THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF INDIA

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The Political Future of India by Lajpat Rai

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TO MY FRIEND

COLONEL JOSIAH WEDGWOOD, M.P., D.S.O.

PREFACE

My book, *Young India*, was written during the first year of the war and was finally revised and sent to the press before the war was two years old. It concluded with the following observation:

"The Indians are a chivalrous people; they will not disturb England as long as she is engaged with Germany. The struggle after the war might, however, be even more bitter and sustained."

The events that have happened since have amply justified the above conclusion. India not only refrained from disturbing England while she was engaged in war with Germany, but actively helped in defeating Germany and winning the war. She raised an army of over a million combatants and supplied a large number of war workers, and made huge contributions in money and materials. She denied herself the necessities of life in order to feed and equip the armies in the field though within the last months of the war, when scarcity and epidemic overtook her, she lost six millions of her sons and daughters from one disease alone — influenza. This was more than chivalry. This was self-effacement in the interests of an Empire which, in the past, had treated her children as helots. How much of this effort was voluntary and how much of it was forced it is difficult to appraise. Great Britain, however, has unequivocally accepted it as voluntary and has attributed it to India's satisfaction

with her rule. That India was not satisfied with her rule she has spared no pains to impress upon the British people as well as the rest of the world. Reading between the lines of the report of the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy has established the fact of that dissatisfaction beyond the possibility of doubt, but if any doubt still remained it has been dispelled by the writings and utterances of her representative spokesman in India, in Great Britain and abroad. The prince and the peasant, the landlord and the ryot, the professor and the student, the politician and the layman — all have spoken. They differ in their estimates of the "blessings" of British rule, they differ in the manner of their profession of loyalty to the British Empire, they sometimes differ in shaping their schemes for the future Government of India but they are all agreed:

(1) That the present constitution of the Government of India is viciously autocratic, bureaucratic, antiquated and unsatisfying.

(2) That India has, in the past, been governed more in the interests of, and by the British merchant and the British aristocrat than in the interests of her own peoples.

(3) That the neglect of India's education and industries has been culpably tragic and

(4) That the only real and effectual remedy is to introduce an element of responsibility in the Government of India.

In the report of the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, so often quoted and referred to in these pages, the truth of (1), (3), and (4) is substantially admitted and point (2) indirectly conceded. In the

following pages an attempt is made to prove this by extracts from the report itself. Ever since the report was published in July, 1918, India has been in a state of ferment, — a ferment of enthusiasm and criticism, of hope and disappointment. While the country has freely acknowledged the unique value of the report, the politicians have differed in their estimates of the value of the scheme embodied therein. Yet there is a complete unanimity on one point, that nothing *less* than what is planned in the report will be accepted, even as the first step towards eventual complete responsible Government. This is the minimum. Even the ultra-moderates have expressed themselves quite strongly on that point. Speaking at the Conference of the Moderates held at Bombay on November 1, 1918, the President, Mr. Surendranath Banerjea, is reported to have said: "our creed is co-operation with the Government wherever practicable, and opposition to its policy and measures when the supreme interests of the mother-land require it. . . . I have a word to say . . . to the British Government. I have a warning note to sound. . . . If the enactment of the Reform proposals is unduly postponed, if they are whittled down *in any way* . . . there will be grave public discontent and agitation." A little further in the same speech he asked if "by the unwisdom of our rulers" India was "to be converted into a greater Ireland." In less than six months from the date of this pronouncement, the rulers of India gave ample proof of their "unwisdom" by actually converting India into a "greater Ireland" and in establishing the absolute correctness of the prognostication made by the present writer in the