

*One Hundredth Anniversary*

# GANDHI REMEMBERED



*by*

*HORACE G. ALEXANDER*

Pendle Hill Pamphlet 165  55¢

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*About the Author*/Born at Croydon, England, in 1889 Horace Alexander passed from the famous old Quaker school of Bootham, at York, to King's College, Cambridge, where he took a first-class honors degree in history. Twenty years as a lecturer on international relations led to directorship at Woodbrooke, the English Quaker study center near Birmingham.

Here he met C. F. Andrews, friend of Gandhi. Andrews persuaded him to concern himself with the Indian drug problem, an addiction to opium eating from which the British government derived a large revenue. While at a League of Nations Conference for the limitation of drugs Horace received from Gandhi a wire which read: "Please tell conference all India wants prohibition of drugs except for medicinal purposes." This was the author's first contact with the Mahatma.

A year later he was in India studying drug addiction on the spot. Naturally he included a visit to Gandhi's ashram, or community settlement, at Sabarmati, a village near the city of Ahmedabad, north of Bombay. "This," writes the author, "was at the end of my six months of eastern travel. As I travelled I became deeply conscious of the arrogance of many Britishers in their attitude to Indians; so I was very ready to accept Gandhi's view of things, and to work for Indian freedom on my return to England."

Altogether he lived in India for over ten years, including the period of the final British withdrawal. His concern for the country, which did not stop with freedom gained, is reflected in the titles of his books: *The Indian Ferment*, *India Since Cripps*, *New Citizens of India*, *Consider India*, and the Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Quakerism and India*.

In private life birds are his delight. He and his wife, Rebecca, enjoy them in the garden and from the windows of their home at Swanage, Dorset.

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# GANDHI REMEMBERED

I first met Gandhi when I stayed at his ashram at Sabarmati for a week in March, 1928. At that time he had been warned that he must not do any more work, or he might have a serious heart attack. So his daily jobs were relatively light, among them cutting up the vegetables for the household of some eighty persons. He invited me to join him for this early half-hour's domestic duty, so I was able to have several casual talks with him. I discovered at once how easy and simple he was to talk to. Another Friend, Alice Barnes, who visited him in the same year, wrote at the time: "Gandhiji is as simple, as approachable, as friendly, as unexact, as merry, as good, as I should think it possible for man to be." My own impressions were the same. He was very happy in the company of the ashram children, who always accompanied him on his brisk afternoon walk. He was direct in conversation, almost brusque. When I was saying good-bye, I asked him what I ought to try to say to people in England when they asked me of my impressions of India. "First," he said, "we want you to get off our backs."

Sympathetic as I was to his point of view I was rather surprised that he expressed this so sharply. But it had its effect on me. Like many other things about him it was unforgettable.

This man, the leader of India's revolt against British rule,

was the creator of a new force in politics: disciplined, non-violent mass action against systems felt to be unjust and immoral. His exploits in the field were so widely known, and the character of the man so widely felt that, when the news of his assassination, on January 30, 1948, was reported, people wept in the streets of towns and villages all around the world.

His early life gave no hint that he would ever be world famous. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869. He grew up in a small town, capital of the little state of Rajkot, the younger son of the Chief Minister of the State. This did not presage any position of political authority, even in that obscure and remote principality, much less in the vast land of India.

The family were devout Hindus, and his mother, who had a great influence on the boy, took her religious vows so seriously that she would often undergo a complete fast for a day or more. Gandhi's father died when the son was barely grown up. In those days, there were not many professional openings available for younger sons of an Indian family. The law was often the answer; and it was thought that, while the British ruled India, a legal training in London was likely to be the best preparation for a successful career in India. So Mohan made up his mind that he would go to London and become a barrister. He was already married by this time, and had one son.

There were strong objections from the family, not least from his mother; but in the end he raised the money, and overcame all obstacles. He solemnly vowed to his mother that while he was in the west, he would drink no wine, eat no meat and keep sexually pure. The Gandhi family had been vegetarian for generations, and so, no doubt, were most of their friends and neighbors. Orthodox Hindus, like Muslims, abstain from alcohol. As soon as he was on shipboard, bound for England in a British steamer, his difficulties began, for no vegetarian food was provided. No doubt other young Indians had made similar vows to their parents before leaving home, and broken them when faced



with these difficult circumstances. Not so the young Gandhi. Rather than break his vow, he starved on board the ship, eating nothing but fruit, and in London he fared little better, till one day he stumbled on a vegetarian restaurant. After that, not only were his feeding problems solved, but he began to read about vegetarianism. He soon became an ardent vegetarian by conviction, not merely by tradition; and later he joined the committee of the London Vegetarian Society, the first public office of any kind that he held.

His three years in England did not turn him into a public figure, nor did he begin to show an interest in politics, but they helped him to find himself. After a few months of desperate effort to become a typical "English gentleman" he realized that that was not the real M. K. Gandhi. Instead, he became an enthusiast for rational diet, he lived in the utmost simplicity, he walked all over London to save bus fares—and to see for himself how the ordinary people lived—and he was content to make friends with a few congenial Englishmen, such as the members of the Vegetarian Society, rather than attempting to make an impression as a "man about town." It has been well said that his "dietary experiments, dictated by considerations of health and economy, were to become part of his religious and spiritual evolution," and "the control of the palate was one of the first steps in that discipline which was to culminate many years later in total sublimation."

