



MAHATMA GANDHI

(HIS TRIAL—AN IDEALISTIC POLICY
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY)

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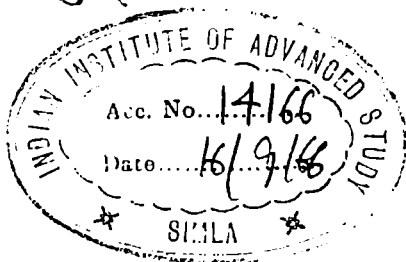
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MAHATMA GANDHI

GENTLEMEN,

DEAR COLLEAGUES:

Among the great ideas that absorb men's lives, there are those which wrinkle their brows, bent without respite over silent research; there are those whose smiling allurements flatter their imagination, and there are also those which take hold of a man by the throat and make him shriek and struggle.

Such is the collective idea which sets a whole nation afoot after the conquest or the recovery of free life fed by its own forces.

That idea when once it has dawned soon becomes imperious. It thunders and roars; it takes up an offensive mud, and it inspires men with desperate fury.

It means war.

Thus it is that in the course of centuries, the history of successive enfranchisements

is one and the same with the history of wars marked by massacres, more or less notorious, by horrors that go nameless so as to be better excused, by bravery certainly, but a mad bravery which plants its new flag on ruins.

Now there comes to us from India an astonishing message. A voice out there arises which says to the people: "You are suffering. Slaughter will not be the remedy. Throw down your arms and purify your hearts. Humiliated India shall be revived in peace through your renouncement."

It has come from afar, this message with its new harmonies! But still more unknown to us than remote from us is that India with her fascinating mystery!

Our travelled novelists have only flashed before our dazzled eyes its fantasmagoria:

From the ground there spring up beasts and plants which jostle in teeming

exuberance. Amid that luxuriant mass, the rarest species of trees and the noblest animals majestically flourish.

And across and through it all, Man has built.

He has vied with Nature :

Temples and palaces, innumerable, sing the glory of man, a gorgeous, incredible glory. The descendants of Akbar had a pea-cock made of emeralds for their throne. The King of Delhi caused a gold cataract to be built, studded with precious stones, so that the water in its fall should take in the sun the most enchanting hues. The Maharajah of Amber desired to have a whole town of rose-coloured marble, and Jeypore at his order was created.

Benares, Ellora show that the splendours dedicated to the gods still out-do the others in lustre and profusion.

And the great Princes of India—almighty sovereigns of prostrate subjects—surge in that magnificent setting. The story of

their lives has gleamed forth towards dull Europe in fabulous tales where there is a glitter of diamonds and precious stones, of bayaderes who dance before the images of Buddha.

This is what the West saw in the glass held out to it by the East. India was the Maharajahs.

And still, from time to time, while we marvelled at those things, there came to us, almost stifled by the Ocean, a brief cry : Famine. It remained unexplained, and died out, lost in our indifference.

It was the whole race that was groaning. It is to that heart-rending moan that the words of peace and renouncement replied. He who uttered them, Mohandas Gandhi, surnamed Mahatma, " the great Soul ", has bent over suffering India his gentle, earnest face, his straight benign gaze instinct with dauntless strength. " He has stood on the threshold of thousands of the disinherited," says Tagore,

“clad like one of them. He spoke their own language to them. There at last was truth, and no mere quotation out of a book.”

A Saint's truth was it, or a Prophet's? Man readily ascribes a supernatural halo to the one who professes such truths, and by so doing, feels less bound to live up to their stern purity, pointing them out, from the start, as unattainable.

What is the good of effort since the stake is in Heaven and we live upon Earth? But a prophet, Gandhi neither is, nor wishes to be. They keep inventing for us periodically, Messiahs more or less adapted to the improvements of our modern life. Divinity requires more mystery.

Is he a Saint then?

Saints we have had in great numbers. There are some still. That there have been men who mortified themselves in their flesh and in their soul is nothing new. For those who believe in God's Heaven, such

men have opened the gates thereof to sinners. For those who believe in the force of example, such men have wafted a little virtue over the world. For those who believe in nothing, such men have left their own place in the sun to others, and have died out; and their death caused no stir on earth.

He was neither a prophet nor a saint. I must meet disappointment half-way: Gandhi is but . . . a barrister.

His father and his grand-father were Dewans of the State of Porbandar. He saw nothing around him in his youth but honours and wealth. At the age of 19, he started for London to finish his education, to the great dismay of his pious mother. Do not smile: she made him take a three-fold vow of abstinence: "abstinence from flesh, alcohol and women."

