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## IV

# INDIA AND THE WAR [1]

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*(March, 1915)*

LORD HALDANE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

My task to-night is anything but an easy one. I wish to speak to one half of my audience only, though I am more than pleased that the other half should overhear all I say. I want to speak to the Indian students, and to speak to them as frankly as possible. It would be easy and very pleasant to expatiate on the achievements of the Indian troops in the war and the loyalty shown by the Indian people to the Empire. But I know that, if I did so, some Indians would be tempted to smile sardonically, and suspect that we have taken this loyalty too much as our due, as a mere testimonial to our good government. "We are loyal," an Indian friend of mine once said to me; "but our loyalty is to India, not England." He spoke only for himself, and I do not feel sure he was right, even for himself. Loyalty is not a thing that is owed. It is a thing that grows, or does not grow. When people have been comrades and worked together for a long time,—even with occasional quarrels,—there rises normally among decent human beings a bond of trust and a mutual expectation. Now, I believe that between India and England that bond exists. We have had a long experience together and mostly—mostly—we have not failed one another. In your times of need, in plague or famine, you confidently expect us to help, and you find even our roughest subalterns and haughtiest officials working their fingers to the bone to help your people. In our times of need—well, you have not often had the full chance of showing what you could do. It is one of your grievances, and one with which I warmly sympathize. But now, when we are threatened to our very life, you have helped. You have given us more than we ever dared expect. That message of the Indian kings and princes which Mr. Roberts read out in the House of Commons will not easily be forgotten.

We shall, I believe, win this war. India will share our glory. The same battles will be emblazoned on the banners of Indian and British regiments. But as you share our glory you will share our dangers; and it is a time of extreme gravity that fronts us when we look into the future. Before the war we were disturbed by an uncertain and treacherous neighbour. After the war we shall have a deadly enemy. It seems to me that the irony of history has been at work with Great Britain. As a nation we emphatically believe in peace. We are a people of traders and manufacturers who live by peace. Our ideals and philosophies are all peaceful. Yet here we stand, in the centre of an enormous war. Again, we believe in freedom, democracy, government by consent. We have largely been the teachers of those ideals to the world. And here we have climbed or slipped, steered or drifted, into the administration of a vast empire where we are governing dozens of other races by a system imposed from without and not dependent on the consent of the governed. No doubt we govern well. Some of you will have criticisms to make, but on the whole most people admit that we bring to the art of government unrivalled experience and a great tradition of public spirit. But, granted that we govern well, we are still governing from outside, not by means of free institutions, and not in the spirit that we normally consider British. And more, we do not see—I believe no one in the world sees—how any other method of government is possible, except, indeed, as a goal to work towards by progressive and careful change. That was the policy laid down by the Liberal statesmen of the nineteenth century, and to that I hope we shall always hold.

What is the end to be?—not now, but hereafter, when you and I are in our graves to east or west of the great ocean, and the disputes, and grievances, and schemes of policy that divided us are forgotten or only remembered as curious puzzles for future historians to make sense of. Is the great Empire—I wish there was another word for it—of which you and I are part, for which your brothers and mine are shedding their blood together in Flanders, in Egypt, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, to grow to be indeed a Commonwealth, the greatest community of free men and women that the world has seen? Or is it to fail, to end in bloodshed and ruin? Or again to establish and stereotype itself as one more in the great world-list of despotic empires, Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Byzantium, which have sometimes lasted so long and passed away so unregretted?

That is the problem on which you and we are set. Neither of us can reject it. From the ends of the earth two utterly different civilizations, which yet were closely akin in their remote origins, have been caught again by the process of

world-history and set together to this enormous task. Of course we may cut the problem: we may rush upon failure by mere fratricide. We may shirk it by abandoning our deepest ideals. We may, by great labour and heroic patience, by constant hard thinking and facing of facts, solve it successfully by building up the great Commonwealth of which I spoke.

I do not underrate the difficulties that lie before us or the differences that separate us. One of them was brought home to me suddenly and vividly some time ago. There was a meeting to discuss our Government's policy in Persia; one speaker defending the Government suggested that our Ministers, knowing that Germany was ready to spring at the throat of her rivals at the first sign of difference between them, thought the danger of disintegration to Persia not too high a price to pay for European peace. The plea was I will not say accepted, but considered reasonable by the meeting. Then there rose an Indian—not a Parsee. He spoke quietly, not like a foreigner or one speaking a language strange to him. He seemed essentially one of us. And with an emotion that vibrated through the room he said that to him and his, European peace was as dust in the balance compared with the disintegration of Persia. Many of those who applauded him must have done so with a certain sense of guilt, a feeling that Persia had been to them a remote, unknown, half-civilized place which might, in a great crisis, be legitimately sacrificed to the peace of Europe. We must try to feel as an Indian would about such things as this; or at least to understand how he would feel.