He passed his examinations without difficulty, and in 1891, as a Barrister-at-Law of the Inner Temple, London, returned to India. But his difficulties were only beginning. He was met by the tragic news of his mother's death, which had been withheld from him while he was still in England. Soon it appeared that his English law degree would not help him in the Indian courts. He was still shy and diffident in public. His early efforts as a lawyer in the Indian courts only ended in fiasco. In desperation, he was prepared to turn to teaching. But he had no diploma or other tangible qualifications as an educator.

## South Africa

At this juncture his brother heard of an opening for a lawyer in South Africa, where two Indian business firms were engaged in a big litigation. He decided to try his luck there. This proved to be the turning point of his life. For most of the next twenty years he lived in South Africa, and when he finally returned to India to live, in 1914, he had made a name for himself that had already spread beyond the boundaries of South Africa and India.

In 1893, when Gandhi first set foot in South Africa, he found himself among an Indian population of a good many thousands, most of whom had been brought there during the previous fifty years as indentured laborers to work in mines or on plantations. The Africans lived in their own villages, according to their own ancestral patterns, and in most cases were unwilling to abandon their traditional life for the wages offered by the Europeans who were developing diamond and coal mines and plantations. Indians were recruited under a system of indenture which made it almost impossible for them to return to India at the end of their period of service. Following the "coolie" laborers came Indian shopkeepers and businessmen, some of whom grew quite wealthy. But they were still known, by the white people who ran the country, as "coolies." Likewise, the London trained barrister, M. K. Gandhi, was a "coolie lawyer."

The case that took Gandhi to South Africa was complicated. It took months for him to unravel it. In the end, although he was satisfied that his client, Seth Abdullah, had a strong case, he was able to persuade him to settle it out of court, on terms that were generous to the opponent, thus demonstrating from the beginning that in his view the true function of a good lawyer should be to work for a peaceful settlement rather than for a battle of wits and outright victory for one side.

By the time the legalities were ended, much had happened to bring Gandhi into the public life of South Africa. Within a

few days of his arrival he had been made acutely aware of the color bar. As he traveled across the country, he was not allowed a proper seat on a bus, and he was turned out of a first-class railway carriage even though he had a first-class ticket. Other Indians in South Africa accepted these discriminations as inevitable. Not so Gandhi. In spite of his diffidence, he had a strength and courage which grew stronger with every obstacle he met. Ultimately he stayed on in South Africa, and, in response to urgent requests from his fellow Indians, led them in the battle against fresh discriminatory legislation.

There was something unique about the quality of his leadership which enabled him to achieve extraordinary results. For the Indians he led were in no sense a united people. They came from various parts of India. They had no common language. Most were Hindu by religion, but some were Muslims, some Parsis, some Christians. Most were illiterate, and accustomed to harsh treatment, including floggings by their European masters. Yet Gandhi was able to identify himself so closely with them, and he showed such purity of motive, and such trust in all of them, that, when the time came for common action, not only men but women cheerfully underwent prison sentences, returning to prison again and again. Gandhi by this time had read not only the New Testament, where he was profoundly affected by the Sermon on the Mount, but also Tolstoy, with whom he had some correspondence, Thoreau, and John Ruskin. Under the immediate influence of Ruskin's book, *Unto This Last*, he gave up his legal work and settled on the land given to him and his family by a wealthy South African of German extraction, Kallenbach. They christened the tract "Tolstoy Farm." Here Gandhi became a farmer, a nurse, and a teacher; later in India, he spent some time every day spinning cotton. He was a profound believer in the dignity and the moral value of manual work.

The details of his African campaigns for civil rights cannot be given here but a few anecdotes show his development. Gandhi's chief antagonist was General Smuts. These two re-



markable men fought each other vigorously, but they also learnt a high personal regard for each other. Once, when Gandhi was in jail, he spent part of his time making a pair of sandals for the General, which he duly presented to him on his release. At another time, just as the Indians were starting their campaign of resistance, they learnt that the South African government was threatened with a serious strike. So Gandhi called off the resistance until the strike was ended.

At an earlier period, when the British were still governing half of South Africa, and war broke out between the British and the Boer Republics, Gandhi organized an ambulance corps to help the British forces. His sympathies were with the Boers, but he held that, so long as he and his fellow Indians were taking advantage of the benefits of the British Empire (and at that time in his life he thought the British Empire was in the main beneficent) they could not avoid the obligation of helping the Empire. Already he was what in the West would be called a pacifist by conviction; so the only help he could offer in wartime was through ambulance work. The Indians showed themselves well disciplined and courageous under fire, and Gandhi received a decoration for valor.

Active resistance to South African law continued for some eight years, with various intervals for negotiation. On one occasion, after solemnly promising not to obey a new law requiring Indians to carry passes, Mr. Gandhi had talks with General Smuts and came away believing that Smuts had promised to repeal the legislation. So he urged his followers to give their signatures voluntarily. One Indian, believing that Gandhi had been "bought," stabbed and nearly killed him. As soon as he was well enough, Gandhi gave his signature from his sick-bed; but he refused to prosecute his assailant. When he discovered, however, that the "Black Act" had not been withdrawn, he believed that he had been tricked. When he was well enough he gathered with other Indians to burn their passes publicly, the assailant and Gandhi holding hands as they led the burning.

It cannot be said that the sufferings of the Indians in South Africa achieved very much. In 1914 some concessions were made, partly under pressure from the British governments in London and India. But even these concessions were not permanent. Ten years later Gandhi believed that conditions for the Indians in South Africa were in some respects worse than ever. And no second Gandhi has since appeared to unite them. But he demonstrated to the world that even a small, poor, disunited group can be welded together to resist a mighty government, not by armed violence, but through self-suffering.

