

THE INDIAN PROBLEM.*

First, let me try to give you a glimpse of the strangeness and the diversity of the Indian sub-continent. We are considering a part of the world which differs in almost every conceivable respect from the world that you here know at first hand.

More than one American has spoken to me of the difficulties arising from your mixed population, and from the divergent elements in your great cities, which undoubtedly cause complications in maintaining order and administering the law; and we from the old country appreciate your difficulties and we warmly sympathize with you. Do not regard us as coming here in the character of superficial or supercilious critics. On the contrary, little as we may know of the details of your own land, we well understand that you here in Chicago and in many of the great American cities have a problem by reason of diversities of race and the like which is far more difficult to handle than similar problems as they arise in the well-settled territory of England or Scotland. But, believe me, your experience in this regard is the palest imitation and reflection of the character of the difficulty arising in India, owing to an inconceivable combination of diverse circumstances, diverse civilizations, diverse languages, diverse religions,—and religions, mark you, which do not mean some formal action of worship or prayer at a particular moment of the day, or the taking part in a particular service once a week, but a religion that enters into every conscious act in the life of various Oriental races—differences so mixed and so complicated that there is nothing whatever in the modern western world which can at all be compared with them. You here in the United States, in spite of all your diversity of origin and all your complications in facing the problem of law and order, you have tremendous welding and uniting forces which have made you the immense United States which you are.

What are they? I do not arrange them in any order of priority, but I mention them as they occur to me. You have your all-prevailing American language, to begin with, understood from one end of your country to the other, a language, I was told the other day, which is being investigated by one of the authors of the famous

*Portion of an address delivered by Sir John Simon, at the luncheon tendered him and other visiting guests of the American Bar Association, at the Blackstone Hotel, Chicago, on Friday the 22nd August, 1930.

Oxford English Dictionary with the result that he has discovered 2,500 words contributed to the English language which were of American origin. If he would read the Chicago newspapers for a week he would find ten times as many.

How does India stand in the comparison? The census of India records some 220 dialects. But leave that out. Take the big prominent languages of India—there are certainly a dozen. I would rather say there are a score. There is no single Indian tongue which prevails over the whole Indian continent. There is nobody, Mr. Gandhi or anybody else, who can communicate with the whole Indian people by using any given form of Oriental speech; and there are vast areas in India where the language is not only different from elsewhere, but it comes from an utterly different family of speech—not like the contrast between English and French, not like the contrast between the languages of Europe, but tongues so utterly different that there is not the remotest prospect of getting that invaluable bond which you have presented by the bond of the American language.

English, in some respects, is the uniting tongue of India. It is the language which is largely used in every great congress. If you were holding this congress on Indian soil and you were Indian lawyers, it might be supposed that you would be talking the Indian tongue. On the contrary, you would all be talking English to one another, because, out of the 320 million inhabitants of India, (two and one-half times the population of the United States), there is a minority of two and one-half million people, many of them highly cultivated and most intelligent people—lawyers, journalists, politicians, and statesmen—people to whom English, the language which Britain brought, is the inevitable medium of communication between one part of India and another. But to the mass of the Indian people, English is of course entirely incomprehensible.

For a second thing, you here in the United States have got this tremendous bond which arises from the fact that the founders of your constitution, the principal element which operates in your government, derived their whole political outlook and philosophy from principles of government which are as natural to you as they are to me. Is that the case in India? Why, there you have stage upon stage, unit on unit, vast complexes of peoples and races and nations which differ from one another in almost every conceivable respect, but have this in common that not one of them can claim as his natural Oriental inheritance the principle of government by means of representative institutions as you and I understand them.

Think of that for a moment before we hastily criticise efforts that are made to assist this mixed continent along the road of constitutional progress, and realize the contrast that is involved. Progress has been and will be made, but it is bound to take time.

Take a third thing. Here in the United States you have a common, widespread franchise, and not only a widespread franchise but a franchise in which the citizen puts his vote into the ballot box along with his neighbour, and recognizes his neighbour as his fellow citizen. You could not have a greater contrast between that situation and the situation in India.

Although great efforts were made under the constitution which was established in 1919, although great efforts were made to make the franchise wide, when the Commission over which I presided went through India and examined the figures of electors we found this; that less than three per cent. of the whole population was exercising a political vote, and that even so, the greater part of those who were casting their vote were illiterate, not only in English but in any language whatever. The Commission has made great efforts to find ways by which this franchise can be extended, but all idea under the circumstances of India today that you can by a sweep of the hand establish universal suffrage even for men, much less for women, is only possible if people utterly misunderstand the real character of Indian difficulties. Look what a difficulty that makes in the way of rapid constitutional progress.

