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THE ROUND TABLE

INDIA AND THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE.

A Quarterly Review of the Politics of the British Empire—Republished Under the Above Heading

III.
VAST and complex a country as India is, there was one fundamental question which the outbreak of war presented to all its classes alike. The King-Emperor had but recently visited India. His Royal kindness in letting his people see him in person and listen to his words, and above all the bidding which he gave them at his departure to be of good hope for the future, had moved the warm heart of his Indian subjects in a way which a country of laborious official beneficence could not. The King-Emperor was now at war, beset by enemies and needing help. Was India going to be true to her salt and worthy of the kindly confidence which he has reposed in her? First and foremost it was with the Indian people a question of honour. To show their loyalty to their Sovereign when he called on them was, as they said themselves, a matter of *dharna*, a religious duty.

This outburst of personal devotion to the Throne was enforced by the general realization of the value of British rule that resulted from the enforced contemplation of a possible alternative. The Bishop of Bombay has put the matter well. "Englishmen had been toiling in India," he says "for many years, conscious that much of their work seemed to Indians incomprehensible and eccentric, and in late years increasingly conscious of the criticisms and restiveness of educated India. Of thanks or of encouragement they received little enough. The loyalty shown at the proclamation of war, however, was an encouragement; it might fairly be interpreted as due, partly at least, to an appreciation of our rule. . . . While this appreciation of English rule was an unconscious sentiment on the part of many of the people of India, it was dragged into consciousness by the idea of a different foreign domination. A witty Indian citizen of Bombay expressed himself thus: 'It has taken us a hundred years to teach you how to govern us. Do you think we are going to begin a over again now with another nation?'"

Naturally enough, the various classes of the community show a tendency to regard the war largely from the standpoint of their peculiar interests. The traders were the first people to feel the shock. Markets were suddenly lost; and in the general alarm there was a run on banks and savings banks; lakhs of rupees were withdrawn from investment and hoarded; credit contracted sharply, and for the time being all enterprise fell off and all expansion ceased. Fortunately harvests were good, and the destruction of the "Emden" speedily reopened the seas. The Government, so far from confiscating savings or commandeering supplies as alarmists feared, exerted itself strenuously to restore credit and to help the cultivator, and to induce the money-lender and the merchant to do business as usual. By special measures it took steps to finance the cotton trade and to prevent an excessive rise in food rates. Gradually credit was restored. But the trading classes, as a whole, feel that it is the power and stability of government that have sheltered them from a fiercer storm, while the most intelligent among them know that it is the British Navy that has been their unseen shield.

Similar reasons tended to rally the peasant classes to the side of authority. In the earlier days of the fighting the riot heard for the first time of submarines and aeroplanes, and regarded them much as he does the destroying monsters of his own mythology. There was no panic, but wild rumours were current, and for a time no story was too fantastic for the rustic imagination. But when nothing abnormal happened and the routine of administration went on unperturbed, rural India was soon persuaded that the world was going on as usual. The very prolongation of the war tended to dull the interest of the ryot, as of others, in it; nor did the letters which came from sepoys at the

front, nor the tales told by the returning wounded, rekindle any great excitement. The only thing that seriously troubled the ryot was the high price of grain. If anyone could help him there, it was the Government, and to the Government he turned, and not in vain. The war was too far off and heard of too faintly for it to be very real to him. But as it was clearly a matter of some concern to the Sarkar, he hoped and prayed that the Sarkar would win, in order that things might go on as before.

To the landed classes the war came as a peculiar heaven-sent opportunity. British administration, which had given them security and honours, had yet failed to bring them whole-hearted contentment, because it had deprived them of their old traditional resource of private warfare, without providing them with any equivalent outlet for their energies and capacity. Our system of government has tended to make education the fount of power, which is more and more ceasing to repose on its ancient bases of courage, holiness, birth, or landed estate. The conservative classes have been falling silently into the background. They are not happy at seeing themselves effaced, but, as they only take slowly and reluctantly to education, they have been powerless to arrest the process. For many of these war was a tradition and a delight, and they welcomed it as an opportunity of again playing a worthy part in public life. They have seized their occasion well. Some have gone to the front; many have helped in collecting horses and stores and in recruiting for regiments or bearer corps. All have given of their wealth readily, whether for military purposes, or comforts for the wounded, or for the sustenance of dependants; and all are genuinely and warmly supporting the Government of their King-Emperor to the utmost of their power. The war has brought about a marked revival of the forces of social conservatism in India.

