

SELF GOVERNMENT FOR INDIA

(By Mrs. A. Besant.)

The convulsions of the European War, and the brigandage of improperly constituted governments are doing much to dis-illusion the slothful and mentally ignorant amongst our own people, the result of which must inevitably lend greater vision and understanding to the term "Democracy" than was conceived by those whose only purpose in its use was the conservation of force as the only means of settling international disputes, with the balance on the side of the interests they truly represent and desire to perpetuate. To the lay mind the term "Democracy" is receiving a much wider application, by whom it is conceived as a universal principle—bringing order out of chaos, and the right to "Life and Liberty" of all mankind, irrespective of geography or international boundary lines. In pursuance of this purpose we reproduce for the benefit of our subscribers the article appended in the hope that it may reach a larger circle of readers than hitherto has been our privilege to supply:

How long ere thou take station?

How long ere thralls live free?

The present moment is peculiarly opportune for the discussion of schemes of Self-Government. In the past, it was necessary to awaken public feeling by urging ideals, by appealing to the greatness of the past, as an inspiration for effort in the present, to create greatness in the future. Impassioned rhetoric was needed to awaken the sleeping, to arouse the indolent, to stimulate the slothful, to inspire with hope the lovers of India who despaired of her future. "India is not dead, she is only sleeping. None can slay her, save her own children; her own sons alone can drive the dagger into their Mother's heart. You alone can be her murderers. Will you kill her by your indifference?" Such were the words spoken by the present writer in 1893, soon after landing at Tuticorin, with the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society in the chair. Tears and cries answered the appeal, and proved the truth that India was not dead. All over the country a similar appeal was voiced, backed by passionate descriptions of the greatness of the past, to stir the sluggish minds of the Indians of the present, supine in easy-going carelessness, and drugged by a false conception of karma, the most inspiring of all doctrines to encourage effort, when understood as Bhishma understood and taught it, he the master-teacher of Dharma. To the end of a National awakening were the old religions revived, as Sir Valentine Chirol acutely saw. For this were schools and colleges founded and fostered, and the students trained in civic ideals, and inspired with the longing to serve the Motherland. For this the lectures given in the Central Hindu College by the President and the Board of Trustees; and the love and respect for Hinduism, the greatest of living religions, were sedulously taught, and vivified the very atmosphere in which the students lived. For this was boy and girl parentage denounced, and married students excluded gradually from one class after another in the Collegiate school. For this were sub-castes slowly but steadily ignored, and the broad four castes respected—with the warning, however, that they too would have to go, unless they were again made a living power by the restoration of their respective dharmas. For this the Sanatana Dharma Text Books were written and sent all over the country. For this was Foreign

would have been a comparatively long one, the stage of constructive criticism and planning, had it not been that the High Gods sent the great War to shake to its foundations western civilization, to shatter materialism, to prove the need of spiritual conceptions for the enduring of Nations, to establish the supremacy of Justice, Right and Honor over Tyranny, Might and Broken Faith, to show the East to the West through Japan and India, to prove to the British Empire and the world the value of Indian valour, Indian chivalry, Indian Imperial consciousness. For with the waking of her consciousness as a Nation has come also, inevitably, the waking of her consciousness as part of a Federated Empire, and the sense of her responsibility thereto.

The pause in controversy makes possible and necessary the work of constructive statesmanship. Alas! that for this our strongest voice and ablest brain have left us; but we fortunately know the general lines along which Mr. Gokhale had prepared his scheme for Self-Government. For this second stage we need neither emotion nor rhetoric, but clear exposition, cogent argument, accurate outlining, full and free discussion, the weighing of each suggestion, the cold clear light of reason. This working out of a scheme of Self-Government, feasible at once but open to the future, is now imperative. Let us betake ourselves to the task.

Is the Present Democracy the Best?

The first thing to be done by those who desire to bring about Indian Self-Government within a measurable time, and to be ready to suggest a practical scheme for it at the end of the War, is to try to form into a party people who are agreed on certain main principles; to reach this agreement, full and free discussion is imperatively necessary and it is the aim of this paper to provoke such discussion. The discussion should clarify ideas, eliminate defects, introduce improvements, so that, finally, a sufficient number of sensible and thoughtful men may be prepared to join themselves together, in order to work for the embodiment of their scheme in legislation. Nothing less than this will meet the needs of the day.

That Democracy is the Spirit of the Age none will deny, for the sign of its coming are seen on every side. Some may be ready to admit, as is the writer, that the Spirit of the Age is a far-reaching divine thought, indicating the trend of Evolution, and that this trend is, in the widest sense, an expression of the Will of God, of that

Law which moves to Righteousness Which none at last can turn aside or stay.

For all who think thus, it becomes a duty to seek for the steady current which, beneath all surface eddies and whirlpools, flows onward resistlessly, Travel encouraged. For this was Swadeshi preached and practised. For this were Indians and Englishmen—the latter carefully selected and chosen, from among Theosophists, after experience with a couple of non-Theosophists, for their love of India—mixed together on equal terms in the C. H. C., mingling in Board, Managing Committee and Staff, in classroom and playground, the color difference vanishing in a common love and service. All, all, with one single aim—the awakening of India, the restoration of pride and self-respect, the vivifying of the National consciousness.

The Work is Done. The Nation is Awake.