But there is a much more fundamental thing than that. This is the fundamental fact about successful self-government. This is the thing that makes your people and my people work it with understanding and success. Self-government does not really mean that everybody governs himself. It means that every citizen is willing to be governed by the votes and judgment of others in return for their franchise.

How does that stand in India? Seventy million Mohammedans—monotheistic, iconoclastic, hating and despising the idols in the Hindu temples, remembering the traditions of a conquering martial race, proud of the magnificent monuments which their Mongol ancestors erected, never forgetting that in the long ago they came through the passes of the Hindu Kush, ran over the plains, and made themselves masters of the land. What is their position in this 300 millions of accumulated humanity that you call so simply "India"? Why, it is this, that nothing would induce those 70 million Mohammedans to vote on the same register as citizens living in the same street that were also Indians but also Hindus,

and they insist that they should have their own list of voters, that they should elect their members, that they should be secure in their own local government, and if they had their way they would like to secure in every branch of the public service, administrative, judicial service, and everything else, that the Mohammedans have there what they would call their fair proportion. Imagine constituting a judicial bench in England or America on the principle that you are to allow a certain fractional proportion for each of the different civilizations to be found in a great continent.

Contrast with these 70 million Mohammedans the 200 millions, and more, called "Hindus." But what is a Hindu? What is Hinduism? It is an immense prevailing system which influences the life of every adherent during every waking moment, in all the mere offices of the day, the ablutions of the morning, the consumption of the meal. Every detail of intimate family life is all governed by an ancient, traditional code, and Hinduism itself, in spite of its amazing and unifying persisting power, is broken up into something like 2,300 castes.

Well now, see how this influences the political problem. The top caste of all, the Brahmans, one of the most amazing examples of concentrated hereditary intellectual power, only contain about seven million men all told. Yet in large parts of India, their monopoly of the priesthood, their tradition of learning, their past position in former administrations, is such that they are feared by every other sort of Hindu in a way of which you have no conception.

In the great province of Madras, for example, a province which is at least as big as Italy, it was thought necessary to provide protection for the non-Brahman Hindus lest they should be swamped by the Brahmans, and they were given a set of seats, 28 separate seats in the legislature, so that they should not be outvoted. Now what do you suppose is the proportion of these dangerous Brahmans to other Hindus in the province of Madras? The Brahmans of Madras are less than four per cent. of the Hindus in that portion of India. And yet their power was such, their influence was such, their tradition was such, that the other Hindu castes demanded special protection for fear that they would otherwise be swamped. You can see how difficult it is to develop a sense of common citizenship in the face of suspicions such as these,

I don't know if you will allow me in a couple of sentences to state (what is no doubt known to many of you), what this conception of caste really involves. Every Hindu belongs to the caste of his parents. No intelligence, no enterprise, no accumulation of

wealth, no change of residence, can alter the fact that in that caste into which he was born he will remain to the day of his death. He is expected to marry inside his caste. It has got nothing to do with social status. The Brahmans range from the highest social type in India to many lowly occupations. Most of the cooks in one of the provinces in India are Brahman, for the simple reason that if you ask your friends to dinner this secures that everybody else will be able to touch the food. For the same reason, curiously to relate, when I visited the jail in Lucknow I was told that they put Brahman convicts in the cookhouse because then the rest of the prisoners cannot object to the food. You realize that the caste system involves, therefore, a series of compartments into which everybody in Hinduism naturally falls which has this great advantage, that every caste man recognizes his caste fellow. Yes, and stands up for him and protects him if he is in unfortunate circumstances, in a way which I think is very admirable. But the barrier which brings the members of a caste together also separates that caste from every other caste, and you have in Indian Hindu society subdivisions prescribed by a tradition of thousands of years, which makes the adoption of our notion of self-government a very difficult thing indeed.

At the other end of the scale of caste you have 40 millions, perhaps 50 millions, of these unhappy people called Untouchables, included inside the Hindu fold largely as the result of Brahman teaching, and yet denied access to the interior of a Hindu temple; living, as I have seen them dozens of times, in a separate little hamlet outside of the main village; in many parts of India denied the right of using the public water supply; required to take all that they need from a different point in the river; in many cases with children who are not able to get access to the ordinary school; and, what is worst of all, people who do not themselves make a struggle to get out of their misery because it is a part of their faith that their miserable lot is the punishment administered by heaven for some wrong that they may have done in a former forgotten existence.

Now, gentlemen, don't you begin to see that you cannot solve constitutional problems in a continent with these divisions by the facile repetition of a phrase? You have got to face the real facts and difficulties of the thing, and at the same time to come to their aid, as we desire to do—you as well as I—to come to their aid with the sympathy and the respect of friends.