Back to his country Mohandas Gandhi carries on his profession successfully. And, in India, practising law successfully implies

a financial success which may well fill with humility the most favoured among us. Such and such an advocate is known to pay over 50,000 pounds of his income, yearly, to the Treasury.

In 1893, the chances of his practice took him to Natal for a year. The very day of his landing there, he experienced a shock which reverberated through his whole life: he, a cultured gentleman of the London Bar, child of a noble race, who had known the splendours of an Indian palace, who had consorted, not with the humble, but with the mighty and the refined of this world, was thrown out of a first-class railway-carriage: by staying in it after a European had entered it, he had been guilty of the crime of high-treason against the white race.

The insult was for the brilliant and self-possessed young barrister the flash which suddenly lighted up for him the world of suffering. The real aim of his journey

sank into the background. His discovery had upset everything in him. Here, in South Africa, he no longer enjoyed the rights of a man, because he was an Indian. The immigrants, his fellow-countrymen, were temporary slaves whom the reigning masters of Dutch origin wanted to turn into slaves for ever.

The Barrister had come over for a year. The man went away only twenty years later, when once he had, with the moral support of England, restored its honour to the Indian Community.

Gradually he had given up his profession which he considered immoral: The best lawyer should be accessible to the poorest man. One day, in the middle of some cross-questioning, he leaves the Court abruptly, because he discovers his client has deceived him. He becomes absolutely impossible, according to the admitted social code.

His political morals are quite as startling. Sent to England, he brings back to his

fellow-countrymen the funds of the mission. He gives out to the poor the gold-plate of which Natal had made him a present.

At the age of 25, the legitimate ambitions of a man have left him. Henceforth his life no longer belonged to him: it was absorbed by his work of devotion.

That work, gentlemen, we are not going to judge. "To conceive great men stripped of their error, one would have to conceive them stripped of their force," Paul Valéry says. The error here does not matter much. It is not for us to seek whether it exists at all. The Great Man only interests us, as he has interested even his rivals, the English, who, in rendering him a personal homage, have shown rare independence of judgment.

That work had nothing revolutionary in its aim. In South-Africa, as he did later

in India, Gandhi said to the Government : Reform, and not Rupture. And yet he has inscribed in history the exceptional events we are going to glance over.

From what well-spring did they surge then? From measureless ambition? From fanatical nationalism? Gandhi was free from both these curses. The well-spring for that man whom some call a political man was a religious ideal.

Do not be alarmed. Gandhi is not a missionary. He does not desire the triumph of one particular religious ideal, but that of " the " religious ideal.

We are used to hearing the Christian preach Christianity, the Mussulman Muhammadanism. Why should not the Hindu preach Hinduism? However incredible the fact may appear to all the supporters of clericalism of the world, the Hindu religion does not exclude the other religions. It is tolerance itself—as it knows to its cost, having received into its bosom undesirable

doctrines—merely because it is loath to repulse. But place this benign Hindu religion in the heart of a man, pure like the Mahatma : he prunes it of all parasitical growths and expresses its pure spirit : “ Jesus Christ ”, he says, “ is a bright revelation of God.” And Buddha ? “ But not the only revelation,” he goes on to say. “ I cannot set him on a solitary throne.”

Hinduism, his chosen religion, teaches him that passions should be purified, not destroyed, that an active worldly life is compatible with the inward life of the spirit. Buddha, whom he venerates, because in sooth Buddha surpassed men, does not appeal to him by his doctrine of immovableness—Negation is repugnant to him—but he draws from Buddha the notion of mental discipline and utter self-forgetfulness.

Towards Christ his soul inclines with fervour. The New-Testament was his

first great religious emotion. He was then twenty and lived in London. The attempts of his friends to make him appreciate the Bible failed utterly. As for the great Hindu Scriptures, the Bhagavad-Gîtâ, the Râmâyana, they were only revealed to him later on. And then he looked for and found in them what the Sermon on the Mount had taught him: the law of love and suffering.

It is with a word out of the Gospel that he concludes his book on "The Ethics of Religion". "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all things will be added unto you." And these words are not for him, as they were for Renan, a mere dream of the "fascinating teacher". He gives them a great and simple meaning, precise and practical. To say that they are but a doctrine, and an impracticable one in our industrial era is, Tolstoï protested indignantly, "as if drunkards on being told they should become more sober answered that

this advice was ill-timed considering their drunken state.”

Christ did not philosophize. He gave the world a definition of human activity, absolutely different from the old one. And, against such odds, Gandhi rushed into politics attended by all this spiritual train —and he was neither a mad man nor an impotent man—against such odds, he caused the soul to shine over the world.

