he

himself had no inkling either that one was being contemplated or necessary. As late as the middle of October 1885 the *Indian Mirror*, a leading Indian newspaper usually well informed on political developments in the country, was reporting that "a Conference of the Indian National Union, which represents all the Presidencies and Provinces of the Empire" was being prepared "at Puna or Jubbulpore", though it had its own doubts whether it could be held at all that year. The decision to change the name was taken almost at the last minute after those involved in organizing the show at Poona—principally, the activists of the Poona-based Sarvajanik Sabha and the Bombay Presidency Association—had discussed the matter with Hume who only returned from London aboard the *S.S. Nizam* on December 2. They rechristened it "Congress" instead of "Conference". At the same time they decided to shift the date of its inaugural session from December 25 to 28 and the provincial "Select Committees", where they existed, were duly informed of the changes.

What had prompted these changes? S.R. Mehrotra in his well-researched and documented book *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* suggests that they were made "to avoid confusion" with another "National Conference"—the second of its kind—which was being held at Calcutta during the Christmas holiday—between December 25-27 to be exact—under the aegis of the Indian Association which had already been in the political field for some years and the moving spirit behind which was no less a person than Surendranath Banerjea. That was clearly the main consideration. For there seems to have been an undercurrent of mild competitiveness, if not rivalry, between the still somewhat embryonic and nebulous Indian National Union and the well-established Indian Association. At least Hume and his associates had not kept Surendranath Banerjea in the picture while planning their conference although very late in the day he was invited by W.C. Bonnerjee to attend it—an invitation which he declined on the ground, as he wrote in his autobiography, that having been largely responsible for organizing the National Conference in Calcutta he could not leave it in the lurch nor suspend it at short notice.

This was perfectly true as far as it went. But, it must be added, the National Conference in Calcutta had been called

somewhat precipitately, invitations for it having been sent out only late in November 1885 and its agenda covered more or less the same themes, even if more specifically spelt out, as the ones which were going to be taken up at Poona. The idea of upstaging the Poona gathering, therefore, could not have been wholly absent from Surendranath Banerjea's mind. However that may be, the new name was to stick though what made Hume and his friends to opt for it must remain a matter for conjecture. Obviously, it could not have been the result of prolonged deliberation and debate, much less a process of premeditation. But though fortuitous to a degree, in hindsight the choice seems to have been apt—even inspired.

Apt, because the word "Congress" literally means "coming together". And that, as far as one can guess, appears to have been the intention of those who had conceived the idea of a meeting of a number of more or less like-minded persons at Poona that Christmas. Hume, with his British background—his father, Joseph Hume, had been a member of Parliament and leader of the Radical group of Liberals—may have spoken airily of his Indian associates in the venture as "the inner circle of the National Party". But in the Indian context of the day, with the imperial power reluctant to entertain the notion of even allowing rudimentary forms of representative institutions to grow up in India, a political party in any valid sense of the term was hardly a practical proposition. What men like Dadabhai Naoroji, B.M. Malabari, Pherozeshah Mehta, Kashinath Trimbak Telang (whose remarkable translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* into English in the *Sacred Books of the East* series had been published in 1882) and others had in mind was a kind of *rassemblement* of kindred spirits to seek a consensus even though the term had not yet come into fashionable political currency. This is clearly implied in the circular that had gone out. It said that the Conference at Poona would have two "direct objects": first, "to enable all the most earnest labourers in the cause of national progress to become personally known to each other"; and secondly, "to discuss and decide upon the political operations to be undertaken during the ensuing year."

Inspired, too, in the sense that the name nicely fitted the

anatomy of the organisation at the moment of its birth—seemingly ad hoc and yet connecting with the ambient political, social and cultural environment of the times. In a strange way, moreover, it also presaged the broad lines along which it was to develop and the pattern of its institutional reflexes over the years to come which ensured that it was always to be much more than a political party or chapel and much less—a paradox which, perhaps, has accounted for its extraordinary resilience and strength as well as its structural weakness and a built-in tendency to periodic peripheral fragmentation if not fission. In its beginning was certainly not its end. But the name which its founding fathers chose for it, more by accident than design, at least contained a precursive hint of the promise of its growth in the fullness of time into a great movement, drawing to itself vast tides of Indian humanity which over a whole historical epoch—and perhaps beyond—guaranteed it against obsolescence that overtook so many political or quasi-political organisations which rose and fell, often leaving not a wrack behind, during a little more than a century which saw the consolidation of British power and its eclipse in India with the transfer of that power to the two succession states in 1947. But let us not anticipate.

The omens, both large and small, during the period preparatory to its first session had been anything but auspicious. If its organisers had been as susceptible to what the stars foretold as some of their latter-day successors, they might well have been tempted to call it off altogether and wait for a more propitious day. At the end of 1884 Ripon, a man of undoubted liberality of mind and spirit as the British proconsuls went and genuinely anxious to humanize an essentially inhumane and arbitrary system of colonial rule, had left India after seeing his effort at reform virtually stultified and having himself barely escaped abduction, if not lynching, by his own kind for trying to be fair to Indians. Within a few months of his departure, in June 1885, the Government in Britain over which Gladstone presided fell and a Conservative administration under Lord Salisbury, not the most liberal among Tories, was installed. This was like an ice-cold douche to Indian hopes of any *mobilisme* in Britain's Indian policy. As the *Indian Mirror* justly lamented: "The ascendancy of the Conservative Party, however, temporary it

may be, means retrogression or stagnation in India". It did.

The changes of name and dates—the latter meant that the session which was originally to extend over six days would have to be cut to three—were not a happy augury either, especially as they indicated differences among "the most earnest labourers in the cause of national progress," with an influential body of them under Surendranath Banerjea insisting on pitching their separate tent elsewhere instead of agreeing to make common cause. The crowning complication came when it became necessary to shift the venue of the Congress session at the eleventh hour.

Poona was to have hosted it. The Sarvajanik Sabha had constituted a Reception Committee under S.H. Chiplonkar. The Committee in turn had set up a fund and made elaborate arrangements to receive and look after the creature comforts of the delegates. According to the circular issued by Hume, "Delegates are expected to find their own way to and from Poona—but from the time they reach the Poona Railway Station until they again leave it, everything they can need, carriage, accommodation, food, & c., will be provided for them gratuitously". The cost of all this was to be met from the Reception Fund "which the Poona Association most liberally offers to provide in the first instance, but to which all delegates, whose means warrant their incurring this further expense, will be at liberty to contribute any sum they please." They were assured that any surplus of such donations "will be carried forward as a nucleus for next year's Reception Fund."

The session was to be held at "the Peshwah's Garden near the Parbati Hill." It had "a fine Hall, like the garden, the property of the Sabha." It apparently also had ample living accommodation and the circular promised that every delegate would be "provided with suitable quarters. Much importance is attached to this since when all thus reside *together* for a week, far greater opportunities for friendly intercourse will be afforded than if the delegates were (as at the time of the late Bombay demonstrations) scattered about in dozens of private lodging houses all over the town." Unfortunately, however, all these carefully worked out plans had to go by the board because a cholera epidemic broke out in Poona and it was considered

prudent not to take any risks with the lives of delegates who, after all, represented the *creme de la creme* of the country's political elite.

Poona's loss was Bombay's gain. The decision to change the venue to Bombay was taken in the third week of December, less than a fortnight before the Congress session was to open. It speaks highly of the resourcefulness of the leaders of the Bombay Presidency Association that they proved equal to the task. They were able to persuade the management of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College and Boarding Trust to allow the Congress session to be held in their buildings above the Gowalia Tank—a locality, incidentally, which was to become associated with other significant events in the history of the Indian National Congress, including the hoisting of the Congress flag by Aruna Asaf Ali on August 9, 1942, after the passing of the "Quit India" resolution by the Congress and after nearly all the top Congress leaders, from Gandhi downwards, had been arrested in the early hours that morning and whisked away to their respective places of internment by the British authorities.

All—proper furnishings, lighting, and seating facilities—were ship-shape well in time; in fact, by the morning of the day-before when the delegates began to arrive and were drawn into informal, preliminary discussions "on the order of the proceedings for the next three days." These continued "the whole day and well into the night of December 27th." Not that there were too many delegates or representatives. There were only seventy-two in all. Bombay and Sind, then and for a long time to come administrative Siamese twins, inevitably provided the largest contingent—thirty-eight. The next largest group came from the other Presidency—Madras—twenty-one. Then, way down in the league table, figured North-West Province and Oudh, later the United Provinces and now Uttar Pradesh, with seven. Bengal, Assam, Orissa and Bihar between them sent only three men good and true—the same number as the Punjab.

The paucity of Congress representation from the Land of Five Rivers was understandable. The British had taken good care to keep the Punjab insulated from the political currents in the rest of India. But why so few came from Bengal, at the time already and for a long time to come politically the most vibrant

Province? Strictly speaking, it was represented by the impressive figure of Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee, a distinguished and much respected barrister on the original side of the Calcutta High Court. Annie Besant in her *How India Wrought for Freedom* mentions Narendranath Sen, Editor of the *Indian Mirror*. Another Bengali, J. Ghosal, Editor of the *Indian Union*, is also known to have taken part in the Bombay Congress, though as representative of Allahabad. The National Conference called by Surendranath Banerjee's Indian Association had succeeded in keeping everybody who was anybody politically in Bengal at home. However, to show there was no hard feeling, according to Ambica Charan Mazumdar in his *Indian National Evolution*, on the last day of the Calcutta conclave the news that the First Indian National Congress was set for opening the next day sent it "into a rapturous acclamation" and the Conference despatched a message "welcoming the birth of the long expected National Assembly."

However, everything is not in numbers, despite Pythagoras. If the number of representatives who mustered for the first Congress roll call in Bombay seemed almost derisory considering the size of the country and its population, the wealth and variety of talent among them was impressive. Many of them were already names to conjure with. Others were to achieve fame and distinction in the years ahead. They included men like Dada-bhai Naoroji who was the first Indian to get elected to the British Parliament; K.T. Telang, a Sanskrit scholar of rare integrity; Pherozeshah Mehta, Dinshaw Edulji Wacha and Rahimtulla M. Sayani, future presidents of the Congress; B.M. Malabari, Editor of the *Indian Spectator* and a brave social reformer; N.G. Chandavarkar, S. Subramania Iyer, P. Ananda Charlu, M. Veeraraghavachariar and Gangaprasad Varma. The national press, in those days national in more than just name, was present in force. Apart from those already listed, Editors of the *Hindu*, the *Tribune*, the *Indu Prakash*, the *Hindusthani*, the *Crescent* and many others were in at the nativity.

Besides the "representatives", about thirty friends and sympathisers graced the occasion. Among them were men in high places in the official hierarchy, like M.G. Ranade, Member of the Bombay Legislative Council and Judge of the Small Cause Court at

Poona, later to be promoted to the Bench, and the great scholar, Professor R.G. Bhandarkar of the Deccan College, D.S. White, President of the Eurasian Association, also attended. Whether William Wedderburn and Professor Wordsworth, grandson of the Poet, were among those who attended "as *amici curiae*, to listen and advise" is not certain. But they were at the informal gathering in the afternoon of December 27 at which the Congress representatives were introduced to the leading citizens of Bombay and probably took part in the private meetings at which the agenda was discussed.

The curtain on the strange drama of India's political destiny, the culmination of a long process of gestation during the previous three quarters of a century, went up at 12 noon on December 28, 1885, in the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College. Or did it? Discretion, it appears, was considered the better part of valour. Unlike what was to become the established custom of the Congress of open debate and decisions openly arrived at, the first Congress met *in camera*. Only carefully edited summaries of each day's discussions were handed out to the Press. The more detailed report of the proceedings did not become public property till a year later.

But, although the first Congress conducted its business behind closed doors, this proved no bar to at least two eye-witness accounts of the scene and what was said and done being published in the Press which are still interesting at this distance because they represent two contrasting ways in which the affairs of the Congress—and India generally—were to be treated in the period ahead by the Anglo-Indian and Indian Press. One of the reports appeared in the *Bombay Gazette*, an official publication, which had evidently managed to slip in an informant, if not an informer—not a very difficult thing to do in the Indian conditions, then or later. It was not a particularly unfriendly account. Nor was it particularly enlightening. Its tone was mildly condescending and it had an undertone of levity, concentrating on the differences of the delegates' physiognomies coming from various regions of India and the idiosyncratic diversity of what they wore or did not wear. It referred to the "men from Madras, the blackness of whose complexion seemed to be made blacker by the spotless white turbans which some of them wore"; noted

the presence of the "bearded, bulky and large-limbed" delegates from the North-West (forgetting that in the late Victorian era practically everybody sported a beard); poked a little gentle fun at "Parsees in their not very elegant head-dress, which they themselves have likened to a slanting roof"; and rounded the descriptive passage with the remark that those assembled in the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College "presented such a variety of costumes and complexions, that a similar scene can scarcely be witnessed except at a fancy ball. . ."

The other account was published in a Calcutta weekly, *Reis and Rayyet* (or Ruler and the Ruled) under the nom-de-plume "Chiel" which, Dr. S.R. Mehrotra believes, might have concealed the identity of Girija Bhushan Mukerji, lawyer and editor of the *Navavibhakar*, who was one of the three delegates from Calcutta. It was a reportage in an altogether more serious vein, concerning itself with the drift and quality of argument rather than the delegates' appearances or sartorial eccentricities though it did not overlook them either. "It seemed to me that," Chiel wrote, "as if every member had inwardly resolved upon having less of words and more of work, every one of them inspired with an inward feeling that it was real work for his country which had called him to that hall, real work and no long or tall talk. . . . Above all, there was moderation in the tone and language such as would have. . . put the most moderate Anglo-Indian to the blush. . . ."

The first item on the agenda before the Congress was to choose the man to preside over its transactions. During the protracted consultations and discussions that had gone on throughout 1885, the idea of asking the Governor of Bombay, Lord Reay, to chair the inaugural session had been seriously mooted, no doubt partly because of the calculation that such high official patronage would lend added respectability to the enterprise and induce greater receptivity in Whitehall to any demands or proposals for reforms that the Congress might formulate. Hume had actually put the suggestion to the new Viceroy, Lord Dufferin of Ava, whom he had consulted some time in May 1885. Dufferin who saw some advantage for the Raj in having a body of influential Indians who could voice the collective wishes of the politically awakened section of Indian society, if not the Indian people as a whole, and as such serve as a safety-

valve for some of the simmering public discontents, however, did not fancy Hume's suggestion.

Hume gave his own version of Dufferin's objections in his letter to Ripon written nearly four years after the event. What he told Ripon is largely confirmed by what Dufferin wrote to Reay at the time to put him upon his guard. "I took it upon myself," he informed Reay in his letter to him written on May 17, "to say that it would be impossible for anyone in your situation to accept such an offer. The functions of such an assembly [that is, the Congress] must of necessity consist in criticizing the acts or policy of the Government, in formulating demands which probably it would be impossible to grant, and in adopting generally the procedure of all reforms associations. The idea of wishing to associate the head of the Executive Government of a Province with such a programme I told him [Hume] was absurd."

It was. But Dufferin, a man of very much more complex temperament and timber than Ripon, and altogether more ambivalent in his attitude to the Congress as was to become apparent soon enough, almost certainly had another reason for shooting down Hume's suggestion. As he told Reay, "I am sure it would be a mistake if we identified ourselves personally either with the reforming or the reactionary enthusiasts." In other words he wanted the British Government in India to keep its distance from all Indian political organisations and retain for itself absolute freedom of manoeuvre and decision. Unintentionally, however, by turning down Hume's suggestion that the Governor of Bombay might condescend to take the chair at the Congress session, Dufferin, perhaps, rendered a service to the Indian National Congress. Had he not done so the future Congress leadership would have been even harder put to counter the charge, once very fashionable on the Left and still heard on occasions on its extremist fringe, that the Congress was but a pet poodle of British imperialism.

If Dufferin was afraid that the Congress might not perform its role of a reform association—that of a *critique toleree*, so to speak—adequately and thus lose its utility for providing an innocuous channel and outlet for the discontents that were welling up, Florence Nightingale's worry was exactly the reverse.

She was apprehensive that it might be too critical, or rather that its criticism might take the form of indulgence in personalities. "I could wish (but you know my opinion is worth nothing in this kind of political policy)," she had written in her letter to Wedderburn, "that it might not only make personal attacks, that it might not e.g., ask for the recall of Mr. Grant Duff. This will have no other effect than of strengthening his position. His term there will soon be 'out'. And it would be so much more dignified and telling if the new 'National Liberal' Union, especially in its first session, would lay down principles, and not to throw down men."

It is curious that she should mention Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff, at the time Governor of Madras having earlier been Under-Secretary of State for India, with whom she had corresponded. Curious in that Dufferin, too, had mentioned him though only by way of illustrating the embarrassment that might be caused if Lord Reay were to preside over the Congress. Hume in his letter to Ripon quotes Dufferin as saying: "Consider how awkward it will be for Lord Reay, if Grant Duff's administration comes to be severely criticised whilst he [Reay] is 'in the chair'." In the event, however, Florence Nightingale's fear proved groundless. There is no record of any personal attacks on Grant Duff or other British officials in high places. The language of discourse heard in the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College was in the main a model of decorous and even plaintive persuasiveness which was so often to be intoned at Congress sessions over the next quarter of a century and more.

The tone was set by the President himself—Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee, the first among those to whom Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in his *The History of the Indian National Congress* aptly refers as "our Indian Patriarchs", and who were to dominate the policies of the organisation during its formative phase. The Special Correspondent of the *Reis and Rayyer* in his "Pen-and-Ink Sketch" described him as "a fine tall figure, with a handsome face, and a graceful flowing beard, with a splendid unimpeachable address, with suave manners...and added to this an almost musical tone in his rich voice and correct pronunciation." "His dress was English, his every attitude, sitting or standing, was English, his gestures were English, from a gentle wave of his hand

to a slight toss of the head," he wrote, "he looked, in fact, every inch an Englishman. And yet, for all that, he looked every inch a Hindoo." A truly remarkable paradox which Macaulay's ghost, if he had been anywhere around the precincts of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College that day, would have recognised as the fulfilment of the dream hybrid his educational system was designed to produce.

He had been elected unopposed, his name having been proposed by Allan Octavian Hume and seconded by S. Subramania Iyer and K.T. Telang. His election, although Bengal had only a token representation at the gathering in Bombay, was partly no doubt in recognition of his personal qualities and professional eminence. But it was also clearly intended to be a gesture of propitiation towards Bengal and, in particular, Surendranath Banerjea whose Indian Association had a political edge at the time over the newly-born Congress and with whom Bonnerjee was on terms of close friendship.

His opening speech was modulated on a defensive note. He started by paraphrasing the four objects of the Congress as they had been set out in the circular that had gone out. These, he said, were to "promote personal friendship and intimacy" amongst all who were working for the good of the country; to consolidate "sentiments of national unity" by eradicating through "direct friendly personal intercourse of all possible race, creed or provincial prejudices" amongst all those who loved India; to ascertain "the matured opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing social questions of the day"; and to determine "the lines upon and methods by which during the next twelve months it is desirable for native politicians to labour in the public interests."

"Surely," he argued, "there was nothing in these objects to which any sensible and unprejudiced man could possibly take exception"—nothing which could justify "condemning the proposed Congress as if it were a nest of conspirators and disloyalists." He was fulsome in his verbal homage to Caesar. "Much," he acknowledged, "has been done by Great Britain for the benefit of India, and the whole country is truly grateful to her for it." "But", he added, "a great deal still remains to be done... I think that our desire to be governed according to the ideas of Government

prevalent in Europe is in no way incompatible with our thorough loyalty to the British Government. All that we desire is that the basis of the Government should be widened and that the people should have their proper and legitimate share in it."

This was a fair summing up of the extent—and the limits—of the demands which the mainstream Indian politicians of the day were prepared to press upon the British Government however pusillanimous they may sound today. The nine resolutions or rather eight, since the ninth was a purely organisational matter concerning the date and venue of the next session, which came up for discussion by the Bombay Congress were framed carefully within these limits. Nevertheless in the course of the debate on them the colonial system of governance and some of its inequities were brought under sharply critical scrutiny and a firm base-line was established from which effective assault could be mounted and expanded.

The fourth resolution on the order paper, for instance, was moved by another of the Congress' "Patriarchs" who was later to be affectionately styled the Grand Old Man of India, Dadabhai Naoroji. The resolution called for the holding of simultaneous and identical competitive examinations in England and India "for first appointments in various civil departments," of the Indian Civil Service, and for the qualifying "maximum age of candidates" to be raised "to not less than 23 years." This was aimed at enabling Indians to compete on something like equal footing with the British. It also demanded that all other "first appointments (excluding peonships and the like) should be filled by competitive examinations held in India."

Speaking on this resolution, which was to become a hardy annual at future Congress sessions till the demand it embodied was partly conceded, Dadabhai Naoroji took the opportunity to link it with his theory of economic drain from India to Britain—a theory which in its germinal form was first formulated almost half a century earlier by Rammohun Roy in one of the papers which he submitted to a Parliamentary Committee. "The sole cause of the extreme poverty and wretchedness of the mass of the people," he maintained, "is the inordinate employment of foreign agency in the Government of the country and the consequential material loss to, and drain from, the country.... The

present English rule is no doubt the greatest blessing India has ever had, but this one evil of it nullifies completely all the good it has achieved." Curiously, or perhaps not so curiously since his constituency, the Eurasian community, expected equally to benefit from it, D.S. White, President of the Eurasian Association, in an impromptu intervention, supported the resolution and wanted "to stop the importation of boys from England at great expense, and to abolish the civil service, utilising, both from England and India, men of experience and reputation."

Others speaking on other resolutions did not mince their critical words either. Pherozeshah Mehta, a moderate among moderates, nevertheless characterized the existing Legislative Councils as "merely shams" where "truth is always buried... never allowed to rise to the surface." This was hardly surprising since the existing "Supreme" Legislative Council and Provincial Legislative Councils had no elected membership and consisted of officials and hand-picked men. The Congress asked for "the admission of a considerable proportion of elected members". It wanted the creation of similar legislative bodies in the North-Western Province and Oudh (U.P.) and the Punjab while at the same time urging greater powers for the Councils, including the power to consider all Budgets and "interpellate the Executive in regard to all branches of the administration." It did not as yet go so far as to claim for the Councils the power of decision by a majority vote. But it called for a machinery in the form of a Standing Committee of the House of Commons "to receive and consider any formal protests that may be recorded by majorities of such Councils against the exercise by the Executive of the power, which would be vested in it, of overruling the decisions of such majorities."

Its first resolution, however, was a reminder to the British Government of its promise of an inquiry into the working of the Indian Administration, both in India and England; and it recommended "earnestly" that the inquiry "should be entrusted to a Royal Commission, the people of India being adequately represented thereon, and evidence taken both in India and England." The next resolution called for "the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State for India, as at present constituted." It considered its abolition as "the necessary preliminary to all

other reforms". and P. Ananda Charlu, who seconded the resolution, described it as "mainly little else than an oligarchy of fossilised Indian administrators" while Annie Besant much later was to call it "India's Old Man of the Sea". It is, perhaps, pertinent to remark that India's Old Man of the Sea managed to survive all the uncharitable things said about it by successive generations of Congress leaders almost till the "transfer of power", though in later years it was largely a decorative appendage of the India Office intended to provide sinecures for "loyalists" of the Raj.

The first three resolutions of the Bombay Congress were concerned with the general administrative and institutional political reforms. They were all aimed at introduction of a degree of public accountability and popular representation into a system and structure which had been hitherto impervious or refractory to any such principles. The fourth resolution was directed at securing a greater Indian share of the more juicy spoils of bureaucracy and it is anybody's guess whether the Congress leaders of the day—or later—were aware that in pressing this claim they were not, paradoxically, strengthening the Raj since, if conceded, it would tend to reinforce the layers of Indian vested interests in the perpetuation of British rule in India.

The next three resolutions, however, touched on highly sensitive areas of British policies and the *Times* must have had them in mind when it said that some of the resolutions passed by the First Congress "appear to us something more than questionable." Not that they openly trespassed into the realm of imperial and foreign policy. The Congress "Patriarchs" knew, consciously or subconsciously, that foreign policy is a function of sovereignty, and they were not quixotic enough yet to lay claims to any such thing. But they did enter a protest against "the proposed increase in the military expenditure of the empire." The fifth resolution considered the increase as "unnecessary, and regard being had to the revenues of the Empire and the existing circumstances of the country, excessive." P. Rangaiah Naidu from Madras moving the resolution pointed out that the military expenditure had increased by fifty per cent since 1857; that it could be cut by changing the "policy of suspicion and distrust for a generous and confiding one" and by improving the "Native Army" and

accepting the enrolment of people as volunteers instead of importing European soldiers. The resolution was seconded by Dinshaw Wacha who, says Annie Besant in her *How India Wrought for Freedom*, history of the first three decades of the Congress, "made the first of many great Congress speeches, an able and exhaustive review of the military position, cruelly unfair to India and placing on her most unjust burdens."

At all events, the sixth resolution pleaded, "if the increased demands for military expenditure are not to be, as they ought to be, met by retrenchment, they ought to be met, firstly, by the re-imposition of the customs duties" whose abolition, as Annie Besant rightly said, "had robbed poverty-stricken India to enrich wealthy Lancashire." The resolution also offered certain other fiscal suggestions for meeting inflated costs of the British military establishment in India and further urged "that Great Britain should extend an imperial guarantee to the Indian debt" much of it incurred, not to advance any Indian interest, but in pursuit of imperialist ends.

This led logically and naturally to the seventh resolution moved by Pherozeshah Mehta deprecating "the annexation of Upper Burmah" and added that "if the Government unfortunately decide on annexation, the entire country of Burmah should be separated from the Indian Viceroyalty and constituted a Crown Colony, as distinct in all matters from the Government of this country as is Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]." The intention, demonstrably, was for the Congress from the very moment of its inception to dissociate itself from the expansionist aims of British imperialism and to proclaim *urbi et orbi*, and especially to the neighbouring countries, that the Indian people were no party to the use of India as a base for the foisting of colonial bondage upon them. It is important to stress this because even some sympathetic British historians sometimes fall into the error of believing that the Indian National Congress at heart approved of the British "forward policy" because it fed their dream of a "Greater India."

The penultimate resolution at the Bombay session concerned the publicising and broadcasting of the decisions it had taken throughout the country. These were to be "communicated to the Political Associations in each province." They were to be

"requested, with the help of similar bodies and other agencies within their respective provinces, to adopt such measures as they may consider calculated to advance the settlement of the various questions dealt with in these resolutions." Strangely, however, nothing was said about setting up even a skeletal staff and official machinery to deal with any residual business or correspondence from the interested public and the provincial political associations which had been asked to spread the Congress message. Nor was it thought necessary to elect or nominate office-bearers though there probably was a tacit assumption that Hume would continue to act as *de facto* General Secretary, and W.C. Bonnerjee who had presided over the Bombay session would provide the ultimate authority of reference even if there is nothing explicit on record to suggest that presidency was conceived, as it became later, a continuing institution in-between successive sessions. Indeed, like the nymphs and the loitering heirs of the city directors in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, the First Congress dispersed even without leaving a postal address behind.

For the ninth—and the last—resolution, moved by Hume who for some reason was listed as hailing from Bengal though he lived in Simla, merely said that the Indian National Congress would "reassemble next year in Calcutta and sit on Tuesday, the 28th of December 1886, and the next succeeding days." And that was all.

Not quite all, it seems. For before the curtain was finally rung down on the show which had cost its organisers approximately Rs. 3,000 (or roughly two hundred pounds at the then rate of exchange), the delegates or representatives did not forget to acknowledge a debt of honour to "the solitary Briton" in that "motley assembly"—there was another Briton, William Wedderburn but being an official he had to remain very much backstage—Allan Octavian Hume who had done almost all the running both in India and across the seas in Britain during the two previous years if not more to make it possible for them to come together. They gave him three cheers. According to the Official Report of the First Congress:

"Mr. Hume, after acknowledging the honour done him, said that...he must be allowed to propose—on the principle of better late than never—giving of cheers, and that not only

three, but three times three, and if possible thrice that, for one the latchet of whose shoes he was unworthy to loose, one to whom they were all dear, to whom they were all as children—need he say, Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen-Empress. The rest of the speaker's remarks were lost in the storm of applause that instantly burst out, and the asked-for cheers were given over and over."

The Freudians may well be inclined to read some specially revealing meaning into Hume's posture of perfervid self-abasement vis-a-vis the Queen-Empress and his reference to her shoes and the latchet. At least the Marxists and Left generally for whom Hume has been a somewhat suspect figure, "a dupe" if not paid agent of British imperialism, have said some caustic things about him and R. Palme Dutt in his classic—*India Today*—characteristically noted that "the lowest depths...of servility came, not from the Orientals, but from the Englishman [*sic*]," which is good knock-about polemics but more than a little unfair to Hume who was a truly remarkable man, one of the tribe of British eccentrics with a radical conscience whom the Victorian era of imperial expansion produced as a kind of anti-body and who cannot be fitted into any neat category.

For whatever other faults he had, "servility" was not among them. Those who managed the affairs of "the Jewel in the Crown", certainly did not find him amenable and, in fact, managed to get rid of him unceremoniously in 1879 on the grounds of what Dufferin, who did not mind using him for the ends of his own policy, called "his impracticability". Others in bureaucratic hierarchy detested him heartily. Sir Henry Maine amiably said of him that he was "the greatest liar who ever came to India"; even Ilbert, supposedly liberal in his outlook, saw him as "an incorrigible mischief-maker"; and Dufferin paid him a backhanded compliment by describing him as being "cleverish, a little cracked, vain, unscrupulous and, I am told, very careless of truth."

But if the British establishment, with the exception of Ripon with whom Hume seems to have got on famously, regarded him at best a nuisance and at worst an insidious and insufferable trouble-maker, it cannot be said that the Congress Patriarchs found him very pliable or easy to get along with. They admired him greatly;

they were grateful to him for all the hard work he did for the Congress and his organising ability; they could not have done without him during those early and difficult years. But they were mostly very discreet men. They chewed every word and phrase thirty-two times before uttering it. On occasions, therefore, they were upset by his habit of speaking out his mind and calling a spade a spade, if not a bloody shovel. For example in the early 1890s an open letter he had written on the state of the country and his rather alarmist assessment of the situation seriously embarrassed the Congress leadership and men like Dadabhai Naoroji had publicly to dissociate themselves from his views and sentiments in the columns of *India*, then a monthly, which was the organ of the Committee of the Indian National Congress in England. In the context of his time and season Hume was very much Left of Centre rather than Right of it. But all that is another story....

CHAPTER II

A MOVABLE FEAST

"India had found her voice," wrote Annie Besant in her *How India Wrought for Freedom*, "India was realising herself as a Nation. Strange and menacing was the portent in the eyes of some. Splendid and full of hope in the eyes of others. The rosy fingers of the Dawn-Maidens had touched the Indian skies!" She was, of course, writing nearly thirty years after the event which she had only witnessed from afar. But her assessment of the event and its significance, though without the sentimental overtones of her prose style, appears to have been shared by others who had witnessed it from close quarters and actually participated in the deliberations of the First Congress, not least by W.C. Bonnerjee who presided over it. By a remarkable coincidence he found himself in the same railway compartment while returning to Calcutta as the Russian traveller, I.P. Minayeff. Minayeff wanted to know from him "what practical results they expected from the conference" and S.R. Mehrotra quotes Bonnerjee in his *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* as telling him: "Growth of national feeling and unity of Indians."

There was in all this necessarily an element of *Couéism*. Any detached observer at the First session of the Congress would have had to be very sanguine to have carried away the impression that here was a political organisation which possessed the irresistible force of an idea whose time had come. Nothing was said and done behind closed doors or at the public meeting after the session was over to set the Back Bay, much less the Indo-Gangetic plain, on fire. Little thought was given to the organisational problems, or equipping it with the instrumentalities and what would nowadays be called "infrastructure" to make it an effective vehicle of political pressure. Altogether there was about it an air of tentativeness, underlined by the fact that while

it had an impressive name, it had no local habitation and was not to have one for a very long time to come. The men who had launched it were nearly all distinguished public figures in their respective spheres, but they were rather like a general staff with hardly a soldier to command.

The *Times*, always a believer in big battalions as the ultimate arbiter in human and especially Indian affairs, did not fail to rub in the moral with a characteristic touch of malice. It reminded the Congress leaders that they may have the gift of the gab, but they had no musculature. "It was by force that India was won," it wrote, "and it is by force that India must be governed, in whatever hands the Government of the country may be vested. If we were to withdraw, it would be, not in favour of the most fluent tongue, or the most ready pen, but the strongest arm and the sharpest sword...." The message was clear enough.

But whatever the helplessness of a fluent tongue and a ready pen when confronted with the strongest arm and the sharpest sword which the Raj wielded, during the next twelve months the Congress cause was to gather considerable momentum and the Calcutta session of the Congress was at once much bigger and more representative. All manner of associations and societies had met to "elect" delegates to send to Calcutta. The number of delegates attending the second session was six-fold the number at Bombay—436 to be precise (434, according to Annie Besant). This great accession of strength was largely owed to Bengal; instead of a token representation of three at Bombay, it had 240 delegates at Calcutta.

This was due not only to easy access which Bengali representatives had, but a political reconciliation in the interval between Bombay and Calcutta sessions. Surendranath Banerjea, one of the most influential political personalities of the day, the "silver-tongued" orator as he was called, had been among the "seventeen good men and true" who had attended a meeting at the house of a well-known reformer, Dewan Raghunath Rao, in Madras after the Annual Theosophical Convention at Adyar at the end of 1884, and had conceived the idea of mobilizing support for a movement to further the political aspirations of the Indian people—a meeting which led Annie Besant later to claim that the Theosophical Convention was the precursor of

the Congress. But for some obscure reason in the subsequent planning of the Conference of the Indian National Union which was eventually held at Bombay as the Indian National Congress, Surendranath Banerjea and his associates were not only not consulted, but, it seems, not even kept *au courant* of what was cooking.

Understandably, there was resentment at this cavalier treatment even though there is little on record to show that it was publicly aired. What Surendranath Banerjea did was hastily to summon a show of his own under the auspices of the Indian Association at Calcutta at the same time and, as has already been noted, this effectively kept Bengal away from the Bombay Congress. But, politically, Bengal was crucial then as for a long time to come and, perhaps, still. The conveners of the Bombay Congress must have realised this when they chose Calcutta as the venue next time and efforts must have been made, possibly through W.C. Bonnerjee, to clear up the misunderstanding with Surendranath Banerjea in order to win him over and try to consolidate Indian political opinion to face the Tory administration in Britain.

Once that was done the Second session of the Congress could be planned on a more ambitious scale than what was improvised in Bombay. Inevitably, it was to cost more—Rs. 16,000. But money was not a great problem. Help was forthcoming from the more enlightened of the landed gentry—the Maharajas of Cooch Behar, Darbhanga, Hutwa and Dumraon, and Jotendra Mohun Tagore and Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's father. To ensure proper hospitality for the delegates—the North-West Province and Oudh had sent 24, Madras 47, Bombay and Sind 48 and even the Punjab and the Central Provinces and Berar 17 and 10 respectively—W.C. Bonnerjee and Babu Hem Chunder Gossain had come forward with their palatial houses for the use of the delegates.

The man chosen to preside over the Calcutta Congress was none other than Dadabhai Naoroji. Already sixty-one, he was a man cast in a truly Victorian mould, with his immense capacity for work, minute attention to detail, and a rather innocent faith in the efficacy of rational argument in human affairs. A friend of H.M. Hyndman, a Fabian even before the Fabian Society

was itself founded, he was the foremost publicist for India in his day at home and abroad. To equip himself adequately for this responsibility, he lived, as Surendranath Banerjea was nicely to phrase it, "in a sea of blue books." The result of his deep-sea diving was eventually to be presented to the world in his *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*—a powerful indictment of British imperialist economic exploitation of the country, the more telling because, he argued, British rule in India violated all those principles of governance by which the British swore.

Naoroji was later briefly to enter the British Parliament on a Liberal ticket from Central Finsbury in the general election of 1897, winning his seat by a narrow majority, after having contested from Holborn unsuccessfully earlier. Indeed, long before he founded with Hume and others the Indian National Congress, he had been among the Indians who set up the London Indian Society in March 1865 "for the purpose of discussing all political, social, and literary subjects relating to India, and adopting such measures as may be necessary to acquaint the public in England with the views and feelings of the people of India on all principal questions that may arise from time to time."

He was in England when the call came to him to attend the Congress session in Calcutta and, curiously, his name was proposed for presidency by one of the oldest participants, Babu Joykissen Mukherjee, 79, and one of the great landowners, who spoke of himself as "an old man, blind and trembling with age". Curiously, because in its later phase the Indian National Congress was to become an anathema to most of the landed aristocracy of India whose influence and power were enlisted by the British to contain and frustrate Congress policies. But these were early days and the Congress seemed to be able to accommodate and safeguard the interests at least of a substantial body of the landed gentry in its programme.

Unlike the Bombay Congress, the first sitting of the Calcutta Congress took place in a public place—at the Town Hall which from all accounts was packed to capacity and more. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Dr. Rajendralal Mitra, an archaeologist and scholar of international standing, in welcoming the delegates saw in the Congress there assembled "the dawn of a better and happier day for India" and "the quickening of

a new life." But he also saw a cloud much bigger than a man's hand obscuring the daybreak. He reminded his guests and visitors, "We live, not under a National Government, but under a foreign bureaucracy; our foreign rulers are foreigners by birth, religion, language, habits, by everything that divides humanity into different sections. They cannot possibly dive into our hearts; they cannot ascertain our wants, our feelings, our aspirations."

This was calculated to strike a responsive chord among his audience even though it was spoken, and well spoken, in the tongue of the very foreigners who constituted the bureaucracy—a paradox which distressed Gandhi when, much later, he was present at a Congress session. Dadabhai Naoroji in his preliminary remarks also deplored the Government's refusal to set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry while being fully sensible that they had agreed to give a Legislative Council to the North-West Province and Oudh (U.P.). Nor did he fail to lay stress on the terrible poverty and destitution of the people and wanted the Congress to proclaim its concern over the matter with conviction and loud and clear.

Later, in his opening address, he told the delegates that the Congress "was a purely political body". "A National Congress", he insisted, "must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to class Congresses." But why did he thus limit the scope and reach of the concern of the National Congress? The answer, perhaps, is that he was speaking in Calcutta, then the capital of India, within hearing distance of the residence of the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, who had reportedly cautioned Hume during the talks the latter claimed to have had with him prior to the launching of the Congress, to steer clear of social questions lest it should get itself into hot water besides creating no end of trouble for the British authorities. His words may well have been intended for the proconsular ears not far away from the Town Hall as a public assurance that Dufferin's advice had been duly taken to heart by the Congress.

Dadabhai Naoroji's address was couched in a prose that would have delighted the hero of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. But those who followed him allowed their eloquence and even

grandiloquence a free rein. The dizzy heights of sonorous rhetoric, predictably, were scaled by Surendranath Banerjea. "Here we have before us personified," he said resonantly, "the incarnate majesty of the nation. What vision of glory, what prospects of rapturous joy, unfold themselves before the imagination of the poet, the historian and the philosopher." Carried on the wings of his own imagination, he was persuaded that "Self-Government is the ordering of nature, the will of Divine Providence" and in consequence "every nation must be the arbiter of its destinies." "We are," he added, "on the threshold of a new age. We are witnessing a new birth."

This was heady stuff. It was mixed with even headier flattery of the ruling race. "What is an Englishman without representative institutions?" asked Madan Mohan Malaviya in a maiden speech which, according to Annie Besant, fairly carried his audience away with its eloquence: "Why?—not an Englishman at all, he is a mere sham, a base imitation. . . 'No taxation without representation'—that is the first commandment in the Englishman's Political Bible." This being so, "How can he palter with his conscience and tax us here, his free and educated fellow-subjects, as if we were dumb sheep or cattle? . . ." And he reinforced his argument with some not very inspiring verse but which embodied the inspiring thought that liberty "is the cause of man" which cannot be confined "within narrow bounds."

In a different but kindred vein which connected with William Houston Chamberlain's *The Myth of the Nineteenth Century* and Gobineau, P. Ananda Charlu, hailing from the South, invoked "the Ancient Aryan mind" and blushed audibly if in the nature of things, unseen, "for those who in the latter end of this boasted century of high civilization, talk as if still might were right and not right might." The syllogism was touching. But in between these various flights of high, if fanciful, sentiment some of the speakers managed to insinuate certain harsh facts of Indian life. Dinshaw Wacha, a close collaborator though not an uncritical disciple of Dadabhai Naoroji, took up the theme which the President of the Second Congress had very much at heart but had not had time to develop. He spoke of the "increasing poverty of vast numbers of the population of India"; of the steadily deteriorating condition of the ryots since 1848; of the forty

millions of people who had to do with one meal a day and even less. He had no doubt of the cause of this destitution. It was "the tribute to Great Britain, exported to fructify there, and swell still further the unparalleled wealth of those distant isles, never in any shape to return here to bless the country from whose soil it was wrung, or the people, the sweat of whose brows it represents." The way to redress the iniquity was through minimizing "the foreign agency" and establishing representative institutions "to ensure the reforms essential to National prosperity."

Coming hot-foot from the Punjab where the paternalism of British rule—the so-called "Punjab tradition" which the British historians of the Raj have tended to glorify—consisted in not sparing the rod, either metaphorically or otherwise, Lala Murlidhar drew attention to yet one more unacceptable face of British imperialism—its methods of repression. He told his Congress colleagues that he had come to Calcutta straight from gaol, having been released on bail, convicted without evidence "because I am considered a political agitator, because I have my own opinions and speak what I think without fear." He was speaking on the restoration of the jury system of trial to its original and plenary form before "the innovation made in 1872."

So the Congress went on for four days at the year's end, first at the Town Hall and later in the rooms of the British Indian Association because they were considered more suitable to the conduct of the business in hand although, apparently, on the third day the Congress returned to the Town Hall. The fourth day was the last and concluding day though it is not clear where the session was held, but, presumably, being the finale, the Town Hall would appear to have been the venue. Altogether, compared to nine resolutions discussed at Bombay, there were fifteen on the agenda at Calcutta.

Two of these—the thirteenth and fourteenth—concerned organisational matters like the decision to set up "Standing Congress Committees at all important centres" and fixing the place and date for the Third Indian National Congress session, the place being logically Madras and the date December 27, 1887. The last resolution was a new departure. It asked for the copies of the resolutions passed at the Congress to "be forwarded to the H.E. the Viceroy in Council, with the humble request, that

he will cause the 1st Resolution to be submitted in due course to H.M. the Queen-Empress, that he will cause all the Resolutions to be laid before Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, and that he himself will be graciously pleased, in consultation with his colleagues, to accord them his best consideration." The Congress was beginning to learn to do its business. It did not want its resolutions to be lost on the wind. It wanted formal cognizance of them by the powers that were.

Why the special emphasis on the first resolution. The answer is that it was also a new departure. At Bombay the cheers called for the Queen-Empress were, in fact, an afterthought on Hume's part. But at Calcutta it was thought fit to begin with a demonstrative propitiatory genuflection towards the Queen-Empress. The reason, perhaps, was that next year—1887—was the Golden Jubilee of Victoria's ascension to the throne, or as the resolution put it, "completion of the first half century of her memorable, beneficent and glorious reign." Any oversight in sending Her Most Gracious Majesty "dutiful and loyal congratulations" and wish her "many, many more and happy years of rule, over the great British Empire" might have been misunderstood and regarded as an act of passive disloyalty by default. It was to become a reflexive drill at many subsequent Congress sessions over the next three decades and more.

However, the obeisance to the symbol of imperial authority might well have been, partly at any rate, tactical. For in the very next resolution, by implication if not direct assertion, it was suggested, whether or not with intended irony must remain a matter for guessing, that during the "glorious reign" of Her Most Gracious Majesty little had been done to mitigate the misery of a vast body of the Indian population. Indeed, the Congress regarded "with the deepest sympathy" and viewed "with grave apprehensions" the increasing poverty in the country and recorded its "firm conviction that introduction of Representative Institutions will prove one of the most important practical steps towards the amelioration of the condition of the people"—a proposition which must have sounded like an insolent *non-sequitur* in the bar-room of the Calcutta Club.

The third and fourth resolutions were even bolder. Having got the bit in its teeth, the Congress seemed to run away with it.

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While the third resolution was a reaffirmation of the call given in Bombay for the "reform and expansion of both the Governor-General's Council and the Provincial Legislative Councils," the fourth outlined a detailed blue-print for the expansion, reform and enlargement of their competence and powers. The fifth resolution was a call issued to "all public bodies and all Associations throughout the country, humbly and earnestly, to entreat His Excellency the Viceroy to obtain the sanction of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, to the appointment of a Commission to enquire exhaustively into the best method of introducing such a tentative form of Representative Institutions into India, as has been indicated in Resolution III of the past, and IV of the present year's Congress."

Some of the other resolutions were more in the nature of *aides-memoire* of what had been passed at Bombay—for example, the tenth resolution asking that the Indian Civil Service examinations be held simultaneously in India and England and the qualifying age for the candidates be raised to twenty-three years. The eleventh resolution again broke new ground. Not content with its call for the extension—or rather restoration—of the jury system of trial, the Congress now urged "a complete separation of executive and judicial functions" which, it said, had "become an urgent necessity" and needed to be effected "without further delay, even though this should, in some Provinces, involve some extra expenditure."

There was no repetition of the demand for the freezing of the military expenditure or meeting any increases through re-imposition of the Customs duties as voiced at Bombay. Instead, the military question was approached in a rather circuitous, some might have thought devious, way. In the twelfth resolution attention was drawn to "the unsettled state of public affairs in Europe" and willingness of the people of India to render assistance to Great Britain "in the event of any serious complications arising" affirmed; and appeal was made to the Government "to authorise (under such rules and restrictions as may to it seem fitting) a system of Volunteering for the Indian inhabitants of the country, such as may qualify them to support the Government effectively, in any crisis." The intention was unmistakable: somehow to persuade the Government to impart military training

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to Indians on a wider basis than the strictly limited recruitment to the Indian army allowed. To allay any suspicions on the part of the authorities that the suggestion had an *arrière-pensée*, it was moved by Raja Rampal Singh from Oudh, a man of impeccable credentials of loyalty to the Raj, though once he got going he seemed to forget himself and said that whilst Indians were deeply grateful to Government for all the good that it had done them, "We cannot be grateful to it for degrading our natures, for systematically crushing out of us all martial spirit, for converting a race of soldiers and heroes into a timid flock of quill-driving sheep...."

An innovation at the Calcutta Congress was the setting up of a committee under the chairmanship of the Congress President, Dadabhai Naoroji, "to consider the Public Service Question and report thereon to this Congress." The committee, consisting of sixteen persons, including the Chairman, was fairly representative of all the Presidencies and Provinces and had three Muslim members, which suggests that the Muslim participation in the Congress was not negligible. It duly reported to the session within forty-eight hours and its eight-point plan for dealing with the question was approved by the whole Congress. The reason for attending to the Public Service question with despatch was not far to seek. Lord Dufferin had appointed a Public Service Commission to go into the question of simultaneous examinations for the covenanted service and increase in the number of Indians employed. Evidently it was considered important by the Congress to come forward with proposals which had the support of the political elite and as quickly as possible so that the Commission should not become just a convenient device for the Government to go on stalling on the question.

The final resolution, like the fifth resolution, indicated that the Congress was not content just to pass resolutions as Platonic exercises. If it was not yet in a position to build up any physical pressure behind them, it nevertheless wanted them to be duly registered in quarters where lay the power of decision. So, unlike at Bombay, it decided that copies of its resolution be forwarded to the H.E. the Viceroy-in-Council, with the request that he will cause the first resolution to be submitted to H.M. the

Queen-Empress and the rest of the resolutions "to be laid before Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, and that he himself will be graciously pleased, in consultation with his colleagues, to accord them his best consideration." Politically, it was obviously becoming a little more professional.

The Viceroy, of course, would have had his own sources of information on what the Congress leaders had been up to. But by officially placing them on his table they no doubt wanted some official acknowledgement from him if not an official reaction. His attitude towards the Congress seems still to have been at least not unfriendly. True, the invitations which it had sent to the members of his Council had been returned. But this could be explained on the perfectly proper ground that officials could not attend political gatherings as that would identify them with particular political groupings and associations which was highly undesirable. And to show that he had no ill-will towards the Congress he received some of its leaders as "distinguished visitors to the capital" and also invited them to a garden party while making it clear that he was not asking them as Congress representatives, only as individuals.

But there is little doubt that hostility to the Congress among the diehard "Anglo-India" and diehard circles in Britain was beginning to well up. The *Times*, which had taken the Bombay session with mild amusement and a minatory wagging of the editorial finger at it, weighed in with heavy invective describing the Congress as an affair put up by "discontented place-seekers... men of straw, with little or no stake in the country... persons of considerable imitative powers" but of "total ignorance of the real problems of Government." All the same, it was worried that "delegates from all these talking clubs might become a serious danger to public tranquillity".

Hard words, however, break no bones; nor do they prevent things which have some inner potential of growth from growing. It must have been already clear to any moderately well-informed and perceptive observer that the Congress was not just a flash-in-the-pan organisation, a kerbside political operator here today and gone tomorrow, but was emerging as a serious interlocutor on the national scene. How many Standing Congress committees at the various important centres were actually set up as the

thirteenth resolution enjoined is not known. But Madras, which was chosen to host the Third session of the Indian National Congress, appears to have taken its responsibility seriously. We have it on the authority of Annie Besant that "as early as May 1st, 1887, a strong Reception Committee of some 120 members was formed, with Raja Sir T. Madhava Rao as Chairman, and embracing Hindus of all castes, Muhammadans, Indian Christians and Eurasians. . . . Every town of over 10,000 inhabitants was asked to form a sub-committee, and a vigorous political propaganda was carried on, 30,000 copies of a Tamil *Congress Catechism* by Mr. Veeraraghavachariar, being distributed. A striking proof of the result of this was the fact that Rs. 5,500 were contributed by 8,000 subscriptions varying from anna one to Rs. 1.8 and another Rs. 8,000 varying from Rs. 1.8 to Rs. 30. Poor people even sent collections from Mandalay, Rangoon, Singapore and the eastern islands."

If on one end of the scale were found "the names of the Ruling Princes of Mysore, Travancore and Cochin, and their Highnesses the Maharaja of Vizianagaram and the Raja of Venkata-giri", at the other end were anonymous labourers who had contributed the annas they could ill afford to part with. But, apart from collecting subscriptions, the Standing Congress Committees were called upon to send up issues for discussion. It was serious political preparation and it paid dividends. Seven hundred delegates were elected, though only 607 participated—nearly fifty per cent more than the number which mustered at Calcutta.

There seems to have been competition among the Presidency capitals in a good cause. At Calcutta Bengal had managed to bring in the largest contingent—240, counting Bihar, Orissa and Assam which were, in a manner of speaking, still satellite regions of Bengal. Madras outdid Bengal's performance. Its quota of delegates to the Madras session was 362. Next in the league table came Bombay and Sind, with 99, followed by Bengal which sent 79 and the North-West Province and Oudh with 45. The Central Provinces sent 13 and the Punjab trailed behind them with only nine, though it had elected 42, according to Annie Besant. Distance was probably the inhibiting factor. And distance is not just a spatial concept but also a psychological one, so that the peninsula below the Vindhyas was to remain for the Punjabis

a kind of *terra incognita* until almost the post-independence period. Another significant feature of the representation, noted by Annie Besant who with her experience of working class struggle in Britain was more observant in these matters than Indian observers, was that there were 45 "ryots", presumably peasants, and 19 artisans among the delegates. A token presence, no doubt, but a portent of things to come.

Both at Bombay and Calcutta the Congress had met and transacted its business within four walls. Perhaps this was not wholly appropriate in a country where all the great epic dramas have always been enacted in the open air. Madras, at any rate, had the novel and yet historically logical idea of putting up a great marquee, or Pandal, in Mackay's Gardens for it to hold its session. It was large enough to accommodate 3,000 persons, but none too large as it turned out. For apart from the delegates, "some three thousand spectators" assembled "in and around the great tent."

The Chairman of the Reception Committee, T. Madhava Rao, was able to say only a few words of welcome, being ill and frail. The rest of his speech was read out by C.V. Sundarama Sastri. As had become customary, he had flattering things to say about the ruling race. The Congress, he claimed, must appear "to well-balanced minds... the soundest triumph of British administration, and a crown of glory to the great British nation." But he was equally emphatic about the reality of India's nationhood. For he said that to the "unprejudiced observer" the Congress would bring the conviction that, "varied as the castes and creeds and races of India" might be, "there is still a powerful bond of union which makes our hearts vibrate with sympathy and mutual love, and a common affection for our Mother-country."

Election of the President followed. W.C. Bonnerjee proposed and S. Subramania Iyer seconded the name of Badruddin Tyabji, a Bombay barrister who was later to be raised to the Bench and who belonged to the reformist school of thought among the Muslims, like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who founded the Aligarh movement, but, unlike Sir Syed, wholly averse to using confessionalism as a political lever to advance narrowly sectarian interests. By choosing him to preside over the Congress its leadership intended to demonstrate in the only way open to it that it was a secular body committed to advancing the cause of the Indian

people as a whole rather than any confession or chapel.

Badraddin Tyabji's presidential address was marked by a rare absence of rhetoric which was more than compensated for by its equally rare lucidity of phrasing and ring of sincerity. He told his audience that he had not been present either at the Bombay or the Calcutta sessions of the Congress. What had brought him to Madras and induced him, in the present state of his health, to undertake the grave responsibilities of presiding over the deliberations of the Congress, he said, "has been an earnest desire, on my part, to prove, as far as in my power lies, that I, at least, not merely in my individual capacity, but as representing the Anjuman-i-Islam of Bombay—do not consider that there is anything whatever in the position or the relations of the different communities of India—be they Hindus, Mussulmans, Parsees, or Christians—which should induce the leaders of any one community to stand aloof from the others in their efforts to obtain those great general reforms, those great general rights, which are for the common benefit of us all.... I for one am utterly at a loss to understand why Mussulmans should not work shoulder to shoulder with their fellow countrymen of other races and creeds, for the common benefit of all." He also did not miss the opportunity to caution "those who recklessly charge us with disloyalty"—meaning, obviously, the Blimps among the bureaucracy and what was known as "Anglo-India"—that their conduct resembles that "of the foolish woodman who was lopping the very branch of the tree upon which he was standing."

But if the President of the Madras Congress eschewed all rhetoric, others were constitutionally incapable of talking in anything but the language of rhetoric. "We unfurl," said Surendranath Banerjea, "the banner of the Congress, and upon it are written, in characters of glittering gold, which none may efface, the great words of this Resolution [the second on the agenda, calling for reforms of the Governor-General's Council and the Provincial Legislative Councils]; 'Representative Institutions for India'." Indeed, by now this demand was no longer being voiced *sotto voce*, but had become a loud and clear refrain. Aswini Kumar Dutt, for instance, called on Congressmen to bestir themselves and "go onwards, do not cease to agitate—agitate, agitate, agitate." Not only Gladstone, but such unlikely

persons as Sir Richard Temple and Sir John Lawrence were invoked to prove that the elective principle and representative institutions were essential for a stable government. And Pandit Bishan Narayan Dar, who ranged far and wide in search of his authorities, was particularly severe on Lord Salisbury for having grouped "Indians and Hottentots together as equally outside the pale of political freedom", apparently unaware that he was freeding dangerously close to a racist attitude.

However, one of the speeches that attracted the most attention and applause was by an English barrister, Eardley Norton, son of John Bruce Norton, who like his father identified himself with India. "I was told yesterday by one for whose character and educated qualities I cherish a great esteem," he declared, "that in joining myself with the labourers in this Congress, I have earned for myself the new title of a 'veiled seditionist'. If it be sedition, gentlemen, to rebel against all wrong; if it be sedition to insist that people should have a fair share in the administration of their own country and affairs; if it be sedition to resist tyranny, to raise my voice against oppression, to mutiny against injustice, to insist upon a hearing before sentence, to uphold the liberties of the individual, to vindicate our common right to gradual but ever advancing reform—if this be sedition, I am right glad to be called a 'seditionist', and doubly, aye, trebly glad, when I look round me to-day, to know and feel I am ranked as one among such a magnificent array of 'seditionists'."

This was strong stuff—so strong, indeed, that even Bipin Chandra Pal's impassioned declaration of his radical and democratic faith, Madan Mohan Malaviya's denunciation of "an odious income-tax, vilely administered and imposed not to meet the expenses of our own Government, but to provide funds to enable Great Britain to annex Burma or menace Russia", and other fiery pronouncements by Indian speakers seemed to pale by comparison.

There were fewer resolutions on the order paper than at Calcutta. A number of them were repeats, like the plea for radical reform of the Councils. Others, like the demand for restoration of the jury system to its full amplitude, had been dropped, partly because there seemed little hope of their evoking any positive response from the Government and partly because they no longer were regarded as matters of urgency and priority. Others broke

entirely new ground in sensitive areas of policy which had been touched upon earlier only indirectly. Such was the case with resolutions four and eight. The former harped back to the Queen's Proclamation which, it said, should be given effect to, "in view of the loyalty of Her Majesty's Indian subjects", by opening the door to "Military Service in its higher grades... to the natives of this country" and establishing "Military Colleges in this country, whereat the natives of India, as defined by statute, may be educated and trained for a military career as officers of the Indian Army." In the next resolution, the Congress repeated its call to the Government to authorize "a system of volunteering for the Indian inhabitants of the country"—and once again on the ground "of the unsettled state of public affairs in Europe."

The eighth resolution must have raised the eyebrows even higher in the corridors of power. Once again protesting the loyalty of the people, the Congress asked for the repeal of the existing Arms Act (XI of 1878) because it cast an "unmerited slur... upon the people of this country." In the course of debate on this resolution which was "animated, almost fiery" and "lasted for some hours", both moral and pragmatic arguments were advanced in favour of repeal of the offensive Act. It was pointed out, for instance, that while no native of India may possess or carry arms without special licence, "Europeans, Eurasians, Negroes, Hottentots or Fiji Islanders, any scum of the earth, even, that the ocean casts on India's shores, may wear arms unquestioned." Hottentots appear to have haunted the delegates assembled in Mackay's Gardens for some inexplicable reason. And not only Hottentots; "tigers and leopards", too. For Bipin Chandra Pal, who seconded the resolution, argued that the repeal of the Act would save thousands of men and women being killed by these beasts of prey and that, in any case the Act was "wrong in principle, injurious in its effect, and is simply suicidal to the Government." But, apparently, outright repeal of the Arms Act was considered too radical a demand and an amendment was moved to call for modification rather than repeal. The resolution was passed in its amended form which left it to the discretion of the Government to debar individuals or members of particular communities from bearing arms by special edicts.

Income-tax, it seems, was already becoming a sore point,

especially with the lower-income groups; and the Congress went on record with a resolution urging the raising of the taxable minimum to Rs. 1,000. The next resolution, number seven in the list, was more important and called upon the Government "having regard to the poverty of the people...to elaborate a system of Technical Education, suitable to the condition of the country, to encourage indigenous manufactures by a more strict observance of the orders, already existing, in regard to utilising such manufactures for State purposes, and to employ more extensively, than at present, the skill and talents of the people of the country." A feature of the debate on this resolution was the intervention "by a working carpenter...with two other artisans from Tanjore."

For the first time since its formation, moreover, the Congress gave some attention to organisational problems. By the very first resolution it passed, it set up a very representative committee of more than thirty leading delegates "to consider what rules, if any, may now be usefully framed in regard to the constitution of the Congress." The Committee was instructed to report within three days that is by December 30. This it did through Allan Octavian Hume. It proposed a long set of tentative rules which obviously could not be considered at that session. A resolution—number nine—was passed to the effect that the draft rules "stand over for consideration till next Congress, but that, in the meantime, copies be circulated to all Standing Congress Committees, with the request that they will, during the coming year, act in accordance with these rules, so far as this may seem to them possible and desirable, and report thereon to the next Congress, with such further suggestions as to them may seem meet."

The debate on the first resolution had revealed some division of opinion. A body of delegates evidently considered it too soon to lay down hard and fast rules which might inhibit the growth of the Congress. An amendment was moved by R.P. Karandikar aimed at circumscribing the terms of reference of the Committee entrusted with drafting the rules defining the constitutional frame of the Congress. More time and experience, it was argued, was needed. However, he withdrew his amendment on appeal by the President. At all events, those who wanted

more time for thought on rules governing the working of the Congress were to get time enough to chew the whole matter as things turned out. Meanwhile there were critical voices complaining that Congressmen did little work in between the sessions and sat on their haunches if not worse.

At one point during the Madras session a somewhat delicate point impinging on religious susceptibilities was raised, whether to create mischief or through excess of confessional fervour, must remain a matter for speculation. A red herring, or rather the sacred cow, was trailed across the field of discussion when somebody wanted the Congress to call for a ban on cow slaughter. Fortunately, however, the issue was neatly side-stepped through a compromise formula accepted on all sides and which later became a firm convention of the Congress by which if any proposal came up affecting a particular class or community, and to which it objected through its delegates, even if they were in a minority, then it should not be taken up. A Scylla was thus effectively avoided. But not the recurring Charybdis which eventually led to the exclusion of a vast area of social concern from secular scrutiny based on humanistic ethics and morality.

With all the three presidency capitals having hosted the Congress in turn, it was decided that the Fourth session of the Congress be held on December 26, 1888, at Allahabad right at the heart of the Indo-Gangetic plain and the confluence of three rivers of India—two, the Ganga and the Yamuna, visible to the naked eye and the third the Saraswati visible only to the eye of faith. The criticism of the Congress made during the Madras session that it tended to lapse into passivity in between the sessions would seem to have gone home. During the interval between Madras and Allahabad the Congress had not allowed grass to grow under its feet. It had undertaken what by the standards of the day seemed a vigorous propaganda and publicity campaign to spread its message, if not throughout the country, at least in most urban centres. Nor had its word fallen on altogether stony ground. Annie Besant recorded: "The development of the Congress movement during 1888 was very great; hundreds of thousands of pamphlets and leaflets were distributed. Hundreds of men travelled and gave lectures, and, as a result, three millions of men took a direct part in the elections

for the delegates.' In Calcutta the women of some of the highest Hindu families discussed the "Kangress" and in Allahabad some even quarrelled with old friends because they were 'anti'; some even did puja for it. . . ."

Even if her account is partly discounted as that of a partisan and an enthusiast, there is evidence enough that the Congress idea had caught on and was attracting nation-wide support. The best proof of this was furnished by the dramatic change of the Government attitude towards it. Dufferin and his advisers had been willing to extend a measure of patronage towards it as long as it behaved like a house-trained pet, gave a bark or two at decent intervals, and then came to heel at command. That explained his condescension in receiving some of the delegates at Calcutta, and the Governor of Madras had even gone further. It was said that Lord Connemara, who had succeeded Grant Duff, had helped the Madras Reception Committee with supplies of odds and ends from Government House. Madras, indeed, was the high watermark of the strange and always uneasy honeymoon between the agencies of the ruling power and the Congress. Soon after that the relationship began to turn sour.

Why? There must have been many reasons. But one of the reasons could have been Hume, the *de facto* General Secretary of the Congress. He had an inconvenient habit of outspokenness. He was not inhibited like his Indian collaborators. A speech he made at Allahabad on April 30, 1888, on the theme of "Indian National Congress, its Origins, Aims and Objectives", was intended to explain and justify the Congress stand and what it was trying to do. It had the opposite effect. The authorities did not receive it well and thought he was being cheeky, stirring up things, exciting passions and "letting loose forces" that neither he nor the Congress would be able to control. Later that year—in October—there was an exchange of letters between Sir Auckland Colvin, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Province and Oudh, and Hume. Sir Auckland, according to Wedderburn, was an able administrator and even claimed to belong to the "Liberal Official Camp". But he was probably irritated with the Congress for having decided to invade his jealously guarded fief by holding its annual session under his very nose.

Sir Auckland's letter ran to twenty pages of print; Hume,

with whom brevity was not the soul of wit, replied in sixty pages. The correspondence was later published by the Committee of the Indian National Congress in London and its journal *India* under the Latin title borrowed from St. Augustine—*Audi Alteram Partem*, hear the other side. Wedderburn summarised the arguments on each side in his memoir of Hume, but it is not germane to our purpose to go into them in detail. Briefly, Sir Auckland Colvin said that he was not necessarily opposed to some of the things that the Congress wanted, like the expansion and reform of the Legislative Councils; nor even to its method of representing its cause at least as it had done at Bombay and Calcutta. But since Madras there had been an attempt to drum up mass support for its demands. This was unwise and even dangerous. It was reminiscent of the Anti-Corn-Laws agitation by Bright and Cobden to which Hume was inclined to harp back. This could lead to mischief and prove counter-productive. It seemed to be aimed at creating hatred of the Government and might lead to counter-agitation and division of "the country into two hostile camps."

Hume countered Sir Auckland's argument urbanely but firmly. Experience of what happened in the revolt of 1857 had evidently bitten deep into his consciousness. He had, moreover, had access to a good deal of what today would be considered as classified information when he was serving as a Secretary in the Government of India. This had confirmed him in his view that the Raj was not like the Rock of Ages its complacent admirers cracked it up to be; that the official hierarchy was rather like the Bourbons at the end of 18th century in France—men who had shut their eyes and ears to the gathering unrest and the rumblings of subterranean discontent. He countered Sir Auckland Colvin's charges against the Congress politely but cogently. He said that in their pamphlets and lectures the Congress leaders had chosen not to "blink or pretend to ignore the grave evils" that existed, but that at the same time they had tried to show the people "how, by loyal and constitutional efforts" they could secure the amelioration of the existing system. This was the very reverse of exciting hatred against the Government. He went on to invoke the parallel of the Congress as "a safety-valve for the escape of great and growing forces, generated by our own

{British} action" and maintained that the real question was not that it was premature but whether it was not too late on the scene.

As for the danger of a counter-agitation being triggered off by the Congress agitation, Hume did not think that the groups opposed to the Congress were of much consequence. He maintained that "excluding an inappreciable fraction, the whole culture and intelligence of the country was favourable to the Congress." He was inclined to dismiss the anti-Congress Party as being made up of a small bunch of "Anglo-Indians", mostly officials, backed by "the Anglo-Indian Press"; a few "Indian fossils, honest, but wanting in understanding; a few men who in their hearts hate British rule, or are secretly in the employ of England's enemies"; and a certain number of "time-servers, men not really in their hearts opposed to the Congress, but who have taken up the work of opposition to it, because it seemed to them that this will 'pay'."

His picture of the opposition to the Congress was doubtless somewhat overdrawn. But he was by no means exaggerating when he claimed that the Congress, far from wishing to divide the country, was bending all its energies to uniting it and bringing into harmonious cooperation people who had hitherto not met all or met only to quarrel. He did not deny that a section of the Muslims viewed the Congress with suspicion and were jealous of it, but he believed that these feelings were not "generally shared by the rising generation of Muslims". Mistrust and suspicion between the two major religious communities in the country, he argued, were sown by "a few ill-advised officials who clung to the pestilential doctrine of 'Divide et impera'."

As regards Sir Auckland's admonition that the Congress would do better to concentrate its effort on social reform instead of meddling in political matters, the Lieutenant-Governor either did not know, or deliberately ignored, the fact that it was Lord Dufferin who had warned Hume against the Congress taking up questions of social reform and advised him to concentrate on political reforms. Hume, at any rate, explained that the Congress was devoting itself to larger national and political ends which the people as a whole desired to achieve and leaving it to other organisations to undertake social reforms in the particular sphere and group to which they belonged. But he pointed out, rightly,

that most of the Congress workers were also active labourers in the field of social reform.

Sir Auckland Colvin was not the only high official to fire a warning shot across the bows of the Indian National Congress. An even fiercer salvo was to be fired from an even bigger gun—the Viceroy. Lord Dufferin, not the most straightforward of men, whose term was ending at the close of 1888, made the Indian National Congress a rather strange parting gift. Less than a month before its Fourth session at Allahabad, Dufferin, speaking at the St. Andrew's Day Dinner in Calcutta on November 30, 1888, made a gratuitous attack on the Congress and on the educated Indians generally whom he dismissed as a "microscopic minority."

This, of course, they were. Curiously, however, in June of that year the Government, over which he presided, had passed a resolution aimed at making sure that the educated Indians should be reduced to an even more microscopic minority than the "half a million with a good knowledge of English, and perhaps a million more with some smattering of it" whom he counted as having "passed out of our schools" in the previous quarter of a century, in the same speech. Evidently he and his administration had come to the conclusion, as Anil Seal has it in his *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, that "the only good Indian was an uneducated one."

For the new resolution, intended to justify the scaling down of Government support for higher education, proclaimed the dogma that the government "pioneers the way, but having shown the way, it recognises no responsibility to do for the people what it can do for itself." The policy henceforth was to be to keep a few Government schools open as models, for the rest rely on "the vitality of local effort", and let the devil take the hindmost. Little wonder that Dinshaw Wacha wrote to Dadabhai Naoroji apropos this resolution :

The Government of India has just published a Resolution which may be considered the death knell of higher education in the country. It distinctly instructs all administrations to retire gradually from higher education as private enterprise makes head....This is the *first* effect of the Indian

National Congress. Educated natives must be less in India. So say the Government. It is they who agitate. Let us diminish their number. As well may they try to stem the Atlantic. They cannot put back the hand of the dial. In fact the result will be that it will give natives greater stimulus to promote higher education. It will teach them greater self-reliance.

Obviously, verbal tirades against the Congress, which was seen as the mouthpiece of the educated classes, by men at the commanding heights of decision in the machinery of the Raj were not just due to a sudden outbreak of allergy among them towards the organisation. It was part of a policy. Nor did it stop at verbal onslaughts. A systematic attempt was made to mobilize opposition to it and, as always, the Muslim card, which was regarded as trumps, was played against it though apparently not with any conspicuous success since quite a number of distinguished Muslims, both traditionalists and reformists, were to take part in the Fourth Congress.

The Government's displeasure with the Congress was not only proclaimed from public platforms. It was also demonstrated through petty administrative obstructionism and pinpricks. The Chairman of the Reception Committee at Allahabad, Pandit Ajudhianath, a member of the Legislative Council and father of Hridayanath Kunzru, was to reveal some of the obstacles placed in their way by the authorities when they were making arrangements for the Congress session. They had started work early, knowing there would be difficulties. They had first sought permission to hold it at the Khusro Bagh and they were informed they could have it. But the permission was soon withdrawn. In April they were told that they could have use of a large piece of waste land near the fort at a price. But four months later the authorities changed their mind—"on sanitary grounds." The Reception Committee then arranged for the use of a group of houses belonging to some people they knew. But they happened to be near the office of the *Pioneer*, a journal under European management and the *de facto* voice of the Government in the Province, which took exception and, moreover, some of the houses, were within the Cantonment area and the military

authorities put their foot down. Finally, with only seven weeks to go to the opening day, as the authorities were congratulating themselves at having foiled the Congresswallahs, they discovered that they had been outwitted. Annie Besant has told the story how:

...a representative of the Reception Committee slipped quietly over to Lucknow, with a carefully drawn lease and the rent in his pocket, went to a Nawab whose splendid house in Allahabad, standing in large grounds, happened to be vacant, and persuaded him to accept the rent and sign the lease. On the very next day, the Reception Committee walked in and took possession, and Lowther Castle, in the very middle of the civilian quarter, nodded to its next door neighbour, Government House, where Sir Auckland Colvin fumed in helpless wrath....

Whether or not Sir Auckland actually fumed, or just stoically smoked his pipe, it was at Lowther Castle that the Fourth Congress met "and a large pandal was raised seating 5,000 persons, while a splendid *shamiana* (marquee) lent by the Maharaja of Darbhanga, served as a general reception room, and another was lent by a Muhammadan nobleman to serve as a reading-room, almost every paper in India—except the Anglo-Indian—being sent gratuitously; round these arose blocks of tents, divided by wide roads, each block having its own dining and meeting halls, the whole forming a finely decorative city, while Lowther Castle itself was used for the President, Secretaries, and leading delegates, with all the business offices. A quarter was set aside for shops, where salesmen offered the beautiful Indian manufactures" of the region but no spirituous liquors and intoxicants. Indeed, temperance seems to have been the official posture of the Indian National Congress long before it became its official policy.

Attempts to build up opposition to the Congress, encouraged and often instigated by the authorities, and the hurdles set up to prevent delegates attending its session had the opposite effect. More than twice as many delegates attended the Allahabad session as had been present at Madras. Altogether 1,500 had been elected and 1,248 actually turned up. As before, the host Province had the largest contingent—583. The next largest number

came from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam—254—followed by 163 from Bombay and Sind, and Madras 95. Even the Punjab managed to send 80 and C.P. and Berar 73. The North-West Province and Oudh had outdone the Presidencies.

But more important than the number of delegates attending the Allahabad session was their composition. There was, for example, a much more than just token representation of the Muslim community, 222, despite the avowed opposition of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh and leader of the Aligarh movement, who, whether by accident or design it is hard to tell, had had a knighthood bestowed on him by the British Government that very year, and whose home ground the Province was. As Moulvi Muhammad Hidayut Rasul was to explain, the very substantial body of delegates from Oudh was "due to the kindness of our brethren in the Aligarh camp—the opponents of the Congress". Since there had been some talk of the Muslim divines declaring the Congress out of bounds to their flock by issuing a Fatwa, or religious edict, Sheikh Haseen Khan, forestalled any such move by producing an edict from the spiritual leader of the Sunni community of Lucknow in favour of the Congress.

Not only the Muslims, but other smaller minority communities were better represented at Allahabad than at the previous three Congress sessions. According to a religious and ethnic breakdown, there were eleven Jains, seven Parsis, six Sikhs, sixteen Europeans and, rather surprisingly, two Americans. Indeed, it was a European who was chosen to preside over the Allahabad session. The name of George Yule, head of Andrew Yule and Co., and Sheriff of Calcutta, was proposed as President by Pherozezshah Mehta, and seconded by Sardar Dyal Singh, an enlightened Sikh philanthropist who had been deeply influenced by Rammohun Roy's ideas. Yule was to be the first in a sizeable line of British men and women who were to be elected to what was the highest national office and it was meant to underline that the Congress was a confraternity of ideals and purposes transcending any considerations of race and creed, caste and confession.

George Yule in his presidential address, which reflected a well-tempered liberal mind, took care to stress this. "The watchword

of the Congressmen," he said, "is Indians first, Hindus, Mahomedans, Parsis, Christians, Punjabees, Mahrattas, Bengalees, and Madrasees afterwards. It is for us by our moderation and business-like character of our deliberations, by our mutual toleration of each other's feelings and prejudices, to justify in act and word, the hopes and aspirations of those who, in the not distant future, seek to realise the dream of a united and federated India and... lead the nations of Asia in the path of progressive advancement in all directions of human activity." He was, he added, "very glad indeed to have rendered any service to the cause of the National Congress. I believe the principles upon which it is founded, are just, good and true, and that in due time, its aims will be accomplished.... No rational man can believe that the present system can go on for ever—that it is the last will and dying testament of Providence regarding us. We are, I trust, the heirs of a better hope."

Eardley Norton, leader of the English Bar in Madras High Court, who had endeared himself to the Indians by publishing and circulating an "Open Letter to Lord Dufferin" in answer to the Viceroy's provocative and unwarranted attack on the Congress and "educated Indians" in his St. Andrew's Day Dinner Speech, and who, as Sachchidananda Sinha has recorded, was to receive a standing ovation when he appeared on the Congress platform in Allahabad, was to take up the same theme as George Yule and drive home the point with four lines of rather indifferent but edifying verse. While moving one of the hardy annuals among the resolutions—number two on the agenda and concerning the holding of simultaneous competitive examinations for the civil service in England and in India—he declared: "Our Congress is outside the reach of petty malice. It is increasing day by day, in power and extent, pushing aside by its own great weight the opposing forces of envy and scorn; and while it draws the various peoples of the country into one common fold of mutual sympathy and good-will, rises with silent majesty into a future of self-reliance and content.

Like some tall cliff that rears its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm

Though round its base the gathering clouds may spread
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

At Madras the number of resolutions had come down. But at Lowther Castle, Allahabad, it went up again—to seventeen. This was rather deceptive. At least eight of the resolutions, including the first resolution which embodied the main political demand, were reiterative, with only minor verbal changes to bring them up to date. But there were also new items, considerably extending the menu in various directions. The seventh resolution called for improvements in "the systems of Abkari and Excise... as shall tend to discourage insobriety." The fifth resolution urged the appointment of a commission, consisting of official and non-official members, to investigate the existing system of police administration in India which "it is the general belief of the people of this country... is highly unsatisfactory in itself and oppressive to them." Another resolution raised an issue which at once exercised and fascinated the Victorian mind—the issue of prostitution and the laws governing it. Captain Banon and Hearsay horrified the delegates by saying, while moving and seconding the resolution on the subject, that over 2,000 women were procured by the Government "for the hideous purpose alluded to". The Congress asked for "the total abrogation of laws and rules relating to the regulation of prostitution by the State in India."

There was some controversy over a resolution concerning Permanent Settlement of the Land Revenue being extended to the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay and other Provinces, Bengal landed interests having already enjoyed the benefit of the system since the days of Cornwallis. Eventually, a compromise resolution was passed referring the question "to the several standing Congress Committees, with instructions to report upon the same, in so far as it affects their respective circles, to the Congress of 1889." To balance this gesture towards the landed gentry, the next resolution remembered the poor, too, and expressed "its disapproval of the recent enhancement of the Salt Tax."

Nor did it forget to take strong exception to the Resolution of the Government earlier that year which was virtually a notice of reduction of expenditure on higher education. The Congress

urged an increase, or at least maintenance at the existing level, of allocation of funds for the purpose and continued Government control of educational institutions. K.T. Telang was particularly sharp in his critique of the shift in the Government's thinking and policy on this question and said: "It is only in this country that the doctrine has been gaining ground that the duty of fostering and encouraging education does not devolve upon the Government. I repudiate it entirely. I think it is not only an erroneous doctrine, but it is a fatal doctrine to be admitted either by the Government or the people."

Curiously, the question of the constitution and working of the Congress which, it had been decided at Madras, should be left standing till the Allahabad session, was not taken up in any systematic manner at all. But a number of ad hoc decisions were taken. To begin with, a Subjects Committee was elected and the whole country divided into territorial circles, and a number of members allocated to each, with each circle electing its own members. The total number was 106. Furthermore, the Allahabad Congress formally endorsed the agreement reached at Madras "that no subject shall be passed for discussion by the Subjects Committee, or allowed to be discussed at any Congress by the President thereof, to the introduction of which the Hindu or Mohammedan Delegates as a body object, unanimously or nearly unanimously." Finally and rather puzzlingly, the last resolution passed at Allahabad read: "That A.O. Hume be re-appointed General Secretary for the ensuing year." This seemed puzzling because there is no record of any resolution having been passed at any previous Congress appointing him as General Secretary although he had, in fact, always performed all the functions associated with that office—and, indeed, done much more.

The Allahabad Congress was an impressive feat of organization—the more impressive when considered against the background of the major effort which the Government had made to conjure up opposition to it, sow mistrust of it in the minds of minority communities, and to enlist the princely order and feudal interests to man the barricades against it, and frighten off the timorous middle class from having any truck with it by propaganda aimed at *Showing the Seditious Character of the Indian*

National Congress and the opinions held by eminent Natives of India who are opposed to the Movement as the title of a pamphlet published under the editorship of Theodore Beck had it. It would be disingenuous to suggest that this campaign at character assassination directed against the Congress combined with heavy denunciatory fire from high British dignitaries, from the Viceroy downwards, did not have any effect on the Congress leadership. Dadabhai Naoroji's letters to Dinshaw Wacha from London reflect his worry and even distress at reports reaching him that some Parsis were saying that "we should dissociate ourselves from the Hindus and Mohamedans." "Nothing," he added, "could be more suicidal. We are India's, and India is our mother-country, and we can only sink or swim with, and as, Indians. If we break with the Indians, our fate will be that of a crow in peacock's feathers. The English will in no time pluck out those feathers. I shall be glad if you have taken many Parsis with you."

This was written on the eve of the Allahabad session and must have reached Wacha after it was all over. However, it is possible to discern a distinctly defensive note in some of the key speeches made at Allahabad though, admittedly, this defensive strain was variously articulated. Some, like Surendranath Banerjea, tried to cheer up the delegates with the thought that "causes the noblest, the most beneficent, the most far-reaching in their consequences for good, have never prospered or triumphed, except under the stress of adverse criticism." Others, like Madan Mohan Malaviya, at the time only twenty-seven and in the first fine political frenzy of youth, were moved to passionate rhetoric of denunciation :

We have impeached the administration on every conceivable ground. We charge the Government of England, with having saddled us with an unnecessarily costly expenditure of the civil service of India; we charge them with having forced upon us a crushingly heavy military expenditure. We charge them with indulging in a great waste of India's money beyond the borders of India; we charge them with want of fairness in their dealings with India in the matter of Home charges; nay more, we charge them —the Government

of India, the Government of England and the people of England with them—with being responsible by reason of their neglect to adequately perform their duty towards India, for the loss of millions of lives which are lost in every decade from starvation, largely the result of overtaxation and inefficiency in administration. We charge the people of England because as some one has said:

Hear him, ye Senates, hear this truth sublime
He who allows oppression shares the crime."

However, the broad band of what would in our own time be regarded as the centrist, if not the dead centre, leadership was anxious that the official anti-Congress propaganda designed to project an image of it as an organisation dominated by rank seditionists should not be allowed to gain public credence either in India where it would have had the effect of frightening away its growing clientele, or in Britain where, thanks to the long and patient work of men like Dadabhai Naoroji and his Indian and British fellow-workers, the argument for constitutional reforms in India had made some headway, especially in the Liberal Party. A number of distinguished "moderates", like Pandit Bishan Narayan Dar, S. Ramaswami Mudaliar, and K.T. Telang made reassuring speeches signalling to the powers-that-were that the Congress was not a bunch of wild Jacobins trying to subvert the British Empire in India.

Telang, in particular, was at once brilliant and subtle, passing off what was essentially an exercise in knee-bending apologies as hilarious fun at the expense of the Governor-General. He recalled the story of the crab which, he said, was described by somebody as "a red fish which walks backwards". The criticism made of this description was that "a crab was not a fish; that it was not red; and that it did not walk backwards." Even so, he went on amidst polite laughter, "Lord Dufferin's criticism [of the Congress] is perfectly correct, except that we have not asked for parliamentary institutions, which England has got after many centuries of discipline; we have not asked for democratic methods of government; and we have not asked that the British Executive should be brought under subjection to us."

At Allahabad the Congress President, George Yule, gave a somewhat surprising ruling—surprising, that is, in the light of subsequent sea change in its language policy. A number of speakers, as might have been expected, had addressed the session in Urdu or Hindustani, among them Lala Lajpat Rai, who was attending his first Congress and making a maiden speech at the age of 23. But as many delegates, especially from the South, did not understand their speeches, the President ruled that "All speakers able to speak in English should speak in that language because a far larger portion of the delegates understand English more than any other language. No departure from this rule will be allowed except in the cases of those who are *bona fide* unable to address an audience in English."

The ruling was received with loud applause. So, too, was the decision to send a telegram of felicitations to Gladstone on his 80th birthday which happily coincided with the fourth and final day of the Allahabad session. Gladstone, who was held in high esteem among the political elite in India, had won Indian hearts afresh by his statement three months before the Congress session in which he said, among other things, "It will not do for us to treat with contempt, or even with indifference, the rising aspirations of this great people." The day before another cable had gone from the Congress—to John Bright who, like Henry Fawcett, popularly known as "member for India", supported the cause of Indian reforms, and who was lying desperately ill. The Congress wished him speedy recovery—alas, to no purpose. For he was to die soon after.

* Organisation of Congress sessions and the propaganda work in between the sessions cost money, increasingly so as the organisation grew and the work expanded. Before the session at Allahabad closed having decided to reassemble "in the Bombay Presidency (either at Bombay itself or at Poona, as may be settled hereafter) on the 26th of December 1889," an appeal for funds was, therefore, launched. With some success, it seems, for Rs. 64,000 were promised on the spot and more than Rs. 20,000 actually collected, no mean achievement in the days before galloping inflation and when cowries were recognised currency and with a rupee in his or her pocket any Indian could order a sumptuous meal and expect some change.

Back to Bombay it was to be next Christmas week. The wheel had turned full circle. True, in its round of Presidency and Provincial capitals, the Congress had missed out Lahore, the capital of the Punjab. For this there were two good reasons, partly related. Then as now the Punjab was a sensitive frontier province and the British kept it in a kind of permanent political quarantine, with no nonsense experiments in incipient liberal imperialism of the kind tried out from time to time in the more developed Presidencies. Instead there was to be a firm paternal hand which could come down heavily to correct the least stirring of any rebellious impulse combined with buying up of loyalties of the strategic landowning classes. As a result, the Congress had not been able to throw any wide or deep roots in the land of Five Rivers, being based for the most part on the trading and professional communities, largely Hindu and caught up in a counter-reformation which was masquerading as reformation—a structural weakness which it was never quite able to get over. It was certainly not ready in 1889 to play host to an annual session of the organisation in Lahore. Another four years had to pass before it felt confident enough to do that.

So, after four years, the Congress returned to Bombay for its annual conclave. But it was quite a different Congress that returned. Gone was the tentativeness which had characterised its founding session behind closed doors. It had become an open national debating forum, the first among all the political organisations if not yet a mass organisation. In 1885 only 72 "representatives" had come together in the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College near the Gowalia Tank. In 1889 the number of delegates who actually registered their names was, by some happy numerological coincidence, exactly the same as the number of years since the advent of the Christian era—1,889. They had all been elected by their respective Circles. In fact, according to Annie Besant, "2,500 delegates had been elected, 1,889 registered their names, and another 24 paid for their tickets, but unfortunately did not register."

More. They represented a fair cross-section of the Indian humanity. "Glancing over the register," Annie Besant has recorded, "we find people of all professions and trades from all parts of the country—princes, landlords, peasants, merchants,

contractors, barristers, vakils, pleaders, solicitors, attorneys, principals, headmasters, professors, teachers, editors, money-lenders, bankers, brokers, manufacturers, traders, shopkeepers, artisans, doctors, sardars, printers, authors, reises, taluqdars, a judge, a munsiff, nine clergymen and missionaries, and ten ladies, seven of whom were Indians. A striking fact is the large number of merchants and zamindars, and also secretaries of public bodies, municipal commissioners, and members of boards."

As always, the host Presidency or Province mustered the largest number of delegates—821 in this case. Madras came next with 366 to be followed by the N.W.P. and Oudh with 266 though, surprisingly, the Central Provinces and Berar, a late-comer to the Congress fold as a distinct entity, was not far behind with 214. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam were the last but one in the league table with only 165. The Punjab, as usual, had the distinction of being the last with 62, which was 18 less than what it had mustered the previous year. Significantly, whereas there had been only two Muslims taking part in the First session of the Congress, there were 254 of them at the fifth—not at all bad considering what the Government and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had been doing to warn Muslims off from having any truck with the Congress.

