

India After the War

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Part II.

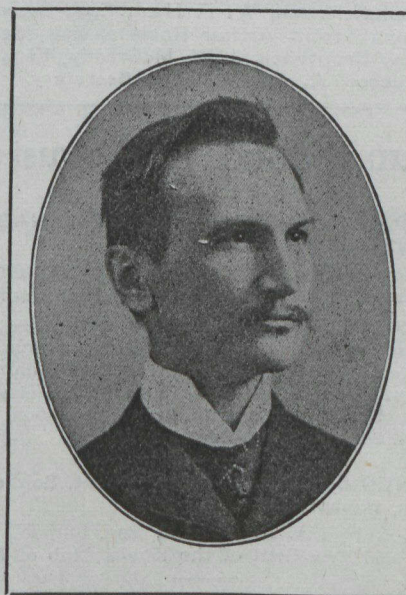
I think it must now be made perfectly clear, that there will be deep and widespread disappointment in India, if British statesmen merely indulge in generous and noble sentiments, instead of taking the people into confidence as to the policy they propose to adopt towards them in the future. The time is come when the Sovereign and Parliament ought to make a definite and solemn declaration that it is Britain's deliberate desire, intention and policy to raise India to the status of a self-governing member of the British Empire within a definite period. The autocratic Government of Russia have promised the grant of autonomy to Poland, at the end of the war; and there is no reason why a similar promise should not be made to India by the Democratic Government of Great Britain. We do not demand that self-government should be granted to India immediately after the close of the war. All that we ask is for a solemn promise that India shall have self-government within some definite period, not unduly long, and that, in the meantime, such reforms shall be steadily and consistently introduced in the existing system of government as will, as it were automatically, lead to the full establishment of autonomy at the end of that period. Such a promise would doubtless have a prodigious moral effect, and constitute by far the best and most genuine proof that England can give of her recognition of the splendid service India has rendered her in her present hour of need and trouble. That India must, sooner or later, have self-government, in order that she may realize her full National development under the British Crown, no true friend of India can deny. India cannot—ought not to—remain for ever intutelage; every force—intellectual, social, economic, political, international—is moving in the direction of her attainment of self-Government. The more clearly and frankly this is recognized, the more harmonic would be the inevitable development of the mutual relations between England and India. The present times are peculiarly favorable for a promise of self-government, and I cannot help saying that the British Government will lose a splendid opportunity of still further deepening the foundations of British rule in India, if they do not rise to the occasion, and make that promise.

Another thing that the Government ought to do, and do immediately, is to raise the civil and military status of the Indian people. There has been, no doubt, some progress within recent years in the matter of our civil status; but our military status has undergone no improvement whatever. It is extremely painful and humiliating to think that, though we are fighting England's battles on the fields of Europe and fighting them with such bravery and heroism as to have evoked the admiration even of our enemies, we cannot yet hope to rise to the rank of commissioned officers, and that some sections of our people are utterly excluded from military service. Our military disabilities are extremely galling, and if they are not removed, we cannot think that our rulers place the fullest confidence in all the different sections and classes of our people. The Mohammedan subjects of the Tsar are eligible to the highest military offices; but the people of India are still condemned to non-commissioned officers, and however competent and brave they may prove themselves to be, they cannot aspire to rise higher. Surely, this great injustice ought to be removed as early as possible. In the same way, though, as I have said above, it has latterly been improved, our civil status still demands further improvement. At present, the higher appointments are practically monopolized by Europeans, and only a very small proportion is filled by Indians. This makes the administration unnecessarily costly, besides keeping the Indians away from their legitimate share in the administration. There is no reason why at least half the higher appointments should not be reserved for the Indians, and why these should not be eligible to be appointed to the office at least of a Lieutenant-Governor. As the matter forms the subject of inquiry by the Public Service Commission, and as the Report of the Commission is expected to be out shortly, I shall not say more on the subject.

In this connection, I should like to add one thing. I do not see any reason why Indians should not be appointed to the Ambassadorial and Consular Service. I do not say that they should be appointed Ambassadors, but surely they might be given some diplomatic training by being appointed

to inferior posts such as that of a second or third Secretary or a Consul. A step in this direction, however small, will be gratefully appreciated, and still further emphasise the unity of the British Empire.

The war has brought out in strong relief the contrast between the ideals of England and those of Germany. British rule stands for justice, liberty, equality, for the full development of the various members of the Empire. Unless these ideals are meant for Europeans only, there is no reason why they should not apply to India. True, the Indian people are different from their rulers in language, religion, social and political development; but after all, they both belong to the same great Aryan stock, and their mentalities are not radically different. The Indian does not hate a foreigner as such; his culture and civilization are intensely humanitarian. And moreover, the action and the reaction that are at present going on between the eastern and the western culture and civilization are slowly but surely evolving a synthesis of thought that cannot fail to bring the European and the Asiatic races intellectually and morally nearer and nearer, as they have been already brought politically and economically. So long as British rule affords the Indian people full scope for their national development, they can have no quarrel with that rule; and if India becomes an autonomous member of the British Empire and enjoys the same freedom of growth as other members, any fear of her ever severing connection with that Empire may be dismissed as utterly groundless. We have many faults, but surely ingratitude is not one of them. We fervently hope and trust that one of the indirect results of the war will be the elevation of our status, both civil and military, within the great Empire to which we are proud to belong, because we feel confident that through the noble ideals of the Empire alone can our national regeneration become an accomplished fact. After the end of the war, British statesmen will have to apply themselves not only to the problem of remaking the map of Europe, but also to the no less important problem of raising the status of India, so as to bring it into a line with that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the Empire. Any result of the war short of this, so far as the people of India are concerned, will be keenly disappointing.



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Hon. Sec. U. C. M.

Who Will Introduce the Subject
of

"Different Forms of Municipal Government in Canada"
at the

U. C. M. Convention.