His South-African campaign concerned but a handful of people, but behold! in India, it is 320 million men he draws along with him, men living on a solid continent that has been shoulder to shoulder with ours for thousands of years, and no utopian planet.

That struggle which we are going to watch, in its cause, its programme, its passionate unfolding, to arrive suddenly at the unexpected calm of a majestic trial, against whom is it directed? Against England?

No. Against degrading injustice, against all that the honour of man should not bear.

So Gandhi speaks to England in these words :

This is what your administration has done. These are its crimes, these, its mistakes. Repair them. What is England? England means its constitution, which insures so many liberties. England means its proclamations, from the one made by Queen Victoria to her subjects of whatever race or creed they were—"In their prosperity," she said, "shall dwell our strength; in their satisfaction our security; in their gratitude our best reward"—down to the proclamation of George V who, in 1920, desires that justice and mercy should reign. The Queen's wish did not turn out to be a prophecy. The Queen is far off. Her envoys sometimes turned the distance to account. But the royal ideal at any rate did not fail. "I sincerely desire," said

Her Majesty, "that every trace of resentment be effaced between my people and those who are at the head of my Government." And in her name the political prisons are opened.

I love the English, Gandhi concludes, I love their Constitution, and want all India to be loyal to them, but a proud India, not a humiliated India.

Is there to be found a better subject of the Empire than he? From 1914 to 1918, while the Empire is in danger, Gandhi calls for recruits for it. He accepts, at the urgent request of the Government, to attend the War-Conference of Delhi, and says to tired India: You must ungrudgingly, unequivocally give your support to the Empire in peril. Later on when the English are in a situation to attend to us, we shall ask them to let us into a dignified partnership, upon a footing of equality, such for instance as the one afforded by the Dominion Status. We shall become partners and friends. But

while good understanding is wished for, it is war that is offered.

Is the cause only in the discomfort of a nation in the throes of political travail, which wishes to achieve this or that up-to-date form of government for the mere pleasure of shedding its old shell and hearing it crack ?

It might have been the case had India only begun to exist in 1858 when it was annexed to the British Crown. But "India " means nothing when seen over the length of a half century or even one and a half century. Her history is 5,000 years old. Her literature 7,000 years old. Her antiquity looms back in the past far beyond that of civilizations that have long since crumbled to dust. She alone has survived. Under the ægis of several kings or of one all-powerful Emperor, in boundless prosperity, she has proudly unfolded herself through the centuries. Even the boldest social virtues have blossomed there, substituting for the

conventional picture of the hideous tyrant, the unexpected figure of a fore-runner of our most extreme communists: One great Emperor, converting into a system certain customs of his ancestors, proceeded every five years to the distribution of the riches accumulated during the interval. And—by a most unheard of gesture, which gives a striking proof of the greatness of the Hindu religion—after having loaded the destitute with gifts, endowed the Buddhist monks and the Brahmins, the pious Hindu for ten whole days distributed his riches to the heretics.

Then it happened that the India of the great dynasties, India swarming with life, the India of myths as of abstractions, had come to a dead stand, and there was slowly sinking.

The European contribution had, in the nineteenth century, stopped the supple, natural rhythm of her age-long activity. Europe poured upon her its broad methods and

complicated machinery. But India absorbed nothing. The methods and machinery super-imposed themselves upon her who, unable to answer by the same means, watched in helpless astonishment that incomprehensible civilization spreading over her, that civilization which, far from improving her, was fast devouring her.

She became "the thing"—without power of resistance—of all these hard-tempered men and instruments. A thing that was sparkling with acquired wealth and promises of wealth. The temptation was too strong. And if these men built their railways and established all the comforts of their civilization, they made use of them to drain India of her ancient riches, and to blow her meditative soul to the four winds of Heaven.

India was robbed of her colour, not fortified. The incoming of material forces meant for her the loss of her own strength.

That is the real cause of the struggle. Gandhi wants emasculated India to recover its own genius.

The immediate causes were not wanting. Scarcely had the Armistice of the 11th of November brought there—as it did here with us—the hope of a better life, when the Rowlatt Bills were passed. As a consequence of some plot hatched by a few fanatics, behold the Penal Code modified, and the Government, in order to cope with a trifling local danger, armed with powers extraordinary against the whole population, the gentlest in the world.

On the other hand, great anxiety takes hold of the Mussulmans of India. Mr. Lloyd George had promised them, in gratitude for their loyalty, that the integrity of the Ottoman Empire would remain unimpaired. Now echoes from the Conference reach them. The dismemberment is being discussed, and what is more, it appears England

is not among the Powers that uphold the Muslim claims.