The two thousand odd delegates and twice that number of visitors who were expected to attend the Congress session, obviously, could not have been accommodated in the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College. But the Reception Committee headed by no less a person than Pherozeshah Mehta had persuaded Sir Albert Sassoon Bart, a rich Jewish dynast and head of his community in India, to lend them the grounds adjoining his residence and enclosed within "handsome iron railings" on which "a vast temporary hall, the quaint beauty of which had seldom been equalled" was put up for the purpose.

The reason for such a massive influx of delegates was, partly no doubt, the increasing interest in the Congress. But there was also an added reason—the fact that Charles Bradlaugh, the free-thinking Member of the British Parliament had been invited by the Congress and had agreed to come. Bradlaugh whom Annie Besant, who had been associated with him in the

Free Thought and Radical Movement in Britain in the 1870s, has described as "that noble English Democrat, who might say with Thomas Paine: 'The world is my country, and to do good my religion'," was a household name in political circles in India. His, indeed, had been the powerful voice at Westminster in support of constitutional reforms in India—so much so that, after the death of Henry Fawcett, he had come to be called "Member for India", by some, as he was to tell the Congress in Bombay "in sneer, and some in hearty meaning", adding that he should love to hold the title, "not simply by great efforts made on great occasions, but by simple doings whenever there is injustice to be touched."

He was, as he said, "only a guest." He did not take any active part in their discussions and debates. But his presence in their midst subtly affected not only the way the Congress conducted its business, but even the business itself. Once again, as at Allahabad, it was a Briton who was chosen to preside over the Congress—Sir William Wedderburn. Wedderburn liked to describe himself as "a hereditary friend of India" because of his family connections with the country, though some of the associations had not been particularly happy. One of his brothers and his child had actually been killed in the uprising of 1857. But he himself during twenty-five years of his service in India during which he rose to judgeship of the High Court and membership of the Governor's Executive Council under Lord Reay in Bombay, had come to love the country and its people. Like Hume, he had been involved in the discussions that preceded the birth of the Congress and, in fact, had been active behind the scenes at the First Congress though as a serving official he could not participate in its work. After his retirement, he was to be the moving spirit in the Committee of the Indian National Congress Agency—later known as just the Committee of the Indian National Congress—which was set up earlier in 1889 and whose appointment was confirmed by a resolution passed at the Bombay session. He was to enter Parliament in 1893 where his championship of India was much disliked by the Blimps of his day who looked upon him as something of a freak. But as he said in his address to the Bombay session, "I have passed quarter of a century among you, and during that period of time I have not

known what it was to suffer an unkindness from a native of India. During that period I have been in the service of the people of India, and have eaten their salt. And I hope to devote to their service what still remains to me of active life." Which he did.

The very first of the fifteen resolutions on the agenda, predictably, was about setting up a three-man Committee—John Adam, Pherozeshah Mehta and W.C. Bonnerjee—"to settle the wording of the said address" to be presented by the Congress to Charles Bradlaugh. The second resolution was the heart of the matter. It outlined a "skeleton scheme for the reform and reconstruction of the Council of the Governor-General for making Laws and Regulations, and the Provincial Legislative Councils." The President of the Congress was asked to submit this skeleton scheme "to Charles Bradlaugh, Esq., M.P., with the respectful request of this Congress that he may be pleased to cause a Bill to be drafted on the lines indicated in this skeleton scheme and introduce the same in the British House of Commons."

Skeleton scheme it was and skeleton it was to remain. At this distance its only interest is as an historical curiosity, probably the first produced by the Congress though not the last. It was a six-point scheme, very modest in its scope, but introducing the thin end of the elective principle into the system of governance, but not the principle of direct election, much less anything approaching majority rule. It seemed so reasonable that Surendranath Banerjea declared that there could "come but one response, which, I am confident, will be in accord with the great traditions of the English people, and will serve to consolidate the foundations of British rule in India, and to broad-base it upon the affections of a happy, prosperous and contented people"—a sanguine prophecy which called forth a rather tart remark from Annie Besant in her book that "Congress speakers show a remarkable readiness to prophesy, with an equally remarkable failure to prophesy correctly." She might have added but did not—and not only Congress speakers.

In the course of the lively—at times even heated—debate on the scheme that followed there were to surface some of the rocks upon which so many efforts of Indian politicians were so often to come to grief. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, both intervening in a Congress debate for the first

time, and both acting in an unlikely, if not unnatural, concert moved an amendment that the Imperial Council should be elected indirectly by the Provincial Councils and not an Electoral College as envisaged in point five of the scheme. The amendment was defeated. So was the one suggested by a Muslim delegate who asked for parity of representation with the Hindus which met with opposition from other Muslim delegates, who thought it unfair. The skeleton scheme, with its elaborate proposals for making the representation of each community broadly proportionate to its total population was approved as originally formulated.

Another resolution—number three on the order paper—was a novel procedural device. Instead of year after year going through the tedious business of repeating resolutions passed at the previous Congress sessions and which had received no answers or only dusty answers from the British Government, it was considered best to pack them all in one portmanteau or "Omni-bus" resolution and ratify them at one fell swoop, so to speak. This was done on the third day—a very busy one it was—and it covered and confirmed a wide range of demands ranging from complete separation of the executive from judicial functions to reduction of military expenditure, from reform of Police Administration to "the impolicy and injustice" of increasing Salt Tax. Some resolutions passed at the previous Congress sessions, however, were regarded worth reiteration in full, like the demand for simultaneous holding of competitive examinations for the Indian Civil Service in India and England (the Government had evidently conceded the demand for raising the qualifying age for candidates from 19 to 23) and liberalization of the Arms Act (XI of 1878).

There were also two brand new themes intoned at the Fifth Congress session—one economic, the other political. The eighth resolution called for removal of "any hindrances whatever to the consumption of silver for manufacturing purposes" in view of the fall in the prices of silver and the exchange value of the rupee, and immediate abrogation of plate duties and making "hall-marking a voluntary institution." The political demand was voiced in resolution nine. It expressed the "earnest hope" that the House of Commons "will forthwith restore the right,

formerly possessed" by MPs of raising "any matter of grievance of the natives of India" on adjournment and for the presentations in Committee of the Indian Budget and its consideration "at such a date as will ensure its full and adequate discussion." Sir William Wedderburn was authorized to present a petition to the Commons on behalf of the Congress along the lines of this resolution.

Organisational matters had by now acquired both importance and complexity and resolutions 12-14 dealt with them. Hume was once again elected General Secretary. However, since he was to be a member of an 11-man team which was to go to England to represent the Congress views "and press upon the consideration of the British public the political reform which the Congress has advocated," it was decided to appoint Pandit Ajudhianath as Joint General Secretary. A sum of Rs. 5,000 was allocated for office staff and expenses and Standing Counsels for Bengal (W.C. Bonnerjee), Bombay (Pherozesbhai Mehta) and Madras (Ananda Charlu who was also made Joint General Secretary).

The draft rules for "the constitution and working of the Congress" first considered at Madras and the additions suggested by various quarters, were not taken up. Instead, the several Standing Committees were asked to consider them thoroughly during the coming year so that they could "definitely be dealt with by the Congress at its next Session." However, there was one matter concerning the working of the Congress that could not be left over for another year. The number of delegates to the Congress sessions was multiplying at such an alarming rate that it was threatening to make the discussions unwieldy if not chaotic. Something had to be done to ensure non-proliferation. Something was done. It was decided that "henceforth the number of delegates to be allowed from each Congress circle be limited to five per million of the total population of the circle", but it was left to the Standing Committee of each circle to allot the number of delegates to be elected from "amongst their several electoral divisions, as may seem most expedient."

The Bombay Congress also confirmed the membership of the Indian National Congress Agency Committee set up in England. It included Sir William Wedderburn, W.S. Caine MP,

W.S. Bright Maclaren MP, J.E. Ellis MP, George Yule and Dadabhai Naoroji. It also appealed for Rs. 45,000 to be raised for the expense of the Congress work in India and in England during the next twelve months and instructed the different Standing Committees to send their respective quotas to the General Secretary, the one half in three, and the balance in six months.

It was a successful and good-humoured Congress session though the business was conducted in some haste. The good humour was partly due to the feeling that the cloud of official disapproval under which the Allahabad session had met had been wholly lifted. The reason for this feeling was not entirely self-evident and some of the delegates had jestingly drawn attention to the watchful eye which the Government was keeping over them. Pandit Ajudhianath, for instance, told the delegates that when he went down to Calcutta in October the Police knew how many servants had accompanied him, where he had put up and for how long. And he added amidst cries of "shame" that a head constable named Munsib Khan had come from Allahabad to Bombay and had been making "close enquiries as to what persons have come from the North-West Provinces, especially Government officials." To this information Eardley Norton from Madras added his own story. "I wish to tell you that Colonel Weldon, our Madras Commissioner of Police," he said, "is here incharge of all the delegates from Madras." But cries of "shame" turned to laughter when another delegate offered the intelligence that a certain "Colonel Henderson, the head of the Thuggy and Dacoity Department and of the Secret Police of all India, is, by a strange coincidence, also sniffing round our premises."

The business had to be conducted in a hurry not only because there was a lot on the menu for the delegates to get through and only three days in which to do it, but also because on the final day the work had to be completed by 5 p.m. so that they could go to a function timed for 6 p.m. which they were all agog to attend and which was, as it were, the *piece de resistance*—the Congress reception to Bradlaugh. Apparently, the address was not presented till seven. It was read out by Wedderburn, with Pherozeshah Mehta in the chair. The address referred

to Bradlaugh's recent illness and said:

Brilliant as was the tribute of national respect which your illness elicited from the fellow-countrymen who for long years had been the daily spectators of your labours and your triumphs in England, you have won, Sir, in the mental distress and prayerful anxiety with which the population of India followed you in the tribulation of your sickness, a homage the more unique and tender that it is not matched in the recorded history of any living statesman. . . You have enchained their admiration by your inalienable fidelity to the popular cause.

Bradlaugh in his reply was more general than specific. At least, reading it after all the passage of time, it is hard to avoid the feeling that his speech was more remarkable for what it did not say than what it did; that he seemed to be anxious not to be too committal; and that his reservations—even over the question of the Indian people's nationhood—seemed to stand out more than any positive affirmations. At times he sounded rather wordy, almost like Ramsay MacDonald in his later years, descending to truisms which Polonius himself could hardly have improved upon as, for example, when he said: "I address you as fellow-subjects; we are here loyal to one rule with the best of loyalty. That is no real loyalty which is only blind submission. Real loyalty means that the governed help the governors by leaving little for the Government to do." It was hardly the kind of thought that could or was meant to set radical hearts ablaze.

But, perhaps, this is being unfair to Bradlaugh. It must be recalled that he had been very ill and was not in his best form. Indeed, he said at the outset of his speech: "I pray your indulgence tonight, for it is the first speech I have made since I looked into the blackness of the grave, and I am not sure how far I can trust my tongue to interpret what I would wish to say." He was not being melodramatic when he spoke of "the blackness of the grave". It was to claim him in just over a year after his first and last appearance at the Congress session. And he was also, perhaps, right in not kindling hopes which he knew he could not fulfil. "Not only do not expect too much," he cautioned

them, "but do not expect all at once....Don't be disappointed if, of a just claim, only something is conceded."

However, he did take on a commitment and it was important. He promised them, "It will be my duty, as it is my right, to present to Parliament directly I get back, on the very day of its opening, the claim you make to have the Bill considered. On the second day the Bill will be introduced. For so much I can answer; but I can answer for nothing more." Being a man of the world and a parliamentarian he was aware of the ways open to "democratic" governments of sidetracking the issues and blocking progressive measures. "I think", he added, "it is possible the Government may introduce some Bill themselves. If they do, it will take precedence of, but it will not avoid, the one you have charged me with; because the Government Bill, in Committee, will come under the discussion of Parliament on every one of the propositions that you desire in the Bill you have charged me with." That is why he wanted them to strengthen his hand by sending him petitions bearing signatures "by the thousand, by the hundred thousand, by the million, if you can."

For the rest, he was impressed by many things about the Congress, not least, as he remarked, "to see that you have women amongst you... although they are few." He was also visibly moved by the affection and sympathy with which he was received and a rippling sentimentality broke through his native reserve: "You are the dawn; I see the day; and I do not count the rays which are yet below the horizon, but I take account of the gilding of the clouds from the rays that I see."

At Bombay the question where the next session of the Congress was going to be held had been left a little uncertain. The resolution on the subject was specific on the date which had by now almost become statutory—the day after Christmas Day, December 26. But about the place it had merely said that it would be "some city in Bengal, the exact place to be fixed hereafter." Whether the claims of any other city in Bengal were considered is not known. But in the end claims of Calcutta seem to have prevailed, probably because of its amenities and the consideration that a political gathering in the capital was likely to attract more notice. The site chosen was the Tivoli Gardens, an amusement park, whose proprietors had lent the grounds as

well as a two-storied house there to the Reception Committee headed by Monomohan Ghose, a famous criminal lawyer.

After the massive turn-up at the Bombay session, the Calcutta show was relatively modest, with only 702 delegates turning up although one thousand had been elected. This was partly because of the rule laid down at Bombay limiting representation to five per million in any particular Congress circle, though this does not wholly explain why Bombay sent only forty-seven, Madras fifty-eight and the North-West Province and Oudh 148. All the same, from all accounts, the pavilion constructed for the session at the Tivoli Gardens was the largest to date, capable of accommodating 5,000 visitors and delegates. According to Annie Besant, 7,000 visitors were packed into the Pandal on the first day and the number was never less than 4,000. This one can well believe, considering the zest for politics of the citizens of Calcutta.

All the same, compared to the excitement generated by Bradlaugh's presence at Bombay, the second Calcutta session appears to have been a rather low-key affair. The honour of presiding over it went to Pherozezshah Mehta, a distinguished lawyer who had come in close contact with Dadabhai Naoroji and W.C. Bonnerjee while studying for the Bar in England, and of whom Srinivasa Sastri was to say that "he was richly endowed by Nature who made him in one of her generous moods." He had already acquired an undeniable pre-eminence both in civic and national politics. His contribution to the civic affairs in Bombay—both the Bombay Municipal Acts of 1872 and 1888 are largely owed to him—was to win for him the title of "the Lion of Bombay". He was also to give Bombay its first Indian-owned English daily, the *Bombay Chronicle*, which first under B.G. Horniman and later under Abdullah Brelvi exemplified what a free newspaper can do even under conditions of bondage, and which, alas, is no more having withered away under the harsh economic winds of post-independence India. Pherozezshah Mehta's statue still stands in front of the Corporation building even though no longer as a sentinel, but rather a helpless witness to the destruction of so much that was lovely in Bombay that he loved, at the hands of nouveaux riches philistines and speculative vandals.

The Lion of Bombay he was, but there was little that was

fierce about his politics. A "Gladstonian Liberal", a firm believer in British connection and "the living and fertilizing principles of English culture and English civilisation", like so many of the early Congress leaders, he did not miss the opportunity of preaching the virtues of moderation in his presidential address though even he appears to have been a little irritated by the British Government's dismissal of the Congress as representing "a microscopic minority". He told the delegates to plead and plead "temperately, for timely and provident statesmanship". "Our duty," he said, "lies clear before us to go on with our work firmly and fearlessly but with moderation, and above all with humility." And he quoted Newman's hymn "Lead Kindly Light" to underscore his point:

I do not ask to see
The distant path,
one step enough for me.

But there came the rub. The Tory administration under Salisbury and its agents in India had a very different conception of "timely and provident statesmanship." They were unwilling even to allow that one step which the President of the Congress would have been content with. As the Official Report of the Congress of 1890, which from textual evidence was probably drafted by Hume who was always going off at radical tangents, lamented: "Millions of educated and patriotic men (than whom no more loyal or loving subjects are numbered in the vast Empire that owns the sway of our beloved Queen-Empress) are treated as political helots to gratify the class prejudices and *amour propre* and fill the pockets of a handful of bureaucrats, the average men amongst whom are, positively, less qualified for rule, *in India*, than a very considerable proportion of those whom England permits them to misgovern. India's people, free-born British subjects, are denied the smallest fraction of those fundamental political privileges which, as British citizens, are their inherent birthright."

The one step which would have sufficed to satisfy the Congress was, of course, "the draft Bill introduced into Parliament by Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, entitled 'An Act to amend the Indian

Councils Act of 1861". The Calcutta Congress took it up in its first resolution and approved it. It not only approved it and humbly prayed to "the Houses of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland to pass the same into law." It empowered Pherozeshah Mehta "to draw up and sign, on behalf of this Assembly, a petition to the House of Commons to the foregoing effect, and to transmit the same to Charles Bradlaugh for presentation, thereto, in due course." This was what Charles Bradlaugh had asked them to do so that his hands might be strengthened in combating Government manoeuvres through Lord Cross' Bill to stultify the purpose of the reform of Councils by retaining the principle of nomination instead of introduction of the principle of election which he and the Congress wanted.

By another resolution—the last on the agenda—the Congress, as at its previous session, decided to send a deputation to Britain "to represent its views in England, and press upon the consideration of the British Public the political reforms which the Congress has advocated." The deputation was to consist of George Yule, Pherozeshah Mehta, W.C. Bonnerjee, J. Adam, Monomohan Ghose, A.O. Hume, Kali Charan Bannerji, Dada-bhai Naoroji, D. A. Khare, and such other gentlemen as may volunteer for the duty with the sanction and approval of the Standing Congress Committees of their respective Circles.

Once again a number of resolutions to which the only Government answer had been a *non-recevoir* were bundled into an "omnibus resolution" whose clauses covered at least a third of the letters of the alphabet. Kali Charan Bannerji in moving it wittily described himself as "an old driver of your omnibus." But the temperance issue seemed by now to have moved up in the order of Congress priorities, above even the vital issue of Salt Tax and the no less tactically crucial question of the extension of Permanent Settlement. It figured fourth on the order paper, and while welcoming some of the steps taken by the Government such as increasing "the import duty on spirits, the taxation imposed on Indian-brewed malt liquors", abolition of the out-still system by the Bengal Government and the closing of over 7,000 liquor shops by the Madras Government, the resolution urged the Government of India "to insist on all Provincial Administrations, carrying, in their integrity, the policy in matters

of Excise . . ." The feelings seem to have run high on this issue in the Congress and Lala Murlidhar, hailing from the Punjab, was bitterly eloquent in his complaint that the East had given the West mathematics, astronomy and other sciences, and the West had given the East in exchange—liquor. In the atmosphere of ethical earnestness that characterised that late Victorian assembly no cynic rose to suggest, if only in jest, that Scotch for mathematics and astronomy might not be such a bad exchange and, in Annie Besant's words, "Needless to say the resolution was carried unanimously."

Other matters of more practical and immediate import were covered by the resolutions. In addition to appointing a deputation to go to England, the Calcutta session also decided "that provisional arrangements be made to hold a Congress, of not less than 100 delegates, in England, all things being convenient, in 1892, and that the several Standing Congress Committees be directed to report, at the coming Congress, the names of the delegates that it is proposed to depute from their respective Circles." The idea obviously was very seriously entertained at the time and for a long time to come though it never actually materialised.

Partly connected with it, though also for other reasons, the Congress finances had become a matter of urgent preoccupation and this preoccupation was reflected in two resolutions that followed—XII and XIII. The former envisaged that "of the funds now in the Joint General Secretary's hands and about to be received a further sum of twenty thousand rupees be added to the Permanent Fund and placed in fixed deposits, and that the rest of the funds accruing on account of this current year, 1890, be held by him available for the immediate purposes of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, but to be replaced as the subscriptions for 1891 are received, and, ultimately, also added to the Permanent Fund." The latter laid down "that a sum of Rs. 40,000 exclusive of individual donations, is assigned for the British Committee of the Congress and Rs. 6,000 for the General Secretary's office and establishment, and that the several Circles and districts do contribute as arranged in Committee." The Congress was evidently getting organised and was making a determined effort not only to win popular backing for its policies through a systematic campaign of propaganda

and publicity in India, but also carrying its campaign overseas to Britain in order to educate the British public as to the political aspirations of the Indian people to enlist their support and sympathy. Indeed, it seems to have come to regard this work as central to its purpose.

It was also anxious to win and preserve the good opinion of the ruling bureaucratic establishment in India. This was proving to be a harder task. Although it had launched itself on its long political haul with some implied encouragement of the British authorities in India, or at least its benevolent neutrality, which made it possible for the Governor-General and the Governors of the Presidencies to extend to it certain courtesies during the first three years of its existence, the relations had become colder and on the eve of its second Calcutta session an official notice had appeared in the various Calcutta newspapers to the effect that "the Bengal Government having learnt that tickets of admission to the visitors' enclosure in the Congress pavilion have been sent to various Government officers residing in Calcutta, has issued a circular to all Secretaries, and Heads of Departments subordinate to it, pointing out that under the orders of the Government of India, the presence of Government officials, even as visitors at such meetings is not advisable, and that their taking part in the proceedings of any such meetings is absolutely prohibited." A letter by the Private Secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor, a certain P.C. Lyon, written from *Belvedere* to the Secretary of the Reception Committee, J. Ghosal, returned the seven cards of admission to the visitors' gallery and made the same point as the press notice and explained why the Lieutenant-Governor and the members of his household "could not possibly avail themselves of these tickets."

The Congress leadership was rather hurt by this coldshouldering, if not act of open discourtesy. So hurt that it was moved to passing a resolution authorising and instructing the President "to draw the attention of H.E. the Viceroy to the declaration embodied in these papers...and to enquire, most respectfully, whether the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal has, or has not, correctly interpreted the orders of the Government of India." What reply the President received is not known. Perhaps no reply was considered necessary, the meaning of the press notice and

the Private Secretary's letter being plain enough, and the Congress leaders were either being very naive, or simulating innocence for diplomatic reasons, if they thought that the Bengal Government had acted off their own bat without consulting and the consent of the Government of India and the supreme British executive of the Raj—the Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne.

There were two notable and significant features about the Congress session held at Calcutta for the second time. The first was that it did not sit for four days at a stretch, but interrupted its work for one day—December 28—in order to make it possible for another organisation, the Social Conference, to take over the Congress pavilion at the Tivoli Gardens for its business which was not directly related to anything on the agenda of the Congress. However, many of the men and women, though not all, who had been participating in the Congress were also to take a leading part in the work of the Social Conference, having discarded their political hats or turbans and put on whatever headgear, metaphorically speaking, was considered appropriate to their role as social reformers. It was the first occasion since the Congress was launched when an important sideshow took place on the margin of the Congress session, but not the last. In fact, it set a precedent which was often to be followed in the years to come, thus establishing an almost umbilical nexus between the movement of political enfranchisement and emancipation of the Indian people and the somewhat fitful and unevenly articulated movement of social reformation in India.

The other notable—and portentous—feature, perhaps not altogether unrelated to the “happening” on December 28, 1890, was that at the end when the time came for the vote of thanks to the President to be moved, for the first time it was a woman delegate, Mrs. Kadambini Ganguli, who was chosen to do the honour. Having thus made history in a minor way the delegates to the Sixth Congress session dispersed to go their various ways. Not, however, before having agreed to keep a rendezvous next year on December 26, but leaving the place of rendezvous open, the option being “either Madras or Nagpur.”

Nagpur, the capital of what were then known as the Central Provinces, it was to be. Madras had to wait till 1894 for its second turn to host the annual session of the Congress. P. Ananda

Charlu, a remarkable self-made man and scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu, was to preside over the Seventh Congress session. Two other names had also been in the field—S. Subramania Iyer and, Pandit Ajudhianath. But the former had just been elevated to the Bench of the High Court in Madras and the latter had stood down because he wanted the presidency to go to a man from the South.

The session began on a sad and sombre note—with a lament for the illustrious dead. The previous twelve months had been particularly cruel to the Congress. Death, the great vandal, had felled not only T. Madhava Rao and Dr. Rajendralal Mitra, but also Charles Bradlaugh, whom Pherozezshah Mehta in his tribute described as India's "valiant knight who had sworn to do battle for her; her chosen and trusted champion, her true and tender friend, her wise and sober counsellor, her accredited representative in the great and august council of the Empire." And he rounded his lament and tribute with two lines of touching verse :

Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.

The session was not a particularly memorable one except, perhaps, for two things. First, it nearly decided to go into hibernation if not fall into voluntary desuetude. Its very first act was to appoint a high-powered committee whose ex-officio members were the President, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, the General Secretary, the Joint General Secretary, and the Standing Counsels to the Congress, and whose ordinary members included such influential stalwarts as Surendranath Banerjea, Veeraraghavachariar, Hamid Ali Khan, Dinshaw Wacha, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Sankaran Nair. The committee was asked to "consider and report, on or before the morning of the 30th instant, whether or not, it is advisable to discontinue the Annual Sessions of Indian National Congress until after the British Session, and, if not, under what regulations, as to number of delegates, localities for assemblage, and the like, future Congresses shall be held."

Fortunately for it—and India—the committee did not think

it a good idea to discontinue the annual sessions, though the notion had been stirring in some minds for at least two years as may be judged from a letter Dadabhai Naoroji wrote to Malabari in December 1889. "I read in the *Indian Spectator* [Malabari's paper]," he wrote, "that there was an idea of making the Congress quinquennial, and I wrote my views against it in Dinsha's letter...." The committee set up at Nagpur was of the same view as Naoroji's. It reported that, after considering the matter referred to it and informally consulting various members of the Subjects Committee and other delegates, it was "clearly of opinion that it is not advisable to discontinue the Annual Session of the Indian National Congress until after the British Session, and that future Congresses should be held under the same regulations as heretofore." The Congress, therefore, resolved "that the Annual Sessions of the Congress in India continue to be held until all necessary reforms have been secured."

This was just as well. For the British Session of the Congress that the Calcutta Congress had agreed should be held in 1892 had to be suspended without any future date being fixed for it even tentatively. This was done on the recommendation of the British Committee and "in view of the General Election now impending in England." That General Election came and went and many more after that. But although the notion of holding a special session of the Congress in England continued to tantalize many a Congress leader, even men like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, it remained such stuff as dreams are made on and, after the arrival of the Mahatma on the scene, sunk without trace into the vast limbo of unfulfilled human plans.

The other thing which entitles the Nagpur session of the Congress to be remembered is that for the first time ending of Indian poverty was declared to be priority number one in the aims of the Congress. The declaration came in a rather indirect way, but it was nonetheless premonitory. In a telegram General Booth of the Salvation Army fame had commended to the attention of the Congress "the claims of the millions of India's starving poor" and urged "the consideration of some scheme by which these destitute multitudes can be placed upon the waste lands of the country, in such an organised and befriended

manner as will enable them to gain for themselves, those necessities of a healthy existence which, in their present circumstances, are denied." And he had ended with a prayer "for the blessing of God upon the labours of the Congress."

The Congress was duly appreciative of this message and in its telegram in reply to General Booth told him that "the Congress programme now embodies all primarily essential reforms." But it was obviously not persuaded that the problem of Indian poverty could be solved by settling the "destitute multitudes... upon the waste lands of the country." "No possible scheme of internal immigration," its telegram to the Head of the Salvation Army said, "can perceptibly relieve the fifty to sixty millions of half-starving paupers, whose sad conditions constitute the primary *raison d'être* of the Congress. It is only by modifying the adverse conditions out of which this widespread misery arises, and by raising the moral standard of the people, that any real relief is possible." It would seem that the *Garibi Hatao* slogan has a long and very respectable lineage going back as it does to the founding fathers of the Congress....

CHAPTER III

THE PROPER STUDY

It was—as it has remained—a movable feast. From Nagpur in a year's time it was to move for the second time to Allahabad at the heart of the Indo-Gangetic plain. And the Christmas after the tables, so to speak, were laid at Lahore. It was something in the nature of *La Ronde*, too, with the wheel revolving in ever widening circles, first taking in all the capital cities, then other cities and towns, and still later covering in its orbit even minor townships and unheard of places. Always, however, keeping within the limits of what was then British India, although Dadabhai Naoroji had favoured fairly early on extending the scope of its concern to embrace the Princely States of India. "It is desirable," he was to write to Hume in January 1888, "that Native States should be allowed to take an interest in, and help, the Congress and even, if they choose, to find delegates. The Native States have their own wants and grievances, and a body like the Congress and other public associations can alone take up political questions. ...A solidarity of this kind between all the people of India is a thing to be desired. The interests of the Native States are intimately connected with those of the subjects of British India." His idea, of course, was to "carry the Native Princes completely with us"—a tall order—but which he thought would add to the strength of the Congress and "give weight and consideration to the Congress in the opinion of the people here [meaning Britain]." The suggestion, however, was never taken up at the time although much later an Indian States' Peoples Conference was to be formed which was technically an autonomous organisation, but in effect a departmental extension of the Congress.

Meanwhile its nomadic way of life and functioning was not without its method and purpose. It was a kind of practical exercise

in national political integration. By holding its sessions in different places each year and compelling India's political elite to travel to them like pilgrims of olden times, it made it possible for them to "discover" India and acquire some sense of that vast similitude [to borrow Whitman's phrase] which, across all its diversities, interlocks Indian people. That would not have been possible if it had a fixed abode and permanent venue. Its detractors, both at home and abroad, might ridicule its sessions as mobile *tamashas*. And, certainly, there was an element of pure spectacle about the annual Congress sessions and the variety of social and cultural sideshows that went with them, though not in the pejorative sense which its critics and traducers implied. For these sessions soon came to acquire the character of a national *fete*, a political *kermis* and even a *kermis heroique* when, in later years, on occasions in holding them the Congress had to run the gauntlet of physical opposition and obstruction by the secular power as, for instance, at Calcutta in March 1933.

Were there space enough—and time—the temptation would be irresistible to reconstruct and chronicle, however briefly, the highlights of each session, if not over the past hundred years, at least till the last Congress session held at Meerut in 1946 before the "transfer of power". For each had its moment of high drama and even humour and comic relief. But in a sketchy outline of its history, obviously, there is neither space enough—nor time—for any such detailed narrative. We are bound, therefore, to summarize, compress and skip over much that seems arresting and not a little that is significant.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to deal at some length with the Congress sessions between 1885-91 not only because of the nostalgic fascination of those early years beyond recall, but because they were crucial formative years. It has always been the contention of those who preside over the affairs of the Society of Jesus that the foundations of human personality are almost unalterably laid during the first seven years of a child's life, a view which modern psychology tends to confirm. But, perhaps, it applies no less to human institutions. At any rate, it was during the first six or seven years of the Indian National Congress that the pattern of the political reflexes which were to determine and govern its acts and decisions over the next three decades

and more became set. It is even arguable that it never quite shook off those reflexes even though they got overlaid by other and much more radical impulses that it developed, partly in response to the challenges it had to meet and partly because of the widening of its base.

More. These early years not only saw the pattern of the political reflexes of the Congress becoming established; they also witnessed the emergence of the opposing pattern of reflexes—and attitudes flowing from those reflexes—of the British power in India vis-a-vis the Congress. The patronizing posture of complaisance which some of the top men in the British bureaucratic hierarchy in India had been inclined to adopt towards the Congress during the first two or three years of its existence soon yielded place to a visceral sense of apprehension that no matter how amenable and docile the Congress leaders might seem, the very force of things was likely to drive them in time towards an adversarial position either because even their minimal demands were not acceptable to the Government or because, in so far as any political concessions could be made, they were liable to whet the appetite and they were sure, like Oliver, to return to ask for more.

Thus the fear grew that the Congress was no mere supplicant for little crumbs that could be spared by the Government, but a challenger in the making for the ultimate power in India. Nor was this fear just a product of an overwrought and neurotic imagination. Independent British observers who had no particular axe to grind also saw the Congress developing in the fulness of time into a centre of power and authority that must eventually undermine the Raj. Edward Carpenter, for instance, in his book *Adam's Peak to Elephanta* clearly discerned in the Congress sessions "a fact quite comparable to the meetings of the Labour Congresses in late years in the capitals of Europe." He went on to add:

If the Congress movement is destined to become a great political movement, it must, it seems to me, eventuate in one of two ways—either in violence and civil war, owing to determined hostility of our Government; or—which is more likely—if our Government grants more

and more representative power to the people, in the immense growth of political and constitutional life amongst them, and the gradual driving out of British rule thereby... I can neither see nor imagine any other conclusions. The Congress movement being founded on the economic causes—the growth of communications, etc.—it is hard to believe that it will not go on and spread...

What actually came to pass was something of a mix of the two scenarios which Carpenter had envisaged. But either way it was not a prospect which the bureaucratic establishment in India or its principals at home could contemplate with equanimity. The original notion of men like Dufferin that the Congress would serve the purpose of "Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition" in India had gone more than a little awry in its working out—perhaps because it had been wholly misconceived. Not that the Congress in those days was ever remiss in paying in season and out of season its tribute of undying loyalty to Caesar. Even at this distance in time, it is difficult to read without deep embarrassment some of the unctuous outpourings of sycophancy that were heard at these early Congress sessions. They seem to have revolted the small body of radicals in the Congress fold at the time. Lala Murlidhar, an engaging and inveterate *enfant terrible* from the Punjab, for example, was to rise to wag an accusing finger at his sedate colleagues assembled in Lal Bagh at Nagpur and castigate them mercilessly in Urdu for their complicity in the British spoliation and exploitation of India :

You, you, it seems, are content to join with these accursed monsters [meaning "the hag poverty" and its ugly brood to whom he had referred earlier] in battenning on the heart's blood of your brethren (*cries of* No, No.). I say Yes; look round: What are all these chandeliers and lamps, and European-made chairs and tables, and smart clothes and hats, and English coats and bonnets and frocks, and silver-mounted canes, and all the luxurious fittings of your houses, but trophies of India's misery and mementoes of India's starvation! Every rupee you have spent on Europe-made articles is a rupee of which you have robbed your poorer

brethren, honest handicraftsmen, who can now no longer earn a living . . .

And our good Government is so grieved at the decay of all native industries, so anxious that we should once more be in a position to supply ourselves and find work here for our people, that they have established, I believe, nearly one dozen technical schools, amongst 300 millions of people.

The Mahatma himself could hardly have improved upon such plain-speaking. However, if some in the Congress—and, perhaps, even more outside its ranks, especially in Bengal—thought that the Congress was overdoing the loyalty act and scarcely attending to its role as “Opposition” under a system of insidious despotism, on the other sides of the great divide there were many more British officials in active service or retirement who were not at all impressed by the demonstrations of loyalty by the Congress at its annual sessions and saw the cloven hoof of sedition and treachery behind the frequent collective kow-tows. Lepel Griffin in his notorious—and unintentionally hilarious if paranoiac—article in *Fortnightly Review* in 1892 wrote of the Congress :

Th : National Congress is no more representative of India than a Socialist meeting in Hyde Park is representative of England. Its Frankenstein was an Englishman whom a speaker in the House asserted would have been hanged or shot as a traitor under any less mild rule than our own, and whose crazy utterances were wisely denounced by both political parties. But his views have not been disclaimed by the Indian Congress, which has for years past adopted and circulated them, although some representatives of the body in London have found it judicious to condemn them. There is plenty of pretence of loyalty to the Queen in the formal meetings of Congress, but all its proceedings are animated by hostility to the Government of the Queen and to the officers whom she has appointed to administer in her name . . .

Lepel Griffin's outburst against the Congress which he was

convinced was nothing but a conspiracy of "itinerant Bengali agitators" and their converts in other parts of India might have been shrugged off as the delirious gibberish of a reactionary mind at the end of its tether. But the animus against the Congress of which it was a symptom was shared by much of the British officialdom in India and in the North Sea Island. After all, even Dufferin who had much impressed P.C. Mazumdar, the Brahmo leader, by telling him that he was an Irishman himself and it was hardly possible that he should "not sympathise with the aspirations of a nation so similarly circumstanced" as his own, did not leave the shores of India without having a nasty side-swipe at the Congress in his after-dinner speech on St. Andrew's Night which Lepel Griffin could quote in his article with approval. "How could any reasonable man imagine," he had asked his bemused but appreciative audience, rhetorically, "that the British Government would be content to allow this microscopic minority to control the administration of that majestic and multiform Empire, for whose safety and welfare they are responsible in the eyes of God and before the face of civilisation? It appears to me a groundless contention that it represents the people of India. Is it not evident that large sections of the community are already becoming alarmed at the thought of such self-constituted bodies interposing between themselves and the august impartiality of English rule?"

That was at the end of 1888. Whether or not any "large sections of the community" were becoming alarmed at the thought, the British Government and its factotums in India, to say nothing of the British commercial interests, had already become alarmed at the growth of the Congress even before it had properly taken off. Far from looking upon the Congress as their pliable tool, or "running dog" of British imperialism as it was once fashionable to describe it amongst Left-wing publicists, it was plain to most people from fairly early on that the British ruling establishment was increasingly inclined to regard the Indian National Congress as its adversary number one whom it must cut down to size, contain and neutralize politically if not eliminate. If the authorities did not straightaway resort to tough sanctions against it, like proscription and suppression—though there were quite a few muscular men at the various echelons of

the administration who were impatient to use strong-arm tactics to put it down—it was only because the Congress was not doing anything, nor was it contemplating anything, which could provide the administration with an excuse or pretence plausible enough for it to come down on it with a heavy hand and which the Government at home could justify in Parliament.

Other ways and means had, therefore, to be worked out. And they were. Every divisive nerve terminal in the body-social of India was probed and played upon even though by a perverse paradox of imperialism the British power had created for its own needs and economic interests the physical and administrative infrastructure which made sense only in the context of a nation-state, actual or potential. The purpose clearly was to conjure up countervailing fields of force and tension—regional, sectarian and confessional—to hem in the Congress and allow it no room for political manoeuvre. Every species of Quislingism was encouraged and patronage and preferments were dispensed freely to subvert national loyalties. All this was coupled with a propaganda campaign of disinformation and distortion to undermine the credibility of the Congress as a national tribune—and that not only during the season of peace on earth and goodwill towards the humankind when it held its annual sessions, but all the year round and relentlessly.

Indeed, by the early 1890s if not even earlier the battle lines between the British power in India and the Indian National Congress were clearly drawn even though so far as the latter was concerned it could only be fought by it as a battle of wits and a battle of nerves. The lines of Indo-British polemics were also sharply etched out during these early years and they were hardly to change over the next half a century when it was time for the British to depart—and did not wholly change even then. The Congress claimed that India was a nation and it spoke for that nation. "The members of the Congress meet together," Pherozeshah Mehta had declared at Calcutta in 1890, "as men, on the common basis of nationality, being citizens of one country..." Dadabhai Naoroji, after his election to the House of Commons from Central Finsbury in 1892, was to preside for the second time over the Congress session—at Lahore in 1893. In his presidential address he took up the refrain intoned at

every Congress session before—and since. “Let us always remember that we are all children of our Mother country.... Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohammedan, a Parsi, a Christian or of any other creed, I am above all an Indian, our country is India; our nationality is Indian.” And Madan Mohan Malaviya who, in his younger days, rarely failed to come up with appropriate quotations from English verse, at Allahabad stressed the oneness of Indian people by reading a poem which ended with the lines :

The mystic stirring of a common life
Which makes the many one.

But, it may well be asked, why was it considered necessary to harp persistently and so vehemently on what should have been taken for granted? Were not the Congress leaders betraying some inner doubt by protesting too much? The answer is that, in part at any rate, these passionate affirmations of Indian nationhood were provoked by the continuous and well-orchestrated British propaganda, both at home and in India, which denied that there was any such thing as an Indian nation and treated the claims of the Congress to speak on its behalf with at best polite scepticism and more often with insolent ridicule. “The fact of the matter is,” the *Morning Post* wrote loftily while the Bombay session was welcoming Bradlaugh as an honoured guest, “that the fundamental assertion which underlies the entire fabric of the National Indian Congress movement is a fallacy of colossal dimensions. The ‘people of India’ is simply non-existent.”

Nor could this be dismissed as the ignorant twaddle of a Blimpish leader-writer. The *Morning Post* was merely paraphrasing what Sir John Stratchey, an Old India Hand, had written a year earlier in his *India: Its Administration and Progress*: “This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India—that there is not and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious: no Indian nation, no ‘people of India’, of which we hear so much.”

R. Palme Dutt quoting Sir John’s cocksure statement in his

India Today nicely observed that it was evidently made in the spirit of the farmer at the zoo stoutly confronting the giraffe. Unfortunately, however, it was no joking matter. The incredulous farmer—and his incredulity was no less impermeable for being feigned—had the key to the giraffe's cage. From the very start, therefore, the Indo-British impasse seemed total. It could not be broken just by arguing. It certainly speaks much for the monumental patience of the Congress leadership that during the first three and a half decades their whole political effort and strategy was based on the stubborn assumption that somehow the impasse could be resolved or circumvented by means of rational debate and argument even when it must have been clear to any detached observer that it was largely a dialogue of the deaf.

Their patience, moreover, had its peril and the peril was twofold. First, while at the outset it was no doubt dictated by necessity and the recognition that they had no other resource at their command against the entrenched might of an Empire on which the sun was still shining the full sidereal day, except reasoned but humble pleading and invoking parallels and precedents from the British constitutional history, the habit of supplication progressively tended to become second nature with them which inhibited any fresh thinking or working out other forms of persuasion. Secondly—and it was related to the first—there was the peril of a growing short-circuit of understanding between the gerontocracy which ruled the roost at the Congress sessions and the younger generation of politically awakened Indians who, despairing of the tired old rhetoric of constitutionalism, turned to what Annie Besant chose to call "anarchism" and "revolutionary plots" which were to prove no more effective by themselves than the pleas and petitions entered by the Congress patriarchs. All this was to become increasingly apparent with each passing year of the last decade of the 19th century—and after.

The proper study of any political party or movement—and the Indian National Congress was more a movement than a party—is not only what it says from the public platforms but what it does on the ground level. Indeed, the ultimate criterion by which it is judged is the degree of equivalence between what

it says and what it does. Of course, there can never be in this best of all possible worlds a cent per cent equivalence between the word and the deed however desirable it may seem from a perfectionist standpoint. But there is a minimal co-efficient of equivalence between the word and serious endeavour to work out the means to make it flesh below which no political party or movement can afford to fall without not just risking loss of credibility but undermining its own inner sense of relevance. During what has been described as the constitutional phase of its struggle, there were occasions when the Indian National Congress verged on that and the crises which it faced from time to time in holding together ultimately connected with that stultifying deficit.

Not that the programmes for which it opted from session to session ever erred on the side of being over-ambitious. If anything, the demands it made tended to be so "immoderately" moderate that they put off youthful radicals in India from swelling its ranks and embarrassed and even irritated its sympathisers in Britain, like Hyndman who was a close friend of Dadabhai Naoroji and held him otherwise in high esteem. But they nevertheless progressively extended to wider areas of Indian concern and interest. The number of resolutions which came up for debate and were passed at its annual sessions expanded or contracted from year to year, depending on the prevailing situation and public preoccupations at any given time. But in general the trend was for the demands to grow and multiply till there was hardly any sphere of domestic policy—administrative, fiscal and economic, educational and social, judicial and even military—which they did not touch.

Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in *The History of the Indian National Congress*, reviewing the resolutions passed by it between 1885-1918, lists fifty-six different items which they dealt with. These ranged from questions of civil liberties like laws on sedition and press to drink and prostitution, police administration and the system of forced labour (*begar*), currency policy and agricultural indebtedness, Forest Laws and the Arms Act, the plight of Indian students in England and the creation of an independent medical service in India. And his inventory is by no means exhaustive. It misses out, for example, the Congress

demand for the extension of the Permanent Settlement operative in Bengal to other Provinces and Presidencies which for several years loomed large on its agenda but which was allowed quietly to be dropped, partly no doubt because the constituency whose interests it was manifestly intended to serve, the great and medium land-owning gentry, had crossed over to the other side and for all practical purposes was lost to the Congress—for good.

One peculiar and significant lacuna in the Congress programme throughout this period which must strike any student of its history was the blind eye it turned to international politics. While drafting the agenda the Subjects Committee seemed studiously to steer clear of foreign policy issues. Yet most of them were men who followed the tide of world events with great interest. The reason for this remarkable self-denial is not difficult to surmise and has already been mentioned. However, while avoiding any direct and overt trespass into a sensitive field which the British Government jealously guarded as its exclusive preserve, the Congress did manage obliquely to stake India's claim to have its say in matters which were deeply enmeshed with the foreign policy of an empire still in the process of expansion.

Thus from the very first session it politely dissociated itself and India from any acts of policy which involved the use of the country as a launching-pad for aggression against and subjugation of India's neighbours. It opposed the annexation of Burma; it opposed military sorties against Afghanistan; and long before the contours of the "forward policy" became fully fashioned in the firm hands of George Nathaniel Curzon, it subjected it to what for it was severe criticism. At the Sixth Congress session in Calcutta Dinshaw Wacha, who had studied the economic consequences of the policy, tore it apart quite savagely :

It is the so-called defence policy, the safeguarding of our frontiers and transfrontiers from a bugbear of their own creation, which is at the root of the financial embarrassments of the Government, and at the root of the starving and misery which are eating away the lives of tens of millions of our pauper Indians... The embarrassments arising from the fall in the value of silver are a mere fleabite,

compared with the financial difficulties in which the Government of India is plunged by this insane policy....

The persistent pressure for a reduction in the expenditure on the military establishment in India, or at least for freezing it at the level at which it was, was essentially directed against the imperialist foreign policy masquerading as a policy of defence of India's frontiers. Admittedly, it came up against a problem here which left it open to the charge of double-talk and disingenuousness. For in the same breath as it called for reduction of military expenditure which had been escalating from year to year, the Congress was demanding the opening of the higher ranks in the Indian Army to Indians, establishment of military colleges in India, introduction of the system of volunteering for military service and other measures which would make military training more freely available to Indians because, as Raja Rampal Singh was feelingly to complain at the Second Congress, the Government policy had been responsible "for systematically crushing out of us all martial spirit, for converting a race of soldiers and heroes into a timid flock of quill-driving sheep."

But, of course, the main ground on which it based its demands was that it would make the Indian Army more cost effective and might even save the Government some money. As Ali Muhammad Bhimji pointed out at the Seventh Congress that an English soldier cost more to keep in India than in England—Rs. 775 against Rs. 285 (roughly £52 and £19 respectively) when the per capita income in India was thirty shillings and £42 in England. The figures he quoted were incontrovertible, though the Congress leaders were being naive if they thought the economic argument would carry any weight with the Government—in Calcutta or Whitehall.

Indeed, the Congress was being transparent rather than disingenuous in wanting progressive Indianization of an army which was paid for by India but Indian in name only, being officered by the British, with a strong Praetorian British component, and used only to serve British interests. Nor was there any double-talk involved in the case made out by the Congress. For the Congress never claimed—not even during the period of Gandhian ascendancy—that it was a pacifist body or movement.

It certainly wanted a defence policy, but one geared to the defence of India and Indian interests, not the defence of a colonial power and its interests. Similarly, its call for the Indianization of the army in India was of a piece with its call for the Indianization of Indian administration at an accelerated pace.

There was yet another point at which the Congress began to encroach upon British imperial policy towards the end of the century. The second half of the 19th century witnessed the opening up of the African continent, especially south of the Sahara, to intensive and ruthless exploitation by Western imperialism, with British imperialism in the vanguard. As part of this process, the British Government had encouraged the export of Indian, though not only Indian, labour to what is now South Africa and then consisted of four Colonies—Natal, the Cape, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, all dominated by the European settlers, principally the Dutch and the British. The first batch of labourers had gone from Madras and Calcutta in 1860 under the "indenture" or contract system, but under certain guarantees, including the right to return to India on the completion of the contracted period or settle as free citizens "on land allotted to them by the Government equivalent in value to the cost of their return passage." Indian workers, apparently, were considered good value for very little money because they seemed to be more amenable and skilled than their African comrades and ideally suited for developing agricultural, mineral and other resources of the vast virgin lands.

In the wake of Indian labourers followed Indian traders and even professional people so that by the 1880s small but sizeable Indian communities had grown up in all the four Colonies, the largest concentration being in Natal—in Durban. It was to Durban that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had gone in May 1893 on a professional visit. He was shocked to discover the racial discrimination to which the Indian population was subjected in buses, trains, schools and hotels, no Indian being allowed to move from one Colony to another without a permit. Ignoring the guarantees given in 1860 and renewed in 1869, lead was taken by the Transvaal in passing discriminatory legislation in 1885 in contravention of the provisions of the London Convention of 1884 between the British Government and the

Transvaal Dutch Republic which declared that all persons "other than Natives [who were not supposed to have any human rights at all]" would enjoy freedom of movement, residence, ownership of property, and carrying out of business, and that they would not be subject to any taxes other than those imposed on Dutch citizens.

The lead given by the Transvaal was followed by Natal which drafted its own "disabling" Bill to disenfranchise Indians in 1894. It was Gandhi who, on the eve of his return to India after finishing his legal work, saw details of the pending racist Bill in the local newspapers and at once realised what it portended. He brought it to the notice of his Indian friends and acquaintances who, characteristically, seemed blissfully unaware of the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. But once alerted they insisted on his staying in Natal and helping them to fight the Bill. This he did and with his usual single-mindedness and energy. He drafted a series of memorials and petitions to the Governor, the Legislative Council of Natal, to Lord Ripon in England, and to Lord Elgin, the reigning proconsul in India at the time. He wrote letters to the Press. He corresponded with Dadabhai Naoroji and later Wedderburn seeking their help in the struggle against the Franchise Law Amendment Bill. But public opinion at home appeared to be slow in responding to the call for help from their compatriots in South African colonies. It was not until Gandhi came back to India to visit his family and addressed a number of meetings in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta in the summer of 1896 and published his pamphlet—the famous "Green Pamphlet"—entitled *The Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa : An Appeal to the Indian Public*, two editions of which sold out in next to no time, that it began to dawn on Indian politicians what an enormity was about to be perpetrated.

Even so the Congress was somewhat tardy in engaging its interest in the fate of South African Indians. The problem must have seemed far away and out of sight; and what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve over. It was not until two years later that it was persuaded to put it on the agenda of the Fourteenth Congress held at Madras—the fourth to be held there—under the presidency of Anandamohan Bose. It was the twelfth on the list and couched in relatively mild, if not soporific, language:

That this Congress deplores the invidious and humiliating distinctions made between Indian and European settlers in South Africa, a prominent instance of which is afforded by the recent decision of the Transvaal High Court restricting Indians to "locations" and appeals to Her Majesty's Government and the Government of India to guard the interests of Indian settlers, and to relieve them of the disabilities imposed on them.

But it seemed more an act of piety than a commitment of wholehearted and active support though G. Parameswaran Pillai who moved the resolution and R.D. Nagarkar who seconded it spoke strongly. This surmise was proved right when the Fifteenth Congress held at Lucknow in 1899, with Romesh Chunder Dutt presiding, gave the issue of racist legislation against Indians in South Africa a miss. But it was not an issue that was to go away. It returned to the order paper at the Sixteenth Congress which met at Lahore at the dawn of the new century, with N.G. Chandavarkar at the helm, though way down as item number 20, expressing the hope "that in view of the re-arrangement of the boundaries in that Continent and the incorporation of the late Boer Republics into the British Dominions, the disabilities under which the Indian settlers laboured in those Republics, and as to which Her Majesty's Government owing to their independence in internal matters felt powerless to obtain redress, will now no longer exist...."

It was some hope. The Seventeenth Congress session at Calcutta under Dinshaw Edulji Wacha was too busy paying tribute to the Queen-Empress who had died in the meanwhile (not to mention Ranade) and tendering homage to Edward VII who at long last had made it to the British and imperial throne to have much time to devote to the plight of Indians in South Africa. All the same, it managed to squeeze in a brief resolution of sympathy for them, urging the Secretary of State for India "to secure...a just and equitable adjustment" of their claims and even promoted it to the sixth place on the agenda.

But this must have been due to the fact that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, still a relatively unknown figure, was present at the Congress for the first time and, indeed, moved the resolution

on the subject in a brief, matter-of-fact speech. "I appear before you," he said, "not as a delegate, but more as a petitioner on behalf of the hundred thousand British Indians in South Africa." He then pointed out their twofold grievances. "The first class of grievances arises from the anti-Indian attitude of the European Colonists, and the second class of grievances arises from the reproduction of that anti-Indian feeling in anti-Indian legislation throughout the four Colonies in South Africa."

He gave some instances of the first type of grievance including the case of a certain Kaikobad, "son of the late Mr. Cowasjee Dinshaw of Aden", who was returning to Natal from Cape Town when there were plague restrictions in South Africa. The Plague Officer, Gandhi told the Congress, simply said, "I cannot land you; you seem to be an Indian. I have instructions not to land any coloured people at all". It was only after the Colonial Secretary of Natal was sent a telegram and gave his clearance that Kaikobad was allowed to land. "Now, as to the second class of grievances," he added, "so far as Natal is concerned, I am afraid, it is a sealed book. The legislation has been already sanctioned. It prevents any Indian from entering Natal unless he or she can write out in one of the European languages the form attached to the Immigration Act."

The remedy he wanted the Congress to apply was what friends had told him in England. Their advice, he said, was "Move the Indian public; let them hold public meetings; if possible, send deputations to the Viceroy, and do everything that you can do to strengthen our hands here. The authorities are sympathetic and you are likely to get justice." But he wanted more than just sympathy from the Congress; more even than just putting their hands into their pockets. "There are delegates", he said, "who are editors of influential newspapers, there are delegates who are barristers, who are merchants, princes, etc. All these can render very practical aid. The editors can collect accurate information and overhaul in their papers the whole question of foreign emigration and ventilate our grievances systematically. Professional men can serve themselves and their countrymen by settling in South Africa...Gentlemen, if some of the distinguished Indians, I see before me tonight were to go to South Africa...our grievances must be removed."

The resolution was passed unanimously and obviously Gandhi's plea had some impact. For next year at Ahmedabad, with Surendranath Banerjea as President, a much longer resolution was placed fifth in the order of priorities. While noting "with satisfaction the assurance recently given by the Secretary of State for India, to a deputation", it "regretted" that the imperialist spirit of the British Colonies, instead of mitigating the anti-Indian legislation, threatens "to impose further disabilities and hardships on His Majesty's loyal Indian subjects." The Congress leaders seemed not to have grasped that loyalty, like virtue, had to be its own reward under imperialism.

But the moment of truth was drawing near. The following year at Madras there was only one illustrious dead to mourn—the late Raja of Ramnad. Lalmohan Ghose, the first Indian to contest a seat in British Parliament, albeit unsuccessfully, had been "dragged out of his political yogism", as Pherozeshah Mehta was to put it, and persuaded to take on the responsibility of presidency of the Indian National Congress. He provided his audience a rare literary feast by quoting Homer and Virgil and invoking the spirits of Dante and Tasso, Shakespeare and Milton, Corneille and Racine "who though dead, deathless all". But although he laid no claims to Sibyl's "hundred mouths... and adamantine lungs", he found words at once strong enough and subtle enough to condemn the "empty pageant" of Curzon's Darbar in Delhi against a backdrop of "Pestilence and Famine", and spoke of the "bitter memories of the different treatment received by Indians and Europeans" at that imperialist extravaganza, he seemed to overlook the humiliations being heaped on Indians in South Africa.

Nevertheless the issue figured prominently on the Congress agenda as resolution number four. It was also worded more sharply than any previous motion on the subject. "This Congress," it said, "views with grave concern and regret the hard lot of His Majesty's Indian subjects living in British Colonies in South Africa, Australia, and elsewhere, the great hardships and disabilities to which they are subjected by the Colonial Governments, and the consequent degradation of their status and rights as subjects of the King, and protests against the treatment of Indians by the Colonies as backward and uncivilized

“races.” For the first time, moreover, it went beyond mere protest and called for a ban on Indian emigration to these Colonies if the Government were unable to secure equality of treatment for them :

It prays that, in view of the great part the Indian settlers have played in the development of the Colonies and the economic advantages which have resulted both in India and to the Colonies from the emigration to and stay in the latter, the Government of India will be pleased to ensure to them *all the rights and privileges of British citizenship in common with the European subjects of His Majesty [our italics]*, by enforcing, if necessary, such measures as will render it impossible for the Colonies to secure Indian immigrants except on fair, equitable and honourable terms; and that *in view of the great importance of the principle of equal treatment of all His Majesty's subjects [our italics]*, H.M. Government should devise adequate measures to ensure that position to Indian emigrants in all the British Colonies.

Thus, after five years of beating about the bush, the Congress had at last got on to the heart of the matter which Gandhi had recognised and stressed as early as 1897 in his remarkable interview given aboard the *Courland* to a reporter of *The Natal Advertiser*. The *Courland*, it may be recalled, had arrived at Durban on December 18, 1896. But neither she nor another ship, the *Naderi*, which had four hundred Indian passengers aboard, were allowed to unload their human cargo on the ostensible—and partly just—ground that Bombay from whence they had sailed was plague-infested. While they were kept in the outer harbour at Durban, the Whites of Natal had begun to agitate vigorously against the Indians being permitted to disembark and set up a “Demonstration Committee” to prevent what they called an “Asiatic Invasion”. However, as after a month of what was prolonged quarantine no incidence of plague had come to light, the yellow flag was lowered on January 13, 1897, and a reporter of *The Natal Advertiser* went on board the *Courland* to interview

Gandhi who was returning to Durban from India having been recalled by the Indian community by cable.

It was a long interview and was published by the paper the next day. Many of the questions were loaded as, for example, whether he had gone to India "to blacken the character of the Natal Colonists". He answered them all, as was his wont, frankly, patiently and courteously. In the course of the interview he also referred to Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 which many a British administrator later devoutly wished she had not been foolish enough to make. For it pledged that all subjects of Her Majesty would be treated on a footing of equality without distinction of race, colour or creed. The Proclamation, of course, only applied to India—and even in India it was being more often ignored than honoured. But Gandhi argued that the policy it enunciated should be followed throughout the Colonies "if all the parts of the British Empire are to remain in harmony."

It was a view shared by the Congress though it was not until Gandhi had begun to agitate against the racist laws in South Africa that were directed against the Indians there that it hitched on to one of the great themes of the liberation movements in the modern world which was to become an integral part of its policy not only during the period of the struggle for freedom, but even after when it became the ruling party and formed a government in post-independence India. And so it remains to this day. Incidentally, moreover, in concerning itself with the problem of Indians in South Africa it established its initial line of communication with Gandhi, the great political alchemist of our age though still only in the making, who within two decades was to become its supreme guide and leader and set about, not always successfully, transmuting by his magic touch the common and tawdry stuff of Indian politics, if not into 24-carat gold, at least a worthwhile quarry from which high grade ore could be extracted.

By taking up the issue of discriminatory laws against Indians in South Africa, the Congress had enlarged the scope of its concern beyond the shores of India proper at a time when it already had plenty on its plate. With each passing year and gradually its commitments were multiplying. Any and every public cause or grievance, whether it related to civil liberties or

economic and social inequity, seemed eventually to become grist to its mill which turned out more and more resolutions every year. No doubt there were other organisations in the field. But for the most part they took up sectional, sectarian or provincial matters. And because they were seen by the ruling power as potential counterweights to and vehicles of containment of the Congress, they received official encouragement and patronage. But the Congress alone concerned itself with things that touched Indian humanity as a whole and as such had by the turn of the century grown into a kind of national ombudsman's office long before the idea had been thought of and the term coined. It enjoyed no official recognition; indeed, after a brief initial period of complaisance, the Government looked upon it with increasing mistrust and suspicion, to the point where even some of its most respectable leaders, like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, as Annie Besant recorded, were kept under police surveillance. But it had acquired a degree of influence and moral authority in the country at large which the Government could not wholly ignore however hard it might try to oppose or neutralize it.

This was no mean achievement, especially "in a land where enthusiasm is generally short-lived and every page of contemporary history records large movements supported by small efforts", as V.S. Srinivasa Sastri remarked in his introduction to a collection of Congress Presidential Addresses delivered and resolutions passed during its first twenty-four years and published by G.A. Natesan, one of the pioneers of national publishing. However, its founding fathers had conceived of it as forming "the germ of a Native Parliament." How was it measuring up to this high responsibility? The answer, even of friendly and charitable observers, could only be—not too well.

True, each year the Congress met—usually on the Boxing Day which had led a newspaper wit in England to call it "the Great Indian Pantomime"—to proclaim loudly that its eyes were set firmly on the distant goal of representative institutions for India based on the "elective principle". The resolutions it passed, as individual items or under an omnibus title, might have changed in phraseology, but their overt and covert thrust was the same. Whether it asked for the abolition of the India Council in London which it rightly saw as one of the principal pillars of

the structure of bureaucratic despotism, or demanded reform of the Governor-General's Council and Provincial Legislative Councils which Pandit Ajudhianath had described as "a melancholy farce" in Bradlaugh's hearing at Bombay because they functioned largely as official rubber-stamping machines, or wanted Legislative Councils to be set up in emergent provinces like the Punjab and the Central Provinces—their purpose was always crystal clear, namely, to get the democratic process going throughout British India on a uniform basis.

Indeed, even its other major demands—administrative reforms, the separation of judiciary from the executive, the Indianization of the services at a quicker pace, the expansion of higher education and setting up of facilities for technical training, and the rest—were part of Fabian tactics of securing for Indians access not yet to the commanding heights of power but at least intermediate levers of decision which would make further advances a little easier. It was, as it were, a plan for "the long march through the institutions", historically conditioned by the fact that the Congress as then constituted was not equipped for any other kind of long march, either through the mountains or to the salt sea beaches.

Fabian tactics, however, were making little or no impact on the citadel of power and authority. Nothing can be had just for the asking and certainly not freedom and democratic institutions. Bureaucratic Jerichos were not going to crumble at the blasts from even the best of oratorical trumpets of which the Congress had no dearth. Its reasoned arguments were ridiculed as the "flatulent verbiage" of the "Baboo" who, said the *Globe*, "is afflicted with a fatal desire to 'shout'; not even Mr. Gladstone himself more dearly loves to hear the sound of his own voice." The "Baboo", the mythical hate-object who figured so large in the popular "Anglo-Indian" bestiary, at least could console himself with the thought that he was in good company in his love-affair with his own voice. But the Congress as the tribune of the Indian people had no such consolation available to it. Rather, it had the mortifying knowledge that its voice was not being heard at all. It could pass all the resolutions it wanted. But the Government had no intention of heeding them. Thus,

instead of forming "the germ of a Native Parliament", it was in grave danger of becoming a mock parliament.

It could—and did—bring its catalogue of demands to the notice of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India in London. On special occasions, it appointed high-level deputations to call on the Viceroy and Governor-General to convey to him in person what the Congress wanted by way of reforms in the system. These deputations were received courteously enough. But they might as well have explained their wishes to a stone wall for all the response they evoked. Nor were their representations in the various council chambers to which a few of them had access any more effective. It was a classical example of a dialogue of the deaf. One thing might conceivably have persuaded the British authorities to pay some heed to them—if the Congress could have invoked the sanction of a mass movement as a means of pressure.

Unfortunately, however, the Congress during these early decades was not in a position—and did not even seem willing—to do so. It was not an altogether "elitist" organisation. Had it been so, it would have been better organised. It is a curious fact worth noting that for the first fourteen years of its life it had no constitution worth the name and functioned on more or less ad hoc basis which might not have been altogether a disadvantage since there is no evidence that parties or movements which start with a fixed constitution prosper any better than those which work without a rigid constitutional framework. At all events, it was not until 1899 that the Indian National Congress at its session in Lucknow adopted a sort of constitution.

What is even more pertinent to note is that there is no resolution during this early phase which lays down any programme of work at the grassroots to mobilize popular support for the Congress demands on the Government for democratic reforms. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in his *The History of the Indian National Congress* has divided the period between 1885-1916 into two unequal parts. The first—between 1885-1905—he characterises as the "Era of Reforms", meaning, presumably, that the Congress asked for no more than reforms in the existing structures. The second—between 1906-1916—he describes as the "Era of Self-Government" because by now the Congress had plucked

up the self-confidence and courage to ask for fully responsible system of government on the lines of other self-governing parts of the British Empire, like Canada, Australia and South Africa. In dealing with this period of three decades or more he passes in "rapid review" all the resolutions Congress adopted and then goes on to offer brief bio-data of British friends of the Congress and those whom he calls "our Indian Patriarchs." But one looks in vain in his account for any mention of the political activities undertaken by the organisation beyond holding its annual sessions. Nor does he refer to its setting about creating any effective machinery or trained cadres for such work.

The assumption, therefore, must be that there were none. This assumption also finds confirmation in Annie Besant's *How India Wrought for Freedom*. In many ways it is a most useful work though it only covers the first twenty-nine years of the Congress. Basing herself on records of the Congress, she provides summaries of what was said and done at each Congress session, followed by complete texts of the resolutions passed at every session. But what is surprising is that there is a complete blank in between the sessions as though the Congress, having met for three or four days, went into a period of suspended animation which, of course, is a misleading impression. Some routine work must have been done; the Congress leaders made speeches and held meetings. Some of them actually found themselves on the wrong side of the law and went to jail. But it was for the most part because of their participation in agitations which were not directly sponsored by the Congress and of which the Congress often did not approve and to which it was rather slow and reluctant to give even its moral support.

However, the paradox is that if the Congress undertook hardly any systematic political follow-up work in between the sessions during these early decades in India proper, it did take considerable pains to organise fairly consistent and sustained publicity and propaganda for the Indian cause five thousand miles away—in Britain. At the root of this paradox was the belief, very widely shared among the Indian liberal and even not-so-liberal intelligentsia, that the key to the Kingdom—and political progress in India—lay in the Palace of Westminster. Ram-mohun Roy himself had been the first to entertain this strange

notion and to act upon it during his stay in England when the renewal of the East India Company's Charter was under debate in Parliament. It informed many of the efforts made during the second half of the 19th century to set up Indo-British societies and associations in London to publicize the case for Indian reforms and the implementation of the pledges contained in the Royal Proclamation of 1858. Especially, during its closing two decades the belief seemed to harden into a conviction that if only somehow some Indians and British friends of India could get themselves elected to the House of Commons, the pace of democratic reforms in India could be considerably accelerated through effective representation of Indian grievances in the Mother of Parliaments.

The parallel of the Irish Party in the Commons undoubtedly had some influence on Indian thinking on this matter. So, curiously, too, had the example of Pondicherry. As early as 1888 at the Allahabad session of the Congress a delegate from Madras, S. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, had invoked the Pondicherry parallel to reinforce his argument in support of truly representative institutions in India. He pointed out that such institutions were flourishing in the French enclave not far from Madras. "I do not know," he said, "whether you are aware how they are flourishing in Pondicherry and other places which are subject to the French Government. England will not yet allow us the smallest modicum of representative institutions, but in Pondicherry every man has a right to elect his representative. He enjoys manhood suffrage! Not only that, but the people of Pondicherry have got a member of their own in the Chamber of Deputies and another in the Senate."

It was not until sixteen years later that the Congress at its Twentieth annual session held for the third time in Bombay under the presidency of Sir Henry Cotton, a former Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal who had blotted his copy-book with Curzon by taking sides with the plantation workers against the planters in Assam and other acts of independence of judgement, that it passed a resolution—number nine on the order paper—asking, among other things, for "the bestowal on each Province or Presidency of India of the franchise to return at least two members to the English [*sic*] House of Commons."

This demand was to be repeated at the next Congress session held under Gokhale's presidency. And then it was dropped, partly because of other developments, but more because it was realised that it was a non-starter.

However, even before the Congress was born attempts were made to get Indians into the British Parliament. In the general election of 1885, for instance, an effort was made to make India an issue and a leaflet and poster campaign on a substantial scale was organised in Britain to project "Indian view of Indian questions", as an anonymous "English Elector" had suggested in a letter to the *Bombay Gazette* in August of that year. More: a number of meetings were held where "delegates" from India addressed British audiences, not apparently to the liking of British Tories who resented Indian intervention "*a la* Irish, in a British general election" as Dr. Mehrotra observes in his book, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress*. The central figure behind this campaign was William Digby, at one time editor of the *Madras Times* and later secretary of the National Liberal Club in London, who had offered to stand as a "Member for India" on condition that his expenses and maintenance were met as they were, in fact, by the Bombay Presidency Association and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. Nor was he the only candidate on behalf of India. Lalmohan Ghose, later to be a President of the Congress, was also a candidate. But the experiment was something of a fiasco. "Lalmohan Ghose and all their 'friends,'" Dr. Mehrotra remarks, "without one single exception, were defeated; all their 'enemies', also without one single exception, were elected to Parliament."

Despite this, however, the campaign for building up a favourable public opinion in Britain behind the Indian demands was not abandoned. Digby had the support, among others, of Ripon and Dadabhai Naoroji. The latter, according to R.P. Masani, his biographer, "ever since the inauguration of the Congress... had been pressing on his colleagues in India the need for establishing a political agency to represent officially the Congress in England and to awaken the British public to a sense of the wrongs of India." As always, the difficulty of raising finances for the venture "was a deterrent factor." Dadabhai was willing to act

as Agent to the Congress on a voluntary basis, "but even the funds for other expenses for propaganda could not be found."

Eventually, Digby, with Dadabhai Naoroji's encouragement, worked out a detailed scheme for setting up the Agency and the plunge was taken. An office was opened at 25 Craven Street—next door to Charing Cross Station—a street where, by a strange coincidence, V.K. Krishna Menon's India League acquired premises for its India Club for some years after the Second World War. Soon after the British Committee of the Indian National Congress was formed with Sir William Wedderburn as its Chairman and the Agency merged with it in the late summer of 1889. The same year at its session in Bombay which Bradlaugh attended as an honoured guest the Congress formally pronounced its benediction on the British Committee and accepted in principle the responsibility for raising funds for the Congress work not only in India, but also in England. Next year it went further and assigned Rs. 40,000—not a small sum in those days—"exclusive of individual donations...for the expenses of the British Committee of the Congress." Four years later the allocation for the British Committee was raised to Rs. 60,000—a figure at which it was stabilized in 1898. After that funds assigned for the British Committee became rather erratic till they trailed off into vague and pious appeals for raising funds to meet its needs.

There is no question that the Committee did pioneer work both in Parliament and outside to present the case for democratic reforms in India. In Parliament at one time it had more than sixty members on its roll-call who could be relied upon to go into the voting lobby in support of any motion favouring political advance in India. Although the membership of this "Parliamentary Committee" was open to both parties, the Tories gave it a wide berth and heartily disapproved of it. Lepel Griffin obviously had them in mind when in his ill-tempered article in *Fortnightly Review* he wrote: "While the number of members who possess a practical knowledge of India has been lately much diminished by death and retirement, the number is ever increasing of those who find India during the cold weather months an agreeable change from Egypt and the Riviera, and who are able to pick up, during their tour, enough information to mislead

them on the complicated problems of Eastern administration. Many of these gentlemen start on their travels with a mind blank and unprejudiced, prepared to adopt the opinions of those who are most anxious to misinform them and win them over as advocates in Parliament of crude and impracticable measures. Others start with a carefully selected budget of prejudices on the opium question, the liquor traffic, the salt tax, the political representation of the natives...."

Warming up to his theme, he lumped the whole pro-Indian lobby in Parliament as "the bores, the faddists, the fanatics and the most unscrupulous opponents of the Government of the day...." And coming down from the general to the concrete particular, he picked on an honourable member, whose name, he remarked with an undertone of racist sarcasm, "by a cruel irony suggests the swan" and who, he bemoaned, "devoted a large portion of his speech to a panegyric of the National Congress, in which he said: 'India has a national voice, and that voice to a large extent is the Indian National Congress'."

This was probably a reference to E.C. Schwann a Liberal MP who was friendly to India and who the previous summer had given an "At Home" in honour of the Indian delegation which the Congress had sent to Britain to win support for the political reforms which it was advocating. Lepel Griffin was particularly incensed because leading Liberals had attended that function, among them Asquith (already a QC and MP) and Gladstone himself had promised to come—he had already received the delegation in his rooms in the Commons—but at the last minute could not because of an unforeseen complication.

Nor was the work of the British Congress Committee confined to lobbying Members of Parliament. It was an important part of the work, but equally important was its campaign of meetings in all parts of Britain to present the Indian point of view to the British people. These meetings were addressed not only by members of the British Committee, but also very distinguished visiting Congressmen, among them Surendranath Banerjea, Bipin Chandra Pal, Pherozeshah Mehta, A.O. Hume, Eardley Norton, Shurf-ud-Din and W. C. Bonnerjee. What is more, the Committee was not only able to enlist the services of the old Congress stalwarts, whether resident in England or visiting

in its well-planned campaign for the dissemination of what it considered as accurate information about the state of India to counter the official propaganda put out by much of the British Press and lapped up by the public. It also gave an opportunity to young, up-and-coming Indians who happened to be in England for studies or other reasons and who were later to make their mark in Indian politics, to serve their apprenticeship in public speaking.

One such young man was C.R. Das who, addressing a Liberal meeting in Oldham in November 1890, allowed his feelings to run away with his tongue and lashed out at a diehard Tory MP, Maclean. Not content with saying that Maclean had earned for himself the "notoriety of lasting infamy", he went on to urge that "when Mr. Maclean ventured to speak again" he should receive "such a welcome as would make him fly away from the country whose air he had polluted with his pestilential breath." This was rather strong stuff for a British audience and embarrassed Herbert Gladstone, the fourth son of the Grand Old Man, who was presiding. Young C.R. Das was thought to have "gone a little further than was customary on an English platform."

Besides lobbying Parliament on India's political claims and organizing and addressing public meetings to the same end, the British Committee of the Congress ventured into publishing, bringing out pamphlets and leaflets, and, most important of all, a journal "for the Discussion of Indian Affairs." It was called *India* and began as a monthly publication but was turned into a weekly from September 1893. Priced at first at two pence (annual subscription two shillings and six pence, post free, and Rs. 3 for India), it began publication in February 1890. Its first editor was a Balliol man, H. Morse-Stephens, Lecturer in Indian History at Cambridge. Later, when it became a weekly, the editorship passed to Gordon Hewart. But both as a monthly and a weekly it set a very high standard in journalism and was one of the most serious efforts of its kind devoted wholly to the cause of India outside the country. Its circulation was never very large. Indeed, it was able to keep afloat largely because the Congress in India had guaranteed a sale of 4,000 copies and fixed a quota

for which each Province and Presidency had to take responsibility for effective sales and distribution.

The quotas which the Congress set throw an interesting side-light on the readership potential of each Congress "Circle" and, therefore, furnish a rough political literacy rating in each case as the Congress leadership assessed it. Thus Bengal, rightly, was allotted the highest quota—1,500 copies. It was followed by Bombay with 1,000 copies. Next came Madras and, rather surprisingly, Berar and the Central Provinces, with 700 and 450 copies respectively. The benighted North West was assigned 350 copies in all of which 250 were supposed to be taken by the North West Province and Oudh and 100 went to the Punjab. Not that the allotted quotas were always taken in full. For there were frequent complaints at the Congress sessions of serious shortfalls in their fulfilment of responsibility to *India*. Evidently, Congressmen even in those days when they had not yet developed a reflexive allergy to serious reading, were rather remiss in doing their duty towards what was for all practical purposes a party journal.

Nevertheless, and although often short of funds, *India* continued for three decades—a record of longevity for any Indian journal published in Britain to date—valiantly to provide a varied, wholesome and well-balanced menu of informative and interpretative articles on many aspects of Indian life and polity. It also gave news of events in India and reports on Congress sessions. From time to time it published light verse and even well-meaning and sentimental fiction, not to mention interviews with visiting personalities from India, like Vivekananda and Annie Besant, and authoritative reviews of books on Indian themes. Its critique of the Indian policy of the British Government, although conceived within the parameters of constitutional liberalism to which the Congress was committed at the time, was often devastating and much bolder than what the Congress spokesmen at home and the Indian Press ventured to offer, partly no doubt because it did not constantly have to thumb through the Indian Penal Code and all the sedition laws and repressive regulations operative in India. Not the least important service to its readers was its parliamentary reporting of debates and interpellations on Indian affairs at a time when the Indian Budget still had to be

presented and passed at Westminster, not in India. All through its life-span it maintained a high quality and presented the Indian case persuasively and to advantage. It was able to do that because it could draw on a large reserve of distinguished talents—and even mature wisdom—among its contributors, regular or occasional, who included Sir William Wedderburn, Dadabhai Naoroji, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Allan Octavian Hume, Surendranath Banerjea and Florence Nightingale. In any serious history of the Congress, it would always merit more than just a footnote in small print.

So, too, would the British Committee of the Congress. It really was a body of “the most earnest labourers in the cause of national [that is, Indian] progress.” It worked steadily and systematically to create public opinion in Britain favourable to democratic reforms in India. The only parallel to the labour it put in is perhaps the work of the India League in Britain during the 1930s and till the “transfer of power” came about, though the constituency which the League worked to win over was the Labour Party and Transport House, not the Liberal Party and the National Liberal Club. It can even be argued that the British Congress Committee was much more of a spokesman for the Indian National Congress than the India League which had close links with the Congress but was not wholly identified with it.

However, it is not easy to say whether or not the British Congress Committee and its journal *India* were able to make any effective dent in the viscous amalgam of vested British economic, military and bureaucratic interests, on the one hand, and the thick layers of ignorance of and prejudices about India, on the other. Perhaps there was something on the credit side in the initial period, partly because the British political establishment had amongst its members some survivors of the mid-Victorian Liberals who, as Dr. Anil Seal remarks in his *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, subscribed to “the logic of Cobdenism” and “relied on influence and looked askance on rule.” But they were fast disappearing and, paradoxically, towards the turn of the century and the first decade of the 20th century imperialist attitudes and ideas, in the proper sense of the term, were actually hardening and gaining ascendancy, partly because, again to quote Dr. Seal, “the patterns of Indian trade were fitting

conveniently into the international needs of the British economy" and "India took its place beside the United Kingdom as a second nucleus of British expansion."

This ought to have been obvious to the Congress leadership at home as well as men like Dadabhai Naoroji who were working overtime in Britain "to inform the British public of the evils of the present system of government and get it reformed on righteous lines", as he wrote to Motilal Ghose in July 1897. The former's own experience verging on humiliation might have been expected to bring home to him that what had been a reactionary undertow in British politics in the early 1890s had by the middle of the last decade of the 19th century become a gathering tide. It had led to his own unseating at Central Finsbury in the general election of 1895 which his biographer, R.P. Masani, attributes to the powerful alliance against him of "the Church and the liquor interest". Undoubtedly, that alliance did work against him since he did not belong to the Kingdom and was also a strong supporter of the Temperance movement which was an essential item of the Congress programme from the start. But his defeat was symptomatic of the general recession in Liberal fortunes which put the Liberal Party on the defensive for a long time to come and, in a sense, on the road to its ultimate decline as a major political force in Britain. It also made it impossible for him ever again to be adopted as a Liberal candidate and led to the humiliating fiasco of his rejection by North Lambeth which he contested as an independent ten years later.

These disappointments at the personal level were paralleled by frustration, or at least stagnation, of the cause which Naoroji and the British Congress Committee were trying assiduously to advance. The reasoned argument to convince the ruling establishment in Britain—its agents in India, in any case, were not open to any conviction on this count—that it had more to gain from going along with India's claim for the democratisation of the system of governance of the country than by resisting it obdurately, was making little or no headway. Outsiders, at any rate, saw this clearly. Hyndman, a friend of Dadabhai and a leading Socialist, was to write to him rather irritably early

in 1898 :

What do you judicious people gain by your moderation? What does your journal *India* gain by its dullness that can be felt? To the naked eye, and even to the microscope, nothing! They just kick you and pass sedition acts over you, and lie about you, even more than they do with us. We, at least, have the satisfaction of chasing them, deriding them, making them look ridiculous, and driving them into furious anger. Moreover, we are getting ready for the inevitable crash which is coming—not in India alone. Suave, moderate gentlemen don't get much attention when 'the band begins to play', so they might at least be heard now—but they aren't.

This was not the first time—nor the last—when Hyndman had criticised Dadabhai Naoroji and his friends for being too meek and mild in presenting their case and warned them that the British ruling class was not going to do anything “unless some serious agitation is set on foot.” Like many a Socialist of his day, he was an impatient man and believed in the imminence of a Socialist apocalypse. But there was, all the same, a valid point in his critique of the moderation to which the Congress seemed addicted. Dadabhai, one of the most intellectually honest Congress leaders of his time and since, acknowledged as much in his reply to Hyndman three days later:

All that you say is true, but Indians cannot do yet what you say. You should realize their position in every respect.... India [meaning the journal] represents Indians, not Englishmen, and India can only speak as Indians should....The Government are now openly taking up a Russian attitude, and we are helpless. The mass of the people yet do not understand the position. John Bull does not understand the bark. He only understands the bite, and we cannot do this.

That was the heart of the trouble and neither the British Congress Committee, nor its journal *India*, could do anything to rectify this deficit. It was the Congress in India which seemed to be toothless and unwilling or unable to grow any political teeth or even equip itself with dentures....

CHAPTER IV

CRISIS OF CONSTITUTIONALISM

"The salvation of India, in spite of the justice of England," R.D. Rusden, a Manchester businessman of radical views who was an occasional contributor to *Mahratta*, advised the Indian delegation which had hopefully travelled to Britain to canvass support for the redress of Indian grievances during the British general election of 1885 when the beguiling notion of building up an "Indian Party" in the House of Commons was very much in the air, "must come from India itself." Dr. S.R. Mehrotra in his book, already mentioned, quotes a report published by Malabari's *Indian Spectator* on December 6, 1885, according to which Rusden urged his Indian interlocutors to "start in India a great Indian Reform League...having a big branch in every big city, and a small branch in every small town, so that when they make a demand, the English Government may know that it is made, not only by a few clever men, or a few journalists, or a small minority of the people of India, but by the people of India itself."

Rusden's view of the inefficacy of bringing about any major reform of the Indian system by a small elite trying to work on another small elite at Westminster was shared by other British friends of India, including Hume and R.D. Osborne, both of whom were sceptical about the value of an "Indian Party" in the House of Commons. "So far as my experience goes," Osborne wrote in a despatch to the *Statesman* in August 1885, "I have found that this organizing an Indian party in Parliament, is like trying to make rope out of sand. There is no difficulty in inducing a goodly roll of members to subscribe their names as belonging to an 'Indian Party', but that having been done, no method has yet been discovered of holding the party together. There is nothing for it to do, except from time to time to ask questions of

the Secretary of State for India, and a party cannot live upon questions alone, more especially when nothing is elicited by these questions, except the lies and prevarications elaborated for that special purpose, in that great manufactory of falsehood—the London India Office....An Indian Parliamentary party can only then become an efficient agency for the reform of Indian abuses, when it speaks and acts as the accredited representative of a National party in India itself....”

Osborne was, of course, right about the folly of the notion that if only a sufficient number of Members of Parliament could be persuaded to enroll in support of the cause of democratic reforms of British rule in India which Dr. Seal nicely describes as “an unabashed autocracy, tempered by the rule of law” (though he might have added that the tempering law was also devised by the same “unabashed autocracy”), then such reforms would have followed automatically as day the night. He was right, too, in suggesting that only if there were a strong “National Party” in India commanding mass support would the British Government have been inclined to pay heed to its demands. The Indian National Congress may not have been a National party of the kind that Osborne had in mind, but it was already the vehicle of a growing national political consensus and it could have built up a powerful head of steam behind its programme of reforms if it had really set about it.

But there came the rub. Its leadership was neither temperamentally nor intellectually equipped for the kind of effort needed to stir up things at the grassroots; effort which required going down to the dust where the Indian humanity lived and moved and had its being and upturning virgin soil. It would be unfair to say that when the Congress leaders spoke tearfully of the condition of the Indian people, it was merely as a political ploy. But despite the setting up of Congress “Circles” in many regions of India they seem to have given little thought to building effective and two-way channels of communication with their popular base.

They were, moreover, prisoners of the constitutional concepts that had conditioned their ways of thought and response and of the methods which these dictated. The British ruling establishment was not so absent-minded as not to have been aware of

this. Indeed, it had a good measure of them and was determined that they should not break out of this prison-house of their own creation much more effective than any of the magnificent jails which the British had generously built all over India and which were to house Congressmen and Congresswomen of a later generation. Through intimidatory techniques of psychological warfare, both subtle and unsubtle, the Government kept the Congress leaders on the defensive. And every time it accused the Congress of being a potential nucleus of sedition and even rebellion, the Congress hands went up in loud and almost abject protestations of unswerving loyalty to the British Crown and repudiation of any thought of sedition or rebellion. The great Surendranath Banerjea himself in his presidential address to the Eighteenth session of the Congress at Ahmedabad in 1902 was so carried away by the irresistible momentum of his own eloquence as to forget that all is evanescent in this universe of sense and succession and declaimed: "We plead for the permanence of British rule in India." And he probably meant it. For what may well have been at the start for some a tactical posture had through constant repetition become for quite a few of the Congress leaders an automatism of reflexive humility verging on servility. Little wonder that it jarred on relatively independent spirits like Hyndman who wrote to admonish Dadabhai Naoroji at the end of March 1900 :

Yes, I saw your memorial in *India*. I consider it much too humble in tone. After all, though politeness is well, after compliments and so forth, you are a representative of 250,000,000 of people—a great position and one which in my judgment calls for even haughty language on your behalf. One of the commonest charges brought against India is that its natives are "servile". You are very far from that. But the tone of your memorial jars on me. I must say. I remember being with my old friend—Giuseppe Mazzini, the great Italian—one day in his poor rooms in the Fulham Road. We were talking in the easiest and pleasantest way. To us was shown in an emissary from King Victor Emmanuel. You should have seen the old man straighten up and have heard him talk. It was one power talking to, and almost down to, another...

And what jarred on Hyndman must have jarred on many of the younger generation in India, too. But the difficulty was that having been once persuaded that they were entering into parleys of a kind with the British power from a position of weakness, the dominant Congress leadership found it hard to see the enormous reserves of strength upon which they could draw if they could overcome their own inner hesitations and inhibitions. Yet the cruel irony was that their pleas and supplications were getting them nowhere and proving to be counter-productive. The more they bowed and scraped before the symbols of British authority the less inclined the British proconsuls and even their underlings were to take any notice of, much less listen to, them. The crowning humiliation came when Sir Henry Cotton, who presided over the Twentieth session of the Congress held at Bombay in 1904, had the temerity to seek a meeting with Curzon during what turned out to be the last year of his proconsular glory in India. Sir Henry had requested a meeting, it seems, because he had been asked to lead a deputation "to present to His Excellency personally a copy of the resolutions passed at the recent session of the Congress...." Curzon, of course, had old scores to settle with Sir Henry Cotton, but at all events he had no wish to be seen receiving a deputation headed by the Congress President which might give the Congress ideas of its own importance. He refused the request.

However, these petty and Philistine discourtesies apart, there was not much the Congress could show for its patient and persistent pleadings and essays in persuasion during the first two decades of its work. Any political concessions which the British Government agreed to give were doled out with coffee spoons and served in leaking cups. Lord Cross' Indian Councils Act passed in 1892 which the Congress "accepted in a loyal spirit," for instance, was something of a fraud. As the Congress lamented in its resolution passed at its annual session at Allahabad in 1892, it "does not, in terms, concede to the people the right of electing their own representatives to the Council", though it "hopes and expects that the rules, now being prepared under the Act, will be framed on the lines of Gladstone's declaration in the House of Commons, and will do adequate justice to the people of this country...." Again, it was some hope. In fact, the Liberal

administration was by no means liberal in dealing with India and the bipartisanship which was later to characterise Britain's policy on India—and not only India—was already an established fact.