## Back to India

When he returned to India in 1914, Gandhi accepted the direction and advice of a man not much older than himself. G. K. Gokhale, an ardent nationalist, but moderate in action, was one of those rare public men who are not afraid to confess their mistakes openly. Probably it was the shining integrity shared by these two men that drew them together. Gokhale advised Gandhi to keep quiet for a year after his return to his homeland; and so he did. But in March 1915, Gokhale died. No one can know what difference there might have been in Gandhi's subsequent life if his guru had lived.

It was some time before Gandhi embarked on national politics. But when approached on behalf of some hundreds of indigo workers who were groaning under oppressive treatment in the state of Bihar Gandhi went to investigate and recognized that the grievances were real. He encouraged resistance to the demands that were being made upon them.

The Government set up a commission of enquiry, and invited Gandhi to join it. Representatives of the employers were also included. In order to achieve a unanimous report which he felt was desirable, it was necessary for Gandhi to abandon some of

the claims that he thought the peasants could justly demand. Most of the abuses, however, were swept away. Gandhi had, indeed, seen that the whole indigo planting system was in a state of decay. Before long it was superseded by new methods, and the peasants were less poverty-stricken.

Near his own home in western India the workers on strike in a cotton factory came to him for advice. Though the factory was owned by a man who had come to the financial rescue of Gandhi's ashram or community center when it was short of funds, Gandhi supported the workers. And, when he found they were inclined to give way without achieving their minimum claim, he even started a fast. This put backbone into the hard pressed workers, and they won their case.

He had demonstrated that what he called "satyagraha" could be used effectively by unorganized poor and illiterate people against employers and against the government. This word "satyagraha" needs to be interpreted. When Gandhi first began his non-violent campaigns in South Africa, the movement was called "passive resistance." Gandhi did not like this expression, as it did not convey the positive ideas that were inspiring him. He invited his friends to offer a new name; and this term, satyagraha, was coined. It means soul-force—the mighty power of truth to be set against the evil of falsehood.

By 1916 the Indian national movement had come to a parting of the ways. The Indian National Congress had long consisted chiefly of men of the upper classes, most of them a good deal westernized, who met in annual sessions and passed resolutions urging the British government to share their authority with unofficial Indians. But some of its members were becoming impatient. They wanted full self-government; they wanted it immediately; and they were determined to make things uncomfortable for the British. Talk of revolution was in the air. Some of the younger men began to resort to terrorism. At this stage Gandhi came upon the scene. He had no use for terrorism or violence of any kind, though he, too, wanted full "swaraj" (self-



rule). In the months immediately after the end of the first world war (1918 and 1919) the British government took the final steps which alienated him. In particular a British general ordered his troops in a big town of northern India to fire on a crowd massed together in a square from which there were no easy exits. Such gatherings had been prohibited, but the crowd was unarmed. Many were killed. The shadow of the Amritsar shooting brought a darkness into Anglo-Indian relations which never lifted. India was now ready for Gandhi's leadership in non-violent defiance. He promised "swaraj" within a year. But just when all was set for mass action, an infuriated mob set fire to a police office and a number of the police were burnt to death. Gandhi, already disturbed by previous threats of violence, thereupon called off the whole movement and undertook personal penance. Most of his colleagues were horrified. To them, occasional violence was to be expected. In fact, "non-violence" for them meant every kind of political pressure that might force the British government to its knees. But Gandhi's satyagraha meant a kind of civil disobedience that would indeed be "civil"—with, to quote his own words, "effects which may be marvelous, but unperceived and gentle."

Ironically his first arrest came soon after he had called off the campaign. Urged by the British Government in London the Viceroy arrested him as the leader of the civil disobedience. Through the pages of his weekly paper, *Young India*, and in his speeches he had publicly warned his followers that there must be no disturbances when he was arrested. There were none. At the trial all concerned acquitted themselves well and showed courtesy to the distinguished prisoner. (He was already known throughout India as "Mahatma," Great Soul). He pleaded guilty, inviting the highest penalty under the law, and was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. But only two years had passed when he was suddenly stricken with appendicitis, and after an operation by a British surgeon, was released.



# The Constructive Program

Gandhi was never a politician pure and simple. Probably the key to all his public action was his passionate concern for the starving millions in the villages of India. His main quarrel with the British Government was not that it was alien, but that its policies, far from helping India to become more prosperous, as British officialdom claimed, were impoverishing and emasculating the Indian people. Consequently, even while he was trying to get rid of the British Government, he was equally concerned for what he called "the constructive program." This included the restoration of healthy village life by bringing back hand-spinning, weaving, and other crafts to supplement their food production; the abolition of "untouchability"; the healing of the rift between Hindus and Muslims; better care for the millions of cattle whose milk provided one of India's main articles of diet; and certain other important economic and social reforms. He had hoped that even while he was in prison the program would continue. In later years, when he suffered further imprisonments, these reforms were carried on; but at this period most of his associates were not convinced of the importance of these things. Fortunately when Jawaharlal Nehru, the ardent socialist, came on the scene, he too was actively concerned with the problems of poverty and exploitation. And although his approach was very different from that of his older colleague, their goal was identical, and by 1930 they supported each other in uniting the Indian Congress party behind a program of radical social reform.

Gandhi was released from his first imprisonment in 1924, but Indian independence was not achieved till 1947. The story of those twenty-three years has been told in detail in several biographical studies. Here a summary outline must suffice, with some of the highlights so far as Gandhi himself was concerned.