The Mussulman, even in India, is violent and fanatical. If he has to choose between loyalty to the British connection and loyalty to his Code and Prophet, he does not require a second to make his choice. The Holy places are going to be desecrated! No more is wanted: two leaders at once spring up, the Ali Brothers, and the 70 million Mussulmans of India, at one bound, leap to their side.

Will this cause remain exclusively Mussulman?

If one were to believe in the legend—not a deep-rooted one at that—which makes of Hindus and Mussulmans inimical brothers, at all times and for ever irreconcilable, then four-fifths of the population would have witnessed with ill-disguised joy the good trick Sèvres was playing on their credulous fellow-countrymen.

But both history and the spirit of Hinduism tell us what the legend is worth.

Hindu Emperors succeeded Mussulman Emperors, without either religion being at any time molested, without there being between man and man that war at once open and secret which makes social intercourse intolerable. Akbar, the Great Mogul Emperor, married a Hindu Princess without any catastrophe ensuing.

Besides, why should the Hindu religion that lives at peace with all the others, be at war with Muhammad's? Its meekness, on the contrary, has made of the Mussulmans of India the gentlest of all Mussulmans.

The Hindu-Muslim question is altogether one of artificial political creation, and barely twenty years old. That out of it should have arisen for the Hindus vexations on account of their worship of the Cow, that in retort they, in their turn, should have played some music before the

Mosques, it all amounts to acts of human pettiness in which religion is a mere pretext. There never has been any religious hostility. There are differences in diet, in social habits, particularly matrimonial habits. If the ones and the others do not sit at the same board, and do not intermarry, it is but wisdom that dictates they should each stay in the group for which they are fitted. It is only kings that ever made a success of marrying shepherdesses !

So that the Hindus had no great violence to do to themselves to help their Muhammadan brethren. It was enough that Gandhi should take sides. A promise has been made. It must be kept. No futile promise, but a vital one for the Mussulman, since it preserves that for which every day he is ready to lay down his life, that is to say, his religious faith and the Holy Places.

Race without wile or subtlety, who took a phase of the diplomatic game in earnest,

forgetting it was but a game and therefore apt to score most contradictorily, without any crime being committed !

Here now is India angered by the Rowlatt Bills and the Khilafat question.

Gandhi, more than any other, resents the injustice, but far from practising on that anger he masters it. He holds out his hand to the powerful Ali Brothers, 70 million men strong—but he disarms them. He proclaims disobedience to the Rowlatt Bills, but he demands from his countrymen that they shall pledge themselves to refrain from any violence whatsoever “to life, person or property”.

He founds a newspaper without license. He distributes prohibited literature: his pamphlet on Home Rule, Ruskin's “Unto this Last,” and Plato's “Defence and Death of Socrates” translated by him and forbidden by Government in 1919.

At the same time, he organizes all over India pious manifestations: hartals, *i.e.*,

days of fasting and prayer, in which the soul collects its forces together to impart its conviction. The Government will understand their blunder. And during all the Spring and Summer 1919, the hartals are multiplied, silent and majestic.

Was it that this impalpable force put armed force beside itself with anger? It occurred at Jallianwallah Bagh, in Punjab, that an order was issued by General Dyer to fire on harmless demonstrators. There were two thousand victims.

One scream of horror rang throughout the country. At the same time, under cover of the Rowlatt Bills, mass arrestations were effected in Punjab, both the innocent and the guilty being judged summarily, in contempt of the most elementary rules of the humane Code. It was as if a sort of frenzy had, owing to a few unworthy officials, seized the whole administration of Punjab.

The Central Government gave orders for an inquiry to be held. The National Congress of India, a patriotic organization, did the same. The inquiries were conducted on parallel lines, for six months, by men equally impartial, and led to confirmation of the facts in their incredible brutality. From one Commission to the other only the form changed. The deed of Jallianwallah Bagh was called by one a massacre, by the other "an error of judgment" of General Dyer.

The British Parliament got hold of the facts. The House of Commons was roused to indignation. The fine speeches of Messrs. Asquith, Montagu and Churchill voiced that indignation energetically.

Then a phenomenon took place which, whenever it occurs, astonishes the simple-minded multitude, but not politicians. The big eddy-water of the House of Commons turned to slack-water in the House of Lords. There the evidence was too

strong: it killed indignation. An English official could not have acted wrongly. And the operation of justice fell into lethargy.

The guilty men were not punished. Some even, by an oversight, got promotion.

India was unlucky indeed!