Other crumbs of comfort which were dropped were even more disappointing. The Public Service Commission appointed in 1886 duly reported in 1888 and took away more by one hand than what it gave with the other. "The whole report is a monstrous, one-sided pleading", Dadabhai wrote to Wacha and wanted the Indian Press and Associations to attack it. He thought the Secretary of State's despatch to the Commission to be even worse, "legally wrong and morally worse." As for the resolution passed by the House of Commons in 1893 supporting the simultaneous holding of examinations in England and India for the Indian Civil Service—on which the Congress had been very persistent and even passionate—it was to remain pigeon-holed for twenty years and more.

There was another issue on which the Congress felt very strongly—the way in which India had to carry the financial burden not only for the India Office establishment in Whitehall, but also for the upkeep of British military and naval bases in Eastern waters, like Aden, to say nothing of wars of aggression against India's neighbours. At every Congress session the matter came up and resolutions were passed asking for an end to this inequity. At last at the end of May 1895 a Royal Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Welby was appointed to go into "the administration and management of the Military and Civil Expenditure incurred under the authority of the Secretary of State for India in Council...and the apportionment of charges between the Governments of the United Kingdom and India for purposes in which both were interested." For the first time an Indian was asked to join the Commission. The choice could not have been better: for it was Dadabhai Naoroji MP for Central Finsbury. Moreover, two other members of the Commission, Sir William Wedderburn and W.S. Caine were, as R.P. Masani rightly remarks, "as good if not better than Indians."

All the same, and inevitably, the majority were not only British but came to their task with anything but open minds. This is clear from the way they cross-examined Dadabhai who decided to appear before the Commission as a witness because he

felt that the Commission would then be under some obligation to take note of and deal with the issues which he regarded as crucial. The following exchange which took place between the Chairman, Lord Welby, for instance, and Dadabhai, illustrates the point:

Lord Welby: "But the history of India is that the people have been continually slaughtering each other?"

Dadabhai: "What have you done here? What is the history of Europe? We do not want to go back, because we have learnt as you have learnt."

Lord Welby: "Is your recipe for reviving the prosperity of India to let loose the Pindaris?"

Dadabhai: "Not necessarily. Those days are gone...."

With the majority approaching the problem with such primitive preconceptions, and with the Commission's terms of reference so circumscribed as to exclude any consideration of the really basic issue whether the financial arrangements dictated by the British Government in London to its managing agency in Calcutta were conceived and designed to serve the economic interests of the Indian people or the metropolitan power, the Commission's inquiry could hardly be of much use, and the Congress had at its Eleventh session held at Poona expressed its doubts and said in its resolution on the subject that the inquiry "will not be satisfactory to the people of this country, nor be of any practical advantage to the Government, unless the lines of policy which regulate expenditure are enquired into...."

These doubts proved to be justified. The Commission took its time on the inquiry and laboured hard and long. But unlike the proverbial mountain, at the end of its labour it produced not one mouse but two mice—a minority and a majority report. The minority report, needless to say, was signed by Dadabhai Naoroji, Wedderburn and Caine. But even the majority report admitted that there was some injustice involved in India carrying the whole burden of the expenses of the office of the Secretary of State, the fortress of Aden and the charges of the legation and consulates in Iran. It recommended some minor readjustments amounting to a quarter of a million pounds in favour of

India which brought forth from Hyndman the sarcastic comment in a letter to Dadabhai in July 1900:

You are, indeed, thankful for small mercies! As against the £250,000 the Government, instead of giving a grant-in-aid, are inflaming the drain by yet another loan. Even so they will draw £11,000,000 this year. At this rate it will take another century or more to drive the thick end of the wedge....

Hyndman had rightly anticipated that the mood in which the Congress was, it would be grateful for small mercies. At its Sixteenth session at Lahore under the presidency of N.G. Chandavarkar it passed a resolution "expressing its grateful acknowledgements for the annual contribution of £257,000 promised to be made from the British to the Indian Exchequer...." But, as usual, it could not resist asking for a little more. India, the resolution went on, "should be granted the arrears payable on this account for the past many years." It prayed "that the British Parliament will be pleased to make this grant." It prayed in vain.

But if the British policy in India during the period between 1885-1905 was to dole out "reforms" with coffee spoons, it displayed no such niggardliness when it came to dishing out repressive and punitive laws and regulations. They were served by the ladlefuls. The small stirring of the liberal impulse under Ripon was smothered almost at its birth though it was long to linger as a fond memory in grateful Congress minds. For what followed were three Viceroys who were cast in a very different mould and worked to very different briefs. Dufferin was inclined to talk big and act small unless the third Burmese War which he waged can be regarded as acting big in a perverse sort of way. As for Lord Lansdowne, he distinguished himself by his interventionist policy on India's borders, both in the North West and North East. Lord Elgin, undaunted by the deficit that he inherited from his predecessor, seemed determined to keep himself busy "teaching lessons", as they would say today, to Wazirs, Swatis and other tribes who resisted the extension of British authority to Malakand and the Afridis who had closed the Khyber

Pass. He had in the call of duty also to rescue the British Political Agent in Chitral. Altogether those educational and rescue operations required the deployment of forty thousand troops over an extended period and they cost thousands of casualties not to mention treasure which had all to come out of the Indian revenue.

This "forward policy" which was to reach its apotheosis under the next proconsul—was paralleled by systematic perfecting of the instruments of a police state within the frontiers of India. An appetizer was served with the Notification of June 1891 aimed at bringing the Press to heel in the British as well as British-protected territories. The story, whether apocryphal or otherwise is hard to say, goes that the Government was provoked to issue it because in the midst of its little local difficulty with the then Maharaja of Kashmir which led to his deposition, the *Anurita Bazar Patrika* managed to publish a complete draft of a despatch by Lord Lansdowne "pieced together, it is understood, from torn bits of paper from the Viceregal waste paper basket." Apparently nobody had yet thought of inventing a shredding machine.

The next and a bigger course in discipline came a few years later with profligate use of the multipurpose Regulations of 1818 and 1827 during the closing years of the century which were years of famine and pestilences. But the best—or worst—was yet to come under Curzon.

He is said to have loved India and he probably did after his fashion—as an extension of his own inflated ego and the British tribal ego. He came in with amendments to the Indian Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes, strengthening and enlarging the definition of sedition to cover almost any criticism of the Government and even anything said by an Indian abroad (though not, it seems, by a Eurasian or Anglo-Indian), available to him ready for use. Speakers at the Fourteenth session of the Congress at Madras had hoped that he would repeal "the iniquitous legislation of his predecessor." But then hope sprang eternal in the Congress breast, though in this case the hope was to be disappointed soon enough. He added to his predecessor's good work by bringing in the Foreign Telegraphic Press Messages Bill which the Fifteenth Congress bemoaned "is opposed to the policy followed by the British Government in India as to the

unrestricted dissemination of useful knowledge and information"; and he followed this up in 1903, the year of his very own Delhi Darbar, with the Official Secrets Bill which the Nineteenth Congress under Lalmohan Ghose bitterly described as "against the interests of the public, dangerous to individual liberty and retrograde in policy" and which Gokhale, not given to strong language, had denounced as "an odious, nay, iniquitous measure."

Nor was this addition to what Annie Besant rightly called "Coercion Legislation" intended to be just decoration to the statute book. It was meant to be used and was used. Apparently, during the 1890s and the first few years of the new century a spectre was haunting the British authorities both in London and Calcutta—the spectre of the possibility of large scale trouble for the Raj. There were reasons enough for their fears. Famine conditions were endemic in India throughout the closing decades of the 19th century though historians of the Raj recollected in nostalgia seem these days to forget it. Famine, indeed, was the "ghost" at the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria as a comment in *India* pointed out at the time and a Famine Commission was actually appointed the next year, presumably to exorcise the ghost, or at least put the cap of invisibility on it. But in 1897 to the famine was added yet another scourge—the outbreak of bubonic plague in an epidemic form in many parts of India and on a scale such as had not been known.

The British authorities in India were even less well-equipped, both mentally and physically, to tackle this new calamity than the famine. In any event, the medical science itself had rather rudimentary ideas on how to contain the disease even though it had made some advance on the methods used during the great plague of London. Segregation of the afflicted—or those who might be infected—was considered necessary. But for that detection was essential and in Indian conditions it posed difficult and sensitive problems. The British military called in to help the civilian administration to cope with the task, whatever their talent for playing "with the bayonet and the butt", were hardly the soul of tact and responsiveness to Indian susceptibilities—especially those of Indian women. Their rough and ready methods of breaking into people's houses and trying to find out the

victims, or suspected victims, were bound to cause great offence. There were certainly some cases of molestation of women by soldiers, but many more of genuine misunderstanding. And it was probably one such that led to the famous "apology incident" when Gokhale, who was in London at the time, in good faith related to a small Committee of British MPs and to the *Manchester Guardian*, an alleged case of violation by some soldiers of two women, one of whom was said to have later committed suicide. The Bombay Government categorically denied the story and said it was a "malevolent invention." On returning to India, Gokhale asked his informants to come forward and substantiate the story which they could not. It was all based on hearsay and man of absolute integrity that he was, Gokhale, without divulging the names of his informants, took responsibility upon himself and offered an unqualified apology—much to the anger of the Indian public and even some of his friends in England.

However, there was no doubt about the severity and insensitivity of the tactics employed by the authorities in dealing with the epidemic. As the *Times of India*, not exactly an anti-British or anti-Government paper, wrote: "It is becoming plainer day by day that if India is to be ruined by the plague we shall owe the ruin, not to the disease—for that disease has its times and its seasons and its limitations quite apart from any legislative enactment—but to anti-plague measures which in their operations result in spreading and increasing the plague." Quite apart from spreading the plague, they were to fill the cup of public anger and resentment against the Government to the brim. In places it overflowed into violence and terrorist acts. There were riots in the Punjab. In Poona the Plague Commissioner—a rather original if bizarre bureaucratic designation—Rand and a British lieutenant, Ayerst, were murdered at the end of January 1897. The Anglo-Indian Press clamoured for a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye. The reaction of the authorities was characteristic—an initial period of puzzled passivity followed by indiscriminate counter-terror, striking at friends and foes alike with deportations, punitive police action and imprisonment with or without trial. A vast conspiracy to overthrow British rule was

evidently suspected. Perhaps there ought to have been one, but there wasn't.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was arrested for publishing matter that he had not written. So were two other Poona editors of Marathi papers. Tilak was tried by a judge and a jury of six Europeans and three Indians. Justice in this case wasn't blind. He was found guilty by six votes to three and Mr. Justice Strachey thought that there was no need to prove an attempt to incite disloyalty; to incite "ill-will of any sorts" was sufficient to prove the crime of sedition. Tilak was sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment. It caused a wave of protests in India and even some in England where Tilak was known not only as an up and coming politician, but a Sanskrit scholar, if with an obscurantist bias. *India*, of course, described the whole conduct of the Government nicely as "Government by Panic." But even less politically committed opinion was worried and a petition to the Queen for Tilak's release was got up and signed, among others, by Max Muller, W.W. Hunter, Sir Richard Garth, Naoroji and even M.M. Bhowmaggree, Tory MP for Bethnal Green, who was not normally seen keeping such company. Tilak was released after serving two-thirds of his sentence.

But he at least had the satisfaction of being tried by a judge and a jury. The two Natu brothers, men of impeccable respectability, were not so lucky. They were whisked away from Poona and kept incommunicado without any trial for nine months. Their case became something of a *cause celebre*. *India*, never at a loss for the right phrase, called it Britain's *L'Affaire Dreyfus*. They, too, were eventually set free, but after nine months. Lord Sandhurst, Governor of Bombay, in a mildly contrite speech said that whatever mistakes may have been committed in Bombay and Poona in the past (this was in the autumn of 1898), "What we must continue to do in regard to plague is to endeavour to enlist the people on our side." Being in his own way a man of literary bent, he could not help quoting some lines which Milton puts into the mouth of Christ:

Yet held it more humane, more heavenly, first
By winning words to conquer willing hearts
And make persuasion do the work of fear.

But this has always been easier said than done. Revolutions, it has been said, are not made—nor consecrated—with rose-water. Nor, come to that, are great Colonial Empires built and preserved by making “persuasion do the work of fear.” Ripon might have been an exception. If so, he was the exception that was to prove the rule. For twenty years after him the British policy in India was anything but aimed at conquering “willing hearts with winning words.” On the contrary, the apparatus of coercion, formidable enough already, was carefully added to and improved to deal with any symptoms of dissidence and refractoriness. The appointment of Curzon was the clearest indication of the British intention to reinforce the ministry of fear in India.

It is a measure of the mood of complacency—or it may have been lack of self-confidence—obtaining among the Congress leadership that at their session in Madras during the Christmas week in 1898, they had accorded “a respectful welcome to Lord Curzon”, noted “with gratitude His Lordship’s words of sympathy for the people of India”, and gone on to authorise their President “to wire the foregoing resolution to his Lordship in Bombay.” What he thought of this gushing note of welcome, or whether he even condescended to acknowledge it, is not known. But what he thought of the Congress—and he was not unique among the British proconsuls and bureaucratic hierarchs in India in this—is on record. “The Congress”, he wrote to the Secretary of State for India in 1900, “is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise.”

This was a wishful thought and quite a few of his successors were to entertain it. Indeed, it persists still, nearly forty years after the transfer of power, in some British minds. But he could be forgiven for forming the impression that the Congress was moribund and only needed a *coup de grace* from him to qualify for a certificate of clinical death. Political institutions, like all living things, develop and grow through their capacity and ability to summon adequate response to each challenge. But the Congress seemed to be wanting in both. Its springs of response to the situation in the country appeared stuck in the rut of its

excessively cautious constitutionalism, if they did not become wholly atrophied.

It was not that it was unaware of the worsening conditions in the country. As early as 1892, Hume, whose political antennae were more sensitive and sharper than many of his colleagues', partly because the lessons of 1857 had been burnt deep into his memory, had sent a circular letter addressed to Congressmen, marked "private and confidential". But not much in India could be kept secret even in the days before the photo-copying machines and other aids for picking up and disseminating secrets, and the *Times* at the end of March that year reported :

A strange correspondence is going the round of the Indian papers and is attracting some attention. It began with a circular which purports to be addressed by Mr. Hume, a leading member of the Congress Party, to every member of that Party, and which, although marked "private and confidential", has somehow been published. Mr. Hume says that the existing system of administration is pauperizing the people and preparing the way for one of the most terrible cataclysms in the history of the world; that the cup of misery of scores of millions is well-nigh full; that, as surely as day follows night, must a terrible rising come. Then Englishmen will be as men in the desert, vainly struggling for a brief space against the Simoon [*sic*]. Therefore, he urges the Congress not to fritter away its resources in different channels, but to divert every rupee to avert the general ruin by carrying on an English agitation on the lines on which the Anti-Corn Laws League triumphed.

This was alarmist rhetoric meant as much to alert the Congress leaders to the dangers of complacency as to warn the British authorities not to delay "more radical reforms in the administration which the Congress has, after years of patient labour, by the ablest and wisest Indians, declared to be essential." One would have expected the Congress "Patriarchs" to welcome this trenchant reinforcement of their argument for reforms. But as the *Times* remarked, "The extraordinary indiscretion, to say the least, of this manifesto is so apparent even to Mr. Hume's own

party that the Standing Committee at Allahabad begged him to stop its further circulation." In London the British Congress Committee met post-haste—the day after the report had appeared in the *Times*—to pass a resolution repudiating Hume's "injudicious letter" and its "unjustifiable conclusions", though it admitted that he had been driven to them "in face of the consideration of the deplorable condition of large portions of the Indian people." It sent it to the *Times* with a letter which Dadabhai Naoroji also signed although he wrote to Dinshaw Wacha a week later that he was "distressed to have had to sign that letter after what Hume had done for us."

If it was inclined to softpedal somewhat even on the question of the almost continued famine conditions in India during the 1890s and the political eruption they might precipitate, the Congress was inevitably much more cautious in taking up the issue of the anti-plague measures to which the Government was resorting. It was aware that the epidemic was a very serious matter and that any Government would have to take strong steps to deal with it. It certainly did not want to give the impression of encouraging irrational opposition to preventive and prophylactic measures that needed being taken. But even within its ranks there was some feeling that it was carrying caution too far.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in his history of the Congress says that it "duly protested against these invasions of popular rights." This is only partly true. There is, for instance, no resolution on record which directly criticises the authorities on this count. In fact, the only resolution which specifically mentions the issue came a year later at its Fourteenth session in 1898 and it dealt not with the measures taken against the plague, but with their cost. It asked that they being "a matter of imperial concern and recognised as such...the expenditure incurred in connection thereof should be borne by the Government and not charged to the funds of the local bodies."

Admittedly, the previous year Surendranath Banerjea had described the "quartering of the Punitive Police at Poona as a mistake" and gone on to say that the Congress regarded "the imprisonment of Mr. Tilak and the Poona Editors as a still greater mistake." For Tilak, he added, "my heart is full of sympathy. My feelings go forth to him in his prison house. A Nation

is in tears...." But, surprisingly, for all his eloquence, he did not propose any resolution condemning the Government for what it had done. Significantly, the Congress did take up the case of "the Sardars Natu" who had been deported under Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827 and, while going out of its way gratuitously to acknowledge that "the Government of Bombay must have acted under a sense of responsibility" in arresting the two men, made so bold as to ask the authorities "to bring them... to trial without delay, or, if the Government have no sufficient evidence against them to place before a Court of Justice, to release them."

The distinction which the Congress made between the case of the Sardars Natu and that of Tilak—an attempt to rush through a special resolution demanding his release was effectively foiled by the platform at the same session—could, of course, be easily explained on the ground that the two cases raised entirely different issues. Tilak had been duly tried by a judge and a jury and pronounced guilty, however perverse the judgement. On the other hand, the Natu brothers were being kept under lock and key without trial under a lawless Regulation of long ago and even the formalities of that Regulation had not been fully complied with. But whatever the justification or rationalisation of the distinction made, it could not but rankle with Tilak's supporters. Already the previous year, at Calcutta, a certain incipient tension was possible to discern between the dominant leadership and the militants like Tilak who, as Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya nicely puts it, had tried "to induce the Congress to show a little more grit."

This tension was to grow in the coming years and become almost a permanent feature of the Congress politics and erupt into periodic crises—and even splits. But, again, let us not anticipate. Immediately, the test of the grit and resolve was to come towards the fag end of Curzon's viceroyalty in 1905 over an issue which was to mark a major watershed in the political history of modern India—the Partition of Bengal.

Any detailed analysis of what complex motives lay behind the British Government's decision to divide Bengal and stir up no end of trouble for themselves is not really germane to our purpose. Nor is it necessary to go into the story of what followed.

And for the good reason that much has been written on the subject—and from all points of view. Especially, after Sumit Sarkar's masterly *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, there is very little that can usefully be added. Moreover, strange though it may sound, the Congress as an organised body played only a peripheral part, if at all, in the emotionally charged movement of resistance to what was in essence, and across all official rationalisations, an act of vindictive political vandalism whether we judge it from the lines along which it was planned or the manner in which the partition was carried out. Individual Congress leaders, and some of the tallest among them at the time, like Surendranath Banerjea and Ambica Charan Mazumdar, it is true, threw themselves heart and soul into the struggle to undo the partition. Nor was this struggle confined to the Congress leaders in Bengal.

For the authors of the partition had completely misjudged its repercussions and consequences. "The native..." Denzil Ibbetson had written in a note early in February 1904, "will quickly become accustomed to the new conditions." The "native" did not. The partition acted as a powerful catalyst, setting in motion chain reactions in other parts of India, forcing to the surface submerged discontents with British rule and activating all kinds of radical and even revolutionary groups, however amateurish and ineffectual, far beyond the frontiers of Bengal. Sumit Sarkar has not exaggerated in saying that "with startling rapidity after July 1905 the movement broke away from all traditional moorings, developed new techniques of militant action, and broadened into a struggle for *swaraj*." It might even be said that Indian politics, for good or ill, was never to be quite the same again.

This was summed up by Dadabhai Naoroji who was not in the habit of allowing his emotions to run away with him. At a largely attended protest meeting in London over which he presided, he claimed, "Now the Indian people have, for the first time, risen and declared that this thing shall not be. Here is a clear issue between the rulers and the people: they are come face to face....I am thankful that I have lived to see the birthday of the freedom of the Indian people." And some weeks later, at the beginning of January 1906, in a message published in Surendranath

Banerjea's paper, the *Bengalee*, he urged Bengal to persevere with the resistance: "The responsibility and the opportunity that has fallen to your lot is to show that Indians have a backbone—the staying power to the last. If we can once establish this reputation, half of our fight for self-government will be fought and won. I don't care—I am prepared for ultimate failure. Bengal may remain partitioned—the Boycott may at last end—but it will be a great gain if we can once establish the character for organised union and self-sacrifice. One more important result I am looking forward to. It is the rousing up of the masses, and the present is just the kind of struggle which can accomplish this object...."

And yet for all the engagement of its sympathy with the anti-partition struggle and the sense of exhilaration which it generated among most of its leading lights, the Congress as the foremost political organisation in India and the only valid tribune of the Indian people, did not come forward to lead the movement of resistance as might have been expected. This was the more surprising because there was little doubt that one of the principal attractions of the Partition of Bengal for those who planned it and carried it out was that it would weaken the Congress which some of the paranoiac British officials were convinced was a front organisation of a nest of Bengali Jacobins. "The best guarantee of the political advantage of our proposal," Curzon assured the Secretary of State for India in a telegram (quoted by Sumit Sarkar) barely three months before the partition was proclaimed, "is its dislike by the Congress Party."

The partition, of course, had other aims. Indeed, it was a classic example of one of those multipurpose schemes in which the British ruling class has always excelled even if they have sometimes misfired and ended in shambles. Whatever "administrative convenience" might have been invoked in justification—and certainly Bengal because of a number of historical accidents, had grown into an oversize and unwieldy province—the actual partition that was put through hardly removed any of the inconveniences as some of the British officials and ex-officials were dispassionate enough to admit. But it did seem to have certain political advantages for the system of checks and balances on which the British power in India rested. The final draft of the

partition plan, as Sumit Sarkar rightly points out, stressed "that Dacca in course of time would acquire 'the special character of a Provincial Capital where Mohammedan interests would be strongly represented if not predominant'." It is even permissible to go further. In retrospect it does not appear too fanciful to see in the Partition of Bengal a precursor of, or at least pilot project for, bigger things to come. Curzon was not indulging in levity when he spoke of its "dislike" by the Congress.

The dislike—in fact, strong opposition—of the Congress was made abundantly clear nearly two years before Curzon issued the fiat on September 1, 1905 that on October 16 that year Bengal would be partitioned. For the idea of partition had been long in the process of gestation and various plans were going the rounds of corridors of power both in London and Calcutta. The question since the beginning of the 20th century had been not whether Bengal was going to be carved up, but in what form. The Congress, with its usual caution, waited till its Nineteenth session in December 1903 at Madras in Spring Gardens, Teynampet, to warn the Government against the folly. It passed a resolution—ninth on the agenda—which expressed its deep concern at the present policy of the Government of India "in breaking up territorial divisions which have been of long standing and are closely united by ethnological, legislative, social and administrative relations, and deprecates the separation from Bengal of Dacca, Mymensingh, Chittagong Divisions and portions of Chota Nagpur Division, and also the separation of the District of Ganjam and the agency tracts of the Ganjam and Vizagapatam Districts from the Madras Presidency."

At its next session held at Bombay it returned to the theme and in stronger phraseology of disapproval. The fourteenth resolution, moved by Ambica Charan Mazumdar and seconded by A. Choudhari, not only protested against the partition proposals but also suggested alternative ways of strengthening the administrative framework of Bengal. According to Annie Besant, "the Hon. Baikunthanath Sen...felt too strongly to do more than speak a few sentences. It was carried after a brief expression of sympathy from Mr. R.N. Mudholkar." It read:

That this Congress records its emphatic protest against

the proposals of the Government of India, for the Partition of Bengal in any manner whatsoever. That the proposals are viewed with great alarm by the people, as the division of the Bengali Nation into separate units will seriously interfere with its social, intellectual and material progress, involving the loss of various constitutional, and other rights and privileges which the Province has so long enjoyed and will burden the country with heavy expenditure which the Indian tax-payers cannot at all afford.

The Congress is of opinion that no case had been made out for the Partition of Bengal, but if the present constitution of the Bengal Government is considered inadequate for the efficient administration of the Province, the remedy lies not in any redistribution of its territories, but in organic changes in the form of the Government, such as the conversion of the Lieutenant-Governorship of Bengal into Governorship with an Executive Council like that of Bombay and Madras.

Needless to say that the suggestion was not taken up by the Government. By the time the next Congress met at Benaras partition was already an accomplished fact. Curzon had resigned though over an issue which was rather like a high-level departmental demarcation dispute, and even left the shores of India. It reflected the curious sense of priority obtaining in the Congress at the time that the first resolution on the order paper was not what was happening in Bengal, but a message of "loyal and dutiful welcome" to the heir to the British throne and his consort (later George V and Queen Mary) which the President was instructed "to submit...to His Royal Highness by wire." The resolution on the Partition of Bengal was the twelfth item on the agenda followed by another and related resolution of protest against the repressive measures being implemented by the Government to curb the upsurge against the partition. These were taken up only on the afternoon of the third day of the session.

But, of course, the carve up of the living body of Bengal dominated the session. Gokhale in his presidential address devoted no small part to the question which, he said, "is upper-

most in the minds of us all at this moment." This followed immediately after his subtle and remarkable damning of Curzon and his administration with high praise:

Gentlemen, how true it is that to everything there is an end! Thus even the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon has come to a close! For seven long years, all eyes had constantly to turn to one masterful figure in the land—now in admiration, now in astonishment, more often in anger and in pain, till at last it has become difficult to realise that a change has really come....

He went on to find a parallel in Aurangzeb which was, perhaps, a little unfair—to Aurangzeb. He saw in Curzon "the same strenuous purpose, the same overpowering consciousness of duty, the same marvellous capacity for work, the same sense of loneliness, the same persistence in a policy of distrust and repression, resulting in bitter exasperation all round. I think even the most devoted admirer of Lord Curzon cannot claim that he has strengthened the foundations of British Rule in India. In some respects, his Lordship will always be recognised as one of the greatest Englishmen that ever came to this country." And he piled compliment upon compliment by speaking of Curzon's "wonderful intellectual gifts, his brilliant powers of expression, his phenomenal energy, his boundless enthusiasm for work." Then came the sting. But, he added, "the gods are jealous, and amidst such lavish endowments, they withheld from him a sympathetic imagination, without which no man can ever understand an alien people; and it is a sad truth that to the end of his administration Lord Curzon did not really understand the people of India."

That must have hurt. So must have Gokhale's criticism of the furtiveness with which the whole operation was prepared and announced "from Simla, where he and his official colleagues were beyond the reach of public opinion." He was even more sharply critical of him because after his resignation, "the only proper, the only dignified course for him was to take no step, which it was difficult to revoke and the consequence of which would have to be faced, not by him, but his successor." Curzon, he continued, also "owed it to the Royal visitors not to plunge

the largest Province of India into violent agitation and grief on the eve of their visit to it. But Lord Curzon was determined to partition Bengal before he left India and so he rushed the necessary legislation through the Legislative Council at Simla, which only the official members could attend, and enforced his orders on 16 October last—a day observed as one of universal mourning by all classes of people in Bengal. And now, while he himself has gone from India, what a sea of troubles he has bequeathed to his successor!"

The resolution of protest against the Partition of Bengal was moved, appropriately enough, by Surendranath Banerjea in an emotionally charged speech in which, as Annie Besant recorded, "he described the grief and excitement in Calcutta: 'the shops were closed, the domestic hearth was not lit, food was not cooked'. The Government was busy 'forging instruments of repression, laying the foundation for the inauguration of a reign of terror.' Meetings were prohibited, Sankirtan processions stopped, the singing of 'Bande Mataram' punished, boys prosecuted and sent to gaol." Speakers who followed Surendranath included three Muslims—Abdul Kasim, Hadayat Bakashi and Nassuruddin." The resolution against the coercive measures was moved by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and seconded by Lajpat Rai who congratulated Bengal "on its splendid opportunity of heralding a new political era for the country... If other Provinces followed the example of Bengal the day was not far distant when they would win."

But that was a big "if". Bengal—both young and old—must have found it flattering for it to be recognised as constituting the vanguard of the national struggle. But what was the vast rearguard going to do to back up its assault on imperialist despotism? Above all, what was the Indian National Congress as the custodian of national honour going to do to meet this challenge? Was it going to pick up the gauntlet and give a fight? The Benaras Congress provided no answer to these agonising questions. There was nothing in its deliberations to suggest that its leadership had worked out any strategy even strictly within the framework of its commitment to constitutional methods for reversing the partition. On the last day, it is true, a resolution was passed appointing Gokhale as its delegate to go to England

"in view of the importance of urging the more pressing proposals of the Congress on the attention of the authorities in England at the present juncture." But there was no specific mention of securing the annulment of the iniquitous decision on Bengal though, interestingly, among those who supported this resolution, was Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble).

One thing, however, the Benaras Congress did do. It accepted the invitation by Jatindranath Choudhary on behalf of the delegates from Bengal to the Congress to hold its next session in Calcutta. This acceptance was demonstrably meant to be a gesture of solidarity with Bengal in its struggle which was gaining momentum in many directions. And in Calcutta it reassembled duly on the Boxing Day 1906. "Never before nor since 1906," wrote Annie Besant, "has the Congress seen such a gathering as that which assembled at Calcutta...in that memorable year. A huge Pavilion was erected by the Russa Road, Bhowanipur, seating 16,000 persons, with wide passages that gave standing room to another 4,000; Bengal had been roused from end to end, all India sympathised with her wrongs." In recent years the number of delegates had rarely reached the figure of a thousand. At Calcutta in 1906 they numbered 1,663, including eight from Burma—a figure only once exceeded, at Bombay in 1889 when Bradlaugh attended.

The atmosphere on the opening day was electric with high patriotic fervour. Annie Besant did not exaggerate when she wrote: "The welcome given to the President-elect [the Grand Old Man of India Dadabhai Naoroji, already over eighty] and past Presidents, as they came on to the platform with the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, rang out from 20,000 throats, and when silence was obtained, Mr. Narendranath Sen, the patriot Editor of *The Indian Mirror*, opened the proceedings with a prayer, and two men choirs and a third of 30 young girls, sang National songs." It was a memorable session in many ways, not least for the acceptance of the Swadeshi movement by the Congress. Gokhale at Benaras had already given it his blessings as "both a patriotic and an economic movement". But at Calcutta the Congress as a collective body pronounced its benediction on it and called upon the people of the country "to labour for its success, by making earnest and

sustained efforts to promote the growth of indigenous industries and to stimulate the production of indigenous articles by giving them preference over imported commodities even at some sacrifice."

However, all had not been plain sailing in the period leading up to the Congress. Bal Gangadhar Tilak had for almost ten years been emerging as the focus of militant dissent within the Congress. As early as 1896, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya has it, he had wanted the Congress to show a little more gumption. Three years later, at the Fifteenth Congress session at Lucknow, "he wanted to move a resolution condemning the regime of Lord Sandhurst" in the Bombay Presidency and "quoted the misdeeds of the bureaucracy... and asked whether he was at all exaggerating." But many of the old stalwarts, including the President that year, Romesh Chunder Dutt, who had "recently retired from the I.C.S.", as Dr. Sitaramayya rather gratuitously notes, opposed the move, partly because they did not consider Sandhurst to be the worst of the provincial satraps and did not wish to make more enemies than there were already. Tilak was persuaded not to persist with his resolution only when the President threatened to resign. But before the Calcutta session, "Young Bengal", who believed that Tilak was on their wavelength, had proposed his name for the presidential chair. According to Bipin Chandra Pal, the *Times of India*, in an inspired piece, sounded the tocsin and the "moderate" leaders managed to frustrate the attempt by "secret diplomacy" and prevailing upon Dadabhai Naoroji to accept the presidency for the third and last time. Neither Tilak nor his supporters were so foolhardy as to offer frontal opposition to the election of the doyen of Indian politics as President of the Calcutta Congress.

But the "moderates", or the Right as they would today be labelled, were mistaken if they thought that Dadabhai would go along with them all the way. He was full of years and very frail. He spoke only a few words of thanks and then asked Gokhale to read his speech. But unlike the normal course of evolution with politicians, with age he had moved leftwards. He had attended the International Socialist Congress at Amsterdam in August 1904 "as an honoured guest" and had addressed the gathering on his favourite theme, "the drain of India's wealth

and the poverty of the people." Next year, as R.P. Masani remarks, "a striking proof of his Socialistic tendencies was given by Dadabhai when at a Conference of Democrats, held on July 29, 1905, under the auspices of the Metropolitan Radical Federation and the National Democratic League at Holborn Town Hall, he moved, as Vice-President of the League, a resolution demanding the establishment of a universal system of old age pensions, based entirely upon citizen rights and free from the taint of pauperism." He was certainly much less exercised over "the growing impatience of young men who ridiculed the idea of India getting justice at England's hand without convulsion" than were some of his colleagues in the British Congress Committee like Wedderburn.

At the Calcutta session—which, incidentally, a young Muslim lawyer from Bombay, M.A. Jinnah, attended as his Private Secretary—his presidential address was modulated on a much more radical note than any of his previous addresses or those of his colleagues. He made no bones about asking the Congress to demand self-government. "Political principles are," he said, "after all, the root of our national greatness, strength and hope. All these political principles are summed up in self-government. Self-Government is the only and chief remedy.... Be united, persevere, and achieve self-government, so that the millions now perishing by poverty, famine and plague, and the scores of millions that are starving on scanty subsistence may be saved and India may once more occupy her proud position of yore among the greatest and civilized nations of the world." And he did not posit it as a distant goal, but declared that "not only has the time fully arrived, but had arrived long past."

This was rousing rhetoric and there was much more of it from him though the voice was that of gentle Gokhale. "We hear a great deal," he said, "about agitators and agitation. Agitation is the life and soul of the whole political, social and industrial history of England. It is by agitation that the English have accomplished their most glorious achievements, their prosperity, their liberties and, in short, their first place among the nations of the world.... Agitate, agitate over the whole length and breadth of India in every nook and corner—peacefully of course—if we really mean to get justice from John Bull."

This was a man of eighty-one speaking. Younger men could hardly do less. Ambica Charan Mazumdar, moving resolution number seven affirming the legitimacy of the boycott movement, invoked the spirit of Milton and Hampden. He even referred to the struggle of "revolutionary Russia". Bipin Chandra Pal called it "an important and divine movement. We may help it and be blessed by helping it. We cannot oppose it." Indeed, he wanted the scope of boycott to be enlarged so that it would extend from boycott of goods to that of honorary offices and associations with the Government in East Bengal. He did not want any leader of the people to associate with the Lieutenant-Governor in any legislative work.

This interpretation of the resolution, however, was not acceptable to more moderate and sober men like L.A. Govindaraghava Aiyar and Madan Mohan Malaviya who maintained that while Bengal was justified in using boycott as a weapon, the Congress could not give a blanket blessing to its use everywhere as Bipin Chandra Pal seemed to want. Gokhale had to intervene to assure them that they were bound by the terms of the resolution and not the gloss which individual speakers put on it. The resolution declaring "the Boycott movement inaugurated in Bengal by way of protest against the Partition" to be legitimate was duly passed with one vote against and one abstention.

The Twenty-second Congress ended, according to Annie Besant, "amidst scenes of the wildest enthusiasm and rejoicings." Apparently there was thunderous applause when a Swadeshi umbrella from Poona was unfurled over the President. Dada-bhai Naoroji, who reminded them that the session "had placed before itself a definite goal—Self-Government, Swaraj" and added that it was now for the younger generation to reach it.

However, the unanimity and scenes of enthusiasm witnessed at Calcutta were a little deceptive. They succeeded in masking very sharp differences and even tensions which for some years past had begun to surface within the Congress whose leadership had become used to functioning rather like a club of like-minded gentlemen. They were taken aback by the obstreperousness which they had encountered in recent years from some of the younger men cast in a very different mould and untutored in parliamentary manners. Men like Pherozeshah Mehta and

Dinshaw Wacha, for instance, had strong reservations about the boycott resolution passed at the Calcutta Congress and admitted as such later. They had also, perhaps, some reservations about the whole character of the anti-partition movement in Bengal which, with much that was positive and progressive about it, trailed clouds of Hindu revivalism and even a degree of confessional bigotry that was to alienate some of the liberal Hindu minds, like Rabindranath Tagore, who had at the start identified themselves wholly with it.

These differences and tensions were to become accentuated in the year that passed between the Twenty-second and Twenty-third Congress sessions. And for obvious reasons. The struggle against partition did not seem to be getting anywhere. Gokhale, always inclined to be sanguine about the intentions of the British Government, had told his audience at Benaras that "there are grounds to believe that Lord Minto will deal with the situation with tact, firmness and sympathy." There was no evidence during the next two years that Minto was going to reverse the policies of his predecessor. A sportsman and an athlete rather than an intellectual imperialist Walter Mitty—one of his many exploits was to ride the winner of the Grand National Steeplechase of France at Auteuil in 1874 at the age of nineteen—he did not care much for Curzon. But he was determined to maintain the partition because, he wrote to Morley in February 1906, "the diminution of the power of Bengali political agitation will assist to remove a serious cause for anxiety.... It is the growing power of a population with great intellectual gifts and a talent for making itself heard, a population which, though it is very far from representing the more manly characteristics of the many races of India, is not unlikely to influence public opinion at home most mischievously. Therefore from a political point of view alone, putting aside the administrative difficulties of the old province, I believe partition to have been very necessary...."

Nor was he the man to go slow on repression, having done his stint in Paris on the side of "the forces of law and order", as the Tory *Morning Post* appreciatively noted while giving Minto's bio-data on his appointment as Viceroy, during the Commune in 1871 when he was barely sixteen. In a series of articles that Keir Hardie wrote for the *Labour Leader* during his tour of East

Bengal in 1907, he vividly described the repression that was let loose against the people, and not only in Bengal. In a piece headed "How Extremists are Made", he said: "Every thing in India is sedition that does not applaud every act of the Government."

The early euphoria generated by the spontaneous anger of the people against the act of partition which seemed to cut across the confessional divide had given way to a mood of frustration among the younger generation and made them turn to the cult of the bomb and the bullet as the short-cut to liberation when, in fact, it only tended to act as a divisive element and provided the authorities with a spurious justification for accentuating their organised terrorism. The mood of frustration was only heightened when the communal tension began to erupt in the early months of 1906 in the form of communal riots in parts of East Bengal and the situation grew steadily worse during 1907.

The Congress as a body was not directly involved in the anti-partition movement, though many Congressmen and Congresswomen were. But for all its elitism, it was a microcosm of the nation in a very real sense and every tremor or turbulence that affected any part or member of India's body social and politic, ineluctably, had repercussions within the body of the Congress. The more so in this case because a curious, if fortuitous, ad hoc alliance had developed between Bengali radicals of various brands and persuasions, on the one hand, and Tilak and his band of militants, who had their own grievances against the Congress old guards, on the other. An anonymous British correspondent after Surat was to describe Tilak as an "impatient idealist" in the columns of *India*. But with his impatient idealism Tilak, commanded a remarkable, if somewhat fitful, shrewdness and a talent, excelled only by Gandhi, for talking to people in their own language and idiom. This was a formidable combination of gifts—or would have been, if it had not been marred by a certain strain of factionalism and even opportunism.

The air was thick with rumours of disagreements between the "moderates" and the militants—dubbed as extremists—on the eve of the Twenty-third session of the Congress. At Calcutta, Nagpur's invitation to the Congress to hold its next session there had been accepted. But, according to Annie Besant, "some local disagreements having supervened, which made the holding of

the Congress there difficult, if not impossible, the All-India Congress Committee, elected under the tentative Constitution passed at Calcutta, decided" to shift the session to Surat. The "Nationalists", as the militants were designated, however, believed, as Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya tells us in his history of the Congress, "that Surat had been purposely selected by the Moderates as a safe place where they could, with the help of local delegates, have their own way."

However that may be, and despite the intimations of the storm ahead, the scene at Surat before the opening of the session was placid enough. The site chosen for the session was enchanting. "Some historic French gardens," wrote Annie Besant, "on the banks of the Tapti, forming French territory, were taken, and a charming city of tents was made with a large Pavilion." Almost 1,600 delegates had converged on Surat to take part in the session. Factional manoeuvrings, and even efforts to compose the differences, had gone on till the opening day. Tilak's supporters, of course, wanted him to preside, having failed at Calcutta to get their way. But they realised this was beyond their reach. It was, therefore, decided to put up the name of Lajpat Rai who had recently been allowed to return from his deportation to Mandalay Fort in Burma and whose popularity was near its zenith. However, he was sensible enough not to agree to be their stalking-horse.

A rumour then spread that the Moderates were planning to go back on the four crucial resolutions passed at Calcutta—on Self-Government, Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education—by excluding them from the agenda at Surat. Who spread the rumour was not known, but it was obviously in the interest of the militants for it to be believed. The Moderates also played into their hands by an act of tardiness. "Unfortunately," Dr. Sitaramayya records, "the draft of resolutions prepared by the Reception Committee was not available till the Congress actually met, and the statements made to the effect that they were included in the draft were not accepted."

All the same, the Congress opened at 2.30 in the afternoon to a packed Pandal of 7,000 delegates and visitors on the Boxing Day (as Annie Besant, probably rightly, recorded although Dr. Sitaramayya opts for December 27 as the opening day for some reason best known to him) things seemed to go reasonably

smoothly at first. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Tribhuvan Das Malvi, was able to give his brief address of welcome without any interruption. The first signs of trouble came when Ambalal S. Desai proposed the name of Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, a perfectly harmless academic of some distinction, erstwhile President of the Faculty of Law at the Calcutta University and member of the Supreme Council and Companion of the Indian Empire to boot, as the choice of the Reception Committee for the presidency. This was their prerogative under the rules and it had been accepted practice for the delegates to endorse the choice by acclamation.

But not so at Surat. Cries of "No, No", were heard from a small group of dissenters. That was only an appetizer. A veritable storm of shouting and counter-shouting broke out when Surendranath Banerjea rose to second the proposals. As the Congress report written the next day and signed by the President (Dr. Ghose), the Chairman of the Reception Committee (Tribhuvan Das Malvi) and the two Joint General Secretaries (Dinshaw Wacha and Gokhale; Hume's name had ceased to appear as General Secretary after the Benaras Congress), stated :

As soon as... he [Surendranath Banerjea] began his speech—before he had finished even his first sentence—a small section of the delegates began an uproar from their seats with the object of preventing Banerjea from speaking. The Chairman repeatedly appealed for order but no heed was paid. Every time Banerjea attempted to go on with his speech he was met by disorderly shouts. It was clear that rowdiness had been determined upon to bring the proceedings to a standstill, and the whole demonstration seemed to have been pre-arranged. Finding it impossible to enforce order, the Chairman warned the House that unless the uproar subsided at once, he would be obliged to suspend the sitting of the Congress. This hostile demonstration, however, continued and the Chairman at last suspended the sitting for the day.

There is little reason to doubt the veracity of this account. It is corroborated by other eye-witness accounts, including the

famous despatch in the *Daily Chronicle* of London by H.W. Nevinson who was in Surat, together with a few other British journalists, like Pierce who was slightly hurt the next day while helping Dr. Ghose to escape. It had been hoped that overnight tempers would cool and wiser thoughts would have time to assert themselves on both sides, though there is nothing on record to suggest that any attempt at mediation between and reconciliation of opposing factions was made during the interval. Instead, the two camps seem to have spent the time literally sulking in their respective tents.

When the Congress met again at 1 p.m. the next day—December 27 (December 28, according to Dr. Sitaramayya)—the President-elect was duly escorted through the Pandal to the platform without any hostile demonstration from any part of the congregation. However, one little incident was noticed. As the procession was entering the Pandal, a slip of paper "written in pencil and bearing B.G. Tilak's signature was put by a volunteer in the hands of Malvi, the Chairman of the Reception Committee." It said that he (Tilak) wished "to address the delegates on the proposal of the election of President after it is seconded. I wish to move an adjournment with a constructive proposal. Please announce me." This was certainly an unprecedented request and went against the normal conventions of the Congress established over more than two decades. But, perhaps, nothing could have been lost if the Chairman had agreed to let Tilak have his say in order that the delegates could see what his "constructive proposal" was. There was little chance, in any case, of his carrying the majority with him and the position of the Moderates could only have been reinforced by a public rejection of whatever Tilak intended to propose.

However, the moderate leadership, too, appear to have been at the end of their patience with the factiousness, if not downright obstructionism, of Tilak and his supporters. The Chairman opened the proceedings by calling upon Surendranath Banerjea to resume his speech at the point at which it had been interrupted. This he did. He was supported by no less a person than Motilal Nehru, then a moderate of Moderates. The Chairman then, without calling on Tilak to come to the rostrum and have his say, "put the motion to the vote. "An overwhelming

majority of delegates signified the assent by crying 'all, all' and a small minority shouted 'no, no'. The Chairman thereupon declared the motion carried and Ghose was installed in the Presidential chair amidst loud and prolonged applause."

But this was for Tilak and his supporters the ultimate provocation—the proverbial red rag to the bull. The official report, which seems a soberly written document, goes on to say:

While the applause was going on, and as Ghose rose to begin his address, Tilak came upon the platform and stood in front of the President. He urged that as he had given notice of an "amendment to the Presidential election", he should be permitted to move his amendment. Thereupon, it was pointed out to him by Malvi, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, that his notice was not for "an amendment to the Presidential election", but it was for an adjournment of the Congress, which notice he had considered to be irregular and out of order at that stage; and that the President having been duly installed in the chair no amendment about his election could then be moved. Tilak then turned to the President and began arguing with him. Ghose, in his turn, stated how matters stood and ruled that his request to move an amendment about the election could not be entertained.

Tilak thereupon said, "I will not submit to this. I will now appeal from the President to the delegates." In the meantime an uproar had already been commenced by some of his followers, and the President who tried to read his address could not be heard even by those who were seated next to him. Mr. Tilak with his back to the President, kept shouting...frantically exclaiming that he would not go back to his seat unless he was "bodily removed."

This persistent defiance of the authority of the Chair provoked a hostile demonstration against Tilak himself and for sometime, nothing but loud cries of "Shame, Shame", could be heard in the Pandal. It had been noticed that when Tilak was making his way to the platform some of his followers were also trying to force themselves through the volunteers to the platform with sticks in their hands...

A general movement among Tilak's followers to rush to the platform with sticks in their hands being noticed, the President, for the last time, called upon Tilak to withdraw and formally announced to the Assembly that he had ruled and still ruled Tilak out of order and he called upon him to resume his seat.

Tilak, however, refused to obey. What followed was a pandemonium and a free-for-all in which the critique of weapon appeared to take precedence over the weapon of critique. Chairs were hurled; sticks were freely wielded. The official report, however, puts it rather decorously: "The President, finding that the disorder went on growing and that he had no other course open to him, declared the Session of the Twenty-third Indian National Congress suspended *sine die*. After the lady-delegates present on the platform had been escorted to the tents outside, the other delegates began with difficulty to disperse, but the disorder having grown wilder the Police eventually came in and ordered the hall to be cleared."

Others present at this unique and "the saddest episode in the story of the Congress" (to quote Annie Besant) gave much more dramatic accounts of it. A Reuter despatch from Surat which was widely carried by the British Press spoke of heads being broken, though it added, rather quizzically, "but no serious damage was done", meaning, perhaps, that Dr. Rutherford, a British Member of Parliament, and several other Europeans among the distinguished guests on the platform, managed to get away unscathed. It described how delegates trying to flee tore great holes in the canvas walls of the Pandal and "tumbled head foremost through the gaps and bolted into the park shrieking for the police". Presumably Reuter's Man in a similar predicament would have tumbled feet foremost through the gap.

However, the best despatches on the Surat tragi-comedy were sent by H.W. Nevins to the *Daily Chronicle*. Earlier that December he had been in Bengal reporting on the situation there, and in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, then a Liberal journal, had written how October 16—the day on which the partition was carried out—had become "the Ash Wednesday of India. On that day, thousands and thousands, probably millions, of

Indians rub dust or ashes on their foreheads; they bathe as at a sacred fast; no meals are eaten: the women refuse to cook; they lay aside their ornaments; men bind each other's wrists with a yellow string as a sign of remembrance; the whole day is passed in resentment, mourning, and the hunger of humiliation."

From Bengal he had gone to Surat, no doubt expecting something to write home about, as turned out to be the case. Later he summarised his despatches in his book *The New Spirit in India*, combining a fine journalistic touch with a sense of objectivity in his reportage:

With folded arms Tilak faced the audience. On either side of him young Moderates sprang to their feet, wildly gesticulating vengeance. Shaking their fists and yelling to the air, they clamoured to hurl him down the steps of the platform. Behind him, Dr. Ghose mounted the table, and, ringing an unheard bell, harangued the storm in shrill, agitated, unintelligible denunciations. Restraining the rage of Moderates, ingeminating peace if ever man ingeminated, Mr. Gokhale, sweet-natured even in extremes, stood beside his old opponents, flinging out both arms to protect him from the threatened onset. But Mr. Tilak asked for no protection. He stood there with folded arms, defiant, calling on violence to do its worst, calling on violence to move him, for he would move for nothing else in hell or heaven. In front, the white-clad audience roared like a tumultuous sea.

Suddenly something flew through the air—a shoe!—a Mahratta shoe!—reddish leather, pointed toe, sole studded with lead. It struck Surendranath Banerjea on the cheek; it cannoned off upon Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. It flew, it fell, and, as at a given signal, white waves of turbaned men surged up the escarpment of the platform. Leaping, climbing, hissing the breath of fury, brandishing long sticks, they came, striking at any head that looked to them Moderate, and in another moment, between brown legs standing upon the green-baize table, I caught glimpses of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos.

Like Goethe at the battle of Valmy, I could have said, "To-day marks the beginning of a new era, and you can say that you were present at it."

CHAPTER V

THE POISONED CHALICE

Nevinson had been carried away by the excitement of the scene at Surat. No political apocalypse was yet round the corner. The vision of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos which he thought he glimpsed was but a mild hallucination to which even the best of journalists are prone under the influence of the heat of moments of human drama they witness from the sidelines. No new era began on the morrow of the Surat shambles and, indeed, could not have begun. And for two reasons. Firstly, the militants—or “Nationalists” as they came to be dubbed by their admirers—led by Tilak had no great new philosophy of action to contribute to the Congress. Their political ideology was not very different to that of the Moderates. The anonymous “Anglo-Indian Correspondent” was right when he wrote in *India*, “We shall find that the newspaper division into Moderates and Extremists is largely fallacious; that India will entertain only one party, the Nationalists. They will disagree about the method and pace, but not about the goal; and the national assembly will be all the more powerful as a school of politics if, as seems inevitable, it is stimulated by the knowledge of an organisation preferring a more radical creed. The shoe at Surat has undeniably cleared the air, and when the Indian papers come to hand it will . . . be seen that the actual cause of the disruption was not so much a divergence of opinions as a blunder in management, made irrevocable by the ‘impatient idealism’ of Tilak.”

But it is easy to understand why Nevinson imagined himself to be witnessing an Indian battle of Valmy. The militants made a lot of noise; they talked in strong language; and they had among them men who, like Ajit Singh, had been deported to Burma with Lajpat Rai and carried a certain revolutionary aura. Young

India, not only Young Bengal, even remote from Surat instinctively thrilled to their radical phraseology and saw in the "happening" at Surat a repeat performance of the trial of strength between the Montagnards and Girondists. In this the reaction of young Jawaharlal Nehru who was eighteen at the time and in his second term at Trinity at Cambridge was significant and typical, even though later he was to realise the limitations of the Tilak school of thought.

This is clear from the letters he wrote to his father, Motilal Nehru who was definitely in the Girondist camp, from Cambridge early in 1908. His first reference to Surat was in a letter of January 2 written from Harrogate, a watering place, where he must have been staying in between the terms. "We expected lively things at the Surat Congress," he wrote to Motilal Nehru, "and our expectations were more than fulfilled. It is, of course, a great pity that such a split should have occurred. But it was sure to come and the sooner we have it the better. You will most probably throw all the blame on Tilak and the extremists. They may have been to blame for it but the moderates had certainly a lot to do with it. I do not at all object to R.B. Ghose being President; but the manner in which he was declared President in the face of opposition can hardly be defended from any point of view. The moderates may represent part of the country but they seem to think, or at any rate try to make others believe, that they are the 'natural leaders' and representatives of the whole country. The manner in which some of them try to ignore and belittle all those who differ from them would be annoying if it was not ridiculous. I firmly believe that there will hardly be any so-called 'moderates' left in a few years' time. By the methods they are following at present they are simply hastening the doom of their party."

This was a pretty harsh judgement and one which his father could hardly have shared being one of the "moderates" the doom of whose party Jawaharlal was foreseeing. Motilal, instead of sending him his account of what had happened at Surat, sent him a press clipping about the Congress from the *Times of India*. So Jawaharlal wrote back, this time from his college at Cambridge, that he had seen a Reuter report of the proceedings at Surat which, he said, was much the same as the one in the *Times of*

India. Motilal had described the *Times of India* report as "not free from party bias." "So I presume," wrote Jawaharlal, "that Reuter was not as fair and unbiased as he might have been." But he stuck to his criticism of the Moderates and was particularly hard on poor Rash Behari Ghose:

The would be presidential speech of Dr. Ghose does not strike me as being very brilliant or original. The beginning of his address is rather pathetic with its thanks for an honour which was not conferred on him and his allusion to the fate of Phaeton, [the son of Helios—Sun—who was killed by Zeus with a thunderbolt when he tried to drive his father's chariot but could not control the horses], which turned out to be true in his own case.

Having noticed in one of the accounts that his father spoke immediately before Tilak came on to the platform, he hoped to be sent his version of it because "this means that you must have been in the midst of the fray." But in his next letter Jawaharlal expressed his great disappointment that there was no mention of the Surat affair in his father's letter. "I have read many accounts about the last Congress," he wrote to Motilal on January 23, "but still I want to know what you think about it. I do hope you will not forget to write about it to me." Whether or not Motilal sent his son his account of Surat Congress, he had written him on January 10: "You know me and my views well enough to understand that I do not approve of the opinions expressed by you, but boys must be boys and I do not blame you for them."

To this Jawaharlal's reply written on January 30 was that he was sorry his father did not approve of his opinions. But, he added, "really I can hardly help holding them in the present state of affairs. They are the only inferences I can draw from my extremely limited supply of facts. . . . Anyhow I have not the presumption of imagining that my opinions are infallible." And he went on to say, rather cheekily: "The government must be feeling very pleased with you at your attitude. I wonder if the insulting offer of a Rai Bahadurship, or something equivalent to it, would make you less of a moderate than you are." This was to upset Motilal deeply and rankle with him. Jawaharlal must have heard about

it from his mother judging from a letter which he wrote her early in April: "I am very sorry to learn that father is unwell. I am particularly distressed to hear that he is depressed and might not have liked something I wrote to him in my letter a few weeks ago. What I wrote to him was written purely in fun and it never occurred to me that it could offend him....I shall apologise to him in my next letter." This he did on April 10:

I have been told that you did not like something I wrote to you a few weeks ago. I was rather surprised to know this as what I wrote to you was written purely in fun and it never dawned on me that it could offend you. All the same I was right sorry I ever wrote that or thought it. But what amazes me is that you should have ever thought me capable of being guilty of such a thing. I do hope this will put an end to the incident....I am sure you will pardon me for an offence which I did not intend to commit.

This rather strange anecdote of a misunderstanding between the father and the son, which brings to mind some observations made by Burke in his *Thoughts on Our Present Discontents*, would not have merited any mention except in the family history of the Nehrus had it not been in some ways symptomatic of a wider phenomenon. For it is undeniable that Surat seemed to bring to a head the growing generation gap in the Indian politics of the day. Not that Tilak could be regarded as part of the younger generation of India at the time. He was already past fifty. Nor could it be claimed that his ideas on many matters would have had particular appeal for the youth. At any rate, Jawaharlal Nehru would have found himself more at home with some of the Moderates. For most of them were men of the Enlightenment while Tilak's views on quite a few crucial social issues were, to put it mildly, conservative to the point of connecting with the Hindu counter-reformation—a paradox which Jawaharlal Nehru was to note in his autobiography. But, for the moment, he appeared to stand out as the symbol of radical dissent and protest against political mendicancy. Hence his attraction even for a man like the young Nehru.

At all events, Tilak and his militants had somewhat over-

estimated their strength and influence in the country—perhaps even more so than the Moderates had done. The bulk of the Congress was not willing to follow them. This was demonstrated at Surat itself. Within an hour or more of the adjournment of the Twenty-third Indian National Congress *sine die* the leading delegates met at Pherozeshah Mehta's camp residence to discuss how the pieces could be picked up and the work of the Congress continued. They resolved to call a convention the next day of those delegates to the Congress who were agreed:

1. That the attainment by India of Self-Government similar to that enjoyed by the Self-Governing members of the British Empire and participation by her in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members is the goal of our political aspirations.
2. That the advance towards this goal is to be by strictly constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit, and improving the condition of the mass of the people.
3. And that all meetings held for the promotion of the aims and objects above indicated have to be conducted in an orderly manner with due submission to the authority of those that are entrusted with power to control their procedure and they are requested to attend at I.P.M. on Saturday the 28th December 1907, in the pandal lent for the purpose by the Working Committee of the Reception Committee of the 23rd Indian National Congress.

The signatories to this notice calling the Convention were Rash Behari Ghose, Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjea, G.K. Gokhale, Dinshaw Wacha, Narendranath Sen, Ambalal S. Desai, V. Krishnaswami Iyer, Tribhuvan Das Malvi, Madan Mohan Malaviya and many others. The next day the Convention met at the appointed time. Over 900 delegates accepted the conditions stipulated in the notice and attended it. As, according to Annie Besant, something like 1,600 delegates were at the aborted session of the Congress, 700

delegates found the conditions unacceptable and, it must be supposed, they were either with Tilak and his militants or did not want to take sides. This suggests that Tilak though in a minority was not in a hopeless minority.

Pherozeshah Mehta opened the Convention more in sorrow than in anger. "I remember," he said, "that once from the Congress platform I spoke of an unconventional Convention for the purpose of promoting the interests of the country. I did not think then that in the process of time we should really have to meet in the form of a Convention for the purpose of resuscitation, if you will, reincarnating, if you desire, of the work which has gone on for twenty-three years with the cooperation of all provinces of this country." He proposed Dr. Ghose's name to take the chair which was seconded by Surendranath Banerjea. However, the key speaker was Lajpat Rai who had risked deportation and whose popularity, consequently, stood very high.

His name was not specifically mentioned among the signatories to the Convention notice. It could be that there was a tussle going on not only for his soul, but possibly in his soul overnight. His speech in which he finally threw in his weight on the side of the Moderates reflected this. He was certainly the Moderates' trump card and was given a great ovation. "While thanking you from the bottom of my heart," he began, "for the kind reception you have accorded me, I beg to associate myself with the proposal that has just been made." But he went on to add, "I wish it was not necessary for me to associate myself with the proposal today. Had we gone on with the proceedings in a normal manner it would have been unnecessary but as misfortune will have it that was not destined... Notwithstanding all our misfortunes we are determined to continue our work and thereby give proof to the world that with all our internal quarrels we are all agreed in the service of the country and that under no circumstances are we going to desert the banner under which we have been fighting."

His was the voice of a patriot and a statesman and it could not but make it easier for Dr. Rash Behari Ghose to take the chair and for the Convention to agree to the setting up of a Committee of over one hundred Congress members to draw up a constitution in conformity with the declaration of the creed

which the participants in the Convention had signed. A resolution to that effect was moved by Gokhale himself who assured them that as far as he "could see the programme of the body they were trying to bring into existence would for all practical purposes be the same as that of the Congress for which they had worked for 23 years." He read out the names and, after Govindaraghava Iyer and A. Chaudhuri had seconded and supported the motion appointing the Committee which would meet "during Easter" and if that were not possible, in September. It was carried unanimously.

The Committee set up by the Convention duly met for two days in April at Allahabad. It drafted a Constitution for the Congress as well as rules for the conduct of meetings. The creed of the Congress was embodied in the first article which was almost identical with the first two points of the notice already quoted, setting the attainment by the people of India of a system of Government "similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire" and "on equal terms with those members". The goal was to be achieved "through constitutional means" and "by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration", which implied progress by stages.

This was nothing very new. It was the goal towards which Dadabhai Naoroji had already urged them to move at Calcutta. But what was new was article two. Hitherto, despite a number of tentative Constitutions for the Congress discussed at various sessions over the years, the Congress had been virtually an open house, a kind of caravanserai almost, with no strictly defined qualifying rules of residence, so to speak. Now, and for the first time, they were asked to make a declaration in writing that they would abide by the rules of this great omnibus political hostelry and accept the purposes for which it was being run. It said:

Every delegate to the Indian National Congress shall express in writing his acceptance of the Objects of the Congress as laid down in Article I of this Constitution, and his willingness [note the male gender which was to become unthinkable only a decade later] to abide by this Constitution, and by the Rules of the Congress hereto appended.

This was the answer of the Congress "Patriarchs" who still ruled the roost to any intrusion of the Mahratta shoe in its deliberations in the future. The first major crisis in the Congress history had thus been overcome, or at least contained, and the unfinished Twenty-third session could be resumed where it had been abruptly interrupted at Surat—but on the coast of Coromandel at Madras in the Elphinston Grounds, Mount Road, a year later.

Paradoxically, the Moderates had something to be thankful for to those whom they characterised as Extremists and who regarded themselves as true nationalists. For once the reaction in Britain to a bit of a smash up at Surat was rather sensible. True the Tory Press was gleeful and shook its head in the spirit of "I told you so." The *Times*, in particular, drew the lesson which it had already learnt by heart: that Indians were not to be trusted with ruling themselves or allowed even intermediate forms of representative institutions. But the Liberals were in power, and though bipartisanship on India was already a well and truly established fact, the Liberal administration was in some degree responsive to the more sapient section of Liberal opinion. The *Star*, for instance, after having a mild dig at the Congress for having "mistaken Surat for Donnybrook" went on intelligently to add: "The danger is that we may take India either too seriously or not seriously enough. We hope Mr. Morley will not fall into either of these two errors". Instead, it counselled him to "hasten rather than diminish the pace of the reform.... It is his duty to show that constitutional action is more fruitful than revolutionary propaganda."

The *Manchester Guardian* was even more emphatic. "It would indeed be a bad day for all Liberalism," it wrote, "when loyalty to its principles in India failed to awaken an answering sense of duty amongst English Liberals. The situation in India is unmistakably clear. For a few years longer the front can be held for the cause of peaceful and constitutional Liberal Reform; but unless English Liberals take energetic action for its assistance, the time is not very distant when India will become like Ireland, a permanent entanglement of English politics, perhaps actually incapable of being resolved by constitutional

reforms. There is no longer any excuse for failure to understand for what the Indian National Congress stands."

These admonitions from what was in those days the friend, guide and counsellor of British Liberalism could not altogether be ignored by a Liberal administration, especially as there were other signals from India indicating that unrest was growing and beginning to acquire serious proportions not only in Bengal, but also the Punjab and elsewhere. By the standards of our own day and age the revolutionary and terrorist groups that sprang up in the wake of the anti-partition agitation in various parts of India were rather amateurish in their methods. They had little expertise and none of the lethal technological competence associated with their counterparts today. But they were to bring off some spectacular acts which attracted a good deal of international publicity, enough at any rate to disturb the proverbial *sang-froid* of the British authorities. On the eve of the abortive Congress session at Surat, for instance, a train in which Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal was travelling, was derailed by a bomb near Midnapur. Next April two bombs were thrown into a hackney carriage at Muzaffarpur in Bihar. They were meant for a District Judge, Kingsford, with whom the revolutionaries had scores to settle, but instead two British women—a Mrs. Kennedy and her daughter—were killed. For this act Khudiram Bose, a youth of 18, was later hanged.

These sporadic acts of violence—and the dramatic incident two years later in the very heart of London at Jehangir Hall at the Imperial Institute when Sir Curzon Wyllie, Political Secretary to the Secretary of State for India and Dr. Lalkaka were shot dead by Madan Lal Dhingra at a public meeting—did not add up to much. But the alarm they caused in Britain was considerable. While the British authorities in India found in them a convenient excuse to tighten up the repressive laws and regulations, Liberals in England argued that the stick alone was not enough and it was necessary to dangle a carrot as well. The stick, of course, was freely used. In July 1908 Tilak was arrested, tried before a Parsi judge who, before pronouncing his verdict, delivered a sanctimonious lecture on the duties of public men, especially those who, like Tilak, exercised great influence—and promptly sentenced him to six years' transportation with hard

labour (later changed to simple imprisonment in Mandalay because of his age and state of health). To this was added for good measure the nine months' remission he had been granted of his sentence in 1897. In Bengal, at the other end of India, ever since the imposition of partition arrests, convictions and deportations, with or without trial, under what was virtually rule by lawless regulations had become the order of the day. Among more than five hundred such convictions was that of Aurobindo Ghose on a charge of seditious writings in the *Bande Mataram*.

Tilak's conviction, however, became something of a *cause celebre*, partly because of his political prestige in the country and his eminence as a scholar. It also led to widespread protest and disturbances in Bombay. Gokhale, not given to exaggeration, had described it as "an ugly discouragement to the Moderates." Even Morley, deeply schizophrenic in his Liberalism who, as Edward Thompson and G.T. Garratt remark in their *Rise and Fulfilment of the British Rule in India*, "in his old age reacted unconsciously against the ideas of his youth", mildly disapproved of it. In his correspondence with Sir George Clarke, the then Governor of Bombay, he considered it "politically unprofitable, though morally and legally justifiable." Indeed, not only the Liberal and Irish MPs were critical, but even some Conservatives were censorious, among them a future Secretary of State for India, F.E. Smith, later Lord Birkenhead.

The Liberal administration under Campbell-Bannerman was, in fact, under some pressure to show some signs of mobility on the political front in India besides passing new and more stringent repressive acts. A convenient occasion for a gesture to assuage the Liberals in India offered itself on the 50th anniversary of Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 by which the Crown took over the Government of India from the East India Company formally and promised that all people, Europeans and Indians, would be treated on a footing of equality. In a message to "the Princes and Peoples of India" (in that order) on December 1, 1908, Edward VII reaffirmed the pledges given by his mother which the British bureaucratic hierarchy in India ever since had been anxious to erode by insinuation of all kinds of semantic ambiguities into the Proclamation. Almost simultaneously, Morley in a despatch outlined a scheme of reforms of the Legislative Councils,

both provincial and central, and for a token opening of the doors to admit Indians—at least those who could be relied upon to be amenable and never to speak out of turn—to the “Holy of Holies”, namely the Viceroy’s Executive Council in Calcutta and the India Council in London.

It was, therefore, in a somewhat mixed mood that the Twenty-third Congress reassembled at Madras on December 28, 1908, to take up the business left unfinished at Surat the previous Christmas. There was, certainly, a mild sense of euphoria—and for a number of reasons. To begin with, the moderate Congress leaders could congratulate themselves that they had managed to come through the crisis with the bulk of their support intact. Indeed, some even felt that the departure of Tilak and his militant cohorts had made the Congress more attractive to the Muslims many of whom had found their strident note of Hindu revivalism more than a little off-putting. What is more, the Congress now had a proper constitution and one which made a repetition of the Surat free-for-all virtually impossible and ensured the ascendancy of the moderate leadership for a long time to come.

However, the main source of euphoria was elsewhere. The Congress leadership at long last had something to prove *urbi et orbi* that their constitutional methods of agitation had not altogether been so much expense of spirit and effort in a waste of shame and futility; that, in fact, they had earned some dividends. The euphoria was further heightened by the widely shared belief that in drafting his scheme for constitutional reforms Morley, by now duly ennobled, had taken his cue from one of them—Gokhale. As Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was to claim quarter of a century later in his history of the Congress, “The Minto-Morley Reforms really owed their origin to a memorandum furnished by Gokhale to Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India. The memorandum was long and detailed so much so that Morley regretted he had no time to go through it and desired Gokhale to put it on a half sheet of paper. So he did and that bodily became the Morley-Minto Reforms.”

There is little evidence to substantiate this claim as will be seen. But it was largely believed and Morley himself probably wanted it to be believed in India. It accounted for the joyous.

note on which Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, who was unable to make himself heard at Surat but was listened to with rapt attention at Madras, modulated the opening passages of his presidential address and said:

The fears which for months haunted the minds of some of us have proved groundless. The genial predictions of our enemies so confidently made, have also been falsified. For the Indian National Congress is not dead, nor has Surat been its grave. It has been more than once doomed to death but, rely upon it, it bears a charmed life and is fated not to die.

This at least was prophetic. Waxing poetic he spoke of the clouds "which darkened the political sky" and which they had "watched so long with fear and trembling" having dissolved in rain and broken "in blessings" over their heads. "The time of the singing of birds is come," he said, "and the voice of the turtle is heard." At any rate his voice was heard paying tribute to English statesmanship "which, as Lord Morley justly boasted, has never yet failed in any part of the world" and which, he claimed, had "risen to its fullest height at this critical time" and had "seized the golden moment, for it knows the season when to take occasion by the hand, not to suppress but to guide the new spirit which England has created in India." He saw India "on the threshold of a new era."

However, his joyful sense of the imminence of the millennium was intersected at many points by grim forebodings and anxiety which surfaced again and again in speeches during the next two days. Even Dr. Ghose was on the defensive and parts of his address sounded very much like an *apologia pro vita sua*:

I repeat, we cherish no illusions. We know that the way is long and hard; we know the danger of taking even a single unwary step, but we are determined to make the road easier for those who will follow us in ever-increasing numbers. Man goes forth into work and to his labour until the evening. But the evening comes before his work or task is done, but others will take up the work which is left

unfinished. Yes, a younger generation will take up the work who will, I, trust have some kindly thoughts for those who too in their day strove to do their duty, however imperfectly, through good report and through evil report, with, it may be a somewhat chastened fervour but, I may say without boasting, with a fervour as genuine as that which stirs and inspires younger hearts.

The anxiety and forebodings were justified. It was not just that far fewer delegates had turned up at Madras for the second act of the Twenty-third Congress—626 against more than 1600 who had come to Surat. But what was at stake was the claim of the Congress to represent the nation. Of the 626 delegates 404 were from Madras and 134 from Bombay. The rest of India, including Burma, was represented by only eighty-eight delegates. Province-wise breakdown of the figures revealed an even more depressing picture. United Bengal—for the Congress for its purposes refused to recognise the partition as having any legitimacy—which had long spearheaded the movement of national resurgence had sent only thirty-six delegates to Madras, though they included old stalwarts like Surendranath Banerjea and Ambica Charan Mazumdar. The Punjab, at the other end of India, was represented by only seven men, however "good and true". In between, the United Provinces had twenty-three and the C.P. and Berar where, presumably, the shifting of the venue from Nagpur to Surat the previous year still rankled, mustered no more than eighteen delegates. It almost looked as if the Congress base had narrowed to Bombay and Madras; and the rest of the country seemed to have become disenchanted with it.

Something, obviously, needed to be done to reverse this trend. But what? The moderate leaders were in something of a cleft stick. They wanted to show their enthusiasm for the reforms foreshadowed in Morley's despatch which had been made public property only a few weeks before the Madras session. Indeed, they were anxious even to claim credit for them. At the same time, they did not want the impression to gain ground that they were merely the camp-followers of and cheer-leaders for the British Government. Already all manner of scurrilous rumours were being spread by their opponents. This included

the preposterous story that it was Gokhale, described delicately as "Honorary Patriot", "the blackfaced man", even "Iago", who had engineered Tilak's prosecution and actually gone to England to persuade Morley to pronounce his benediction on the decision of the Government of Bombay to deport him. Then as now the more grotesque a rumour the greater its coefficient of credibility in India and even supposedly serious newspapers, like the *Bande Mataram* associated with Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose, were willing to publicize such stories.

It was important for the Congress, therefore, to dissociate itself clearly and unmistakably from the policy of unbridled repression which the Government was pursuing—and not only in Bengal—while talking of constitutional reforms. This dilemma was to be with the Congress for many years to come. It was reflected both in the speeches and the resolutions passed at Madras. The very first resolution, for instance, "tenders its loyal homage to His Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor", for having reaffirmed the pledges given in "the memorable Proclamation issued in 1858 by his illustrious Mother, Victoria the Good". The second resolution was equally fulsome in giving "expression to the deep and general satisfaction" with "the Reform proposals formulated in Lord Morley's despatch...throughout the country." The next resolution was also in the nature of a propitiatory gesture to Caesar. It placed on record the Congress' "emphatic and unqualified condemnation of the detestable outrages and deeds of violence which have been committed recently in some parts of the country, and which are abhorrent to the loyal, humane and peace-loving nature of His Majesty's Indian subjects of every denomination."

However, the rest of the substantive resolutions passed at Madras session read like a long inventory of griefs. These included the hardy annuals like complaint against the denial of equal citizenship rights to His Majesty's Indian subjects in the British self-governing colonies which "is fraught with grave mischief to the Empire and is as unwise as it is unrighteous"; against "high prices of food-stuffs for the past several years, and the hardships to which the middle and poorer classes are put thereby" and asking for an enquiry into the "causes of such high prices, with a view to ascertain how far and by what remedies

such causes could be removed"; plea for "immediate steps" to make "Primary Education free at once and gradually compulsory throughout the country" and for larger allocation of funds for secondary, higher and technical education; protest against "the fresh burden of £300,000 which the British War Office has imposed on the Indian Exchequer for military charges on the recommendation of the Romer Committee"; and, inevitably, a lament at the heavy charge of land revenue on Indian agriculturists, great and small, this exaction being "not a tax but... in the nature of rent." But the gnawing preoccupation of the Congress leadership was something else.

It was the Partition of Bengal and its aftermath. The fifth resolution earnestly appealed to the British Government "to reverse... or to modify it in such a manner as to keep the entire Bengali-speaking community under one and the same administration". It argued that "the rectification of this admitted error will restore contentment to the Province of Bengal, give satisfaction to the other Provinces, and... enhance the prestige of His Majesty's Government throughout the country." Ambica Charan Mazumdar, not exactly a firebrand, attributed the unrest and the growing cult of violence in the country to this act of folly and arbitrariness. "Violence," he said, "and lawlessness we hate; anarchism we detest. But it seems impossible not to feel the force of the circumstance which has given monstrous birth to the insane bomb-maker. And gentlemen, what has been the remedy applied to this state of things—Repression, Repression and nothing but Repression. But, gentlemen, if anarchism has in every age and in every country failed to achieve the salvation of any people, Repression has likewise nowhere succeeded in restoring peace and order, and in this country repression has so far only succeeded in converting prison-houses into martyrdoms." And almost defiantly he added, "If the Partition is a settled fact, the unrest in India is also a settled fact, and it is for Lord Morley and the Government of India to decide which should be unsettled to settle the question."

The tenth resolution urged the Government to repeal the Bengal Regulation III of 1818 and similar regulations in other Provinces of India under which people were being deported, often without even the semblance of any legal trial; and it "respectfully"

prayed "that the persons recently deported in Bengal be given an opportunity of exculpating themselves, or for meeting any charges that may be against them, or be set at liberty." It was moved by Syed Hasan Imam. Among the speakers who supported it was Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru who made his debut at the Congress session by describing the Bengal Regulation III of 1818—and other similar lawless Regulations—as "the Sword of Damocles" always hanging over their heads and "against the very first principles of English jurisprudence, and...opposed to all the traditions of the English Constitution."

But even the Moderates renowned for their moderation were beginning to lose faith in the efficacy of the first principles of English jurisprudence and the traditions of the English Constitution in curbing the British bureaucracy from riding roughshod over elementary civil liberties. Bhupendranath Basu who seconded the resolution bravely stood up and counted himself as "a close friend of some of those deported" and their fellow-workers for many years. "Are we to be imprisoned, are we to be deported, are we to be arrested, without being given even an opportunity of explaining our conduct?" he asked rhetorically and pointed out that at the recent Midnapore trial elderly men and some of the highest in Indian society had been arrested and brought to trial "upon the information of a drunken debauchee picked up in the streets of Midnapore"—information which could not be substantiated and had later to be abandoned as evidence.

The next resolution was worded more mildly and merely expressed the hope that Acts VII and XIV would not long remain on the Statute Book. The first of these Acts empowered the authorities summarily to attach newspaper presses and the second made it a punishable offence for anyone to subscribe to any association which was under executive proscription. The reason for this muted critique which almost implied a signal of supine acquiescence in repression, was that the Congress leadership was in something of a quandary over the issue. One of them, Gopal Krishna Gokhale no less, who in his person combined a rare political astuteness and even wisdom with a spasmodic habit of naivete and ingenuousness, had been persuaded by the Government to give his assent to the new Draconian curbs

on the Indian Press after having been shown certain "evidence" of seditious writings.

Apparently he had agreed to them despite advice to the contrary from some of his closest colleagues, among them Pherozeshah Mehta, not exactly an extremist and under whom Gokhale had served his political apprenticeship and, indeed, who had virtually bequeathed him his seat in the "Supreme Council". As H.P. Mody relates in his biography of Mehta, he was strongly opposed to the Congress saying anything which might give the impression of its approval of further curtailment of the freedom of the Press when the authorities were already armed with powerful judicial and extra-judicial instruments of discipline and correction. But it was not possible for the Congress publicly to repudiate Gokhale either. So a form of compromise phrasing was worked out to do a characteristic balancing act. While the eleventh resolution deplored "the circumstances" which had led to the passing of the offensive laws, it expressed "the earnest hope" of the Congress "that these enactments will only have a temporary existence in the Indian Statute Book." The Congress Moderates, it seemed, had inexhaustible reserves of "earnest hope".

However, hope, whether "earnest" or simulated as an exercise in political Coucism, availed little. The glaring deficit in the crucial resolutions passed at Madras, as at all the previous Congress sessions over nearly a quarter of a century, was not a flaw of semantics, but of will and self-confidence. Beyond deploing and even strongly protesting against the policies of repression and insolent bureaucratic despotism, the Congress offered its followers no strategy, much less programme, of popular resistance. It was notable, for instance, that at Madras, the Congress reiterated "its most cordial support to the Swadeshi Movement" which was good news to the emerging "Indian producers" and industrialists. But there was not a word about "the Boycott Movement" which the Congress under Dadabhai Naoroji had accepted as a legitimate form of pressure, at least in the limited context of Bengal, to get the Government to change its mind on partition. This could not but serve to alienate the Radicals—and not only in Bengal—from the Congress. It could not even be said that the Congress posture of being grateful for small mercies

made much tactical sense. The Government was bound to read it as an indication that for sometime to come the Congress would be too busy trying out the new constitutional scheme to make any importunate demands for any real sharing of power. Worse still, all the thanksgiving at Madras was likely to encourage the die-hards in London and Calcutta to intensify their clamour for paring down still further the crumbs of Reforms which had been offered, confident that the Congress, now safely in moderate hands, would do nothing to rock the administrative boat in India by organising any active opposition on the ground.

In spelling out their "deep and general satisfaction" with the Reforms outlined in Morley's despatch the Congress leaders had been inclined to take them at their face value. Unfortunately for them and India, however, his political package was not quite like a famous brand of whisky so distinctly bottled as to rule out all vagueness. There was plenty of vagueness about it, not all accidental and some obviously deliberate and intentional. Moreover there was a whole area of crucial details left to be filled in later on. Of course, sanguine as always, the Congress at Madras had "hoped" that these details will be informed by "the same liberal spirit in which the main provisions . . . have been conceived." This hope, too, was to prove a dupe. The way in which the details were worked out was meant to circumscribe the scope of the proposals and vitiate them. This was soon to become crystal clear.

Not that the general scheme itself represented a giant step forward towards effective representative institutions, much less any substantive transfer of executive or legislative power to Indians. Morley himself was at pains to deflate the excessive bubble of expectancy that he had raised in India. "If it could be said," he declared in the House of Lords to which he had been elevated, "that this chapter of reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it." This was exactly ten days before the Congress met in Madras so that its leaders could not say that they had not been warned of his real intentions.

Minto was even more brutally dismissive of any suggestion that the Reforms which were to become associated jointly with his and Morley's name for all times to come, constituted a decisive

advance on the road to responsible government in India. And Morley, far from demurring even *sotto voce* to Minto's wholly negative gloss on the scheme of reforms he had partly fathered, chimed in with His Majesty's Government's "cordial concurrence" with His Excellency's "disclaimer" that the administration over which he presides were "advocates of representative government for India in the western sense of the term" which, in their judgement, "could never be akin to the instincts of many races comprising the population of the Indian Empire...."

This was a statement of the obvious. Not, however, about the supposed "instincts of many races comprising the population of the Indian Empire", but the true nature and worth of the "reforms" that were being offered to India. As the authors of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, a successor to Morley's despatch, were to put it ten years later, "Excessive claims were made for them [that is, the package labelled Morley-Minto Reforms] in the enthusiasm of the moment.... These sanguine expectations were short-lived." It is surprising, in fact, that there were any sanguine expectations at all. True, in the Indian Councils Act passed in February 1909 replacing Lord Cross' Act of 1892, by mathematical juggling the "elected" component of the Councils, both at the Centre and in Provinces, was increased. In the Provincial Councils "elected" members formed a majority. In the Imperial Legislative Council they remained a minority, though a bigger one.

But the numbers game whether at the Centre or in Provinces was largely fraudulent. For neither the "elected" majority in the Provincial Councils nor the reinforced minority at the Centre were vested with any power. They exercised no control over the executive and none over finance. They could not legislate any important measure, absolute power of veto being vested in the Provincial Governors and in the Governor-General and Viceroy at the Centre. They could not even dream of voting the administration out of office. All they could do was to criticise. For all practical purposes, they were to be political castrati and this was often rubbed in with brutal candour.

Even from the viewpoint of the British Government, as intelligent historians of the Raj were later to acknowledge, this was not, perhaps, good sense. "The Government," E.J. Thompson and

G.T. Garratt have remarked, "had thus organised itself a perpetual opposition, with no function except to criticise, no chance ever of taking office, and no real responsibility to the rather vague electorate which they were supposed to represent." It was a system ideally calculated to generate a reflex of negation among the political "elite" which has proved hard to outgrow and which could not but make it enormously difficult to develop healthy democratic norms and traditions in the future. It is important to stress this because it has been argued that the Minto-Morley Reforms had "some educational value in a country where little was known of the machinery of democratic government." At least neither Minto nor Morley made this spurious claim and were frank enough to go on record that the last thing they intended was for their scheme to serve as a training course for a parliamentary system in any real sense of the term for Indians.

The denial of even rudimentary power and responsibility to the Legislative Councils—their members were for the most part elected indirectly and where provision was made for direct election it was in order to entrench the interests of certain specific economic and confessional groups and that, too, on the basis of extremely restricted franchise—was to be expected. The bureaucratic despotism was not going to part with any of its power just for the asking. But this was by no means the worst feature of the Morley-Minto scheme. It had a far more sinister device built into it with infinite potential for evil. For the first time a kind of electoral apartheid was introduced by establishing separate electorate for the Muslim community in India which constituted roughly twenty-five per cent of the population of the undivided India. The ostensible purpose was to safeguard their interests against the possibility of being swamped by the majority. But what it inevitably did was to plant in the very heart of Indian polity a morbid and pathological culture which, given the historical context, was to spread and grow and ultimately corrode and poison the whole body-politic with lethal consequences in the not too distant future.

There was no doubt a real problem for which a rational solution had to be found. The minorities in India, like minorities anywhere, whether ethnic or religious, entertained the fear that any system based on the counting of heads would place them at a

disadvantage. This was particularly the case with the Muslims who were not so much a minority as a major element of the body-social. A significant section of their leadership, again owing to complex reasons, both historical and psychological, felt that in the absence of effective safeguards, the educational, economic and other disparities between them and the majority community would tend to increase rather than diminish. And for the good reason that the emergent Hindu middle class had been far less inhibited in adjusting itself to the new economic order which British rule had been instrumental in ushering in and was thus far better equipped to profit from the opportunities, however limited and subordinate to British interests, which it offered.

This feeling, and the reflexive mistrust and rivalry to which it gave rise between the majority and minorities in general, but especially the Muslims, was not, of course, entirely a British creation. As H.V. Hodson writes in his *The Great Divide*, "It is not possible to divide and rule unless the ruled are ready to be divided. The British may have used the Hindu-Muslim rivalry for their own advantage, but they did not invent it. They did not write the annals of Indian history... They were realists, and if they did use India's divisions for their advantage, the divisions themselves were already real." This is a fair point. But he is less convincing in his mild apologia of the system of separate electorate which was the dubious gift to India of the authors of the Morley-Minto "Reforms" and which in his words "remained an integral part of the constitution of India right up to the transfer of power." The system, he argues, has "to be judged in terms of the actual facts at the time at which they were applied. The position of the Muslim minority being as it was, and the relationships of the chief communities being as they were, to establish separate electorates appeared as necessary as it was logical, if the pattern of Indian life was to be truly represented in the counsels of government, and justice was to be done to the underdog in the tangle of class and caste and religion in India."

That does not follow. Surely, there were other ways of doing justice to the underdog—and, incidentally, the underdog never got a vote at all till after independence—than through political and electoral apartheid which separate confessional electorate amounted to. Gokhale, for instance, who among the Congress

leaders of the day was the least tainted with any confessional bias, was most anxious that justice should be done and seen to be done to the minorities—particularly the Muslims. In his memorandum to Morley he had made an interesting proposal. "I think," he had suggested, "the most reasonable plan is first to throw open a substantial minimum of seats to elections on a territorial basis, in which all qualified to vote should take part without distinction of race or creed. And then supplementary elections should be held for minorities which numerically or otherwise are important enough to need special representation, and these should be confined to members of the minorities only."

Gokhale, indeed, was so anxious that no section of the population of India should "feel any real or reasonable grievance" that he insisted that "it will not do to be guided in this matter by a strict regard for numbers only; for it may be necessary at times to give special representation to a minority so small as not to be entitled even to a single member on a strict numerical basis." He seemed pretty confident that if his ideas were implemented, the Muslim community would not feel any need for "dependence upon Government nominations" because he believed, optimistically enough, that "their interests are generally so far identical with ours that they are bound before long to come and range themselves on our side."

He may have been oversanguine in this regard. His proposal for a dual system of constituencies, one open to all and everyone on a territorial basis, and the other restricted to the various minorities only, may well have failed. But this cannot be either proved or disproved. It was never given a trial, or even seriously considered by Morley who, like Minto, was not averse to using Gokhale for his own ends. However, quite apart from Gokhale's proposal and its practicality or otherwise, it is hard to believe that the constitutional experts in and around Whitehall, to say nothing of the great academic institutions in the North Sea Island, who like nothing better than inventing all manner of constitutional games and models—and did so and often tested them on ground in Britain's vast imperial possessions, and especially in India which served as a living laboratory of continental dimensions—could not have come up with something different and less potentially evil system than electorate based on

confessional allegiances. It was obvious that such a system carried within it the germ of untold mischief.