As he was released on grounds of health, he did not consider himself free for political action until the full six years had

clapsed. Meanwhile he gave himself wholeheartedly to some of the tasks that might prepare India for self-government. At this time, there were many riots in the larger towns of India, as Hindus and Muslims attacked each other. Gandhi, himself a Hindu, undertook a three-weeks' fast in the home of one of his Muslim friends in Delhi. As in all his later fasts, one purpose of this was self-purification; but it was also a mute appeal to men of both religious persuasions to be reconciled. For a time it seemed to have achieved its purpose; but soon the trouble broke out again. During the middle twenties, Gandhi traveled from village to village over many parts of the huge country, preaching goodwill among all the people, and urging them to tackle their own problems, including the vast poverty that afflicted millions. His royal remedy here was to bring back village crafts, especially the spinning and weaving of their own clothes. For thirty years he did his utmost to foster hand-spinning and weaving, as a first step toward the restoration of a healthy village life. He also urged people of every class to spin for half an hour every day, both to help the country towards a sense of unity, and also to bring to the middle and upper classes a sense of the dignity of labor. He himself found time to do the half-hour's spinning every day, though he never became a very proficient spinner.

In 1927, during one of his tours, he became ill with high blood pressure. The doctors warned him that he would never be able to work hard again. He paid some attention to what they said, and for some months lived quietly in his ashram, helping with various menial tasks, listening to the innumerable visitors who came to see him, and editing and writing his weekly, *Young India*, which was a running commentary on all sorts of public affairs, not to mention religion, health, and many other matters.

But he had not forgotten his old techniques of resistance. The peasants of a neighboring district, called Bardoli, sought his help in opposing an excessive increase of their land revenue. After

he had satisfied himself that they had a good case, and after all appeals to the government had failed, he encouraged mass disobedience. This was so extraordinarily well disciplined that, in spite of strong repressive action from the government, the peasants stood firm, and the government had to give way. Again Gandhi had helped the common people to throw off their old inertia and demonstrate their own inner strength.

## The Round Table Conferences

At the end of 1927 the British Government decided to set up a commission to decide whether India was ready for the first step toward self-government. The method of appointment of this purely British commission was regarded by all sections of Indian opinion as insulting. There was a wide boycott of the commission when it visited India. The several parties in India formed their own commission which drew up a plan of self-government, the so-called Nehru report, named for its chairman, Motilal Nehru, father of Jawaharlal. They recommended the immediate establishment of a free India as a member of the British Commonwealth. Some of the younger men, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, were dissatisfied, as they wanted complete independence. Gandhi was urged to return to active politics to help in resolving this conflict. He did so, and persuaded the younger generation to give the British government a year's grace before any direct action was taken. But the year (1929) went by, and there were still nothing but promises for some vague future. Meanwhile the British Government had invited a number of Indian leaders to meet in London for a Round Table Conference to work out plans for the future government of India. They had hoped that Gandhi and his colleagues of the Congress would attend, but as the British would not assure them in advance of full Dominion status they refused to take part, and the whole Congress Party



once again put Gandhi in control of the "revolution," leaving it to him to decide both when and how to act.

After sending a last appeal to the British Viceroy, Gandhi decided to start the campaign by breaking the salt law. Salt was a government monopoly, and it was illegal to take salt from the sea, though in many parts of the coast there were extensive deposits of it. Gandhi held that this was a tax on the very poorest Indian, for every man, however poor, needed salt with his food. So he selected a band of followers, and setting out from the Sabarmati ashram they walked nearly two hundred miles to the sea, where they then began to make salt. At the time many people thought this a mad action, which would not move any one; but as usual Gandhi understood the mentality of the Indian masses better than the sophisticated townsman did. All India was stirred. People began to manufacture illicit salt, or to raid the government salt-pans, up and down the country. As soon as they were arrested others joined in the work. Soon they found other laws to break. For the first time women took a leading part in civil disobedience. They spent the day standing or sitting in front of liquor shops or foreign cloth shops, as if saying, mutely, to their countrymen: "If you come to buy at this shop, you are no true patriot."

Gandhi himself was arrested again, and given an indefinite sentence of internment. While he was in prison the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, allowed me to visit him in the hope of finding some basis for improved relations. We had a long and friendly conversation. When at last I said: "I expect I had better leave you now," Gandhi replied with a laugh: "Yes, unless you prefer to stay here in the prison with me."

In the absence of the leaders still in jail, a number of Indians did take part in a London conference in the autumn of 1930, and did their best to advance their country's interests. They induced the British leaders to go a long way towards a free Indian government. On their return to India some of them visited Gandhi in detention, and following this Lord Irwin asked Gandhi



to come and discuss the future with him. They had a series of long, heart-to-heart talks, to the great indignation of Winston Churchill and some other British imperialists, who were horrified to think of a "half-naked" rebel leader striding up the steps of the Vice-regal palace to parley with the King's representative. In those talks these two men found each other, and agreed to a pact which enabled Gandhi to call off civil disobedience, and to take part, with several colleagues, in the adjourned Round Table Conference in the autumn of 1931.

For nearly three months he was in England, this time not as an unknown student, but as a famous (or notorious) Mahatma. Large sections of the English people hated him as a dangerous rebel, but others were eager to meet him and to learn from him. His week-ends, between the conference sessions, were mostly spent out of London, one of them in Lancashire, whose cotton workers had been hit by the Indian boycott of foreign cloth. Here, as also in the poorer parts of London, where he spent his nights and early mornings at the Kingsley Hall settlement as guest of Muriel Lester and her associates, the working people responded to his outspoken friendliness. But in the main the sophisticated people of England found him difficult to appreciate.