One more fact. I take it you gentlemen realize that in this

enormous area of India with its mixed population, the average Indian is not in the least the gentleman whom some of us are thinking of. The average Indian lives in a village. There are over 500,000 villages in India. So overwhelmingly rural is the population that in that enormous area there are only 33 towns with a population of over 100,000. In those towns, of course, for the most part, you will find the cultivated and educated minority. Not a word I may say is intended in the least to belittle their intelligence and culture. Indeed, the Indian educated minority presents one of the most amazing spectacles on earth. There you see a man, the heir of a very ancient civilization, far, far more ancient than ours, speaking and even thinking in the foreign language of English, competing in examination with the best British brains, arguing, as Lord Dunedin would agree, his case before the Privy Council with great subtlety, knowledge and distinction, and he has acquired his great intellectual grasp and range because he has learned to adopt western education, western philosophy, western outlook, while he is really the recipient and transmitter of the ancient traditions of the East.

Now the real question which Britain has had to face in India is this. It is British rule which very largely has unified India. We came there at the time when the place was broken up into all sorts of warring factions. I am far from claiming that everything in the history is as it should have been. That is not true of any country. But Britain set to work. She organized in course of time, after we took over from the East India Company a civil service, the Indian Civil Service, which, I claim boldly before you, has got a record for probity and devotion which cannot be exceeded in any page in the history of any quarter of the globe.

I have seen these men at work, young men who left our universities, who enter into this honourable and exacting duty, and who devote thirty years of their life in an Indian district as "the father and the mother" of the people—the man whom everybody trusts, who everybody knows at least wants to play fair, who endures the terrible heat, who fights famine and the scourge of disease and drought, tries to keep up a decent standard of administration and encourage all around him to do the same. At the end of thirty years, he retires, a sun-baked bureaucrat, to some watering-place in Britain with nothing except the consciousness that he has discharged his duty faithfully and that he is paid the modest pension which the State provides.

In the history of the Indian Civil Service I know of no case, in

spite of the abuse and contumely poured upon the British administration, where any man or any newspaper has said there is in the British-Indian Civil Service a man who has accepted a secret bribe.

A great many people imagine that the whole country is littered with British officials, but that is not true. There are other branches, of course, of British administration. In this Civil Service there are only about 1,300 persons. That is all. Again and again you will find that he is the only man in a district, which may be fifty or a hundred miles from the nearest town. There he is, doing his work as well as he can, and his Indian colleague besides. And here, I think, is one of the fine things about the administration of India. There has been no question that it is largely due to British influence that we find in that country a standard of justice and of good administration which is adopted by the Superior Indian Service just as vigorously as it is by the Briton who goes out there with his duty to do.

But it is quite a mistake to suppose that the whole country is staffed by English officials. That is not true. You will find that even in the Indian Civil Service itself quite a change is going on, which in a few years will mean that the proportions are about equal.

There are two things that I will mention, and then I will ask you to consider the problem, and conclude: I have by no means mentioned all of the difficulties. There are two other tremendous difficulties which face you in India, which a great many people omit from calculation altogether. There is first of all this: One-third of Indian soil is not British at all. It constitutes the realm of the Indian princes, and there are no less than 560 Indian States dotted about India which are not British soil. In some cases they are great areas, corresponding to a European country, governed by some powerful Maharaja who is in treaty alliance with His Majesty, King George, for whose person he has a great veneration, and who looks, and is entitled to look, to the protection of the British Crown in all his external affairs. That is the basis upon which he, at any rate, accepted British administration in India. Now you see that complication.

It is all very well to adopt modern democratic notions and try to apply them to this vast confused mass of humanity, but you are continually coming up against the Indian State. They are often governed on feudal principles, certainly not on democratic principles, by a great potentate who is entitled to say, "I have got my treaty with you, and I call upon the British Raj to honour its bond,"—a difficulty which is all the greater because these Indian States are

areas that are not naturally cut off by frontiers and scientific barriers from the rest of India. You may get into the train at Bombay and proceed towards Delhi. As the train runs along over level country you may look out of the window and you will see a sign which says, "You are now entering the State of Gwalior." The country is the same, the people are the same, the language is the same, everything appears to be the same. You see, perhaps, the great fortress of Gwalior standing on its rocky base. Another half hour passes and you pass the same sort of a signboard and you find a notation which says, "You are now leaving the State of Gwalior." Therefore India is a patchwork which contains these Indian States all over the place, and the complications for statesmen are immensely increased thereby. In fact, for one-third of the whole area and between one-fourth and one-fifth of the whole population, we are not dealing with British India at all.