There is little doubt that when opting for it the experts who drafted the Morley-Minto scheme were fully aware of what they were doing. H.V. Hodson admits as much even if in an understatement. Acknowledging that there is "some force in the Indian criticism that separate electorate was riveted upon India in pursuit of a 'divide and rule' policy", he observes: "And undoubtedly ulterior motives reinforced the honest belief of British Viceroys and Secretaries of State that by giving the minorities, especially the Muslims, separate electorates they were doing justice and assuring fair play in the conditions of India. At the time of the Minto-Morley reforms, and later up to the end, the Muslims were regarded and from time to time employed as a counterpoise to the Hindu majority, and the Muslims' resistance to majority rule as a counterpoise to the swelling demand for democratic self-government."

That, indeed, is the essential truth of the matter. There were other ways of ensuring fair play and justice for the minorities, including the Muslims, than setting up watertight confessional electoral compartments. Nor is there any evidence of British being so concerned about being just and fair to Muslims in other parts of the world. The reason for the British Government's excessive concern for the interests of Muslims in India was obvious enough. From Clive onwards the builders of British power had played upon the differences of caste and creed among the various segments of the Indian population as one of the most effective ways open to them to maintain and extend British paramountcy in India.

At the close of the 19th century, after the foundation of the Congress when it soon became apparent to the British authorities that it was tending to become the focus of a new secular sense of national political solidarity, the Muslim card began to be used increasingly and systematically to trump the Congress demands for changes in the machinery of governance of the country to bring it into line with some democratic norms. The role of Theodore Beck, Principal of the M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in selling the idea of a Muslim-British alliance to the founder of the College and the Aligarh Movement, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who was by

no means either a Muslim "fundamentalist" or anti-Hindu and was actually well-qualified to lead the movement of liberal Reformation in Indian Islam as Rammohun Roy had done half a century earlier in Hinduism, is well known. It was no accident that when in 1893 the Mohammedan Defence Association of India was established, Beck became one of its Secretaries.

However, it was during the first decade of the present century, and after the ground had been well prepared, that the decisive step was taken to make the communal divide an integral part of the political structures. In this the role of Minto was crucial. Contrary to the view prevailing among Congress leaders, including Gokhale, who had heaved an audible sigh of relief when Curzon had resigned and was replaced by Minto, that he was at least mildly sympathetic or less hostile to the Congress, Minto was as implacably opposed to the Congress as Curzon. If anything, his hostility to it and what it stood for was more intractable than Curzon's because it was less open and more insidious. Curzon had described his successor, with more than an undertone of contempt, as "a gentleman who only jumps hedges"—an allusion to Minto's equestrian skills and exploits which had earned him the nickname of "Mr. Rolly" in racing circles. Unfortunately for India and the Congress, Minto could not only jump hedges, but was quite an expert at setting them up—and not only on the turf.

At any rate, from the very start he busied himself with laying deadly political booby-traps for the Congress while disingenuously acknowledging the need for "recognizing" it and being "friends" with it. "I am afraid," he wrote to Morley on May 28, 1906, "there is much that is absolutely disloyal in the movement and that there is danger for the future." He was determined to create countervailing forces to contain and neutralize it. "I have been thinking a good deal lately," he wrote in the same despatch, "of a possible counterpoise to Congress. I think we may find a solution in the Council of Princes, or in an elaboration of that idea; a Privy Council not only of Native Rulers, but of a few other big men to meet say once a year for a week or a fortnight at Delhi for instance. Subjects for discussion and procedure would have to be very carefully thought out, but we

should get different ideas from those of Congress, emanating from men already possessing great interest in good government."

Presumably Morley did not rise to this bright idea, though it was not without a tomorrow. Meanwhile Minto did not neglect to pursue the more familiar and time-tested strategy of trying to mobilize the Muslim community as the ally of the Raj. In October of the same year in which Minto had the brain-wave about staging a show of the "Native Rulers" as a counter-attraction to the annual Congress sessions, there was the "historic" affair of a Muslim delegation being received by Minto at the Viceregal Lodge at Simla. It consisted of "about seventy delegates from all parts of India" and was headed by no less a person than the Aga Khan who, as Jawaharlal Nehru once wrote, managed to reconcile in his versatile personality "Newmarket and Mecca", and must therefore have been very much a man after Minto's own heart. Lady Minto in her Journal for October 1, 1906, was to write about "the ceremony...in the Ball-room" which she "and the girls" had witnessed: "This has been a very eventful day; as someone said to me 'an epoch in Indian history'....In the afternoon a tea-party was given for the Delegation in the gardens of the Viceregal Lodge....Touching to hear their appreciation of the sympathy and understanding shown them." Even more touching was the letter received from an official the same evening. "I must send Your Excellency a line to say," he wrote, "that a very, very big thing has happened today—a work of statesmanship that will affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of sixty-two millions of people [meaning the Muslims of India] from joining the ranks of seditious opposition [meaning the Congress]."

The anonymous official was right, of course, though it must always be open to question whether the institutionalising of the confessional divide at the very heart of the political structures can properly qualify as "a work of statesmanship." Lady Minto herself was rather impressed by the show she witnessed and is on record as having exclaimed: "Quite a Command Performance!" What exactly she meant we shall never know though Indians at the time—and since—took her words literally. H.V. Hodson, on the other hand, believes this to be a misunderstanding on their part which "gave rise to one of the undying myths of Indian

politics." "To an English reader," he argues, "the allusion was to the presence of everybody who was somebody, in their finest garments and regalia, as at a Royal Command Performance at the opera; but to Indians unfamiliar with English social custom and idiom the phrase was taken to imply that the delegation was performing by command—a set of puppets summoned and animated to justify a policy already determined in the Government's own interest. The myth became part of the inevitable stock-in-trade of Indian opponents of communal representation."

He may well be right though he seems to underestimate Indian familiarity with the English idiom and social custom, both "U" and "non-U". Opposing mythologies are likely to remain with us, but there is historical evidence that even if it was not actually a "Command Performance", it was a show scripted and staged by mutual arrangement. Members of the delegation were carefully picked and well-rehearsed. They had received their cues from their British impresarios, especially Archibold, Beck's successor as Principal of M.A.O. College, Aligarh—an archetypal denominational educational institution which, especially after the death of its founder, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, was used systematically by the British as a breeding ground for Muslim confessionalism and political separatism. For long before the C.I.A. was heard of and had the bright idea of enlisting the services of amenable academics to destabilize the minds of impressionable youth of the emergent nations in the post-colonial period, the British had perfected this technique to a fine art for their own imperial ends. Like Beck, Archibold seems to have been part of the British para-intelligence apparatus in India. He not only served as the go-between who arranged an appointment with Minto for the Muslim deputation, but actually insisted on laying down the lines on which his Muslim clients should present their case for special favours :

Colonel Dunlop Smith, Private Secretary of His Excellency the Viceroy, informs me that His Excellency is agreeable to receive the Muslim deputation. He advises that a formal letter requesting permission to wait on His Excellency be sent to him. In this connection I would like to make a few suggestions. The formal letter should be sent

with the signatures of some representative Mussalmans. The deputation should consist of the representatives of all the provinces. The third point to be considered is the text of the address. I would here suggest that we begin with a solemn expression of loyalty. The Government decision to take a step in the direction of self-government should be appreciated. But our apprehension should be expressed that the principle of election, if introduced, would prove detrimental to the interests of the Muslim minority. It should respectfully be suggested that nomination or representation by religion be introduced to meet Muslim opinion. We should also say, that in a country like India due weight must be given to the views of zamindars [landholders].... But in all these views I must be in the background. They must come from you....I can prepare for you the draft of the address or revise it. If it is prepared in Bombay I can go through it as, you are aware, I know how to phrase these things in proper language. Please remember that if we want to organise a powerful movement in the short time at our disposal, we must expedite matters.

The drift of Archibold's instructions could not have presented any difficulty of English idiom or social custom to those to whom they were addressed or anybody else. As he claimed with becoming modesty, "I know how to phrase these things in proper language." And it would be naive to suppose that in assuming the role of the unmoved mover behind the scenes, he was acting entirely off his own bat and without clearance and even encouragement from higher authority in Calcutta and Whitehall. At any rate, Morley appears to have been highly pleased with the whole transaction and wrote to Minto on October 26: "All that you tell me of your Mohommedan is full of interest, and I only regret that I could not have moved about unseen at your garden party. The whole thing has been as good as it could be, and it stamps your position and personal authority decisively. Among other good effects...is this, that it has completely deranged the plans and tactics of the critical faction here, that is to say it has prevented them from any longer representing the Indian Government as the ordinary case of a bureaucracy versus the

people. I hope that even my stoutest Radical friends will now see that the problem is not quite so simple as this."

It certainly wasn't. But by conjuring up and then entrenching the virus of a confessional vested interest in the political system, the problem was made almost insoluble except through an eventual amputation. Two months later, in December 1906, another inevitable and fateful, some might say fatal, step was taken. The All-India Muslim League was set up under the presidency of the Aga Khan whose talents as a broker and fixer in their dealings with the Muslims in India—and not only India—the British were discovering and increasingly to utilize. The League, no doubt, was to have a chequered political evolution and even pass through a phase of radicalism after a fashion under the leadership of the younger Jinnah and other Muslim Liberals. But it was rarely to depart from the tablet handed to it from on high at the very moment of its birth which laid down that it was "to support, wherever possible, all measures emanating from the Government, to protect the cause and advance the interests of our co-religionists throughout the country to counteract the growing influence of the Indian National Congress, which has a tendency to misinterpret and subvert British Rule in India, or which might lead to that deplorable situation, and to enable our youngmen of education, who for want of such an association have joined the Congress to find scope, according to their labours and ability, for public life...."

"So, for good or ill", writes H.V. Hodson nicely, "the die was cast." It was. But it could hardly be for good....

CHAPTER VI

A PYRRHIC VICTORY

The British, it has got to be admitted, were under no obligation of any sort to reduce the divisive strains in India's body-social and politic, or to encourage forces which were trying to reinforce the sense of nationhood as the necessary condition for the building of a secular and modern polity. Indeed, from the narrow standpoint of imperialist *realpolitik*, it obviously suited them to exacerbate sectarian tensions in pursuit of their strategy of *divide et impera*. The temptation for them to resort to political scissors and cut up and segment India along communal lines instead of using the needle, to recall a metaphor invoked by the medieval Muslim mystic, Baba Farid, was too strong to be resisted. Nor did they resist it even though by yielding to it they largely undid what might otherwise and historically have been a major item on the credit side of their rule in India—the creation of a physical and administrative framework more elaborate and resilient than any previous system of governance or regime had attempted, much less achieved. There were all along some clairvoyant spirits in British public life who were aware of the perverse paradox that was being enacted in India and claimed as an act of statesmanship. But they were regarded as cranks if not subversive; and their voices could make little impact over the din of imperialist bombast being intoned by the dominant school of thought in the British establishment.

However, while one could not expect the British Government to concern itself overmuch whether its acts of policy weakened or strengthened the unity of India, the Congress, as the custodian of long-term interests of the Indian people, was under an imperative obligation to sound the tocsin about the danger inherent in the introduction of separate electorate and reject any constitutional scheme of which they were made an integral part.

Can it be said that it did so? The answer, unfortunately, has to be not sufficiently clearly, and not in time. True, at its Twenty-fourth session held in Bradlaugh Hall at Lahore on December 27, 1909, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in his presidential address spoke of "a wall of separation" which the Regulations setting up separate electorate for the Muslims would create. "The Regulations," he lamented, "for the first time in the history of British rule have recognised religion as a basis of representation, and have thus raised a wall of separation between the Mahomedan and non-Mahomedan subjects of His Majesty which it will take years of earnest efforts to demolish." But in hindsight the argument he marshalled against the Regulations which were to provide the essential nuts and bolts of the Morley-Minto Reforms seems to trail clouds of confusion and even a certain self-stultifying dualism.

Thus, on the one hand, he rightly stressed the insidious regressive thrust of the Regulations which the Madras Congress, the previous year, had naively hoped would be conceived in a "liberal spirit". "They have," he ruefully pointed out, "also practically undone, for the time being at any rate, the results of the earnest agitation of a quarter of a century to secure an effective voice to the elected representatives of the people in the government of their country." What is more, he criticised them for laying down "unnecessarily narrow and arbitrary restrictions on the choice of electors." This was perfectly true and wholly in accord with the principles which the Congress had made its own. Unfortunately, however, there was also another strand in his argument which was rather flawed, even fatally so.

This became manifest in the line along which he developed his critique of separate electorate. It was a vicious device to set up a focus of morbidity at the very heart of democratic polity in India. They deserved to be rejected on principle. But Malaviya's condemnation of them fell far short of rejection and, what was worse, betrayed more than an undertone of mistrust of and riggardliness towards the minorities—and especially the Muslims. "We find," he complained, "that the Regulations have been vitiated by the disproportionate representation which they have secured to the Mahomedans...and the small room for representation which they have left for the educated classes; also

by the fact that they have made an invidious and irritating distinction between Moslem and non-Moslem subjects of His Majesty, both in the matter of the protection of minorities and of the franchise...."

Nothing was better designed to play into the hands of British imperialism and strengthen the marriage of convenience between it and the Muslim vested interests than this line of critique of communal electorate. It made his plea for unity and expression of hope that "under the guidance of a benign Providence feelings of patriotism and brotherliness will continue to increase among Hindus, Mahommedans, Christians and Parsis, until they shall flow like smooth but mighty river welding the people of all communities into a great and united nation, which shall realise a glorious future for India and secure to it, a place of honour among the nations of the world", sound like an empty piety if not an exercise in insincerity and double-talk.

It is surprising that Madan Mohan Malaviya, a mature politician nearing fifty, seemed to be unaware that his rather ill-bred harping on how the majority community was being wrongly done by while the Muslim minority was getting away with all the plums under the Regulations drawn up to govern the functioning of the India Councils Act of 1909 was liable to jar on the susceptibilities of his Muslim audience. It certainly speaks much for the tolerant spirit and liberality of mind of the Muslim delegates at Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore, that there was not even a murmur of dissent, much less protest, from them at the way in which Malaviya was dealing with the delicate and sensitive issue of separate electorate. This would not have mattered much if the views and the sentiment behind the views which he expressed represented his personal views and sentiment even though voiced from the presidential chair which he was occupying, as it happened, *faute de mieux*. The brief period of his radical enthusiasm already lay well behind him and the descent down the slippery slope of Hindu conservatism had begun. This was over the next twenty years to make him increasingly take his distance from the Congress policies so that Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was nicely to sum up his position by saying in his pen portrait of him that "as a Congressman he is conservative and often times leads the rear."

Unfortunately, however, the arguments that he deployed in

his presidential address were translated into a substantive resolution of the Lahore Congress. Number four on the order paper, it was moved by Surendranath Banerjea who said that "it is no exaggeration to say that the Rules and Regulations have practically wrecked the Reform scheme as originally conceived." This was true, but the Congress resolution on the issue set the wrong tone by condemning the electoral apartheid along confessional lines for the wrong reasons:

That this Congress while gratefully appreciating the earnest and arduous endeavours of Lord Morley and Lord Minto in extending to the people of this country a fairly liberal measure of constitutional reforms, as now embodied in the India Councils' Act of 1909, deems it its duty to place on record its strong sense of disapproval of the creation of separate electorates on the basis of religion and regrets that the Regulations framed under the Act have not been framed in the same liberal spirit in which Lord Morley's despatch of the last year was conceived. In particular the Regulations have caused widespread dissatisfaction throughout the country by reason of:

- (a) the excessive and unfairly preponderant share of representation given to the followers of one particular religion;
- (b) the unjust, invidious and humiliating distinctions made between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of His Majesty in the matter of the electorates, the franchise, and the qualifications of candidates;
- (c) the wide, arbitrary and unreasonable disqualification and restrictions for candidates seeking election to the Councils;
- (d) the general distrust of the educated classes that runs through the whole course of the Regulations; and
- (e) the unsatisfactory composition of the non-official majorities in the Provincial Councils, rendering them ineffective and unreal for all practical purposes.

And this Congress earnestly requests the Government so to revise the Regulations, as soon as the present elections

are over, as to remove these objectionable features, and bring them into harmony with the spirit of the Royal Message and the Secretary of State's despatch of last year.

Many of the objections raised by the Congress against the illiberal spirit in which the Regulations had been framed were eminently just although it could be argued that it was rather simple-minded of the Congress leadership to have expected otherwise in view of their past experience in dealing with Whitehall and Calcutta. However, it was a tragic error for those responsible for drafting this crucial resolution to have picked out as the principal target of their attack the allegedly "excessive and unfairly preponderant share of representation given to the followers of one particular religion"—meaning, obviously the Muslims. This was a gift to the British Government and the divisive forces in India. For it could only have the effect of accentuating any misgivings which the Muslim community might have entertained, rightly or wrongly, regarding the intentions of the majority community once genuinely representative institutions with real power were established.

More than that: it transformed—and gratuitously—a two-sided argument and polemics into a triangular conflict of purpose. Hitherto it had been in essence an issue between the British Government and the Indian National Congress. By getting obsessed with the most-favoured community treatment accorded by the British to the Muslims, the Congress leadership unwittingly made it into a litigation on two fronts—with the British Government and those who claimed to represent the special interests of the Muslim community. At the very least, it was a tactical blunder of the first magnitude through which the Congress managed to get itself, if not exactly into a corner, at least on to very narrow and tricky political ground where it had little or no room to manoeuvre. It could well have avoided this predicament by confining itself to a rejection of the whole concept of separate electorate and taking the stand that it was incompatible with any secular democratic norms as, in fact, it seemed to suggest in the opening paragraph of its resolution. That would also have been more consistent with its criticism that the promised non-official

majorities in the Provincial Councils were unsatisfactory. Indeed, they were no majorities at all, but a snare and a delusion.

Thus the argument and controversy were allowed to be deflected from the solid ground of rational principle into a morass of communal claims and counter-claims from which it proved well-nigh impossible for the Congress to extricate itself. This distortion was compounded by another no less serious. The Congress resolution complained that the Regulations guiding the Morley-Minto schemes reflected "the general distrust of the educated classes." So they did. But even more they reflected distrust of the Indian people as a whole whom they denied franchise and other elementary democratic rights because they were not considered by the British Government to be fit for them. This ought to have worried the Congress more. By getting hot and bothered over the British mistrust of "the educated classes" it seemed to lend some substance to the charge of the bureaucratic hierarchy that the Congress spoke only for a microscopic minority as Dufferin had phrased it twenty years earlier, not the Indian people as it claimed.

How was it possible for the Congress leadership which consisted of some of the most astute, subtle and even wise politicians not to see these obvious traps? There were several reasons for this, but it is tempting to suggest that one of the main reasons was an unforeseen development on the eve of the Lahore session of the Congress. Almost unanimously, Provincial Congress Committees had chosen Pherozeshah Mehta as the President, the only dissenting voice being that of Bengal which probably regarded him too moderate for its taste. However, a fortnight before the session was to open, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Lala Harkishen Lal, one of the more liberal-minded but ill-starred Punjab Congress leaders, received a telegram from Mehta saying: "I deeply regret that owing to a combination of unexpected circumstances, I am compelled to relinquish the honour."

He did not specify or even hint at what the unexpected combination of circumstances was which had "compelled" him to refuse so high an honour. He was to remain, so it was said at the time, "as silent as the Sphinx." Nor has any light been shed on the reason why by H.P. Mody in his excellent biography of Pherozeshah Mehta. The decision seems to have puzzled him

and for once the biographer ventured some criticism of his hero by saying:

A stout and fearless fighter, the act was strangely inconsistent with the whole record of his life.... But whatever the motives operating on his mind, it cannot be gainsaid that his decision was as unwise as it was unfortunate. There were trouble and unrest in the land.... Not even the Reforms seemed able to stem the tide of sedition and anarchy and the repressive legislation they brought in their train. In this momentous hour of her destiny, all India was on tiptoe of expectation as to what her great leader had to say on the burning questions of the day.... But the lead was never given, and the man best fitted to sound the note of reason and true statesmanship, and to inspire the country with his own robust optimism and his abiding faith in peaceful and ordered progress, with a masterful gesture retreated into the background, and left his following wondering and helpless.

However, it is not difficult to guess the reason for Mehta's refusal of the Congress crown. There had been a ground swell of opinion in favour of burying the hatchet between the Moderates and the Radicals. Several provincial conferences had sought rapprochement between the two factions. As the *Bengalee* was to argue: "Bengal feels that a sectional Congress is not a National Congress; and that a sectional Congress has no right to speak in the name of the Nation." But Pherozezshah Mehta was a hardline constitutionalist, and in answer to a plea for a united Congress from Bhupendranath Basu, he had not minced his words. "I cannot help saying," he wrote :

that there is a great deal of mawkish sentimentality in the passionate appeals for union at all cost. For my part, I think it is most desirable that each set of distinct convictions should have their separate Congress. To jumble them up in one body confuses the real understanding of the extent to which opinion really tends in one direction or another, and it is not possible to make out what are the dimensions of the cleavage and difference of opinion existing on any particular question.

...For God's sake, let us have done with all inane and slobbery whine about unity when there is really none. Let each consistent body of views and principles have its own Congress in an honest and straightforward way, and let God, i.e., truth and wisdom judge between them.

Pherozechah Mehta's obstinate refusal to entertain the idea of any compromise or fudging of the issue in the larger interest of unity sounded strange coming from a man who had modelled his politics on British Liberalism. It came in for considerable criticism. The language of his letter was described as "choice epithets of cultured Billingsgate" by one commentator. Even the *Bengalee*, noting its "strong unconciliatory" tone, was "constrained to say" that "it was too masterful to suit the democratic temper of those who have been brought up amid the traditions of the Congress", though it softened its disapproving comment by adding: "But this is only a matter of style about which the writer must please himself."

Besides Pherozechah Mehta's disinclination to go along with those who were in favour of some accommodation with the militants—the bone of contention being the question of boycott which had won Congress support at least partially at Calcutta three years earlier—there was possibly another reason for his declining to preside over the Twenty-fourth Congress session. There had been reports in the Press that the "extremists" as they were dubbed by their opponents and "Nationalists" as they chose to call themselves, intended to turn the Lahore Congress session into "a pandemonium" if the President-elect insisted on pronouncing "ex-cathedra the views expressed in his letter." Mehta was a courageous politician and had earned the title of the "Lion of Bombay." Nor did he mind opposition and had often faced it squarely in civic politics of the City of Gold. But he held high notions of decorum in and civilised conduct of public affairs and had strong distaste of bad manners and rowdiness. Having had experience of what muscular Radicals could get up to at Surat, he probably had no wish to see a repeat performance of it in Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore, with a Punjabi shoe being substituted for a Mahratta one as a handy missile.

But whatever the reasons for his refusal to come on to the

bridge and serve as helmsman at a critical moment in national affairs, it was, as H.P. Mody puts it, "a shattering blow" to the Congress morale. It was also to prove politically most unfortunate, if not disastrous. For although Madan Mohan Malaviya [who was in "the mofussil...engaged in professional work" and still hardly recovered from "a recent illness" when he was invited to step into the breach at the last minute by the Congress General Secretary, Dinshaw Wacha] was a seasoned Congress leader and much respected, it would not be unfair to say that he did not have the same reputation for impartiality and dispassionateness of judgement which Pherozeshah Mehta enjoyed—especially on the very sensitive question of minorities and their rights. A tantalizing doubt must, therefore, remain whether, if Mehta had presided over and guided the Lahore Congress, the fourth resolution would have been phrased in the indelicate way it was with little concern for the susceptibility of the Muslim community, and, indeed, the "uneducated" populace. Somewhat surprisingly, Gokhale did not intervene in the debate on the resolution which was initiated by Surendranath Banerjea—not at his best—and tended to become a repetitious whine over the injustice done to the majority community under the Regulations.

Even otherwise it was a melancholy gathering and not a Congress to remember and look back on with pride. To begin with, there was the death of two former Presidents to mourn—Lalmohan Ghose and Romesh Chunder Dutt—and that of a British friend, Lord Ripon. Annie Besant in her account of the session speaks of "a great chill over the country." She could have added that the chill inside Bradlaugh Hall was even more acute. The attendance was dismal, leaving plenty of empty chairs in a conference hall not designed to accommodate a multitude. Altogether only 243 delegates had turned up—the lowest figure since the First Congress in Bombay. The largest contingent, naturally, came from the Punjab—76. The next largest group came from U.P.—64. Bombay was third in the table with 57, the biggest number of them being from Sind—30. Madras and Bengal each mustered 20. The Central Provinces and Berar had sent only six.

These figures reflected a certain ebbing away of the strength and influence of the Congress since the session at Madras.

The Madras session with its apparent air of normalcy and business as usual, indeed, had been deceptive and induced among the Congress leadership a mood of complacency which led them easily to assume that all was for the best in the best of all possible Congresses; that no harm had been done by the Surat split and possibly even some good had resulted from it. With Tilak safely locked up in Burma and the Congress kept out of bounds to his troublesome followers, they could go through their routine of eloquent rhetorical exercises undisturbed. Always in the habit of lying fallow in between the sessions, they made little attempt to tone up the organisation or to reinvigorate it. They did not even register the stirrings at the grassroots reflected in passionate calls for a united Congress from a number of provincial conferences. And at Lahore the President in his address seemed to give the impression that no special effort was needed to bring together those who had parted company although he was distinctly on the defensive:

Ever since the unfortunate split at Surat, the Congress has come in for a great deal of criticism, both friendly and unfriendly. It is said that there has been a division in the Congress camp. It is true, it is sad. We should have been happy if it was not. We hear a great deal of disapproval, of condemnation, of a "disunited Congress", and a great desire expressed for "a united Congress." I ask, gentlemen, how are we "a disunited Congress"? Are we not here a united Congress, united in our aims and our methods, and in our determination to adhere to them?... Have we departed in the smallest degree from the lines on which the Congress was started twenty-four years ago? Have we shut out any fellow countryman of ours who wishes to work with us on those lines from coming to the Congress? I emphatically say, no.

He went on to defend the creed which the Congress had adopted, but insisted that it was "no new creed" but "the creed of the Congress from the beginning." And what, as he saw it, was the creed of the Congress from the beginning? "The foundation of the Congress," he declared without a murmur of protest from his bemused audience, "rests on loyalty to the British Government.

That has always been the basic principle of the Congress." Not, it seems, loyalty to the Indian people, but to an alien Government. This was a travesty of the aims of the founding fathers of the Congress who, however guarded their language, had put commitment to "the cause of national progress" as the criterion for joining the Congress and which they fervently hoped would form "the germ of a Native Parliament" and not just serve as a loyal cheer leader for the British Government.

Later in his address, Malaviya unwittingly contradicted himself when he quoted the first Article of the Congress Constitution adopted after the Surat smash-up. It set as the prime objective of the Indian National Congress "the attainment, by the people of India, of a system of Government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire, and a participation by them in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members." Certainly, this object was to be achieved "by constitutional means, by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration", but also "by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit, and developing and organising the intellectual, moral, economical and industrial resources of the country." This was clearly somewhat more than what the great Pandit visualised as "the foundation of the Congress."

Altogether the presidential address, for all Madan Mohan Malaviya's display of Brahmanical learning, invocations of Veda Vyasa and Vasishtha, with occasional quotations of edifying but feeble English verse, was not an inspiring performance. It was as long in words as it was short in any clear perspective for the Congress movement. Nobody who heard it could have come away with his or her heart ablaze with patriotic fervour. On the contrary, critics of the Congress would have found in it plenty of ammunition, especially in the passages where the President dealt with the Regulations attached to the packet of Reforms and Land Alienation Acts of the Punjab, U.P., and some other Provinces designed to provide the tillers of the soil some protection against the moneylenders, to prove that although the Congress claimed to speak for the nation, it really cared only for the interests of a small urban elite and, within that elite, largely for the majority community only.

He could get away with it, partly at any rate, because the minorities were very thinly represented among the delegates to the Lahore session. The number of Muslims could be counted on the fingers of two hands, with some fingers to spare. Although it was being held in the capital of the Punjab, there were only three or four Sikhs present. Even the more radical among the Moderates had apparently chosen to lie low or play truant from the Congress. The session at Lahore seemed to be haunted by some notable absences.

Among them none other than Lajpat Rai—the first among the trinity jointly known as Lal-Bal-Pal, the other two being Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. A Congress session at Lahore without him was almost like *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Lajpat Rai, as related in an earlier chapter, had agonized quite a bit at Surat before deciding to come to the rescue of the Moderates by throwing in his weight on the moderate side of the scales. This was because Tilak, whom he had almost persuaded to waive opposition to the election of Dr. Rash Behari Ghose as President, had allowed himself “to be led by some...wild spirits” in his party. But he was equally unhappy by some of the things done by the Moderates after Surat. For instance, he did not approve of their not only adopting a Constitution—of which, incidentally, he approved—but, as he explained in his letter to the *Punjabee* in July 1909, setting a “high-handed precedent of fastening the Constitution on those who had no legal hand in framing it, and that too in the name of the old organisation.” At the same time he had kept aloof from a controversy in which, as he put it, “one cannot definitely take sides and wishes well to both.”

That was why he had not attended the Congress at Madras, having left for England at the end of August 1908. He had returned to India—and Lahore—in March 1909. But he was against the holding of a Congress session in Lahore; indeed, he wanted the annual sessions to be suspended for some time. This was for a set of complex and even mutually contradictory reasons. His biographer Feroz Chand rightly describes him at the time as being something of “a Nationalist peg in a Moderate hole” and as such “a sad misfit.” He was also passing through one of his periodic moods of what has euphemistically been

characterised as "Hindu nationalism"—a theme on which he actually addressed the first Hindu Conference held at Lahore at the end of October 1909. He had conveyed to the Congress Secretaries, and through them to Pherozeshah Mehta, that holding the Congress session at Lahore "*in defiance of the best Hindu opinion of the province*" would be "unwise and not in the best interests of the country, Province and the Congress." In his letter to the *Punjabee* he also argued, sensibly enough, that it would be "an error of tactics" to make "the split a 'settled fact'." He made it clear that he wanted the Moderates to "retain the actual control and management of the Congress", but he also wished that "the other party [meaning the Radicals] should remain inside the Congress" and "influence" it "in the way in which all strong minorities do."

There was also, perhaps, a subtler reason for his plea that the militant minority should be accommodated by the Congress and there should be no irrevocable parting of the ways between the Moderates and the militants. "I am emphatically of opinion," he wrote, "that the extinction of the extreme left wing of the Indian National party is a grave menace to the Congress itself. The Moderate leaders may discover it when it is too late." The implication was clear. The presence of a radical element within the Congress might serve as an inhibiting factor on the British in treating the Congress in too cavalier a fashion, as he thought was likely after the change of Government in Britain.

This argument made sense, but not to the dominant section of the Congress leadership. Nor was his advice against holding the Congress session at Lahore which was less sound and betrayed a political schizophrenia that flawed an otherwise heroic spirit, heeded. The session was held as scheduled between December 27-29. Lajpat Rai did not attend it. It would obviously have created embarrassment for him as well as the Congress leaders, for many of whom he had high esteem, if he had remained in Lahore and not put in an appearance at Bradlaugh Hall or met them socially. To avoid this he went away from Lahore for the duration of the Congress session.

He did not miss much. The low-key, if not insipid, presidential address was followed by three days of discussion on some two dozen resolutions, many of them hardy annuals, which rarely

rose above a pedestrian level and at times was like a replay of old gramophone records. Even the debate on the eighth resolution appealing to the Government of India and the Secretary of State for India, "not to treat the question of the Partition of Bengal as incapable of reconsideration, but to take the earliest opportunity to so modify the said Partition as to keep the entire Bengali-speaking community under one and the same administration," did not ignite any great spark of enthusiasm of the kind that can move mountains.

The resolution was moved by Bhupendranath Basu who, under its terms, was to go to England with Surendranath Banerjee as "a deputation, to lay the question of the Partition before the authorities and the public there." That he felt deeply the injustice of the Partition of Bengal was clear from the word go. "We shall not rest, the Bengalee, despised though he may be, he will not rest, not he," he said, "until this question has been thoroughly threshed out, until the line which now divides his province so beloved and dear to him, has been shifted. ..." And he concluded on an even more eloquent and passionate note:

...I stand like a Neophyte at the altar which you have raised for the worship of our mother to plead for a cause which to others may seem to be lost, to re-vitalize what to others may seem a vanished hope. Gentlemen, so long as the Bengali race will last, so long as the blood which flows through our veins courses through generations yet unborn, so long as the picture of United India remains on our vision, so long as the mighty rivers of my native province flow on in their majesty and glory to the sea, so long as the fields and meadows of East Bengal wave in all their verdant glory, our cause will not be lost. So long as the inspiring strains of Bandemataram put new hearts into generations of Bengalees yet to come our cause will not be lost. For the moment we may have suffered defeat. For the moment the question seems to be settled but, God willing, we shall yet turn the defeat into victory. God willing, we shall yet unsettle that question....

In a way, this was quite magnificent. But how was the "settled"

question to be unsettled and the defeat turned into victory? The question worried some of the delegates and especially a certain Parmeshwar Lal from Bihar. He posed it obliquely. He had apparently tried to move an amendment to the resolution in the Subjects Committee and had given notice to the President of the amendment. He wanted to read it out "in the hope that someone" would second it. But he was firmly ruled out of order by the President. He bowed to the President's decision. But the point he had made was valid. "I think", he said, "I am voicing the opinion of not merely younger men in this country but also perhaps of our leaders when I say that if constitutional agitation carried on in the strenuous way in which it has been carried on in connection with the Partition fails the blame will not be on the Indian people if they cease to believe in constitutional agitation." This was a warning to the platform and it was coupled with a reminder later in his speech that "the Partition of Bengal has in a way given birth to the Extremist Party. Whether that Party is for the good of India or for evil it is not for me to say but, Gentlemen, it must be admitted to be one of the most powerful bodies that perhaps today exists in India." A hint, clearly, to the Congress leaders that their sweet reasonableness was not enough and if their pleas and petitions did not yield positive results, the Congress might find itself being eclipsed by the Extremists who were prepared to do or die.

The session, however, really came to life during the debate on another resolution—number nine on the list—which dealt with something that was happening, not in India, but many thousand miles away—in South Africa. It was a long resolution expressing the Congress' "admiration of the intense patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice of the Indians in the Transvaal, Muhammadan and Hindu, Zoroastrian and Christian—who, heroically suffering persecution in the interests of their country, are carrying on their peaceful and selfless struggle for elementary civil rights against heavy and overwhelming odds." It also pressed upon the Government of India "the necessity of prohibiting the recruitment of indentured Indian labour for any portion of the South Africa Union, and of dealing with the authorities there in the same manner in which the latter deal with Indian interests." And it concluded with a protest "against the declaration of

responsible statesmen in favour of allowing the Self-Governing Colonies in the British Empire to monopolise vast territories for exclusive White settlement...while preaching and enforcing the opposite policy of the open door in Asia."

Gandhi had addressed the Congress session for the first time on the subject at Calcutta in 1901 when he was almost unknown. He was not present at Lahore being in the Transvaal preparing to launch another phase of the struggle for the rights of Indians and other Asians. But two of his trusted associates were attending the Lahore session—C.R. Naidu and H.S.L. Polak. Both spoke and Polak, in particular, made a moving speech and told them that he was there "to represent even the dead" and to remind them "of the name of that young hero martyr, Nagappan, who died for the honour of India. I am here to remind you of the women who in the agony and misery of uncertainty have given birth to still-born children. These men and women, compatriots of yours, have carried on this struggle for freedom with the name of India in their hearts, with the name of India on their lips. The men have gone to jail again and again with a smile on their faces, and the women have sent their husbands, brothers and sons to prison gladly, because they felt that India's honour demanded it. I wish that I could take you to the Transvaal today; I could show you scenes in Transvaal jails, I could show terrible hardships that could make your hearts bleed. I myself have seen many of these things, but I must not speak of what I have seen, I could not trust myself..."

His words brought a breath of the harsh and searing realities of an Empire which for the most part turned a blind eye to them when it could not justify them, and at times even connived at them. The resolution had mentioned M.K. Gandhi by name, offering him and his "brave associates" warmest encouragement. It also called upon "all Indians of whatever race or creed to help them unstintedly with funds." Already Ratan Tata had donated Rs. 25,000. Amidst scenes of intense enthusiasm, Rs. 18,000 were collected on the spot, the great Surendranath Banerjee going round with hat in hand to collect donations, and one of the women in the audience, Saraladevi Chaudhurani actually "pulled off her gold bangle and offered it as her contribution." It was something new in a Congress session and it

presaged the shape of things to come under Gandhi whom a telegram was sent which read: "The Congress deeply appreciates, admires heroic struggle brethren Transvaal and urges continuance same. Promises utmost support. Cabling funds."

The rest was anticlimax. Even the resolution urging upon the Government the repeal of the old Regulation relating to deportation, and praying "that the persons who were last year deported from Bengal be set at liberty without further detention, or be given an opportunity to meet the charges, if any, that may be against them, and for which they have been condemned unheard", was debated in rather mealy-mouthed terms. The speeches made were remarkable for their omissions, and though Lajpat Rai's deportation in 1907 was mentioned, there was no reference to that of Tilak to Mandalay (where he at least had the leisure to work on his quite remarkable if insidiously and at times manifestly obscurantist *Gita Rahasya* in the monastic seclusion of the Fort where he was held). For the Congress he seemed to have become an Orwellian "un-person". However, the Congress itself on its Lahore showing was in an even greater danger of becoming, if not defunctive through inanition, virtually irrelevant to the political destiny of India through excess of caution and pusillanimity.

Things appeared to pick up for it somewhat at its next session at Allahabad, judging by the register of attendance it was able to muster. At Lahore there had been only 243 delegates. At Allahabad as many as 636 turned up which was a respectable median figure, though it was streets below the number that crowded into the grounds of Lowther Castle in 1888 when Allahabad first hosted a Congress session—1248—in the teeth of the Government's opposition. The largest number, inevitably, came from U.P., 202. Bombay and Madras were neck to neck—138 and 121 respectively. More significantly, while at Lahore Bengal had only 20 delegates, at Allahabad it had more than four times as many—85. This was not only because Allahabad is half the distance from Calcutta compared with Lahore. A Bengali will travel to the ends of the earth once his political interest and curiosity are aroused. The Punjab sent 27 delegates but hardly a Sikh among them. This was because the upper strata of Sikhs sided with the Raj and the less-favoured ones found

the Congress too moderate for their taste. Bihar, by now a distinct unit of the Congress, managed 39. The Central Provinces and Berar, each having established its separate identity, had sixteen and eight representatives each. And Burma, as far as the Congress was concerned, was another country and was not represented—a proof that whatever other sins it may be charged with, it never thought in expansionist terms and had no territorial ambitions beyond the frontiers of the Indian subcontinent.

Not only was the Allahabad session better attended, but there were more Muslims among the delegates, including M.A. Jinnah, Nawab Sadiq Ali Khan, Hasan Imam, Mazhar-ul-Haque and Kazi Mohamed Wajeeb. As for the visitors, Annie Besant put their number in round figures at 4,000. The increase in the number of delegates and visitors was partly due to two factors. First, it was no ordinary session, but a great milestone—marking its silver jubilee. This by itself was something of a triumph. At the time it was born there were not many even among its friends who thought it would survive that long and, as for its adversaries, they had periodically declared it to be a terminal case. Yet there it was, twenty-five years later, alive and kicking and more or less in a piece. Its leadership, therefore, had made a special effort to celebrate the occasion with due pomp and circumstance, or at least in a fitting manner. Some pomp and circumstance, too, had been provided. As Annie Besant has recorded, the Congress Pandal or pavilion “was pitched on a plot of ground opposite the Fort, and it was quaintly designed with twenty-five sides and twenty-five doors, with a picture of a President over each door.”

It was an occasion on which anybody who had actively or even passively been associated with the Congress wanted to be in. There was, moreover, another attraction—the President-elect, Sir William Wedderburn. He had presided over the Congress session once before. That was at Bombay in 1889 when he was in his early fifties. Since his return to Britain, in Parliament and outside, he had worked indefatigably for Indian self-government. He was one of the leading lights of the committee of Indian National Congress in Britain and he had managed to keep the journal *India* going for two decades, often at his own expense. Now in early seventies, he was not in robust

health. But he agreed to undertake the five-thousand miles journey to preside over the Congress at Allahabad because he believed he could be useful to both Britain and India at a critical moment in their relationship and also in the hope of promoting understanding between the Congress and the Muslim leadership whom the Morley-Minto Reforms, or rather the Regulations which governed their implementation, had divided in some degree as they were designed to. Political India was anxious to hear what he had to say. Hence, perhaps, the improved attendance, both of delegates and visitors.

The session lasted four days from December 26 to 29, 1910. It had a heavy agenda to get through. There was a King-Emperor's death to mourn—that of Edward VII who would have had a hearty laugh if he had seen the Congress worthies, to most of whom the good things of life that he relished were anathema, standing up “in reverential silence” to pass the condolence resolution. There was the new King-Emperor, George V, to be felicitated on his accession to the Throne. There had also recently been a proconsular change, Lord Hardinge had taken over from Minto as the Viceroy and Governor-General of India. He was reputed to be a man of very different timber to either of his two predecessors and who shared some of the liberal ideas of Ripon. The reputation was probably well-deserved. But, in any case, there seemed to be a rough mathematical formula determining the choice of the man for the most coveted preferment which the British ruling establishment, though nominally the Crown, had within its power to bestow upon one of its own. After every two or three Viceroys who were either briefed or temperamentally suited, to turning on the screw on Indians just to remind them who was the master, a proconsul was usually despatched to India who, as it were, represented imperialism with a human face and could apply the anodyne balm of minor gestures and kind words to the wounds inflicted by insolent authority.

Through their fairly extensive contacts in England—and Wedderburn himself—the Congress leaders knew that Hardinge was going to be different and they could expect some civility from him. They were always willing and anxious to reciprocate and even initiate propitiatory moves in the hope of evoking a

response. They had been thinking of presenting Hardinge an address of welcome and the notion had been reinforced by Wedderburn's advice, both private and public. In his presidential address which, in parts, read as if Polonius had composed it, he had urged the Congress to make "Hope", "Conciliation" and "United Effort" their "watchwords"; not to "dwell on matters of controversy, but cultivate a spirit of toleration"; forget differences which for him were only "apparent" and "work together in harmony, each casting into the common treasury his own special gifts, whether of authority, or of knowledge, or of unselfish devotion." Having received, it seemed, assurances that there would be no rude shutting of the door in their faces as Curzon had done, the Congress in its third resolution on the order paper decided to set up a sub-committee "to prepare an address to be presented to His Excellency in the name of the Congress by a deputation headed by the President" and consisting of several ex-Presidents, the General Secretaries, and leading members of the Congress from all the Provinces—among them Bhupendranath Basu, T.V. Shesagiri Iyer, M.A. Jinnah, Bishan Narayan Dar, Nawab Sadiq Ali, Syed Hasan Imam, R.N. Mudholkar and Harkishen Lal.

Besides passing these resolutions, sad or joyous, by "acclamation", there was much other business to be transacted in the remaining two and half days of the session, the first day having been taken up by the formalities of the installation of the President in his chair, the reading of the address of welcome by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Pandit Sunder Lal, and the address of the President himself. Even excluding the first three resolutions and the last six which were either formal or related to organisational matters, including the Constitution of the Congress to which amendments were being proposed at every session, there were twenty-one substantive resolutions to be debated.

Many of them, it is true, were old familiar friends. But the Congress never wearied of chewing the old bones over and over again. Some related to neuralgic issues and grievances of recent origin. By now the activities of Gandhi and his associates in South Africa had made it incumbent upon the Congress not to forget the plight of Indians in the Colonies and at Allahabad

G.A. Natesan, the pioneer nationalist publisher of Madras, moved the resolution on the subject (which had been shifted to the fifth place on the agenda) in a very forceful speech in which he reminded them that Indians in South Africa "brave men, poor men, born of the people... have shown a heroism and a fortitude which make the proudest amongst us blush. What is it that they are fighting for? I consider that they are fighting for the honour of India."

Equally, since the Partition of Bengal was still "a settled fact", the issue and the consequential measures of repression and coercion could not be forgotten by the Congress. Like King Charles' Head, they cropped up in resolutions which were debated with passion even if the President who wanted "by-gones to be by-gones" and cheered his fellow Congressmen with the distant vision of the "United States of India" albeit "under the aegis of the British Empire," according to Annie Besant, had made "far too little of the 'indiscriminate house searchings, prosecutions, and other processes in pursuit of offences'." But the main focus of concern, understandably, was the question of Reforms and especially the attendant Regulations promulgated the previous year introducing separate electorate for the Muslims. The Congress was deeply worried at the prospect of the extension of this pernicious system "to municipalities, district boards or other local bodies." Resolution sixteen which strongly deprecated this development was moved by M.A. Jinnah in a very brief speech which was not exactly whole-hearted. In fact, he told the Congress frankly that he was "not prepared to make a long speech" on the resolution and "did not intend to speak at all but in response to the wishes of a great many leaders of the Congress" had agreed to move the resolution in question. More: he made it "quite clear" that although the resolution embodied his views, they were his personal views, and he did not represent the Muslim community in the Congress nor had he "any mandate" from it.

The same hesitancy, even a degree of ambivalence, was implied in the speech of Mazhar-ul-Haque who was singularly free from any confessional narrow-mindedness otherwise. He did not see any incompatibility between being a member of the Muslim League and a member of the Congress at the same time

and believing firmly in the unity of India. Like Jinnah at the time, he, too, did not believe in the principle of separate electorate which he regarded as "unsound". But as a practical man of the world he added, "There is such a thing as riding a principle to death. To my mind the question of questions...is to bring the two communities together in order that they may work shoulder to shoulder for the regeneration of our motherland." And now that Muslims had been given special electorate for themselves in the Imperial and Local Councils, "it is no use opening up old sores, absolutely no use...If you will do it you will ruin the cause of India." He wanted them to stop and at the same time he wanted to say to the Muslims "to stop where they have gone so far and no further."

Jinnah and Mazhar-ul-Haque were not being culpable of double-talk and double-think when they argued in the way they did. They were on the horns of a cruel dilemma. They, perfectly genuinely, disapproved of separate electorate. But they could not honestly claim to speak for their community among which the upper crust was divided on the issue and nobody quite knew what the main body of the Muslims thought about it. For nobody had held any popular consultation. Where Mazhar-ul-Haque was in error was in thinking that having introduced separate electorate at the level of the Imperial and Provincial legislatures, they could call a halt and say thus far and no further. One of his Muslim colleagues from Bihar, Hasan Imam stressed as much. Recalling the Madras session of the Congress in 1908, he observed that "every thoughtful man in the land realised, and justly realised, that this pernicious scheme would travel down from the chamber of Viceroy's Council to the chamber of the District and Taluk Boards. It was then that we considered that our voice ought to be raised against all institutions which might create a division between the various classes that inhabit this vast land." He went on:

Gentlemen, that apprehension entertained more than a year now has come to be realised in the form of the actual proposals being made either in these distracted provinces or other provinces.... This is not merely an objection on the ground of sentiment. Sentiment accounts for a great

deal undoubtedly, but looking at it from a more practical point of view one can have no hesitation in declaring that the method of separate representation on the local bodies will introduce great complications that will subsequently get into the home of every Indian, be [he] a Hindu, or Mohammedan, Parsi, or Jain, Christian, or Sikh or anybody else...we do not know where we shall stop....

His warning was absolutely justified. For India, with the bait of paltry reforms, had been tempted on to an exceedingly slippery slope. Unless it could step back from it, headlong descent into the abyss was inevitable as in the event it proved to be. But the liberal-minded non-Muslim Congress leaders were also impaled on a dilemma which was the mirror image of the dilemma of their Muslim colleagues. No such dilemma was faced by men like Madan Mohan Malaviya who were too apt to identify the particular interests of their community with national interests. But leaders like Gokhale and in some degree Motilal Nehru were aware that by excessive hue and cry over the unfairness to the majority community and undue emphasis on the need for giving Hindus special weightage in the Provinces where they were in minority would be counterproductive and play into the hands of those who wanted the rift between the majority community and the minorities to be widened.

It was a minefield through which one had to tread warily. There was some hope that Sir William Wedderburn's mediatory efforts might bear fruit and differences between the Congress and the Muslim League might be resolved. He had played a leading role in arranging a conciliation conference in Allahabad immediately after the Congress session. There was a reference to it in Mazhar-ul-Haque's speech. "His Highness the Agha Khan,—look at his generosity and large-heartedness," he said, "has come all the way in a special train from Nagpur [where the All-India Muslim League had held its session under the presidency of Syed Nabi Ullah on December 28] with fifty Mohammedan leaders. They are coming to you, you are not going to them. Theirs is the first hand extended to you. For heaven's sake, in the name of your country, in the name of our

motherland, grasp it and do not reject it. The regeneration of your country demands it...."

The Conciliation Conference duly met on the New Year Day 1911. For *India* in its issue of January 5 carried a Reuter report of it which read:

The Hindu and Muslim Conciliation Conference in promoting which the Aga Khan and Mr. Ameer Ali have taken the leading part was opened here [Allahabad] this morning [January 1], and was attended by a large number of influential members of both communities. The object of the Conference is to concert measures for preventing religious conflict between Hindus and Mohammedans, for settling standing differences between them. Sir William Wedderburn, who was also present, excused himself for his rashness in interfering in questions so delicate as were those about to be discussed, on the ground that the gravity of the tension between Hindus and Mohammedans was a serious menace to the progress and prosperity of India. The Aga Khan on behalf of the Mohammedans and Saroda Charan Mitra, ex-Judge of the Calcutta High Court, on behalf of the Hindus, made statements, and a free exchange of views followed, at the conclusion of which a representative committee was appointed to discuss differences. The Aga Khan in a subsequent interview stated that he was gratified with the results of the Conference, and that with a little patience and mutual concessions the outstanding problems would be solved.

Despite the Aga Khan's Panglossian assessment of one of the early attempts at arriving at a common position by the representatives of the Congress (there were other individuals and bodies also represented at the Conference) and the Muslim League, the Conference seems to have ended inconclusively and little is on record about the labours of the representative committee that was set up. At all events, it was overtaken by momentous events which had not been foreseen at Allahabad either by the Congress leadership or the Muslim leaders who had gone there from Nagpur in a special train with the Aga Khan.

It had been decided at Allahabad that the Twenty-sixth session of the Congress be held at Calcutta and as usual in the Christmas week. At the time Calcutta was chosen as the venue of the next Congress session, there seems to have been nobody among its leaders, not even Sir William Wedderburn, who had any premonition that they were on the verge of attaining one of the objects of their heart's desire—the revocation, or at least the modification, of the Partition of Bengal for which they had been pressing ever since Curzon imposed it. This is rather surprising. For there had been oblique hints that some rethinking was going on in Whitehall. All the major personalities involved in the original decision had been trying to shuffle off their responsibility for it. One of the Congress delegates at the Lahore session of the Congress had been acute enough to note this in his speech. Parmeshwar Lal, a delegate from Bihar (though technically listed under Bengal) had said:

It is said prestige stands in the way of the Partition being altered. And yet the Partition of Bengal is a measure the author of which it is difficult to find out. Lord Morley told us at the beginning of his Office that it was a bad business. Lord Curzon says that he was not the author of it. Mr. Brodrick (now Lord Middleton) says that the blame does not lie on his shoulder either. In that case it does not seem that the Partition of Bengal owes its authorship to any particular person, and so the question of the prestige of that person need not be considered in undoing the Partition of Bengal....

Yet he did not venture the guess that they were about to witness a change of heart—or, at any rate, an act of backtracking—on the part of the British Government. This was probably because, like the rest of his colleagues, Parmeshwar Lal had been inclined to take at its face value the repeated hardline statements in the Anglo-Indian Press, almost certainly inspired by the bureaucratic hierarchs in Calcutta and Provincial capitals, that the partition was a "Dead Issue" and that Indians had better shut up and lump it. But possibly the deepening crisis in the relationship between the then Big Powers in Europe which

might lead to a war also had some influence in hastening a change of mind in London to win the goodwill of the majority in India.

Significantly, the announcement of the decision to modify the Partition of Bengal was made from the Throne itself—or its equivalent. King George V and Queen Mary were in India for what in history books is described as the "Coronation Durbar". The function was held in Delhi—to which the capital was to be soon shifted from Calcutta—with much pomp and pageantry for which the British have a particular talent. The timing and the manner of announcement was finely calculated to, and did, make the maximum psychological impact *urbi et orbi*, in India and the world. After the proclamation of the King's coronation (which had taken place in the Westminster Abbey on June 22), his speech to "the representatives of the Indian Government and people", and the reading out of the Royal favours and boons and other ceremonials, at the close of the performance, and as he and the Queen were about to leave the bedecked pavilion, he stood up and said :

We are pleased to announce to our people that on the advice of our ministers and after consultation with our Governor-General-in-Council, we have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the Government of India, from Calcutta to the ancient Capital of Delhi, and simultaneously as a consequence of that transfer, the creation at as early a date as possible of a Governorship-in-Council for the Presidency of Bengal, of a new Lieutenant-Governorship-in-Council administering the areas of Bihar, Chota Nagpur and Orissa, and of a Chief Commissionership of Assam, with such administrative changes and redistribution of boundaries as our Governor-General-in-Council, with the approval of our Secretary of State for India-in-Council, may in due course determine. It is our earnest desire that these changes may conduce to the greater prosperity and happiness of our beloved people.

Thus what everybody had been told firmly was a "settled fact" was unsettled as the Congress had been demanding for the previous six years. Despite the apparent spontaneity of the

Royal gesture, the move had been very carefully considered between Calcutta and London for sometime as the publication of the despatches exchanged between the Governor-General, Lord Hardinge, and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Crewe, showed. Lord Hardinge in his despatch written from Simla on August 25 had gone over the wider issue of British policy towards India and had virtually acknowledged that the Partition of Bengal decided during Curzon's Viceroyalty had been a mistake and the Coronation Durbar at Delhi afforded "a unique occasion for rectifying what is regarded by Bengalis as a grievous wrong"—a view with which Lord Crewe had concurred. The fact that the show cost India £1,200,000 at the then prevailing prices, as Hyndman was to point out in a letter to the *Times* two days later, and only "a beggarly £300,000 or so are provided for the education of 224m of people over and above the miserable amounts now allocated for the purpose," was not considered of any consequence though the matter was raised in exchanges between Kier Hardie and Edwin Montagu, the Under Secretary of State for India, in the Commons according to a report in *India*.

The King-Emperor had given out the glad tidings on December 12. The Indian National Congress met at Calcutta for the sixth time exactly a fortnight later. Ramsay MacDonald, who was much admired in Congress circles because of his radical views on India expressed in his book *The Awakening of India* and who had not yet discovered the discreet charms of dinners with the Duchesses, had agreed to preside over the Calcutta session "if there was no autumn session of Parliament". But that was not to be. In a letter written from 3 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, on November 30, 1911, he conveyed his regrets that he would not be able to attend the Congress session . . . "We cannot control events," he wrote, "and have to content ourselves by finding consolation in bowing to them when they happen." He did not say what events he had in mind with characteristic British reticence. But the Congress leaders knew. It was the death of his wife that had kept him from being the fifth in the line of distinguished Britons to preside over the Congress since its inception.

In his place Pandit Bishan Narayan Dar was elected to preside

over the session. A Kashmiri like the Nehrus and Saprus, he was a Barrister from Lucknow and had begun to take part in the Congress as early as 1887 when he was only 23. The *Pioneer* in those days a mouthpiece of bureaucracy and Anglo-India, and later of the big landlords, described him as "a staunch and irreconcilable Congressman" a description which for the *Pioneer* and its patrons carried deeply pejorative implications. But Surendranath Banerjea who proposed his name for the presidency saw in him a man who was "sober and moderate in his views and in the utterance of these views," and who was needed to guide the Congress in "a new era of peace, of conciliation and goodwill" that he saw dawning.

Surendranath's description of Bishan Narayan Dar was closer to the truth than that of the *Pioneer*. Moderation in word and thought was reflected in his long presidential address which was a kind of *tour de horizon* of the situation in the country and the state of the nation and problems it faced. This had become obligatory for Congress presidents each year. But Bishan Narayan Dar at the outset paid a high tribute to Mrs. MacDonald who, he said, "was deeply interested in everything that concerned the welfare of India" and whose chapters in her husband's book *The Awakening of India*—he thought it the best "antidote" to Valentine Chirol's *The Indian Unrest*—on the position of Indian women were characterised by "her keen womanly insight into the life of her Indian sisters and her touching sympathy with their lot."

Dar's address showed him to be a product of Enlightenment, both Eastern and Western, and that composite culture which flourished in Lucknow and Allahabad and of which the Kashmiri Pandits who had migrated to U.P. so abundantly partook and to which they contributed in no small measure. It was certainly free of that strain of sectarian partisanship which ran through Malaviya's presidential pronouncements at Lahore and although a Moderate with a capital M who believed that "enthusiasm and idealism cannot achieve impossibilities" and that "human nature is conservative and national progress is slow of foot", he was not contemptuous of nor severe on the Radicals, whether in the Congress or outside. "I know," he observed, "that moderation sometimes means indifference and caution

timidity, and I hold that India needs bold and enthusiastic characters—not men of pale hopes and middling expectations, but courageous natures, fanatics in the cause of their country:

Whose breath is agitation,
and whose life a storm whereon
they ride.

"Enthusiasm", he said, "is good, . . . and I for one sympathise with those who are called visionaries and dreamers, for I know that in every active and reforming body there is always an extreme wing that is not without its uses in great human movements." A literate man himself—he even related an example of Madame De Stael's wit—he devoted a good part of his speech to Gokhale's Elementary Education Bill, "a most modest and cautious measure", which was making heavy weather in the Imperial Legislature and meeting opposition "in some respectable English journals on the ground that education would create political discontent among the masses." And he went on to quote some telling statistics. "It is interesting to observe", he said, "that while in the United States of America, the expenditure [on education] per head of the population is 16s, in England and Wales 10s., in Japan 1s. 2d., and in Russia 7.5d., in India it is barely one penny. And the result of this parsimony in education and extravagance in the military and other departments is that for mental backwardness India is a bye-word among the nations of the world. It is to remedy this ever-to-wipe away stain—that Mr. Gokhale has brought in his Bill. . . ."

The ambient mood of the session, inevitably, was of joy unconfined. It had opened with the singing of *Bande Mataram* "in chorus by a number of girls and boys led by Mrs. Sarla Devi." The next day the session began at noon with another song—this time written by Rabindranath Tagore who was himself present. The reversal, or rather the modification, of the Partition of Bengal was seen by the Congress as a major triumph even though its own part in the struggle against it had been largely one of offering moral support, agitating constitutionally for its annulment, and raising the matter whenever and wherever it could in Britain through its friends and supporters. As for the more militant

forms of opposition to partition, it had been inclined to frown on them.

But not only its joy was unconfined. So, too, was its gratitude towards the Government. The first three resolutions were couched in a language of unctuous ingratiation and thankfulness which later generations of Congressmen and Congresswomen could not but read with a degree of embarrassment. The first resolution tendering the Congress' "most loyal homage to the Throne and Person of their Imperial Majesties" was put from the chair and carried unanimously. Three hearty cheers for the King-Emperor were given followed by three more for his consort. And the General Secretary Dinshaw Wacha announced that the President would telegraph to His Majesty the text of the resolution.

It might have been thought that this would have sufficed. But not so. The second resolution was no less fulsome and expressed the "profound gratitude" of the Congress not only to King-Emperor, but the Indian Government and the Secretary of State for India. It was moved by Surendranath Banerjea who seemed besides himself and overwhelmed by "the impulse of gratitude" which, he claimed, had been evoked, "from one end of the province to the other, in the hearts of the people of Bengal." All because "Our gracious Sovereign, His Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor in the abundance of his beneficence, with a statesmanship which is the inalienable heritage of His Imperial House, has righted the wrong and has redressed the grievance." He did not explain why righting a wrong was an act of beneficence.

But the quality of gratitude of the Congress was not overstrained by the first two resolutions. The third resolution was informed by the same "sense of gratitude" towards the King-Emperor for what was merely a consequential administrative decision—"the creation of a separate province of Behar and Orissa under a Lieutenant-Governor in Council." But the gratitude had to stop somewhere and it did soon enough. For the fourth resolution connected with the less beneficent and gracious face of British imperialism and the harsh realities of the Indian situation. Hardinge may have been liberal-minded compared with his predecessors, but he had done nothing to dismantle

any part of the structure of the police state over which he presided. The resolution "respectfully" repeated the Congress' "protest against the Seditious Meetings Act and the Press Act," and prayed "that, in view of the loyal enthusiasm evoked by the Royal visit, and the official pronouncements about an improvement in the general situation, these measures, as well as the Regulations authorising deportations without trial, may now be removed from the Indian Statute Book."

Another resolution further down the list—number twenty-one—using the same argument made bold, again "respectfully", to submit "that the advent to India of Their Imperial Majesties may be signalled by the release of those who are undergoing imprisonment for purely political offences; such an act will be appreciated throughout India, and will deepen the feelings of profound gratitude and loyalty which the Royal visit has evoked." The Congress had been encouraged to call for a general political amnesty by the announcement at the Delhi Durbar that sentences of 183 political prisoners were to be modified or cancelled as an act of clemency though Edwin Montagu, when questioned in the Commons at the time, was unable to say whether one of His Imperial Majesty's most important political prisoners being held in Mandalay Fort—Bal Gangadhar Tilak—was to be among the recipients of the Royal clemency. The reason for Montagu's agnosticism was simple; he was playing for time and must have known that there was no intention to stretch the amnesty to include Tilak. He was also probably aware that the Congress would not be unduly worried if he was not let off. At the Calcutta session there was no mention of his name during the debate on the resolution appealing for the release of political prisoners. He was almost a forgotten man.

The rest of the business transacted at Calcutta consisted of reiteration of old demands, ranging from spending cuts for the Imperial and Provincial Governments to the separation of Judicial and Executive functions. New subjects over which the Congress had recently begun to show concern were also discussed; separate communal electorate was once again deprecated; and the last political resolution on the agenda to be passed unanimously was about the woes of Indians in South Africa and the heroic struggle they were putting up under Gandhi's leadership

for whom "three hearty and ringing cheers" were raised. There was, moreover, an important resolution relating to the organisational structure and governance of the Congress. The Constitution and Rules of the Indian National Congress, as amended by the Sub-Committee at Allahabad session of the Congress, were adopted and, after year of mulling over, it had at last a more or less definitive framework within which to function.

The session ended in the same mood of euphoria induced by the Royal announcement on the Partition of Bengal as it had begun. The dark side of the moon was hardly noticed. Even the disquieting evidence of fall in the register of attendance seemed to be overlooked. At Allahabad, after the poor showing at Lahore, the attendance had dramatically improved. But that was probably due to the fact that Sir William Wedderburn was coming all the way from England to preside over it. At Calcutta the attendance once again dropped—to 446 (not a thousand as Reuter, for once erring on the side of overestimation rather than underestimation of support for the Congress, had reported according to *India*). Of these, 148 came from Bengal, 136 from Madras and 94 from U.P. That meant that the rest of India had sent only 68. Bombay's quota of 26 was even lower than it had contributed to Lahore, possibly because the Presidency included Maharashtra where Tilak was still remembered.

But the Congress leadership had other things to worry about—or would have had if it had been less taken up by acts of obeisance to their Imperial Majesties. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in his history of the Congress remarks: "When it is said that the Partition was annulled, let it not be understood that the *status quo ante* was restored." The *status quo ante* he had in mind was the restoration of the oversize administrative unit that existed before 1905, including Assam, parts of Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur. Such a restoration was neither feasible nor desirable. What Bengali opinion had been agitating for was the restoration of the unity of areas of old Bengal which had a broad linguistic and cultural identity—that is West and East Bengal. The announcement of December 12, 1911, meant the conceding of that demand. But at a heavy price though few in the Congress realised it at the time or have since.

For the Partition of Bengal was one of those complex and subtle imperialist manoeuvres from which the British Government stood to gain, heads or tails. The demonstrable intention was to break or weaken Bengali nationalism which provided a positive leaven to Indian nationalism as a whole. The consolidation of an Eastern Province of Bengali-speaking Muslim majority was seen as providing a check and countervailing force. But it was in all probability foreseen that the scheme to which even a section of opinion within the British bureaucracy demurred might not prosper and might have to be jettisoned. The calculation could have been that even in that event the whole exercise would have generated enough bad blood, or at least mistrust, between the two communities for the original purpose to have been amply served—as indeed turned out to be the case.

The Congress, and especially the Hindu opinion both within it and outside, had ostentatiously hailed the modification of the partition as a triumph. But this could not be said of the Muslims—even those who owed their allegiance to the Congress. The resolution on the Partition of Bengal at the Calcutta session was carried unanimously. But there is nothing in the records of the session to suggest that any Muslim delegate took part in the thanksgiving exercise. As for Muslims outside the Congress, already confused, they were easily persuaded by the more sectarian leaders among them to view the ending of the Partition of Bengal as a defeat for their community and its interests. It would be futile to speculate what would have been the course of modern Indian history if the partition, however, unjust in its motivation and arbitrary and even absurd in its execution by any rational criteria of judgement, had been allowed to stand. But certain gnawing questions are bound to remain in the minds and hearts of those to whom the unity of India, and the finely balanced and composite culture that went with it, has not been just a theoretical postulate but a passionate commitment of the soul.

For instance, would not political alignments in what would have been the North East Frontier Province of India followed the same pattern as in its North West Frontier Province? The latter was given the full provincial status very late in the day and, then, too, in face of opposition from an influential body of Hindu opinion in the undivided Punjab and not only the Punjab,

Despite this, however, its Muslim majority resisted almost to the end the temptation of a separatist confessional polity and never developed that seige mentality which the Muslim community seemed to exhibit in Provinces where it was in a minority and which inhibited it from being drawn into the mainstream of Indian nationalism.

The question is likely to remain unanswered till the end of time. But what is beyond question is that the deepening of the cleavage between the two communities which began to manifest itself during the anti-partition movement and led to some ugly blood-letting in Bengal, was carried a stage further by the announcement that the partition was to be reversed. The fact that this decision was announced simultaneously with the announcement of the decision to shift the seat of Government from Calcutta to Delhi (which, surprisingly or, perhaps, not so surprisingly, was relished neither by the Bengali Hindu opinion nor the British diehard opinion in India or Britain) as a sop to Muslim sentiment, did not assuage the feeling of bitterness and sense of betrayal among the Muslim community.

The shock to its self-esteem was all the greater because its leaders had allowed themselves to be beguiled by the flattering but misleading pronouncements of some of the highly placed British officials, like Sir Bampfylde Fuller, who had propounded the parable of the two wives and gone on to label the Muslims as his "favourite". They were to discover—as others before them and since—that British imperialism had no "favourite wives" or even mistresses, but bestowed its favours according to what it conceived to be its paramount interests at any given moment. The sectarian Muslim leaders were not consoled by the decision about the transfer of the capital to the old Moghul city of Delhi. Delhi, after all, had a history which stretched far into antiquity before the dawn of Islam. Nor were they deceived by the language of the Government of India's despatch of August 25 and Lord Crewe's reply to it written on November 1 which conveyed the impression that the Partition of Bengal had been a mistake and that the British Government had come to realise it through some inward process of illumination and was setting it right voluntarily. They knew only too well that it was the systematic protest and appeals by the Congress over six years combined

with sporadic acts of violence by militant Bengali nationalists, which had a psychological impact in Britain far beyond any physical damage they inflicted as Minto ruefully told Morley, that had persuaded the British Government to change its mind.

The lesson for them was obvious. They must adopt similar tactics. It was summed up in the phrase they coined in their bitterness: "No bombs, no boons." The Muslim militants in India never quite took to the cult of the bomb. But the Muslim politicians were now convinced that they must strengthen their own separate sectarian organisations and cling tenaciously to the system of separate electorate as their major safeguard. It would be beside the point to argue that it was the wrong lesson for which the Muslims of India had to pay dearly in the long run. But, then, equally mistaken and delusive was the belief of the Congress which saw the modification of the partition as a famous victory. It was a victory which it—and India—might have done well without. For it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the ending of Partition of Bengal was at least partly responsible for sowing the seeds of a much more tragic amputation thirty-six years later and on which there could be no going back....

CHAPTER VII

BETWEEN THE ACTS

The Kingsize bubble of euphoria which the Royal pronouncement at the Delhi Durbar, and the announcement of "boons" which went with it, had generated was pricked soon enough. Early in the new year, indeed within days of the dispersal of Calcutta session of the Congress, Lord Crewe took it upon himself to administer a cold douche to the hopes which were running wild in many a moderate Congress leader's breast. He furnished his own gloss on the despatches which had been exchanged between the Governor-General and himself the previous August and November and warned that the scope of promises and prospects held out in those documents had been greatly exaggerated. His speech, inevitably, caused a wave of disenchantment in India, especially among the middle-of-the-road politicians, whether in the Congress or outside it, who had fondly imagined that the Kingdom was nigh.

His understudy, Edwin Montagu, being persuaded for his part that they needed the support of the Congress Moderates to run India without undue coercion in the difficult times ahead, or possibly because he preferred to leave things in a saving penumbra of ambiguity, speaking at Cambridge at the end of February, tried to mollify Indian opinion and put quite a different and encouraging gloss on the ends of British policy in India. The goal, he said, "towards which we propose to work, not immediately, not in a hurry, but gradually" has "at last, and not too soon," been stated by a courageous Viceroy, meaning Hardinge. This was an opportunity too good for Curzon to miss. Fully convinced that he alone understood India and how to run it, and nursing his grievance that he had been made to resign prematurely and his successors had undone much of the good work he had accomplished, he barged in with his own petulant

comment while tackling Lord Crewe on the apparent dissonance between the tune the Secretary of State for India was playing and his Under Secretary was intoning. And Lord Crewe took advantage of a conveniently timed interrogatory by Lord Inchcape in the House of Lords that summer to clarify the matter.

Clarify is not, perhaps, the right term in the context. It would be nearer to say mystify. In a statement which revealed an unsuspected philosophic bent tempered by a talent for semantic hocus-pocus, the Liberal Marquess first dismissed the whole "legend" that there was any difference "between Mr. Montagu and myself, or between the Government of India and myself" as "absolutely baseless." He then went on to argue that the misunderstanding had arisen on the use of the word "goal". India had certainly been put on the road to constitutional development, but it was a road which had no conceivable terminal point—no ending:

There has, as I said, been a second misunderstanding in the use of the word "goal" as describing the lines on which the Government of India desires to work, mixing, that is to say, the road along which the Government of India desires to travel with a supposed, a possible, termination of that road on which an entirely new form of Government would be found to exist. It cannot have in view what some Indians describe as "swaraj", and therefore, although it wants to advance along a road of including in the Government of India as many Indians as is possible, it does not—and I do not believe it ever will—speak of a final goal which it desires to reach. It has to be borne in mind, as I mentioned the last time I touched on this subject, that the dream in which some Indians love to indulge—and, for all I know, some Englishmen too—is a dream of complete form of self-government for India, within the British Empire. I repeat categorically what I stated last, that there is nothing whatever in the teachings of history, as far as I know them, or in the present condition of the world, as far as I understand them, which makes such a dream even remotely probable.

The meaning of this statement, for all its superb obfuscatory circumlocution, could hardly have been lost on the Congress leadership. But soon they had a shock of very different kind. They had believed that with the ending of the Partition of Bengal terrorism and what they called "anarchism" would wither away on the vine. They were shaken out of their complacency by an "outrage" planned and executed hardly seventy-two hours before the opening of the Twenty-seventh session of the Congress at Bankipore in Bihar. On December 23, 1912, as the Viceroy was making his State entry into Delhi riding an elephant with Lady Hardinge, and the procession was passing through Chandani Chowk, then the most fashionable shopping centre in Delhi, a rather crude home-made bomb was hurled at them from the roof of one of the houses. As *India* reported in its issue of December 27, "the back of the howdah was shattered, and, of the two servants who were in attendance, the one who was holding the State umbrella over the Viceroy was killed, and the other was seriously injured." Lord and Lady Hardinge had what *India* described, and no doubt was, "the narrowest possible escape." But Hardinge was wounded in the right shoulder; had three bomb splinters lodged in his back; and his helmet was found to be penetrated by small nails and particles of the iron casing of the bomb.

He was reported to have kept his *sung froid* and said to his wife, "Go on. Don't take any notice!" This may or may not be apocrypha. But what is not apocrypha is that the official procession was quickly re-formed and the arrangements for the day were not allowed to be disrupted or even altered, except that a certain Sir Guy Fleetwood-Smith officiated for Hardinge at the presentation of the address of welcome on behalf of the non-official members of the Imperial Legislative Council by Nawab Saiyid Mahmoud, "a representative of Madras and a staunch Congressman." Later that evening the Viceroy from his sickbed issued a message to say that what had happened had not in the least shaken his trust in the affectionate heart of the Indian people.

But the Congress leadership were visibly and audibly shaken. Their horror at what had happened was the more acute because they did not believe that Hardinge who, after all had shown some sympathy for the aspirations of the Indian people, however

qualified, would be chosen by those who believed that the terrorism of the State had to be met with counter-terror as their target. This was loudly and repeatedly articulated at the Twenty-seventh session of the Congress held at Bankipore. Surendranath Banerjea seemed beside himself with his sense of outrage at the incident. "I can scarcely conceive the sense of horror, the sense of indignation, the sense of detestation", he said, "that I feel in my heart of hearts when I contemplate the crime of this woeful magnitude levelled against the personality of him who has been one of the truest benefactors of our country.... We here detest and execrate from our hearts anarchism and all the principles of anarchism. Anarchism, Sir, is not of the East."

Malaviya's lament was no less vehement. "That such a friend of the people, that a man who, since he assumed the reins of office as Viceroy of this country, has been labouring so earnestly and so honestly to promote the well-being of the people, should at such a moment when he was going to make public the feelings of his heart and unloose his mind,—that he should be struck by a villainous hand in the way he was struck is certainly a matter of the deepest national sorrow...." A villainous hand! This was a reflexive rather than a considered judgement which came naturally to the moderate Congress leaders and a far cry from the status of national heroes to which those who were responsible for the bomb throwing—among them the four, Master Amir Chand, Bhai Balmukand, Avadh Behari and Basant Kumar, who were sentenced to death and executed—have since been elevated as, indeed, they were regarded at the time by popular opinion. Lajpat Rai, however, made a more measured reference to the incident describing the act as harmful on political grounds rather than morally reprehensible. He said that those "who believe in this cult and who think that by having recourse to bomb they are advancing in the least possible way the interests of the country... are doing the greatest possible harm to the cause of Indian progress."

Even apart from the shadow of the bomb that lengthened across the Congress pavilion at Bankipore, a salubrious suburb of Patna which formed the Civil Station of the city, the Congress session which began on December 26, 1912, seems to have been rather a damp affair. Jawaharlal Nehru who had only

recently returned from England and attended it as a delegate for the first time in his life certainly found it so. "Towards the end of 1912," he has written in his autobiography, "India was, politically, very dull. Tilak was in gaol, the Extremists had been sat upon and were lying low without any effective leadership, Bengal was quiet after the unsettling of the partition of the province, and the Moderates had been effectively 'rallied' to the Minto-Morley scheme of councils.... The Congress was a moderate group, meeting annually, passing some feeble resolutions, and attracting little attention. I visited, as a delegate, the Bankipore Congress during Christmas 1912. It was very much an English-knowing upper class affair where morning coats and well-pressed trousers were greatly in evidence. Essentially it was a social gathering with no political excitement or tension. Gokhale, fresh from South Africa, attended it and was the outstanding person of the session. High-strung, full of earnestness and a nervous energy, he seemed to be one of the few persons present who took politics and public affairs seriously and felt deeply about them. I was impressed by him."

Nehru was recollecting the event nearly a quarter of a century after and in one of the peak moments of his radical and socialist enthusiasm. He was, therefore, perhaps a little unfair to the Moderates. But he was right in describing the Bankipore session as dull and lacking in excitement. This was not necessarily the fault of those who were hosting it. Indeed, they had spared no pains to make it an impressive affair. It was, after all, the first time that Bihar, only recently created a Province in tandem with Orissa under a Lieutenant-Governor, had been given the opportunity to welcome the annual session of the Congress on its soil. Congress leaders in Bihar were anxious to make it a memorable occasion.

It was Hasan Imam who had extended the invitation to the Congress at its Calcutta session. But in the meanwhile he had been appointed to the Bench and obviously could not take part in the preparations for a political gathering. In his place Mazhar-ul-Haque chaired the powerful Reception Committee drawn from members of both communities. For Bihar in those days was still able to boast of a mellow composite cultural identity and had not become a syndrome of sectarian and caste

antagonisms and bigotry. Mazhar-ul-Haque in his own person represented that identity. At the time a glass of sartorial fashion and mould of westernised form, later, under Gandhi's influence, as Sachchidananda Sinha, who served as General Secretary of the Reception Committee, has recorded, he was to lock up "his fastidiously well-tailored suits", forsake "his foreign style of living", and build "for himself outside Patna a hermitage, called *Sadaqat Ashram* ("The Abode of Truth")", and give up "the use of motor car, abjure meat and drink."

The pavilion the Reception Committee constructed for the session won the admiration of even Dinshaw Wacha, not given to easy enthusiasms. "The mind which conceived it," he wrote, "and gave it body and form was certainly a methodical mind, chastened by experience, refined by native talent." At any rate it had a sense of Indian history and knew that the Congress was being held in the Buddha country. The pavilion, or Pandal, had twenty-eight gates, commemorating not the Congress history, but the history of the region—and of India: the Patliputra Gate, the Chandragupta Gate, the Buddha Gate and so on down to the gate number twenty-seven which was called the Asoka Gate. The twenty-eighth gate was left unnumbered but carried a name—the Mahendru Gate. It was reserved for the President of the Congress to make his entrances and exits.

Gokhale's name had been put up for the presidency. However, he had made it known that he would not be available, partly because of his preoccupation with the problem of Indians in South Africa which he had visited and also probably because he was to be appointed to the Public Services Commission set up by the British Government that year and on which one of his colleagues was to be a future British Labour Prime Minister—Ramsay MacDonald. As a result, the presidency went to Ranganath Narsing Mudholkar who had started his career as a lecturer in logic and political economy—two rather disparate subjects—at the Elphinston College, Bombay, but had transferred his talents to a more rewarding field, legal practice, first at Akola and later at Amraoti. Active in the Congress almost since its inception, or at least since 1888, Jawaharlal Nehru could not have been thinking of him when he spoke of Bankipore session being

dominated by gentry in morning coats and well-pressed trousers. For he wore the distinctive Maharashtrian headgear.

The *mise en scene* at Bankipore was splendid—a magnificently designed pavilion large enough to accommodate five thousand delegates and visitors, a vast array of tents, 320 in all, to provide offices and house the delegates though many of them were put up by the local Congress leaders in their homes, and all other amenities that go with a “national assize”. But bedecked pavilions with many gates and tents and ornamental gateways and banners and festoons do not a great political occasion make. What has always made Congress sessions significant and memorable is what is said and done there. And there was little said and done at Bankipore session which registered itself on historical memory unless it was that the session mourned the death of a man—Hume—whom both Gokhale and Gandhi were to describe as the “Father of the Congress” though he himself was modest enough to go on record that the Congress owed its birth to the effort of many men of idealism and foresight.

A certain morosity characterised the session as Nehru noted. The reason for it was not far to seek. Anybody had only to look round “the delegates’ blocks” at the centre of the Pandal to find it. There were more empty chairs in it than occupied ones. Only 207 delegates had troubled to come. This was the poorest showing except the inaugural session at Bombay in 1885, worse even than at Lahore three years earlier. It hardly substantiated the claim of the Congress to represent the people of India or even being the premier political organisation in the country. Far from gaining strength, it seemed to be suffering from some wasting disorder and withering away.

The province-wise breakdown of the delegates was even more disheartening. The largest number hailed from U.P., 67; Bihar with 58 came next; Bengal followed with 35. Between them they accounted for more than three-fourths of the total. Madras had sent 19. But the disappointing surprise was Bombay with only 10. This was less than those from Berar which, perhaps because of Mudholkar’s connection with it, had contributed 13, which would have been an unlucky number but for the addition of the solitary delegate from the Central Provinces. The Punjab, as often, was bottom of the league with four and not a Sikh or Muslim to be

seen among them. At that rate it could not even qualify to be considered a respectable debating society.

One would have thought that the first thing the delegates would have given attention to was this progressive loss of ground. They may have done so in secret conclaves. But the public proceedings of the Bankipore session gave no indication of any anxiety on this count. Mazhar-ul-Haque in his very long address of welcome did voice some anxiety, but it was over the bomb outrage in Delhi and the woes of Muslims in what we now call West Asia and North Africa—"the sacrilege committed by the Russian troops on the sacred mausoleum of Imam Moosi Raza at Meshed in Persia", the invasion of Tripoli by Italy, the expulsion of Turks from Salonika. The British Government, he lamented, had not raised its "little finger" against these iniquities and several British politicians, like Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, Masterman and Acland had actually spoken in "exultant tone at the expulsion of the followers of Islam from Europe." He found only two comforting things. The reigning Viceroy had "grasped the danger and at once handled the situation with tact and sympathy" and these misfortunes had brought about a "rapprochement" between the two communities which, he said, he "had despaired of ever seeing in my life."

Mudholkar's presidential address was almost as long as the welcoming address of the Chairman of the Reception Committee. It covered much the same ground, beginning with the obligatory expression of horror at the bomb attack on Hardinge. "A thunderbolt...from the blue firmament" was his rather sententious description of it. He followed this up with an equally *de rigueur* claim that the people of India's mission was "the reconciliation of jarring creeds, the harmonising of all religions, . . . the spiritualisation of life" with an invocation of a sacred text of infinite ambiguity, the *Bhagavadgita*. There was the inevitable going over the whole course of constitutional developments and "our wanderings in the desert" like the Israelites of old. He expressed his unhappiness at "the anomalies, the inequalities and the defects in the Council Regulations" which he tabulated under four sub-headings. But it was clear that he was by now resigned to separate electorate. Curiously, he seemed to have tumbled on an old proposal of the Congress which had been

dropped, dusted it and presented it as a bright new idea—the idea that India should have representation in the British Parliament. No wonder that the young Nehru was to find the whole show rather off-putting.

On the question of the troubles of Turkey and the woes of Muslims in the Middle and Near East to which Mazhar-ul-Haque had feelingly drawn the attention of the Congress, Mudholkar was transparently ambiguous and almost evasive. Of course, on his own behalf and on behalf of his "Brother-delegates" he gave "expression to the profound sorrow and sympathy which the Hindus and all non-Muslim Indians feel for our Muslim brethren in the great misfortune which has overtaken the Khalifate, and the struggle for existence which the Turkish Empire has to carry on against a powerful combination." But this expression of sorrow did not lead to any commitment or support. "When the political sky is overcast with dark and threatening clouds," he added, "it is not desirable for us, the subjects of a Power which is striving to preserve the strictest neutrality [*sic*], to enter into the merits of the quarrel between the belligerent Powers, nor are we in a position to discuss them with adequate knowledge. But as staunch believers in the supremacy of the moral law and upholders of the principle of peaceful evolution, this much I believe is permissible to us to say, that it is possible to satisfy the just and legitimate aspirations of the Christian Provinces of the Turkish Empire without destroying the existence or the importance of Turkey or subjecting her to the humiliating condition of powerlessness."

Professor Godbole in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* could hardly have improved upon Mudholkar's exercise in sitting on the fence and saying nothing in a round-about way and at some length. Mazhar-ul-Haque and the Muslim delegates at Bankipore could not have derived much comfort from it. Later in his address Mudholkar spoke with a sense of gratification that "the All-India Muslim League promises to become an ally and a loyal supporter." This was a reference to certain developments that were taking place in the League in which the younger men, like Jinnah, were soon to assert themselves in policy-making and trying to make it less of a "loyalist" organisation. But Mudholkar's formulation of the Congress views on the fate of Turkey over which, rightly or wrongly, the Indian Muslims were

concerned, was scarcely calculated to make it easier for them to bring the League into closer alignment with the Congress.

Naturally enough the Congress did not register its concern over what was happening to Turkey or Persia or Tripoli in any resolution. There were, perhaps, two reasons for this lack of concern. Firstly, the Congress at that stage did not wish to involve itself in foreign policy matters which, in its wisdom, it considered it was the prerogative of the ruling power to worry about. Secondly, its leadership seems to have been unaware that the moves for the carve up of the tottering Ottoman Empire and North Africa were not unrelated to rivalries of the Western colonial powers and would prove to be a prelude to a great blood-bath into which India would be drawn whether its people wanted it or not. It is even arguable that if the Congress had begun to take interest in the plight of Indians, and Asians generally, in South Africa—at Bankipore, too, it passed a long resolution on "Indians in the Colonies" and authorised the President to send a message to Gandhi reaffirming "the country's whole-hearted support" to him and his fellow-workers—it was only because Gandhi was waging a struggle in South Africa which could not be ignored.

Other resolutions, nearly twenty of them, were mainly a re-iterative litany of old, well-worn demands and pleas which had remained unanswered and unheeded. But with the Congress in those days hope deferred did not necessarily make the heart grow sick and weary. Apart from these routine items, the first resolution was about the bomb in Delhi and recorded its "sense of horror and detestation at the dastardly attempt made on the life of His Excellency the Viceroy" and prayed "that His Excellency may have a speedy recovery and restoration to health." This was followed by a condolence resolution on the death of Allan Octavian Hume and the President was "requested to cable this...to Sir William Wedderburn, Baronet, Chairman of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress" and he, in turn, was requested to "convey to Mrs. Ross Scott, Mr. Hume's daughter, the sympathy of the Congress in her great bereavement."

At the session itself rich tributes were paid to Hume, including one from Mazhar-ul-Haque who probably had no opportunity to know him and another from the President, Mudholkar,

who certainly did. He described him, in the words of a poet, as "One who never turned his back but marched breast forward, never doubted clouds would break," and then, mixing metaphors, likened his memory for the Congress to that of Moses for the Israelites, but with a difference. Hume, he said, "was, indeed, more fortunate than Moses; for it was permitted to him not only to have a sight of the Promised Land but to see his people make their entry therein and to witness that they had some taste of the milk and honey of political life." For all its eloquence, it must have sounded a little too formal.

However, a more moving because more intimate tribute came from Bhupendranath Basu whom Jawaharlal Nehru had found "an aggressive talker". He was subdued as the occasion demanded, but not niggardly in giving Hume the glory and the credit "of conceiving the great idea of gathering the races of India, her different nationalities, her different communities, into one great temple." And he told them of his last meeting with Hume during his visit to England the previous year at his house :

There also in the gathering gloom of the evening as I bade him good-bye I knew that we had no reasonable expectation of meeting on this side of life. I bade him good-bye in the simple style of an Indian and I asked for his blessing. He said, "Bhupendranath, who am I and what, that I can give you a blessing? All I can do is to ask Him who sees all hearts to give you His blessing and not mine. I am old; you also are getting old. We may never meet"; and he said, "Bhupendranath good-bye. If for ever, then forever".

Hume died, after a protracted illness, in his eighty-fourth year on July 31, 1912. He was cremated at Brookwood cemetery just outside Woking, Surrey. He was a life member of the Cremation Society of England and, as he had put down with his native sense of thrift in his will, this entitled him "to be cremated at death without fee." Six days later a memorial meeting was held at Caxton Hall, Westminster (alas, now no more, and with it have vanished many historic associations with India, like that of the first public meeting addressed by Jawaharlal Nehru in London in 1936, not to mention the shooting down by Udham

Florence Nightingale

(1820 - 1910)

Although she never visited India, Miss Nightingale had a longlasting interest in Indian medical and social conditions. In this letter to Sir William Wedderburn, written from 10 South Street, Park Lane, W1 dated November 27th 1885, she welcomes 'the birth of a new nationality' on the eve of the first Indian National Congress in Bombay.