We shall have clashes of that sort, clashes arising chiefly from facts of geography. We shall have interminable clashes of habit and national character; clashes of sentiment. An instance is our present war with Turkey. There has been a strain there, and both sides have met it with great forbearance. Indian Moslems have to look on while we batter down the door of a great Moslem empire. We, because of our relations to you, have stood a great deal more from Turkey than we should naturally be inclined to stand. Yes: as the Germans have pointed out, there are between you and us the seeds of disunion. Of course there are, any one can see them. But there are seeds of brotherhood as well. And it does not follow that seeds of evil need grow more than other seeds. There is no nation so uniform, no small society, no band of friends, which has not seeds of disunion in it. It rests with men themselves, with their good-will and strength of character, whether amid the million seeds which life scatters, one kind or another comes to maturity. We must see to it that the seeds of disunion die while the others ripen.

Again, we shall have clashes arising out of our differences of religion. The situation needs toleration, forbearance: yes, but it needs more than that. It needs active mutual appreciation. If Christian and Moslem, Christian and Hindu, are to form a real Commonwealth, it is not enough for one of them to say of the others, "Such-and-such is a good fellow in spite of his religion." You must see that he is good because of his religion. There is some inherent religious quality, some piety, or devotion, which comes out in one religion as in another, and deserves respect. There are doubtless also some special qualities which are fostered specially by each separate religion. I speak from a point of view which some of you will share, some not; though I have heard a missionary say nearly as much. To me it seems to the last degree improbable that any one religion, or any one form of culture, has the monopoly of truth, and I expect Christianity to be improved by contact and comparison of thought with other great religions.

And further: if this is true in religion, it must be true also in civilization. Look at any single civilization as it now exists. Look at it with plenty of common sense, but also a little imagination. England's is a fine civilization; it is both stable and progressive. Almost every department of it, if you ask the experts, is demonstrably improving.

Yet look through England. Go to the hotels and boarding-houses and notice the people you see; walk the streets of the great manufacturing towns; go to the places of amusement, the theatres and music-halls, and observe the audiences. Is it a civilization with which one can feel content? Is it a civilization to impose, untempered, upon the world? Clearly not. And your own civilization—I will not be impolite to it. I will leave you yourselves to think it over; to ask if it is satisfactory, if it is free from characteristics that fill you with discouragement and even some sense of shame, if it can possibly hold up its head as an equal among the great moving forces of the modern world except by drawing abundantly on the enlightenment of the West? I do not know what your various answers will be. But for my own part I believe that the true development of this vast heterogeneous mass of strong life which we call the British Empire will involve utilizing all the different elements and contributions which our various races and societies can bring to the common stock. The process is already going on. It lies with us to make it into a good process or a bad. It is very easy to choose the bad and cheap and vulgar things in one another's habits. The way to do that is to begin by despising one another and looking out for the contemptible things. If we respect one another, we shall tend more to notice and cultivate what is good.

One great permanent difficulty—you see all my speech is made up of difficulties—is the vastness and variety of our

respective nations. Many a time it must happen that an Englishman and an Indian, talking as friends over their national differences, feel that if the matter lay with them, if they too were their respective nations, it would not be hard to come to an understanding. But behind each is a trail of innumerable human beings, utterly unlike the two supposed principals. I can think of many pairs of sensible people who would do for my purpose; several statesmen, a great many writers and historians. But imagine, for example, Lord Haldane and the late Mr. Gokhale. Clearly they would understand each other: they might or might not agree on some special point, but the basis of common action and agreement and mutual respect would be there. But as you look at England, doubtless you see behind Lord Haldane masses of people less understanding and less sympathetic, cheerful, ignorant subalterns, common soldiers who talk contemptuously about "black men"; determined old gentlemen, most falsely called "imperialists," who cry out that India was taken by the sword and must be held by the sword. You see in your indignant imagination the squalid crowds that reel out of our public houses and music-halls and race-courses, and ask with secret rage if these are your born masters; if these are the people who claim by blood and birth and colour to be your inherent superiors! Is that overstated? No; I think not; though we must always remember in a well-ordered modern State how little the baser elements of a population direct its policy. But there they are. And on the other side, behind Mr. Gokhale—you can imagine better than I can describe the extraordinary combination of peoples, of different habits and ethics, different religions and superstitions, different levels of culture from almost the highest to the lowest. "One nation governing another": put at its crudest, such a principle implies putting the whole of one of these vast, incoherent, heterogeneous masses on top of the other to govern it. Any such process would be clearly wrong. It is a principle which even the stoutest, old-fashioned imperialist has abandoned. The only possible plan is, by one method or another, to select out of both masses those capable of governing best, and of best understanding and learning from one another.