He spent one week-end at Woodbrooke, the English equivalent of Pendle Hill. As we approached the front door we were greeted by Henry T. Cadbury, then head of Woodbrooke. When I introduced Henry Cadbury, Mr. Gandhi's immediate response was: "I ate your chocolates in South Africa!" So the first thing the students of Woodbrooke heard, even before Gandhi entered the front-door, was a burst of laughter.

He joined the students for the devotional meetings; and one evening the common-room was packed with specially invited visitors, who plied him with questions, not all of them friendly, for well over an hour. He made a profound impression on most of the younger people. But the extent of misunderstanding is exemplified by one elderly lady who went home to explain that

“Mr. Gandhi certainly does not believe in non-violence. He said that blood would have to flow before India achieves her liberty.” What he really said was that he expected further clashes with the British Government, and many Indians might be shot down, even though they were resisting non-violently.

## A Convert to Silence

During this conference I was able to be with him and his “family” in London a day or two each week. What most impressed me then was that he was never out of temper. The pressure on him was tremendous. His hours of sleep grew less and less. The conference gave him no satisfaction; he often wished he had not come. But even when his secretaries and others near him became irritated, it was he, at the center of things, who kept his serenity. Two top Scotland Yard detectives were assigned by the British government to look after his safety while he was in London. They became his close friends. Before he left London he found time to go out to south London to have tea with one of them in his home. The inspector commented that Gandhi was perhaps the busiest of all the important men he had had to look after; but “He is the only one who found time to come and have tea in my house.” The domestic helpers who looked after his office quarters also became his devoted friends.

English Friends felt much concern for the conference. Meetings of silent prayer, holding the conference in mind, were held each week at Friends House. This recalled to me an incident which had occurred three and a half years earlier. When I was leaving the ashram after my first visit in 1928 Mr. Gandhi said to me (with characteristic modesty): “If you have noticed anything that we do here that you think might be improved, please write to me about it. We are always glad of suggestions.” Taking him at his word, I wrote to ask if he had thought of including

some silence in the prayers. He replied that he did not think it would suit the members of the ashram; and added that he had attended some Quaker meetings in South Africa, but he was not impressed.

Now, invited to meeting at Friends House like other members of the conference, Indian and British, Gandhi accepted. He was so impressed with his first meeting that he resolved to come again, but pressure of work again and again stood in the way. Near the end of the conference, he said to me: "I am determined to come this week." However, he had contracted a bad cough in the raw English November weather, and on the day of the meeting it was worse. So his son, Devadas, came to me and said: "Do please persuade my father not to go to your meeting; he will not listen to us." So I went to him, only to get the firm reply: "I am coming." He came. Just after we settled into the silence he had a fit of coughing. But I thought: "I must not worry: that will only make it worse." He did not cough again. When the meeting was over, he suggested that we go straight back to his office in Knightsbridge. When we got there Dr. S. K. Datta, Indian Christian, and member of the Round Table Conference, who was living in the house, came at once to Mr. Gandhi and said to him: "Is it not time for you to do something about this cough? It gets worse each day." Mr. Gandhi looked up at him, and said, laughing: "So you are the professional doctor, are you, advising me about my cough?" "Yes," said Dr. Datta. "Well," replied Mr. Gandhi, "the cough has gone. I left it at Friends House." He had. It did not return.

A few months later I received a letter from him, now back in India and in jail again. He wrote to tell me that he had had letters from the ashram about some personal difficulties that had arisen there. He had suggested to them that they should introduce a few minutes of silent meditation in the prayers each day. "This," he wrote in his letter, "they have done, and they tell me that things are going better." The two minutes of silence remained a part of the ashram prayers through the rest of his life.



Gandhi had returned home exhausted and, to quote his own expression, having “drunk the bitter cup of disappointment to the dregs.” In India he found his friends back in jail and a new Viceroy who had made up his mind that this time the Congress must really be crushed. Back went Gandhi to his internment.

The work of the Round Table Conference, however, continued in a third session, and a new measure of self-government for the provinces of India was actually in process of coming into being.

## Untouchability

But this happy development was hindered by a grave and difficult issue. India had for long included people of different religious communities, and the conflicts that arose between them from time to time, especially between Hindus and Muslims, were referred to as “communal conflicts.” Already, in the electoral system of India, the two major religious communities, Hindu and Muslim, had been divided, so that Hindus voted only for Hindus, and Muslims for Muslims. The electorates were quite separate. Some of the leaders of the Depressed Classes pleaded in the Round Table Conference that they should also now be given separate electorates, so as to guarantee them some seats in all the popular legislatures. Gandhi, who had worked for the abolition of the evil of “untouchability” throughout his life, and had even adopted an untouchable girl into his own family, resisted this reasoning in the strongest manner.

He pointed out that it would have the effect of cutting the “untouchables” right out of the main stream of Indian life, and it would perpetuate a division which needed to be healed. He said he could never live to see this vivisection of India. In the Conference no agreement could be reached. So, after some months the British Prime Minister promulgated his decision.



Known officially as "the communal award," it gave the depressed classes a separate electorate. Gandhi, when he heard of this in prison, declared that he would start a fast unto death.

Immediately men all over India got busy. Gandhi was given access to his friends. Within a few days the Hindu and Depressed Class leaders had agreed on a modified plan, which the British government accepted and which assured the untouchable communities reserved seats in the legislatures for many years to come, but without actually isolating them into a separate electorate.