"... Mr. Hume who brought me a letter from Mr. Ilbert was so good as to give me a good deal of his time. This "National Liberal" Union, if it keeps straight, seems altogether the matter of great interest that has happened in India, if it makes progress, perhaps for a century. We are watching the birth of a new nationality in the oldest civilisation in the world. How critical will be its first meeting at Poona; I bid it God speed with all my heart I could wish (but you know my opinion is worth nothing in this kind of political policy).

God bless you and your work,

Ever yours faithfully,
F. Nightingale

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F. Nightingale



ROUSING THE SENTINEL!!

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS - 1887
[MADRAS]

A cartoon from Hindi Punch

Sketches of Congress delegates from India



Ranchoolal Chotalai



S. Subramania Iyer



Pherozeshah Mehta



Madan Mohan Malaviya



W.C. Bonnerjee



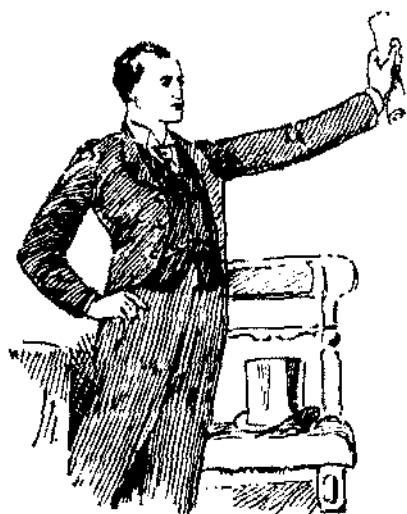
Syed Ali Rizvi



N.G. Chandavarkar



Lala Harbhajan Das



Eardley Norton



Pandit Ajudhianath



Bisnu Kali Charan Bannerji



Rev. G.M. Cobban



Pandita Ramabai and Mrs. Trimbak (Telang?)



A Muslim delegate



H.A. Wadia

Proclamation.

WHEREAS the Government has thought fit to effectuate the Partition of Bengal in spite of the universal protest of the Bengali nation, we hereby pledge and proclaim that we as a people shall do everything in our power to counteract the evil effects of the dismemberment of our Province and to maintain the integrity of our race. So help us God.

Dated this First day of November
in the year Nineteen Hundred
and Five and given under



Anti-Partition Proclamation



Bal Gangadhar Tilak



Lajpat Raj, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal



ALLAN OCTAVIAN HUME

Indian National Congress Past Presidents



WOMESH CHUNDER BONNERJEE
1885, 1892



DADABHAI NAOROJI
1886, 1893, 1906



BADRUDDIN TYABJI
1887



GEORGE YULE
1888



WILLIAM WEDDERBURN
1889, 1910



PHEROZESHAH MEHTA
1890



P. ANANDA CHARLU
1891



ALFRED WEBB
1894



SURENDRANATH BANERJEE
1895, 1902



RAHIMTULLA M. SAYANI
1896



C. SANKARAN NAIR
1897



ANANDAMOHAN BOSE
1898



ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT
1899

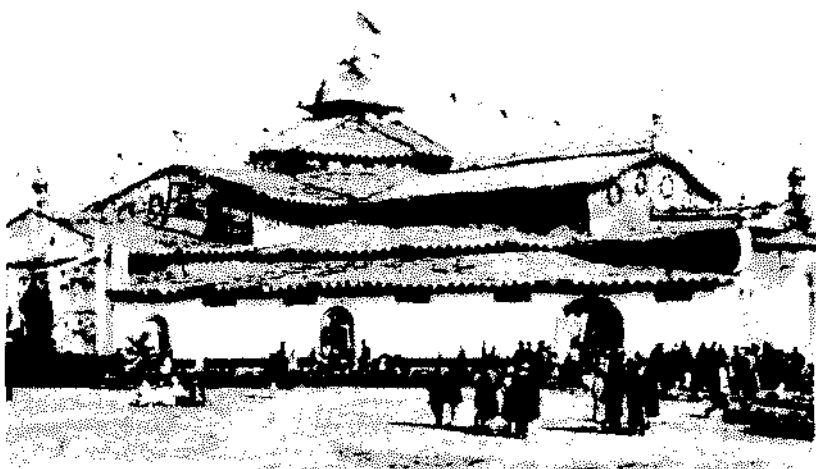
The Congress Presidents, 1885-1918



The Congress Presidents, 1885- 1918



Sir James Meston, the Governor of U.P., arriving at the
Congress Session, Lucknow, 1916



The Lucknow Congress Pandal, 1916

Singh of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab at the time of the reign of terror in 1919, during the Second World War). It was attended by many eminent people, both British and Indian. Gokhale who with Wedderburn had attended the cremation, presided though Wedderburn for some reason was not present. But a long tribute to Hume by Wedderburn had already appeared in *India* which editorially said of him that "he lighted a candle which can never be put out."

Marcus Aurelius has an admonition: "Let all thy words have the accent of heroic truth." That is impossible to achieve. But some of Hume's words certainly had that accent, not least his call to the graduates of Calcutta University as early as March 1883 to furnish "fifty men, good and true". "You," he exhorted them, "are the salt of the land. And if amongst even you, the elite, fifty men cannot be found with sufficient power of self-sacrifice, sufficient love for and pride in their country, sufficient genuine and unselfish heartfelt patriotism to take the initiative, and if needs be, devote the rest of their lives to the Cause [his emphasis]—then there is no hope for India. Her sons must and will remain mere humble and helpless instruments in the hands of foreign rulers...."

Besides his somewhat chequered career as a civil servant which began in 1849 and continued under the Raj till 1882, Hume was a man of many parts, like many eminent Victorians, and not a few controversies. He has been called "the Pope of Ornithology" by those who knew what it is. But whether or not that particular papal crown fits, there is no doubt that he expended much time, energy and treasure to collect material for a definitive work which was to be entitled "The Birds of the Indian Empire". It was never completed because, unhappily, most of the material was lost or destroyed while he was away from his house in Simla, Rothney Castle, during the winter of 1884. But jointly with C.H.T. Marshall he did produce a book in three volumes with many coloured plates called *The Game Birds of India* only a thousand copies of which were printed. Earlier he had edited an Ornithological Quarterly called *Stray Feathers* and in 1885 he gifted his collection of more than eighty thousand birdskins and eggs to the British Museum of Natural History in Cromwell Road,

South Kensington, together with his collection of the heads and horns of Indian big game animals.

Birds and big game animals of India did not exhaust his interest. W.H. Griffin wrote in *India* soon after Hume's death how he had purchased the freehold of 323 Norwood Road, S.E., for "the reception of his herbarium and library" in 1910 and set up a capital endowment "to provide an income sufficient to maintain that establishment vested in trustees and incorporated in the South London Botanical Institute with the object of 'promoting, encouraging, and facilitating amongst the residents of South London the study of the science of Botany'." Griffin was appointed the first curator of the Institute.

However, for India Hume has an historical importance because of the crucial role he played in founding the Indian National Congress. He never claimed that it was his idea exclusively. On the contrary, as Wedderburn has recorded, he explained it was the work of many men "mostly Indians who bound themselves together to labour silently for the good of India." But Gokhale, who would have known, was in no doubt about it that Hume's part was predominant. "No Indian," Gokhale said at the memorial meeting for Hume in London, "could have started the Indian National Congress. Apart from the fact that anyone putting his hand to such a gigantic task had need to have Mr. Hume's commanding personality, even if an Indian had possessed such a personality and had come forward to start such a movement, embracing all India, the officials would not have allowed it to come into existence, if the founder of the Congress had not been a great Englishman [*sic*] and a distinguished ex-official. Such was the distrust of political agitation in those days that the authorities would have at once found some way or the other of suppressing the movement."

Gokhale's attribution of the paternity of the Congress to Hume was endorsed by the Mahatma though it is, perhaps, of some psychological interest that he mixed his terminology and imagery a little and, like Gokhale, described Hume as "an Englishman" when, in fact, as Wedderburn tells us, "he was the son of that sturdy Scottish patriot and reformer Joseph Hume, from whom... [he] inherited not only a political connection with India but also his love of science, and his uncompromising faith in democracy."

Speaking in the Federal Structure Committee at the Second Round Table Conference at St. James's Palace in London, Gandhi said, "It is a matter of the greatest pleasure to me to state that it [the Congress] was first conceived in an English brain: Allan Octavian Hume we knew as the father of the Congress."

Whether or not Hume was both father and mother of the Congress as Gandhi seemed subconsciously to convey, there can be no denying him the critical maieutic role. More: not only was he the midwife who helped ensure a safe birth for the Congress, but for many years acted as its sustaining wet nurse. Until the Fourth Congress session he served as the *de facto* General Secretary. After that, at Allahabad, he became its *de jure* General Secretary, though curiously, the word used was "re-appointment", presumably to cover up an act of omission. From then on till 1905 his re-appointment as General Secretary was automatic at every Congress session. But in 1906 his name disappeared and, indeed, that year nobody seems to have been appointed to take his place.

However, the puzzle is that the man who served as the Congress General Secretary for twenty years and more and who took so major a part in bringing it into being was never invited to preside over its affairs. Practically every other General Secretary in due course and the fullness of time was elevated to the presidential chair. Why the exception made to the rule in Hume's case? It is hard to find any explanation of this in the Congress records. But it must be assumed that what inhibited the Congress in doing him this well-merited honour was his radical outlook and his habit of not keeping his views to himself. Especially, after the episode of the circular which he was responsible for issuing in 1892 in which he had warned of "a universal agrarian rising" in an apocalyptic language which our latter-day "Marxist-Leninists" could hardly have improved upon, he had blotted his copybook with the "Congress Patriarchs". The circular, as has been related, had been leaked out in the press and was disowned by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress in a collective letter to the *Times*. To offer Hume the presidency of the Congress after that was out of the question. It would have been regarded by the British Government as an act

of gross provocation. But it could hardly object to Hume receiving its tribute of remorse.

For a strong vein of remorse can be discerned throbbing behind the fulsome language of obsequial encomiums at Bankipore and before. Words came easier to Congress leaders in those days than acts. Dinshaw Wacha described him as "Agamemnon and Nestor rolled into one." "He alone knew," he added, "how to charm, how to strengthen, and how to teach. He is gone, but not without teaching us that though we have no wings to soar, we have feet to scale and climb, more and more by slow degrees the cloudy summits of our times." And for Rash Behari Ghose Hume's tomb was "the whole of India and his most lasting memorial" to be found "not in marble or bronze, but in the hearts of those for whom he lived and died."

Fired by his own eloquence, Surendranath Banerjea had described all the great men of the past as dreamers—Buddha and Jesus and Mahomed and even secular figures like Columbus, Mazzini and Garibaldi. "Let us dream,—a little dreaming does good if it be of the right sort." True, but there came the rub. There was an air of unreality even more than dullness about what was said and done at Bankipore. A long-winded document prepared by the Congress office-bearers seemed to recognise as much. In the introduction to the transactions of the Twenty-eighth session held at Karachi—the first ever to be held there—under the presidency of Nawab Syed Mohammed Bahadur a life-long Congressman from Madras, they admitted: "Of late... it is a matter of regret to have to say that for some reason or another a session has not been all that could be desired.... The number of local delegates, let alone outside ones, had materially dwindled down. Depression prevailed...."

They seemed to believe, however, that at Karachi and after Karachi the deep depression had lifted. "It is a matter of rejoicing," they wrote, "that depression had disappeared in Karachi. All seemed to have worked enthusiastically and with the one object of making the Congress a thorough success.... The total number of delegates reached 550, a number which was in pleasing contrast with some very poor ones at recent Congresses." Pleasing it may have been, but pleasure was part of an exercise in *Coueism*. The figure of 550 delegates was arrived at through

a naively conjured statistical illusion. The 201 members of the Sind Reception Committee were included among the delegates to inflate the total. If they were subtracted, the figure would have come down to 349. This certainly was an improvement on Bankipore. But even that improvement was qualified. Of the 349, 264 were from "Bombay and Sind". There was no indication of how many came from Bombay and how many from Sind, but the presumption must be that the majority came from Sind. The rest of India sent exactly 85—33 from Madras, 22 from Bengal, 13 from U.P., 10 from the Punjab, four from Bihar, and three from Canada. Why Canada which is no part of India that is Bharat? The answer is that Indian settlers in Canada and those wanting to settle there were beginning to face increasing difficulties and the matter was to come up at the Karachi session.

It was not just that in real terms there had been no significant accession of strength to the Congress. What must have been disappointing, if not depressing, was that some of the star turns were missing from the platform. Pherozeshah Mehta had for some years not been attending Congress sessions though his name always appeared at the top of the list of the members of the All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.) from Bombay together with that of Dadabhai Naoroji—*ex-officio*. His absence at Karachi was taken for granted. But Surendranath Banerjea, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were not to be seen either, though Gokhale had been kept away by his heart trouble from which he had suffered ever since his fall at Calais during his first trip to Britain years ago and which was to kill him within a little more than a year.

The Reception Committee headed by Harchandrai Vishni-das had, of course, worked hard to make the first Congress session in the "capital" of Sind as pleasant as possible for the delegates with lavish hospitality for which the people of Sind are noted. Moreover, the Chairman of the Reception Committee had done his home work and in a welcome address which was somewhat shorter than was customary for such speeches to be, he managed not only to give a potted history of the region, highlight some of the special problems it faced, touch upon the wider national problems including rapprochement between the two great communities of India, but also come up with a major

economic issue which would have delighted Dadabhai Naoroji because it offered a blatant example of the way India was being economically milched by the City of London. He said :

It seems to me high time that this Congress expressed its condemnation of the Currency system under which about 40 millions sterling of India's money consisting of Paper Currency Reserve, Gold Standard Reserve and Floating Cash Balances is withdrawn from this country and used in London for loans to Joint Stock bankers, bill brokers and finance houses of that city. In the first place this money earns only 2.5% interest in London, whereas in India it could be lent on 5%. In the second place being in India it would on the one hand largely assist Indian Trade, as one of the crying needs of India now is more capital with which to develop her natural resources, and on the other it would greatly ease the money market and thus serve as a check upon monetary crises like the appalling one we have so recently witnessed. Under the present arrangement not a pie of those stupendous millions goes to the benefit of India. Is our money to be made a football for foreign exploiters to play with? Are the interests of the millions of population from whom the money is taken and whom the currency operations affect to be considered a negligible quantity, while those of the microscopic but clamorous and influential minority to be pandered to?

All very pertinent questions though no resolution was tabled on the subject. After Harchandrai Vishnidas' speech of welcome, the presidential address was a wide-ranging survey of the political scene and problems. Descended from the great Tipu Sultan, Nawab Syed Mohammed Bahadur, represented the liberal current in Indian Islam which was beginning to gain a certain ascendancy in the Muslim League and bring it for the time being into much closer alignment with the Congress on all major political issues. His association with the Congress began very early. Ten years earlier he had been the Chairman of the Reception Committee when the Congress met for the fourth time in Madras. He was, indeed, to be the only man in the history of the Congress to hold what Iswara Dutt in his *Congress Cyclopaedia*

(*Vol. I*) calls "the triple distinction of being Chairman of the Reception Committee (1903), President (1913) and Secretary (1914-1917)". This distinction, it may be added, he amply merited.

The middle portion of his presidential address covered well-trodden ground—the future of the India Council which the Congress wanted to be abolished or modified to include an elected component, the functioning of the reformed legislatures in India, local self-government, expansion of primary and technical education, the Public Services Commission, Indians in the army and so on and on till the last syllable of what to posterity must appear as the ultimate in tedium. In his time and season, however, they were live issues. In the opening and closing parts of his speech he dealt with two matters over which he felt deeply. He was obviously optimistic over the prospect of true rapprochement between the Hindu and Muslim political opinion. He rejoiced in the fact that the All-India Muslim League, thanks to the effort of men like Jinnah and Syed Wazir Hasan, who were members both of the Congress and the Muslim League, had adopted a resolution defining the objective of the organisation as "the attainment under the aegis of the British Crown of a system of Self-Government suitable to India."

This seemed identical with the first Article of the Congress Constitution. Seemed, but it wasn't. There was that weasel phrase at the end which made all the difference. Its seeming innocence concealed submerged rocks of ambiguity upon which all manner of mental reservations could fasten to wreck the substance of any self-government whatever the aegis. This the President of the Karachi session did not notice or chose to ignore. Equally, he was being oversanguine when he suggested the British Government had had its conversion along its own particular road to Damascus and had abandoned the policy of *divide et impera* for one of "Unite and Rule." Like other Moderates, with him wish seemed to be father to the thought, partly because he had tended greatly to overestimate both the influence of Edwin Montagu in policy-making on India and his determination to stand firm on his position and have the courage of his good intentions.

In the concluding part of his speech he spoke of "the

troubles and misfortunes" of the Muslims outside India. The Indian Muslims, he said, had witnessed with deep concern "the subversion of the Ottoman power in Europe, and the strangling of Persia"; they had "anxiously watched...the dismemberment of Turkey"; and this anxiety was shared by non-Muslims. The last part of his statement was a polite exaggeration. At best the non-Muslims in India were indifferent to "the fate of Muslim states and their treatment by Europe." But he was not exaggerating when he spoke of how exercised the Indian Muslims were on what was happening to Turkey and other Muslim regions in the Middle East and North Africa. At the end of 1912 Mohamed Ali through his paper the *Comrade* had actively promoted the idea of sending an Indian Medical Mission to Turkey; the Indian Government, through Malcolm Hailey, an up and coming civilian in the Punjab "tradition" who was then serving as Commissioner in Delhi, had let it be known to Dr. Ansari that it had no objection to the enterprise; and a mission led by Dr. Ansari did go out to do humanitarian work in Turkey for about six months.

However, that was the limit of the Indian and British Governments' complaisance towards and regard for Indian Muslim susceptibilities. The British establishment at home was in two minds over the matter. Curiously, or not so curiously, the Tories were rather reluctant to offend the Indian Muslims and the Liberals were taking a rather Blimpish line reflected in the comment in the *Spectator* which wrote: "If we allow the feeling of Indian Muslims to be the test of our foreign policy we should abrogate the right to judgement altogether." And in India, Mohamed Ali had got into very hot water with the authorities over the printing of a proscribed pamphlet entitled "Come Over Into Macedonia and Help Us", originally published in Constantinople (now Istanbul).

The Congress leadership, too, was very reluctant to take up the issue, though it would have been good politics for it to do so, both on tactical and larger political grounds. For although Indian Muslim perception of and reaction to developments in West Asia and North Africa was motivated by confessional affinities, in essence it was an issue which connected with anti-imperialism. But then Congress at that stage, though involved in struggle with an empire almost in spite of itself, was unwilling

and even positively averse to taking up an anti-imperialist position. At Bankipore Mazhar-ul-Haque's pleadings on behalf of Turkey and Persia had evoked only a lukewarm response of sympathy from Mudholkar and the Congress looked the other way. Syed Mohammed was no more successful at Karachi in moving the bowels of compassion of his Congress colleagues by telling them of the woes of Muslims outside India. The least that the Congress could have done would have been to express its sympathy for them and pass a resolution of human solidarity. It did not do so and chose to look the other way. It was not until several years later that it could be persuaded to take up their cause. But by then it was a different Congress, almost a Congress reborn.

There were no surprises in the resolutions passed at Karachi. Most of them related to issues already musty with age. However, an interesting shift in the Congress' hierarchy of concerns and priorities was noticed. The problems of Indian diaspora—exemplified at its most neuralgic in the tribulations they were facing in South Africa—had moved from the periphery to the centre of its preoccupations. Immediately after the first resolution which recorded its "sense of great loss" at the death of two of its veteran champions—J. Ghosal and Justice P.R. Sundara Aiyer—came the resolution entering the Congress' "emphatic protest" against the Immigration Act passed by the Pretoria regime in violation "of promises made by the Ministers of South African Union" and "respectfully" urging the Crown to veto the Act, and the Imperial and Indian Governments "to adopt such measures as would ensure to the Indians in South Africa just and honourable treatment." It actually made so bold as to "express its abhorrence" of the cruel treatment which Indians were experiencing in Natal and entirely to disapprove "of the personnel of the Committee appointed by the South African Union to enquire into the matter". And it ended with an expression of its "warm and grateful appreciation of the heroic struggle carried on by Gandhi, and his co-workers" and called "upon the people of this country of all classes and creeds to continue to supply them with funds." This was the least it could do.

After all, even in Britain there was some unease at what was being done in South Africa by the Boer ascendancy which had only a few years earlier been in open rebellion against the British

Crown. Lord Ampthill, a former Governor of Madras, who had briefly acted as Viceroy in 1905, had been moved to raise the matter in the House of Lords on July 30, and criticised Crewe for being so indulgent towards the Pretoria regime as to allow it to ride roughshod over the provisional settlement of 1911 and the stipulations of the British Government. Even Curzon who regarded Gandhi's "passive resistance" as "the most odious of all forms of conscientious objection", was subtly scathing about Crewe's apologetics over and rationalisation of the Government's supine surrender to the Pretoria racists. He said of Crewe's reply that "there had been a note of extreme candour about certain admissions" in it, "a tone of apology about others, and a rather doubtful note at the end." He did not stop there and went on to quote a passage from the Secretary of State's despatch of October 1910 in which Crewe had been categorical and said: "I ought to add that any solution [in South Africa] which prejudiced or weakened the present position of Indians in the Cape Colony or Natal would not be acceptable to His Majesty's Government." "That was a quite clear statement," Curzon chided Crewe, "unattended by any qualification, and the noble Marquess could not get away from it." He also found it hard to understand why London had been in such haste to instruct the Governor-General in South Africa to pronounce his benediction on the racist immigration legislation when it could have hastened but slowly to secure certain changes in it.

In India, of course, the feelings were running high over the treatment of Indians in South Africa and the Congress was underplaying rather than overplaying the issue. The President of the Congress had obliquely called for retaliatory measures against South Africa. "I have more faith," he had said in his address, "I confessed in retaliatory measures such as the placing of an embargo on the importation of coal from Natal into this country, and the closing of the doors of competition for the Civil Service against the South African Whites [strange though it may seem, apparently the South African Whites could enter the Covenanted Service and come to India to lord it over Indians while the latter were being wholly disenfranchised in South Africa]. It seems to me that these are the only weapons at present available and the Government of India should lose no time in making use

of them. I am aware that these measures have disadvantages of being merely irritating without being directly effective or inflicting any real disability on the Colonists. But their moral effect would, I am convinced, be very great on our people and will not be altogether lost on the Union Government...."

In spite of this, however, there was no call for any retaliatory sanctions against South Africa in the resolution that the Congress passed at Karachi. This was rather surprising. At some of the earlier sessions of the Congress—the Nineteenth and Twenty-first sessions, for instance—it had been emboldened to demand some retaliatory measures. Why then, when the struggle in South Africa was intensifying and only two months earlier the Indian mine-workers had struck and Gandhi had been arrested at Volksrust while he was leading a march into the Transvaal, did the Congress hold back from calling for retaliation? Was it in danger of slipping back in its effort to prove its respectability?

It is hard to be sure. It could be that in the absence of Gokhale, who was their guide and philosopher on South African and kindred problems, they did not want to take any decisive stand on the question of retaliatory sanctions. There was, moreover, a new problem on their plate. Three Indians, all of them Sikhs, had come over to enlist the support of the Congress against an inequitable and racist clause embodied in a Canadian Privy Council Order—No. 920—entitled the "continuous journey" clause. Manifestly and ingeniously designed to shut the door in the faces of Indians entering Canada, and even any Indian already settled there bringing over his wife and family, it prohibited entry to them unless they had made "a continuous journey from India". And this was an impossible condition to fulfil because there was no direct shipping line between India and Canada and no shipping line would book any Indian passenger and issue him or her a through ticket involving trans-shipment. A perfect Catch 22 situation, but one which was later to produce the heroic saga of Baba Gurdit Singh and his comrades who chartered a Japanese ship, the *Komagata Maru* for six months in 1914, to get over the "continuous journey" hurdle.

But that was for tomorrow. Immediately, all the Congress did was to pass a resolution "strongly" protesting against the Canadian Privy Council Order No. 920 and "urge upon the

Imperial Government the necessity of securing the repeal of the said Continuous Journey Regulation." There was another matter also on which it was moved to register or, to be precise, "reiterate" its protest. This was the infamous Indian Press Act placed permanently on the Statute Book in 1910 as Minto's parting gift to India and to reinforce the complex armature of coercion perfected over more than half a century since the last serious challenge to British rule in India in 1857. Hardinge may have been a model of liberality in comparison with some of his predecessors. But he had shown no signs of any willingness and intention to dismantle any part of the elaborate system of powers of suppression and intimidation which he had inherited, least of all since the attempt on his life.

Rather the reverse, as the case of Mohamed Ali's journal *Comrade*, which had published the text of a pamphlet "Come Over Into Macedonia and Help Us" was to prove, especially after the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Sir Lawrence Jenkins, while dismissing his application against the confiscatory order under the Press Act of 1910, found that there was nothing in the publication that could be construed as sedition. Jenkins commented on the *Alice Through The Looking Glass* character of the Act and said: "The provisions of Section 4 [of the Act] are very comprehensive and its language is as wide as human ingenuity could make it.... It is difficult to see to what lengths the operation of this Section might not plausibly be extended by an ingenious mind.... Much that is regarded as standard literature might undoubtedly be caught."

But, in any case, much that was regarded as standard and even innocuous literature was already being caught with or without the sanction of the Press Act. Earlier in the year, for example, some books of W.S. Blunt (related to the ill-fated Anthony Blunt, the Fourth Man in a post-Second World War spy drama with a touch of class) which had no direct bearing on the situation in India and addressed to a reputable and well-known bookseller of Lahore, Ramakrishna, were seized by the Customs at Karachi. Some of them were confiscated; others reached the bookseller who had ordered them with passages blue-pencilled. H.G. Wells could not have been thinking of this episode though he might well have invoked it as evidence to prove the point he made

in *The New Machiavelli*: "Our functions in India are absurd—we suppress our own literature there.... The other day the British Empire was taking off and examining printed cotton stomach wraps for seditious emblems and inscriptions." Hardinge could not have changed this state of affairs even if he had wished. But there is nothing on record to suggest that he wished to change the system. The Congress resolution on the Press Act, like similar previous ones, evoked no response from the Government.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF A ROAD

The Karachi session was the last to be held in peacetime. However, little was said or done at the first ever gathering of the Congress in the city "between the desert and the sea" which indicated that it had the faintest premonition that before its next session "to be held in the Province of Madras" most of the so-called civilised nations of the Western World would be at each other's throats. True enough, the President of the Congress and some other speakers had spoken feelingly of the Balkan imbroglio, the hiving off of parts of the Ottoman Empire and the military incursion by Italy to secure a toe-hold in North Africa. But these developments had been seen by almost everyone entirely in the light of their confessional concern and anxiety over the misfortunes of Islam outside India. It had not occurred to them that they were much more and that the major European powers were flexing their muscles and manoeuvring for positions of vantage in the mortal combat in which they were preparing to engage to carve up Asia and Africa anew.

If any student of international affairs among the Congress leaders had any such foreboding he kept it to himself. It must be assumed, however, that nobody had such foreboding or the Congress would certainly have discussed its implications for India. So unaware were the Congress leaders of the imminence of a catastrophe liable eventually to engulf the planet that they blithely resolved that the All-India Congress Committee be authorised to arrange for a deputation "consisting, as far as possible, of representatives from different Provinces, to England, to represent Indian views on the following subjects:

1. Indians in South Africa and other Colonies;
2. Press Act;

3. Reform of the India Council;
4. Separation of Judicial and Executive Functions;
5. And important questions on which Congress has expressed opinion."

The delegation consisted of Bhupendranath Basu (Bengal), M.A. Jinnah and N.M. Samarth (Bombay), B.N. Sarma (Madras), S. Sinha (Bihar) and Lajpat Rai (Punjab). It set sail for England early in the spring of 1914, although Lajpat Rai did not go with the main delegation but joined them later in the middle of May. He had stayed behind because, as his biographer tells us, a bomb conspiracy case was then on and "there were ugly dark rumours that Lajpat Rai might somehow be connected with the conspiracy, that his house might be searched and he himself arrested as a conspirator or an inspirer of terrorist deeds", apparently because he knew two of the young men who were implicated—Bal Raj, son of his friend, Principal Hans Raj, and Balmukand who had actually been working for him. However, Lajpat Rai was able to get to London well in time to watch the progress—or rather lack of it—of the Council of India Bill which Lord Crewe had introduced in the House of Lords.

The Bill, Lajpat Rai says with some justice in his unfinished *Autobiography*, "was a typical Whig measure which satisfied no one and provoked opposition from all sides." The Bill had not been published when the delegation left India, but once the contents became known "the Indian Press expressed dissatisfaction.... Even the delegation was divided in its opinion. Personally I saw no reason to welcome the bill, but our chief [Bhupendranath Basu] was pledged to support it and for the sake of unanimity we submitted notes to the Secretary of State in which after suggesting radical changes we gave our general support to the bill. The bill was, however, very stoutly opposed by the Tory party and the Tory press raised quite a howl over it...."

The Bill was finally rejected by the Lords, partly because Crewe, whose heart was not really in it, mishandled its passage and partly because Curzon drummed up support among the Tory peers for defeating the Bill. He was particularly opposed to two provisions in the Bill—one which made it obligatory for the Secretary of State to appoint two Indians as members of the

India Council from a panel of names chosen by the Legislative Councils in India, and another which, in Curzon's view, transformed the Secretary of State into "a Great Mogul in Frock-coat." His dislike of the Bill was the more virulent because he suspected that Crewe had been guided in drafting the Bill by Edwin Montagu. This was to lead to an exquisitely effective piece of polemics in a letter to the *Times* by Montagu in which he said that "Lord Curzon with his wonted delicacy of touch lifts the skirt of a reforming measure in order to reveal the cloven hoof of a scheming politician, and what is to him worse, a politician still young..."

In any case, even if the Bill had not been thrown out by the Lords, it had but little chance of getting on to the Statute Book and early implementation. For it would have been overtaken by cataclysmic events and the Serajevo assassination at the end of July was to trigger off the First World War for which the major European powers had been girding their loins for quite some time.

Lajpat Rai was actually in the Lake District, attending a Fabian summer school, when the news of the Archduke Ferdinand's murder broke. He returned to London on July 31 and was appalled by the frivolous reaction of some of the Indians. "I met a number of Indians sitting in the smoking room of the National Liberal Club," he writes in his autobiographical fragment, "and talking of the war as if it were an occasion of jubilation. The group included some of the highest placed Indians, Hindus as well as Muslims. Their mirth and jubilation became so unmannerly that Mr. Jinnah had to rebuke them for their indecent behaviour, considering that the English members of the Club were so gloomy and anxious about the situation." But, he goes on to add, the attitude changed overnight and "all the leading Indians...began a competitive race in which everyone tried to outbid others in expressions of loyalty and devotion to the Empire and to take the credit of having given the lead."

There were some in the delegation of the Congress of which he was a member who wanted to issue a statement of support for the British Government immediately and without consulting all the members. Lajpat Rai opposed the suggestion "on various grounds", not the least being that their assignment ended with the

rejection of the Council of India Bill and they had no representative competence. Jinnah agreed with him. Eventually a statement, drafted by Sir William Wedderburn, and signed by the delegates and others assuring Lord Crewe of their loyalty to the British cause was published in the *Times*. Lajpat Rai's signature was put on it without his consent, but having been presented with a *fait accompli*, as it were, he decided not to make a fuss and put his signature to it "a day or two later at the National Liberal Club." But he was not very happy about it and his unhappiness grew when he saw the great jubilation in the British Tory Press and establishment at what was interpreted as India's offer of "voluntary, spontaneous, enthusiastic, universal" help to Britain in its hour of need. "Now all this," he has written, "was extremely embarrassing to those of us who had been proclaiming from house-tops that British rule in India was unnatural, unjust and unrighteous and that India was being economically bled white by the policy of 'drain'. The 'outburst' of loyalty was thrown at our faces as a complete answer to our statements against British rule. Under the circumstances I asked the permission of the Webbs to write an article on 'India and the War' for the *New Statesman*. They naturally wanted to see the article. When the article reached the editor he declined to publish it as it breathed sentiments of disloyalty and enmity towards England." However, despite his characterisation of the stance taken by the Indian national leaders in the War of 1914 as "improper and unpatriotic", Lajpat Rai was to admit that "perhaps that was the only policy to be followed."

The protestations of loyalty by Indian notables in Britain were but an echo of even louder declarations of support for the Empire in India. "In public," as Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "loud shouts of loyalty to Britain filled the air. Most of this shouting was done by the ruling princes, and some of it by the upper middle classes who came into contact with the government. To a slight extent the *bourgeoisie* was also taken in by the brave declarations of the Allies about democracy and liberty and the freedom of nationalities. Perhaps, it was thought, this might apply to India also, and it was hoped that help rendered then to Britain, in her hour of need, might meet with a suitable reward later. In

any event, there was no choice in the matter, and there was no other safe way; so they made the best of a bad job."

This is broadly an accurate assessment of the way in which the Congress, too, reacted to the situation at the outbreak of the War, though anybody attending its Twenty-ninth session at Madras would have carried away the impression that the Congress leadership was not just making the best of a bad job but lining itself behind the British Government heart and soul. At any rate, in his presidential address Bhupendranath Basu—at one stage the name of Lajpat Rai had been put up for presidency, but evidently it was thought that he was at best lukewarm about the policy of unconditional support for the British war effort—set a tone of perfervid loyalty to the Empire. Jawaharlal Nehru, after his first taste of Bhupendranath's oratory at Bankipore had described him as "an aggressive talker." And so he may have been. But his eloquence could plumb depths of an unctuousness which verged on sychophancy that must have made some at least among his audience at Madras feel a little queasy as, for instance, when he said:

India has recognised that, at this supreme crisis in the life of the Empire, she should take a part worthy of herself and of the Empire in which she has no mean place. She is now unrolling her new horoscope, written in the blood of her sons, in the presence of the assembled nations of the Empire and claiming the fulfilment of her destiny.

It was more than a terminological inexactitude to speak of India having recognised that she must unroll a new horoscope in the blood of her sons. Nobody had troubled to consult India when declaring the War on her behalf. As Lajpat Rai was to write in his autobiographical piece fourteen years after the event though he may not have been thinking of Bhupendranath Basu exclusively, "It is easy for public men to vote away millions of men and money as a generous gesture of chivalry without making any terms but this only proved their political inability". Bhupendranath, however, not content with assuming consent on the part of India, "strong in her men, strong in her faith", to participate in a war that was not of her own choosing, was

contemptuously dismissive of anyone who did not share his enthusiasm for the defence of the Empire. "What does it matter," he said in the concluding part of his address, "if a solitary raven croaks from the sand banks of the Jumna and the Ganges? I hear it not. My ears are filled with the music of the mighty rivers, flowing into the sea scattering the message of the future."

It is difficult to identify "the solitary raven" whom he had heard croaking in dissonance "with the music of the mighty rivers" from the sand banks of "the Jumna and the Ganges." But as Lajpat Rai has related "the only two men who raised a feeble voice against the giving away of Indian money and Indian men were the late Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya." Did Bhupendranath Basu have either of those two men in mind? It must remain a matter for conjecture. What is not a matter for guessing is that Tilak had been brought back from Mandalay and released at the dead of night at his house on June 17, 1914, a few weeks before he had completed his full term of imprisonment.

He was, of course, not quite the man that he was in 1908. He was already past fifty when he was deported to Mandalay; fifty-eight when he was set free. Six years spent behind the massive walls of the Fort at Mandalay were not exactly a rest-cure for a diabetic even though he was put in a part of the detention area reserved for European prisoners, and his sentence had been changed from hard labour to one of simple imprisonment. The conditions were tough. Subhas Chandra Bose, who was himself to be locked up in the same Fort in 1925, described the room in which Tilak was lodged as a "horrid cage". This only underlines his abundant moral and physical courage. For when G.S. Khaparde, who was at the time in London and presumably on hints from British authorities, sounded Tilak in a letter written in May 1909, whether he would be willing to accept release on certain conditions, he declined the suggestion because he did not think the conditions would be such as he could honourably accept. He wrote back to Khaparde that having considered the matter fully he had "come to the conclusion that it [accepting conditional release] is inconsistent with all my antecedents. In fact I shall be undoing my life's work thereby."

Physical hardships of life in detention apart, he was to suffer

a terrible intimate blow. Early in June 1912 his wife died. He took the blow stoically as he did his other misfortunes. Indeed, according to one of his biographers, Ram Gopal, "when he read the telegram [conveying the news of her death] there were hardly any signs of grief on his face." But grief which we try to conceal is often in the end more deadly and like "a worm in the bud... eats the heart away." As he wrote to his nephew Dhondo Pant, "Your wire was a very great and heavy blow. I am used to take my misfortunes calmly; but I confess that the present shook me.... What grieved me most is my enforced absence from her side at this critical time. But this was to be always feared.... One chapter of my life is closed and I am afraid it won't be long before another will be."

It was a rare descent into self-pity for him, but whatever may be thought of his estimate of the antiquity of the *Vedas*, his estimate of his own life expectancy was to turn out not far wrong. In his reply to Khaparde at the end of May 1909, he had said: "I am already 53 years. If heredity and average health be any indication of the longevity of a man, I do not hope to live at best more than ten years more." The premonitory feeling that his time was strictly limited, perhaps, accounts for a certain strain of caution that was discernible in his actions immediately after his release and that had not been so noticeable before.

Possibly there was also another reason why he did not want to make any hasty or impulsive move. What has been diagnosed as the Rip Van Winkle syndrome is almost unavoidable for any active political leader who has been forced to live in exile or prison, away from the main battle arena, for a lengthy period. Stone walls may not a prison make nor iron bars a cage, but they do in some degree breed a sense of isolation which undermines certitudes and sureness of political touch, especially when there is awareness that no sustaining and organised mass struggle is going on outside. This was the case with Tilak and he recognised it publicly in so many words in one of his speeches after his release. Much water had flowed down the Ganga and the Yamuna during the six years that he was kept *incommunicado* in the Fort at Mandalay as His Imperial Majesty's guest. Moreover, the shadow of a World War was already lengthening and, as Jawaharlal Nehru noted, "politics were at a low ebb in India". Tilak could not at all

be sure of how much of his old following, never organised into a proper party or movement before the Government struck at him, was still with him.

But he need not have had any doubts on this count. Even the British authorities were taken aback at the welcome he received within a few days of the news spreading that he was free. On the basis of C.I.D. reports they had assumed "that some time must elapse before he can regain his former influence." The fact was that, at least in so far as Maharashtra was concerned, there had never been any waning of his influence. But he did sound a note of doubt while addressing one of the public meetings in Poona held to congratulate him on his return. "When after six years' absence, I return and begin my acquaintance with the world," he said, "I find myself in the position of Rip Van Winkle. I was kept by the authorities in such rigorous seclusion that it seems that they desired that I should forget the world and be forgotten by it. However, I have not forgotten the people, and I am glad to notice that the people have not forgotten me." He went on to declare that he was "willing and ready to serve them in the same capacity as I did six years ago, though, it may be, I shall have to modify the course a little."

His hint that he might have to modify his course a little gave rise to all kinds of speculation and rumours. It was said, for instance, that he was going to withdraw from active politics and devote himself to literary and philosophical pursuits. This story had some verisimilitude in so far as his enforced leisure in Mandalay had been devoted to the writing of his commentary on the *Gita* and drawing up a programme of future religious and philosophical study and writings. Again, a story appeared in the Press that he intended to go to England and spend several years in Europe. The only substance to this story was that a book containing grossly libellous insinuations against Tilak had been published in Britain—Valentine Chirol's *The Indian Unrest*—by Macmillan & Co in 1910 while he was in prison in Mandalay Fort. He had no opportunity to read it or even see it while in prison. When he read it on his release, he wrote to Chirol to withdraw the charges he had made against him and to make suitable amends. This Chirol refused to do and Tilak decided to file a defamation suit against Chirol in England thinking, wrongly

as it turned out, that he was more likely to get justice in a court in Britain than in India. The case was to necessitate his going to London, but that was not to be till almost five years later and after the War. But rumour as usual had anticipated the event.

What he probably had in mind when he spoke of modifying his course a little was something very different—holding out some kind of an olive branch to the Congress. Tilak was nothing if not a political realist even though he had the reputation of being an impatient idealist. His Nationalist group and the Congress Continuation Committee he had set up before his arrest in June 1908, he knew, did not add up to a great deal for all their militancy in speech. At all events, they were largely based in Maharashtra, with some following in Nagpur and stray individual supporters elsewhere. With all its shortcomings, its constitutional allergy to public agitation beyond passing resolutions and sending deputations to England, Congress remained the only potentially effective vehicle for any nationwide movement for achieving substantive political ends. Certainly, such ends could not be achieved through sporadic acts of revolutionary violence which undoubtedly created a measure of radical ferment among the youth but also provided the British with an alibi for strengthening the apparatus of repression and, moreover, could serve them as yet another convenient pretext for stalling on the growing national demand for representative institutions for which even a body of opinion in Britain was calling.

Tilak seems to have believed that it was time to bury the hatchet and make a serious attempt to compose his differences with the Congress leadership and reinsert himself into the mainstream of Indian politics rather than condemn himself for the rest of his life to operating ineffectually on the fringe of it. It was not as if these differences were as wide and fundamental as they appeared when magnified by partisan passions generated by the Surat rumpus. In the solitude of his cell at Mandalay he had, perhaps, thought over the whole episode and realised that his tactics at Surat had played into the hands of his opponents. The sticking-point, ultimately, had been on a question of procedure rather than principle. At least Lajpat Rai believed that he had persuaded Tilak to accept a compromise and that it was only the

wilder spirits in the Tilak camp who had frustrated his efforts. Could not something like that compromise solution be revived?

Towards the end of November 1914 Tilak sent a circular letter to his supporters to sound them whether they would be agreeable to a compromise. He told them that on the Congress side, too, there had been feelers for exploring the ground for a reconciliation. This was true. A new and very dynamic personality had entered the Congress—Annie Besant. She was in every sense of the term a most remarkable woman, one of the great figures which the first wave of the movement of women's emancipation that began in the West towards the end of the 18th century produced. Intellectually and politically she had travelled a long way—from free thought under the influence of Bradlaugh and Edward Aveling to Theosophy under Madame Blavatsky, from Socialism to identification with the movement for self-government for India. She had been always sympathetic to the Congress and even believed that it had originated at a Theosophical Convention. In 1914 she finally decided to join it—and that meant livening it up with the enormous kinetic energy that she possessed combined with an obstinate will and inexhaustible reserves of determination. She was convinced that the situation, especially after the outbreak of the War, made a united Congress imperative and she threw herself whole-heartedly into the task of bringing about a healing of the breach. To this end she and N. Subba Rao Pantulu, one of the two General Secretaries of the Congress, went to Poona in the first week of December to talk things over with both Tilak and Gokhale who had returned from Britain only a week before.

It proved to be a harder and more complex task than she had imagined. Ostensibly, the main difficulty was that the Constitution adopted by the Congress at Calcutta in 1911 was specifically designed by the moderate leadership to ensure that "extremists" or Radicals would not get themselves elected as delegates with the idea of capturing the organisation from within through a kind of coup like the one allegedly attempted at Surat which came unstuck. Article XX of the Constitution laid down that only organisations and associations which explicitly accepted the Congress creed as defined in the first Article of the Constitution—that is, the goal of self-government within the Empire to

be achieved through constitutional means—would be entitled to elect delegates to the Congress. This seemed a perfectly logical and reasonable condition on the assumption that the Congress was just a political party, not what in effect it was and continued to be for a long time to come—a broad consensual national tribune, a *rassemblement* of often disparate interests but bound together by an overriding common aspiration. Tilak wanted the rules under Article XX to be modified to enable some of the associations he controlled, like the Sarvajanic Sabha which had taken part in the genesis of the Congress, but had since come under his radical influence, to elect delegates to the Congress.

Rather surprisingly, Gokhale was agreeable to some modification of the rules to make them more flexible. Annie Besant went to Tilak and his friends, among them G.S. Khaparde, Dr. B.S. Moonje, N.C. Kelkar and J.S. Karandikar. Dr. Moonje, who perhaps was not very enthusiastic about the idea of a compromise and later was to drift into the communalist camp, wanted to know whether Pherozeshah Mehta approved of the compromise acceptable to Gokhale. There was some point to Dr. Moonje's query. Pherozeshah Mehta had not been taking a very active part in the affairs of the Congress and had not attended any Congress session since he declined to preside over it at Lahore in 1909. But he was still a power in the Congress, an *eminence grise* who wielded much influence. In his own way, he was a political purist and had been dead set against the idea of blurring the issue and opening the doors of the Congress to men who accepted its creed for tactical reasons but had no intention of abiding by it. He told Subba Rao Pantulu that the compromise formula was not acceptable to him.

Subba Rao conveyed this to Gokhale in Poona. What followed was to become shrouded in a bitter controversy. Gokhale was bound to pay great attention to Pherozeshah Mehta's views who was not only an elder statesman of the Congress but to whom he owed a great deal for helping him in his political career. Gokhale therefore decided to call on Tilak as Tilak had called on him earlier at the Servants of India Society's headquarters. In his talk with Tilak, Gokhale, according to Dhananjay Keer in his *Lokamanya Tilak*, "tried to impress upon him the desirability of his not entering the Congress as he thought Tilak and the

Moderates would not hit it off together." Tilak, it seems, took it rather hard, Keer adds: "Tilak told Gokhale that the Congress was not the property of any one Party. It belonged to the nation. He would prepare the country first and then capture the Congress."

If, indeed, Keer's version is correct, then it is revealing. Talk of "capturing the Congress" was hardly calculated to reassure Gokhale about Tilak's plans and intentions. But the meeting appears to have ended on one of those diverting and humane notes of irrelevancy which constitute the bliss of Indian political life. Tilak, a diabetic, suffered from frequent eruption of pimples on his head. Gokhale, himself a diabetic, says Keer, "suggested to Tilak to apply Rasinol ointment to the pimples.... Tilak used it to the end of his life." However, Rasinol ointment was not much use in curing the bad temper on Tilak's part that Gokhale's retreat from the compromise formula had generated.

Gokhale in a letter to Bhupendranath Basu, President-elect of the Madras Congress, on December 14, a fortnight before the session was due to open, gave his version of the talks he had with Tilak. He told him that while he was willing to see relaxation of the rules to meet Tilak's conditions, Tilak was unwilling to accept the Congress policy of cooperation with the Government where possible and opposition to it when and where necessary. Tilak wanted systematic and comprehensive opposition to the Government although within constitutional limits. "Tilak," Gokhale wrote, "wants to address only one demand to the Government here and to the British public in England, viz, for the concession of Self-Government to India, and till that is conceded, he would urge his countrymen, to have nothing to do with either the public services or Legislative Councils and Local and Municipal Bodies. And by organising obstruction to Government in every possible direction within the limits of the law of the land, he hopes to be able to bring the administration to a standstill, and compel the authorities to capitulate. This is briefly his programme."

In other words, as Gokhale interpreted Tilak's position, it would have been tantamount to total boycott and obstructionism on the Irish model. Whether this was an accurate construction on Tilak's stand at the time is hard to say. It would have not been outrageous if that had been his position. But obviously it was not

compatible with membership of the Congress as it was, though it projected the shape of things to come. The matter came up at a meeting of the Subjects Committee of the Congress at Madras. Bhupendranath Basu who, again rather surprisingly, favoured unity moves, himself referred to Gokhale's letter. Annie Besant who was keen for the Reception Committee to invite Tilak was taken aback. She wired Tilak: "It is said by opponents you favour boycott of Government. I say you do not. Wire which is truth (Reply prepaid)." Tilak's answer was: "I have never advocated boycott of Government. Prominent Nationalists [that is, men of his persuasion] have served and are serving in Municipalities and Legislative Councils and I have fully supported their action both privately and publicly."

Tilak was furious with Gokhale and, as Keer tells us, said "that Gokhale had stabbed him in the dark and challenged him to publish his letter to Bhupendranath. It was reported that he was about to resort to his usual weapon of taking legal proceedings against Gokhale." Had Gokhale, in fact, deliberately and purposely misrepresented him? Again, the answer cannot be a clear "yes" or "no". On the face of things, it is unlikely that Tilak had told Gokhale he wanted total boycott of the Government. Just then he was anxious not to get on the wrong side of the authorities. In fact within three weeks of the outbreak of the First World War he had issued a statement setting down his views on the situation and his attitude towards the War and the British Government. It was meant partly to preempt any action by the authorities against him under the Defence of India Regulations that had been proclaimed post-haste to smother any unrest and opposition to war effort. Partly it was intended as a rebuttal of the libellous statements made in Valentine Chirol's book *The Indian Unrest* connecting him with terrorist murders, produced with the cooperation and connivance of the British authorities in India, and against which he was contemplating legal action in Britain.

In his statement he described as "nasty and totally unfounded" the charges which Chirol had levelled against him. "I may state once for all," he declared, "that we are trying in India, as the Irish Home rulers have been doing in Ireland, for a reform of the system of administration of Government, and not for the overthrow of Government; and I have no hesitation in saying that

the acts of violence which have been committed in different parts of India are not only repugnant to me, but have, in my opinion, only unfortunately retarded to a great extent, the pace of our political progress." And he went on to pay compliments to the British and their rule in India which, for their "loyalist" sentimental gush, could not have been improved upon even by Bhupendranath Basu :

It has been well said that the British Rule is conferring inestimable benefit on India not only by its civilised methods of administration, but also thereby bringing together the different nationalities and races of India, so that a united Nation may grow out of it in course of time. I do not believe that if we had any other rulers except the liberty-loving British, they could have conceived and assisted us in developing such a national ideal....

England, as you know, has been compelled by the action of the German Emperor to take up arms in defence of a weaker state. At such a crisis it is, I firmly hold, the duty of every Indian, be he great or small, rich or poor, to support and assist his Majesty's Government, to the best of his ability.

In the light of this statement, it is hard to believe that Tilak would have told Gokhale that his policy aimed at a total boycott of the British Government and all its works. Nor, in fact, did Gokhale in his letter to Bhupendranath Basu, use the word "boycott". But Gokhale was not far wrong in suggesting that there were unstated reservations behind Tilak's acceptance of the Congress policy. Even Tilak's biographer, Keer, implies that there was an element of disingenuousness in the "loyalist" public posture he had assumed as "a matter of expediency." Indeed, he goes further and says: "The shrewd Mahratta tactics shown by Tilak in issuing the statement had the desired effect. Shivaji also had once written an appealing letter to Aurangzeb to bring pressure on the ruler of Bijapur to release his father Shahaji. This was not a policy of surrender. It was a tactical move. Government removed the police chowkies and the watch, and Tilak became free to move and work."

If this interpretation is true, then the pitch of anger to which Tilak worked himself against Gokhale whom he denounced violently in an article in his paper, the *Kesari*, seems all the more indefensible. Not only indefensible but cruel because Gokhale was a dying man and, though very hurt by the virulence of Tilak's attack on him, forbore to repay in kind. Gandhi, who had just returned to India, was upset by Tilak's denunciation of Gokhale and went to see Tilak at Poona to remonstrate with him. After Gokhale's death within a few weeks of this controversy, Tilak was obviously stricken by remorse and paid Gokhale very high tribute at the cremation ground where people had cheered him on his arrival. He rebuked them and said: "This is not a time for cheers. This is a time for shedding tears. This diamond of India, this jewel of Maharashtra, this prince of workers is laid to eternal rest on the funeral ground. Look at him, and try to emulate him. Everyone of you should place his life as a model to be imitated...."

The controversy and the polemics to which it gave rise made it impossible for the Reception Committee at Madras to invite Tilak to the session and his biographer says he "could not afford to be a mere spectator and waste his time." As a result the "loyalist" sentiment could find uninhibited expression. Bhupendranath Basu's presidential address set the tone which was sustained by other delegates, with the exception of Annie Besant who struck a note of dignified self-assurance and almost of defiance: "India," she said, "does not chaffer with the blood of her sons and the proud tears of her daughters in exchange for so much liberty, for so much right. India claims the right, as a nation, to justice among the peoples of the Empire. India asked for this before the war, India asks for it during the war, India will ask for it after the war, but not as a reward but as a right does she ask for it. On that there must be no mistake."

This was quite a new accent, rarely heard at Congress sessions before. And she continued in the same vein when she spoke in the context of the resolution on the treatment of Indians in other parts of the British Empire and which for the first time laid down the principle of reciprocity. "Whatever a Colony does towards India," she said, "let the Government of India do that towards that Colony. That is the rule and nothing less than that will satisfy the sentiment of the people of India, for it has to be remembered

that India is growing in the sense of her own dignity...."

H.N. Kunzru underscored Annie Besant's argument by saying, "If once the Indian Government notify that aliens in India will be treated in the same way as Indians are treated elsewhere, I have no doubt that it will exercise a great restraining influence on them. Besides such a solution will have the element of equality about it...."

Hers was the boldest voice heard in the compound of Doneton House, Nungambakkam, where the Congress pavilion had been set up. For the rest the critical note was even more muted than before. The first resolution to be taken up on the second day of the session was one of "heartfelt and respectful sympathy" for the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who had suffered a double bereavement—death of his wife after an operation at the relatively young age of 46 and then, in December 1914, of his eldest son Edward who was wounded in one of the earliest engagements in the War and did not recover. This resolution was followed by two other condolence resolutions mourning the deaths of veteran Congress workers, Ganga Prasad Varma, Ambalal Sakarlal Desai and Bishnupada Chatterjee.

Then came the *pièce de résistance*. As India reported a month later, after the condolence resolutions had been duly negotiated, Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, entered the pavilion accompanied by his personal staff and was conducted to a seat on the dais near the President. Such an honour had not been bestowed upon the Congress in the first three years of what was a honeymoon period in the relationship between it and the Government. Indeed, as noted earlier, when a number of invitation cards had been sent out to high officials for the Second session of the Congress at Calcutta, they had been politely returned on the ground that it would be improper for Government officials to attend a political gathering. Presumably, just as Henri IV considered Paris worth a Mass, Pentland, no doubt under instructions from the Raj which employed him, thought that the Congress backing for the British cause in the War was worth putting in a ceremonial appearance at Doneton House, Nungambakkam. All the twaddle about the Congress representing no more than "a microscopic minority" was now conveniently forgotten. Instead, Pentland and his retinue could purr to their hearts' content as they listened to assurances of unflinching loyalty to the

Empire from Congress leaders who only a few years earlier were on the list of undesirable characters fit for deportation, including, the President and Surendranath Banerjea.

The sound of purring could be heard from five thousand miles and more away where the British media of the day which had been fixed in their attitude of hostility to the Congress since its inception, lapped up the fulsome language in which the resolution—number four on the order paper—pledging the Congress' "profound devotion to the Throne, its unswerving allegiance to the British connection, and its firm resolve to stand by the Empire, at all hazards and at all costs" and placing on record "the deep sense of gratitude and the enthusiasm which the Royal Message, addressed to the Princes and Peoples of India...has evoked throughout the length and breadth of the country..." Even the *Times* softened sufficiently to give the Congress a pat on the back. "The presence of Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras," it wrote, "was valued as a recognition of the successful issue of the efforts of the Congress to keep Indian political growth on healthy lines." But this approving nod was followed immediately by an admonition that it had better leave the function of criticism to the Legislative Councils "where administrative topics can be effectively debated while the Congress disseminates sound views on education, sanitation and economic advancement. These are the questions really agitating the public mind, and no organisation that neglects them can retain its validity."

The *Times* would not have been so complaisant towards the Congress if it had read the sixth resolution. The Congress was no doubt as, if not more, sincere in its expressions of loyalty to the British Throne as Tilak was when he had issued his statement a few months earlier. But while it was interested in "education, sanitation and economic advancement", it was not willing to steer clear of concern for what the *Times* regarded as "administrative topics" and which it wanted the Congress not to meddle with. Indeed, it seemed to believe that if the Indian soldiers were considered fit enough to die on "Flanders fields" to which they were sent within a month or two of the outbreak of hostilities, then they were entitled to promotion to higher ranks this side of the ocean. For almost three decades it had been urging

the Government to throw open higher ranks in the Army to Indians and it felt that the War situation had reinforced its argument. So in resolution number six it urged on "the Government the necessity, wisdom, and justice" of opening up these ranks to Indians "and of establishing in the country Military Schools and Colleges where they may be trained for a military career as officers in the Indian Army." More: it demanded that "in recognition of the equal rights of citizenship of the people of India with the rest of the Empire, and in view of their proved loyalty so unmistakably and spontaneously manifested, and the strongly expressed desire of all classes and grades, to bear arms in the service of the Crown and of the Empire" the existing system of volunteering be reorganised "so as to enable the people of this country, without distinction of race or class, to enlist themselves as citizen-soldiers of the Empire."

And the same logic was invoked to press home all the other demands of the Congress reiterated year after year, including the call for devolution of political power. The tenth resolution appealed to the Government that "in view of the profound and avowed loyalty" that the people of India had demonstrated "in the present crisis", it should remove "all invidious distinctions here, and abroad, between His Majesty's Indian and other subjects, by redeeming the pledges of Provincial Autonomy contained in the Despatch of the 25th August, 1911, and by taking such measures as may be necessary for the recognition of India as a component part of a Federated Empire, in the full and the free enjoyment of the rights belonging to that status."

To make all these tall demands was all very well. To secure them or even to ensure serious consideration of them by the British Government was a different matter; and the mere fact that the Governor of Madras had condescended briefly to attend its session was in itself no guarantee that such consideration would be vouchsafed them. Increased political "clout" was needed for that and far from gaining strength over the past several years vitality had seemed to be ebbing away from it. This was reflected in the progressive fall of attendance at its annual sessions. At Karachi, it is true, the Congress leaders had been able to delude themselves into thinking that the slow haemorrhage had been stanchd. But this was through a statistical sleight. The

number of delegates had been inflated by including all the members of the Reception Committee in the total. That trick could not be repeated with any conviction at Madras. Instead, the list of delegates there was packed by mustering local delegates. Out of the total representation of 866, 748 hailed from Madras and its environs. While it was perfectly natural that the host Province should furnish the largest contingent, the disproportion witnessed at Madras made hardly any sense. Of the remaining hundred and eighteen, Bombay and Sind accounted for fifty-four and Bengal thirty-eight. The rest of India, it appeared, had contributed only twenty-six delegates—twelve from U.P., five from Berar, another five from Bihar, two from C.P., and none from the Punjab. Burma, which for some reason had once again started sending delegates to the Congress, accounted for the remaining two.

At this rate the Congress ran serious danger of becoming a mere coterie of elderly rotarians with a past but no tomorrow, and drawn largely from Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, himself a Congress elder statesman, S. Subramania Iyer, in his address of welcome—which, incidentally, had to be read out for him—had referred to the suggestion that with the establishment of Legislative Councils the work of the Congress was over and it would be best for it to preside over its own dissolution. He did not agree with the suggestion, but admitted that "for some little time past, a certain waning of enthusiasm is observable among the Congress workers", though he saw "nothing abnormal in this."

He had some ideas for getting over this difficulty. They had to "arrange for the carrying on of our work throughout the year systematically." As a first step towards it, he wanted the money to be raised for the purpose. To this end he suggested the setting up of a body, "under the designation of Congress supporters or the like", each member paying a fee of Rs. 25 annually. "I presume," he said, "it will not be difficult to find in each province a few hundred of such subscribers." In his prefatory remarks he had yet another and rather engaging suggestion to make and, in particular, to the youth. "I trust," he said, "that the many able young men of the rising generation who are thirsting

to serve the country as Congressmen will diligently cultivate the art of effective speech, not of rapid eloquence."

The trouble, however, was that not many able "young men of the rising generation" were "thirsting to serve the country as Congressmen." Some of them, as invariably happens when established political formations become too respectable and lethargic, were being attracted by small groups of beyond-the-fringe revolutionary groups which had connections with like-minded groups among the Indian diaspora in the West and even the Far East. Even the less romantic among the youth found a leader like Tilak politically more attractive however counter-reformatory his ideas on social issues which led him to oppose tooth and nail the Age of Consent Bill and other measures of social reform, might have been. Tilak, as we know from his biographer, Keer, had told the General Secretary of the Congress before the Madras session that he intended to launch a Home Rule League. Annie Besant, whose preoccupation with Theosophy and other religious pursuits could not absorb her abundant energy, was also thinking of starting a similar enterprise.

It was, therefore, not accidental that the Chairman of the Reception Committee had come forward with suggestions for reviving the enthusiasm of the Congress workers and proposed organisational reconstruction, or at least reinforcement, and changes in its working methods. He and other Congress leaders were aware of the generation gap that was widening between the Congress and the new generation and knew that time was not on their side. But quite apart from their reflexive dislike of any innovations, they had hemmed themselves in by inflexible rules laid down in the Constitution they had designed deliberately to keep the "extremists" out. These required changing.

There came the rub. A resolution was moved at Madras to amend the Constitution and especially Article XX. The discussion in the Subjects Committee on the two amendments proposed by Annie Besant was lively and heated. But nothing was decided at that Congress session. Instead, it was resolved that amendments "be referred by the General Secretaries of the Congress to a Committee consisting of three members, to be nominated by each, Provincial Congress Committee; with the General Secretaries

as ex-officio members." The Committee was to meet at a time and place of its own choice though to be fixed "in consultation with the Secretaries of the Provincial Congress Committees." And it was to report "to the All-India Congress Committee in regard to the said amendments for such action, if any, as the All-India Congress Committee may deem fit to suggest to the next Congress."

The setting up of the committee to report on Annie Besant's amendments was plainly a stalling device and essay in procrastination to see how the country reacted to Tilak's agitational methods. But it was soon to become clear that the ground swell of opinion in favour of closing the ranks of Indian nationalism and presenting some kind of a united front to the Raj was mounting. Indeed, in a very real sense the first phase of the Indian National Congress ended with the outbreak of the First World War and its Twenty-ninth session at Madras. It ended not only because the War, which for the combatants was only politics by other means, ineluctably altered the coordinates within which the Indo-British argument and litigation had developed. It ended because the road along which the Congress leadership had travelled for nearly three decades was trailing off into sand. The path into the future was not at all visible and, perhaps, had still to be found as, too, the pathfinder.

The truest and most valid assessment of what had been achieved during this first phase was made by one who was one of the most lucid ideologues of the Congress during this period and who combined a most rare intelligence with a singular freedom from conceit. "It will no doubt be given to our countrymen of future generations," Gokhale said, "to serve India by their successes. We of the present generation must be content to serve her mainly by our failures." Future generations, too, were to have their failures but whether they were to be of as much service to India as those which Gokhale had in mind is another question.

CHAPTER IX

SURAT IN REVERSE

Death took a heavy and tragically selective toll of Congress leadership in 1915. In quick succession it struck down three of its former Presidents—Pherozeshah Mehta, Sir Henry Cotton and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Each one of them in his own way had contributed in a generous measure to the building of the Indian National Congress and influenced its outlook and policies. Pherozeshah Mehta, of course, was one of the founding fathers of the Congress and although in recent years he had not been seen at its annual sessions, remained a force to reckon with in its inner councils. Sir Henry Cotton, an Englishman born in India, had presided over the Congress session in 1904 and was one of the first among the few British who identified themselves with the aspirations of the Indian people and had been active in the work of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress with Sir William Wedderburn, Dadabhai Naoroji and others.

However, both Cotton and Mehta, who died within eight days of each other a few weeks before the Thirtieth session of the Indian National Congress was due to open in Bombay, had completed their three score years and ten. In a way, therefore, it could be said that their future already lay behind them. But not so with Gokhale. When he died at Poona on February 19, 1915, he had still not quite completed his forty-ninth year. If this was not generally realised, it was because of his rather precious accomplishments, the well-merited reputation for maturity of judgement that he enjoyed and the aura of seasoned statesmanship which surrounded him. He was only thirty-nine when he was called upon to preside over the Congress at its Twenty-first session at Benaras at a most critical moment in the life of the nation when Curzon's decision to impose the Partition of Bengal

had set into motion the first major wave of turbulence since 1857. He was thus the youngest man to be elevated to that high office in the pre-independence period. For both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, though they were regarded as personifying the youth of the country, were a year or two older than Gokhale when they were elected to Congress presidency in 1929 and 1938 respectively.

Gokhale's death, therefore, was a greater loss to the Congress if it were at all possible—and permissible—to establish any valid comparative measure applicable in so intangible and imponderable a context. Loss, not only to the Congress, but to the whole movement of enlightenment in India hinging on the progress of liberal political and social thought. For, in his case, perhaps, the best had yet to come. It was only ten years before his death, in June 1905 and six months before he presided over the Benaras Congress, he had founded the Servants of India Society. He had done so, not because he wanted to institutionalise a cult of personality centred on himself as such societies tend to—and not only in India. Rather it was because he realised as most sapient Indian leaders, from Rammohun Roy to our own day, have realised, that the movement of political emancipation needed to be synchronised and interlocked with the effort at social reformation if Indian nationalism were not to degenerate into chauvinism of the most pernicious kind—that which is rounded with confessional bigotry.

At any rate he intended the Servants of India Society to be a truly secular order or brotherhood of service, cutting across all divides of caste and creed and confession and dedicated to work for India. That was what its members were required to pledge themselves to and, during his lifetime and for sometime after, the society did live up to that promise. But had he lived longer and been able to give it uninterrupted attention instead of having to spread himself over what Edwin Montagu described as "an almost unlimited field of activity", it is conceivable that it might have struck deeper roots and provided a wider focus of idealism in the country.

It is interesting and significant that a man like Jinnah, before private and public frustrations soured and introverted his mind, admitted to his ambition of becoming a Muslim Gokhale. What is

even more interesting and significant is that Gandhi, intellectually and temperamentally of a very different kidney, took him to be his mentor or "master" (as he called him) rather than Tilak who possessed great personal magnetism. Why? Gandhi was to explain it in a speech at Santiniketan on the morrow of Gokhale's death: "His conscience ruled every action of his life. He did not wear it on his sleeve, he wore it in his heart.... His last words to those members of the Servants of India Society who were with him were: 'I do not want any memorial or any statue. I want only that men should love their country and serve it with their lives'.... It was through service that he learnt to know his own nature and to know his country. His love for India was truthful and therefore he wanted nothing for India which he did not want for humanity also. It was not blind love, for his eyes were open to her faults and failings.... I was in quest of a really truthful hero in India and I found him in Gokhale...."

Strangely enough, somebody working from a very different premise and himself almost a stranger to India, formed a very similar assessment of Gokhale's personality. Among the many tributes paid to Gokhale by leading British public figures, including Curzon and Crewe, which *India* published the week after his death was one by Ramsay MacDonald who had worked with him on the Royal Commission on Public Services in India whose report, MacDonald lamented, "he will never sign". It struck a remarkably perceptive note of which the Mahatma would have approved :

He belonged to that race of Indians who retain that dignity of mind and spirit which come from an unassailable belief in their own race and its destiny.

He knew the West, its powers and its kingdoms. No one paid a more wholehearted homage to its attainment. But he knew the East, too. The breath of the life of his Mother India was his own breath of life. Jealously he guarded her reputation, faithfully he sought to remove her defects. Where she had fallen, he sought to uplift her; where she had triumphed, he sought to praise her.... His knowledge, his

resources, his nimbleness, his persistence, his authority, have been a source of endless wonder to me....

May his resting place remain in the affectionate heart of his people. He would desire no other shrine. May his work inspire those who have to step in and fill the place he has left vacant. He would have prayed for no other resurrection.

It can serve no purpose to speculate what he might or might not have contributed to the building of India if he had been spared another ten or fifteen years. But it is not impertinent to suggest that his voice would have enormously strengthened and encouraged the forces of reason and reconciliation when the irrational and divisive strains in Indian body-politic were beginning to acquire a certain morbidity; that his benign personality would have provided a bridge of understanding across the chasms of gratuitous mistrust and incomprehension which were opening up in India's body-social in the 1920s under the stress of political and economic competitiveness articulated largely along confessional lines. But that was not to be. He had never enjoyed robust health since his fall at Calais when he had seriously strained his heart. There were the complications of diabetes. He needed to husband his meagre physical resources most carefully. But he was unsparing of himself, especially during the last few months of his life when, in addition to his other commitments, he was working on the draft of his Reform Scheme. He was having bouts of cardiac asthma and the abusive campaign which Tilak's paper, the *Kesari*, was relentlessly carrying out against him was hardly calculated to bring him any relief in an ailment which is now recognised to be in no small part psychosomatic. As he told Subba Rao Pantulu: "The *Kesari* in particular has been pressing the accusation against me with a virulence of which I can give you no idea. I have carried forbearance to its extreme limit and it is impossible for me to keep silent any longer."

But silence was imposed upon him by the great Silencer. Gandhi who had seen him in Poona a week before his death told his audience at Santiniketan: "Doctors repeatedly advised him to retire from work but he did not listen to them. He

said, "None but death can separate me from work." Nor did he allow himself to be. He completed his draft and sent copies of it to the Aga Khan and Pherozeshah Mehta on February 17. Forty-eight hours later he was no more.

The Thirtieth session of the Indian National Congress opened under the shadow of the death of three of its most influential veterans. To this was added the death of Keir Hardie who had visited India and was among the pioneers of the British Labour movement who had deeply interested himself in the affairs of India—and inevitably the Congress. Indeed, the first four resolutions on the order paper at Bombay were condolence resolutions. Dinshaw Wacha as the Chairman of the Reception Committee referred to the cruel losses which the Congress had suffered in his address of welcome. "The whole country," he said, "laments the death of these three great pillars of the Congress, and its people smite their breasts with cruel blows.... Never before had we to mourn such a triple tragedy...."

But the living bury or burn their dead and get on with the business of living. The Congress, moreover, was under some challenge. This was partly because of Tilak who had not allowed any grass to grow under his feet after his release. He had been very active and in May 1915 had carried out a fairly impressive muster of his supporters. A conference of the "Nationalist Party" was held at the Kirloskar Theatre in Poona under the presidency of Joseph Baptista, a close associate of Tilak, who gave a call for the setting up of a Home Rule League and for propaganda to be systematically carried out in Britain, presumably in competition with the work of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress under Wedderburn which Tilak regarded as too timid and, though for tactical reasons he did not say so, excessively "loyalist".

Tilak was not the only political leader who wanted to set up a Home Rule League. The idea had occurred to others, too. Annie Besant, for one. In her case, and especially in her later years, the prima donna complex was very much there. Although she had joined the Congress the previous year, she seemed to hanker after a captive organisation of her own tailor-made to suit her personality. In September 1915 she made a speech which hinted this

and later that month in her paper *New India* she announced:

After conversation in India and correspondence with England, which have been going on for many months, and the beginning of which goes back to discussions held last year with some English politicians and sympathisers with India, it has been decided to start a Home Rule League, with 'Home Rule for India' as its only object, as an auxiliary to the National Congress here and its British committee in England, the special function of the committee being to educate the English democracy in relation to India and to take up the work, which Charles Bradlaugh began and which was prematurely struck out of his hands by death.

These stirrings must have rung a mild bell of alarm in the moderate Congress circles and made them sit up and take notice. Already at Madras there had been admonitions from the platform that somnolence would not do and for Congressmen to work at the grassroots, to create primary Congress bodies where they did not exist, and reinforce them where they existed. And in some degree these admonitions had been heeded. At least a Congress report claimed that "during the year [1915], a zealous endeavour was made,—mainly with the willing services of members of the Servants of India Society—to widen the recruiting ground for the Congress by organising District Committees wherever they did not exist, especially in the Town and Island of Bombay, the vast area of which was parcelled out into Congress Districts corresponding in most cases to the Municipal Wards of the city. This made it possible for a much larger number of delegates to be returned by the Electorate in the Province of Bombay in accordance with the Constitution of the Congress than would otherwise have been the case."

This was certainly true. As at Madras, an overwhelming majority of the delegates—at least two-thirds of the total—were from Bombay. If the delegates from the Sind region of Bombay were added to this number, Bombay's share would have risen to almost three-fourths. But unlike at Madras, other Provinces had also done some work and each had contributed a somewhat larger number of delegates to the Bombay session, with the exception of the Punjab from where no delegate was listed. But

this may have been owing to some error in reporting. At all events the Bombay session set a new record 2,259. The previous highest figure recorded was 1,889 in 1889—a remarkable numerological coincidence—when the Congress met for the second time in Bombay. But, then, the attraction had been Charles Bradlaugh. There was no such star turn billed in 1915.

On the contrary, both Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta were dead. The latter was known as the "Lion of Bombay." Indeed, it was he who had dictated the choice of Bombay for the fourth time in thirty years as the venue for the annual session of the Congress. He had done so because he intended to oppose the strong current of opinion among the rank and file Congressmen and Congresswomen for reuniting the Moderates and the "Nationalists" of the Tilak school of thought. As his biographer, H.P. Mody, puts it, "He was anxious to put an end once and for all to the manoeuvres which had been going on for some years to effect a compromise which he regarded as mischievous, and he was confident that his personality and his immense influence in Bombay would carry everything before them." He not only dictated the choice of the venue. He also made sure that an extreme Moderate should preside over the Congress session—Sir Satyendra Prassanna Sinha, the first Indian to be a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and to be later ennobled and who styled himself as Lord Sinha of Raipur.

However, says Mody, "fate conspired against Mehta." "The hand of the Reaper", as Dinshaw Wacha was to lament in his address of welcome, was to gather in Pherozeshah Mehta on November 5, 1915, one of the father-figures among the Moderates. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, describing the plight of the Moderates, says in his history of the Congress, "There was no Field-Marshal, no Generalissimo to lead the army.... Leadership was almost passing from the Nation to the bureaucracy. Power had gone out of the Moderates." His picture of the decrepitude and virtual impotence of the moderate leadership after the disappearance of Gokhale and Mehta is a little overdrawn. There was still some fight left in the Moderates. This was shown when Annie Besant was only partially successful in getting her supporters elected as members of the Subjects Committee in Bombay and failed to get her way on her Home Rule resolution in spite

of her customary persistence in bringing up the issue both inside the Congress and outside at the meetings she had convened to discuss her plan for setting up a Home Rule League.

It is even possible that Pherozeshah Mehta's death had put the Moderates and especially the people of Bombay on their mettle to make the Bombay session a success as a homage to the man who had served them well and with dignity over decades. The public reception given to his choice for the President, S.P. Sinha, who had been reluctant to accept the crown, on his arrival and as he was taken in a procession to the Bombay residence of the Maharaja of Baroda, Jaya Mahal Castle, on Nepean Sea Road, was one, as Surendranath Banerjea eloquently put it, "which kings might have envied." Sinha himself was at some pains to dispel the impression that he was an antediluvian backwoodsman out of tune with the *zeitgeist*. Certainly, there were passages in his presidential address which would justify Dr. Sitaramayya's description of it as "a most reactionary speech" as, for example, when he likened India to a patient whose fractured limbs were in splints and his acceptance of Britain as the custodian of Indian destiny. Furthermore there must have been some moments of embarrassment for him during the discussion of resolution seventeen which reiterated protest against the Indian Press Act.

For he had been the Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council at the time when the legislation was rushed through the Imperial Legislative Council. Indeed, he it was who had half-convinced Gokhale of its necessity by showing him supporting "evidence". This was now to come home to roost with a vengeance. The debate on the resolution was to be opened on the last day of the Congress session—December 29—by a man who was well qualified to represent the Fourth Estate, himself British born and bred, and, indeed, the son of a former Paymaster-in-Chief of the Royal Navy—Benjamin Guy Horniman. A literary soldier of fortune of fiercely radical outlook, he had come to India in 1906 and found a job on the *Statesman* as an Assistant Editor. But, obviously, it was not a newspaper on which his talents could find their full and most effective expression. In 1913 when Pherozeshah Mehta founded the *Bombay Chronicle*, he was called upon to edit it which he did till 1919 when he was deported to England and his passport confiscated. That he

should be chosen to move the resolution against the Press Act was wholly appropriate.

It was not a long speech, but a devastatingly effective one. He characterised the Act as "a measure of most extraordinarily drastic provisions,—unparalleled...almost in any civilized country of the world today..." Later in his speech he even described it as "Hunnish—excrecence on the Statute Book of British India." In between, he subtly pointed the accusatory finger at the man who was in the presidential chair. "In the indictment which we have to make against the Government under this Act," he said, "and in that indictment, Sir, I regret to say that you are *particeps criminis*." But he softened the blow by adding, "In this respect I think we can give the Government a loophole through which they can assist us,—we are able to say that this Act is not what they intended it to be, and it is not carrying out the work which they undertook, and not carrying it out in the way in which they undertook that it should be carried out at the time it was passed."

And he quoted not only the case of the *Comrade* and the withering comments of the Chief Justice of Bengal, Lawrence Jenkins, but Sinha's own words when he had argued at the time of the passage of the Bill: "it is of no use to attempt to convince us that it is a very drastic measure because we feel sure that it is not." He went on:

...I do not wish to say anything that might be embarrassing to our President, and I am not going to ask him to answer any question that I may put to him, but I ask him here publicly without wishing him to answer it, merely for the sake of getting down a fact,—I ask whether he could lay his hand on his heart today and say as fervently and as eloquently as he said on that occasion,—and he spoke very fervently and very eloquently, I was there to hear him and I know what an enormous impression he made upon the Council—I ask him to say whether he or anyone else can honestly say today that it is not a very drastic measure, that he is sure it is not a very drastic measure....

The Official Congress Report is silent on how the President reacted to Horniman's indictment and there is no way of knowing how he felt about it. But in fairness to the future Lord Sinha of

Raipur it must be said that he had tried to adjust himself to the mood amongst the Radicals both within and outside the gates of the Congress Pandal. If his presidential address harped on a gradualism indefinitely prolonged through such phrases as the "gradual development of popular control over all departments of Government" and "the progressive nationalisation of the Government of the country", it also deviated at points sharply from the restrictive concept of "self-government within the Empire" and introduced such outlandish transatlantic notions as "Government of the people, for the people, by the people." In his concluding address he appealed to every sincere patriot and educated Indian to "run to the help and the rescue of the poor and the weak",—of "the people in the villages who toil with the sweat of their brow", "whom we want to be capable of self-government," and to work for their uplift, "day and night, patiently, persistently and strenuously." For a Moderate among Moderates, this savoured of almost Dantonian audacity.

The Bombay session was something of a paradox. The Moderates were still very much in control, but they were also on the defensive. They were aware that the tide was turning—against them. A delegate from Bengal, R.C. Bonerjee, speaking on a resolution re-affirming for the nth time its previous pleadings on the subjects of military training and volunteering and urging upon the Government "the justice and expediency of admitting Indians to Commissions in the Army and Navy and of throwing open to them the existing Military and Naval schools and Colleges and of opening fresh ones in the country so that they may be trained for Military and Naval careers; and the necessity of re-organising the present system of volunteering with due regard to the right of the people of this country to enlist themselves as citizen-soldiers of the Empire without distinction of race, class or creed", had gone on to reinforce his argument by quoting some lines of English verse as was customary in those days when poetry was still a currency of political debate:

For while the tired waves vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
By creeks and inlets slowly making
Comes silent flooding in the main.

Banerjee, of course, was trying to make the point "that concessions are wrung slowly and by force of circumstances from the Government" and that they must persevere because "there will come a time when we shall prove that we are in full flood." But the argument was no less applicable to the dominant moderate leadership of the Congress in its dealings with the Radicals or the "Nationalists" whom it was not allowing into its fold. It was obvious now that they could not be kept at bay permanently and the time was approaching, if it was not already there, when they would have to be admitted into the Congress. Paradoxically, while the late Pherozeshah Mehta had intended Bombay to be the Waterloo of those who had been clamouring for ending the schism that had occurred at Surat, it turned out to be the reverse and the session became a prelude to the family reunion, so to speak.

In this connection the significant thing was not that the Committee set up at the Madras session to consider and report on the two amendments which Annie Besant had proposed, had decided to reject them in the form in which they were put. The significant thing was that in rejecting them it had conceded the substance of what she had proposed. Resolution twenty-five adopted at Bombay amended the Congress Constitution in the sense in which Annie Besant—and Tilak—wanted it to be changed so that the Congress would no longer be out of bounds to those who were of their persuasion.

Tilak during his years in the wilderness and the cell at Mandalay Fort had grown wiser and did not try to overplay his hand. He had actually tried to make up with Mehta before his death by calling on the old man and the quarrel, in any case, could not be extended beyond the Tower of Silence. He lost no time in announcing the acceptance of the compromise offered in the Congress resolution. He also had it accepted by his cohorts at a meeting of the Bombay Provincial Conference at Belgaum next year when he told his supporters: "If we are there in the future, I have not the slightest doubt this limitation [this referred to the right which the All-India Congress Committee reserved to itself to disqualify any political association or body at any time from electing delegates to the Congress] will be removed. Will

you wait outside until it is removed or will you go in and get it removed?" They inevitably chose to go in.

There were also other straws in the wind to indicate that the Moderates were changing their tune if not their tactics. While most of the twenty-seven resolutions on the agenda at Bombay were old friends, dressed up for the occasion, there was at least one brand new one—number eleven. This referred to a resolution that had been passed unanimously by what was known as the Imperial Legislative Council that India should take part in the next Imperial Conference which was to discuss the post-war settlement on a footing of equality with the self-governing parts of the Empire or Dominions, and Great Britain. The Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, was sympathetic to the demand and promised to get a satisfactory response from the British Government. At the same time he entered a mild demur and pointed out that under its constitution, the Imperial Council as a collectivity decided whether or not to admit any other part of the Empire. The Congress in its resolution did not take any heed of this reservation which implicitly postponed India's participation in the Imperial conclave to the next conference but one. It thanked the Viceroy "cordially...for his statesman like support" and expressed "the hope that the demand made by the unanimous voice of the Imperial Legislative Council on behalf of the people of India will meet with adequate response from the Dominions and the Imperial Government" and urged "that the persons selected to take part in the [Imperial] Conference on behalf of India should be two members to be elected by the elected members of the Imperial Council."

Symptomatically, B.G. Horniman was chosen to move this resolution, too. He had a reputation for plain-speaking and he did not mince his words on this occasion either. The preceding resolution had been concerning the rights and treatment of Indians in South Africa and Canada and other Colonies dominated by the Whites; it had been moved, appropriately enough, by Gandhi. Horniman said that listening to the speakers on the previous resolution he had wondered whether "it is wise and dignified for this Congress to pass the resolution" which he was going to move. "I am not sure," he said, "whether it would

not be the more appropriate and more dignified course for this Congress to say to the Colonies "we thank you for welcoming us to your Imperial Conference; but so long as our people continue to be denied the rights of British citizens in your colonies, we do not want to sit with your representatives in the Imperial Conference."

He admitted, however, that although such a course would be more dignified to take, it would perhaps "not be expedient." But he took the opportunity to tell the Congress leaders two things which may or may not have occurred to them. The first was that Hardinge was either being disingenuous or was just ill-informed when he argued that because of the "constitution" of the Imperial Conference India would have to wait till the conference after next to get a seat in it because the proposal had first to be approved by the Conference. "But I have to say with all respect," he observed, "that I think Lord Hardinge was wrong. This Imperial Conference has no constitution properly speaking and the Viceroy, when he spoke of its constitution, was in error. In fact the voice was the voice of Jacob, but the hand was the hand of Esau; the voice was the voice of Lord Hardinge; the hand was the hand of Whitehall. Whenever there is any great step forward to be taken, no matter how obvious the necessity and how easy the way, the people in Whitehall will ferret out some sort of technicality, some sort of 'constitutional' invention in order to create delay. That is what I think happened on this occasion."

This was perfectly true. So was the second point he made before concluding, though he said that it was "not strictly speaking absolutely germane to the subject." He wanted them "to consider very carefully, that if you are represented at the Imperial Conference by an official representative of the Government, you must remember the difference of the impression that will be made upon the other members of the Conference, the colonial representatives.... Nothing is more essential to the future status of this country in the British Imperial firmament than that it should be thoroughly understood in other countries of the Empire that what I may call the representative classes of this country are as fitted to manage their own affairs or, at any rate, as fitted for responsible Government, whether they have got

it or not, as the Colonies are." He, therefore wanted them to insist that India be represented at the Imperial Conference not by the bureaucrats "of this country or the sundried bureaucracy of Whitehall", but men elected by "the non-official Members of the Imperial Council" some of whom, he noted, were "sitting at this table."

Horniman, of course, was British. Rather like Hume before him, he was less inhibited in speaking out the plain truth and in a manner which the Indian Congress leaders did not think it politic to assume, conditioned as they were over a generation to calling a spade by some less harsher name. But there had been some change even in their tone and accent. This was reflected time and again during the Bombay session and especially in the debates over the oft-reiterated resolution urging modification of the Indian Arms Act of 1878 and a wholly new resolution calling for "complete fiscal freedom in special reference to import, export and excise duties."

The War, as Jawaharlal Nehru noted both in *Glimpses of World History* and *The Discovery of India*, gave a spurt to the process of industrialisation of India because "the vast quantity of British goods that used to come to India was now very largely cut off" and India had to provide for herself as best as she could and "also to supply the Government with all manner of things needed for the war", with the result that not only "the old industries, like textile and jute" but also new war-time industries were encouraged even though Indian capitalists had to accept the position of junior partners to their British counterparts. There was, consequently, some re-thinking of the doctrine of Swadeshi which had been accepted as an integral part of the Congress policy since 1906, if not even earlier.

Hitherto the tendency had been to extol Swadeshi largely in sentimental and even Utopian terms. But at the Bombay session some speakers were bold enough to ask for a redefinition of its scope and purpose. K.R. Vakil, a Bombay delegate, who moved the resolution supporting the Swadeshi movement, for instance, while he quoted Dr. Ananda Coomarswamy's remark that "if the reawakening is to come at all, it will be the fruit of India's recognition of her national self", went on to urge his audience also "to read that stirring and eye-opening special paper by

Sir Dorab Tata on the Japanese invasion of India." Meanwhile he more or less paraphrased Dorab Tata's argument. "Gentlemen", he said, "in order to check effectively this foreign invasion of our industries, a well founded modern system of Industrialism is urgently needed. . . . I am conscious of the fact that many of the notions of industrialism and industrial ideals might clash with the philosophical ideals of the Indian mind and heart but we are living in a cruel world that marks the plan of human life and human progress by force. . . . Your country is overrun by exploiters of other lands. If you have scruples about or a distaste for modern industrialism, they are only too pleased to see you hold back and stand aloof. We have got to march in the wake of the times and remember that with material prosperity, we shall have better opportunities of cultivating the artistic and philosophic life of the nation."