For the rest, we in our home politics have a large task before us in levelling up the conditions of our poorer classes to something worthier of our place in the world, in material conditions, in education, in outlook on the whole of life. Our task will be heavy; but a task of the same character lies before you, and yours will be colossal. You have a far larger field to plough; you have to cut your way through a far deeper and wilder jungle. To raise the level of life in Great Britain—in India: the more they are both raised to the level of their best people, the more they will be ready to understand and help one another, the more all the unnecessary difficulties between the two parties will tend to disappear.

"Bande Mataram": "Hail, Mother!" I attended lately an Indian dinner where that Nationalist motto met one's eye at every turn. You will work in devotion to your Mother. It is well that you should. And no one who knows you can doubt that you have among you the spirit of martyrs. That is a fine thing; in some emergencies of life an indispensable thing. But there is something far finer, and that is the spirit of a statesman. A martyr sacrifices himself rather than be false to some principle. A statesman, without thinking of himself one way or another, when he finds some evil or dangerous state of affairs sees how to make it safe or good. Let us serve our Mothers, you yours and we ours, so far as we can in the spirit of statesmen.

But is there not—I put this question quite practically—a Greater Mother whose children we all are, whose day is coming, but not yet come? Cannot you and we work together in the service of this Greater Commonwealth, which is also the service of humanity? We *must* be together. I can see no future for an isolated India; no happy future for a Great Britain which is content to boast that she holds India merely by the sword. Working together, we have formidable obstacles to face, but we have wonderful and unique gifts to contribute. Nations are apt to see vividly enough one another's faults, but they would do better to remember, as J. S. Mill puts it, their "reciprocal superiorities." I will not try now to define them. My own respect for England—if for the moment I may speak as one who has but little pure English blood in his veins, being an Australian Irishman of Scotch descent—has grown steadily with experience. But I will not dwell on special virtues of England, nor yet on those of India; on your wonderful intellectual aptitude and readiness for fine thought; on your great past which is still living; on your people's characteristic aloofness from the vulgarity of modern Western life; on the qualities shown in your Moslem architecture, your Hindu religious thought. But here I would venture, if I may, to suggest a caution. Some writers, I know, hold up for your admiration and example that famous episode in the Bhagavad Gita in which even the noise of battle has to wait unregarded while the stream of philosophic thinking runs its course. That spirit is a fine element in life; but, if I may for once give advice, I will say: Beware of letting it be more than an element. To an Indian who wishes to make India great I would say, Beware of losing yourself in reverie while others are fighting the battles of life. Beware altogether of dreams and dreamlike passions. Face facts; get knowledge; cultivate common sense; learn to trust and be trusted; serve your community. Do not lose yourselves in admiration of your own past or your own racial peculiarities; think of your future, and be not afraid to uproot from your culture every element which prevents India taking her place among free and progressive nations.

You need never be afraid that your own special qualities will not remain and exercise their valuable influence on the world. You will teach us and we you. And other nations will be near, bringing their help and their lessons: America not far off with her generous swiftness of movement and her loving-kindness towards all in suffering; not very far, perhaps, even our present enemies with their great powers of discipline, of self-devotion, and of remorseless effectiveness. Let us preserve our national characters. Let us use our feelings of patriotism and nationalism to inspire us and to give strength to our hands; but at the back of our minds let us always remember our wider Commonwealth, our Greater Mother, and think of the time when we brother nations may bring our various gifts to her feet and say together our "Bande Mataram."



## FOOTNOTES:

[\[1\]](#) Address to Indian students.

[End of *India and the War*, by Gilbert Murray]