Gandhi was then released; but he interpreted his release as meaning "release for the prosecution of his campaign to destroy the whole system of untouchability." He started a new weekly paper, and gave it the name *Harijan* which means "Children of God." Henceforth, the use of such opprobrious names as "untouchable" was to be superseded by this new name. All religions agree, said Gandhi, that God is the friend of the poor and the despised. So they alone should be known as his children. In time, he hoped, the high-caste Hindus might also deserve to be called "Harijans," but that could only be when they had atoned for their age-old sin against these humble people and had wiped out all the evils of their present status. A vigorous campaign was started for opening schools to the Harijan children; for opening Hindu temples to them; enabling them to draw water from the same wells as the rest of the village, and so on. These activities have continued ever since, but India is a vast country, old social habits do not vanish easily; and though today it is illegal to show any discrimination against a Harijan, the ancient abuses are not dead. Some Harijans have held positions of distinction in the new India since independence, but they probably will still need their special protection for some years to come. Yet it may be fairly claimed that the blows struck by Gandhi in the 1930's, and vigorously supported by Nehru and others of his colleagues, have broken the old curse of untouchability in India once for all.

During the middle 1930's Gandhi himself devoted much time

to Harijan emancipation. Touring India tirelessly, often on foot, to raise funds and to bring reforms in the villages, he was opposed by the orthodox Hindus, and from time to time he had to face abuse and hostile demonstrations.

## A New Constitution and World War II

It must be admitted that the strong and relentless government action against civil disobedience had worn the Congress Party down. Fewer and fewer people were volunteering for disobedience of the laws and the consequent long prison sentences. The leaders were gradually being released. Finally Gandhi himself advised the suspension of the movement. Then, in 1937, the new constitution came into force. Elections were held throughout British India for new provincial assemblies; and on the basis of these, ministries were to be formed which would be virtually self-governing. The British government might still intervene in case of emergency, but would they do so in practice? In the elections the Congress won sweeping victories almost everywhere, in spite of the fact that for years the party had been outlawed. In five provinces they had an absolute majority; in three more they were the biggest single party. In six of these provinces they were able immediately to form ministries; and the Viceroy gave an assurance that the governors would not intervene. Gandhi, who had never felt much interest in legislative action, especially while the British were still in control of the central government, yet approved this degree of co-operation in the hope that the ministries might encourage village industries, introduce prohibition of intoxicants, reduce the burdens on the peasantry, promote the use of hand-spun cloth, extend and improve education and combat untouchability. His eye was con-

stantly on the need of the poor in their innumerable villages, and if provincial ministers could help to lift them out of their poverty, let them by all means go to it.

For over two years many Congress leaders were busy in these important fields, and Gandhi hoped that there need be no further clashes with the government. Surely the British would see the good work being done at the provincial level and would be converted to a complete withdrawal. So, indeed, it might have been, but for the outbreak of war in 1939. The Viceroy immediately declared India also at war with Germany without consulting Gandhi or any other leader of Indian opinion. Gandhi and Nehru and others were sympathetic to the struggle against the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini; but they wanted the British to demonstrate their real belief in democracy by accepting it for India. The response they got to their challenge was grudging and half-hearted. Before long the strain between British and Indian became so acute that the Congress leaders all withdrew from the provincial ministries, leaving the government of all India once more in the hands of comparatively small groups who were content to work with and under the British. Gandhi had no wish to embarrass the government in wartime; but as the alienation deepened he was led to initiate individual disobedience.

For the first lawbreaker he chose Vinoba Bhave, a man who had lived in Gandhi's ashram for many years, who had never taken any part in ordinary politics, but who wholeheartedly shared Gandhi's own convictions about non-violence, including opposition to all wars, however "righteous." And finally in 1942, after the failure of the Cripps Mission—an effort by Sir Stafford Cripps, on behalf of the British government, of which he was then a member, to find a solution that would satisfy the Congress leaders—the Congress again declared for active opposition to British authority. Up to the end there was conflict on this issue. Gandhi believed that such an "open rebellion" would not affect the war effort one way or the other. Nehru, on the other hand,



who was now recognized as the Mahatma's successor in the leadership, argued that it might make it easier for the Japanese to invade India. Gandhi accordingly issued instructions to the Indian people on methods of non-violent non-cooperation with possible Japanese invaders.

The government did not wait for the "rebellion" to get under way, but arrested Gandhi and all the chief Congress leaders, and they remained isolated from the world till after the war was over, though Gandhi himself was released earlier, after the death in prison of his devoted wife Kasturba, whom India had long regarded as the mother of the country.

As the war drew to its conclusion, the then Viceroy, Lord Wavell, made heroic efforts to find a solution to the problem of Indian government; but it foundered on the claims of the Muslim League, represented by M. A. Jinnah, to speak for all Indian Muslims and to claim separation from India. As there had always been some Muslims who supported the Congress and believed in a united free India, Gandhi found these claims intolerable.

## Independence at Last

In 1945, a new government came into office in Britain. Its leaders, especially Mr. Attlee, the Prime Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Lord Pethick-Lawrence, who became Secretary of State for India, were determined to bring about full Indian freedom, and not to allow sectional divisions to prevent this. Political prisoners were all released, and three British Cabinet Ministers traveled to India to work out a plan for withdrawal.

It was hard to convince the Congress leaders that this time the British really meant business, and Gandhi was at first as incredulous as any of his colleagues. Finally the Cabinet Mission evolved a plan that would hold India together, while giving the



Muslim minority the fullest possible safeguards. With this provision Nehru and his colleagues in the summer of 1946 entered an interim government and proceeded to plan for the calling of a Constituent Assembly to prepare a constitution for free India. But Jinnah and his fellow Muslims were still not satisfied. The year from August 1946 to August 1947 saw terrible bloodshed and violence in many parts of India, especially in Bengal, where Muslims and Hindus slaughtered one another.