Here we already had more than a precursive hint of the concept of Indian industrial self-reliance. And he was also quite certain that India could "well supply her own wants" and quoted a passage from Romesh Chunder Dutt. "No country on earth," Dutt had written, "labouring under the disadvantages from which we suffer, could have shown more adaptability to modern methods, more skill, more patient industry, more marked success." This has almost a contemporary ring. Admittedly, there were other voices, supporting a somewhat different and more orthodox notion of what the Swadeshi movement was all about—or should be. Dr. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a future President of the Congress and its historian, slightly misconstruing the argument of the mover of the resolution, chose to divert the minds of his listeners from the "materialistic" to the "mental" aspect of the Swadeshi movement. He seemed to work himself into quite a passion while castigating those who were inclined to twist the Swadeshi doctrine to justify wholesale industrialisation of the country albeit under Indian auspices. He evidently associated modern industrial culture with "flaming Brussels carpets, Tottenham Court Road Furniture, Italian Mosaics, German Tissues, French Oleographs, Austrian lustres and all kinds of cheap brocades", not to mention "trade in Merino and Crevianette, in Dawson's boots and Christy's hats." "To cast aside the exquisite gifts of the Mother," he expostulated with some warmth,

"and to run after the 'husks and trappings' of modern luxury does not constitute a stimulus for sacrifice, but argues a vulgarity of spirit and a degeneracy of soul in the country."

These were harsh words, but obviously Dr. Sitaramayya felt strongly on the subject. He ended on a very disconsolate note and said: "With most of us, Swadeshi was once a fashion; it has now become the fad of a few; it has become the prejudice of the many, at best it has become a formula upon such sacred occasions to be mechanically uttered, meriting no word of prayer or praise as was the fate of the 'Swadeshi' Resolution at last year's Congress...." According to the official report of the session, he then "retired." Whether this meant that he left the Congress Pandal or merely that he returned to his seat is not clear. Nor is it known what Gandhi thought of Dr. Sitaramayya's protest against the way the issue of Swadeshi was being handled by the Congress. For he must have been there on the platform where the previous day he had sat on the left of the President. What we do know is that the resolution on the Swadeshi movement was the last business on the agenda on the second day of the session and that the President, apparently in a hurry to call it a day, almost forgot to put the resolution to vote, and only just remembered it in the nick of time to do so before the delegates had begun dispersing. This rather underscored the point that Dr. Sitaramayya was trying to make.

The significance of the Bombay session, however, was not only in the record number of delegates that attended it or even in the fact that it paved the way for the return of the prodigals who had left the fold, or rather were effectively excluded from it, eight years earlier after the debacle in the French Gardens at Surat. Historically, its significance was and must remain in the fact that it portended and, indeed, prepared the ground for a much more crucial and consequential consolidation of Indian political opinion. In that sense it marked at least a partial and temporary but distinct setback for the imperialist policy of *divide et impera*.

When the All-India Muslim League had been founded with official blessings in 1906, it was obviously intended to be developed as a countervailing political force to the Congress. And for some years that seemed to be the role it played. However, since 1912 it had begun to show marked recalcitrance to the part

for which the British authorities had set about grooming it. A number of younger men among its leadership, like M.A. Jinnah, Mazhar-ul-Haque and Wazir Hasan, did not wish the League to become a pliable tool in the hands of the ruling power and wanted it to keep in step with the main body of political opinion in the country. They had been successful in persuading the League to adopt self-government within the British Empire as the goal of its policy which, at least to all appearances, made it a *de facto* ally of the Congress in its strivings, though textual analysts would have detected ambiguities of nuance which suggested a parallelism rather than an identity of aim and purpose. The Congress reciprocated this move at its Karachi session by a policy of *la main tendue* and offered "joint and concerted action" in everything that concerned national interests and welfare.

The response of the League was positive though, since there was no annual session of the League in 1914, it was not possible to gauge how positive it was. In 1915 it announced that it would also hold its annual session at Bombay synchronizing it with the Congress session. This was a dramatic break-through in itself. But the quite extraordinary scenes of fraternization between the two organisations at Bombay exceeded all expectations and seemed to mark the advent of a new epoch of cooperative politics in India. As the report of the Bombay Congress session recorded it: "For the first time... in the history of the Congress, the representatives of the All-India Muslim League attended the Congress Pandal in front of the Congress delegates and were received by the vast assemblage with hearty applause and enthusiastic manifestations of cordiality as they entered the Pandal and took their seats in the prominent place reserved for them."

More manifestations of cooperation and comradeship followed. To quote the official report:

The Congress volunteers and the Muslim League volunteers arrived at a "joint decision" that the volunteers of the Congress as well as of the Muslim League should cooperate in the work of both the assemblies and work shoulder to shoulder and so they did. At a joint Hindu-Muslim Dinner, which was organised by some of the

educated youngmen of either community, it was a gratifying and an inspiring sight to see the organisers wearing a brilliant badge which combined the Crescent with the Lotus, symbolising the union of the two faiths in the service of their Motherland and invoking the eye of the thinker to see therein the realisation of "Akbar's Dream" in the not distant future.

However, much more important than these sentimental and demonstrative gestures of goodwill and political fraternization between the Congress and the League, was the resolution number nineteen which the Congress passed. It was in two parts, the first part expressing the Congress' opinion "that the time has arrived to introduce further and substantial measures of reform towards the attainment of Self-Government, as defined in Article I of its Constitution, namely reforming and liberalising the system of Government in this country so as to secure to the people an effective control over it." To this end it set out a seven-point programme beginning with the "introduction of Provincial Autonomy including financial independence" and "expansion and reform of the Legislative Councils so as to make them truly and adequately representative of all sections of the people and to give them an effective control over the acts of the Executive Government" and ending with a call for "a liberal measure of Local Self-Government."

This part was largely a repetition of resolutions passed earlier and made more explicit in their thrust. But it was in the second part of the resolution that new ground was broken. It authorised the All-India Congress Committee not only "to frame a scheme of reform and a programme of continuous work, educative and propagandist, having regard to the principles embodied in this Resolution", but "confer with the Committee that may be appointed by the All-India Muslim League for the same purpose and to take such further measures as may be necessary; the said Committee to submit its Report on or before the 1st of September, 1916, to the General Secretaries, who shall circulate it to the different Provincial Congress Committees as early as possible."

Thus for the first time the Congress entered into a substan-

tive dialogue with the Muslim League to forge an agreement on a scheme for the political future of the country. There had been informal talks between the leaders of the two bodies before on various occasions on specific problems that arose from time to time. Indeed, it could be said that the process of consultation was more or less continuous through contacts and what in our own day would be described as "interaction" between the two, since membership of the League and the Congress was perfectly compatible with each other and, in fact, several leading Congressmen were influential members of the Muslim League who had been active in giving a new shape to its policy and outlook. But the decision taken at Bombay raised the relationship between the Congress and the League to a higher stage. It implied acceptance of the League not just as an *interlocutor valable* in discussing matters of special concern to the Muslim community, but its recognition as a partner, undoubtedly younger but in no way subordinate, in drawing up what Bhupendranath Basu in full spate had once called the "political horoscope" of India. It was a decision which would have gladdened the hearts of Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale even though in the long run it was to prove abortive and involve for both sides much expense of spirit in a waste of shame, or at least frustration.

The Bombay Congress has come to be seen by some as the "swan song" of the Moderates. In a sense that seems true. By the time the Congress was to meet at Lucknow the ascendancy of the Moderates at the decision-making level of the Congress was to be a thing of the past. But it was a past on which they could look back with some pride, even if over three decades of relentless pleading—uncharitable critics regarded it as habitual mendicancy—the inroads they had made into the institutional structure of governance of India had been relatively modest, even nugatory. It could hardly be otherwise considering that they had nothing but the weapon of critique at their disposal; critique, moreover, conceived within constitutional categories. S.P. Sinha in his presidential address was to argue that there were only three ways in which they could obtain "the priceless treasure of self-government": first, by way of free gift from the British nation; second, by wresting it from them; and third, "by means of such progressive improvement in our mental, moral and material

condition as will, on the one hand, render us worthy of it, and on the other, impossible for our rulers to withhold it."

This was an accurate assessment of the options. Since the first option belonged to the realm of fantasy, and the second was one which the Congress leadership of the day was not qualified nor the people of India yet mentally or physically equipped to adopt with any hope of success, there was nothing else to do but to stick to the third option of the long haul however painfully slow and at times even humiliating the results might be. This the moderate leadership which dominated the Congress for three decades had done not only with an untiring persistence, but a certain *finesse* which even the proverbial ranks of Tuscany found it hard not to cheer. Year in and year out they went on reminding the British ruling establishment of all the promises made in Royal proclamations, in Parliament and outside. These plaintive aides-memoire may have evoked guffaws in the Clubs in London, Calcutta, Simla and elsewhere in the Empire over which the sun never set. But there was that great British institution—hypocrisy. In some measure it constituted the Achilles' heel of British imperialism. And there was something else also. There was the British radical conscience which however small and fitful was nevertheless a factor in moulding British opinion on India as well as many other issues.

The task of the Moderates, therefore, was not all that hopeless. It could even be argued that by sustaining a debate within the limits of the language of constitutional discourse, they had not only managed to win over a small but not wholly uninfluential section of British Liberal opinion, but even succeeded in some degree in tilting the balance of debate in favour of India. Inevitably, this had alerted the powerful body of reactionary imperialist vested interests in the perpetuation of the *status quo* to the danger inherent in even the mildest of concessions to the Congress. They put up obdurate and at times even malevolent resistance to the slightest acceleration of the liberalizing process and reforms.

This had been abundantly demonstrated in the way in which Curzon and his phalanx of diehard cronies in the House of Lords had defeated the proposal for the establishment of an Executive Council in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh which would

have placed U.P. on a footing of equality with the Presidencies under a Governor-in-Council early in 1915, thanks partly to a characteristic piece of procedural ineptitude on the part of Lord Crewe (though comment in *India* hinted that the procedural mistake had an element of contrivance about it and Crewe's heart was not in the proposal—one of his last acts, incidentally, as Secretary of State for India before yielding place to Austen Chamberlain).

But the very fierceness of their resistance was a kind of indirect tribute to the work of the Congress and acknowledgement of the ground which it had won for India. The War, too, though for the time being it ruled out the possibility of any significant political initiative towards reforms, was to strengthen the Congress' case as presented by its moderate leadership. The part played by the Indian troops not only in the peripheral theatres of combat, but on the crucial Western Front was receiving considerable publicity. Even the diehard Tory Press was in something of a quandary: it wanted to highlight it as an illustration of the solidarity of the Empire but without drawing any political moral from it and, indeed, even twisting it into an argument against any change in Indo-British relationship. But, on the other hand, the organs of Liberal opinion were insistent that India's role in the War was big with political consequences which must follow when the killing was over. As the *Daily Chronicle* remarked: "When India lifted her hand to help the Empire, she jerked the shackles off her own wrists."

That was being oversanguine. The shackles on India's wrists were not so easily to be jerked off. But Ramsay MacDonald in a review of Annie Besant's *India: A Nation* in the *Herald* was perceptive and nearer the mark when he wrote:

The war is to reorganise the Empire for better or for worse, and in that reorganisation India must find a place. Her friends—and by that I mean everyone who believes that India has a future, distinctive and independent, a future of her own Indian soul and mind—must see that place cannot be one of an almost voiceless subordination. There will be vast problems to solve, trustful courage will be required, but the past is past. India's future belongs to self-

government, to the Indian genius, to the Indian will, and Great Britain will miss the greatest of her opportunities and involve herself in the most distressful of troubles if she does not recognise the facts, and so act boldly to face them.

It would be beside the point at this stage to say that Great Britain did miss what MacDonald thought to be "the greatest of her opportunities" with incalculable and tragic consequences. What is pertinent to stress is that the tone of comment in Ramsay MacDonald's review indicated that not only the balance of debate had shifted somewhat in India's favour, but the terms of debate were beginning to change even if fractionally, though also sufficiently to open up the prospect of a *denouement* such as nobody had dreamed of at the start. Thus, as the twilight was descending on the surviving Moderates who had presided over the destiny of the Congress since its birth and some of them realised that a new phase of Congress history was beginning and other palms would be won, they could at least console themselves with the thought that much distance had been covered and the goal was appreciably nearer. Even R. Palme Dutt, at the height of his polemical elan in his *India Today*, while summing up the first phase of India's national struggle during which the Moderates had guided the Congress movement, was careful not to dismiss them or pass a wholly negative judgement on their achievement. He wrote:

It should not be assumed...that these early Congress leaders were reactionary anti-national servants of alien rule. On the contrary, they represented at that time the most progressive force in Indian society... They carried on work for social reform, for enlightenment, for education and modernisation against all that was backward and obscurantist in India. They pressed the demand for industrial and technical economic development.

They did much more, of course. But coming from a Marxist critic who was not easily swayed by any sentimental considerations this is no mean praise and will stand the test of time.

CHAPTER X

WAITING FOR GANDHI

"The saint has left our shores," wrote Jan Smuts, in his own way a devout Christian whom one might have expected to like the company of saints, heaving an almost audible sigh of relief, "I sincerely hope for ever." This was in a letter written at the end of August, 1914, and he was, of course, referring to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who had been something of a thorn in the flesh—and possibly also the spirit if that term can be used in so inappropriate a context—of the Pretoria regime over which Smuts presided.

Smuts was not alone in wishing to see Gandhi out of South Africa where he had lived for almost two decades and taken the initiative in launching a novel form of struggle against the system of racist laws which the White minority was already building brick by brick that in our own day was to find its evil apotheosis in the completed doctrine of apartheid. Judith M. Brown in her *Gandhi's Rise to Power* quotes a letter from Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India, to Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy, written a few months earlier in which he had observed:

The best possible outcome will be if Gandhi will return to his native land. He is a quite astonishingly hopeless and impracticable person for any kind of deal, but with a sort of ardent, though restrained, honesty which becomes the most pig-headed obstinacy at the critical moment.

One can well appreciate Smuts' and Crewe's feelings, although some of the latter's successors at the India Office would have devoutly wished Gandhi to be anywhere else rather than in "his native land", where he was before long to create no end of trouble for them and the Raj. The paradox, however, is that not infrequently the Congress establishment itself was to find "the saint"—or Mahatma as he came to be designated in India—a very

awkward and disconcerting customer, because he was to make demands on them which they were temperamentally and intellectually ill-equipped to fulfil. The "elitist" leadership which dominated the first phase of the Congress movement—as, indeed, the more radical section of political intelligentsia, both within and outside the Congress, at a later stage of the struggle—could never quite atune themselves to the wavelength on which he operated. They had found it much easier to raise "hearty" cheers for him at annual sessions of the Congress, and even collect funds to help him and his comrades who, though without any weapons at their command except their bare bodies, had taken up arms in an unequal battle against racism in South Africa, than in coping with him when they found him in their midst.

For when he was at a distance they could take vicarious pride in his achievements, but at close quarters they could make little sense of his notions of politics and ways of functioning. Indeed, even in a country where taboos on various kinds of food are among the things of the world most commonly prevalent, they were baffled by his dietary, not to mention sartorial habits. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, on whom the mantle of Gokhale was soon to fall even though he was a man of very different make to the founder of the Servants of India Society, remarked in a letter written as early as January 1915: "Queer food he eats: only fruits and nuts. No salt: milk, ghee, etc. being animal products, avoided religiously. No fire should be necessary in the making of the food, fire being unnatural. . . . The odd thing is he was dressed quite like a *bania*: no one could mark the slightest difference. He had a big sandal mark on his forehead and a kunkum dot besides."

Gandhi was not unaware of the problem he posed for his countrymen in general—and for the Congress establishment of the day, in particular. That was why he was not at all keen to inflict himself on them when he finally returned from South Africa to India, because, as he said, there "can be no deliverance for me except in India", which he saw in his idealised vision of it as "the refuge of the afflicted" and which he loved with a strange kind of passion that is beyond both hope and despair.

He had left Cape Town on board the *S.S. Kinfauns*, travelling for the first time third class, on July 18, 1914, sincerely believing that his mission in South Africa was accomplished and the agreement

he had negotiated with Smuts earlier in the year and which in his "Farewell Letter" he had fondly described as "our Magna Carta", was going to hold. But he did not sail directly for India. Instead, with his wife and Hermann Kallenbach, a friend and fellow-worker of German birth, he went to England. By a strange coincidence the news of declaration of the War reached them as they were sailing up the English Channel on August 4. This was later to create difficulties for Kallenbach whom Gandhi had wanted to accompany him to India but who, despite Gandhi's intercession with Charles Roberts at the India Office, was eventually to find himself landed at Dongeas Aliens Camp, Isle of Man.

Gandhi had not wholly recovered from "the long fast" and was laid up in bed for two days after he reached London with "the old pain in my left leg" as he wrote to Chhaganlal Gandhi at Phoenix in Natal. But he attended the reception at Hotel Cecil given for him, Kasturba and Kallenbach by their British and Indian friends, among them Sarojini Naidu, Sachchidananda Sinha, Lajpat Rai, Jinnah, Mrs. Wybergh and Albert Cartwright, with Bhupendranath Basu, President-elect of the Madras Congress presiding. He made a brief speech, with no rhetorical flourishes, but all the same moving because of the references that he made to some of the unknown heroes who died in that early phase of struggle against racism—Hurbat Singh, "an ex-indentured Indian, 75 years of age", who was with him at Volksrust Gaol; Narayansamy, a young lad from Madras, who had never seen India except as a deportee; Nagappan, "another lad from Madras", who died of exposure "on the African veldt" where he worked as a prisoner; and Sister Valliamma, "a girl of 18" who was discharged only when she was beyond recovery.

He also took the opportunity to pull up one of his hosts—Albert Cartwright—whom he called "our staunch friend throughout" and whom, he said, he honoured for his help, but added:

I tell him here that he almost tried to weaken us. I remember, and he will remember how he came to me in Johannesburg Gaol, and said: "Will not this letter do?" "No, Mr. Cartwright," was my reply; "not until this alteration is made." "But everything is achieved by compromise," he urged.

"There can be no compromise on principles," I answered. There never was any compromise on principles from 1906 to 1914. The Settlement is final on all points of our passive resistance, but not of all our grievances....

He was to spend the next five months in London, staying first at 60 Talbot Road, Bayswater and later at a Boarding-House run by a Parsi called Gandavia. Indian soldiers wounded on the Western Front were arriving in England in substantial numbers. For the casualties had been pretty heavy in those early months of slaughter. Most of them were being accommodated in hospitals around Brighton. Gandhi saw 470 of them at Netley Hospital alone at the end of October as we learn from his letter to *India* appealing for "Indian young men residing in the United Kingdom" to enlist as nurses and orderlies who were much needed. A Committee of Indian Volunteers, of which he was the Chairman, had been set up soon after the outbreak of War with its office at 16 Trebovir Road, near Earl's Court, and although he was ailing off and on during his stay in England, he appears to have devoted a good deal of his time to its work and the work of the Indian Ambulance Corps. He paid high tribute to their work at a farewell reception for him and Kasturba at Westminster Palace Hotel on December 18, 1914, which was attended among others by Charles Roberts MP, Sir Henry Cotton, and the South African writer Olive Schreiner.

Gandhi left England for India the next day on board the *P & O S.S. Arabia* which, incidentally, was to be torpedoed the following November off Malta, though fortunately all but two of its passengers and crew, including Sir Ratan and Lady Tata, were rescued. He landed in Bombay on January 9, 1915, and was interviewed on board by a correspondent of the *Bombay Chronicle* who naturally asked him about his future plans. He told the reporter that he had "come to India to settle here"; had no intention of returning to Africa unless circumstances made it necessary; and did not have any definite plans about his future "but he would be at the service of Mr. Gokhale, whom he had for years recognised as his guide and leader, and his movements would be largely controlled and directed by him." He went on to add: "For the present, as Mr. Gokhale has very properly pointed out, I, having been out of India

for so long, have no business to form any definite conclusions about matters essentially Indian, and that I should pass some time here as an observer and a student. This, I have promised to do, and I hope to carry out my promise."

Sadly for him, Gokhale was not to be there to guide and direct him for very long. Within six weeks of his return to India Gokhale died. Gandhi had gone to Poona during the week before Gokhale's death and spent some time with him and discussed whether he should join the Servants of India Society with him. Gokhale was obviously very poorly, but Gandhi could not have thought that the end was so imminent, or else he would not have left for Santiniketan where the news reached him that Gokhale was dead and he hastened back to Poona.

After Gokhale's death, as Gandhi wrote to B.D. Shukla, he was "left without shelter." But he kept his promise to him of not involving himself in any politics at least for a year. He spent much of 1915 in travelling through India and even visited Rangoon in March. He also busied himself with working out rules and financial estimates for his Satyagraha Ashram at Kochrab near Ahmedabad, presumably having decided that after Gokhale's death there was not much point in pursuing his idea of joining the Servants of India Society many of whose leading members were not particularly welcoming to him. What is interesting to note, however, is that throughout the year he seems to have had little contact with the Congress or its leaders. In fact, the only Congress body to hold a reception for him jointly with the Madras Mahajana Sabha was the Madras Provincial Congress Committee on April 23 (the next day the Madras Muslim League also was "At Home" to him).

True, he attended the Madras Provincial Conference at Nellore early in May and the Bombay Provincial Conference at Poona in July. He spoke at both these conferences, but not on any political issue of the day. His speech at Nellore was in reply to a resolution expressing "grateful appreciation" of his and Kasturba's sacrifices. At Poona he spoke on a resolution of condolence on Gokhale's death moved by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade. He, of course, also met Tilak at Poona, first time in February when he had protested against the attacks which the *Kesari* was carrying out against Gokhale and then again twice in July. But the two were

never quite on the same wavelength. Tilak is reported to have described Gandhi as "a seasoned missionary" after his first meeting with him, whether this meant approval or disapproval must remain anybody's guess; and Gandhi, as we know, compared Tilak to "the ocean" in contrast to Gokhale whom he found like the Ganges in which "one could have a refreshing bath".

Gandhi attended the Bombay session of the Congress at the end of the year. He was not eligible to be elected to the important Subjects Committee, but was nominated to a place on it by the President. This was, perhaps, for the good reason that there was a resolution on the agenda—number ten on the list—which dealt with the disabilities of Indians in South Africa and other self-governing Colonies. The Congress would have looked very silly if the man who had been throughout in the thick of the battle for human rights of Indians, indeed had initiated the struggle, had not been asked to move the resolution. But apart from moving the resolution in a brief speech in which he told his audience that a contingent of Indians from South Africa—drawn from ex-indentured labourers and their children, petty hawkers, the toilers and the traders—was "nearing the theatre of war in order to help the sick and the wounded", he does not seem to have taken any active part in the deliberations of that session.

Nor is there any evidence that he was invited to. The attitude of the Congress leadership towards him appears to have been a mixture of admiration and respect, on the one hand, and a certain puzzlement, on the other. They did not quite know what to make of him and what his course of action in India was going to be. His South African achievement, however temporary it was to prove to be, was an enormous asset, but how he was going to use that asset was a great question-mark, and the fact that he seemed absorbed in setting up a "soul-force" ashram outside Ahmedabad had not really answered the question. He remained an unknown quantity, the factor X in any political or social equation in India— and that at a time when most of the equations were in a state of flux.

For 1916 was the year in which the pressures for change which had been building up over almost a decade were beginning to come to a head. The old Congress itself was visibly pregnant with

the new. The Bombay session had opened the way, not only for its base to be widened, but also for transfusion of new blood at the apex. The struggle for leadership had begun in earnest. It was not, in the normal sense of the term, a struggle for power. For the Congress had no power nor had it any patronage to dispense. But it was a major force in the Indian situation which had to be reckoned with, however much the bureaucracy in India and Whitehall, and the motley groups and interests which it had been able to recruit as its allies, might try to belittle it.

The struggle, therefore, was not about power, but about who was going to direct the enormous pent-up force which the Congress represented and how. The differences over the goal towards which this force was to be directed had always been much exaggerated. By the beginning of 1916 they had ceased to have much importance for Tilak. His biographer, Dhananjay Keer, writes that in his articles on Home Rule in December 1915, "he purposely dropped out the term 'Self-Government' or 'Swaraj'. One of the causes that led to the battle of Surat was the definition of the words 'Swaraj' and 'Self-Government' . . . Tilak wanted to keep the word Swaraj undefined, because Pal [Bipin Chandra] and Aurobindo had voiced absolute independence as the goal of the Congress, and he wanted to maintain unity among the Nationalist leaders from Bengal and Maharashtra. Home Rule was perfectly legal and implied all those terms!"

But more important than this semantic variation on the theme of Swaraj were the series of political manoeuvres which Tilak carried out during the twelve months that separated the Bombay and Lucknow Congress sessions. He was determined not only to make a re-entry into the Congress, but re-enter it at the head of an organised force, a kind of avant-garde. Almost simultaneously with the Bombay session, he had mustered his "Five Hundred" Nationalists from Bombay, the Central Provinces and Berar on Christmas Eve at Poona who had set up a committee of "some fifteen gentlemen . . . to determine whether it was desirable to establish a League to obtain Home Rule for India and what steps should be taken with this object in view." In due course the *Mahratta* announced that the committee "reported in favour of a pioneer organisation for Bombay, the Central Provinces and Berar" but that the formation of an all-India body "should be

postponed till arrangement could be made to establish affiliated provincial organisations in all or nearly all the provinces of India."

Taking time by the forelock some weeks later—on April 28, 1916, to be precise—the committee met and resolved to establish a League to be called the Indian Home Rule League with the object of attaining Home Rule or Self-Government within the British Empire by all constitutional means and to educate and organise public opinion in the country towards the attainment of the same. Tilak himself did not take any office in the proposed body, preferring to be the king-maker rather than the king. Joseph Baptista was appointed President and N.C. Kelkar who had from the beginning been associated with him in politics as well as his newspaper ventures—he had kept both the *Mahratta* and the *Kesari* going during his two terms of imprisonment, first a relatively short one and the second stretching over six years—was made the Secretary. Members of the committee included, inevitably, his old faithful friend, G.S. Khaparde, and Dr. B.S. Moonje who was later to distinguish himself in the Hindu Mahasabha, the forerunner of the post-independence Jana Sangh.

In explaining the purpose of his new organisation in a leading article in the *Mahratta*, Tilak more or less paraphrased the announcement which Annie Besant had made about her Home Rule League in *New India* the previous September, except that he sounded rather denigratory about the Congress as an effective political organisation. He acknowledged that "the Congress was the body which would naturally possess the greatest authority for undertaking such a work with responsibility—that is, "agitating for Home Rule throughout the country"—but went on to say:

The scheme of self-government, which the Congress is supposed to be intending to hatch, served as a plausible excuse for most of the Moderates to negative a definite proposal to establish a Home Rule League. But the Congress, it is generally recognised, is too unwieldy to be easily moved to prepare a scheme for self-government and actively work for its practical success. The spade work has got to be done by someone. It can afford to wait no longer. The League may be regarded as a pioneer movement, and is not intended in any sense to be an exclusive movement.

It is not quite clear why, since evidently he considered the Congress to be so ill-suited to carrying out nationwide political work, he was so keen to rejoin it. An even greater puzzle was why he did not join hands with Annie Besant who was also going to set up a Home Rule League and who, moreover, had taken considerable pains in presenting his suit to the Congress. The answer to the second question, in part at least, is that their alliance was tactical rather than a matter of identity of objectives. Equally, both had a *prima donna* complex which would have made it impossible for them to get along with each other in the same organisation. Moreover, just then everybody seemed to be in a mood of expectancy, imagining the end of the War to be much nearer than it was and hopefully looking forward to major political changes that would follow allied victory for which the Congress was officially praying. One consequence of this climate of expectancy was the proliferation of political organisations representing various constituencies and personalities, among them the Home Rule League not only in India, but abroad. Annie Besant, who had contacts in Britain, for instance, was partly instrumental in the establishment of a Home Rule for India League in the United Kingdom.

It had its offices at 18 Tavistock Square, London (which today is the site of the Gandhi statue done by Freda Brilliant), and was set up on June 7, 1916. It had influential membership and an executive, among them C. Jinarajadasa, G.S. Arundale, Esther Bright, Countess de la Warr, Lady Emily Lutyens, John Scurr and George Lansbury. Major D. Graham Pole, later a Labour MP, was appointed General Secretary and it had ambitious plans, not only for publicising what India was asking for through a network of branches in other parts of Britain, but also forming an independent party which would not be affiliated to any other political party but co-operate with any party which was willing to further India's cause.

In America, acting on his own, Lajpat Rai who moved there soon after the outbreak of War, had forestalled Annie Besant and Tilak, and founded the Indian Home Rule League of America as early as October 1915. With himself as its President, Dr. J.T. Sunderland as Vice-President and who was to remain a life-long fighter for Indian independence, and K.D. Shastri and N.S.

Hardiker as Secretaries, the League ran an "Information Centre" to provide authentic news about what was happening in India and later brought out a small monthly journal of its own entitled *Young India* which was edited by Lajpat Rai himself with N.S. Hardiker's assistance.

Unlike Annie Besant, Tilak as yet had few international contacts though later he was to correspond with Lajpat Rai and even send him financial help—five thousand dollars (equivalent at the time to approximately Rs. 17,000)—despite the difficulties imposed by war-time regulations on sending remittances abroad, as Lajpat Rai's biographer, Feroz Chand, has recorded. But that was during and after Tilak's visit to London in 1918 to fight his libel case against Valentine Chirol, the Correspondent-Extraordinary of the *Times* in India for many years with instant access to the Viceregal ears. In the first half of 1916 Tilak was concentrating mostly on enlarging and strengthening his own political base. To this end he had arranged for the Bombay Provincial Conference which, according to his biographer, Ram Gopal, "represented the extremist [*sic*] element in the Bombay Presidency", to meet at Belgaum on April 29, 1916. He intended it to serve as the effective launching-pad for his Home Rule League and to approve his strategy of re-entering Congress by accepting the terms of the compromise offered at Bombay. He was naturally most anxious to enlist the support of Gandhi.

Kaka Kalelkar had written to Gandhi inviting him to the Belgaum Conference. The Moderates, understandably, were equally anxious for Gandhi not to identify himself with the Tilak faction. But Gandhi agreed to go to Belgaum. On the eve of the Conference he met Tilak and his friends who tried to persuade him to attend the Conference as a delegate. He was at first reluctant to do this which rather exasperated some of them, especially Kharparde who is reported to have said: "He does not belong to our Party"—a view which was correct and which he had not changed two and a half years later when he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru, "Mahatma Gandhi (is) very estimable and good and yet in quantity so uncertain that you cannot count upon (him) for any particular purpose."

But Tilak, who had a deeper perception of human personality knew the enormous power that Gandhi represented. He

persevered with his effort to persuade Gandhi to agree to being a delegate to the Conference and sent D.V. Belvi and D.V. Gokhale with a personal request from him to agree. Gandhi eventually agreed. But it cannot be said that he was too favourably impressed by the tone and content of some of the speeches made by Tilak's disciples. Indeed, he warned them that if they hoped that after rejoining the Congress they would drive away the Moderates, they would gain nothing by it nor would the Congress. However, speaking in Hindustani he supported the resolution drafted by Tilak and said:

I am an outsider in the sense that I am not a member of the nationalist party or for that matter of any party. I have no mental desire to listen to the speeches or to my own voice, but I felt it my duty as an aspirant for national service to study all the institutions I can and hence it is that I find myself at this conference. I was desirous of being present here as I am anxious to see the inauguration of an era of peace between the two great parties which, I was assured, would take place at Belgaum.... I heartily support the resolution moved by Mr. Tilak [it stressed the need for uniting "in the interest of our Motherland" and accepted the constitution of the Congress as amended, though "the amendment is highly unsatisfactory" and appointed a committee of five, including Tilak, "to do further work from within"].

However, he obviously had some reservations about the way in which the resolution was worded and told them they would not expect him "to endorse every word of the resolution" and further that, had "the wording of the resolution been in his own hand, he would probably have omitted some expressions." He particularly stressed his disagreement with Joseph Baptista who, he said, had approached the question "in the pleaders' spirit." If they did that "they would be constantly picking holes. What was needed was to approach the national question as common men. They would then overlook the faults and defects in their erstwhile opponents but would ever seek points of agreement and contact. Indeed if the party returned to the Congress fold with an absolutely honest and selfless spirit, ever thinking of the country and its cause and

never thinking of party or personal gain...the nation could then [go] forward in the face of the world's opposition."

Much as he admired Tilak and his spirit of self-sacrifice, he wanted to keep his distance from his political line. This was even more true in the case of Annie Besant. She had, it seems, approached him towards the end of 1915 to be one of the founders of her Home Rule League. But he had declined the honour on the grounds, as Judith M. Brown has it, "that he did not wish to embarrass the British during the war." This did not exactly make her feel very favourably disposed towards him. He had further blotted his copybook with her early in 1916 when there was a mild contretemps between him and Annie Besant at the inauguration of the Benaras Hindu University. He, of course, spoke on the occasion and in English which, he said, was "a matter of deep humiliation" to him. This led him to deplore that an Indian youth "reached his knowledge through the English language" and thereby "lost at least six precious years of life." "Multiply that by the number of students turned out by our schools and colleges," he remarked, "and find out for yourselves how many thousand years have been lost to the nation."

Much of the rest of his speech was also in a critical vein. It was the kind of speech which any adult Indian who returns to the country after a long stay abroad and is struck by the incongruities of the scene and the conduct of the urban middle class, feels inclined to make. He was, he observed, not making a speech but "thinking audibly." Some of his "audible" thoughts can be read with profit seventy years after they were uttered. A Maharaja was presiding over the function and he noted that His Highness "spoke about the poverty of India. Other speakers laid great stress upon it. But what did we witness in the great *pandal* in which the foundation ceremony was performed by the Viceroy? Certainly a most gorgeous show, an exhibition of jewellery which made a splendid feast for the eyes of the greatest jeweller who chose to come from Paris. I compare with the richly bedecked noblemen the millions of the poor. And I feel like saying to these noblemen: 'There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen....' " The word "trust", he explained later, was intended "humorously."

At one point, however, he referred to the "army of anarchists" which "India in her impatience" had produced. "I myself am an anarchist, but of another type", he argued and added: "But there is a class of anarchists amongst us, and if I was able to reach this class, I would say to them that their anarchism has no room in India if India is to conquer the conqueror. . . . I honour the anarchist for his love of the country. I honour him for his bravery in being willing to die for his country; but I ask him: Is killing honourable? . . . I have been told: 'Had we not done this, had some people not thrown bombs, we should never have gained what we have got with reference to the partition movement'."

The drift of his argument was clear, but Annie Besant for some reason thought that he was encouraging the anarchists and those who believed in bomb-throwing. She was annoyed and said: "Please stop it." He said he would stop if the Chairman, the Maharaja of Darbhanga, told him to. There were cries from the audience of "Go on", while the Chairman told him to "explain" his object. This he did and said, among other things, that it was better that they should be talking these things openly rather than "irresponsibly" in their homes. But some on the platform—most of them members of the gentry and even several ruling princes—resented the tone and content of his speech and started to leave, so Gandhi believed, on Annie Besant's prompting.

It was one of those incidents, rather common in Indian politics, where people who have much in common tend to get at cross-purposes gratuitously and the misunderstandings get blown up out of all proportion to their importance in the statements and counter-statements to the Press that inevitably follow as they did on this occasion. Annie Besant in her paper *New India* offered a somewhat contradictory but plausible explanation that she thought Gandhi was wrong in dragging in political matters on a non-political occasion, especially in the conditions of tension that prevailed in Benaras at the time, but that this was not the reason why she had asked him to stop. The reason, she claimed, was "that the Englishman behind me, who, I concluded, was a C.I.D. officer, made the remark, 'Everything he says is being taken down and will be sent to the Commissioner.' As several things said were capable of a construction that I knew Mr. Gandhi could certainly not mean to convey, I thought it better to suggest to the Chairman

that politics were out of place at that meeting." She also denied that she prompted the princes to leave. Gandhi, for his part, maintained that he was not eager to speak at all, but had done so under "great pressure from friends" as he "was credited with having some influence over the student population of the country." Moreover, he said, "but for Mrs. Besant's hasty and ill-conceived interruption, nothing would have happened and my speech in its completed state would have left no room for any doubt as to my meaning."

Whatever the truth of these conflicting versions of the incident—and they do not seem to differ all that much except in the varying subjective nuances which the two read into each other's actions—it was indicative of a certain lack of rapport between Gandhi and Annie Besant which was later to lead to serious differences and Annie Besant leaving the Congress and publicly attacking Gandhi's policies. It was also due to the incompatibility of their distinctive approach not only to politics, but life in general. And this lack of rapport—antipathy would be too strong a word to use in this context although it has been used—was only accentuated in the years to come because of Annie Besant's temperamental imperiousness and hyper-sensitivity which increased in the measure in which her political influence waned in India.

For it was not only Gandhi with whom she found herself at variance. Even the alliance with Tilak, one of convenience rather than based on any deep doctrinal affinity, was soon to wear thin and become uneasy for both. It was equally characteristic of her that she imagined there was a conspiracy of the "Congress Elders" against her to whom, she said, she was "obnoxious"; and that this was why she was kept out of the presidential chair at Lucknow in 1916. The fact, of course, was that she had only properly joined the Congress in 1914. Even given her work for the Indian cause and her love for the country, it would have been in the highest degree unfair if the majority of the Provincial Congress Committees had chosen her rather than the veteran Congress worker from Bengal, Ambica Charan Mazumdar, who had been with the Congress practically from the start. The voting had been five to two against her, with one vote going to an outsider. Even so the Reception Committee

did not want to look unchivalrous and decided by a majority of sixty-two to thirty-five to refer the matter to the All-India Congress Committee. It must be said in fairness to her that she had withdrawn her name gracefully even before the voting; and the Congress was to make amends by duly electing her to preside at the Calcutta Congress next year.

As far as Gandhi was concerned, whatever reservation he might have had about her political judgement, there is little to suggest that he bore her any grudge for interrupting his *cri de coeur*—his own words were “I am laying my heart bare”—at Benaras. Even that day he had jumped to her defence when some students in the audience resented her interruption of his speech and told them that “if Mrs. Besant this evening suggests that I should stop, she does so because she loves India so well, and she considers that I am erring in thinking audibly before you young men.” Nor did he have a moment’s hesitation in joining the protests against the inequitous order of the Chief Presidency Magistrate in Madras asking her for a cash security for her paper *New India* which was forfeited within a few days because of the articles on Home Rule it had published. He was one of the main speakers at a very largely attended meeting at Bombay on June 24, 1916, “to protest against the Press Act of 1910”, and “uphold the liberty of the Press”, under the auspices of the Indian Press Association at which B.G. Horniman, Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, presided.

In his speech Gandhi made it a point to refer to the inequity and arbitrariness of the Government’s attack on Annie Besant’s *New India*. He said that he had “no faith in these meetings and in these resolutions”, but felt “that something should be done in this matter.” He did not say what, but presumably he meant something more than holding meetings and passing resolutions. Again, later in the year, at the Bombay Provincial Conference held at Ahmedabad at which Jinnah presided, he was the man who moved the resolution expressing “deep concern and alarm” at the absence of any safeguards against the operation of the Defence of India Act under which Annie Besant had been prohibited entry into the limits of Bombay Presidency because she had been taking active part in the Home Rule agitation. He argued, with some cogency, that on the same grounds “their late Viceroy Lord

Hardinge was equally liable to be prohibited from entering the Presidency because it was His Lordship who had first raised this question."

Apart from these two interventions, both connecting with Annie Besant, for the most part throughout 1916 he seemed to take little part directly in any political activity. He kept himself busy with the organisation of his ashram just outside Ahmedabad. He also kept up his correspondence with those who were carrying out the work he had started in South Africa and collected money in India for the Passive Resistance Fund. He did a certain amount of journalism, contributing articles to relatively obscure journals on themes which were philosophical, educational or social. These included a reply to an attack on his philosophy of *ahimsa* by Lajpat Rai in the *Modern Review* under the title "Ahimsa Parmo Dharmah—A Truth or a Fad"; there was another piece on the Hindu caste system in the Marathi Journal *Bharat Sevak* in which he made the breath-taking claim that "the caste system contains within it the seed of swaraj." He even found time to write instructions for "Railway passengers" in India whether "educated or uneducated, rich or poor" which, if followed, would eliminate "75 per cent of the hardships of passengers...in a moment" and published these in a pamphlet for free distribution. They were excellent suggestions and would make rail travel much more pleasant for everybody if they were followed, though nobody to this day has cared to do so. Nor is it likely that they will be heeded in the foreseeable future.

That, however, is not the point. The point is that there was nothing in the activities that Gandhi was undertaking, even after the year of probation that Gokhale had set for him was over, which could be considered as serious preparation by a man anxious to make a dramatic entry into Indian politics. On the contrary, his preoccupations during 1916 suggested as if, after the opposition he had experienced to his wish to join the Servants of India Society and his distaste for the factionalism of approach to national problems of the two Home Rule movement leaders and their followers, he had more or less made up his mind "to plough his lonely furrow", as Judith M. Brown puts it. And that, too, in fields which were remote from the exhilarating rough and tumble of politics.

Yet it was a period of hectic political manoeuvrings as well as ferment. Both Tilak and Annie Besant were engaged in febrile propaganda in support of their Home Rule programme, each from their own captive platforms. Tilak's Home Rule League was making considerable headway already when Annie Besant formally set up her own League though she had announced it a year earlier. But she had a wider following in the United Provinces, Madras, Cochin and Travancore besides Bombay because of her theosophical contacts. The Government also, unwittingly, helped to widen the base of their support by its acts of crass stupidity. After her first security for *New India* was forfeited, she was ordered to deposit a much larger sum as security and later the Bombay Government declared the Presidency out of bounds to her. The latter fiat was under the Defence of India Act and as such no appeal was possible. But against the order of the Madras Presidency Magistrate demanding security under the Press Act of 1910 she appealed to the High Court and, like, Maulana Mohamed Ali in the *Comrade* case, scored a moral victory. A three-man bench ruled by a majority of two to one that the magistrate had exceeded his powers, but under the terms of the Act they were powerless to provide any redress or revoke the order. Nothing was better calculated to win public sympathy for Annie Besant not only in India but Britain than this illustration of Alice Through the Looking Glass form of justice under the Raj.

Much the same thing happened in Tilak's case. The speeches which he had been making day in and day out to propagate the Home Rule idea had got under the sensitive skins of the authorities. They wanted to gag him, but did not know how to go about it since he was careful to say nothing that was overtly seditious. The Bombay Government considered a number of alternatives, including prosecution under the hackneyed Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code. But they were in some difficulty for certain technical reasons. Ultimately, the more roundabout way was thought best and the District Magistrate of Poona on July 22, 1916, issued an order on Tilak asking him "to show cause why he should not be ordered to execute a bond for a sum of Rs. 20,000, with two sureties each in a sum of Rs. 10,000 for his good behaviour for a period of one year."

By a singular irony the order was served on him on his sixtieth birthday—the day on which he was presented with a purse which he said he would use “for national work” after “adding my own quota to it”—and the police officer had the courtesy to felicitate him on the happy occasion. The case was heard five days later, but the hearing was a formality and the magistrate confirmed his original order. Tilak lodged an appeal with the High Court, at Bombay and Jinnah, who had defended him also in the lower Court, was among the defence counsels. It was successful. The two judges, Mr. Justice Stanley L. Batchelor and Mr. Justice Shah, in a concurrent judgement repealed the magistrate’s order.

This was on November 9, 1916. In the same month he was elected by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee to the All-India Congress Committee together with fourteen other members. His prestige had only been boosted by the Government’s attempt to intimidate him as had happened with Annie Besant. The two between them held the political initiative, working on parallel lines, but with a certain tacit understanding on demarcation of spheres of influence, Tilak’s League having its jurisdiction over the Central Provinces, Bombay Presidency and the city of Bombay itself, while Annie Besant’s League could carry out its operation over the rest of India.

However, the Moderate leaders were by no means inactive. They were engaged in the unspectacular task of drawing up a scheme for Indian self-government. They could not keep the deadline for producing their report—September 1—which the Bombay Congress had set them. But on the Council front they were pretty effective. Some time in October the overwhelming majority of elected members of the Imperial Legislative Council—nineteen out of twenty-seven—presented the Viceroy, Chelmsford, a memorandum outlining a thirteen-point scheme for post-war constitutional reforms. *India* editorially claimed that the list of signatories represented “every type of constituency.” And the claim was true at least in so far as the upper middle class and middle class political India was concerned.

It was not, moreover, a very radical plan of reforms. It seemed broadly in tune with a note on constitutional changes which Lord Hardinge before his departure had presented to the

British Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India. The support for it in the Council was even bigger than the figure of nineteen out of twenty-seven suggested. For not all those who had not signed it were opposed to it. In a break-down of the list of non-signatories, *India* pointed out that the two British elected members, representing the Bengal and Bombay Chambers of Commerce, had not been asked to sign the memorandum, two were away from Simla at the time, one represented Burma and consequently the plan for reforms did not concern him since it only applied to India proper, and two Muslim members out of eight, Abdur Rahim and Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhuri from Bengal, had some misgivings over the safeguards provided for their community. One member who stood aloof, unhappily, was a Sikh, Sundar Singh Majithia, elected by the Punjab Legislative Council, renowned for being *plus royalist que le Roi*. The signatories included three former Presidents of the Congress, two former Presidents of the Muslim League as well as its President-elect—Jinnah. There could be no doubt that the memorandum embodied a very broad-based consensus and in bringing it about it was the moderate leadership which had played a crucial and major role.

Such was the configuration of political forces in the run up to the Thirty-first Congress session at Lucknow which was scheduled to open on the Boxing Day, December 26, 1916. Curiously, however, in all these preliminary activities Gandhi had played hardly any part at all. He seemed to be involved in all manner of fringe—even beyond the fringe—activities. Of course, he had committed himself to virtually unconditional support for the British war effort and even was to undertake a recruiting campaign. This partly explains why when the time came for the election to the Subjects Committee which was done by delegates from each Province, Gandhi's name was pitted against one of the "Extremists" who commanded a majority among the Bombay delegates by now and he was defeated. However, before they could raise cheers for their famous victory, Tilak, who was incomparably wiser than his supporters, rose to declare Gandhi elected and they acquiesced in their leader's decision.

Even so Gandhi's participation in the deliberations of the Lucknow session, which was something of a landmark in the history of the Congress, seems to have been relatively peripheral.

He moved the resolution calling, not for the first time, for the abolition of the system of indentured immigration by "prohibiting the recruitment of such labour within the ensuing year", in a speech which was partly in English in deference to the wish of his "Tamil brethren" and partly in Hindustani. He also moved the sixteenth resolution on the agenda which expressed Congress' "alarm" at "the extensive use made of the Defence of India Act... which is an emergency measure" and demanding the same kind of safeguards for those against whom it was used "as under the Defence of the Realm Act of the United Kingdom." He was instrumental, too, in getting the Congress to pass a resolution—number eleven in the list—urging upon the Government "the desirability of appointing a mixed committee of officials and non-officials to enquire into the causes of agrarian trouble and the strained relations between the Indian ryot and the European planters in North Bihar" and to suggest remedial measures. This was to acquire great importance in the light of things to come.

However, there is no record of his having intervened in the debate on the two most important resolutions passed at Lucknow—asking the Government to take "a definite step... towards Self-Government by granting the reform contained in the scheme prepared by the All-India Congress Committee in concert with the Reform Committee appointed by the All-India Moslem League" and at the same time urging "the Congress Committee, Home Rule Leagues, and other associations... to carry on through the year an educative propaganda on law-abiding and constitutional lines" in support of the jointly worked out reform scheme. He apparently did not take any part in the discussion on the resolution on education although there is evidence that the question was much in his mind at the time. On the last day of the year he also attended the Muslim League session and was called upon to address the meeting after a resolution protesting against the treatment of Indians in the Colonies was moved from the Chair—that is, by Jinnah himself—and duly carried.

However, judging from a report of his speech in *The Leader*, Gandhi spoke not so much about the predicament of his countrymen in the Colonies dominated by the Whites as of their unity and of another question which was preoccupying him then and all through his life—the question of a national language. He had,

in fact, presided over the All-India Common Script and Common Language Conference held at Lucknow while the Congress session was going on. According to *The Leader* "he exhorted them [his Muslim League audience] to conduct their proceedings in Urdu if they wished to carry out their resolution to maintain Urdu as the *lingua franca* of India." He further urged them to take some interest in Hindu literature which would enable them to arrive at a permanent rapprochement with the Hindus. In the Colonies, Hindus and Muslims had always cooperated in taking concerted measures and, if that example was followed in India, the coveted prize (meaning Swaraj) would soon be theirs. He also advised them that in the course of their propaganda they should not be afraid of the Government because "it was in the nature of Englishmen to bow before the strong and ride over the weak."

It is not without significance that in his correspondence with his various friends and associates in the weeks following the Lucknow session we find hardly any mention of its transactions or his part in them. He did, however, give his views on the resolution on self-government passed at Lucknow in an interview he gave some time around December 29-31, 1916. In it he answered other questions also: regarding Hindi as the national language; the institution of *Varnashram* or caste, and the *Shuddhi* (purification, meaning in effect conversion or reconversion) movement started by the Arya Samaj which evidently soon after his return from South Africa had entertained hopes of luring him into its fold.

But it was his attitude to the twelfth resolution—one on self-government—which was significant. Asked what he thought of it, he replied: "It may be good or it may be bad, but I do not have any high opinion of it." As was often to happen when he intuitively disliked a particular proposition but had not been able to determine for himself the ground for his dislike, he came out with a whimsical and rather unconvincing reason. He did not think highly of the resolution, he said, "because ill-will is inherent in it." But, he added, he could not say that "the venture is unworthy or that it will fail." All he could say was that it was not his way and not the Indian way—"the ancient, traditional way." Pressed to say what he thought was his way or the ancient,

traditional Indian way, he evaded the question. "We shall not go into it now," he said.

What should be clear from this interview is that he was not greatly impressed by what the Lucknow session had achieved and was rather out of tune with some of the major decisions taken and the way in which they were taken. He may have felt something of an outsider at Lucknow, perhaps even more so than at Bombay the previous year. This may have been partly owing to his feeling that he was not a delegate to the session in his own right but only by courtesy of Tilak. At all events, he still had not wholly made up his mind whether the Congress was the kind of organisation through which he could best serve India and to which he could give his whole-hearted commitment although he may not have been as doubtful of it as he was of the two Home Rule Leagues.

But if the Lucknow Congress was not a particularly important occasion for him in a directly political sense, it was to prove immensely important in a personal sense. It marked the beginning of his relationship with a much younger man—Jawaharlal Nehru. "My first meeting with Gandhiji," Jawaharlal writes in his *Autobiography*, "was about the time of the Lucknow Congress during Christmas 1916." Until then though he had "admired him for his heroic fight in South Africa...he seemed very distant and different and unpolitical to many of us young men." But Tibor Mende quotes him in his *Nehru: Conversations on Indian and World Affairs* as saying, "I was simply bowled over by Gandhi, straight off....I worked as a kind of secretary to [him]....I was searching for some [satisfying] method of action."

The chemistry—perhaps alchemy is a more appropriate term in the context—of their truly rich and strange relationship is far too complex to admit of any facile analysis. Nor is it strictly germane to our immediate purpose. What is germane is to suggest two things. The first is that it was not the kind of relationship one expects between an older and younger politician, between the preceptor and the disciple, or the master craftsman and the apprentice. It was a much more equal relationship than has been generally acknowledged. Through the interaction of their two personalities, to vary a phrase of Yeats somewhat, a rare beauty was born which was to impart over the next three decades a humanizing, indeed ennobling leaven to Indian politics and draw

out what was best in the common stuff of Indian humanity. At any rate, in the perspective of history this unique relationship, in many ways the most surprising and seemingly unlikely, will be seen as having profoundly influenced the Congress movement and, therefore, the destiny of India. And, inevitably, India being what it is and where it is, anything that has so deeply touched its evolution was bound in some measure also to affect the affairs of the humankind at large. Whether positively or negatively, it is for the posterity to judge. . . .

CHAPTER XI

A SEASON OF CONSENSUS

To all appearances Christmas 1916 was the high noon of national consensus in India. We have it from the mouth of the man who was at the very centre of what may well be called the second coming together. "I am glad to say," remarked Tilak as he rose to "a thundering ovation" to speak on the principal resolution at the plenary session of the Thirty-first Congress on December 29, "that I have lived these ten years to see that we are reunited in this Congress and we are going to put our voices and shoulders together to push on this scheme of Self-Government; and not only have we lived to see these differences closed, but to see the differences of Hindus and Mahommedans closed as well. So we are now united in every way in the United Provinces, and we have found that luck now in Lucknow. So I consider this the most auspicious session of the Congress."

Auspicious it undoubtedly was, especially for him in a personal sense. His felicitous play on the name of the city that was simultaneously hosting the Congress session and the session of the All-India Muslim League, to say nothing of the Theosophical Convention and the All-India Common Script and Common Language Conference was some indication of the good humour in which he was at the time. And, in turn, it put everybody among the massed ranks of 2,301 delegates (that is, counting the three honorary ones, among them, Hriday Nath Kunzru), which was a record to date, and three times that number of visitors who packed the Congress Pandal, in equally good humour. For Tilak it marked not only the end of his long exile from the political mainstream, but also his emergence as the dominant figure on the national scene.

There was, indeed, a distinctly triumphalist note when, according to his biographer, Keer, "he said in his natural husky

voice, *'Home Rule is my birthright and I shall have it,'* and the audience applauded as one man. His triumph, it should be added, had been well and carefully prepared and some might even say stage-managed. His readmission to the Congress was already a *fait accompli* in July when he rejoined the Poona Congress Committee after a nine-year break in order to be eligible to election as delegate to the annual session at Lucknow. But he wanted to make his re-entry as dramatic as possible. He had left Bombay on December 23, "accompanied by his admirers and party leaders and delegates" not in an ordinary but a special train chartered for the occasion. His supporters among the citizens of Bombay gave him a tremendous send-off. In the words of one of his biographers, "the platform was filled to capacity. The compartment occupied by Tilak was decorated by his admirers with flowers and bunting. And amidst thundering cheers Tilak started, like a conqueror, to attend the Congress...."

It was to be cheers, cheers all the way. *"En route to Lucknow,"* says Keer, "people held receptions at Kalyan, Nasik, Manmad, Bhusawal, Chalisgaon, Bhopal, Bina and Jhansi." The *Times of India* feigned alarm and "warned the Moderates that Tilak was going to capture the Congress." But there was precious little that the Moderates could do to stem the Tilak wave. He had the wind in the poop. When he arrived at Lucknow at noon on Christmas Day—the train reached a little late, it seems—a vast crowd was waiting at the station to greet him. The Reception Committee had arranged to take him to his camp by car, but his radical admirers had a better idea. "Young leaders and volunteers," Keer tells us, "bubbling with enthusiasm wanted to take Tilak in a brougham drawn by themselves. So someone punctured the tyres of the motor-car, and he was made to sit in the horse carriage. But after a few minutes the horses were let off, and the volunteers drew the carriage!"

The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Pandit Jagat Narain, made a brief reference to the restoration of Congress unity. "For the first time since the unfortunate split at Surat," he said, "we witness the spectacle of a united Congress. Realising that in union alone is strength, both the parties have laid aside their differences and resolved to work shoulder to shoulder to win for India a position compatible with her self-respect and dignity in the

British Empire. They have heard the call of the country and obliterating old divisions, rallied round her in the hour of her need." This sounded a little less than a hosanna. But the President, Ambica Charan Mazumdar, an old stalwart who had thirty-five years of work for the national cause behind him, after modestly referring to himself as one who "never rose above the rank of a subaltern" and had the Field-Marshal's "baton thrust into his hands", was more emotional when he came to speak of the quarrels of the clans in the Congress being at last, behind them. He said:

Gentlemen, even the darkest cloud is said to have its silver lining, and in this vale of sorrow, there is hardly any misfortune which has not both a positive and negative side. If the United Congress was buried in the debris of the old French Garden at Surat, it is re-born today in the Kaiser Bagh of Lucknow, the garden of the generous King Wajid Ali Shah. After nearly ten years of painful separation and wanderings through the wilderness of misunderstandings and the mazes of unpleasant controversies, each widening the breach and lengthening the chain of separation, both the wings of the Indian Nationalist Party have come to realise the fact that united they stand, but divided they fall, and brothers have at last met brothers and embraced each other with the gush and ardour, peculiar to a reconciliation after a long separation. Blessed are the peacemakers. Honour, all honour to those who in this suicidal civil war held the olive branch of peace....

He hoped that both sides had "grown wiser" through their "experience... and learnt to know each other better." "Let us now," he pleaded, "no longer disparage the old nor despise the young. If youthful zeal and enthusiasm are invaluable assets, the judgement and experience as also the caution and sobriety of the old are no less useful and indispensable." He asked the Congressmen and Congresswomen to "follow the leaders who, if they have not won the battle, yet have neither fallen back nor betrayed their trust." At this point he turned to Tilak whose arrival on the platform had been acclaimed, according to Valentine Chirol, as

though he was the "incarnation of the deity", and said: "I most cordially welcome Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mr. Motilal Ghose and other brave comrades who separated from us at Surat and have been happily restored to us at Lucknow. I rejoice to find that they are after all 'of us' and 'with us' and let us hope never to part again."

Later in his presidential address Ambica Charan Mazumdar managed retrospectively to refer to "the sufferings of Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak" on which for the past eight years the moderate Congress leadership had been deafeningly silent, although he immediately added that he was not there "either to defend or denounce him." It seemed clear that he was on the defensive vis-a-vis Tilak and, what is more, uncertain of the attitude Tilak was going to adopt towards the Moderates now that he commanded a great influence even though they held all the levers of office, to say nothing of the physical assets such as they were, of the Indian National Congress. Tilak, for his part, was also aware of the advantage that he held, but wanted to keep them guessing as to his future strategy now that he had succeeded in breaching the ramparts and penetrating the "Citadel". Alternately, he cooed and growled, was gentle and stern. If in private discussions he was willing to accept compromises, his public postures showed him often to be unyielding and tough. Keer, for instance, quotes him as saying in one of his speeches on the opening day of the session which lasted from December 26 to 30, "We are entitled to the possession of the whole estate at once. If we allowed you to share in that possession, it was in the hope that you would clear off. You must acknowledge that we are the masters."

Much of the agenda of the Lucknow Congress was in the nature of an oft-rehearsed catechism of India's griefs and unsettled claims. The list included the familiar complaint of "the baneful effect on the martial spirit of the whole race...of the military policy of the Government of India", which is based on distrust; the Indian Press Act of 1910 which had "proved a menace to the liberty of the Indian Press"; call for an end to the system of recruitment for indentured labour; the plight of Indians in self-governing Dominions and Crown Colonies; the inadequacy of the educational facilities at every level in the country; and a plea for the repeal of

the Indian Arms Act so that Indians might "possess and use arms on conditions similar to those which prevail in England."

Rather surprisingly, the resolution demanding the repeal of the Indian Arms Act, though moved by a male delegate, found its most eloquent supporter in a woman—and one who had won a degree of international recognition for her poetic talent from fellow poets like Yeats, Ezra Pound, Harold Monro and critics like Edmund Gosse and Ernest Rhys. Soon after her return from England, Sarojini Naidu had begun to take part in Congress politics and at the Bombay session in 1915 she had made her debut with a speech that was somewhat different to the common stuff of political oratory and ended with one of her own poems—an ode to Mother India.

At Lucknow she spoke against the Arms Act and was conscious of the piquancy of the situation in which a woman was trespassing into a male preserve. "It may seem a kind of paradox", she said, "that I should be asked to raise my voice on behalf of the disinherited manhood of the country, but it is suitable that I who represent the other sex, . . . the mothers of the men whom we wish to make men and not emasculated machines, should raise a voice on behalf of the future mothers of India to demand that the birthright of their sons should be given back to them, so that to-morrow's India may be once more worthy of its yesterday . . ." Not only of its yesterday, but also of its today. For she went on to ask: "Have we not, the women of India, sent our sons and brothers to shed their blood on the battlefields of Flanders, France, Gallipoli and Mesopotamia?"

It was a rhetorical question but perfectly legitimate, though it would have been even more pertinent if she or somebody else had turned on the searchlight of their interrogatories on the manner in which the lives of Indian soldiers were being squandered in the various theatres of war. Very early after the outbreak of hostilities, it is well to recall, a number of Indian divisions were rushed to Europe to plug the holes on the Western Front without much preparation, conditioning or acclimatisation. Later they were largely withdrawn, partly because they were needed elsewhere—in the Middle East and East Africa, for example—and partly for reasons, never spelt out but obliquely hinted, which were related to racist complexes, although a section of the British Press and

politicians, among them Winston Churchill, pressed for the use of Indian and African labour behind the lines so that more British manpower could be drafted for combat duties.

The management of campaigns in these secondary theatres had been even more incompetent than in the West. Particularly, the Mesopotamian adventure had been conducted in a shockingly bad way and had led to the appointment of a commission of inquiry which, in its report, was very severe in its comment on its political as well as military handling, and virtually placed the onus of mismanagement on Hardinge and Sir Beauchamp Duff, the Commander-in-Chief. Yet neither at Bombay nor at Lucknow did the Congress take up the issue, though in each session a resolution was passed affirming the Congress' support for the Empire and praying "that the cause of the Allies may be crowned with success." This offered good ground for "constructive criticism" of the conduct of the War, especially in the areas where India was providing bulk of the cannon-fodder and its soldiers were heavily engaged. Even Tilak and his militants seemed to resist the temptation of exploiting this as a politic line of attack against the Raj, or it may be that they were unaware of the gravity of the matter.

At Lucknow, of course, the whole focus of Tilak's concern was fixed on the crucial resolution, number twelve on the order paper, demanding the elevation of India to the status of a self-governing Dominion and the consequential resolution which followed urging "the Congress Committee, Home Rule Leagues, and other associations which have as their object the attainment of self-government within the Empire to carry on through the year an educative propaganda on law-abiding and constitutional lines in support of the reforms put forward by the Indian National Congress and Muslim League." He considered discussion on other resolutions as mostly supererogatory, if not a waste of time and energy and said so in so many words:

We cannot now afford to spend our energies on all the resolutions on the Public Services, the Arms Act, and sundry others. All is comprehended and included in this one resolution....I do not care if the sessions of the Congress are held no longer; I believe it has done its work as a

deliberative body. These are the days of work and incessant labour, and I hope that by the help of Providence, you will find that energy and those resources which are required for carrying out that scheme within the next two years to come, and if not by the end of 1917, when I expect the war will be closed, and then I hope we shall meet at some place in India, where we shall be able to raise up the banner of self-rule.

This was a naively oversanguine view of the prospects ahead, not only for India but a world at war. Airy optimism has always come easily to Congress leaders as, indeed, it must to leaders of any progressive movement. In this instance, moreover, it was understandable. As for hopes of an early victory for Britain and its allies, Tilak could be forgiven for expecting it by the end of 1917. News from the war fronts reaching India was almost all filtered through the prism of British propaganda which put an optimistic gloss even when things were going rather badly as, in fact, they were at the end of 1916, both on the Eastern and Western Fronts. As for the political conjuncture in the country, his optimism was fairly widely shared.

And for reasons which appeared well grounded, but were to prove deceptive. The Muslim League Council and the Congress Executive, mandated at Bombay to work out a joint position on a plan for self-governing India, had duly met in April 1916 at Allahabad and then again in November at Calcutta. They had succeeded in hammering out a scheme together which was complete except for two ominously significant details on which agreement had eluded them. These related to the quotas for Muslim representation in the legislatures of the Punjab and Bengal, both of them Provinces with a Muslim majority though a rather tenuous one. They were constrained to leave the two points to be settled by the Congress and League leaders at Lucknow where both organisations were holding their annual sessions during the post-Christmas week.

Thus Lucknow was to mark not merely the ending of estrangement within the Congress family. It was also to see the consecration of a much wider national consensus embracing the Muslim League which had originally been conceived by some of its

occult authors as an opposing current, or at least a breakwater, to the rising tide of Indian nationalism represented by the Congress. This happy transformation of the League was owed largely to the efforts of men like Jinnah and Mazhar-ul-Haque who were active in both the Congress and the Muslim League and saw the latter's role as that of an important tributary of the political mainstream, not that of a permanently contrary eddy within it.

Tilak's attitude to the issue was of crucial even decisive importance. He had not been a party to the negotiating process that had produced the Congress-League concordat. In fact, he was not a member of the All-India Congress Committee which finally settled the two outstanding points at Lucknow, though he apparently attended the joint meeting of the A.I.C.C. and the Muslim League on the evening of December 26. The acceptance of the Congress-League proposals by the Congress as a whole was by no means a foregone conclusion. There was an important and influential body of opinion, led by Madan Mohan Malaviya, which was opposed to it on the ground that it was too generous to the Muslims and unfair to the majority community. If Malaviya and his men could have won over Tilak to their side they might well have succeeded in securing the rejection of the draft of Congress-League Scheme by the Subjects Committee where the debate was stormy and the opposing faction even threatened to hold a public demonstration against the Congress "if it surrendered to the Muslims."

However, Tilak's was a very paradoxical personality. His confessional orthodoxy was not in doubt in view of his staunch opposition to reforming legislation like the Age of Consent Bill. Moreover, there were aspects of the Congress-League blueprint for self-government which he did not particularly relish. But, unlike some of his perfervid supporters, he had a realistic sense of priorities and wanted to put first things first. Again, unlike some of the Hindu Congress leaders from what we now call the Hindi belt, he was not on the defensive nor did he harbour a siege complex vis-a-vis the Muslims. He did not think that the heavens would fall if the maximum concessions were made to the Muslim League to achieve a united front behind the demand for early Home Rule and devolution of power. He, therefore, had no

hesitation in throwing his weight behind the draft of the Congress-League concordat. As C.S. Ranga Iyer has recorded in *Reminiscences and Anecdotes about Lokamanya Tilak* (Vol. II). "When the angry speakers were foaming on all sides he [Tilak] was calm as a rock...The leader of the Maharashtra who was the most religious, the most learned in the Vedas and among the most orthodox of the Hindus, would not listen to any argument against the Pact. Not that he was enamoured of it himself but if it would satisfy the Muslims, if it could bring them to the Congress, if it could replace their extra-territorial patriotism by Indian Nationalism, the agreement was worth reaching. Lokamanya Tilak's attitude was the deciding factor in the Hindu-Muslim settlement, the last word on the subject as far as the Hindus were concerned."

In the nature of things it could not be the last word, but it certainly was the deciding factor in getting the Congress-League accord ratified by the plenary session of the Congress at which he made a characteristic speech which was not exactly a masterpiece of debating performance, but contained much home-spun wit which disarmed and won over his audience. He said:

It has been said that we Hindus have yielded too much to our Mohammedan brethren. I am sure, I represent the sense of the Hindu community all over India, when I say that we could not have yielded too much. I would not care if the rights of Self-Government are granted to the Mohammedan community only. I would not care if they are granted to the Rajputs. I would not care if they are granted to the lower classes of the Hindu population... Then the fight will be between them and another section of the community, and not, as at present, a triangular fight... The British tell us that we the descendants of the Aryans are not the original owners of the soil. We Aryans took the country from the Aborigines; the Muslims conquered it from the Aryans; and the English conquered it from the Muslims. Hence the English are the guardians of the Aborigines. Well, I agree to this and ask the English to go away delivering the possession to Bhils, Gonds and Adi-Dravids. We will gladly serve the original owners of the soil.

This kind of down-to-earth oratory laced with populist humour was well calculated to amuse, entertain and win over an audience already under the spell of Tilak's personality as, in fact, it did. The plenary session resoundingly ratified the Congress-League Pact. Two days later, on the last day of the dying year, the Muslim League followed suit with its ratification. Jinnah, who had worked hard to bring about the *entente cordiale* between the two principal political organisations in India and on that record fully deserved Sarojini Naidu's description of him as the "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity", hailed it as the great sign of the birth of a united India. The Raja of Mahmudabad, who was to take over from Jinnah as the President of the Muslim League next year, did not even wait for the ratification of the Pact by the League to throw a banquet in honour of the Congress and the League and other distinguished visitors to Lucknow for the occasion on December 29 at which covers were laid for 150 guests. As *India* was to report a month later, "After the loyal toasts had been duly honoured, Mr. M.A. Jinnah proposed the toast of the Congress and Mr. Surendranath Banerjee responded by suggesting the toast of the Muslim League. Both the toasts were received midst utmost enthusiasm."

It did not say what the upraised glasses contained when the toasts were honoured. Presumably, choicest sherbet which Lucknow could offer since both the Congress and the Muslim League were committed to teetotalism, at any rate, on public occasions. But *India* did not miss the opportunity to have a dig at opponents of Indian self-government. It asked: "What have the good people to say to this who are for ever representing Hindus and Mohammedans as mutually antagonistic communities?"

The question was pertinent up to a point. Undoubtedly, in the short run the Lucknow accord seemed to offer the best answer to the propagandists of the Raj who argued that Indians were incapable of agreeing among themselves and that this was the principal impediment to Indian self-government. However, in the ambient climate of rejoicing over the Congress-League concord, certain disquieting questions were overlooked, not least the question whether the whole edifice of the Congress-League concordat was not founded on quicksands and built with highly

inflammable material—whether, in fact, by opting for a tempting short-cut to a necessary and essential rapprochement the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League had not, unwittingly, set India on the road to the abyss of partition and created the conditions in which a monumental act of political vandalism could be perpetrated three decades later.

In hindsight it is easy to see why such disturbing questions remained unasked or were stifled when anybody tried to raise them. A rational critique of the central feature of the Pact, setting up a wall of separation between the Muslim and Hindu electorate, was not developed with any determination at the time and later it was to be too late. Much of the vociferous opposition to the Pact came from a section of the Hindu leadership which was itself rather sectarian in its outlook and had never really accepted the imperatives of secularism except as verbal smoke-screen behind which narrow egotisms could be defended. It was clearly impossible for any liberal-minded person to identify himself with this current of opposition to the Lucknow accord however doubtful people might have felt about certain aspects of that accord.

There was also another factor, perhaps, which gave to the Lucknow Pact a deceptive appearance of an exercise in pragmatic statesmanship when it was actually a case of falling for naive opportunism and allowing the nation to be pushed along the line of least resistance which, not for the first or the last time in our subcontinental story, was to prove the line of worst resistance. There was a widely shared belief that separate electorate for the Muslims was a kind of political homeopathy, a temporary expedient, intended for the minority community to enable it to outgrow its fears and anxieties of being swamped by the majority in a democratic set-up; that eventually they would be abandoned. Certainly, Tilak who courageously faced opposition even from some of his own followers and was accused by the more bigoted among them of having sold the pass to Muslims, thought so. On the other side, Jinnah, too, shared this view which he was to express before the Parliamentary Select Committee in 1919 when giving evidence. Answering a question put to him by Major Ormsby-Gore whether he wanted “at the earliest possible moment to do away in political life with any distinction between Moham-medan and Hindu”, his answer was: “Yes; nothing will please

me more (than) when that day comes." And there is no reason to doubt that he meant it at the time and was not just saying it for effect.

However, the notion cherished by many Congress and some Muslim League leaders that given time and the narrowing of the educational and economic gap between the two communities, the need for separate electorate would disappear, was sheer fantasy. The virus of confessionalism once insinuated into the body-politic at the time of the Morley-Minto Reforms was bound to spread as some people had feared and warned. In so far as the Lucknow Pact envisaged the injection of an heavier dose of this morbid culture into the political bloodstream, it could only serve to make the cure virtually impossible and make it certain that every appointment and preferment, from the lowly peon or *patwari* upwards, would in time become a bone of contention, if not *casus belli*, between the communities, especially in a country which had hardly taken the first step on the road to economic development and where employment opportunities were extremely limited. But somehow in the climate of convivial fraternization and euphoria that obtained at Lucknow in the post-Christmas week of 1916, these perils looming ahead did not come into the field of vision of the leadership on either side, or, if they did, were quickly brushed aside.

Some other danger signals were also not heeded. The War was not at all going well for Britain and its allies. Predictably, the Tory Press was feverishly searching for a scapegoat and had no difficulty in finding one—not in the up-and-coming Lloyd George who had been the Minister of War since Kitchner's death by water, but in the Prime Minister of the day, Asquith. Lloyd George saw in the crisis on the war fronts a golden opportunity for realising his ambition. He engineered a political crisis at Westminster through a stratagem the audacity of which was equalled by its effrontery. He demanded the setting up of an inner War Cabinet of three but from which the Prime Minister would be excluded, having made sure of the Tory support for his proposal. It was not a demand which Asquith could possibly accept and he eventually resigned. Bonar Law having declared his inability to form a coalition administration, it was left to Lloyd George to conjure one and preside over it. It was a

strange coalition in which none of the old-time frontbench Liberals had agreed to serve although they promised it full extramural support.

Normally, any changes in British politics were watched in India with intense interest, especially by the Congress leadership in those days and every new development was scrutinised most carefully for its possible effect on Britain's Indian policy, in particular. But, rather surprisingly, the distinctly rude elbowing out of Asquith by Lloyd George somehow did not quite receive the attention one might have expected. This was the more surprising because it happened barely a month before the Congress and the Muslim League were due to meet at Lucknow, though preoccupation with the signing and sealing of the concordat between the two may partly explain relative lack of concern for the remarkable *coup* which the Welsh Wizard had brought off with such consummate lack of *finesse*. Partly also the reason why undue attention was not paid to it in India may have been that there was to be no change at the India Office where Austen Chamberlain was to continue for some time longer.

All the same the departure of Asquith and the arrival of Lloyd George at the helm had certain implications for the future—and even the present—of India. *India* which had sensitive antennae in these matters and was close to the scene was aware of the adverse repercussions it might have on the British handling of Indian affairs. It disliked Lloyd George for other reasons—perhaps because it considered him something of a parvenu and with a parvenu's happy want of scruple—but its fear was that he was merely the mascot for what was essentially a Tory Government. What is more, Lloyd George knew little about India; as it editorially commented some months later, he “has everything to learn about India” and it was apprehensive that he would learn from the wrong people. It noted with understandable alarm that Lloyd George had almost immediately after his assumption of power set up an inner War Cabinet of five, though, unlike what he had demanded of Asquith, he did not exclude himself from it. Other members of this War Cabinet were Bonar Law, Curzon, Milner and Arthur Henderson. Bonar Law, presumably kept busy as the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons, it was said, “will not be

expected to attend regularly." As for Arthur Henderson, he was included to keep the Labour happy and was really a supernumerary. This left only the triumvirate—Lloyd George, Curzon and Milner—as the supreme arbiters and decision-makers.

India regarded Lloyd George as something of a "wild elephant" who was at his best only so long as he was hemmed in between "two tame ones." But its harshest judgement was reserved for Curzon and Milner whom it described as "perhaps the most sinister figures in the English political life." "Each," it added, "has set a continent alight"—a reference to Curzon's role in the Partition of Bengal and Milner's part in shaping the policies that led to the Boer War. Its leader-writer was certainly pitching it rather high, but he had good grounds for his acute sense of misgiving. For Curzon's was, as Gokhale had said, "a masterful" personality, and though he was not directly involved in handling Britain's Indian policy he was bound to influence it and in a manner likely to vitiate any positive content that might be imparted to it as, in fact, proved to be the case. This despite the fact that towards the middle of July 1917, Lloyd George, partly as a balancing factor against Curzon and partly to reassure "these loyal myriads" as he called the Indians in a speech in April at the Guildhall, inducted Edwin Montagu at the India Office who was Curzon's *bete noire*.

However, nothing was said and done at Lucknow to suggest that the Congress leaders, including Tilak, were at all worried over the changing of the guard in Whitehall. In the mood of exhilaration and optimism that the Congress-League entente had created, they were contemplating other and beguiling prospects ahead. The Congress had passed a resolution—number twenty-second on the agenda—authorising "the All-India Congress Committee to arrange that a deputation consisting, as far as possible, of representatives from the different provinces should proceed to England immediately after the war to press Indian claim as outlined in Resolution XII on the attention of the Government and people of England." It had even fished out from its old files a suggestion adopted at Calcutta more than a quarter of a century earlier and then almost forgotten. The twenty-second resolution authorised the A.I.C.C. "to arrange for a special session of the Congress in England, if necessary."

Yet there was cause enough for worry even though it was obscured by certain gestures of courtesy which the representatives of the Raj were willing to make to the Congress for services rendered and abjuring all thoughts of trying to turn Britain's war-time difficulties into an opportunity for India as Kautilya and other classical Indian authorities on *realpolitik* might have enjoined. Already in 1914, Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, had put in an appearance at the Congress session just long enough to hear it affirm its "profound devotion to the throne" and its "unswerving allegiance to the British connection." At Lucknow Sir James (later Lord) Meston, Lieutenant-Governor of U.P., went a step further. He not only briefly attended the Congress session with Lady Meston, but actually condescended to reply to the President's words of welcome and in so doing discovered "a curious link both in time and in sympathy" with it "from the day of its inception" in the happy coincidence that the year in which it had seen the light—1885—was also the year in which he had begun his "endeavours to serve India."

Such polite gestures were certainly preferable to rude ones. However, they buttered as yet no political parsnips. Moreover, there was another side to the medal which was not so pretty. Judith M. Brown in her *Gandhi's Rise to Power* delivers herself of an exceedingly bland, if not soporific, generalisation. "All governments, imperial or otherwise," she says, "have to work a judicious combination of conciliation and assertion of power." That is only another way of saying that they resort to the stick and the carrot in turn. The *Leeds Mercury* writing at the time was to put it less coyly and spoke of "these alternate doses of the cane and jam." It could have added that the jam was only promissory—and even the promise had not been spelt out at the beginning of 1917. As for the cane, it was for real most of the time.

For even Hardinge, for all his liberality, had done little to attenuate in any degree the structure of the police state and the coercive laws reflected in the gruesome statistics of hangings, imprisonments without trial and sentences of transportation for life during his extended term as proconsul. After he left—and he was soon himself to face a bitter inquisition, ostensibly for his mishandling of the Mesopotamian expedition but really because the Tory diehards considered him to have been too soft with

Indians—what Dr. Brown describes as “the policy of balance between conciliation and repression” was distinctly tilted towards the latter under his successor, Chelmsford. A “valued Indian Correspondent” of *India* wrote: “Things look very black and we are in for a long spell of the iron hand without the velvet glove.”

This was by no means an exaggerated and overdrawn picture of the political condition of India during the first half of 1917. It is confirmed in a letter written about the same time to a literary friend in England by Rabindranath Tagore who was in no way volatile in his political reactions. He wrote:

Constant conflict between the growing demands of the educated Indian community in India for a substantial share in the administration of their country and the spirit of hostility of Government has given rise among a considerable number of our young men to methods of violence, bred of despair and disgust. This has been met by the Government by a policy of thorough repression. In Bengal itself hundreds of men are interned without trial, a great number in unhealthy surroundings in jails, and in solitary cells, in a few cases driving them to insanity or suicide. The misery that is carried into numerous households is deep and widespread. What I consider to be the worst outcome of this irresponsible policy is the spread of the contagion of hatred against anything Western in the minds which suffer from it. In this crisis the only European who has shared our sorrow incurring the anger and derision of her countrymen, is Mrs. Besant. This was what led me to express my grateful admiration for her noble courage.

Tagore's reference to Annie Besant is of some significance. Under Hardinge by and large the top-ranking leaders of Indian opinion were left alone, though there were notable exceptions to this, like the Ali Brothers, Mohamed Ali and Shaukat Ali, who were interned in May 1915. The quasi-immunity from arrest and molestation they enjoyed was a very sore point with provincial administrations who would have liked to be tough with all and sundry and teach every Indian politician a lesson for being uppish. Hardinge's departure was a signal for the provincial

satraps to begin pressing the Government of India to allow them a freer hand in dealing with political dissidents of the more respectable variety, Annie Besant and Tilak in particular.

Annie Besant had been prohibited from setting foot in the Bombay Presidency as early as 1916. Tilak's turn was to come next. Both he and Annie Besant had taken the resolution passed at Lucknow session of the Congress urging upon all Congress and Home Rule Leagues' workers to carry the message of the resolution on self-government, which was the central pillar of the Congress-League accord, to the people, *au pied de la lettre*, as it were. On the very morrow of the Lucknow session they launched themselves into a kind of barnstorming propaganda campaign to build up mass support for the proposals for self-government embodied in the Congress-League scheme, but always taking care not to trespass into the very wide area covered by the sedition laws and regulations and Tilak, with Mahratta shrewdness, even organised a meeting in the middle of February urging upon the youth of the country the need of joining the army in response to the announcement by the Viceroy that the Government intended to enrol Indians in the Defence of India Force for military service for the duration of the War. But the authorities were not impressed by what the Home Member of the Government of India dismissed as "the cloak of loyalty to the Crown."

They had got wind of Tilak's intention to extend the campaign of propaganda to the Punjab, flattered by British publicists at the time and since by describing it as the sword-arm of India because it furnished a substantial part of the cannon-fodder. It was then under the stern rule of a Lieutenant-Governor who was two years later to win even greater laurels before and during the Martial Law—Sir Michael O'Dwyer. His administration was in something of a panic, partly simulated and partly real, because it was alleged that several hundred members of the *Ghadar* Party from America had managed to return home and were planning a terror campaign and conveniently a conspiracy to raid armouries in Lahore, Ferozepore, and Rawalpindi cantonments was unearthed, to say nothing of the arrest of a Mahratta named Pingle at Meerut with a number of bombs. Sir Michael was determined not to allow Tilak to disturb the peace in his fief and on the very day of Tilak's Poona meeting served an order forbidding his

entry into the Province. Simultaneously, the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, seat of the Imperial Government, prohibited his entry into that city.

There were other indications that the Government's nerves were on edge. In March a very high-powered deputation of the Indian Press had called on Lord Chelmsford to argue the case for repealing the Press Act of 1910. They were taken somewhat by surprise at the manner in which he showed them the length of his tongue. As *India* was to report, "coached by Sir Reginald Craddock" of whom Bentham might have said that he was more concerned with enforcing law than creating order, "he berated the deputation for bothering him at such a time." He also took the opportunity to tell the High Court judges, some of whom had made critical comments on the lawless laws which the Government had enacted and which debarred them from redressing flagrant acts of injustice, to mind their own business. The function of a judge, he said, was not to say what the law ought to be, but what it is.

The climax of the policy of graduated toughness with troublesome politicians was reached in mid-June of the year. Under Craddock's promptings, Chelmsford overcame his own reluctance and gave clearance to the Madras Government to take action against the most vociferous propagandist for Home Rule, a woman in her 70th year, Annie Besant. In fairness, it must be said, that unlike the ruthless way in which the British dealt with the leaders of the Irish struggle after the Easter Uprising of 1916, the authorities in India were still rather gentle and polite in their dealings with leaders of the Indian Home Rule movement. Lord Pentland, an erstwhile Liberal British MP and Governor of Madras, showed Annie Besant "great consideration." He called her to see him, as he said, to give her opportunity for consideration. There followed a remarkable interview which must rank as a classic example of the dialogue of the deaf and which reminds one of a scene in Attenborough's *Gandhi* where a future Viceroy of India tells his aide to thank the Mahatma for his letter and arrest him.

Annie Besant wanted to know what she was to consider. "That", said Pentland, "is for you to decide." When she repeated her question, he replied that he could not discuss it. After more

of this back and forth, Annie Besant said: "I can only act according to my conscience and leave the rest to God." To that Pentland's weary answer was, "We must all do that. You must understand that we shall stop all your activities." Annie Besant resignedly said: "You have all the power and I am helpless.... There is just one thing I should like to say to Your Excellency and that is that I believe you are striking the deadliest blow against the British Empire in India." She added that she had no personal feeling against him and the interview was at an end. Pentland courteously walked with her to the door.

He had given her twenty-four hours to consult with her friends. But, as she had told him, she had nothing to reconsider and she declined the generous offer which the authorities apparently made to her of a "safe conduct" to England for the duration of the War so that they could breathe in peace. On June 15, 1916, they acted and took her in custody together with her two fellow-workers both in the cause of Home Rule and Theosophy—G.S. Arundale and B.P. Wadia. They were taken to Ootacamund in the Blue Mountains to be interned. *Noblesse*, they say, *oblige*; and Pentland, courteous to Annie Besant to the last even though Sir Reginald Craddock, Home Member of the Government of India, had referred to her as "a vain old lady", offered her six alternative places to choose from for her internment. She opted for Ooty. But this did not prevent him from barring her and her companions from "writing new or publishing old articles or books and corresponding with anyone," or from forfeiting the securities deposited for her press and paper, *New India*, which were, it seems, taken over by P.K. Telang, son of the translator of the *Gita* into English.

In spite of the gentlemanly manner in which her internment was carried out, it was a profound shock even to the most moderate Indians. Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru, "one of the most constitutional of Indian politicians", according to Judith M. Brown, was incensed and wrote to a friend and colleague, Sita Ram:

So the campaign of repression has begun in right earnest. I am afraid the political atmosphere has never been more gloomy or threatening than it is at present.... I think we must stand by.... Mrs. Besant who had fought for us and

worked for us so bravely. I personally am not one of her chelas, but I feel that she has been very unjustly and harshly dealt with....

Among those who had been closely associated with her, the reaction to her internment was even stronger. S. Subramania Iyer, a man of the utmost respectability, a former acting Chief Justice of the Madras High Court and a knight into the bargain, had already stood up and insisted on being counted as a supporter of her Home Rule League when Pentland had made a veiled threat in the Legislative Council of suppressing Home Rule propaganda a few weeks before her internment. After her arrest he was to renounce his knighthood and wrote to President Wilson protesting against her internment and pointing out that it was the attitude of bureaucracy in India which was hindering the war effort, hoping this argument would carry some weight with the Americans who had joined the fray by April 1917. The letter which described the state of India under the British and listed some of India's griefs was by no means an exaggeration though it was, inevitably, selective. It is not known what, if any, answer was vouchsafed to the plea for the American President's intercession from S. Subramania Iyer. What is known is that the White House, as behoved a loyal ally, passed on the contents of the letter which had been sent to President Wilson through two American citizens, Mr. and Mrs. Hotchner, to the British Ambassador in Washington.

As a result a number of questions were asked in the House of Commons by irate Tory and other MPs; very nasty things were said about Subramaniya Iyer and condign punishment demanded. This was eventually to lead to his voluntary renunciation of all the honours that had been conferred on him by the Government, and both Chelmsford and Montagu, when they were in Madras in December 1917, administered very severe reprimands to him. Montagu, whose speeches Subramania Iyer had edited, was particularly harsh on him. "Perhaps I treated him rather harshly, but I was angry," he noted in his *Diary*.

But neither Chelmsford nor Montagu could allow themselves to be angry in public with the British MPs, some of whom

personally knew Annie Besant, who kept on pestering the Secretary of State for India week after week at Westminster. Nor could the Viceroy do anything effective to prevent the movement of protest against her internment spreading throughout the country. As Jawaharlal Nehru tells us, many Moderates, among them his father, Motilal Nehru, joined her Home Rule League as a gesture of solidarity. Even Jinnah, a man not given to any impulsiveness, did the same as did another Moderate, C.Y. Chintamani, to say nothing of Surendranath Banerjea. Madan Mohan Malaviya, who had been associated with her in the founding of Benaras Hindu University, actually "began circulating a passive resistance manifesto for signatures."

The idea had also occurred to the man who had field experience of passive resistance and had conducted it to some effect though not so far on any major scale in India—Gandhi. Whatever his differences with Annie Besant on political or philosophical grounds, he was in no manner of doubt that the Government had committed a "big blunder" and wrote to Chelmsford asking him to acknowledge as much and withdraw the internment order, though he made it clear that he did not "like much in Mrs. Besant's method" or "the idea of political propaganda being carried on during the War."