A glance at India's history serves to explain the attitude of many of her people to the war. Of old she was a land of kings and feudal chiefs, and of humble and industrious artisans and peasants. Whenever the kings raged together the lowlier folk took the blows, or better, in the picturesque Indian version, "when Rama fought with Rawan, it was the

poor monkeys that got killed." Then after many centuries there came from outside India for the first time a power strong and just enough to stop the fighting and rapine and to secure to each man the fruits of his industry. The humbler people prospered, particularly the artisan, the trader, and the banker; but the chiefs and nobles' occupation was gone. Suddenly that power itself became involved in a deadly war. It was natural that the most peaceful and the most warlike classes should both, from different motives, rally to its support. The one sought shelter and the other opportunity.

The war placed one large and important community in India in a position of peculiar difficulty which entitles it to the sympathy of all generous-minded persons. Turkey's entry into the field of hostilities in November, 1914, presented the Indian Mohammedans with an inexorable choice between their temporal and spiritual allegiance. On purely historical grounds it is not difficult to maintain the thesis that Pan-Islamism is the artificial creation of Ottoman politicians, and not a living reality in the minds of men; that the Khalifa is by the very terms of the Ottoman Constitution a *Defensor Fidei*, whose duty is protection, not propagandism; that in countries where the liberty of Islam is already secured he has accordingly no function. It can be argued with force that the Khalifa of Islam is by no means inevitably bound up with the Ottoman monarchy; that the legitimate devolution of the office ceased when the Abbasid Khalifa of Baghdad was executed by the Moguls; that the transfer of the office to Cairo was at least of doubtful validity; and that when the Ottoman Selim I. conquered Egypt and secured the reversion of the Khalifa's rights the transaction was one which neither party was really empowered to effect. But such considerations appeal only to the learned. Whatever may be the Sultan's position in relation to the non-Ottoman Muslim world from a strictly juridical standpoint, there is no question what his position is in fact. He is the *de facto* Khalifa of the Mohammedan peoples, first because he is the custodian of the Holy Places, and secondly, because he is the temporal head of the senior Muslim kingdom in his world, which to the eyes of all Muslims still represents the past glories and conquering greatness of the Faith.

Before the war broke out the Mohammedans of India had already gone through a difficult and trying period. Not merely had their own efforts at self-reform and advancement, after creditable beginnings, suffered from various causes a setback, but they saw throughout the world at large the tide of events running against the fortune of their co-religionists. Events in Persia, Morocco, Tripoli, and the Balkans seemed to presage the break-up of the surviving Muslim kingdoms, and throughout the period of the Italian and the Balkan wars a very natural bitterness of spirit possessed them, and temporarily alienated them from the Government which in earlier days they knew to be their friend. Yet when the rupture with Turkey occurred there was no hesitation about the Indian Muslims' decision. In reply to the Viceroy's manifesto, which set forth Turkey's seduction by German agents, guaranteed in the name of the Allies the security of the Holy Places, and called on the leaders to steady the ignorant and to declare their own loyalty, all the great chiefs at once set the example, and it was followed by people of position throughout the country. Loyal addresses poured in and prayers for British victory were offered. The tentative endeavours of one or two newspapers to appeal to the Pan-Islamic stimulus fell flat. No doubt with intelligent Mohammedans the difference of temper may be due to their perception that, while in 1912-13 Turkey seemed the victim of gratuitous attacks, in 1914 she was an unprovoked aggressor. But this hardly explains the quietude of the ignorant and inflammable masses. In various ways sedulous endeavour was made by the enemy to persuade them that this is a religious war. But even in the eyes of the ignorant the facts were too strong. Turkey had yoked herself unequally with unbelievers, and opposed herself to the greatest Muslim Power in the world, which seventy millions knew as the home of religious liberty. It was not now open to the agitator to preach under the guise of religion politics that necessarily meant treason to the King; and, since

(Continued on page 3)



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