During those months Gandhi showed his most heroic qualities. He spent weeks and months touring on foot through the countryside where outbreaks had occurred, trying to restore courage to the minority community, and rebuking the majority groups, especially in the province of Bihar where the Hindus were the assailants. He was still striving to keep India united on a foundation of villages where Muslim and Hindu were unified in fact. He achieved marvels, but the political tide was too strong for him. When Lord Mountbatten came as Viceroy in the spring of 1947, he found the leaders of the Congress ready to accept partition, on the assurance from Mr. Jinnah that this would bring peace. Gandhi thought they were mistaken, but accepted the decision, and strove all the harder to reconcile the two communities.

On August 15, 1947, India was proclaimed a free country, and at the same time, the northwest and northeast, where Muslims formed the majority of the population, were separated to form the state of Pakistan. Gandhi was not interested in national celebrations; so the man who had spent the past thirty years leading the movement for independence was not present in Delhi when the flag of free India was unfurled. Instead, he was spending the day in a deserted Muslim house in the city of Calcutta, capital of the Indian province of Bengal.

As the great day drew near, I asked if I might be with him, whether in the villages of East Bengal, or wherever else it might be. He invited me to come and be his guest for as long as I could stay. So a few days before the event I joined him in Cal-

cutta, and went with him to the deserted Muslim house in an area of the city from which Hindus had forced out their Muslim neighbors. Here Gandhi and Mr. Suhrawardy, former Chief Minister of the Bengal Government and notorious leader of the Muslim League, were entering on an extraordinary partnership. They had made a pact to live with each other in an effort to restore peace to this city which had been suffering from something approaching civil war for a year.

## The Miracle of Calcutta

On our arrival, we were greeted with a hostile demonstration from a number of young Hindus, who threw stones through the windows. Later they sent a few of their leaders into the house to talk things over, and Gandhi, with his habitual frankness, told them how misguided their behavior really was. The next day things were better, but at the time of the evening prayer meeting some of the young men found that Mr. Suhrawardy was not outside in the garden at the meeting; so they came shouting round the house again, and a young Indian policeman and I had to put up the shutters. The noise continued after Mr. Gandhi returned from prayer. He soon got up from his seat, went with his granddaughter to the window, threw back the shutters, and began talking in his habitual quiet conversational tone to the men outside. This immediately produced silence. First rebuking them, he then brought Suhrawardy to the window. These young protestors considered Suhrawardy mainly responsible for the killings that had disgraced the city a year earlier. So one of them shouted, "Aren't you ashamed of what you did last August?" "Yes, I am ashamed of it. We should all be ashamed of it," he replied.

At that they began to listen more attentively. And in the same moment a policeman arrived with news that Hindus and Muslims

were fraternizing in another part of the city. When Suhrawardy announced this, it was greeted with cheers. Soon after Gandhi dismissed the crowd, and we were left to spend this fateful night in peace. Gandhi then came to me to tell me what had just happened at the window. "The decisive moment," he said, "was when Suhrawardy made his open confession. Public confession," he added, "is always good for the soul, and it clears the air."

He then went on to speak of his plans for the following day. He was intending to spend it in prayer and fasting. For him it was natural, at every critical moment of life, to turn first to God. So this decisive day in the life of India, when it officially gained independence, was to be one of thanksgiving and dedication. Instead of prayers at 4 a.m., they would begin at 3:30. They would drink water, but eat no food all day. "But you are my guest," he added, "so, if you want food, I shall be glad to see that you get it."

At our prayers the next morning, while it was still dark, some young girls came singing Tagore's beautiful songs of freedom. When they found we were at prayer, they joined us; then they sang again, and taking Gandhi's blessing, went quietly away. Soon another group of singers came, and I think yet another. Then we settled to our daily tasks, as if it were any other day, but I could not help wondering what was happening all over the city. Later in the morning a friend came to fetch me to see the marvel of that day of universal rejoicing. The black clouds of fear seemed to have dissolved overnight, and the city was basking in the sunshine of universal goodwill: the "miracle of Calcutta." "No miracle," insisted Gandhi, meaning, I take it, that he had no miraculous powers. But the "one-man boundary force," as Lord Mountbatten called it (really the two-man boundary force) had done its work, and peace reigned over Bengal, both west (which was still part of India) and east (which was now part of Pakistan).

Efforts were made from the Hindu side to break this hard-won unity, but the people of Calcutta would not go back to the



evil days from which they had just been delivered. Gandhi went on a fast, and very soon the recalcitrant Hindus accepted the new era of peace and goodwill.

## Partition: the Aftermath

Alas, Gandhi could not be in two places at once. The partition of the northwest led to fresh outbreaks of violence. Millions were driven from their homes on both sides of the new frontier. In the capital city of Delhi itself, law and order broke down for a time. As soon as he could leave Calcutta, Gandhi traveled to Delhi, and there he remained through the last months of 1947 and until his death on January 30, 1948.

During those last months, when he was working night and day to bring back goodwill and make India safe for Muslims to live as first-class citizens, I was often in and out of his room in Delhi. I would look in on him for a talk about work we were trying to do under his general direction for easing tension, or for the relief of victims of communal outbreaks. Special memories cling to the mind, though by then I knew him well enough to take his remarkable qualities for granted. Sometimes, when I was talking to him, Mr. Nehru or one of the other top men in the new Indian government would come for his advice and help with the stupendous problems they were trying to tackle. All one was expected to do on these occasions was to withdraw to the other side of the room till the "big man" had left again. From that short distance one could see, within minutes, the haggard, overwrought look on the face of the visitor give way to repose, and soon the two men would be laughing together. The problem might not have been solved, but the burden had been lifted.