What is the other problem? There is another problem facing the statesmen who have any responsibility for India which has not got its parallel anywhere else in the British Empire, or, indeed, in any part of the world. It is an immense frontier problem, the problem of the northwest frontier of India—that great stretch of mixed mountain country cut through here and there by a pass like the Khyber Pass leading down to Peshawar. Why, gentlemen, the contrast between that part of India and the India of the plains has got to be seen to be believed. There you see some hardy, fanatical tribesman in his white robes, spending much of his time on a tower with a rifle in his hand looking around—I will not say whether for his neighbour or his enemy,—with his women folk and his cattle and his chickens inside a fortified farmstead, cultivating a bit of stony ground, seeing the caravans of camels pass along, as they have done for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, by the road by which Alexander marched into India, by which so many invaders have marched into India since. And this hardy tribesman regards looting and fighting and struggling as one of the natural occupations of existence.

You read telegrams from Peshawar. Newspapers all publish telegrams from the part of the world where there is trouble. You must not suppose because of that the whole of India is in an uproar. But here is a part of the world which has got one of the biggest practical military problems of all times—60,000 British soldiers, 160,000 Indian soldiers—a great army, much the largest army in the British Empire, actively engaged in the twin duties of protecting the frontier against a very active and present danger, and

helping to administer law and order in the rest of India. That is, in a very brief sketch, the outline of the problem that has got to be faced.

What has Britain done about it? Ever since Queen Victoria made her famous proclamation of 1858 we in the old land have recognized that it is impossible to continue indefinitely the administration of a great area like that on military principles, and that our duty was to do everything that we could to encourage the increasing association of Indians in the work of administration.

Well, first, about 1880 there was established throughout India in the face of a great deal of opposition, and opposition from some quarters in India itself, a system of local government—district councils, municipal councils, all of which contain at least a majority of Indian members, and today this local government is, for practical purposes, entirely in the hands of Indians in the different parts of India.

We then pass down to the provinces, the great provinces, of which there are nine. In each of those there has been established a legislature, in which the vast majority, the great majority of the members are elected—Mohammedans elected by Mohammedans, Hindu members elected by Hindus, Sikh members elected by Sikhs, Indian Christians by Indian Christians, Europeans by Europeans. Believe me, it is far more complicated than the biggest meeting of the American Bar Association you ever saw. I am very far from saying that the Indian politicians have not taken an interest, and a deep interest, in the problems of government, and with mutual respect and co-operation much can be done.

There has been established in every one of these provinces a system by which certain Indians fill certain places on the Executive Council, respecting Education, Public Health, Roads, and Local Government. On the other hand, at present, certain other forms of administration, like Revenue and Law and Order, have been retained in the hands of the Governor and his Executive Council. Every Executive Council includes the most eminent Indian Councillors whom the Governor can get to serve.

And now the question has arisen, can we go further? And the Commission over which I am presiding has suggested various means by which we can go further. For, believe me, there is no party in Britain, there is no responsible statesman in Britain, who does not want, with good sense and sympathy, to go forward.

We are under no delusions as to the task which rests upon our shoulders to develop the opportunities for responsible government

in India. But until you can get a country which is really one, which is bound together by stronger ties than exist yet, and still more—until you can get this vast place to be a place in which the citizen takes his place as a citizen and recognizes that the rule of the majority must prevail without question, you can see for yourselves the nature, the quality of the complications that have to be met.

I myself believe that if we can induce a spirit of co-operation between all that is best in India and all that is best in Britain great developments may emerge out of this which, believe me, is the most tremendous problem that has ever faced the statesmen of the world. My appeal to you is, by all means recognize the national aspirations of these highly cultivated and most patriotic Indians who are leading the political movements. I know enough about the history of national movements to know that there is a force and a power behind them which will sweep in their train great elements otherwise not responsive, and there is no country in the world that has a greater sympathy for a genuine national movement than my country of Britain.

But make no mistake—Britain has a task which is a trust. Here are 40 or 50 millions of Untouchables. There is not the slightest doubt that they, at least, are not willing to submit themselves to the government of some select Hindu caste. Here are 70 million Mohammedans who tell me quite boldly that they do not intend to find themselves under the subjection of a majority belonging to another race. And the task which falls upon Britain, therefore, is not simply the task of proclaiming herself Mistress of the Indies. It is a duty that is resting upon us by the circumstances of history and the facts of time, and it is one, as I believe, in which we are entitled to get, and I believe we shall receive, the sympathy and the encouragement of men of good will who, like ourselves, want by sane and practical means to promote self-government in every part of the earth.