We enter the second great stage; it

carrying with it the Human Race. It is our wisdom to seek to discover, to understand, and to co-operate with that forward-going stream, steering our vessel with it, not against it, and re-shaping, if necessary, our own ideas, so as to go with it intelligently and helpfully.

But it does not follow that the way in which Democracy is shaping itself in the West—the "one man one vote" and the counting of heads—is the only form in which the Spirit of Democracy may embody itself. In fact, as we study many of the workings of Democracy among western Nations, they appear to us as warnings rather than as examples, as ways showing us how not to do things, rather than as effective methods. A system which gives a vote of equal weight to a Gladstone and a clodhopper, which sends an empty-headed fop to Parliament rather than a man ripe in years, in knowledge, and in experience; which is influenced more by a glib tongue than a weighty argument—such a system for making our Rulers surely cannot be the ne plus ultra of human genius, devising the perfection of Government?

Is it not possible to have a system in which every one shall have a voice, with a share of the power of guidance over the things he understands, in which knowledge, experience and high character shall be the credentials for power, and in which the area over which that power extends shall be proportioned to the development of these characteristics in the one who seeks to wield it? May not electorates become smaller, the qualities earning the franchise more developed, as the area over which power is wielded becomes larger, the interests concerned vaster and more independent, the problems to be solved more complex and farther-reaching? A man may be able to choose very sensibly a representative competent to deal with the small and simple interests of his village, who would be utterly unable to weigh the merits of two opposing candidates who would have to adjudicate on the conflicting interests of China, Japan, Australia and America; he might not even know that the Pacific washes the shores of all of them; nor how the absence of women emigrants in a Chinese crowd affects the reaction of the Chinese labor on a western civilization; nor how the struggle of capital and labor is handicapped by a large influx of indentured—i.e., slave—labor; nor how the climate of northern Australia limits the possibilities of its successful cultivation.

A scheme worked out and assented to by the Nation would not sin against the idea of Democracy, if it gave more power to knowledge than to ignorance—provided that education were within the reach of all—and utilized all available capacities for the general good. It cannot be that the most complex and difficult of Sciences—excepting the Science of the Soul—the Science of Government, should be the only one in which the opinion of the ignorant should weigh as much as the opinion of the learned, that the labor of Government must always be unskilled, that the apprentice shall claim in this alone to do the work of the craftsman, that it shall be the only trade which can be followed equally well by the ignorant and reckless as by the wise and prudent, by the novice as by the experienced. If all around us there are poverty, disease, misery, crime—can ignorance discover their causes, and is selfishness likely to cure them? Surely in this, as in all else, Knowledge is Power.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN PRISON

There have been various discussions in the House of Commons about the position and treatment of conscientious

objectors. One of the most important recent decisions is that there are to be no more remissions of court martial sentences during the continuance of hostilities, and that men who continue to disobey orders will serve successive sentences in prison. Special circumstances may be taken into account in certain cases. There have been several flagrant cases of ill-treatment in barracks, notably those of J. Grey, and James Brightmore, a young solicitor's clerk in Manchester. The latter was kept for eleven days in a pit. He managed to write a letter from which the following is an extract:

I was bullied horribly when I was tried, and sentenced to twenty-eight days detention in solitary confinement, to be given raw rations and cook my food myself. This does not sound bad, but I have found the confinement was in a pit which started at the surface as three feet by two, and tapered off to two feet six inches by fifteen inches. Water was struck, but they continued until it was ten feet. The bottom is full of water, and I have to stand on two strips of wood all day long just above the water line. There is not room to walk about, and sitting is impossible. The sun beats down, and through the long day there are only the walls of clay to look at. Already I am half mad. . . . I hunger-struck for two days in the hole here, but I found I was getting too weak to resist, and my brain seemed to be giving under the strain.

A friendly soldier adds: "They would not listen to him. They cursed him and told him he was a soldier and they would do just as they wished. It is no use Brightmore making any complaints because they have orders to take no notice. This torture is turning the man's brain."

Repeated demands from his friends for enquiries and investigation, and questions asked in the House have resulted in the officers concerned being relieved of their commands. Brightmore is, however, still a prisoner, condemned to two years' hard labor.

Happily this kind of thing is not common, though a number more C.O.'s have been sent to France in distinct contravention of the promises made by the Government, and some of these have suffered the extremest form of field punishment.—Friends Fellowship Papers, England.

CORRESPONDENCE.

HAMILTON NOTES.

Hamilton Local had Com. Mervyn Smith of Kitchener at their first regular Sunday afternoon meeting on Nov. 4th. Though a stranger to a Hamilton audience, a record crowd turned up, which we were very thankful for, as the address was one of the most educative and lucid ever given here. The subject, "Socialism, Its Rise and Meaning," gave Com. Smith a great opportunity of displaying his mastery of the development and philosophy of our movement. We were already aware of Com. Smith's ability as a writer and reasoner through the pages of the Forward, but now, after this additional gift of oratory is proven to us, and taking into account his youth, we make bold to prophesy that in Com. Smith we will have one of the greatest assets of the Canadian movement in the days to come. His enthusiasm and sincerity give us further assurance in our prediction. Our meetings are off to a good start. Com. Bainbridge is our speaker for Nov. 11th.—J. A.

AND NOW HE'S FIRED.

"What do you mean by whistling like that in this office?" demanded the merchant.

"Well, sir, I thought I'd like you to know that I'm bearing up cheerfully in spite of my miserable salary," answered the clerk.