Once I fell ill just before he was returning to Delhi after a trip, so I sent a message to explain why I had not come to meet him. The next day a note arrived from him: "Naughty of you to

be ill. I must come and see you in your bed and make you laugh." In spite of urgent political business he did find his way to the hospital the next evening, after his usual bedtime, and he did make me laugh. It was typical of him to find time for all his innumerable friends, whenever they needed his help.

One day in the middle of January 1948, I went in to see Mr. Gandhi at his room in Birla House, Delhi, to say goodbye to him for a time, as I was planning to go to Calcutta. He had asked me to stop in before I went to the station, as he was writing a letter to a mutual friend and suggested that I might be his postman. It was Monday, his weekly silent day, so we had no conversation; but we laughed together over a snapshot that some one had taken showing him with a little girl poking her nose into his cheek. He seemed to be in a relaxed and carefree mood. So I was astonished to read the placard of a newspaper the next morning, as my train was nearing Calcutta: "Gandhi begins a fast." Not till then did I realize that while laughing and entering into my mood of the day before he had been all the while in inward agony of spirit.

I soon learnt that, at the evening prayer meeting, when he broke his silence, he had declared that the burden of insecurity for the Muslims terrorized by Hindus and Sikhs in Delhi and some other places, where the example of Bengal had not been followed, was more than he could bear, so he must try to find relief through his last remaining means—a fast without limit. At this the leaders of all the communities came together within a few days, and gave him their solemn assurance to work for racial harmony. So he broke his fast. But a few days later a young Hindu shot him dead as he came out to the prayer meeting.

The shock of his death did more for the protection and security of the Muslim community than all his efforts over many months.

# Gandhi's Guiding Principles

Some of Gandhi's critics were inclined to say: "What a pity that the saint has allowed himself to be involved in politics." To which he himself replied: "They have it the wrong way round. I am a politician who is trying to become a saint." It was his conviction that every man, whatever his religious convictions, should play his part in the affairs of the world. His whole life was a protest against the idea that a religious man is one who withdraws himself out of the world in order to pray and meditate. I have heard him say that he could believe that a man, withdrawing in his latter years to the Himalayas, might influence the world from his lonely sanctuary; but he was sure that this call had never come to him. His job was to stay in the world, and if necessary suffer from the dirt of the highway.

What did religion mean to Gandhi? Let us take a few sentences from his many published discussions of the matter.

"Religion," he said, "should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality . . ."

"With those who say God is Love I, too, would say God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth above all . . . But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, God is Truth and Truth is God."

When he was asked: What then is Truth? he answered: "A difficult question, but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you." But, argues the critic, different people hear different and even contradictory inner voices. Gandhi admits this and claims that it is partly because the final Truth is so vast and so rich that each man finds a differ-



ent aspect of it. But also he insists that no man can expect to learn much of Truth without a very thorough discipline. In order to learn something of eternal Truth he must undergo certain vows including the vow of poverty and nonpossession. "Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows you may not embark on the experiment at all." He called his own autobiography "The Story of my Experiments with Truth," and his life was in fact a pursuit of ultimate truth, with the joy of discovery of aspects of Truth all along the route.

In his later life he constantly spoke of Truth and Non-violence as the twin principles that guided him through every crisis. Non-violence was the best expression he could find for that aspect of "love" which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*: the mighty force of true understanding affection; the Love or Charity of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians. This, he held, was the principle that must be applied in every sphere of life: in politics no less than in the daily intercourse between man and man. Einstein said that Gandhi's great contribution to our time lay in his determination to moralize politics. Perhaps, he added, he is inclined to make his principles a little too absolute; but that is a healthy change from the ordinary politician, who abandons principle whenever it suits him.

Gandhi had strong views about ends and means. He had no use for short cuts. Once convinced that the right way to bring freedom to India was by non-violent action alone, he would rather wait many years than resort to the alluring short cut of violence. Evil means, he was convinced, always spoilt the end they were intended to promote: violence used in achieving the goal would lead to the enthronement of violence, and to reliance on coercion when the supposed "victory" was won.

He believed that the modern world, especially the western world, has gone astray by placing too much emphasis on human rights. Man has no inherent rights, he said; rights can only be earned by the fulfillment of duty. Let each contribute all he can to the community; then only let him begin to think of his rights.

Conflict there will still be between one nation, one class, one group, and another. Let those who have faith in the justice of their cause demonstrate their conviction by self-suffering, not by attempting to coerce or to destroy the "enemy."

His dream for India was to see the country composed in the main of villages, providing the world with essential foodstuffs; villages with thriving handicrafts, where the village community was knit together in brotherly affection, without the divisions caused by wealth or caste or religion. Cities there must also be, but the cities and their big industries and the financiers must not be allowed to dominate the life of the village. He saw the peasant, the countryman, as the pillar of all true community. The farmer produces the primary essentials of food and raw materials. He outlives the comings and goings of wars and revolutions. His silent, continuous cultivation of the earth keeps the whole body politic healthy.

As for the superstructure, his dream was of all men united in one world, where all nations live in mutual respect, where all obey the moral law of non-violence, and practice mutual aid. He would have liked to see free India adopt a policy of total disarmament from the beginning of her independence. He knew that the country was not ready for it; but he believed to the end that the country that can set this example, without waiting for its neighbors, will be able to lead the world away from hatred, fear, and mistrust towards the true community, the harmony of man.