Already, a little over a century earlier, when Warren Hastings had been arraigned before the House of Lords, so many years were required to run over the endless list of his extortions, that by the end of the seventh year the Lords got tired. From a hundred and sixty that they numbered at the opening debate, they came down to twenty-nine on the day . . . of the acquittal.

Gandhi failed to appreciate the attitude of the Lords as a simple political phenomenon, somewhat disconcerting, and he declared: "A scandal of this magnitude cannot be tolerated by the nation if it is to preserve

its self-respect and become a free partner in the Empire.”

At the same moment the fate of Turkey is settled. Unfaithful hands have meddled with the Ottoman Empire. A wind of revolt blows. Gandhi, in an open letter, urges the Viceroy to uphold the Muslim cause, to take the lead of the agitation himself, so as to have it in hand. A last effort, doomed to failure from the first. It was considered as a piece of extravagance. The Rowlatt Bills were still in operation. The wounds of Punjab were not dressed.

The dice are cast. The time has come when action will go hand in hand with prayer. On August 1st, 1920, Gandhi gives the signal for the carrying out of his great idea: non-co-operation.

“Of all absurdities the most absurd,” the Viceroy says. Of all attempts to struggle by peaceful methods in spite of all, the most desperate attempt :

“I would co-operate a thousand times with this government,” proclaims “Gandhi, to wean it from its career of crime. but I will not for a single moment co-operate with it, to continue that career. . . .”

And this is the programme he unfolds in four stages :

The giving up of all titles and resignation of honorary posts ; withdrawal of children from Government schools and colleges ; boycott of British law-courts by lawyers and litigants ; boycott of foreign goods. So much for the first stage.

The second will be : refusal to fill civil or judiciary posts in the Government service.

The third stage : refusal to pay taxes.

The fourth : withdrawal of the police and the military forces.

A programme of unheard of audacity which threatens the government machine with complete paralysis. Let 320 million men refuse 100,000 other men their milliards

and their human power : these 100,000 men will be reduced to powerlessness.

But will this programme be carried out ?

When Gandhi appeared, India was not without leaders. The National Congress, a gathering of cultured and liberal men, was there, presiding over her destinies. Is it going to approve of and support Gandhi ? Or, in other words, will all these well-known leaders melt into the mass to serve him ? It is hard to give up hearing the music of one's own name. Yet, after a short hesitation, all were great enough to do it.

Unanimity on a political formula is nothing short of witch-craft. However convincing the orator be, when one speaks to the brain, the brain answers . . . by an objection.

The spell was that in this matter Gandhi spoke not to the brain but to the heart and soul.

One must, he says, take a religious interest in the acts of those who govern. Whether

one likes it or not, the disastrous political gesture of General Dyer has produced a "moral effect". Above government politics are government morals. Therefore, if Government becomes systematically unjust, the citizen's duty is to cease supporting it. If the citizen has not always broken that bond in such a case, Tolstoï explains, it is because "mankind often laboured under hypnotism".

That denial of the citizen to co-operate with the Government will perhaps promote the violence of the latter. So it is a law of suffering that Gandhi dictates.

"A law of suffering and also a law of love": and he declares he will retire from the struggle if he feels there is any hatred against the English in it.

A law of suffering but not of impotency : It is more manly to forgive than to punish, he says. "But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish.

A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her."

The power of the Indian nation will be the "soul force".

This is the new energy : "Till a new energy is harnessed and put on wheels, the captains of the older energies, will treat the innovation as theoretical, impractical, idealistic and so on. We may be certain that the steam-engineer was laughed at by the horse-dealer, till he saw that even horses could be transported by the steam-engine."

Non-co-operation with the Government does not mean a particular series of actions; it means a living faith. And a living faith freed from the servitudes of the political strife. Gandhi's soldiers have not the intolerance of trades-unionists. They would think it a shame if the hartals were partly the result of a threat of the militant to the lukewarm.

It is the faith of the enthusiasts which must lay hold of the conscience of those who waver.

The struggle, besides, is disconcertingly frank and open. Gandhi abhors the "sin of secrecy". He displays his boldest plans openly, and thus lives at peace with the secret police. Far from being hunted up, he will often accept the friendly offices of these "gentlemen" who apologize for being obliged to follow him. The Government itself, impressed by such cool audacity, answered Gandhi's most severe letters, as if in spite of itself it felt bound to justify itself.

There is spread abroad that faith which makes the most arrogant uneasy. It transposes the struggle not into the domain of abstraction but into that of a less vulgar reality. A reality essentially active nevertheless. The idea is not only "not to do", but also "to do things anew". Non-co-operation is no passive

resistance: it is an abstinence and a creation.