This was in July. Later that month the All-India Congress Committee and the Council of the Muslim League met in Bombay and demanded the release not only of Annie Besant, but also the Ali Brothers. However, on the issue of a passive resistance campaign opinion was divided and the matter was referred to the Provincial Congress Committees—to which, it seems, Gandhi was opposed, arguing puzzlingly, that passive resistance implying the use of "soul force", "was purely a matter of individual conscience" and as such "the subject should not be considered at all by the Congress Committees or by the Congress." Earlier he had advised some of his Bombay friends—Umar Sobhani, Shankerlal Banker, Indulal Yajnik and others—who had approached him that they "should collect 100 volunteers to walk from Bombay to her place of internment in protest." It was almost as if he had in his mind some kind of a laboratory experiment in Indian conditions of what he had tried in South Africa and what he was

himself to attempt on a vaster and much more ambitious scale thirteen years later.

But it never came to that. As far as the All-India Congress Committee and the Muslim League Council were concerned, they opted for procrastination and deferred the matter to their meeting at Allahabad in the first week of October. Others had serious doubts as to the wisdom of launching a passive resistance campaign on the internment issue. These doubts were only to be accentuated by an unexpected development at Westminster which made political leadership in India wonder whether, after all, the still unpromised land was not much closer than they had been imagining in their moments of pessimism.

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN TWO POLICIES

Thursday's child, so they say, has far to go. Edwin Samuel Montagu may or may not have been born on a Thursday. At all events, and unhappily, his political career was cut short by his resignation in March 1922 for having published without Cabinet authority a telegram from the Government of India urging a more friendly policy towards Turkey and finally by death in November 1924 at the relatively early age of forty-five. However, it was on a Thursday—July 12, 1917—that he made one of the most notable speeches in the House of Commons on the theme of Indian policy of His Majesty's Government. He described the Indian system of Government as "statute-ridden" and "indefensible" and the methods of Indian bureaucracy as the "apotheosis of circumstances." He called for immediate and drastic constitutional changes in India and in a key passage said:

...whatever be the object of your rule in India, the universal demand of those Indians whom I have met and corresponded with is that you should state it. Having stated it, you should give some instalment to show that you are in real earnest.... I am positive of this, that your great claim to continue the illogical system of Government by which we have governed India in the past is that it is efficient. *It has been proved to be not efficient*.... Unless you are prepared to remodel, in the light of modern experience, this century-old and cumbrous machine, then, I believe, I verily believe, that you will lose your right to control the destinies of the Indian Empire.

He spoke as a private member. It sounded good sense, even rather bold though it would not have needed an Empsonian

talent for spotting ambiguities for some of his fellow-members in the Chamber to discover that his phrasing was sufficiently elastic, even non-committal, for Montagu to make it mean as much or as little as suited his purpose. The general impression, however, was that it was a performance not altogether without some *arriere-pensee* and they could guess what it was. The guess became a certainty the next day when Austen Chamberlain resigned as Secretary of State for India and Montagu, who had served as understudy to Chamberlain's predecessor, Lord Crewe, between 1910-14, took over the charge of the "Jewel in the Crown".

Montagu, of course, denied that in speaking the way he had spoken he was making a bid for the India Office or that he was privy to the information that its Tory incumbent was vacating his tenancy. But his disclaimers were taken with more than a pinch of salt. The Tory Press was predictably angry over his appointment. The *Morning Post* was scathing about Montagu. "Being possessed of the hide of a rhinoceros" and a "brow of brass", it said, he had "snatched" at the office "without shame or compunction." And *India* was not exaggerating when it wrote that "the India Office has gone into deep mourning". The bureaucratic hierarchy—all the way up and down the ladder—in India was equally unhappy. For its part *India* had been pleasantly surprised. It had feared that Lloyd George, who seemed to prefer Tories to Liberals as his ministerial colleagues, would replace Chamberlain by another Tory. But this was to misread some of the signs it had itself reported and underestimate Lloyd George's cunning.

In his Guildhall speech at the end of April, he had spoken of the "loyal myriads" of India (and Ireland) and remarked that they were "entitled to ask that they should feel, not that they are subject races, but partner nations." This passage may or may not have been targeted at the ears of President Woodrow Wilson who had brought the United States into the War barely three weeks before. But evidently it was regarded sufficiently subversive by Reuter to omit from its nothing-but-the-truth cables to India. Then on May 18 he had done S.P. Sinha, a former President of the Indian National Congress, though an archetypal Moderate, the signal honour of inviting to breakfast with him

at No. 10 Downing Street. *India* had written about this invitation in a light-hearted vein and recalled that in Disraeli's *Lothaire*, "one of the best drawn of political ladies", Lady St. Julian, says that "men who breakfast out, or who give breakfasts, are dangerous characters." Whatever Lloyd George's reputation with the ladies, whether political or otherwise, *India* had recorded his compliment to the ex-President of the Congress "with appreciation." It indicated that the British Prime Minister was contemplating some initiative over India—or go through the motions of one. For this he needed some convincing, or at least plausible, instrument.

Montagu was well qualified to be that. He enjoyed a reputation for being sympathetic to Indian aspirations. Not that he was quite the radical which the Tory establishment in Britain made him out to be. Whatever the extent of his sympathy with Indian aspirations, he did not wish to jeopardise his political prospects and had to tread very warily. He was aware that he had powerful enemies at the very apex of power—among them Lord Curzon of Kedleston with whom he had effectively crossed polemical swords not so long ago and who was now a member of the inner War Cabinet, the so-called War Council. The Tory establishment did not love him and Tory MPs seemed determined to subject him to embarrassing interrogatories over the speech he had made on the eve of Austen Chamberlain's resignation in which he had voiced a harsh critique of the system of governance in India. They wanted to know whether he still stood by the views he had expressed on that Monday, July 12, 1917. He, of course, tried to back-pedal a little if not eat his words. He said that then he was speaking as a private member. "Now," he added, "I am the spokesman for His Majesty's Government." This was a fair, at least plausible, point to make. But his Tory tormentors were not so easily to be shaken off. They returned to taunt him again and again.

His difficulties with his Tory critics and opponents were only a part of the problems he faced. He was also under pressure of events and developments in India. If the good opinion which Indian politicians had of him was not to be dissipated and his term of office to end in a miserable fiasco, he had to move quickly and make some gesture of responsive goodwill. He knew that

Annie Besant's internment had alienated even the most moderate of Moderates and made it impossible for them to side with the Government. As he was to write in his *An Indian Diary*, "I particularly liked that Shiva who cut his wife into fifty-two pieces, only to discover that he had fifty-two wives! This is really what happens to the Government of India when it interns Mrs. Besant." His appointment had inevitably intensified the pressure not only for the lifting of the internment order on Annie Besant, but also the release of other eminent internees, like the Ali Brothers (Mohamed Ali was President-elect of the Muslim League) and young Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who had been interned at Ranchi. Both the Congress and the Muslim League were under considerable popular pressure to launch a passive resistance movement to secure their release.

On August 20, therefore, the House of Commons witnessed one of those contrived scenes which are an essential part of parliamentary politics in the North Sea Island. In answer to a pre-arranged question by Charles Roberts, a former Under Secretary of State for India, Montagu made a statement that there was complete accord between the Imperial Government and the Government of India as regards the policy "of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps should be taken in this direction as soon as possible." Having served this appetiser in the first part of the statement, he took care to dilute it with an abundant dash of qualifications and conditions:

...progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and the advancement of the Indian peoples, must be the judges of the time and measure of each advance and they must be guided by the co-operation received from those on whom new opportunities of service will thus be conferred, and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility.

Simultaneously two other announcements were made. First, it was made known that the Secretary of State for India would be shortly going to India to discuss the matter with the Viceroy. Secondly, a long standing plea of Indian politicians was accepted and it was announced that army commissions from which Indians had hitherto been barred would be thrown open to them. However, the quality of this generous concession to Indian wishes was not overstrained. At a time when the authorities were engaged in an intensive recruiting campaign to fill the breach left by heavy casualties, the first instalment of commissions offered to India was meagre enough to be counted on the fingers of two hands with a finger to spare.

As for the declaration outlining the British Government's policy perspective relating to constitutional developments in India, it was vague and insubstantial, leaving plenty of room for subsequent tergiversations. This was hardly surprising. For though the voice that read out the statement in the House of Commons was the voice of Edwin Montagu, the language was the language of that "sonorous phantom"—Lord Curzon—as his biographer, Lord Ronaldshay (later Zetland), testifies, with some assistance from Austen Chamberlain, Montagu's predecessor. It was, at all events, designed to be a holding statement to gain time and defuse the situation in India and keep it from boiling over. Montagu was himself to admit as much and claim in his *An Indian Diary* that by making this declaration of policy and visiting India he "kept India quiet for six months at a critical moment in the War."

Montagu's statement on the ends of British policy in India and the announcement that he would soon be going there could not but strengthen the hands of those in the Congress, the two Home Rule Leagues and the Muslim League—and at the time the membership and leadership of all these political organisations often tended to be overlapping—who were opposed to or lukewarm about the notion of a passive resistance campaign over the internment issue. The issue, in any case, virtually became a non-issue when in the middle of September 1917 the Government of India, apparently against the wishes and advice of the Madras Government, persuaded the latter to lift the internment order on Annie Besant and her associates. It was not prepared to

extend the amnesty to other eminent political internees, like the Ali Brothers and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, even though not only the Muslim League, but Gandhi was beginning to press for their release. The Government, it seems, regarded these Muslim leaders as greater danger to the Empire because of their alleged pan-Islamic sympathies and support for Turkey and other Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa which were seen as a region ripe for a fresh carve up among the Allied Powers after their victory.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya in his history of the Congress, somewhat curiously, hints that the Indian Government decided to withdraw the internment order against Annie Besant following some pledges she gave to the Government. The only basis for this rather unlikely suggestion is a passage he quotes from Montagu's *An Indian Diary* in which he writes that Chelmsford was contemplating reimposing internment on her because of some speech she made after her release and because she had "violated her pledges." But the actual text—and the context—of this entry does not wholly warrant Dr. Sitaramayya's suggestion. On the other hand, the Anglo-Indian Press and a considerable body of diehard British bureaucrats in India, who intensely disliked Montagu, suspected him of having put pressure on Delhi to lift the restrictions on her and thus set what they considered a bad precedent. However, Montagu's part in the whole affair seems to have been minimal and the Government of India, or at any rate Chelmsford, appeared to have acted of their own volition—and for the perfectly understandable reason that they wanted to create a favourable atmosphere for Montagu's India mission.

The ploy worked. At their joint meeting the All-India Congress Committee and the Council of the Muslim League at Allahabad on October 6 decided to drop the idea of passive resistance on the ground that the situation had "changed". Over the next six or seven months the principal focus of political attention and expectancy was to be Edwin Montagu and what he said or did as he travelled round the country, receiving "addresses" from all manner of organisations and associations, some real, others conjured up by the authorities for the occasion, but a large number of them representing the diverse secular or confessional vested interests and egotisms. Between the late

Fall of 1917 and the end of Spring in 1918 his interviews with Indian politicians, his meetings with their Highnesses some of whose domains were larger than the British Isles while others whose principedoms (as he was told) extended no further than the fields watered by a single well, and his talks with the bureaucrats who constituted the "steel frame" of the Indian administration and many of whom hated his guts and could barely be polite to him—made the daily headlines in the Press.

Because of security reasons the details of his passage to India at the head of a delegation which included the Earl of Donoughmore, Charles Roberts who had formerly been Under-Secretary of State for India, Sir William Vincent whose services had been lent to him by an obliging and curious Government of India, and Bhupendranath Basu had been kept secret. But we know from the *Diary* that they travelled overland to Taranto in the second half of October 1917, where they boarded the H.M.S. Bristol, their first port of call being Port Said. They stayed in Cairo for a few days where Montagu was the guest of Sir Reginald Wingate, and sailed for India aboard the P & O liner *Kaiser-i-Hind* on October 30, arriving in Bombay on November 10.

It was not Montagu's first trip to India, having been there on a private visit five years earlier. Even so the beauty of Bombay as it was before the vandals began systematically to destroy it in the post-independence period, did not fail to thrill him. "Bombay itself and one's first introduction to India," he wrote, "is, I think, one of the wonders of the world, and must produce exuberance, enthusiasm even to the most prosaic nature." He was also overwhelmed by the thought of the difficult assignment that he had undertaken, alternating between a feeling of humility and that mood of Walter Mittyism to which most British politicians tended to be prone, whether Tory, Liberal or Labour, when they imagined they were settling the fate of India. He wanted to do something big and wrote:

My visit to India means that we are going to do something, and something big. I cannot go home and produce a little thing or nothing; it must be epoch-making, or it is a failure; it must be the keystone of the future history of India.

However, between his desire to do "something big" and his ability to achieve anything big there fell a shadow—or rather a number of shadows. The shadow, to begin with, of his awareness of the inadequate political weight he carried in the British Government and Parliament. Soon after his arrival in Bombay he ruefully wished that he had not undertaken his Indian assignment all alone. He wrote in his *Diary*:

I wish Lloyd George were here; I wish the whole British Cabinet had come; I wish Asquith were here. It is one of India's misfortunes that I am alone, alone, alone the person that has got to carry this thing through....The responsibility rests with me....It is I that have got to do this thing, and I spend my whole time racking my brains as to how I am going to get something which India will accept and the House of Commons will allow me to do without whittling it down....I would that I could make it clear to those at home that if the results of our deliberations are either something which India will not accept, or a niggling, miserly, grudging safeguard, fiddling with the existing order of things, we shall have defrauded, and defrauded irreparably—for they will never believe us again—a vast continent whose history is our glory, and whose hopes and aspirations, fears and tribulations it is pathetic to see....

There was the even bigger shadow of the forces ranged against him both at home and in India. At home he had to run the gauntlet of "Curzon, Milner, Bonar Law, etc." Charles Roberts, who was a member of his team and from the start deeply pessimistic and convinced that the whole enterprise was going to end in disaster—as in fact it did—told him so in Delhi. In India, he could expect little help from Chelmsford who, he bemoaned, not only came "from the wrong class", but "collected his views from his surroundings...did not take the prospect of reform seriously...thought things would go on as usual for ever." His favourite phrase, Montagu noted, was, "I wish it were possible but I am afraid...." As for most of the bureaucratic hierarchs, they had not wanted him to visit India at all and, in his own

words, were making every attempt to "hurry him in order to get him out of the country."

But, perhaps, the biggest shadow of all was that cast by his own ambivalence and contradictions permeating the interstices of his mind. In her preface to his *An Indian Diary*, his wife, Venetia Montagu, who seems to have been a woman of some perceptiveness and much beauty, claims: "The welfare of India was the one mastering passion of his life: he joined Mr. Lloyd George's Government...only on condition that he should go to the India Office, confident in the great work which he felt he could accomplish for the cause he had so much at heart." There is no reason to doubt her testimony on this point. Unfortunately, however, although Montagu was sincere in wanting to do something "epoch-making" in India and for India, this was something wholly beyond him. And for the good reason that the universe of constitutional concepts in which he lived and moved and had his being was far too narrow for anything big to emerge from it. Indeed, it was made up of the same bits and pieces which were the stock-in-trade of bureaucratic thinking in Whitehall and India and which were bound to stultify the generous impulses that stirred within him from time to time.

It was curious, for instance, that he was much taken by the Curtis scheme. Lionel Curtis, it will be recalled, was one of the leading lights of the Round Table group who saw in the British Empire a "Commonwealth of God"—or *Civitas Dei*—and exercised considerable influence with the British establishment. Montagu noted that he held "in the hollow of his hands the *Times* and Lord Milner." He could have added that, with Chirol, he was very much a *persona grata*, almost a friend, guide and counsellor, with the bureaucratic establishment in India. A year before Montagu's visit to India, Curtis had had a brain-wave and floated the idea of collective stewardship of Indian affairs by Britain and the White Dominions, including South Africa where he had been Assistant Colonial Secretary, presumably because he felt that after the War Britain alone might not have the muscle to cope with the political discontent that might erupt in India. The document in which he set out this bright idea—a

letter—was somehow leaked to the Indian Press and was published. It led to a wave of protests at about the time of the Lucknow Congress, including one from Gandhi.

In view of the mistrust of Curtis by nationalist politicians in India, it might have been thought Montagu would have been very wary of any proposals coming from him. But not so, and he seemed to be taken in by him. And Tilak when he read the Montagu-Chelmsford Report in July 1918 was to write an article in the *Kesari*, headed "A Sunless Morning", in which, with some justice, he said that the Report embodied "Montagu-Curtis Reforms." However that may be, even the tentative proposals which Montagu jotted down in his *Diary* after his first round of talks in Delhi showed him to be very much under Curtis' spell. They did not, in any case, add up to very much, except for a "brilliant idea"—like Archimedes, the inspiration came to him in his bath—that he would resign as Secretary of State for India on condition that Lloyd George found a seat in the Commons for S.P. Sinha (later Lord Sinha of Raipur) so that he could be appointed in his place to pilot the reforms through the British Parliament whilst he would offer to serve under Sinha as Under-Secretary of State for India and help him in his task.

This, he felt, would "teach the Indian (he obviously meant the British) Civil Servants that a British Statesman who, however undeservedly, has reached the Cabinet rank, finds nothing derogatory in assisting rather than controlling an Indian." He also believed that this "brilliant idea" was just the sort of thing that would appeal to Lloyd George's dramatic sense and which he would accept. And he was sure—and in this he was probably right—that the gesture would "fire the imagination" of Indians. But, he added, it was something "very much in the future." He could have gone further and said that the future he envisaged was not to be—at least in the way in which he envisaged it.

He was shrewd enough not to be deceived by the exhibits that were presented to him as evidence to prove that everything was for the best in the best of all possible imperial possessions. He knew that some of the "deputations" who came to see him and present "addresses" were in the nature of command performances. They consisted of men who represented no tangible body

of sapient opinion in the country—and perhaps not even themselves. In his *Diary*, for instance, he records how he and his colleagues “ragged” a certain Raja Hrishkesh Saha whom he found “continually subscribing, on various deputations, to views in which he did not believe.” And he knew full well who were the valid interlocutors with whom the constitutional future of India could be, and would ultimately have to be, discussed to some purpose.

Thus, after meeting the representatives of the Congress, the Muslim League and the two Home Rule Leagues—and the three deputations overlapped—he noted: “We were face to face with the real giants of the Indian political world. We had not the dupes and adherents of the Provinces, but we had here a collection of the first-class politicians.” His assessment of individual leaders was also fairly accurate. Tilak (who, incidentally, garlanded him) rightly judged as probably having “the greatest influence of any person in India” but added: “Although he did not impress me very much in argument, he is a scientific man of great erudition and training.” Jinnah, he found “perfectly mannered, impressive-looking...a very clever man” and he thought it “an outrage that such a man should have no chance of running the affairs of his own country.” He was not quite sure what to make of Gandhi as, indeed, were many Indian political leaders. But he sensed that here was something unique and wrote:

Afterwards we saw the renowned Gandhi. He is a social reformer; he has a real desire to find grievances and to cure them, not for any reasons of self-advertisement, but to improve the conditions of his fellow-men. He is the real hero of the settlement of the Indian question in South Africa, where he suffered imprisonment. He has just been helping the Government to find a solution for the grievances of the indigo Labour in Bihar. He dresses like a coolie, forswears all personal advancement, lives practically on the air, and is a pure visionary....

His attitude to Annie Besant was more mixed. In fact, when he landed in Bombay, he was, if anything, hostile towards her. This was partly because he was anxious to dispel the impression

that was abroad that he had been responsible for putting pressure on the Government of India to withdraw the internment order on her and thus make Pentland and the Government of Madras lose face—something which the Anglo-Indian Press and a large part of the bureaucracy in India regarded as a sin against the Holy Ghost and for which they were not prepared to forgive him. It was, however, not true that he had put any great pressure on the Indian Government. He was even prepared to see her interned again and wrote while in Bombay: "I do not think we shall get through without taking action against her again, and I cannot but feel sympathy with Willingdon [at the time Governor of Bombay and whom he much liked] who says, 'We acquiesced in her release, but that does not alter our opinion of her'." However, when he met her in Delhi, he could not help being disarmed—even charmed—by her. His account of his interview with her bears quotation:

And then...we saw Mrs. Besant herself. This was an interesting interview, if I ever had one. She gave me the history of the Home Rule League, how she felt it necessary to get hold of the young boys; how, if the Home Rule League policy could be carried out, she was certain that they would forswear anarchy and come on to the side of the constitutional movement. She assured us solemnly that India would have, and insisted upon having, the power of the purse and the control of the Executive. She fought shy of all the financial problems. She said she was not a financial expert. She got over difficulties in that way. She kept her silvery, quiet voice, and really impressed me enormously. If only the Government had kept this old woman on our side! If only she had been well handled from the beginning. If only her vanity had been appealed to! She is an amusing old thing, in that, knowing perfectly well that the interview was to be in Chelmsford's room (because they take good care that I should never see anybody important without him), she turned up and sat in my tent, [Montagu and his party had been put up, not in the ample guest suites of the Viceregal residence, but in tents, admittedly very luxurious ones, pitched in the vast grounds of

the palatial mansion one of which—Donoughmore's—was actually to catch fire. *India*, and many Indians, interpreted this as bureaucracy's way of showing that Montagu and his mission were not welcome] and coming in from dressing, I found her waiting there. I told her the interview was in Chelmsford's room, and she drove me up in her motor car, and explained to me that the fact that I had not received a welcome from the Indian people was simply due to their recognition that the Government would not allow it. She implored us to come to the Congress....

The idea evidently tempted him. For he wrote: "Oh, if only Lloyd George were in charge of this thing! He would, of course, dash down to the Congress and make them a great oration. I am prevented from doing this. It might save the whole situation. But the Government of India have carefully arranged our plans so that we shall be in Bombay when the Congress, the real Indian political movement, is in Calcutta, and now they plead plans as an excuse for not accepting the invitation which is showered on us." Yet it was characteristic of his ambivalence—Venetia Montagu in her preface refers to his habit of writing "impulsively, and on the spur of the moment", but it was more than that—that when Charles Roberts came to him, while they were in Calcutta about a fortnight before the Congress session was due to open, and announced that he must attend the session, Montagu set about dissuading him vigorously on the ground that "he could not sit through certain speeches, or he would be accused of sitting through them when he ought to have left; either that he would be regarded as our emissary, in which case we would frighten the moderates into thinking we were accepting the Congress scheme, or he would be regarded as differing from all of us in wanting to accept it, which was not the case; in any case, we were Chelmsford's guests, and must not do anything of which he disapproved." A truly Catch 22 mode of reasoning!

Roberts, inevitably, dropped the idea after "a talk with Chelmsford." But the episode reflected the two-faced approach Montagu had to the problem of India. He knew perfectly well that the Congress-League scheme was modest enough and was the minimum which had any chance of being accepted by the

body of political opinion that mattered. Yet he not only appeared to acquiesce in the various ruses to which the Government of India resorted in order to undermine the consensus on which the Congress-League scheme was based, but was willing to give credence to and almost welcomed reports which were brought to him as evidence that support for the Congress-Muslim League plan for constitutional reforms was collapsing and that he could safely ignore it. In an entry in his *Diary* on December 7, 1917, we find him crowing with smug self-satisfaction and claiming: "Chelmsford, Curtis and I have, between us, absolutely blown the Congress-Moslem [League] scheme out of the water and the intelligent people are all discarding it."

This was delusive braggadocio. Whatever the merits or defects of the Congress-Muslim League proposals—and in the retrospective light of experience their defects stand out more sharply than the merits—they represented something approaching national consensus and commanded a much wider measure of political support than any other scheme or proposals in the field, including the Curtis plan which had impressed him or even the "brilliant" ideas that bubbled in his mercurial mind from day to day—and between one bath and another. At all events, it is hard to understand why he should have felt so elated at the prospect of the Congress-Muslim League scheme losing public support and even claimed having played a part in blowing it out of the water. This could scarcely make his own task in evolving a workable and acceptable plan for reforms any easier. Quite the contrary, in fact.

However, it was characteristic of the perverse spirit in which even the more sympathetic British politicians approached the problem of India that they could not help trying to undermine any political consensus that emerged, or seemed to be on the point of emerging, instead of helping to consolidate it consistently with their protestations of wanting nothing but the good and happiness of the Indian people. In Montagu's case this was the more surprising because in his lucid moments he could see the utter folly of what he had himself described as the "niggling, miserly, grudging" way of dealing with India. Yet when it came to tackling the problem at a most critical juncture he approached

it as a kerbside operator in the market place, or at best as a petty-fogging politician lacking in any vision and sense of historic issues that were at stake. The result could hardly be anything but a fiasco—and even disaster which he had feared at times.

Fiasco and disaster not only for India—"a vast continent whose history", he had declared, "is our glory"—but his own ambition as a statesman. It gave his opponents at home, men like Curzon, and diehard "Anglo-India" which had never relished his appointment as Secretary of State for India because of his reputation for being sympathetic to Indian aspirations, an excellent opportunity, if not wholly to abort his Indian mission, at least to make sure that it proved to be largely an expense of spirit and good intentions "in a waste of shame"—or even worse. It is, of course, possible that long before Montagu's accession to India Office the British Government had made up its mind of what kind of constitutional changes to offer India after the War and to see that any concessions to Indian public opinion should be minimal leaving the ultimate power in British hands. Dr. Sitaramayya in his history makes an intriguing suggestion without, however, being specific as to the source of his information. He writes:

...it may be news to many that the whole of the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme, so-called, was worked out in every detail by March, 1916. The fact was that Lord Chelmsford was a Major in the Army in the Territorial Force in India, when the order reached him of his appointment as Viceroy. When he went to England in March, 1916, he was shown the full-blown scheme ready-made,—a fact which we learnt only in 1934,—which was to be associated with his name.

His suggestion is not inherently improbable. It is certainly known that the hand of Lord Curzon was writ large in the declaration which Montagu read out in the House of Commons on August 20, 1917. It is even conceivable that Montagu's appointment was partly meant to lend credibility to the British plans for India after the War was over and to provide a facade of liberality to the British policy which, as always, had two faces—one pretty and the other not so pretty. Montagu's visit and talks

with Indian leaders represented the former. The other, and more forbidding, face was not unveiled till he had already been in India for a month and had been able to draw Indian politicians into the process of consultations with him.

The unveiling of the unacceptable face of British policy came on December 10, or just a fortnight before the opening of the Thirty-second Congress session in Calcutta, with the announcement of the appointment of a committee under a Judge of the King's Bench to enquire into "the criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movements in India and recommend and advise as to the legislation to enable the Government to deal effectively with them." The British Judge—whose only other title to fame is that he presided over the Royal Commission on Lotteries and Betting, 1932-33—was a certain Sydney Rowlatt, later created a Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India for services rendered. He was to be assisted in his labour of love by two British and two Indians—Sir Basil Scott, Chief Justice of Bombay, Sir Verney Lovett, member of U.P. Board of Revenue, C.V. Kumaraswami Sastri, Madras High Court Judge whose main title to immortality was to be his membership of this ill-starred committee, and P.C. Mitter, additional member of Bengal Legislative Council for whom this assignment was to be a stepping stone to a knighthood and higher preferments.

The decision to appoint the committee and Rowlatt to head it had been taken by Montagu himself almost simultaneously with his statement of August 20, 1917, though it was not considered politic to announce the good news till December 10. It is hard to fathom what made Montagu to take this step which was virtually to wreck whatever good intentions he had. It could be that he believed that the appointment of the Rowlatt Committee would appease the diehard opinion in Britain and the bureaucratic establishment in India—"the Pentlands of this world or the O'Dwyers", as he was ruefully to write to Chelmsford later. But it was also a decision flowing from the split personality reflexes which even the more sympathetic British politicians seemed unable to overcome when they came to dealing with India and which almost invariably led them to undo with one hand whatever liberal policy they dispensed with the other. This can be judged from the rather casual reference which he makes

in his *Diary* to Rowlatt whom he met in Bombay on the day after the latter's arrival in India, apparently unhonoured and unsung:

After lunch, Sir Sydney Rowlatt, whom I had asked to come out to consider internecs and policy with regard to them after the war, who arrived by yesterday's mail, came to see me.... He arrived to find it was a holiday; he had no money; nobody had met him from the Home Department; no provision had been made to engage rooms for him or to find him a servant. I was really very, very angry. He tells me that he had not been allowed to join the mail at Marseilles, that he had come all the way from London by sea, and had been forty-one days on the water. But he was in very good spirits, and is a very nice fellow. He looked miles better than when I saw him in London.

He took the opportunity to give Rowlatt some good advice which the latter did not particularly take to heart. "I explained to him," Montagu adds, "that Government by means of internment and police was naturally a delightful method which built up only trouble probably for our successors, and that I hoped he would remember what was parliamentarily defensible in listening to the plan which had been prepared for him by the Government out here." This was a delusive hope and only went to show how extreme naivete can co-exist with a high degree of sophistication and even true intelligence in the same political mind. He was being patently disingenuous, of course, in saying airily that he "asked" Rowlatt "to come out to consider internecs and policy with regard to them after the war." He knew perfectly well that the terms of reference of the committee which Rowlatt was to head were much wider—and by no means so innocent as he made them sound. But, in fairness to Montagu, it has to be admitted that he was not alone in having no premonition that the Rowlatt Committee was going to plant a time-bomb along the path of any constitutional reforms which he and his colleagues were busy hatching. The leaders of the Congress and the two Home Rule Leagues and Indian politicians in general shared Montagu's insouciance over the Rowlatt Committee enterprise

—at least at the time it was announced and for many months after.

This was largely due to Montagu's personality which had a politically soporific effect on India and disarmed suspicions of British motives and intentions. Indian leaders were impressed by his open-mindedness, his freedom from haughtiness, his willingness to listen with apparent sympathy to their arguments—and his refusal to be hidebound by considerations of protocol. For instance, he saw nothing wrong in rising and standing to attention while *Bande Mataram* was being intoned at the end of a sumptuous lunch (Montagu did not fail to record the menu which seems to have been a gourmet's delight as it was a health hazard) which one of his colleagues, Bhupendranath Basu, gave in his honour at his residence in Calcutta and which embarrassed the other British guests, among them J.L. Maffey, Chelmsford's Private Secretary, who had to stand up, too, in order not to appear discourteous to the Secretary of State for India ("I do not think Maffey will ever forget it", he noted in his *Diary*).

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya for some reason singles out Annie Besant for having passed round the word "We must support Mr. Montagu" among her friends after her interview with him at the end of 1917. Certainly, she seems to have been taken by him and met him more than once and was anxious he should have good opinion of her—something in which she did not wholly succeed even though he liked her "silvery voice...the most beautiful voice I have ever heard." But this was partly tactical. She believed, for one thing, that she could persuade Montagu to accept the Congress-League proposals or something akin to them as a first step to be followed a few years later by plenary Home Rule. It was a mistaken notion as we know from his rather churlishly scathing comment on the idea. For another, she was keen to enlist his sympathy for her personally and convince him that she was not the pistol-packing seditionist which the British authorities in India considered her to be. For she feared—on good grounds—not only that she might be interned again, but that she might be deported and never allowed to return to the country she loved even to carry on her work as President of the Theosophical Society. Her apprehension on this count was obliquely confirmed by Chelmsford when she met him and

the previous year and which was itself a record. In addition there were over five thousand visitors packed in the Pandal.

But it was not only the record attendance which made the 1917 Congress session—the seventh to be hosted by Calcutta—memorable. Rabindranath Tagore, already a Nobel laureate and the first literary Indian to be knighted by the British and by far the most towering figure on India's cultural landscape in our times, was present at the session. He had attended the last Congress session in Calcutta—in 1911. Indeed, even a song by him had been sung on the second day. But since then he had not taken any conspicuous part in the Congress—or, for that matter, in politics in general, except, perhaps, during the early phase of the agitation against the Partition of Bengal. This was not because he was apolitical, but rather because he judged, rightly, that his talents could be more fruitfully deployed in other fields. His presence at the opening session of the Congress at Calcutta was seen, and no doubt meant to be seen, as a public gesture of his identification with the Congress cause.

He not only attended it, but read out an invocatory poem. The session began at two in the afternoon with the chanting of a hymn from the *Rig Veda* which, appropriately, is a call to unity:

United in progress and in speech, let your minds apprehend alike. Alike in council and in prayer. Alike in feelings and in thought, be ye one in your aspirations and your desires; and may your minds be drawn together to bear with one another.

The hymn was followed by the singing of *Bande Mataram* by a choir of women and children, all dressed in white, and led by Amala Das. The Chairman of the Reception Committee then invited Tagore to recite his poem. Its English translation lacks the melody and the lyrical lift of the original in Bengali. But the argument struck a note which seemed designed not only to cut across but through the mood of facile expectancy that the Kingdom was nigh which prevailed in the political circles in general and the Congress leadership in particular. "Our voyage", said the poet, "is begun", but he held out no promise of an

early and easy landfall. On the contrary, he cautioned:

The storm howls and the waves are wicked and wild,
but we sail on.
The menace of danger waits in the way to yield
to Thee its offering of pain.
And a voice in the heart of the tempest cries :
"Come to conquer fear"!
Let us not linger to look back for the laggards,
or benumb the darkening hours with dread and doubt.

His invocation was also a veiled admonition which Gandhi, who operated on quite a different wavelength, might have approvingly echoed. For it sounded like a call to his audience to shed the habit of mendicancy and rely on their own resources of strength and determination:

Let us not wear our hearts away in picking small
help and taking slow count of friends.

After this stoic and almost heroic utterance, the address of welcome delivered by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Baikunthanath Sen, must have seemed very small and stale beer even to an audience officially committed to teetotalism. If his speech had any merit it was one of relative brevity. He began with a feeling lament for the lost glory of Calcutta—"the Capital so long of British India but now, alas! shorn of its proud distinction." He passed on quickly to the gravity and difficulty of problems facing the Congress. "Our responsibilities have never been heavier," he said, and added: "Our fate is in the making as it were, and the future of succeeding generations of Indians will depend, to some extent at least, upon our deliberations in this hall and our activities outside it."

What seemed to be his primary worry was "the drawbacks to the full employment of the splendid manpower of India at this crisis" which he attributed to the fact that after 150 years of British Rule "the martial instinct" was "practically dead throughout the country" and people had "forgotten the use of arms, thanks to the operation of the Indian Arms Act—so much

so that most of them have come to develop quite a fear for fire-arms." This was an old familiar refrain at Congress sessions. But Baikunthanath Sen justly pointed out that bureaucratic hierarchs, like Sir Michael O'Dwyer to whom the Congress was anathema, could not have it both ways—complain that the Indian "response to the call for recruitment" had not been "commensurate with our protestation of loyalty and thorough identity of interests with the British nation" while continuing to pursue "the policy of exclusion, executive domination, estrangement and mistrust." He had earlier insisted that "the Indian must be placed on a level of equality with the European as regards admission into the commissioned ranks of the Army before any substantial results can be expected from the recent change of policy" which allowed a very limited number of commissions for Indians.

As others had done before him, he deplored "the dislocation of the ancient village organisation and decay of cottage industries through the evils of a 'wooden and inelastic', and one might add 'unimaginative', administration." But above all he attacked "the series of repressive measures recently adopted by Government...the Seditious Meetings Act...the Indian Press Act, and the Defence of India Act." Strangely, however, he did not seem to be unduly worried over the appointment of the Rowlatt Committee, though he found it puzzling that it should coincide with the announcement of the "preliminaries for a thorough overhaul by the Imperial Government of the whole constitution of the Indian Administration with the definite object of granting self-government to India within a reasonable time." But otherwise he sounded very complacent and even said that "the public will await with interest the report of the commission presided by a Judge of the King's Bench Division of the British High Court of Justice"—words which he lived to rue.

For his part he would have preferred the papers concerning the detenus to be sent "to a body of distinguished English Judges" in whose virginity, like many Indians of his generation and since, he had a touching faith, instead of a special committee being set up and on which, moreover, "the Punjab—the home of the Ghadr Party"—was unrepresented. But he made bold to say that the evidence against the internees "must be tested in

a court of law" and they "must be placed on their trial", because otherwise the inference was bound to be that "any evidence in the possession of the Government" was "tainted", or of "such a character that it cannot be produced in a court of law." Warming up to the theme, he had some scathing things to say about the treatment of political prisoners in British Indian jails which had only recently led to a hunger strike by "the State prisoners in Alipur Central Jail". He went on to dilate on the role of "that favourite, all-powerful and infallible department known as the Criminal Intelligence Department" and its ubiquitous spies and informers. He illustrated the point by reminding his audience of "the letters written by the suicide Sachindrachandra Das Gupta of Rungpur to the District Magistrate and the CID Inspector on the eve of his death" which threw "lurid light, not only upon the mischievous activities of the CID, but also upon the state of exasperation and helplessness to which people, anxious to live quietly, are driven by them." He did not think that "political lollipops" would "divert public attention and neutralise the evils of repression."

All the same, by the time he reached the end of his speech, he appeared to be ready to settle for half a "political lollipop." After showering high praise not only on Montagu but also Chelmsford, he hoped that between them, and with the help of their colleagues and especially Bhupendranath Basu, they would "be able to evolve a sound scheme of responsible government" capable of satisfying "Indian aspirations at least for a generation or two." Not that he considered the idea of "granting responsible government in stages" as very sound. On the contrary, he argued, "the weight of reason and... perhaps of authority, is in favour of full responsible government in the internal administration of the country." However, being what in our day would be considered as a "pragmatic" politician, Baikunthanath Sen was aware that neither reason nor the weight of authority counted for much with those in power in London and Delhi. He, therefore, suggested that should full responsible government in the internal administration be not forthcoming, "let us at least have the foundations of real self-government, let us have a scheme such as in the natural process of evolution

will lead to the introduction within a reasonable time of the colonial form of self-government."

This was pretty tame even if it fell short of waving the white flag from the Congress platform. Obviously, the ghost of "Moderation", Indian style, had not been laid at Bombay two years earlier as some of the Congress Radicals had deluded themselves into believing. What their—and, in particular, Tilak's—reaction was to Baikunthanath Sen's Minimalist perception of the Congress position is not known. It is true that Tilak had arrived late at the session. According to a Reuter despatch quoted by *India* "in the middle of proceedings, Mr. Tilak, at the head of 400 gaily turbaned delegates, who had been delayed on a train journey from Bombay [evidently even under the Raj trains did not always run on time], into the enclosure, when the shouting reached a climax". But this was before Tagore had read out his "specially composed ode" and Surendranath Banerjea had formally and "cordially" proposed Annie Besant's election to the chair. So Tilak must have heard Sen's speech in full.

However, whatever else might be said of Annie Besant's presidential address, it could not be described as tame. The *Times* found it "prolix" and added that it had only deepened "our sense of the impractical attitude of the members of the Congress." Certainly, it was long—perhaps the longest ever to be delivered by any Congress President till then if not since. It ran to almost thirty thousand words. It even had its *longueurs*. But these were more than compensated for by its moments of insight and the sense of perspective which informed it. She was obviously sensible of the importance of the occasion, especially for her. She had passionately wished for the moment to come. Vanity, as her critics and detractors suggested, might have been a part of this wish. But there was almost certainly another dimension to it which was above and beyond human vanity. She saw in it the seal of her acceptance by a people and a civilisation which was not her own but with which she had identified herself, heart and soul.

This was clear from the note of deep personal emotion that she struck in the opening passage. In retrospect it may sound sentimental, but in the context of time and events in which she

spoke it has the ring of sincerity which redeems her words from maudlin sentimentality. Her predecessors, she said, had "found fitting words for their gratitude", but she did not know "in what words can I voice mine, whose debt to you is so overwhelmingly greater than theirs":

For the first time in Congress history, you have chosen as your President one who, when your choice was made, was under the heavy ban of Government displeasure, and who lay interned as a person dangerous to public safety. While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour, while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative. I have no words with which to thank you, no eloquence with which to repay my debt. My deeds must speak for me, for words are too poor. I turn your gift into service to the Motherland; I consecrate my life anew to her in worship by action....

These words could hardly fail to move her audience. Nor much of the rest of her presidential address fail to inspire them. *India*, which published it almost in full for its British readers, spoke of it as "the case for India," the title under which it was brought out by the Home Rule for India League priced one Shilling, from 1 Robert Street, Adelphi, London. It was undoubtedly that—and more. She put it not only with eloquence but affirmatively and without bending into apologetic postures to which many Indian politicians tended to be prone. Having drunk deeply of the libertarian spirit of the English literature and of an England "that sheltered Mazzini, Kossuth, Kropotkin, Stepanyak, and that welcomed Garibaldi", she saw no need for India to stake her claim to freedom in a language of supplication:

Today when India stands erect, no suppliant people, but

a Nation, self-conscious, self-respecting, determined to be free; when she stretches out her hand to Britain and offers friendship not subservience, cooperation not obedience: today let me, western born but in spirit eastern, cradled in England but Indian by choice and adoption, let me stand as the symbol of union between Great Britain and India, a union of hearts and free choice, not of compulsion....

Like most of the political elite in India, she saw the War, not as a struggle between rival imperialisms for world domination and possession of its riches, but in ideological terms as a conflict between forces of freedom and despotism. At one point in her speech she referred to the Central Powers of Europe as "Ravana" and said: "India, with her clear vision, saw in Great Britain the champion of Freedom, in Germany the champion of despotism. And...rightly she stood by Great Britain, despite her own lack of freedom and the coercive legislation which outrivalled German despotism, knowing these to be temporary..." And she went on to recall that early in the War she had "ventured to say that the war could not end until England recognised that autocracy and bureaucracy must perish in India as well as in Europe. The good Bishop of Calcutta, with a courage worthy of his free race, lately declared that it would be hypocritical to pray for victory over autocracy in Europe and to maintain it in India."

This almost presaged the argument which Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders were to deploy at the outbreak of the Second World War and during it more than two decades later in between their stints in prisons. Annie Besant stressed that, despite the disenchantment and rebuffs, India had given "immense aid" to Britain in the War. She quantified it by quoting official statements. Not only that, but she gave a detailed account of how in the past the British Government had drawn on India's blood and treasure, not to defend her against external threat or internal disorder, "but in order to carry out an imperial policy." "Ever since the Government of India was taken over by the Crown," she asserted, "India has been regarded as an Imperial military asset and training ground." With each passing year

the financial burden had increased and "year after year" the Congress had continued to remonstrate against this profligacy, but to no avail.

She spoke of the "New Spirit in India" and tabulated the causes which had generated it, among them the general awakening of Asia, its masses, its middle classes and, not least, its women. "Each of these causes," she said, "has had its share in the splendid change of attitude in the Indian Nation, in the uprising of spirit of a pride of country, of independence, of self-reliance, of dignity, of self-respect. The war has quickened the rate of evolution of the world, and no country has experienced the quickening more than our Motherland." She went further. She added:

But the present movement in India will be very poorly understood, if it be regarded only in connection with the movement in the East. The awakening of Asia is part of a world-movement, which has been quickened into marvellous rapidity by the world war. The world movement is towards Democracy, and for the West dates from the breaking away of the American Colonies from Great Britain, consummated in 1776, and its sequel in the French Revolution of 1789. Needless to say that its root was in the growth of modern science, undermining the fabric of intellectual servitude, in the work of the Encyclopaedist, and in that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and of Thomas Paine. In the East, the swift changes in Japan, the success of the Japanese Empire against Russia, the downfall of the Manchu dynasty in China and the establishment of a Chinese Republic, the efforts at improvement in Persia, hindered by the interference of Russia and Great Britain with her growing ambition, and the creation of British and Russian "spheres of influence", depriving her of her just liberty, and now the Russian Revolution and the probable rise of a Russian Republic in Europe and Asia, have all entirely changed the conditions before existing in India. Across Asia, beyond the Himalayas, stretch free and self-ruling Nations. India no longer sees as her Asian neighbours the huge domains of a Tsar and a Chinese despot, and compares her

condition under British rule with those of their subject populations. British rule profited by the comparison until 1905...but in future, unless India wins Self-Government, she will look enviously at her Self-Governing neighbours, and the contrast will intensify her unrest....

This was a language of political discourse such as had rarely been heard from Congress platforms. It seemed to connect with the future rather than the past, breaking away from the familiar system of categories within which the Indo-British argument had revolved. It foreshadowed the terms of debate which Jawaharlal Nehru popularised in the Congress and India generally. She hammered home the absurdity and unacceptability of India's "perpetual subordination" :

...the Briton rules in Great Britain, the Frenchman in France, the American in America, each Dominion in its own areas, but the Indian was...not to feel his own country as his own. 'Britain for the British' was right and natural; 'India for the Indians' was wrong, even seditious. It must be 'India for the Empire,' or not even for the Empire, but 'for the rest of the Empire', careless of herself. 'British support for British Trade' was patriotic and proper in Britain. 'Swadeshi goods for Indians' showed a petty and anti-Imperial spirit in India. The Indian was to continue to live perpetually, and even thankfully, as Gopal Krishna Gokhale said he lived now, in 'an atmosphere of inferiority', and to be proud to be a citizen (without rights) of the Empire....

She spoke of the "loss of belief in the superiority of the White races". Not that alone. "But even deeper than the outer tumult of war," she said, "has pierced the doubt as to the reality of the ideals of liberty and nationality so loudly proclaimed by the foremost western Nations, the doubt of the honesty of their champions. Sir James Meston [then Lieutenant-Governor of U.P.] said truly, a short time ago, that he had never, in his long experience, known Indians in so distrustful and suspicious a mood as that which he met in them today. And that is so."

Why? Because, she said, for long years there had been many breaches of promises and pledges to them. This "deepened mistrust" could only be removed, she insisted, by "a frank and courageous statesmanship applied to the honest carrying out of large reforms too long delayed. . . . The time for political tinkering is past; the time for wise and definite changes is here."

Having deployed the case for Indian self-government on pragmatic grounds, she came to the moral heart of the argument and stated it with a compelling, almost Gandhian simplicity:

It is not a question whether the [British] rule is good or bad. German efficiency in Germany is far greater than English efficiency in England; the Germans were better fed, had more amusements and leisure, less crushing poverty than the English. But would any Englishman therefore desire to see Germans occupying all the highest positions in England? Why not? Because the righteous self-respect and dignity of the free men revolt against foreign domination, however superior. As Mr. Asquith said at the beginning of the War, such a condition was 'inconceivable and would be intolerable.' Why then is it the one conceivable system here in India?"

And she posed a challenging question to Indians, too. "Why is it not felt by all Indians to be intolerable?" she asked and answered as Gandhi was to answer later:

It is because it has become a habit, bred in us from childhood, to regard the saheb-lok as our natural superiors, and the greatest injury British rule has done to Indians is to deprive them of the natural instinct born in all free people, the feeling of an inherent right to self-determination, to be themselves. Indian dress, Indian food, Indian ways, Indian customs are all looked on as second rate; Indian mother-tongue and Indian literature cannot make an educated man. Indians as well as Englishmen take it for granted that the natural rights of every Nation do not belong to them; they claim "a larger share in the government of the country", instead of claiming the government of their

own country, and they are expected to feel grateful for "boons", for concessions. Britain is to say what she will give. The whole thing is wrong, topsy-turvy, irrational. Thank God that India's eyes are opening; that myriads of her people realise that they are men, with a man's right to freedom in his own country, a man's right to manage his own affairs. India is no longer on her knees for boons; she is on her feet for Rights. It is because I have taught this, that the English in India misunderstand me, and call me seditious; it is because I have taught this, that I am President of this Congress today.

This was true. Annie Besant was aware, too, that the opportunity for her to speak as the chosen tribune of the Indian people was unlikely to come her way again. She wanted, therefore, to make the most of it and had obviously worked hard and long on her presidential address. Indeed, it was for her something in the nature of her solemn political testament and she wanted it to make the maximum impact. She ended on the same note of high emotion on which she had begun. And whatever the latter-day cynics might make of its effusiveness, it represented her convictions and it connected with the convictions of those she was addressing:

To see India free, to see her hold up her head among the Nations, to see her sons and daughters respected everywhere, to see her worthy of her mighty Past, engaged in building a yet mightier Future--is not this worth working for, worth suffering for, worth living and worth dying for? Is there any other land which evokes such love for her spirituality, such admiration for her literature, such homage for her valour, as this glorious Mother of Nations. . . . And has any land suffered as our India has suffered? . . .

After a history of millennia, stretching far back out of the ken of mortal eyes; having lived with, but not died with, the mighty civilisations of the Past; having seen them rise and flourish and decay, until only their sepulchres remained, deep buried in earth's crust; having wrought,

and triumphed, and suffered, and having survived all changes unbroken; India, who has been verily the Crucified among Nations, now stands on this her Resurrection morning, the Immortal, the Glorious, the Ever-Young; and India shall soon be seen, proud and self-reliant, strong and free, the radiant Splendour of Asia, as the Light and the Blessing of the World.

Nations as well as individuals need some charge of exultation to sustain them and cope with the defeats and heartbreaks in which life, whether of individuals or collectivities, abounds. Annie Besant's words were deliberately chosen to communicate a new elan and sense of exultation to the Congress at a time when many of its leaders were involved in inane debate over trivial constitutional technicalities and even petty manoeuvrings aimed at establishing their claims as valid interlocutors in discussions over Indian reforms with Montagu and Chelmsford. They were meant to—and did—lift their minds and eyes to a larger vision of India's destiny. For her personally it was beyond doubt her finest hour from which the misunderstandings and misconceptions that were soon to arise could in no way detract anything in any long-term perspective. But even in the evolution of the Congress as one of the most, if not the most, important national liberation movements of our times it marked a significant psychological transition from what it had been in the previous three decades and what it was soon to become.

Otherwise the Calcutta Congress, which was held more or less concurrently with the annual session of the All-India Muslim League, no doubt to underline that the consensus reached at Lucknow held firm, was one of consolidation rather than any bold new departures, though there were some new initiatives. Altogether there were twenty-three resolutions on the agenda, the last three of them being formal as indeed were the first four. As every year, there was the death of old veterans to mourn—of Dadabhai Naoroji and Abdul Rasul, a Muslim nationalist, whom the condolence resolution described as "a man of the highest integrity of character, of noble devotion to duty and of the purest and most stainless patriotism, one who laboured strenuously to unite the Hindus and Mohammedans of this country in one

bond of loving service to their country, forgetful of all differences of race, language and religion."

As for Dadabhai Naoroji, he was no ordinary Congress veteran. He was one of the founding fathers of the Congress and had thrice presided over its annual sessions—the last time at Calcutta in 1906 when he was already over eighty. He had died at the end of June at his retreat in Varsova just outside Bombay. For the last ten years of his life he had taken no active part in Indian politics or public life in general. But his contribution to both had been immense. The condolence resolution spoke of "his saintly character, his private worth and public virtues" which "will for all time to come be an example and an inspiration to the people of India." By some curious oversight Baikunthanath Sen had not referred to the death of the Grand Old Man of Indian politics, but Annie Besant did not forget to place him in the gallery of "Immortals" who "in Swinburne's noble verse, are the stars which lead us to liberty's altar:

These, O men, shall ye honour,
Liberty only and these.
For thy sake and for all men's and mine,
Brother, the Crowns of them shine,
Lighting the way to her shrine,
That our eyes may be fastened upon her.
That our hands may encompass her knees."

This was a fitting tribute to one who belonged truly to the movement of enlightenment in India and contributed to the Congress more light than heat although the selfless devotion with which he served it and the Indian cause was not wanting in a sustaining passion. What is more, he was among the first of the few who equipped the Congress movement with the sharp and cutting weapon of the economic critique of British imperialism in India.

The two condolence resolutions were followed by one of reflexive assurances of deep loyalty to the Throne and "unswerving allegiance to the British connection" which, it was contended, the people of India, were firmly resolved to maintain "at all hazards and at all costs." In the next resolution "a most cordial"

welcome was extended to Montagu and hope was voiced that "his visit will be crowned with success and that it will convince him of the supreme necessity for the establishment of responsible government in this country." The assurances and welcoming words were no doubt sincerely meant, though they were also in part tactical and intended to dissociate the Congress from the propaganda being put out by Kaiser's Germany and the German Social Democrats who were taunting the British Government that if it believed in self-determination, then "How about Ireland and Egypt? And what about India [to quote the German Socialist leader, Scheidemann]?"

The fifth resolution was less cordial. It urged on the Government "the immediate release of Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali who have remained incarcerated since October, 1914, and are now kept interned because of religious scruples which they hold in common with the whole of Islam in India and elsewhere and which are not incompatible with loyalty to the King-Emperor." Gandhi had begun to interest himself in their case and had, in fact, tried to visit them in their internment at Chhindwara as early as April 1916 but had been refused permission by the authorities. He had, however, continued to correspond with them intermittently. As for Annie Besant, she knew what internment meant, having been an internee herself though for a much shorter period. She could hardly be indifferent to their plight and made a feeling reference to "Our Interned Brothers" towards the end of her address, saying: "For three and a quarter long years they have been withdrawn from public life, and condemned to the living death of internment. To high-spirited and devoted patriots, no punishment could be more galling...."

Calling for their release in a separate and distinct resolution, instead of including this demand in the wider resolution—number nine on the order paper—which dealt with the issue of internments and coercive laws and regulations in general, was obviously intended as a gesture of fraternal solidarity with the Muslim League. This was the more necessary because the Muslim League had deliberately elected the younger of the Ali Brothers, Mohamed Ali, as President of its annual session, which was held at Calcutta two days after the Congress session,

and by so doing provoked the wrath, or at least extreme displeasure, of the Government. To underline the sanction behind its resolution, it was Tilak himself who moved it, and addressing the Muslim League session on the last day of the year, Gandhi, speaking in Urdu, assured his audience that the Hindus were "to a man" with them in the agitation for the release of the Ali Brothers and other Muslim internees; and further urged everyone, whether a Mussalman or a Hindu, to tell the Government that if they did not release them (the Ali Brothers), they ought themselves to be interned with them—an indication that he was already contemplating a civil disobedience campaign on the issue.

At Calcutta the Congress returned to the old device of an "omnibus" resolution which had fallen in desuetude for many a year. Resolution number ten listed most of the items for which it had been pleading in vain. Presumably it was meant to be a kind of *aide-memoire* to the Government at a time when, in the Indian journalistic jargon, the future of India was "on the anvil." But, inevitably, the interest was focused on resolution number twelve. It embodied the main demand of the Congress which was to be endorsed the same week by the Muslim League subject to certain not unreasonable safeguards for the secular and religious interests of the Muslim community. After expressing its "grateful satisfaction" over the statement made by the Secretary of State for India in August that year, the Congress urged "the necessity for the immediate enactment of a Parliamentary statute providing for the establishment of Responsible Government in India, the full measure to be attained within a time-limit to be fixed in the statute itself at an early date." As "the first step in the process", it wanted, "the Congress-League Scheme of Reforms... to be immediately introduced."

In the next resolution it lamented as it had been doing for nearly two decades the "disabilities" under which British Indians of South Africa and East Africa laboured and which "materially" affected their trade and rendered "their residence difficult" and restricted their movement "to and in these parts of the Empire... unjustly and unduly." It hoped that "the local authorities will realise their responsibility to the Indians" and reminded them that "in spite of disabilities" they had "taken their full

share in the war by raising corps and otherwise" The resolution was moved, needless to say by one best qualified to speak for the Indian diaspora in South and East Africa—Gandhi.

If resolution number thirteen was a repeat of what the Congress had been saying year after year since the beginning of the century, the fifteenth resolution on the agenda was unique and not only broke new ground but ventured into what had been until then forbidden territory. It was unique in the sense that it was not addressed to the Government or even to the field workers in the Congress organisation, but to "the people of India." What is more, it took up an issue of crucial social reform which touched the very heart of any attempt at serious reconstruction of Indian society.

Not that the Congress leaders had been indifferent to social reforms. On the contrary, some of them had been in the forefront of the movement of social reformation and it had become almost customary for a social conference to be held at the same time or immediately after the Congress session. An All-India Social Conference, for instance, was scheduled to be held on December 27 simultaneously with the Congress session at Calcutta, but was postponed till December 31 when Gandhi presided over it. But the founding fathers of the Congress, including Dadabhai Naoroji, considered it impolitic for it to get directly involved in questions of social reform which might prove divisive at a time when what was needed was the widest measure of national consensus to lend weight to its political demands on the British Government. The lifting of this self-imposed inhibition by inclusion in the Congress programme of call for justice and removal of "all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character" was the first clear recognition on the part of the Congress leadership that the movements of social and political reforms could not be kept in separate compartments and must merge one with the other. The resolution foreshadowed in a very real sense the Gandhian phase of the Congress movement.

Another significant—even fateful—decision was taken at Calcutta. In her address Annie Besant had remarked, "There is also much work to do in helping the people to prepare themselves for the new powers which will be placed in their hands.

And for this, the work must be done in the vernaculars of each Province, as only by their mother-tongue can the heart and brain of the masses be reached." This, again, seemed to connect with the Gandhian argument on the language problem. The twentieth resolution was the first step towards its practical implementation. It laid down, in response to what the Congress workers in the region had been urging for some time, "that the Telugu Districts in the Madras Presidency, Sind in the Bombay Presidency, and Delhi with Ajmer-Merwara and British Rajputana, be constituted into separate Congress circles."

This meant that in organising its own constituent units, the Congress had accepted the linguistic principle as the determining factor in contrast to the British policy which had been determined by administrative convenience, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the system of elaborate checks and balances as between the various linguistic groups which enabled the Raj to play one against the other and thus ensure for itself the role of the ultimate arbiter. The Congress resolution was theoretically perfect. Linguistic redistribution of the country was undoubtedly one of the necessary conditions for the different regions to develop their full potential, both culturally and otherwise. However, there was a negative side to this coin which was apparently not realised at the time, partly because insufficient thought had been given to the consequences and there had been no opportunity of testing the concept of linguistically homogeneous units on the ground.

The negative aspect was that in a country, like India, where over millennia there had been virtually unrestricted movement of populations across linguistic as well as political frontiers, the linguistic pattern in all but the most remote and isolated regions had become extremely chequered. The creation of discrete linguistic political and administrative units, therefore, presented immense difficulties. For any such redistribution still left sizeable pockets of linguistic minorities in practically every region; and these would need to be assured that their linguistic and cultural identity would not be put in jeopardy in the process. This in turn was fraught with the possibility of opening up a whole new area of hazards fertile in endless linguistic arguments and rivalries, political tensions and even conflicts.

Some other organisational decisions taken at Calcutta were less fraught with the possibility of future trouble. Annie Besant was keen to have C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, a brilliant and highly ambitious man who was associated with her and admired her, as one of the Congress General Secretaries. But the constitution of the Congress provided for only two General Secretaries. Consequently, a resolution—number eight on the agenda—was passed which, among other things, allowed for the Congress to have three General Secretaries. It was at Calcutta, moreover, that the question of a National Flag was seriously taken up and a committee appointed to recommend a design. It included among its members Rabindranath Tagore's painter brother, Abanindranath Tagore. It seems, however, that the committee never met and, as Dr. Sitaramayya relates, "the old Home Rule League flag virtually became the Congress flag, with the *Charkha* [spinning wheel] added on it later on" until, fourteen years later, the Flag Committee changed the red horizontal strip to saffron colour.

Finally, the Calcutta Congress tentatively established a new British political connection. Ever since its inception, the Congress had close links with eminent British Liberals if not the Liberal Party. Indeed, the Congress Committee in London gave the impression of being recruited almost wholly from the members of the National Liberal Club, Whitehall. However, Annie Besant before she was drawn to the "Secret Doctrine" and got absorbed in the affairs of the Theosophical Society, had been associated with the working class struggle in Britain, the Fabians and Radicals like Charles Bradlaugh. A Home Rule for India League, set up in London in June 1916, as already noted, had Labour Party members, like George Lansbury, on it. Tilak had never been altogether satisfied with the way in which the Committee of Indian National Congress in London seemed to rely almost exclusively on the Liberals. Although very far from being attracted to Socialism, he was anxious to broaden the base of support for the Indian cause in Britain and elsewhere in the West and the Labour Party, though already a junior member of the British establishment, naturally presented itself to him as a possible ally, or at least a sympathiser.

In this view he was influenced considerably by Joseph Bap-

tista, one of his staunch lieutenants in the Home Rule League. Baptista had gone to Britain ahead of Tilak's own planned visit, partly in connection with the prosecution of his case for defamation against Valentine Chirol but also to mobilize public opinion, and specifically radical opinion, in favour of India. He had been sending enthusiastic reports back home on how good the prospects were of winning over the Labour Party and the Trade Union movement to the Indian cause. Indeed, N.C. Kelkar, another loyal lieutenant of Tilak, had telegraphed to Annie Besant on the eve of the Congress session in Calcutta the text of a cable he had received from Baptista:

Barrister Baptista wires me from London as follows: Transmit following Congress President. Congratulations and best wishes Congress success. Magnificent Labour response everywhere. Genuine sympathy with aspirations of Indian Nationalism. Twenty Trades and Labour Councils, including Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, representing over 200,000 members have pledged themselves to support Home Rule for India. Hull Resolution on Agenda of Labour Party Conference recommends new constitution on lines of South African constitution with Provincial Autonomy with power for people to elect their own Governments to be brought into operation within 20 years. *Times* calls resolution a newcomer on Labour agenda. Inform Congress suitable occasion.

Baptista, obviously, was carried away by the manner in which his "eloquent and convincing arguments" in his presentation of the case for India had been received by his Labour and Trade Union audiences. But his excitement over the Hull resolution on the agenda of the Labour Party Conference to be held at Nottingham early in the New Year, envisaging power for the Indian people to elect their own Government within twenty years, was unlikely to be shared by Tilak or Annie Besant. She, in fact, had suggested in her address that the Congress "should ask the British Government to pass a Bill during 1918, establishing Self-Government in India on lines resembling those of the Commonwealth of Australia [significantly, with her acute political sense, and unlike the Labourites of Hull, she had not taken the South

African Constitution which disenfranchised the majority of the population as her model], the Act to come into force at a date to be laid down therein, preferably 1923, at the latest 1928, the intermediate five or ten years being occupied with the transference of the Government from British to Indian hands, maintaining the British tie as in the Dominions." It is true, however, that in the resolution which the Calcutta Congress adopted the time scale for the transfer of power was not precisely specified and was left open to negotiation. Nevertheless the resolution did insist that the time-limit for the attainment of plenary Responsible Government must be set down in "the statute itself at an early date". This was, presumably, to rule out the possibility of backsliding by the British Government later on.

However, the Congress was glad of any support that it could win in Britain and it passed a resolution—number nineteen on the list—requesting "Joseph Baptista and H.S.L. Polak, both now in England, to convey to the Labour Party in annual session assembled, its cordial welcome of their proffered help in obtaining the passage through Parliament of a statute embodying the grant of Responsible Government to India." The resolution authorised Annie Besant "to send a cablegram to Sir William Wedderburn Bart, Chairman of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress", of the decision of the Congress to appoint Baptista and Polak as the Congress representatives at the forthcoming Labour Congress in response to the invitation from the Labour Party.

The Congress was, partly at any rate, reciprocating. For as Annie Besant in her speech mentioned, Major D. Graham Pole was present at the Calcutta Congress as "messenger" to the Congress from the Labour Party. She went on to hope "that a link will thus be formed which will draw closer together the United Kingdom and India. For this, as well as for the coming of the Secretary of the State to India, will 1917 be marked as a red-letter year." But it is not clear from what she said whether Major Graham Pole was attending the Calcutta Congress session as a representative of the British Labour Party or as a fraternal delegate from the Home Rule for India League set up in England in the summer of 1916 of which he was the General Secretary.

Perhaps Graham Pole's status at the Congress session was

left deliberately vague and ambiguous so as not to commit the Labour Party to specific and explicit support of the Indian National Congress and its policies. Although still very much a junior partner of the British imperial establishment, the British Labour leadership seemed already well-versed in those tricks of the trade to which it was to resort when it eventually came to power and had to take decisions. At any rate, it is evident from a message which the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress and the National Executive of the Labour Party sent to the Russian people early in January 1918 that, for all its rhetoric, the Labour leadership was not prepared to stray very far from the position on India of the British Government, in which it was represented:

We accept the principle of self-determination also for India and the other dependencies of the British Empire, though we believe that the record of British Government here gives little occasion for reproach, and that the application of the principle is peculiarly difficult. We intend to meet this by a very much more rapid development of self-government. Our purpose is to raise these dependencies to the status of Dominions. We cannot give them the status at once, because it is impossible to end in a day the position which has been created by a long period of British administration.

This was an early exercise in Orwellian news-speak and the term "rapid" in practice came to mean going as slowly as possible and giving as little as possible—and often too late. However, that may be, as it turned out Baptista was unable to be present at the Labour Party Conference held at the Albert Hall, Nottingham, towards the end of January 1918, due to some confusion over the day on which he was expected to be there. We learn from a report in *India* that "he had received no intimation, until it was too late, that 'fraternal greetings' were to be delivered on that date [Tuesday, January 23]. He had made all arrangements to be present, even to the extent of cancelling meetings already advertised at Glasgow, and Dundee, and stopping the fixing of other meetings." But Polak, one of Gandhi's

associates from the South African days who had visited India more than once and spoken at the Congress sessions on the issue of the treatment of Indians in South Africa, was present at Nottingham and addressed the Conference. He was given "a tremendous ovation" and Ramsay MacDonald himself moved a vote of thanks to the speaker. More: the Conference sent to India "a message of good cheer in her struggle for liberty." This sounded great, but committed the Labour Party to very little, if anything. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

TOWARDS PARTING OF THE WAYS

For the most part for India and the Congress as for the world in general, though not for exactly the same reason, 1918 was a year of waiting for some kind of a *denouement* which seemed imminent and yet somehow proved elusive as days and months passed. The Calcutta session had reflected and, indeed, ended on a note of what can best be described as *attentisme*. The last resolution it passed, as in the previous years, fixed the venue for the next session—Delhi. However, unlike what had been hitherto the practice, it did not fix the date when it would be held. The date was left open for obvious reason. It was waiting on events—or rather one particular event. The event for which it was waiting was the unveiling of the scheme for constitutional reforms promised in Montagu's statement of August 20, 1917, and which he and his colleagues had come out to India to fashion in consultation with the Government of India and after listening to the views of various leaders of Indian opinion, authentic or drummed up for the occasion.

For the wider world the constitutional future of India was a relatively peripheral concern, if at all, the British Empire having come to be accepted at its own valuation of its legitimacy. Admittedly, German propaganda was harping a good deal on the position of India—and Ireland and Egypt—not necessarily because Germany wanted to see them as free and sovereign nations, but to expose the hollowness of the British claim that the war was being waged to establish the right of self-determination of peoples. This certainly embarrassed the British ruling establishment, but even for the British people it was a side-issue, and the prevailing mood of agonising *attentisme* hinged on the question when the War which had become one of attrition and mutual slaughter was going to end.

The entry of the United States into the fray on their side in the spring of 1917 had raised hopes of an early and victorious end. But as the summer came and went, and the autumn, too, and winter again set in without any break in the stalemate, the gloom deepened—especially after the collapse of the Russian Front and the opening of negotiations between Kaiser's Germany and the nascent Soviet State. Montagu even thought a negotiated settlement with Germany a distinct possibility. In an entry in his *An Indian Diary* at the end of 1917, he reflected:

I cannot help thinking that everything seems to... show the likelihood of the War petering out now that Russia has set an example. I hope it may not be so, but once people begin to negotiate with anybody the example may be infectious.

His apprehension that the War may peter out was belied by the course of events. The Russian example did not prove infectious. On the contrary, the killing went on unabated and Allied fortunes over the next three months of winter showed no signs of improvement. Then came the physical and psychological shock of the massive offensive which the Germans were able to mount early in the spring of 1918 and which made considerable headway. It dispelled any notion that the War was all over bar the shouting and the victory parade. News from the war fronts purveyed in India was, inevitably, filtered if not doctored. But Montagu had access to official reports which were more accurate and deepened his despondency. Towards the end of March he wrote gloomily in his *Diary*:

The news of the German offensive makes one realise, as one has always realised, that in all work for after the War one is building on what may be the sand. Are we going to have an Empire after the War? I can honestly say that my work these six months has helped, because it has kept India quiet. But what is happening in France?

However, the question which was being asked by a section of the Tory Press in Britain with increasing impatience was not

what was happening in France—that was obvious enough from the casualty figures—but what was happening in India. It had long been grumbling that the Government of India was not taking the War seriously enough; that British bureaucrats in Delhi and Simla to say nothing of the Boxwallas as in Bombay and Calcutta were continuing to savour the *dolce vita* while Britain was being bled white. With the heavy toll on the Western Front there were demands that India must be made to do more financially as well as provide more man-power by intensifying the recruiting drive. Early in April Lloyd George sent a telegram to the Viceroy which virtually said so in so many words and at the same time obliquely warned that the enemy was almost at the gate, or rather the Khyber Pass :

At this time, when the intention of the rulers of Germany to establish a tyranny not only over all Europe, but over Asia as well, has become transparently clear, I wish to ask the Government and people of India to redouble their efforts. . . . I have no doubt that India will add to the laurels it has already won, and will equip itself on an even greater scale than at present to be the bulwark which will save Asia from the tide of oppression and disorder which it is the object of the enemy to achieve.

To this rather flattering message—the casting of India in the role of a saviour of Asia from the tide of oppression and disorder by a British Prime Minister was something new—the Viceroy had sent an appropriately loyal reply on behalf of the Government over which he presided and the people of India, assuring Lloyd George that “India had been stirred to the depths by the noble sacrifices being made by the British people”; that “your trumpet call at this crisis will not fall on deaf ears”; that he felt confident “it will wake the princes and the people’s leaders to a keener sense” of the gravity of the situation; and that he looked “to the princes and people of India [apparently not to their leaders] for the fullest effort to safeguard the soil of the Motherland, against the attempts of a cruel and unscrupulous enemy.”

This also was something new. Hitherto at least the term “Motherland” in reference to India had not come easily if at all

to proconsular and bureaucratic lips. But adversity has its uses, sweet as well as salutary. As for the leaders of the Indian people, they must have regarded it as rather a backhanded compliment to them that they needed waking. Almost since the outbreak of the War even the Moderates among them had been telling the British Government both in India and Britain that the main obstacle to the mobilisation of India's resources was the bureaucracy and its congenital mistrust of the Indian people. That was part of the message spelt out again at the Calcutta Congress and if it did not register itself on the Viceregal mind it was only because Chelmsford—and unfortunately by now Montagu, too,—were too busy listening to, and believing, their trusted informants (some of them Indians to be sure) who told them that the session had been “a failure” and that Annie Besant was being deserted by her associates.

Whether or not she was being deserted by her associates in the Congress and her Home Rule League is not easy to establish at this distance in time. Undoubtedly, later that year all manner of differences, political as well as temperamental, were to surface between her and some of her colleagues. But contrary to what Chelmsford and Montagu were told and eagerly believed, these flowed from reasons which were the exact obverse of what they imagined. What is more, the Calcutta session of the Congress, far from being a failure, was a personal triumph for her. At the end of her address, she had made it perfectly clear to the assembled delegates that she had no intention of hibernating in between the sessions. The duty of the leader, she said, “is to lead”. In other words, she intended to be a very presidential President. As Dr. Sitaramayya, who had the great advantage of being a witness to the era whatever his limitations as an historian, wrote: “Mrs. Besant... took the view that the President of the year's session of the Congress was President for the whole year. This was not a new idea, by any means, but she was the first to act upon it.”

As it turned out, her presidential term was to be somewhat truncated. But while it lasted, she not only set an example of indefatigable personal effort as she had promised: she also tried to impart the same dynamism to the Congress at all levels of the organisation. “At the very first meeting of the All-India

Congress Committee held immediately after the Congress on 30th December, 1917," Dr. Sitaramayya has recorded, "the question of raising a permanent fund for the Congress was considered, and further, Provincial Committees were called upon to appoint a Working Committee for carrying on educative and propagandist work in India and England. The months that followed were months of incessant activity...."

They were. *Attentisme* under her stewardship was not allowed to become inertia. She was anxious to build up popular understanding of and sanction for the Congress-League scheme. Taking her cue from Gandhi even though she never wholly succeeded in establishing a rapport with him, she had said in her address at Calcutta:

Mr. Gandhi's capital idea of a monster petition for the Congress-League scheme, for which signatures were only to be taken after careful explanation of its scope and meaning, has proved to be an admirable method of political propaganda. The soil in the Madras Presidency had been well prepared by a wide distribution of popular literature and the Propaganda Committee had scattered over the land in the vernaculars a simple explanation of Home Rule. The result of active work in the villages during the last year showed itself in the gathering in less than a month of nearly a million signatures. They have been taken in duplicate, so that we have a record of a huge number of people interested in Home Rule, and the hosts will increase in ever widening circles, preparing for the coming Freedom.

It was characteristic of her that she was not content merely to issue instructions to others to do the hard field work. She herself undertook a strenuous campaign of tours throughout the country to build up the momentum of support for the Congress-League plan of reforms as the stepping stone to full self-government. "The first five months of 1918," Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who was by no means among her uncritical devotees, writes in his history of the Congress, "were a period of restless

activity for Mrs. Besant. An idea of her continuous tours is given in the pamphlet on 'Home Rule Leagues'."

The conduct of the day-to-day functions of the Congress was by no means easy. The authorities resorted to a whole bag of tricks to create difficulties and hurdles for it though they were inhibited to some degree in imposing any blanket ban on Congress activities by the presence of the Secretary of State for India in the country and uncertainty about the future. Thus when the All-India Congress Committee met in Delhi on February 23, 1918, it was without Tilak who, in Montagu's own assessment, was at the time by far the most powerful political figure in India. He could not attend because he had been barred by a prohibitory order from entering the territories of the Punjab and Delhi. True, he had been to Delhi at the end of previous November, but that was under a special and conditional dispensation so that he could meet Montagu as part of the Congress and Home Rule League deputations, the condition being that he should not address meetings or receive deputations. But no such indulgence was extended to him in February, despite the fact that a deputation waited on the Viceroy to urge him to lift the ban on Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal which declared the Punjab and Delhi to be out of bounds to them.

The A.I.C.C. meeting in Delhi was held in the wake of a bereavement. Sir William Wedderburn had died on January 25, 1918, at his country home at Meredith (Gloucestershire). The funeral took place at Tibberton churchyard nearby on January 29. By a strange coincidence his last public appearance in London had been a few weeks earlier at a meeting in memory of his friend and fellow-worker in the cause of India, Dadabhai Naoroji. As *India* reported, the weather was very bad and he had contracted a chill which kept him confined to his rooms on return. He seemed to be on the mend, but complications set in on January 22 and he went into a coma from which he never recovered.

Although technically Wedderburn was not a founding father of the Congress—at the time of the First session of the Congress he was still in Government service and could not participate in its work, but he was active behind the scenes as we know—he had served the Congress with a rare devotion for upward of three decades. He had twice presided over its annual sessions:

the first time in Bombay in 1889 when Bradlaugh had attended it as a guest, and then, again, at its Twenty-fifth session in Allahabad in 1910. He had been the Chairman of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress and had kept its organ *India* going, often at his own expense, for a quarter of a century. A man of total dedication to India and the long-term interests of the British nation, with Hume and Henry Cotton, he had made an invaluable contribution to the Congress movement during its formative phase and been instrumental in ensuring that it should steer clear of xenophobia and racial bitterness. While he was still alive, Surendranath Banerjea had said:

Milton sang of his life as self-consecrated in the service of God. Of Sir William Wedderburn we say that his is a dedicated life in the service of India . . . If his lot had been cast in more superstitious times, his contemporaries would have regarded him as the incarnation of some great Hindu Mahatma born again in the flesh for the well-being of his people.

This was a sentiment which Gokhale had echoed at a luncheon at the National Liberal Club in less soulful but no less poignant words: "India has held his whole heart to the exclusion of every other subject. . . . His faith in the people of India is, indeed, a part of his great personality. He has believed in us in spite of the obloquy of his own countrymen. He has believed in us in spite of ourselves. . . . The picture of this great, venerable *rishi* of modern times, who has done this work for us is a picture that is too beautiful and too inspiring for words: it is a picture to dwell upon lovingly and reverentially and it is a picture to contemplate in silence." In a brief and moving editorial note after his death, *India* neatly summed up the essence of Wedderburn's philosophy of life and work in words which could not but touch to the quick the hearts of its Indian readers. "He sought not the 'fruits of action' in the spirit of the *Bhagavad Gita*," it wrote, and went on to remark that in looking back on his "beautiful and rich life, we find its keynote in the following lines from Lowell:

'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that failed not by the way:
Virtue treads not the paths that end in the grave."

In mourning his death the A.I.C.C. members were in a very real sense mourning the passing away of an era. The condolence resolution was also to prove to be a kind of requiem on the British Committee of the Indian National Congress of which he had been the life and soul. For although it was to linger on for two years or more after his death, its effective life lay behind it and the well tempered intelligence that guided it had departed. In any case, the Congress leaders meeting at Delhi were preoccupied with thoughts of the future which seemed so imminent and yet somehow was, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "powerless to be born". They took two important decisions: the first was that a special session of the Congress be held, and following it a deputation be sent to England. Allahabad and Lucknow were suggested as the likely venue. But the date of the session—the first ever of its kind to be called—was left open. It was to be soon after the publication of the Report on Constitutional Reforms for which India was impatiently waiting. They were quite in the dark as to when that would be.

Curiously, the man on whom rested the primary responsibility for producing the Report—Montagu—was equally in the dark as to when, if at all, he would be able to deliver it. For all practical purposes his round of interviews with representatives of Indian political opinion and other exploratory work were over by the beginning of January. But that was a very small and the easier part of his task. He was also having some difficulty with his colleagues in getting them to concentrate on the work in hand and to do their home work. He complained, for instance, that Bhupendranath Basu would not go through the mass of documents and memoranda which were presented to them—or, perhaps, was unable to because he couldn't keep awake. As Montagu was to remark later, "He cannot read two pages without sleeping." This irritated Montagu though it is hard not to sympathise with Basu, considering that much of the literature he was expected to go through was not distinguished by its high coefficient of readability and some of it was of egregious and

repetitious tedium.

However, his greatest headache was not the tendency of some of his colleagues to sleep over the documents he wanted them to read and inwardly digest, but the incurable and perverse recalcitrance of officialdom. Chelmsford seemed to be in two minds when he had a mind at all. The members of his Executive Council, and especially the influential ones like Vincent and Meyer, were devious or stubborn, and sometimes both. A majority of the provincial satraps was dead set against any suggestion of constitutional mobility and the more powerful among them, like O'Dwyer and Pentland, were highly allergic to the idea of having representative democratic institutions even at the provincial level, O'Dwyer loudly and pugnaciously so, and Pentland with his sullen taciturnity. Assorted bureaucratic hierarchs who were called in from time to time to help added to the general confusion. Montagu was unwilling to admit that, jointly and individually, these men were bent on thwarting his good intentions through a kind of attrition and that any proposals to which they agreed would be nugatory to the point where they would have little chance of acceptance even by moderate Indian politicians. But that should have been obvious.

He alternated between brief moods of elation when the whole scheme seemed to be within his grasp and fits of depression when the prize tantalizingly receded. Early in January he wrote despairingly, "I do not know what to do; I do not know where to turn for help. The whole thing, just as it looked most promising, has tumbled about my ears." Yet three weeks later, on February 7 after what he called "a black Wednesday", the prospect looked rosy to him. "Our proposals in principle," he noted, "are complete. We are engaged on the writing of the report, which will be complete by the end of this month." But the end of February came and the end of March, too, with everybody still at cross-purposes. At Dehra Dun where he had gone with the Viceroy and their team, he was still making heavy weather over preparation of the final draft of the report:

We have spent almost every day... continuously from ten in the morning till eight at night in revising the report... Chelmsford has sat through the whole proceedings, taking

his turn in reading out aloud the paragraphs, and confining himself to such speculations as to whether the Government of India is a plural or a single noun. Marris [Inspector General of Police in U.P. whose literary talents had been enlisted by Montagu in drafting the report] has fought consistently for the right to say disagreeable things about people: I have fought to avoid it. . . . There have been long arguments, and I have had much to suffer from Marris's temper, which culminated on Friday by my determining that I could not go on under a situation in which I was left to argue with him, Chelmsford sitting in judgement or being appealed to as a sort of judge, as to which of the opposing counsel was right. So I lost my temper, spoke violently, received apologies from him, and things went better thereafter. . . .

There was a terrible incident on Thursday, which cost us, I take it, three days in concluding our labours. Vincent was invited to make his comments on the report. He began to complain about suppression of truth, and it soon became obvious that every alteration in the report which we had made to which Marris did not assent had been reported to Vincent, and Vincent had been asked to fight the battle over again. Chelmsford lost his temper almost immediately, with the result that Vincent put up his papers and left, saying that he had no responsibility in the matter and would do no more. I had to make the peace, and it took me some time. . . .

Had they but known it, the Indian leaders might have drawn some consolation that while the British intelligence agents, both paid and unpaid, were delighting their principals with reports of growing differences on the Indian side and, especially, the widening rift between Annie Besant and her colleagues in the Congress and the Home Rule Leagues, it was not plain sailing on the British side either and that Montagu and Chelmsford were not finding it easy to work harmoniously with their advisers and counsellors. Nor, it may be added, among themselves. At the very last minute after the report had been finalized at the Viceregal Lodge in Simla—Montagu rather aptly described it

as "exactly like a Scotch hydro"—another awkward question arose.

As Montagu has related in his *Diary*, Chelmsford came up to him with "a problem: was his name or mine to appear first on the report?" He was rather apologetic about the whole thing. "He told me that it was my scheme and my report; that the reforms would always be known as the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, but that it being in India, he felt he must sign first. What an interesting problem, fraught with what consequences to a great Empire, requiring our serious attention!", Montagu was to comment in his *Diary*. However, he did not respond to Chelmsford's plea with a direct "yes" or "no". Instead, he seemed to play for time by enlarging on all the uncertainties which still lay ahead. Chelmsford, he noted, "looked rather sorry for himself, but agreed. As a matter of fact, I made up my mind to reconsider the situation and see what could be done."

And reconsider he did, coming up with the compromise suggestion to the Viceroy three days later "that our two signatures should be attached to the report side by side. It seems ridiculous, but it made him much happier, and, after all, it is a unique occasion which demands a unique form of signature." All the same, in this, for Montagu "ridiculous" game of one-upmanship, Chelmsford managed to have his way to all intents and purposes. For we learn from Montagu's entry in his *Diary* for Monday, April 22, 1918, "I was sent for by Chelmsford. I found three copies of the report spread on his table, and Lady Chelmsford in Red Cross uniform standing by him, and Maffey, [J.L., Private Secretary to the Viceroy], tall and silent, next to her. There was one copy for the Cabinet, and two bound in blue leather one for him and one for me. He had already signed all three. I signed, and we shook hands. I wondered whether he was still thinking of the order of the signatures and had determined to sign first."

Thus was sealed and signed an exercise which in the still-evolving mythology of the post-colonial—or, as some would have it, the neo-colonial—epoch is being increasingly presented by some of the British historians as the first decisive act in the unfolding scenario of the "transfer of power" to the successor states of an Empire built in a "fit of absent-mindedness" but shed

according to a well-planned and phased design of gradual and constitutional devolution of authority. However that may be, Montagu left Simla the same afternoon, walking down "the steep hill to Summer Hill station" with Lord and Lady Chelmsford. "As the trolly [rail car] left," Montagu wrote in his *Diary*, "the band at Verney's suggestion, but partly to show its devotion to Parsons, played what somebody fortunately told me was 'Auld Lang Syne'." Two days later "at twelve o'clock precisely" he left India aboard the H.M.S. *Dufferin*, wondering whether he would see the country which, in his own words, he "loved", and where he was "happiest", again.

In the rather disingenuous back and forth which he had with Chelmsford over who was to have precedence in signing their joint masterpiece, Montagu had stressed the imponderables in the situation and said: "It was too early yet to say that there would be any reforms arising out of the report, that that depended upon the action taken by him in India and by me at home. We had only begun our difficulties. I might be out of office in a few weeks; he might have done some internment affair which would upset the apple cart." The likely internment he had uppermost in his mind was that of Annie Besant or Tilak and possibly both. He had good reasons for thinking so. Chelmsford himself had told him that they might have to intern her again and even to deport her. Others, lower down the rungs of the bureaucratic ladder, were even more eager and almost itching to muzzle and effectively incapacitate her in some way. Nor would Montagu have objected to their taking any action against her. For although she had tried hard to win his sympathy—she had seen him a number of times and corresponded with him—somehow the two had never been able to establish even minimal rapport. However, the only reason why he felt any action against her was inadvisable was because it would make a martyr of her and enhance her political reputation which, he seemed persuaded, was rapidly on the decline. Only the day before he left Simla, he had written in his *Diary*:

By the by, Mrs. Besant is going to issue a telegram asking Indians to help in the War. It is a clever document which has roused the fury of the Services, because it uses the

Prime Minister's words about Ireland. Why should not they? She wants to get interned, and if she fails to accomplish this, she is going downhill so fast that she will disappear. But she is too clever for them, and they are too stupid to avoid her game. They are already beginning to consider where they shall deport her to, if they took power to deport under the Defence of India Act... .

He misjudged her motives completely. In fact, far from wanting to court internment or deportation, she was most anxious to avoid internment and deportation. This not only because as a realistic politician she did not wish to be interned and thus put *hors de combat* at what she believed to be a most critical juncture when the political future of India—her chosen Kurukshetra, or field of disinterested, righteous endeavour—was about to be decided. She was even more apprehensive of being deported and was determined to avoid it at all costs. For she had learnt it straight from the horse's mouth—the Viceroy himself—that if they could once get her out of the country they would never allow her to return. This largely explained some of the equivocal statements she made and ambiguous positions she took up during the spring and summer of 1918 which lost her the support of many of the Radicals in the Congress and even her own Home Rule League without necessarily endearing her to the Moderates.

As for Tilak, the authorities tried to put all manner of obstacles in his way through externment orders and ban on political speeches and thus provoke him into some act of rash defiance which would give them the pretext for prosecuting him or just interning him without having to go through the courts. But, as Montagu said of Annie Besant, he was "too clever" for them. He did not defy any prohibitory injunction and made carefully balanced speeches, urging people to enlist for military service and come to the help of an Empire at war and at the same time repeatedly stressed that the Indian people would willingly offer themselves as soldiers if they were assured that they were also fighting for India's freedom and not just freedom of others—an argument which was to be deployed by the Congress

again during the Second World War. However, after his plea reinforced by an interview G.S. Khaparde had with Chelmsford to lift the ban on his entry into Delhi territory to attend the All-India Congress Committee meeting at the end of February had been turned down, he probably felt that he could serve the Indian cause better elsewhere just then—and nowhere better than in the capital of the Empire, London.

The A.I.C.C. at its Delhi meeting had decided to send a deputation to England, but only after the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. Both Annie Besant and Tilak thought otherwise. Instead of waiting for the publication of the Report, they preferred their respective Home Rule League deputations to be in London as soon as possible. Already a number of Indian politicians were on their way to England or had arrived there, judging from a report in *India* of April 5, 1918. Somewhat unexpectedly, the authorities in India were rather forthcoming in issuing passports and travel facilities to Indian politicians of different persuasions and none who were eager to go to England, possibly because they thought they would be less bothersome there than in India as a high official of the Government of India was to argue a few months later. Some of Annie Besant's Home Rule League men were already on the way to London when Tilak started from Bombay at the head of a contingent of his own Home Rule League on March 27, 1918.