That abstinence, you know the programme of it. That creation consists in the organization of private arbitration, of the national production, of National Universities, and finally in the removal of the shameful practice of untouchability which makes pariahs of millions of human beings.

In the first two forms of that creative activity there is nothing to surprise us. They deal a direct blow at the Governmental power, the first impairing its authority, the second its wealth. This latter (*i.e.*, organization of the national production) was a passion with Gandhi. He sees India as a country of villages, of 750,000 villages, for which the supplementary industry of the spinning-wheel is a bare necessity. Now the machines of Lancashire have thrown millions of people into idleness. The ruin of the spinning-wheel means chronic

famine for India. Everyone, therefore, must refuse to buy imported cloths, and weave at least what he consumes, till India has become again the country of wonderful textures. And every day, Gandhi himself untiringly weaves, and listens as it revives all over India, to that music of the wheel celebrated by Kabir, the old weaver and poet, the wheel which the Emperor Aureng-Zebe used to spin.

But what have the two other creative activities to do in that struggle? Will they not doom it to failure by raising up a multitude of enemies? To raise the pariah is to meddle with the vital cell of Hindu society: that is to say caste, a religious dogma, not a mere institution. What! Is it the Mahatma, the Great Religious Soul who wants to commit that sacrilege? On the other hand, does not the creation of Indian universities mean a criminal rejection of the vast western culture?

Bidding defiance to incomprehension, Gandhi demands from the non-co-operator that he will extend his creed so far.

Caste which, in our eyes, is only the great wall that smothers Hindu society (by rejecting out of its bosom millions of men), caste is not an instrument of oppression. Hinduism has drawn four great theoretic divisions: the religious thinker, the warrior, the merchant, the craftsman and peasant. And in so doing Hinduism has not created privileges; it has defined the essential callings of mankind. If, in the course of time, a rank has been established, it was not among the men themselves but among their activities.

Is it not wonderful to see that in India the first rank is given to those who deal in philosophical and religious thought, the Brahmins, who keep up the sacred fire of Sanskrit culture, the real treasure of the nation? In the West, Philosophy is its own end. It does not permeate our life. Out

in India it is life's torch. All the powers bow low before it; it is Plato's dream come true: Philosophers are the masters and leaders of Society.

That is what Hinduism has conceived. It has never excluded from men's intercourse the unfit whom, at the present time, one cannot touch without sin. In the name of Hinduism, Gandhi repudiates this monstrosity which is but a malignant excrescence of it.

It is also to prevent the evil one from quoting scripture that he wants to free fallen women from their compulsory yoke of ignominy. Far from copying Buddha who said of woman: "Avoid looking at her. If you must look, do not speak to her. If you must speak, then be on the watch." Gandhi, he, is the man who said of his own wife: "She moves me as no other woman in the world can."

And he holds out his hand to the lost women and does not shut them out when

he says: " The female sex (is) not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two for it is . . . the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith . . ."

It is because it frees the genius of India from an internal constraint that this particular purification is, for Gandhi, an essential factor of the political struggle. It is because it frees it from an external constraint that the creation of national universities is another essential factor.

It is not Gandhi's intention to depreciate or reject English culture, nor all the other cultures of the world, but it is necessary first "under pain of civil suicide to imbibe and live one's own". Only the use of the vernacular can stimulate the originality of thought: "No country, he says, can become a nation by producing a race of translators."

The foreign lore of these impotent clerks does not filter down to the masses, whereas

the beauty of the Hindu culture was precisely its diffusion throughout the nation. India is the land where the courtier and the husbandman speak with the same elegance and courtesy.

The disappearance of native-education has made men strangers to themselves: they must find themselves again. The master ought to be as he was once, not only he who teaches, but he who shapes a character; he should restore to the Hindus—belittled in their body, mind and soul—their pride in their own civilization, which was presented to them as barbarous, superstitious and useless for all practical purposes.

Modern civilization is not Christian. It is too much imbued with what Gandhi calls the "Rockefeller spirit". It is destructive of that which for India is the most precious heritage: her intense spirituality, which expresses itself by the plainest living and the highest thinking.

The Hindu, from the humblest to the most enlightened, is steeped in the religious mystery of the Infinite. "The wonder is not," Anatole France said magnificently, "that the field of stars is so vast, but that man has measured it." For the Hindu the wonder is that the field of stars should exist at all.

Those are the things that Gandhi, for fifteen months, allowed to soak into the nation. Fifteen months during which he kept India at the constructive work, delaying the extreme stages of non-co-operation, though arrests and arbitrary measures went on increasing every day.

Once only politics had its turn. The Duke of Connaught, in the course of an official voyage to India, was greeted by empty streets. Gandhi had so willed it, though he called the Duke "the good prince," because he, Gandhi, cannot tolerate that the Government should make use of the Duke's popularity in order to

score hurrahs that were not meant for him.

But behold! the Government itself accelerates matters: in September 1921, the Ali Brothers are arrested. The Mussulmans seize their good and trusty swords. Gandhi achieves the miracle of mastering them, but he no longer spares the Government: The Ali Brothers are innocent, he says. They have never incited any one to violence. They have simply pointed out to the sepoy that the Government have not made use of him "to defend the liberty or the honour of the weak", but for oppression or conquest, in Mesopotamia, in Egypt. It is an absolute right for any one to express his opinion on the opportunity of offering the Government his services or withdrawing them.

Words that rang dangerously, which push ajar Gandhi's prison-door.

In November, the Prince of Wales comes to make up for the failure of the Duke of

Connaught. This time, hartals throughout the length and breadth of India, changed into mourning-clothes, the clothes of rejoicing that had been given out. And immediately integral non-co-operation will be started.

With impressive unanimity the hartals spread their phenomenal silence. The European is alarmed.

But in Bombay a handful of hooligans breed trouble. Blood is shed.

With heart rent, but without hesitation, Gandhi suspends the movement. If the non-co-operation cannot get the better of the detestable mob, one must wait yet longer. And how rightly he can answer those who accuse him of being a clever politician under the mantle of saintliness, that if he seems "to take part in politics it is because politics encircle us to-day like the coil of a snake"! But politics never have dominated a single one of his decisions. To him can the Chinese proverb be applied

which says: "Only those are worthy to govern who would rather not govern." Gandhi, a political leader? No, the leader of an orchestra, rather, in whom sings "the still small voice" and who wants to make that voice audible. A leader who never overlooks a single false note and implacably stops the impulse he has given, to start again towards greater perfection.

And meanwhile the prisons are brimful. The Viceroy is perplexed. Why challenge the Government and compel arrest? he asks. Gandhi enlightens him in a pungent article entitled: "A puzzle and its solution." Violence and public opinion grapple with each other. The latter will not capitulate before the former.

Gandhi's prison-door turns on its hinges and opens a little wider.

But now the National Congress of India, resolutely won over to Gandhi, gives him full powers.

No more lobby-politics: *one* man and *one* idea. It will mean civil disobedience, inaugurated at Bardoli and hence to gain the whole country if, within the week, —we are now in February, 1922—the Viceroy has not liberated the Press, opened prisons, and restored the fines and forfeitures.

“Then,” said the Government, “the alternative is between lawlessness and all its disastrous consequences on the one hand, and the maintenance of those principles which lie at the root of all civilized governments.”

“No,” answers Gandhi, “the alternative is between mass civil-disobedience with all its dangers, and lawless repression of the lawful activities of the people.”

The people *shall* disobey.

At that time a tragedy is acted at Chauri-Chaura: The police fire on a procession. The infuriated mob pursue them to their quarters and set fire to them.

Chauri-Chaura, fatal knell ! stifled by the clamour of the nation at the highest pitch of sacrifice. All on fire, she yearns for the signal to begin that redeeming disobedience. Chauri-Chaura, fatal knell !

The Mahatma hears it, deep-echoing in his conscience. Once more he stays the flood of the immense human tide. Bardoli shall *not* disobey.

An unheard of audacity it was to bring back, humiliated, to his starting point, the soldier as he was rushing forward, thrilling with ardour. A huge political blunder, they mutter on every side. What matter a few corpses if the nation be saved ! That going back means freedom lost, the Government more overbearing than ever at the moment when it was on the brink of capitulation.

And now cowardly mediocrity springs up on every side and overwhelms him. Anonymous letters beseech him not to forbid violence ; others give him to understand

that his non-violence is but a clever feint ; others threaten to co-operate ; others at last say he has betrayed the Ali Brothers.

He totters. His dauntless faith drinks to the dregs the cup of disenchantment.

And secretly a temptation dawns : his haughty challenge to the Government, not being carried out, becomes a pompous and ridiculous gesture. Must he drink the cup of humiliation as well ?

His pain is infinite, but it is for him as a second birth. He comes out of it still more resolute. His words now fall from such heights that they can express everything. Towards his people he turns, implacable :

“ I have made a Himalayan miscalculation . . . I see that our non-violence is skin-deep. We are burning with indignation. You want to deliver non-violent blows . . . ” If you are not capable of non-violence, adopt violence loyally. But let there be no hypocrisy.