Apart from himself, the deputation consisted of Bipin Chandra Pal, N.C. Kelkar, G.S. Khaparde, and R.P. Karandikar. They were given a tremendous send off when they left Victoria Terminus for Madras *en route* to Colombo, although Tilak at the time had been involved in a controversy because of his equivocal conduct at the All-India Depressed Classes Conference three days earlier which he had attended and addressed, winning great applause for his statement that it is "a sin against God to say that a person is untouchable", and then refused to sign its manifesto declaring that "its signatories would not observe untouchability in their day-to-day life." They reached Colombo on April 2 and were expecting to embark for England on April 5. But at the last minute they were told that the boat they were to take would not be arriving till April 23. They tried

to book their passage on the *Lancashire* which was leaving earlier. However, on April 12, Tilak was informed by the office of the Colonial Secretary in Ceylon (as it then was) that the War Cabinet had decided against allowing them to go to Britain and they were to hand over their passports for cancellation.

If Montagu is to be believed this was a development which came as much of a surprise—even a shock—to Chelmsford as to Tilak and Indian opinion generally though not to the Home Department of the Government of India over which Vincent presided:

The Tilak incident was very characteristic. Passports were issued to him and his friends without reference to me, but in issuing them, it seems to me that the Government were clearly right. Tilak had to go home (meaning England) to fight the Chiror case; and to stop his expedition at the time that the papers are full of Lord Sydenham's activities would have been a fatal mistake. But, having allowed him to go home, either out of sheer malice or crass stupidity, the Home Department, without reference to the Viceroy, sent home a telegram containing so black a picture of Tilak's antecedents and probable activities that I do not wonder the Home Government were nervous. It seems a little strange, however, that they should have cancelled a passport given by a duly authorised authority without consulting him. However, it was done. I drafted for the Viceroy a telegram of protest, which was ultimately sent, with a request for reconsideration. It has failed; the Home Government refuse to let him sail, mainly on the ground that the General Staff will not have it; so that it seems that [General] Henry Wilson is governing England. I asked them to telegraph home accepting the Government's decision, and suggesting a stop being put upon Sydenham's [who headed a virulently anti-Indian lobby in England] organisation. This they won't do, and the only thing I am confident about is that they will handle Tilak stupidly when he returns.

He was right in this surmise. They did. But he was deceiving

himself in thinking that anybody in Delhi or Simla or the bureaucratic set-up generally wanted Sydenham's anti-India outfit—the Indo-British Association—to be curbed and muzzled. On the contrary, most of them were operating on the same wavelength and some of them were in covert, if not overt, collusion with it. Again, it was not just sheer malice against Tilak or crass stupidity which had motivated the Home Department of the Government of India—probably on the basis of information supplied by the C.I.D. which was headed by Cleveland (Sir C.R.) with whom Montagu got on famously—in transmitting a “black picture” of Tilak's “antecedents.” Malice and crass stupidity were certainly factors in their attitude towards Tilak. But there was something else which Montagu was not willing to admit though it should have been obvious to him—and, perhaps, was. They were engaged in a strategy aimed at revenge and sabotage: revenge against him personally for having gratuitously stirred up things and sabotage of any proposals for constitutional reforms that might eventually be placed before the British Parliament as a result of his labours in India.

This was to be done by fouling the political climate in India and Britain so that whatever reforms were proposed would not get a chance of being considered dispassionately and on their merits. Apart from all the internments and recourse to what would today be described as Police State methods, especially in Bengal and the Punjab, they seemed determined to provoke even the Moderates by repeated acts of petty discourtesy, pin-pricks and restrictions even against the tallest of Indian leaders and thus undo the attempts being made at the top to “rally the Moderates”. The cancellation of the passports of Tilak and his team—and they were lucky that they were turned back at Colombo while others, as we learn from Syud Hossain's letter in *India*, had their passports cancelled after they had already reached Gibraltar and had to find their way back at their own expense—was part of this calculated anticipatory spoiling game.

The affair of the cancellation of Tilak's passport led to considerable protest both in Britain and India. Questions were asked in the House of Commons by Ramsay MacDonald who urged reconsideration as Chelmsford had done, but only received a laconic and dusty negative answer. A protest meeting was held

in Bombay on April 8 over which Jinnah presided and at which he said that "the Home Government has ears but no eyes." It passed a resolution saying: "It is unfair and impolitic to refuse facilities to the trusted delegates of the Indian people to represent their cause before the British public in the face of the insidious campaign against the policy of self-government for India now being carried on by their opponents." The Bombay Branch of the Home Rule League of which Jinnah was the President authorised him to send a telegram to Lloyd George which stressed the "unfortunate effects" of the arbitrary cancellation of the passports of the delegation headed by Tilak. The All-India Congress Committee at its meeting at Bombay on May 3 also strongly protested against the act of the British Government. But these protests availed nothing.

On the contrary, those who had been instrumental in thwarting Tilak and others in reaching England and trying to counter Sydenham's anti-India campaign managed to persuade Chelmsford to add insult to an injury. During his last few days in Simla Montagu had written in his *Diary* quite a bit about the Durbar which the Viceroy was planning to hold in Delhi at the end of April. Montagu was keen to be present at it, or for a message from him to be read on the occasion. Important Indians also wished him to be there and a letter from Sir Dorab Tata had been passed on to the Viceroy to this effect by one of his Executive Councillors, Sir Claude Hill. But Chelmsford and his closest advisers among the bureaucratic cabal were determined to see that he was kept out: Chelmsford because he was afraid that Montagu with his panache might steal what was, after all, his very own show, and the cabal because they feared that Montagu's friendly rhetoric might make the Indian politicians even more uppish than they seemed to have become since his statement in the House of Commons the previous August. "It is a little astonishing," he wrote in his rueful innocence, "that it has never been suggested by a soul that I should speak at the Durbar."

However, even he was not astonished that, when the invitations were sent out to the princes and other notables of India summoning them to Delhi to take part in what Montagu had called a "Durbar", but, in fact, was "a War Conference", to raise more money and men for the War, neither Annie Besant

nor Tilak were included in the list of invitees. The exclusion of Annie Besant was a snub to her personally, but also to the Congress of which she was the President and which at that time was in a most co-operative frame of mind. As for Tilak, it is just conceivable that part of the reason why Chelmsford countenanced his exclusion was that there was a ban on his entry into Delhi and the Punjab; and while the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, Malcolm Hailey, a high flyer among the heavenborns, would have obliged by lifting, or rather suspending, the ban for the occasion, the "pugnacious" little Ulster Man who ruled the Punjab was more difficult to handle (and it was impossible to enter Delhi without having to traverse the Punjab as it then was).

Montagu did not care whether Annie Besant was invited or left out. But he considered Tilak's presence at the conference crucial. In the entry in his *Diary* for April 27—the day the conference was to take place—he wrote, presumably when he was already on the high seas on his way to London:

With regard to Tilak, if I were the Viceroy I would have had him at Delhi at all costs. He is at the moment probably the most powerful man in India, and he has it in his power, if he chooses, to help materially in War effort. If, on the other hand, he attached conditions of a political kind to his offers of help, as, indeed, he would, at such a conference things would be said to him which would for ever destroy his influence in India, at least, so I think. If he is not there, it will always be said that we refused to select the most powerful people. Tilak is already saying that in his speeches, and it would have completely taken the wind out of his sails if he had been invited as one of the leaders of Indian opinion....

Montagu was almost certainly mistaken in thinking that if they had invited him to the Delhi Conference and exposed him to opposition from some of the prize "loyalists" at their beck and call, the Government could have undermined his influence if he had proved intractable. Just then nothing could have taken the wind out of his sails except death which it did soon enough. By cancelling his passport and ignoring him ostentatiously in

their attempt to mobilize India's resources for the War which was still not won, they only succeeded in reinforcing his already powerful hold over the popular political mind. In this the reaction of Gandhi to this act of gratuitous discourtesy to Tilak was interesting and significant.

The more so because the stand he was taking at the time was rather peculiar and regarded by both the Moderates and the Radicals as eccentric and even illogical, although to him it appeared perfectly consistent with his principles. For him it was still the age of innocence in that he had not yet begun to question the moral legitimacy of the Raj in India. He, therefore, considered it logical and even ethically imperative to offer unconditional support to Britain in the moment of its peril. Hence his wholehearted participation in the recruiting campaign and his pleas to other Indian leaders, like Tilak, Annie Besant and Jinnah who linked their support for the war effort with certain reciprocal concessions, to do the same. It is besides the point whether or not his recruiting campaign was very effective; and the fact, quoted by Ms Judith M. Brown on the basis of a Bombay Police Abstract that the Nadiad Sub-Inspector of Police "could only report 120 recruits as a result of Gandhi's campaign" in 1918 is not strictly relevant. What mattered was the principle, not the statistics, though anybody knowing the traditions of the region would not be so dismissive of 120 recruits from Nadiad.

At the same time, however, Gandhi was prepared to take issue with the Government over specific questions where he was persuaded that its acts and policies were unjust and morally wrong. Dr. Judith M. Brown speaks in this context of his "ambivalent" attitude. Others, however, would regard his stand as ethically correct as well as consistent with common sense. At least over the struggle he had waged on behalf of the poor indigo cultivators of Champaran in Bihar even the authorities had acknowledged the legitimacy of the agitation he conducted by eventually conceding his demand for an inquiry into the grievances of the peasantry. Again, while fully backing the recruiting campaign, he had no hesitation in leading the peasants of Kaira in Gujarat whose crops had failed (thus compounding their misery after a plague epidemic and at a time of soaring prices due to war-time scarcity) in their movement of resistance

to the payment of revenue dues when their pleas for relief had been turned down by the authorities.

More: for more than a year he had been exercised over the continued internment of the Ali Brothers. At the Calcutta Congress (1917) their mother, a brave and remarkable woman who had been widowed when Mohamed Ali was only one year old, had attended the Congress session and received a standing ovation when the President, Annie Besant, introducing her to the audience, said: "She is a woman with a mother's love but with a lion's heart and she does not mourn. Rather, she rejoices that her sons are born worthy to serve their mother-country. She asks me to tell you that she was invited to the Moslem League [of which Mohamed Ali was the President in *absentia*] and that she would not go there without coming here first. For, she says that though the Mussalmans are her brothers in faith, all Indians are her brothers in country..." As related earlier, the Congress had passed a resolution urging the immediate release of Ali Brothers. Gandhi had been so moved by his meeting with their mother that on January 1, 1918, he had written to Maffey, Chelmsford's Private Secretary, that the Ali Brothers "should be discharged or should be properly tried and convicted" and requested that he "be allowed to go to Chhindwara and visit" them.

Significantly, he had not voiced any protest at the cancellation of the passports of Tilak and others. But he was upset at the decision of the Viceroy not to invite Tilak and Annie Besant to the Delhi Conference. So upset, in fact, that he at first declined to "take part in the Conference". In a letter to Sir Claude Hill, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, written the day before the Conference was to open, he explained the reason why he had come to this decision. "I feel," he wrote, "that the Conference will be largely abortive with the most powerful leaders excluded from it. The absence of Mr. Tilak, Mrs. Besant and Ali Brothers from the Conference deprives it of any real weight. I must confess that not one of us... has the influence of these leaders with the masses. Refusal to have them at the Conference shows that there is no real desire to change the attitude hitherto adopted by those who are holding the reins of Government. And without any real alteration in the spirit all your concessions will lose their grace and force and will fail to evoke

genuine loyalty from the masses...."

While about it, he told Hill of something else that had worried him and entered into his decision to refuse the invitation. The Soviet Government had recently published the text of the "Secret Treaties" between Tzarist Russia and the Allied Powers regarding, among other things, the plans to carve territories and spheres of influence in the Near and Middle East. Apparently C.F. Andrews, whom he had asked to accompany him on his journey to Delhi, had read out an account of these disclosures in the *New Statesman*. "I feel," he told Hill, "that for other reasons also I could not effectively serve on the Conference. I have just read the Home Mail papers. They deal with the secret Treaties. The revelations make painful reading. I do not know that I could call the Allies' cause to be any longer just if these treaties are truly reported. I do not know what effect the news will produce on the Mahomedans of India...."

Thus the decision not to attend the "War Conference" in Delhi seemed to be taken on both pragmatic and moral grounds and, as he wrote in his brief letter to Maffey, "after considerable hesitation and much deep thought." However, after an interview with Chelmsford on the eve of the Conference, Gandhi changed his mind and "decided as a matter of duty to join the Conference", although "in fear and trembling." The Viceroy made light of his "fear and trembling", judging from a message he received from his Private Secretary. The Conference duly took place. It opened with a speech from the Viceroy and a message from the King-Emperor. The latter while appreciating India's help in the War, carried more than an implication that it did not measure up to India's "full resources and her strength." This oblique Royal rebuke was made rather explicit by Chelmsford in his speech in which he condescendingly referred to India being "true to her salt."

The superior, if not insolent, assumption underlying these admonitions seemed to be that India had some moral obligation to pour out her blood and treasure in a war which was certainly not of her choice and into which she had been drawn without even the semblance of any consultation with her people and their leaders. It jarred on *India's* editorial writer who described it as a "fresh piece of bureaucratic tactlessness and ineptitude" and

added: "India is assuming her full responsibility within her means, not because she is true to her salt, but because she is true to herself. India's salt has been eaten by many who have been, and still are, within India and this country [Britain], false to her best interests."

Curiously and perhaps significantly, however, nobody at the Delhi Conference even took a mild exception to the Royal and proconsular exhortations—not even Gandhi. He, in fact, supported the main resolution, though he did so in a brief speech in Urdu saying: "I consider myself honoured to find my name among the supporters of this resolution. I realise fully its meaning and I tender my support to it with all my heart." Judging from a letter by his Private Secretary, Chelmsford "felt very much touched" by Gandhi's presence at the Conference and "by the simple words you said and the way you said them." Maffey, however, could not help adding, "Standing out for rights is not always the best way of getting them. If you can believe in us, fight for us and don't be impatient with us." This seemed a piece of gratuitous guidance.

It must have puzzled if not worried Gandhi. At any rate it led to a longish letter to Chelmsford the next day in which he went over the reason why he had at first declined the invitation to the Conference and then "persuaded myself to join it,—if for no other cause, then certainly out of my great regard for yourself." He also restated his own position. "If I could make my countrymen retrace their steps," he wrote, "I would make them withdraw all the Congress resolutions, and not whisper 'Home Rule' or 'Responsible Government' during the pendency of the war. I would make India offer all her able-bodied sons as a sacrifice to the Empire at its critical moment. . . ." But, he went on, "the whole of educated India" thought otherwise—and not only educated India. Since his return from South Africa, he had been "coming into most intimate touch with the ryots" and he wished "to assure" him "that the desire for Home Rule has widely penetrated them" and felt sure "that nothing less than a definite vision of Home Rule—to be realized in the shortest possible time—will satisfy the Indian people." As for him, the Conference meant "a definite step in the consecration of our lives to the common cause." But, he added, "ours is a peculiar

position. We are today outside the partnership. Ours is a consecration based on the hope of a better future. I should be untrue to you and to my country if I did not clearly and unequivocally tell you what that hope is. I do not bargain for its fulfilment. But you should know it. Disappointment of the hope means disillusion."

All this was true. But why was he labouring it so much and to somebody whose main concern was to extract more man-power and money from India in what was still a war to be won? The answer, perhaps, is that this was partly an argument with himself and reflected some inner perplexity, if not conflict within himself, not so much because he had any doubt about the position he had taken up with regard to the War, but because he felt he had not been able wholly to convince either the Government that he was wholeheartedly with it or the Congress and Home Rule Leagues' leaders that his stand made any sense in terms of *realpolitik*. What is more, rather strangely, he told Chelmsford that while India "should give to the Empire every available man for its defence" he could not "say the same thing about financial assistance", since he was convinced "that India has already donated to the Imperial Exchequer beyond her capacity."

While about it, he also tried to make it clear that his unconditional support of the Allied cause did not mean that he was willing to abjure his right to resist "tyranny and wrongdoing on the part of officials." This was because Chelmsford had deprecated "domestic differences". His argument was that "in Champaran, by resisting an age-long tyranny" he had "shown the ultimate sovereignty of British justice." The same, he said, was true of Kaira where he was conducting a movement of resistance to payment of revenue exactions. Indeed, he described both Champaran and Kaira experiments as his "direct, definite and special contribution to the war." And then followed an astounding contention: "If I could popularize the use of soul-force, which is but another name for love-force, in the place of brute force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to do its worst. In season and out of season, therefore, I shall discipline myself to express in my life this eternal law of suffering and present it for acceptance to those who

care." He also did not miss the opportunity to urge upon Chelmsford that he should "ask His Majesty's Ministers to give definite assurances about Mahomedan States", adding: "I am sure you know that every Mahomedan is deeply interested in them. As a Hindu, I cannot be indifferent to their cause. Their sorrows must be our sorrows."

It is not known what the Viceroy and his Man Friday, Maffey, made of Gandhi's earnest outpourings in this letter and others which he wrote to them between April 26-30, 1918. Possibly they reacted to them with the same mixture of amazement, incomprehension, and exasperation as, nearly two thousand years earlier, the Roman proconsular authorities must have felt when confronted with the seemingly contradictory, if not incoherent, utterances of the strange Galilean who wanted people to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's and yet whose message and endeavour if, they had succeeded, they knew in their very guts, would have proved subversive of the order of things which Caesar stood for.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ANTICLIMAX

Gandhi was most anxious that the Viceroy and his men should understand the stand he had taken and the reasons for which he had taken it. That explains his labouring the point again and again in his letters to them. But he was equally anxious that the Indian public should be fully informed of what he had been discussing with Chelmsford and the logic behind his offer of unconditional support to the British Empire in the War which was not self-evident and was being misunderstood not only by the Radicals of the Tilak school of thought, but even the Moderates who felt that he was protesting his loyalty rather excessively. He, therefore, sought the Viceroy's permission to publish his letter to him and wrote to Maffey before leaving Delhi for Nadiad that this was "intended to counteract forces of darkness."

Maffey wired to Gandhi on May 2 that he could do so but at his "own discretion" and that "no authority for doing so should be quoted." Obviously, Chelmsford did not want anybody to get the impression that he and Gandhi were acting in concert and that, as far as he and the Government were concerned, what they regarded as Gandhi's laboured essays in self-justification, were a matter of no importance to them, being irrelevant to the purpose for which the Delhi War Conference had been called which was to mobilize India more effectively for prosecuting the War. Maffey's qualification about "no authority" being quoted was meant to rub that point in though obliquely.

Despite this and a certain area of perplexity within him which he did not seem wholly to admit even to himself, Gandhi was unusually optimistic about the prospect ahead and the future of India. This can be inferred from a letter to Rabindranath Tagore written on April 30 before he left Delhi for Nadiad. He

told Gurudev, as he always addressed the Poet, that much as he would like to keep C.F. Andrews with him "a little longer", he must leave for Calcutta tonight to be with the poet who was keeping indifferent health and needed Andrews' "soothing presence." He went on to volunteer hopefully: "We are on the threshold of a mighty change in India. I would like all the pure forces to be physically in the country during the process of her new birth. If therefore you would at all find rest anywhere in India, I would ask you and Mr. Andrews to remain in the country and kindly to lend me Mr. Andrews now and then."

So keen was Gandhi that Tagore should be close at hand to witness and be in at the expected advent that he told him that he had been in touch about it with Ambalal Sarabhai, a most amiable and remarkable industrial dynast of Ahmedabad, with whom and his fellow textile millowners he had only recently had a tussle and against whom he had organised a largely successful strike of their millhands. "Mr. Ambalal has asked me", he wrote, "to say that he will welcome you and your company as his honoured guests in his bungalow at Matheran." Indeed, Ambalal had offered to arrange accommodation for Tagore and his party at Ootacamund if he so desired, but Gandhi thought it best for Tagore to come for a while to Matheran, a minor hill station in the Ghats above Bombay.

The letter to Tagore not only shows how private lives and public affairs in India in those days—and for a long time to come—intertwined because at the apex of leadership and even at lower levels everybody seemed to know everybody else intimately just as the founders of the Congress had wanted them to: it also indicates the high hopes Gandhi entertained of an early and happy political *denouement*. The reason for his optimism is not easy to understand, but what is not in doubt is that it was in this sanguine mood that he attended the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on May 3.

The meeting was not particularly memorable or even conclusive. It could hardly be. Predictably, it registered the Congress' protest against the arbitrary act of the British Government in turning back Tilak and his friends from Colombo and another Home Rule League delegation from Gibraltar and cancellation of their passports. It also passed a resolution, drafted by

G.S. Khaparde and others who had attended the Delhi Conference. But judging from the text Gandhi could not have had much hand in drafting it. For its endorsement of the decisions of the Congress was hemmed in implicitly if not explicitly by the conditions on which Tilak and Annie Besant had been harping. The Committee, in fact, "expressed the opinion that nothing short of an authoritative pronouncement that India shall have Responsible Government as the issue of the war will inspire the youth of the country to flock to the colours in sufficient numbers to ensure success" and went on to speak of "a Citizen Army, sufficiently large to defend the country from invasion."

The A.I.C.C. further decided to request the British Labour Party to send a fraternal delegate to the next session of the Congress, though whether this meant the special session or the normal annual session is not clear from the report of the General Secretaries. A more, important and crucial matter came up at the A.I.C.C. meeting and which it was decided to refer to the Provincial Congress Committees for opinion and report. This related to letters from Mrs. Margaret Cousins and Mrs. Dorothy Jinarajadasa, both married to leading Theosophists and both ardent suffragettes, asking for assurances that in the coming Reforms the rights of women on an equal footing with men's would be safeguarded.

Mrs. Cousins, it should be added, had drafted the "address" to Montagu presented by the Indian Women's Deputation, which included Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu ("a very attractive and clever woman", Montagu had noted in his *Diary* for December 18, 1917), when they saw him in Madras and which listed their demands for educational facilities for girls, more medical colleges, and, of course, voting rights. At the time they had told him that the "Congress would willingly pass a unanimous request for women's suffrage." This was to prove true. Although dominated by men, whatever other failings it may or may not have had, any obtrusive male chauvinism was not among them, and from the start it had shown no resistance or tardiness in the acceptance of the principle of equality of rights of men and women.

Yet another question taken up by the A.I.C.C. at its Bombay meeting must have given at least partial satisfaction to Gandhi.

Before dispersing it "extended its sympathy and support to the cultivators of Kaira, who were headed in the Movement of Passive Resistance by Mr. M.K. Gandhi." This was a step forward—or would have been if it had not come up against opposition from V.S. Srinivasa Sastri to whom by now anything savouring of active opposition to Government had become an anathema. The resolution had not specified what kind of support the Congress was offering to the movement of resistance on the part of Kaira peasantry which Gandhi was leading and in which several prominent Congress leaders, though not the Congress itself, were involved—among them Vallabhbhai Patel who was virtually second in command to Gandhi. Srinivasa Sastri was not having it, though he objected to it on the technical ground "that seven days' notice of the resolution had not been given." Gandhi offered to withdraw it. But other members did not want it withdrawn. However, Sastri persisted in objecting to it. According to a footnote in Vol. XIV of Gandhi's *Collected Works*—a veritable gold mine of material essential to an understanding of the Mahatma and the whole epoch which he straddled and influenced—it seems that the resolution "was dropped." With characteristic largeness of heart, Gandhi was not upset by Sastri's pedantic obstructionism. Rather the reverse. In a two-line letter to him on the same day, he wrote: "Your 'No' had a real value to me. The 'Ayes' had no value at all."

He was obviously being more than fair to Sastri. In the nature of things, that meant being less than fair to those who were with him on the issue of the Kaira Satyagraha—a parallel, it might be said, in the context of the Indian struggle, of the preference given to Mary over Martha. But, of course, what could be accepted from a man like Gandhi, could not be accepted when lesser Congress leaders began increasingly to make a habit of it. For it amounted to putting a premium on disloyalty to the cause—or at least creating the impression that loyalty to the movement had a very low rating among the virtues which the Congressmen and Congresswomen were supposed to cultivate. And this could not but lead to a degree of demoralization among the Congress faithful—as it continues to this day.

Curiously, one of the important things on which the A.I.C.C. meeting at Bombay was expected to come to a decision, could

not be settled. This was the question of the date and venue of the special session of the Congress which it had decided to call at its meeting in Delhi at the end of February. With that lack of a sense of urgency which had long been a built-in organisational reflex of the Congress, even the circular that a special session was going to be held was not sent out till three weeks after the Bombay meeting, and the question of venue which was tentatively mooted at Delhi as either Lucknow or Allahabad, was not taken up with the Congress leaders in U.P. till the beginning of June. As for the date that, inevitably, depended on the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the A.I.C.C. was still in the dark as to when that would be. The Congress leaders knew that Montagu had left the country and that the Report on the Reforms had been completed in Simla before he left. But nothing was known as to when they would be unveiled in India and in England. As a result the *attentisme* was prolonged beyond the Bombay meeting.

Hope deferred is said to make the heart grow sick. At least waiting is rarely good for the nerves—and that goes for political nerves, too. During the dry hot months of May and June, while India waited for the Reforms which Montagu, Chelmsford and their colleagues and advisers had fashioned to be revealed, political tempers were getting a little frayed. The Moderates and the Radicals in the Congress and the two Home Rule Leagues seemed to be increasingly at cross-purposes and found cohabitation irksome. A more than incipient process of polarisation was clearly discernible. While the Moderates appeared to be willing to lower their sights and even buy the proverbial pig in a poke, the Radicals were digging their toes in and saying that the minimum acceptable to them—and India—would be the Congress-League scheme, with a statutory commitment to early and rapid advance to plenary Responsible and Self-Government.

It was symptomatic of this polarisation that while the Moderates as well as the Government looked upon Annie Besant as an extremist—or what in our own day would be considered as far to the Left—quite a few of her own Radicals thought that she was sliding towards the Moderate camp, or the Right. This

became evident at the Madras Provincial Conference held at Conjeevaram soon after the Bombay A.I.C.C. meeting on May 9-11, when she had considerable difficulty in getting the Conference to endorse her resolution on recruiting. She was surprised that S. Satyamurti moved an amendment to it deleting the whole clause on recruiting. He argued that for more than three years India had been furnishing men and treasure for defence of the Empire and all that it got in return was 2,000 internments in Bengal alone and cancellation of Tilak's passport. She was even more surprised at the voting. The amendment was carried by 140 votes to 118, despite her threat that if the amendment was voted she would call meetings in all parts of the Presidency and see that the resolution was passed in its original form. There followed a wrangle lasting two hours and a second vote which was still 123 for the amendment and 121 against. However, it was discovered that one person had voted who was not a delegate and "another name was illegible". And so the amendment was declared lost because of the President's casting vote—that is, her own.

Gandhi found himself also in the same predicament. The Moderates were more than a little worried over his tangential initiatives, like leading the struggle of Kaira peasantry as Srinivasa Sastri's blocking of a fairly moderate and innocent resolution on the subject at the A.I.C. C. meeting in Bombay had amply shown. But, on the other hand, his manifest zeal in offering his services to the Government as its "recruiting agent-in-chief"—a term which he himself used in a letter to the Viceroy's Private Secretary on April 30—grated on the nationalist sensibilities of the Radicals in the Congress and the Home Rule League and only increased the sense of distance between him and Tilak—and Annie Besant. They felt that he was going too far too fast in his enthusiasm for the war effort; that it was politically unsound tactics; and that it would only serve to confirm the British Government in its habit of taking India for granted.

This feeling of political distance was only accentuated by another incident early in June when Lord Willingdon, Governor of Bombay, whom Montagu had considered more liberal in his attitude to Indians and India, administered a public snub to Tilak and his life-long associate and friend N.C. Kelkar. This was

at the provincial "War Conference" which Willingdon had called in Bombay on June 10 and to which, after initial reluctance, he had invited Tilak and Kelkar, partly to please Gandhi who had pleaded with him that his own "usefulness will be curtailed" if men like Tilak were not invited. But the whole affair ended in a disaster. Willingdon, whose liberalism was only skin-deep if that, chose to make a very truculent inaugural speech in which he virtually charged the Home Rule League leaders of creating "embarrassment and difficulties" for the Government. When Tilak was called on to speak, he began, of course, by expressing, his own and all Home Rulers' "deep loyalty to the King Emperor" and then went on to say that the resolution which they were being asked to endorse was somewhat flawed and that rules of procedure did not allow any amendment to be moved. All the same, he added, they were prepared to co-operate with the Government, but co-operation to be effective needed certain conditions. This was too much for Willingdon and he interrupted by calling Tilak to order, not once but twice. Tilak and his friends then walked out of the Conference.

Even Gandhi protested against this act of rudeness on Willingdon's part and wrote to Willingdon the next day that it "was a serious blunder." "Will you not," he added, "publicly express your regret for the blunder or send for both of them, expressing your regret to them, and invite their co-operation and discuss their viewpoint?" Willingdon through one of his understudies, James Crerar, conveyed it to Gandhi on the same day that while he was "always ready to recognize legitimate difference of opinion on public matters", he could not "conceive of two opinions on the propriety of admitting a contentious political discussion on a resolution expressing loyalty to His Majesty the King-Emperor", nor could he entertain the notion of "any loyal citizen of the Empire" attaching "conditions to his offers of service." And he reminded Gandhi, though in a rather flattering way, that his own "offer of his services to the Viceroy", to which he attaches the highest value, was made unconditionally....

All this was essentially a restatement and justification of the stand he had taken at the Conference and he treated Gandhi's suggestion that he should express this regret publicly (or privately) to Tilak as if it had never been made by completely ignoring it.

Gandhi wrote back to Crerar that he would like to meet Willingdon again on returning from Poona and that, in the meanwhile, he should "assure His Excellency that my letter was not intended to suggest even a possibility of any change of views or alteration in my offer...."

Whether or not Gandhi met Willingdon on his return to Bombay from Poona is not known. But Gandhi, too, stuck to his rather incongruous position. On June 16 he presided over a large protest meeting in Bombay to express their strong feelings against "the Governor of Bombay's provocative statements" at the Conference. In his speech, while paying Willingdon high compliment by describing him as "probably...the most popular" Governor and a man of "liberal views" regarding the aspirations of the Indian people, he still maintained that he had "committed a grave blunder and did a disservice to the cause which he had come to espouse." "That loyalty must, indeed, be skin-deep," he argued, "which requires a wall of protection against criticism." The meeting passed two resolutions. The first registered its protest against "the public insult levelled by His Excellency the Governor of Bombay against the members of Home Rule Leagues"; and the second criticised the measures being adopted by the Government to mobilize manpower and resources of India and said that they were wrong and likely to be counter-productive. The text of the two resolutions, under Gandhi's own signature, was cabled to the British Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India in London.

The protracted and, for political India, a nerve-racking tryst at last ended. It ended not in June as Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya rather vaguely has it in his history, or as S. Vijayalakshmi implies in Chapter VII of *A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress : Vol. I*, edited by B.N. Pande, on July 12, but precisely on the afternoon of July 4, 1918, as, the *Hansard* records. On that day which was a Thursday the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of constitutional reforms was laid on the table of the House of Commons and published simultaneously in India and the United Kingdom the next day. Was the choice of the day of formal unveiling of the bride meant to convey some symbolic historical coincidence or was it merely dictated by the normal routine and convenience of the business in Parliament?

Probably, the latter. At any rate nobody at the time or since, either in India or Britain, noticed that almost a year earlier Montagu as a backbencher had thrown out a bold challenge to the Government of which he was next day to become a member that it should not only state the goal of its Indian policy in clear terms, but do something definite and tangible to show that it was "in real earnest", if it did not wish to forfeit the right to preside over "the destinies of the Indian Empire"—a challenge foreshadowing Harold Laski's famous speech as Chairman of the British Labour Party twenty-seven years later. But it is hard to believe that Montagu was unmindful of the coincidence.

But there was another and historically more significant coincidence which has somehow failed to be noticed and which must have been fortuitous. July 4 was the American Independence Day and one cannot believe that Montagu, sympathetic as he may have been to Indian aspirations, intended to establish any symbolic parallel between the constitutional future for India that he envisaged and the severance of the British connection which American independence involved. If anything, Montagu's basic aim was to preserve India within the imperial structure. He and his colleagues, and especially Montagu, had laboured hard. But if it would be unfair to say that they had only succeeded in producing the proverbial mouse, it is by no means unfair that it was very far from being that "something big" or "epoch-making" that he had dreamed of when he had landed in Bombay. On the contrary, it looked very much like the thing he wanted above all to avoid fathering—"a niggling, miserly, grudging, safeguard fiddling with the existing order of things" which would be tantamount to a fraud on the Indian people and which "India will not accept."

The packaging of the reforms, admittedly, was seductive. Montagu and Marris—"Malice (Marris)" as the younger of the Ali Brothers, Mohamed Ali, was neatly to describe him five years later in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru thus confirming the impression which Montagu formed of the man who helped him in drafting the document—had managed to produce an elegant Report, although Dr. Sitaramayya was probably damning it with high praise when he referred to it as a "masterpiece of literature." Morley was much nearer the mark in speaking

obliquely and "humorously" of a certain "copiousness" which "makes everything more respectable to me" because of "a literary habit." However, once the wrapping was taken off, there was very little in it which was calculated to warm the cockles of any Nationalist heart in India except the extreme Moderate who was willing to pick up any crumb, and be thankful for it.

It is not particularly relevant to this undertaking to go into the details of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme at any length. Doubtless it would have a place in any *Musee Imaginaire* which the erstwhile Colonial Powers may think of designing to house all the elaborate constitutional devices they fabricated to distract, if not dam, the liberation movements in their imperial preserves. It was not too long as such Reports went. Together with appendices and other papers it ran to some 300 octavo pages. A rather lengthy introduction was followed by the main body of the Report which consisted of two parts. The first was the material upon which the proposals rested and the second outlined the proposals themselves.

The liberality of the proposals was most marked at the lowest rungs of the constitutional ladder. The local bodies were allowed the maximum autonomy, possibly because they had very little power and even less funds at their disposal with which to do anything. At the level of provincial administration, an attempt was made to experiment with the principle of responsibility by setting up the so-called system of "dyarchy"—a kind of concubinage between democracy and bureaucratic despotism by dividing the functions of provincial governments into two branches, namely, "Transferred Subjects" which would be presided over by "Ministers" and the "Reserved Subjects" under the control of the officials. Even the Minister or Ministers were to be chosen not by their respective legislative parties or the elected membership as a whole, but by the Governor armed with vast discretionary and vetoing power and, therefore, ultimately accountable to him rather than the elected members of the Legislative Council. The demarcation of the "Reserved" and "Transferred" Subjects was left to be decided later by a committee to be appointed by the British Government, though there was enough in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report to indicate that the Reserved Subjects under the charge of official Members of the

Governor's Executive Council would include all the vital departments of governance, like Law and Order, Civil Justice, Land Revenue, and Industrial matters, while the Ministers would be entrusted with relatively secondary, if not peripheral, affairs of the provincial administration. Another committee was proposed to determine the scope and extent of the franchise to be granted.

The niggardliness of spirit in which the Reforms had been conceived was even more manifest in the proposals for the Central Government. Indeed, they were at crucial points so regressive in character that they seemed a classic example of taking one step forward as a cover for taking two steps back. Thus the old Imperial or Supreme Legislative Council was done away with to be replaced by a bicameral system—a Legislative Assembly and a Council of State. The former was to have about a hundred members, two-thirds of them being elected. But the elected majority was to be devoid of any substantive power of legislation in any vital field. That was to be exercised by the Council of State of about fifty members, a large majority of them being either officials or nominees of the Government. It was also to be "the revising authority upon all Indian legislation." But even the Council of State was to be subject to the power of certification and veto vested in the Governor-General, presumably to safeguard against the possibility of the nominated members turning like the proverbial worm and deciding not to do their master's bidding.

However, once again, and no doubt fearing that even their Moderate friends might consider the proposals for reforms as too trivial and small change for them to accept with any dignity, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report tried to keep alive the small flame of hope in their—and other Indian—breasts of better things to come if they conducted themselves with due and proper docility. It envisaged the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry in "ten years after the first meeting of the new legislative bodies to review the constitutional position both as regards the Government of India and the Provinces." More: it stipulated a whole series of similar review commissions to be set up "at intervals of not more than twelve years"—and so on and on, if not exactly to eternity, at least to what must have looked like the Greek calends to more impatient spirits.

Public reaction to the Montagu-Chelmsford Report in both Britain and India could not have come as a surprise to its authors. They probably not only expected it, but might well have intended it. In Britain Tory diehards both in Parliament and outside saw in their scheme of reforms the blueprint for the scuttling of the Empire in India, though curiously when it came up in the House of Lords early in August, Lord Sydenham, the presiding spirit of the Indo-British Association of that day, was singularly muted in his criticism and even "warmly welcomed" some parts of it—much to the embarrassment of some Liberal peers. However, the Tory Press was fierce in its attack on the scheme and Montagu whom it regarded as its true architect. The *Morning Post* accused him of undermining British Rule in India. The *Spectator* went even further in its venom. It saw in Montagu "a popularity-hunting politician in a mixed condition of pity and terror" and, in an epigrammatic exaggeration, stigmatized his proposals as "Bolshevism by order in Council." It warned: "We are proposing to inoculate every creed and race in India with the virus of unrest, quite unforgetful that it is physically impossible for us to find means to allay the sufferings, or cure the fever and delirium, which may arise from the undertaking . . ."

Partly because of a favourable predisposition towards Montagu, partly also because it knew that any constitutional movement towards democracy in India was likely to come up against bitter Tory hostility, Liberal opinion in Britain was more than willing to judge the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms charitably and generously far beyond their merits. *Leeds Mercury* described them as a "most important contribution to Imperial reconstruction", and *India* was so carried away by its enthusiasm for them that for the first time it seemed to get out of tune with the main body of Congress opinion in India which it was expected to represent in Britain and had represented for more than a quarter of a century with admirable and consistent loyalty and perceptiveness.

However, unfortunately for those in Britain who had come out chivalrously in support of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, the attitude of the Tory-dominated coalition Government towards it was lukewarm and non-committal. Pressed in the Commons both by the supporters and opponents of the Report, Bonar

Law had refused to say whether His Majesty's Government had accepted or rejected its proposals. It seemed willing to wait and see which way the wind of opinion in the country was blowing before declaring its own hand. Also, perhaps, the original sense of urgency was no longer operative. Partly, at any rate, the whole exercise of the declaration of August 20, 1917, and the subsequent Montagu mission to India, had been undertaken to keep India "quiet" at a critical stage in the War. A year later the War was still not won, but its issue was much less in doubt than it had been when Montagu had gone out to India. That possibly explained why the Government was taking so leisurely a course that it was at first unwilling to find time for the discussion of the Report in Parliament before adjournment for summer recess. It needed considerable backbench pressure for it to agree to a debate on August 6, 1918—and that, too, tangentially on a motion moved by Montagu that "the House go into Committee on the East India Revenue Accounts."

Nor can it be fairly claimed that Montagu enhanced his reputation as a parliamentary performer, much less as a statesman, by his contribution to the debate. He seemed to be on the defensive. In the Report itself, he had tended rather to magnify the far-reaching character of its recommendations for constitutional advance towards representative and responsible government in India, no doubt purposely to impress Indian opinion. The Report, indeed, ran down the claims made on behalf of the Morley-Minto experiment in "Reforms" so that Montagu's own brain-child could shine by comparison. It even suggested that it had little genealogical link with the earlier scheme—a claim which no less a person than Viscount Morley of Blackburn was to challenge with some subtlety publicly at a ceremony of presentation of his bust to the National Liberal Club by his Indian friends at the end of July. Replying to Bhownaggee who had made the presentation, Morley in Montagu's presence—the latter made a rather brief and sheepish speech on the occasion—said that he "could not be mistaken in tracing the lineaments of the parental physiognomy of 1909 in the progeny of 1918." Having thus established the heredity of Montagu's packet of Reforms, he went on to cast some doubt on their being a giant stride towards a parliamentary system in India. He had been

reproached, he said, "for stating that he could not take part in a reform of India that might lead to an Indian Parliament. He would like to know what was meant by a Parliament. He did not know whether the outcome of the proposals now before the country would amount to Parliament, and what sort of Parliament it would be."

Montagu's gloss on his own proposals in the House of Commons tended to confirm that they were by no means as radical, much less revolutionary, as some passages in the Report implied. He even trotted up all the old Blimpish arguments why any movement towards democracy had to be carefully controlled and gradual and paraphrased much of the speech he had made a few days earlier when he had been adopted as Liberal candidate for the new division of Cambridgeshire in which he had said that "India is not yet in the true sense of the term 'a nation'" because of "differences of caste, religion and race...," though he was gracious enough to add that the British "wanted to see it a nation" and put "the feet of India on the road to nationhood and self-government." This line of talk was probably partly tactical and intended to reassure his Tory critics. But it could not have failed to dampen the spirits of the supporters of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme in Britain—and India.

The reaction to the Report in India, predictably, varied from group to group. Predictably, too, its overall effect, as intended, was to deepen and widen the divisions among the various political bodies and interests, not least in the Congress and the Home Rule Leagues. The Moderates had been a party to the Lucknow concordat and the Congress-League scheme which was born of it. They had participated in formulating the proposals which it embodied. One would have expected that they would remain true to their commitment to it and resist the temptation to settle for something which fell far short of it. But many of them, including Srinivasa Sastri, Dinshaw Wacha, Surendranath Banerjea (the last two of them already in their seventies) seemed in a hurry to declare their acceptance of Montagu's constitutional bauble.

Tilak, on the other hand, was clearly not impressed by what was on offer. The Report and its recommendations confirmed him in his scepticism of British post-war intentions regarding India. Reuter quoted him as saying that the Montagu-

Chelmsford scheme "is entirely unacceptable and will not satisfy anybody. It is only a miserable, cheese-paring measure proposed in the interest of the bureaucracy whose vested interest would always remain adverse to our aspirations." Curiously, however, he wanted India's case to be taken to "England and to appeal to the British Democracy." Annie Besant was no less scathing about the proposals for reforms. She said they were unworthy of Britain to offer and unworthy of India to accept.

In taking this view they were much more in tune with the views of the bulk of the rank and file supporters of the Congress and the Home Rule Leagues than were the moderate leaders. The Bengal Provincial Conference, for instance, meeting in mid-July, endorsed the condemnation of the scheme by younger leaders like C.R. Das and B. Chakravarti in spite of the influence which Surendranath Banerjea still wielded. The Madras Provincial Conference meeting early in August was no less decisive in dismissing the reforms as unsatisfactory and unacceptable. Annie Besant addressing the Conference warned that they would lead to "a perpetual slavery which can only be broken by revolution." The tide of popular opinion was running strongly contrary to the wishes of the Moderates.

It was in this atmosphere of internal dissension and even political confusion that the special session of the Indian National Congress was to meet for four days from August 29 to September 1, 1918. Not, however, at Allahabad or Lucknow as had been mooted at the A.I.C.C. meeting at the end of February, but at Bombay for the fifth time since its foundation. The moderate leaders had been a party to the decision to hold it. Indeed, Dinshaw Wacha, already seventy-four, had agreed to head the Reception Committee. But very late in the day he was persuaded to change his mind and withdraw, and announce that he would not attend the special session. Not content with abstention, he and his moderate colleagues decided to hold a conference of the Moderates after the special Congress session.

What was the position of Gandhi in all this? Both the Moderates and the "Radicals" were anxious to enlist his support even though he had scarcely taken any active part in hammering out either the Congress-Muslim League proposals or in the consultations with Montagu and Chelmsford that had preceded the

fashioning of their design for the constitutional future of India. Instead, he had continued to be preoccupied otherwise: on the one hand, with his recruiting campaign which had not been conspicuously effective and, on the other, with organising popular resistance to specific wrongs, as in Champaran in Bihar and Kaira in Gujarat, where he could claim some success. The stand he took on the Reforms embodied in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was once again rather eccentric and one which was not calculated to endear him to the Radicals nor likely to please the Moderates.

Within a few days of the publication of the Report, Srinivasa Sastri, who was himself in something of a dilemma, had invited his opinion for publication in *The Servant of India*. Gandhi did so in a long letter written on July 18 from Nadia. "As you know," he wrote, "I did not feel called upon to take an active part in the framing of the Congress-League scheme. . . . I do not pretend that even now I have studied the reform proposals as a keen politician would." Despite his "very great hesitation" in expressing his opinion on it, he thought it to be "an artistic production" and "superior to the Congress-League scheme" and paid high compliment to the honesty of Montagu and Chelmsford. He, therefore, did not want any "hasty rejection of their effort", but rather "a sympathetic handling". At the same time, he was sure it would need "to be considerably improved before it is accepted." "Our standard of measurement," he said, "must be the Congress-League scheme. . . . I think that we should with all the vehemence and skill that we can command press for the incorporation into it of the essentials of our own." And in conclusion he harped back to his view that the best way of enforcing Indian opinion was to "crowd the battlefields of France with an indomitable army of Home Rulers fighting for victory for the cause of the Allies." "The gateway to our freedom," he wrote, paraphrasing Montagu and Chelmsford, "is situated on the French soil."

That refrain ran through his letters to others, whether Moderates or "Extremists" as the Radicals were dubbed in those days and to whom the Moderates must have looked like extremists in their readiness to fall in line with the British Governments' wishes. A few days before the Bombay special session of the

Congress, in reply to a letter from Tilak who had expressed concern about Gandhi's health, he took the opportunity to tell Tilak that he did not "propose to attend the Congress or the Moderates' Conference either" because his views were "different from those of either." After repeating his belief that the greatest service to India which anyone could render at the time was to "enlist hundreds of thousands of recruits" and that neither Annie Besant nor Tilak shared his view and that "the Moderates also will not take up the work earnestly", he wrote:

My other point is that we accept the substance of the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme, explain clearly the improvements that we wish to be made in it and fight till death to have these improvements accepted. That the Moderates will not accept this is clear enough. Even if Mrs. Besant and you accept it, you will certainly not fight in the way I wish to fight. Mrs. Besant has declared that she is not a satyagrahi. You recognise satyagraha as [only] a weapon of the weak. I do not wish to get caught in this false position. And I do not wish to carry on an agitation in the Congress in opposition to you both.

He was also opposed to the idea of a patched up compromise between the two opposing points of view:

That the Moderates and the Extremists should each abandon some minor positions and come together is a thing repugnant to me. There are two wings in the country. I do not believe that it will do any harm to make the positions of both clear to the Government and the people.... It will do much good if both parties boldly proclaim their respective positions....

Five days earlier, on August 20, 1918, in a letter to one of the leading Moderates, N.M. Samarth, he had explained why he must hold himself "aloof from both the movements" because he held views which were unacceptable to both. Whilst he accepted the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme in the main, to make it acceptable he should "insist upon certain modifications" and this

insistence "would go [to] the length of wrecking the Scheme if the modifications were not accepted after exhausting every means" at his disposal. "To get the modifications accepted," he said, "I should not therefore hesitate to use what has been commonly called passive resistance. The Moderates will not accept this condition. I must therefore bide my time patiently and plough my own solitary furrow." He did and was not among those who took part in the Bombay special session.

The moderate leaders, like Dinshaw Wacha and Surendranath Banerjea, who stayed away from the session were men of influence and mature judgement. However, some of them were also like the ageing *prima donnas* and they had misjudged the mood of political India. Their absence from the Congress at Bombay did not materially affect its success. According to official figures, 4,968 delegates attended the session—or one more than the Thirty-second session at Calcutta—though, admittedly this total included Members of the Reception Committee who numbered 1,073. There was, it seems, one delegate from South Africa. One special feature of the special session, we learn, was the attendance of over fifty delegates from the Depressed Classes, presumably those whom Gandhi was later to name Harijans. As always, the number of visitors equalled if not exceeded the number of delegates. But the great Pandal set up on the Marine Lines Maidan was spacious enough to accommodate more than 10,000 people, 1,500 on the presidential dais itself.

After Dinshaw Wacha's withdrawal, the choice for chairmanship of the Reception Committee had fallen on a clever and even brilliant barrister, Vithalbhai Jhaverbhai Patel, a relative newcomer to the Congress, who was to distinguish himself in the next decade and a half, by becoming the first elected President (Speaker) of the Legislative Assembly set up under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme and then passing from the Chair to prison—or, as he wittily put it, getting his "peerage and pension." In his speech of welcome at the Bombay special session, he displayed something of the wit and subtlety which was to enable him later to fill the office to which he was elected with a dignity and authority that have rarely been equalled and hardly surpassed by the Speaker of any sovereign and democratic Parliament anywhere in living memory. It is well to record this because his services

to the Congress and India have tended to be rather overshadowed by the achievements of his younger brother, the great Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

The main issue before the Bombay session was, of course, the question of the Reforms offered in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report and what attitude the Congress should adopt towards them. After likening the Indian National Congress to "a splendid *Bodhi* tree whose roots have reached down to the hearts of the nation, whose branches are the resting place of all patriotic thought", he made two obvious points which may well have occurred to others before him but which had not been made by any leading Congressman from a Congress platform and which reflected an awareness of the power that the Congress wielded—or could wield. Hitherto, he said, the function of the Congress for so many years had been "that of knocking at the gate, iterating and reiterating the demand to be admitted into the hall of the nations and to be given a seat by their side. To use a familiar legal figure the Congress has so far and for so many years been in the position of the plaintiff and the Government has sat in the chair of the Judge holding the right of decreeing or dismissing the claim." Today, however, he added, "for the first time, the position has been reversed. It is the Congress, it is you, the representatives of the people, who sit in the chair of the Judge to adjudicate on the merits of the case as stated in the Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms...."

This was, in essence, true if a little overstated. The second point he made connected with it. He argued that the packet of reforms had not been offered voluntarily and, as it were, out of the goodness of the heart of British Government. "It may be unhesitatingly asserted," he observed, "that this scheme of reforms such as it is, is the outcome, to a large extent, of our own endeavours. The steadily growing pressure exerted by the Congress, the widespread and persistent agitation by other bodies that have grown out of the Congress, the strength and weight of public opinion and the constructive character of constitutional agitation have made it impossible for the legitimate demands of the country to be denied any longer with prudence...." That was why, despite the War, Montagu mission had been sent to

India. He went on to add:

I do not say this in any spirit of exultation, for indeed the time for exultation is not yet, but merely to point out that if we are true to ourselves now and in the future as we were in the past, and realise the gravity and importance of the issue that depends on our efforts we shall proceed in the right spirit and do our duty by our country and our people.

Referring to those who had decided to abstain from the special session of the Congress, he did not want "to utter one word of bitterness", though he regretted their decision. The more so because he could find no justification for their assumption "that this special session of the Indian National Congress has been convened merely to reject the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of reforms, that you have travelled long distances and have assembled here at considerable sacrifice for the sole purpose of denouncing the scheme by book, bell and candle. . . ." On the contrary, he said, "whatever individual views may have been expressed on the proposed reforms they are certainly not binding on the Congress, nor is there any valid reason for anticipating as inevitable any decision of the Congress."

But, on the other hand, he felt bound to say that nobody in the Congress, or for that matter in the country, had accepted the Report "in its entirety." Even "the illustrious authors of the Report", he maintained, "themselves have nowhere claimed that their scheme should be accepted as final." And since there was "no question of the wholesale acceptance or rejection of the report there would have been no difficulty in finding out a *modus vivendi* if the few absentee Congressmen had agreed to a preliminary conference for an exchange of views... instead of inconsistently running away from the Congress and seeking safety in the undefined region known as nowhere." There followed an exquisite and telling dig at the Moderates who had chosen abstention as their weapon and decided to pitch a separate tent. Recalling that as long ago as 1899, Pherozeshah Mehta had spoken of dissidents in the Congress having hobbled off to what he called "the Indian political cave of Adullam", he remarked: "I shall not have the impertinence to suggest that the proposed Conference of a few Moder-

ates... will be another cave of Adullam, but I shall respectfully venture to ask whether any Conference of Moderates or Immoderates can serve as a counterpoise to the Indian National Congress, and whether any assembly claiming to hold all the wisdom in the country can be a fulcrum of the magnitude of the Congress and exert the same leverage."

All this was true as was his statement that the special session had "not been sprung as a surprise on the country." On the contrary, again, "all parties were united as regards the special session of the Congress, and no one had the remotest suspicion that the Report itself would prove a veritable Apple of Discord. And this discord is all the more extraordinary since the apple is not a Golden Apple, and though some have nibbled at it gingerly and meticulously. I have seen no attempt anywhere to swallow it entire, and everybody wants to exchange this particular apple for another." He claimed, and rightly, that "the genesis of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of reforms is to be found in the Congress-League scheme" which embodied "the carefully weighed and considered opinion of the whole country, and has been accepted by the thinking portion of the entire community." But "an examination of the Report will show the essentials of the Congress-League scheme have been rejected and only the non-essentials have been accepted." He briefly pinpointed the serious shortfalls in the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals, briefly because he did not wish to encroach "on the inaugural address of the President" and the deliberations of the delegates. He was sure, however, that "passed through the alembic of public opinion the proposed reform scheme will have to shed several ingredients if it is to form a basis of mutual trust and co-operation between the Government and the people."

The President of the special session was Syed Hasan Imam, younger of the two Imam brothers both of whom were brilliant lawyers, and both of whom were to distinguish themselves not only at the Bar, but in National as well as progressive Muslim politics. Indeed, it was Hasan Imam who at the Calcutta session which celebrated the ending of the Partition of Bengal, had extended the invitation to the Congress to hold its next annual session at Bankipore in Bihar, though as it turned out he himself was unable to take any active part in the first Congress ever held

in Bihar because in the interval he had been raised to the Bench at the relatively early age of forty.

He could be relied upon to submit the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme to the sharp scrutiny of his incisive legal logic. But he was also a man well-versed in the humanities and, while steering clear both of outright rejection and uncritical acceptance of the package on offer, he insisted that the criterion of judgement for them must be the Congress-League scheme. By that touchstone, he said "the proposals have placed us under a great disappointment, for, though the essentials of our demand are acknowledged in theory, they have not been conceded in substance." As for the controversy between "Moderates" and "Extremists", he said, "We know no Extremists and we know no Moderates, names that have been devised by 'our enemies' to divide us. We know only one cause and we have only one purpose in view. Our demand is the demand of a United India, and so long as our rights are denied to us we shall continue the struggle:

Unchained in soul—though manacled in limb—
Unwarped by prejudice—unawed by wrong,
Friends to the weak and fearless of the strong."

At one point in his speech, the Chairman of the Reception Committee had used a rather arresting phrase which, over the next quarter of a century or more, was to be repeated time and again in political debate and polemics. Jawaharlal Nehru himself was to use it as the heading to one of his pieces that appeared in the collection of his miscellaneous writings and speeches on diverse themes entitled *Unity of India* though in quite a different and more valid context. "We have", said Vithalbhai Patel, "come to the parting of the ways, but I do not see either in the near or the distant future any prospect of the two paths commingling, and running out straight and wide to the goal we are striving to reach."

He was exaggerating a little, partly because he might have been disheartened by the failure of an attempt on the eve of the special Bombay session by the A.I.C.C. to hold a conference "of

persons who had expressed various divergent views on the Reform proposals, so that a *modus vivendi* might be arrived at." Partly, he was just yielding to the reflexive impulse widely shared by politicians everywhere, but particularly in India, to magnify their differences. At any rate, Vithalbhai Patel was being somewhat premature in thinking that the parting of the ways between the Radicals and Moderates was final and "never the twain shall meet". Some of those who had kept away from the special session were to return to the Congress and only a very few were lost to it for good.

More significant still was the curious paradox that although the Congress and the kindred Home Rule Leagues were like a house divided on the attitude to be adopted vis-a-vis the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, these divisions had not materially affected the larger national consensus embodied in the concordat sealed and signed at Lucknow of which the Congress-League scheme was an offspring. For although because of "technical difficulties" the suggestion to hold a joint session of the Congress and the Muslim League could not be carried out, another modality was worked out to re-affirm their compact. As the Official Congress Report put it, "It was decided that the Council of the All-India Muslim League should cooperate with the Subjects Committee of the Congress in 'framing the Resolutions' and on 30th August 1918, this was done and a free exchange of views took place between the two bodies." Informal talks, of course, went on between the two bodies throughout the special session since some of the Muslim League leaders, like Jinnah, were also members of the decision-making organs of the Congress and others attended the special session as distinguished and fraternal guests and were accommodated on the platform.

In all there were eighteen resolutions on the agenda of the special session. But this multiplicity was more than a little deceptive. For apart from the first two and the last two resolutions, the remaining fourteen seemed to form part of a portmanteau resolution dealing with the various aspects of the constitutional reforms in the offing and how and in what direction the Congress wanted them modified or amplified so that a point of relative congruence could be reached between the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme and the Congress-Muslim League proposals. Indeed,

even the first two resolutions were related to the main preoccupation of the Congress. Thus the first resolution on the order paper, while offering the customary "loyal homage" to the Crown and expressing "great satisfaction" at the recent successes of the Allies on the battlefields, prayed for an early and decisive victory which it saw as "the final vindication of the principles of Freedom, Justice and Self-determination"—obviously an oblique reminder to "His Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor" of President Wilson's declaration as well as India's expectations.

The second resolution was in the nature of an emphatic reaffirmation of the consensus reached by the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League at Lucknow in 1916 and repeated at Calcutta in 1917. It declared that "nothing less than Self-Government within the Empire can satisfy the Indian people and by enabling it to take its rightful place as a free and self-governing nation in the British Commonwealth, strengthen the connection between Great Britain and India." In the next resolution it took issue with the assumption in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report that the Indian people were not "fit" for Responsible Government. But even so it was not prepared to reject the scheme out of a hand. On the contrary, in the sixth resolution—one of the longest on record—it not only spoke of its appreciation of "the earnest attempts on the part of the Rt. Hon. the Secretary of State and H.E. the Viceroy to inaugurate a system of Responsible Government" but recognised "that some of the proposals constitute an advance on the present conditions in some directions." At the same time, however, it found the proposals "disappointing and unsatisfactory" and hopefully and helpfully catalogued a whole series of changes which, it declared, were "absolutely necessary to constitute a substantive step towards Responsible Government."

They were by no means so radical as to involve a decisive transference of power to Indian hands or making the Indian Government responsible to a democratically elected and sovereign Legislative Assembly. In the light of subsequent evolution of Congress thinking it is hard not to be surprised at the moderation of what it was asking for. Even when it called for India to be given "complete freedom in all fiscal matters" it qualified

this demand by saying that this should be consistent "with imperial interests." Again, while it was not satisfied with and, in fact, recorded its "deep disappointment" at the rate of grant of commissions to Indians in the Indian Army, in the twelfth resolution it wanted no more than an immediate grant of twenty-five per cent of the commissions to Indians, "to be gradually increased to 50 per cent within a period of fifteen years."

There were, however, two resolutions which even in retrospect appear to reflect significant advance in the outlook of the Congress on the future of Indian polity. Resolution four headed "Declaration of Indian Rights", wanted "that the Statute to be passed by Parliament should include the Declaration of the Rights of the People of India as British Citizens." It listed five rights to be included in the Declaration of Indian Rights:

- (a) That all Indian Subjects of His Majesty and all the subjects naturalised or resident in India are equal before the law and there shall be no penal or administrative law in force in the Dominions, whether substantive or procedural of a discriminative nature;
- (b) That no Indian subject of His Majesty shall be liable to suffer in liberty, life, property, or of association, free speech or in respect of writing, except under sentence by an ordinary Court of Justice, and as a result of lawful and open trial;
- (c) That every Indian subject shall be entitled to bear arms, subject to the purchase of a licence, as in Great Britain, and that the right shall not be taken away save by a sentence of an ordinary Court of Justice;
- (d) That the Press shall be free, and that no licence or security shall be demanded on the registration of a press or a newspaper;
- (e) That corporal punishment shall not be inflicted on any Indian subject of His Majesty, save under conditions applying equally to all other British subjects.

This was a rather tall order, considering the fact that the British themselves had never—and to this day have not—enjoyed the benefits of a Bill of Rights as part of their unwritten

constitution. Moreover, perhaps, the bureaucratic hierarchs, both in Delhi and Whitehall, most of them products of the British Public School system and as such not altogether strangers to the taste of the birch which made men of them, regarded it as gross impertinence on the part of the Congress to call for virtual abolition of corporal punishment in India. But the resolution passed at the special session at Bombay formulating the demand for a statutory Declaration of the Rights of the People of India as British Citizens was historically premonitory, though thirteen years were to pass before the Congress actually pledged itself to the inclusion of Fundamental Rights and Duties of Indian citizens in any future constitution of India to which it was a party.

Resolution eight on the order paper also concerned human rights, but of one of the most deprived sections of Indian humanity. Women's organisations were just beginning to be formed in the country and such as were already active were for the most part departmental extensions of the Congress or the Home Rule Leagues. At its meeting early in May the A.I.C.C. had taken note of the letters which Mrs. Margaret Cousins and Mrs. Dorothy Jinarajadasa had addressed to Annie Besant as President of the Congress staking the claim of Indian women to franchise under the Congress-League scheme. At the special session the Congress readily conceded this demand and "resolved that the women possessing the same qualifications as are laid down for men in any part of the scheme shall not be disqualified on account of sex." This was a rare and bloodless victory for the champions of women's right to franchise and whatever other vacillations of the Congress in the period ahead, it never wavered in its commitment to this principle and fully honoured it when the time came for drawing up the constitution of independent India. And it would not be too much to claim that this in turn to some degree influenced the thinking of other liberation movements in Asia and Africa in the post-Second World War period.

The last resolution on the agenda of the special session was a follow-up of the decision taken at Calcutta authorising the A.I.C.C. to send a deputation to England if necessary. At Bombay the delegates had no difficulty in persuading themselves that it was necessary and resolved to set up "a committee of selection for

the purpose of selecting the members of the Congress Deputation to proceed to England to press the Congress views on the British Democracy." The Selection Committee consisted of the President of the special session, Syed Hasan Imam, President of the Congress for the year, Annie Besant, and the three General Secretaries—G.M. Bhurgri, P. Kesava Pillai, and C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar.

There was evidently no dearth of ardent patriots ready to cross the ocean, unsolicited, to serve on the Deputation the Congress proposed to send to England, though some of them made their offer contingent on an undertaking by the Congress that it would provide adequate maintenance allowance for their families at home while they were pressing the views of the Congress on the British Democracy such as it was. However, these preliminaries turned out to be a little premature. Towards the end of September when Syed Hasan Imam (who, as it happened, had got involved in a minor litigation with a British member of the Covenanted Service in Bihar) waited on the Viceroy with C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar in connection with securing passports for the Congress Deputation, Chelmsford was not very forthcoming. According to the Official Congress Report for the year, he told them that until the Committees to be appointed to make recommendations on the question of franchise and the functional demarcation of "Reserved" and "Transferred" Subjects had made their reports, no passports were to be issued to the members of any political organisation.

True, the Government had made an exception in Tilak's case. After the British Government's cancellation of his passport when he was already on his way to England at Colombo earlier in the year, he had been informed in June that he could proceed to England. But this was made conditional on his refraining from undertaking any political activity, while in the United Kingdom and confining himself strictly to the prosecution of his libel suit against Valentine Chirol.

By the time the normal annual session of the Congress was due to meet after Christmas for the first time in the new and historic capital of India—Delhi—the whole international context and with it, inevitably, the basic equation of forces which determined the course of Indian politics, were to undergo a sea change.

When, at the end of August, the special session had met at Bombay, while the issue of the First World War was largely predictable given the new balance of military power, it still remained uncertain when it would actually end. But within a few weeks the so-called Triple Alliance seemed to be collapsing. Germany's Central European allies were surrendering one by one. Bulgaria and Austria were *hors de combat*. By the end of October the central armature, Kaiser's Reich, was itself falling apart. There had been a naval mutiny in Kiel; and Socialist uprisings in Munich and even Berlin. The end was demonstrably near. It came on November 11 when at five in the morning (according to Lloyd George's statement in the Commons) in a clearing in the forest of Compiègne near the famous Chateau which had only lately provided a magnificent hostelry for the *wehrmacht* commanders on the Western Front in a railway carriage the German plenipotentiaries signed the instrument of surrender. Six hours later, at 11 a.m. precisely, the armistice was an accomplished fact. The slaughter was over and the 19th century maps of Europe became obsolescent.

In Britain the political repercussions were swift. The Tory dominated coalition under Lloyd George did not wish to miss the electoral dividends of the military triumph. Parliament was prorogued on November 21 and dissolved on November 24. The general election was to be held on Saturday, December 14, 1918. The "khaki-election" campaign was on, the wartime coalition asking for the renewal of its mandate to be able to carry on the good work and make England a land fit for heroes to live in, unhampered by any opposition except the still small voice of Labour and the Irish group, the Sinn Feiners among whom had in any case announced their intention not to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown and attend Parliament.

India and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were not an issue in the election campaign, as *India*, by now out of tune with the mainstream Congress views and virtually a mouthpiece of the Moderates noted in an editorial article. But Indian politicians were aware that the British Government and its managing agency in India were no longer under the same kind of compulsions as they had been during the spring and summer of 1918. The Government of India had been under heavy pressure from the authorities

at home who thought that India was not pulling its weight in the War, to intensify its recruiting drive and raise more money to pay for the War. But these preoccupations had changed overnight with the end of hostilities. Money was still needed and there was to be no relief from the financial burden, but men were no longer required. On the contrary, the worry henceforth, both in Delhi and London, was how to dispense with the services of nearly a million—953,374, according to official figures—Indians who had enlisted or been forced to join the armed forces, to ferry those among them who were overseas in the various theatres of War back to India, to put them into civvy clothes and send them home to live happily ever after. It was realised that this would not be an easy operation and might raise serious problems, economic and political, to say nothing of security.

This rather than putting the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms on the Statute Book was now the priority. The debate in the Commons during discussion of the Indian Budget early in August stood adjourned over the summer recess and nobody seemed to be in a hurry to resume it after the recess was over. But in the House of Lords a debate took place on a motion by a number of Tory Peers asking for the Report outlining proposals for constitutional reforms in India to be submitted to a Joint Select Committee of the two Houses before any legislative step was undertaken. It was obviously a time-wasting, if not spoiling, device and Curzon was believed to be in tacit agreement with the movers of the motion. The debate, as *India* was to remark, left "an unpleasant flavour in the mouth", though it took some comfort from the thought that "the Middletons, the Lansdownes and the Salisburys, can no more speak for democratic Britain than their confreres in Prussia can satisfy President Wilson that they speak for democratic Germany." It had been moved to this comment by some of the speeches from the Tory benches, especially Lansdowne's claim that the Declaration of August 20, 1917, "committed nobody". Even Curzon could not let this pass unchallenged and said that it committed "His Majesty's Government". Indeed, unlike Montagu who was by now wholly on the defensive and repeating all the catch-phrases why India could not yet be regarded "a nation", Curzon spoke of the "Indian Nation" which had been stirred to the depths by the War.

The motion was lost, but only by a narrow margin, 25 votes to 21, which the Tory backwoodsmen in the Lords could easily have made good if they had really tried. But probably they just intended to fire a warning shot across the Government's bow to indicate that even the niggardly reforms offered by the Montagu-Chelmsford tandem would need to be further whittled down to be acceptable to them and that any legislation on constitutional advance in India would have a rough passage through "the Morgue." These danger signals from the North Sea Island did not go unnoticed by politicians in India. They ought to have prompted them to close their ranks and in some measure that was the effect. Some of the Moderates who had kept away from the Bombay special session of the Congress, like Srinivasa Sastri, were willing to return to the Congress fold though it must remain a moot point whether their intention was to stem the tide of radicalism from within.

That tide, in any case, was on the ebb. The *Times* may well have written off the Congress as a "sectional" organisation which had been hijacked by the "extremists" and whose resolutions could not be "taken seriously." But then, it had a congenital allergy to the Congress which it could never outgrow. Another true-blue Tory organ, the *Daily Telegraph*, was more realistic in its comment on the Bombay session when it editorially remarked that the "effervescence of Extremist Indian politics invariably fizzles out in the business-like atmosphere of Bombay, and the four-day special session of the Indian National Congress organised by the Besant-cum-Tilak Party... followed the rule." In India, the *Leader* of Allahabad, whose editorials gushed with the distilled essence of "Moderate" wisdom, thought the Moderates could well go along with the line taken by the President of the Bombay session, Syed Hasan Imam.

However, there were other moderate leaders—among them the most eminent and influential, like Dinshaw Wacha and Surendranath Banerjea—who had not been happy since the previous Bombay session in 1915 when Tilak had made his re-entry into the Congress. They seemed to see no point in returning to the Congress whose policies they could better influence from without rather than from within and who felt that the parting of the ways was best accepted. They wanted to have an organisation of their

own and thought that their Conference of the Moderates could be a very effective launching pad—as, indeed, it proved to be—of such a body (it came to be known as the All-India Liberal Federation). So they went on with the preparations for their separate convention as they had announced.

These, unhappily, were marked by some bad luck which had little to do with politics. The War was still raging when another scourge was visited on the humankind which was to claim as many if not even more victims—a virulent and deadly form of influenza which knew no frontiers. It broke out in an epidemic form in Bombay in October. This led to shifting of the date fixed for the gathering. Eventually it was held in Bombay in the first week of November. The attendance was rather thin, about five hundred. *India* which seemed to have become identified with the cause of the Moderates took some comfort from the thought that in its earlier phase the Congress sessions had been somewhat thinly attended and even recalled that at Bankipore only a little over two hundred had taken part in the Twenty-seventh Congress. The parallel, however consoling, was not altogether apt. The Moderates represented the past rather than the future, and even the liberal ideology which they proclaimed as their own, was to find in the Congress a more valid and dynamic vehicle for its effective dissemination than the National Liberal Federation which came to incarnate the concept of “Moderate” politics.

Paradoxically, the keynote speech at the Moderates’ Conference sounded in parts more radical than the presidential address at the Bombay special session of the Congress. Dinshaw Wacha who had withdrawn after having first accepted the chairmanship of the Reception Committee for the Congress session acted in that capacity for the Moderates’ Conference. The presidency, predictably, had gone to Surendranath Banerjea who at seventy was still strong in rhetoric if not logical consistency. He was evidently anxious to prove that he was not a “yes man” of Montagu and Chelmsford and that the Moderates could not be taken for granted by the Government. He started by saying that he did not like the word “Moderate”, adding rather quizzically, that he liked the things which the word connoted, like “prudence” and “moderation”. He defined the difference between the Moderates

and the Radicals of the Congress by saying: "our guiding principle is to cooperate [with the Government] when we can and criticize when we must, not [as the Radicals did] to criticize when we can and cooperate when we must." But he had "a word to say to the Government of India", indeed "a warning to sound":

The attitude of the British Government in regard to the reforms proposals is, so far as one can judge, unsatisfactory and even ominous.... Any postponement will mean public discontent, followed by agitation, the magnitude of which it would be difficult to exaggerate....

He said that they "wanted peace and rest", "steady and progressive development, accompanied by cooperation between the people and Government." But he could not help pointing to "a dark cloud of contention, controversy and agitation, the future of which none can divine." "There will be," he feared, "agitation on the one hand, intense, bitter, and widespread accompanied by deep national discontent, all parties being in it. There will be repression on the other, leading to God knows where." He conjured up an even more disturbing scenario. "Is India," he asked rhetorically, "to be converted by the unwisdom of our rulers into a greater Ireland? Are the days of the anti-Partition agitation to be renewed and aggravated a hundredfold by the intense political life of today...."

Nobody at the special session of the Congress two months earlier had gone quite so far in voicing his grim forebodings about the consequences of the lack of a sense of urgency on the part of the British Government over the question of reforms. But Surendranath Banerjea was a master of Fabian evasive tactics. Having hinted at the dangers ahead, he performed an about-turn and dismissed the dismal thoughts with a verbal flourish. "But," he said, "I have no doubts, no misgivings. The true sense of the British Democracy will prevail. It cannot be that the civilized world has spent its blood and treasure, and India has taken part in the supreme sacrifice of the nations, in order that this ancient country, the home of a great civilization, may continue to be a hewer of wood and drawer of water, barred out of her heritage of universal freedom."

His faith—and it was for real—in the true sense of British Democracy was touching. It was a faith which others besides his band of ardent Moderates shared. The British Democracy, for all its virtues, however, was seldom able to live up to it. In the months and years ahead India was to pay a heavy price for this great illusion of its political elite.

The Conference of the Moderates was held before the War had ended and before the British Parliament was dissolved and a general election called. At least these uncertainties were no longer there when the Thirty-third Congress met at Delhi on the day-after Christmas. But, of course, there was the shadow of other imponderables serving as the backdrop to, if not actually lengthening across, its deliberations. Those were the days before opinion polls and instant computerised election results. The polling had taken place on December 14. But the counting of the votes had to wait a fortnight by when the Congress had been in session two full days. Probably the complete results did not become available in India till it was more than half way through its business. These, however, could not have come as much of a surprise to Congress leaders even if they might not have guessed the scope and extent of the landslide victory for the coalition candidates. It was to win 484 seats in a House of 707. Asquith's section of the Liberals were to be reduced to a rump with thirty-six seats and Asquith himself was defeated. The largest Opposition group was that of Sinn Feiners with 73, but it had made it clear that its members would not take their seats in the Commons. This left the non-coalition Labour with 59 members as the only effective opposition.

There was not much for India to cheer in these results. Rather the reverse. Most of the candidates sympathetic to Indian aspirations were defeated—Charles Roberts who had accompanied Montagu on his mission, George Lansbury who was active in the auxiliary Home Rule for India League in Britain, Dr. G.B. Clark who had taken over the chairmanship of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress after Wedderburn's death and John Scurr, the Secretary of the Labour Party, with whom the A.I.C.C. had been in touch regarding its invitation to Labour to send a fraternal delegate to the Congress session. It was not even certain whether the Tories with 338 members against

136 of Lloyd George's Liberals would permit him to retain Edwin Montagu at the India Office even though he had won his seat by a majority of 6,000 over his Labour rival. These uncertainties could not but weigh upon the minds of the delegates to the Delhi session and in some degree colour their decisions.

Even otherwise the preparations for the Congress session had not been all smooth sailing. First there was the fact that, despite appeals to distinguished Moderates, including one from Gandhi who himself could not attend because of his "poor health" but hoped that "delegates from both sides" would be there, the men who really mattered, like Surendranath Banerjea and Dinshaw Wacha, and whose names still appeared as *ex-officio* members of the A.I.C.C. did not bother to reconsider their position and did not turn up at Delhi. Secondly, at one stage the Reception Committee of the Delhi Congress developed some doubt as to whether it would be able to muster enough resources to organise the show because of "the very limited extent of the Province of Delhi, Ajmere and Merwara" and asked the A.I.C.C. to permit it, as a special case, to enlist members of the Reception Committee "from the residents of the United Provinces and the Punjab." This request was granted.

Finally, there was the question of presidency. The special session at Bombay had ended on September 1. After that it took nearly a month for the Provincial Congress Committees to indicate their choice for the President. Almost all of them chose Tilak in the fitness of things. But there came the rub, apart from the fact that he was still under a ban from entering the Punjab and Delhi. By the time the decision was taken to invite him to preside over the Delhi session he was on his way to England to prepare his libel case against Chirol. Indeed, according to his biographer, Keer, he received the cable telling him that he had been elected President of the next Congress at Aden aboard the *S.S. Japan en route* for London where he reached on October 29, 1918. He thanked the Reception Committee but had no option but "to decline the honour."

Other names had to be considered. That of C. Vijayaraghavachariar and it seems, judging from a report in *India*, also that of Rabindranath Tagore. Nothing could have been more appropriate if India's National Poet had also headed the Indian

National Congress. It would have made the Delhi session truly one to be remembered. But it was not to be. Like Gandhi, and even more so, he was keeping very indifferent health at the time and did not want his name to be put up. In the event, the choice was Madan Mohan Malaviya. Once before, in 1909, he had been drafted to occupy the presidential chair at the last minute because on that occasion Pherozeshah Mehta, for some inexplicable reason, had withdrawn. This time, again, he had to step into the breach, though not quite at the last minute.

However, Delhi session was quite a different affair to the dismal gathering at the Bradlaugh Hall in Lahore. Once the Delhi Congress Reception Committee had surmounted its hesitation and self-doubt, it spared no effort, in spite of what it had described as "local difficulties", to make the Thirty-third Congress worthy of the city which in a real sense encapsulated the history of the Indian people. The site chosen for the great Pandal to be set up could not have been more appropriate. It was under the shadow of the Red Fort and within a stone's throw of the great Jamma Masjid, two magnificent examples of the architecture of the Moghuls who, as Bishop Heber remarked in his *Journal*, "built like giants" and, he might have added, with the exquisite craftsmanship of master jewellers.

The Official Congress Report speaks of a "record" number of delegates attending the session. This is a slight exaggeration. The figure it gives is 4,865 or 102 less than that for the attendance at the Calcutta session. But the difference is neither statistically nor politically significant. But what is important is another detail. Apparently, a large number of *kisans*, or peasants and farmers, from the neighbouring areas attended it and there was a large block reserved for them. Dr. Judith M. Brown plumps for the explanation furnished in a report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence that "Congress leaders, particularly Madan Mohan Malaviya" had "rallied a group of about 700 peasant delegates from areas near Delhi like Rohtak, Karnal and Gurgaon, paying all their expenses to attract them to the Congress meeting." But "Criminal Intelligence" reports are not always gospel truth, least of all in India, though with that curious mixture of naivete and analytical sophistication the Cambridge school of British historians seems to think so. It could be that

the *kisans* who came to the Delhi session were genuinely interested in what the Congress was all about and not just having a picnic on expense account.

The Chairman of the Reception Committee was Hakim Ajmal Khan, a reputed physician who practised the Yunani, or Greek, method of medicine. He was also an embodiment of that composite culture which flourished in Delhi even more than at Lucknow, at least until the "transfer of power" after which the cultural landscape of Delhi was to change, not necessarily for the better. His speech reflected that culture in which it was often difficult to know where the poetry ended and prose began. A good part of it was devoted to stressing the need for strengthening Hindu-Muslim unity and the concordat reached between the Congress and the Muslim League (the latter was also holding its session in Delhi on December 30-31) at Lucknow two years earlier.

On the question of constitutional reforms, he took a distinctly middle-of-the-road stand, blowing neither hot nor cold. All the same he made a telling point by remarking that Indians were being offered power and responsibility in areas of governance which were peripheral if not inconsequential, while they were being denied both power and responsibility in areas which really mattered. He put it rather delicately and even poetically:

The portion of the Report which deals with Local Self-Government requires but few words. There is no doubt that Indians have been treated liberally in this matter. But...in regard to the Provincial and Imperial Governments I am reminded of the famous partition between the poet and his brother who said :

"From the floor to its roof the house belongs to me.
And from the roof to Pleides is all thine."

He was understandably exercised over the repercussions of Allied victory on the question of Muslim Holy places, the Khilafat and Muslim States. Any assembly claiming "to represent the whole of India," he rightly argued, cannot "ignore questions so profoundly affecting 70 millions of her population." And he said he could best do it by quoting "the acknowledged and revered leader of the country Mahatma Gandhi". He went on to

quote a passage from his letter to the Viceroy written at the end of April to which a reference has been made in an earlier chapter. "No better exposition of the case could be made", he said which was essentially true.

Madan Mohan Malaviya's address did not advance the argument about the inadequacies of the Montagu-Chelmsford packet of reforms much further than Syed Hasan Imam's address to the special session four months before. He did, however, dilate at some length on President Wilson's address to the Congress of the United States on January 9, 1918. He quoted *in extenso* from his fourteen points beginning with the need for "Open covenants of peace openly arrived at without any secret diplomacy", "removal of all economic barriers and equality of trade conditions", disarmament and so on to "the formation of a general association of nations under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity for great and small states alike" and "the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another."

This, logically, led him to the issue of India's representation at the forthcoming Peace Conference. He recalled a speech by Lloyd George in which, while referring to India's contribution to the War, he "had promised that India's necessities would not be forgotten when the Peace Conference would be reached." He noted gratefully that an Indian—"our distinguished countryman, Sir S.P. Sinha"—had been appointed by the Indian Government to represent her at the Conference. He also noted with some satisfaction that an Indian ruling prince, the Maharaja of Bikaner, would also be there. He was glad of it, though he pointed out that Sinha—who was soon to be appointed Under Secretary of State for India and elevated to peerage—presumably "will represent at the Conference views which are in consonance with the views of that Government" and that the Maharaja of Bikaner "will be there to represent the views of the Indian States and the Ruling Princes." However, he sighed almost audibly, "it will remain a matter for regret that British India will not be represented at this great Conference by a person appointed by the Government on the recommendation of the elected representatives of the people."

The regret could not have been expressed in more moderate terms and, indeed, the whole tone of his address was ingratiating. Yet the Congress had been dubbed extremist by the *Times*. By contrast, Surendranath Banerjea addressing the Conference of the Moderates had been much more combative in certain passages of his address and had not hesitated to sound a warning note. What is more he had not pinned his faith on divine intercession in pleading the case for Indian self-government with the British Government as Madan Mohan Malaviya did in his concluding sentence. "I am sure," he said, "God will grant us self-determination earlier than many of us imagine we are going to get it." But this was whistling in the dark. Self-determination was not something which it was for the deity to grant or even President Wilson to secure for India. The key to the kingdom was with the British Government and it seemed in no hurry to part with it, especially in the heady mood of victory over the Kaiser's Reich and when, after the surrender and eventual scuttling of the German fleet, Britain believed it ruled the waves whatever the American pretensions.

In a passage at the beginning of his speech of welcome to the delegates to the Thirty-third Congress, Hakim Ajmal Khan had sounded a rather cheerful note. "At a time when the eager and far-seeing eyes of the sons of India," he had said, "are scanning the western horizon in search of the crescent of their hopes and aspirations, the Delhi session of the Indian National Congress possesses an importance which can make amends to a considerable extent for our disappointments in the past." He did not make it at all clear why and how this was to come about. But, presumably, he shared the mood of optimism which the older generation of Indian leaders for no evident reason had managed to sustain ever since Montagu's declaration of August 20, 1917.

Not everybody was quite so optimistic. Indeed, the younger Radicals and even some of the older ones, like Bipin Chandra Pal, for one, reminded the Congress that "the war is over. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report was a war measure: the war being over it is only a measure: and to increase the weight of that measure I want the people of this country with one united voice to demand their legitimate birthright to govern at least their provincial administration themselves without any interference

from outside, subject of course to such control as the Central Government must exercise over provincial governments." Speaking on Resolution number ten which dealt with repressive laws and regulations, those already operative and those ominously hinted by the Rowlatt Committee, he demanded that all detenus, interned or externed, under the Defence of India Act and other coercive enactments, be released. Without mincing his words, he said:

The Irish Sinn Feiners were granted amnesty in the midst of the war. Why should not our political prisoners be granted amnesty now that the war has practically come to an end? I want therefore your sanction for this demand. It is not a prayer. It is the demand of the people of India. It is the demand of the soul of India; it is the demand of her whom we salute as *Bande Mataram*.

Nor were they for fudging the issue in order to appease the Moderates. Annie Besant had argued in favour of an honourable compromise within the family. "A compromise with your brothers, a compromise in your own family, the recognition that some walk faster than others and others are a little slower, that for family unity you will keep together and walk a little more slowly because then you will be one party," she had pleaded, "that compromise I hold to be an honour and glory to those who make it; and I am not ashamed that I make a compromise of that kind." But S. Satyamurti, who had had a passage of arms with her at the Madras Provincial Conference not very long ago, would have none of it. He was for being bolder and getting even tougher in their demands. As for the compromise with Moderates, he was contemptuous of the idea. "We are the liberals," he said, "the radicals, and we shall be faithless to the light which burns in our hearts, if we do not go forward but in mere timidity go with those who do not agree with us and who will never agree with us." C.R. Das, of whom Dr. Judith Brown dismissively says that he had "nothing to lose by denouncing the reforms", was even more emphatic. He said:

Who are those Nationalists and who are those Moderates?

What right have they got to barter away the rights of the people like that? So far as I am concerned I entered into that compromise because I hoped that upon that compromise, upon a surrender of point for point by us I hoped that the moderate party as a whole would join us; the moderate party has not joined us, are we to go by that compromise and sell our birthright because the moderate party does not join us? I say such a principle is pernicious, and I refuse to follow it.

Against this ground swell of radicalism Srinivasa Sastri's attempt to sell the Montagu-Chelmsford packet to the Congress as "a substantial step in advance towards responsible government" was unavailing. Most of the resolutions dealing with the reforms were a re-affirmation of the resolutions passed at the Bombay special session. But they were couched in much stronger terms and, taking its stand on the pronouncements of President Wilson, Lloyd George and other British statesmen regarding the principle of Self-Determination as the foundation for the peace of the world, the Congress passed a resolution—number eleven on the order paper—claiming "the recognition of India by the British Parliament and by the Peace Conference as one of the progressive Nations to whom the principle of Self-Determination should be applied." It also demanded full responsible government in the Provinces at once and not only insisted that the Punjab should enjoy in the Reform Scheme equality with Bengal, Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces, but called for Delhi to be constituted into a Regulated Province with a Legislative Council and at least entitled to two representatives in the Legislative Assembly. It called for the same constitutional status for Ajmer-Merwara as for Delhi. Having taken the bit in its teeth, it seemed to run away with it and in resolution number thirteen had the audacity to say that in justice to India, it should be "represented by an elected representative or representatives, to the same extent as the Self-Governing Dominions at Conferences that may be held to deliberate on, or settle, the terms of peace or reconstruction." It went even further. It said:

In view of the shortness of time, and in anticipation of the

request made in the preceding part of the resolution being acceded to by His Majesty's Government, this Congress elects as its representatives Bal Gangadhar Tilak, M.K. Gandhi and Syed Hasan Imam.

The agenda was longer than at the special session—twenty-five resolutions instead of sixteen. Some of them were old faithfuls, including the call for the release of Ali Brothers who had already served four years of internment. Some raised new issues, like call for the Government to play an active part in promoting the industrial development of the country in line with the recommendations of the Industrial Commission and especially commending Madan Mohan Malaviya's separate minute to it—to say nothing of the resolution urging a better deal for the indigenous systems of medicine.

But once again the resolutions seemed to offer no strategy to ensure that they were heeded by and acted upon by the powers that were. The only thing the Congress could think of was still to set up a committee consisting of N.C. Kelkar, K.M. Munshi, B.G. Horniman and V.J. Patel to draft an address of congratulations to H.M. the King-Emperor on the successful termination of the War and a petition to the High Court of Parliament in England "enunciating our demand for Responsible Government as an integral part of the British Empire and embodying the resolutions of the Congress regarding such demands...." The idea of a Deputation to be sent to Britain was reaffirmed and a larger committee set up to select members of the Deputation and to raise funds for the purpose in cooperation with Provincial Congress Committees. N.C. Kelkar was to be the convener of the committee which included C.R. Das, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Barkat Ali, Harkishan Lal and Fazl-ul-Haq, an up and coming Muslim leader from Bengal.

The final resolution was in regard to the next Congress venue. In a few words it was "Resolved that the next Congress meet at Amritsar." There was no prophetic soul among the delegates gathered at Delhi who had even the remotest premonition of what Amritsar was to come to signify in the history of the Congress—and the Indian people—by the harvest festival of the New Year, 1919....

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