As the majority affirm their sincerity, "then," he declares, "the nation gained by my humiliation . . . and the confession of my error."

And he pledges himself to fast, "for," he says—and let us thereby measure the force of his mental attitude—"he must become a fitter instrument, able to register the slightest variation in the moral atmosphere about me."

And to the Government he turns, dauntless: "I shall continue to confess blunders each time the people commit them."

But the Government has *not* the mental attitude one might wish. And this is how it answers the heroic movement of retreat: "If the existence of our Empire were challenged," an official telegram said, "and demands were made in the very mistaken belief that we contemplated retreat from India, then India would not challenge with success the most determined people in the world, who would once again answer the

challenge with all the vigour and determination at its command.”

The British Lion has made a mistake. Gandhi throws in its face his famous article entitled “Shaking the Manes”: “In spite of the hard fibre . . . and all the determination and vigour of the most determined people in the world, the rice-eating, puny millions of India have resolved upon achieving their own destiny without any further tutelage and without arms . . . No Empire intoxicated with red wine of power and plunder of weaker races has yet lived long in this world . . . Submission to the insolent challenges that are cabled out on due occasions is now an utter impossibility.”

Words like those are not bandied twice. The air is pregnant with the inevitable catastrophe. On the 10th of March, 1922, Gandhi is arrested.

And as if it were the doom of this strange being to provoke among men exceptional

reactions, the storm which was fatally, it seemed, to sweep over the country at the news of the arrest, turned into a majestic and meditative silence. Gandhi's soul was triumphant. India had understood that she could not render her passionately beloved master a greater homage than that of her pious discipline and dumb suffering.

And there is not in the records of history a more momentous trial than that which took place a week later before the Sessions in Ahmedabad.

The Court was not invaded by the jarring hubbub of political trials. It was a temple where none but noble words resounded.

England was magnanimous. She won back through her magistrates all that the harshness of her administrators had caused her to lose.

Debates there were none. The public prosecutor had taken up the three famous articles: "Tampering with Loyalty," "The

"Puzzle and its Solution," and "Shaking the Manes," in order to have punished under the Indian Penal Code the man who had preached disaffection towards His Majesty or the Government.

Mahatma Gandhi pleaded guilty to the charges, yet was careful to lay stress on the fact that only his crime against Government was retained, and that the King's name was rightly omitted from the charges, as he had always dissociated the two. The Government had ill-served His Majesty. The Government alone had acted amiss.

The publisher of the articles, Sankarlal Banker, also pleaded guilty.

So when Gandhi spoke after the Advocate-General had addressed the Court, it was not to discuss his arguments; it was to take the multitude who listened to his inmost heart.

In a statement which was a sort of declaration of faith and self-examination,

he explained how thirty years of devoted fidelity to Government had ended in making of him the apostle of non-co-operation.

And it was wonderful to hear the accused from that solemn Bar draw up the indictment of the system. "No sophistry, no jugglery in figures, he said, can explain away the evidence the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye."

The section under which he was prosecuted, "the prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code," as he calls it, thinks it can "manufacture or regulate affection". Now every one should be free to give the fullest expression to his disaffection so long as he does not contemplate, promote or incite to violence . . . "Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is the last article of my faith," he says. His people have sometimes gone mad.

But far from denying the bloody episodes he abhors, he is great enough to endorse all the responsibility. He knew he was playing with fire, yet he could not hesitate. He refuses all mercy : " I am here to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen."

The Judge, a large-hearted and large-minded man, achieved in such difficult juncture the wonderful feat of safe-guarding the dignity of justice-dealing England and expressing his sense of the unique event he had to deal with.

He proved magnificently that, while having the strictest conception of his duty, a magistrate could be a man.

"The law," he said, "is no respecter of persons. Nevertheless, it will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I

have ever tried, or am likely to have to try. It would be impossible to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals, and of noble, of even saintly life."

"There are probably few people in India," he goes on to say, "who do not sincerely regret that you should have made it impossible for any Government to leave you at liberty."

And after scrupulously weighing the matter in the balance, he asks Gandhi to decide for himself what his penalty should be.

A useless question. Gandhi thinks there can be no penalty lighter than the six years' simple imprisonment proposed. And he pays the deepest-felt homage to the peerless courtesy of his judges.

An admirable trial that in which such words were uttered. And proud may be

the nation whose teaching well-understood breeds grandeur and impartiality.

At the minute we have now reached, all the noise has turned to silence, the agitation to order. And as in remote times when the gurus, the wisemen of India, sent from the depths of their antique forests the call of truth, one seems to hear, mystic and vital, the call of the Mahatma: What the world requires is less machinery and more soul.

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