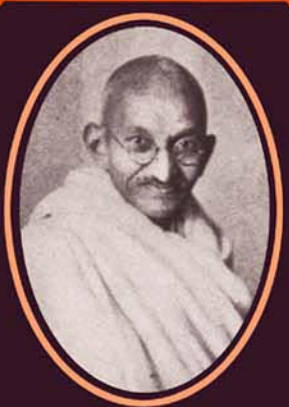
LOOKING BACK ON INDIA



HUBERT EVANS

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FRANK CASS

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TO MAUREEN

PREFACE

This book of reflections and reminiscences would not have been written but for some importunate pressure. My view was that with the passing of long years the only proper person from now on to describe the way we did things in India would be the young historian able to sift the archives and extract their yield. If a small handful of us who once played a role in the drama were still around —what of it? 'Superfluous lags the vet'ran on the stage.'

My wife, however, brushed this aside: my argument was treated as a subterfuge. Archives, I was reminded, are powerless to convey the setting in which our rule was acted out. And it was the setting which from start to finish dictated the direction of that rule and determined its character.

I had one card left. I contended that the novels, films, television programmes of the moment are teaching a modern generation everything there is to know about 'the Raj'. Her reply was: 'You don't really mean that.'

And then, clinching the case, comes a letter addressed to me by the India Office Library and Records Department which emphasizes the value of memoirs in the very terms, almost word for word, my wife had used.

I gave in.

H.E.

1
INTRODUCING BRITISH INDIA

When the liner which took me to India for the first time, S.S. *Ranpura* of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, three weeks out of London, made a landfall at Bombay and disembarked her passengers at Ballard Pier, it surprised nobody on the crowded quayside that with hardly an exception we were English. For Englishmen had been seen hereabouts a good three hundred years. They had even been lording it over the whole continent for a matter of one hundred and eighty. Understandably, therefore, the illusion of the permanence of our presence and authority persisted. And yet in barely another twenty years, we—for I can revert to 'we' in this sentence instead of 'they'—would have packed up and gone.

Eighty per cent of my fellow passengers had been 'Sahibs' returning from leave and, it was quite obvious, glad to be getting back. Not simply was there the hilarity of the closer groups at table or in the huge canvas bag slung aft and filled with sea-water in which to splash, but a marked sociability all round. Within the caste, that is. And was caste out of place in the world beginning at the foot of the gangway? Wherever I had dragged my deck-chair into the sun or out of it, during the long blue afternoons, I could count on conversation. Where was I going? 'United Provinces' I would answer, and then wait as a greenhorn should. 'Fraid I don't know anyone there at the moment, actually,' the Sahib or the Memsahib might tell me apologetically. Or else, and more often, it would be: 'Why, then you'll meet so-and-so,' and to cheer me up with the prospect, 'I know you'll like him. Grand person. Actually he and I used to…'

I have recorded these banal, if amiable, remarks for the sake of their implication. Which is that we were few, we British in India.

Not that this aspect of our rule caused us anxiety, not in the I.C.S. —the Indian Civil Service—anyhow. Why should it have? We considered ourselves as being, so to speak, a few foreign gardeners engaged in training an indigenous plant. We were

enough for the job. But of course if your mind ran on battalions, as, say, Stalin's did, our position was not simply astonishing, it was absurd. Stalin is on record as saying to Ribbentrop on the night they signed their fateful pact: 'How ridiculous it is that a few hundred Englishmen should dominate India, a continent as big as Europe!' For myself, I would stand this argument on its head. I would contend that we accomplished what we did in India precisely because we were so few. Let me clarify. Our rule rested on force, as all rule must. But force applied by the very few to the very many is force lightly applied. Ours, with some deplorable lapses, was; and that is why our authority had across the centuries won the assent, and enjoyed the loyalty, of those very many. That is why, even as I was walking from the ship's side to the Customs shed, a naughty child was being scolded in some Cawnpore home: 'Do that again, you little imp, and I'll tell the White Topee!' And why in one or another of four hundred Districts up and down the country a lonely Englishman was hearing himself addressed as 'Cherisher of the Poor'.

How had it all happened? How had the British Raj come into being? How could it be that 'a few hundred Englishmen' were doing what they pleased with 'a continent as big as Europe'?

The story began when the first Elizabeth gave the charter to a corporate body of London merchants to trade in the name and style of the East India Company. There was nothing peculiar in that; other European nations, the Portuguese and the Dutch, were in the field already, and the French would follow suit. The year was 1600, and the India which admitted these adventurous Londoners was that of Akbar the Great Mughal. Presently they tumbled to the discovery that if their commerce were to flourish—commerce in pepper, indigo, opium, salt petre, silk, muslin and much else—they must curry favour with the Indians in the neighbourhood of the factories and forts they had established at, or alongside, or behind, Bombay and Madras. But imagine the astonishment of the trader who has been prudent enough to ingratiate himself with the warring parties round about when the latter begin to turn to him in their wrangles as an umpire. As the remaining decades of the century go by, he gets more and more involved in regional affairs— and by the same token makes more and more money for his masters. For himself too—and why not? After all, his chances of ending up as a nabob are considerably more slender than his chances of an early grave in Indian earth. 'Shake the Pagoda Tree' was the motto. Some did this to such effect that they were able to buy their way into history: like Elihu Yale who founded a university; like Thomas Pitt who founded a

family that would give us two Prime Ministers. And so the thing continues until one fine day behold the Company acquiring territory, using Indian soldiers for the protection of this, picking its Indian allies, playing the Indian political game as to the manner born. The English government at home, able to milk the now affluent Company very nicely, is all for such activities.

Meanwhile the Mughal Empire, which in the reign of Akbar the Great had been far richer than Queen Elizabeth's realm, was showing signs of exhaustion. It now collapsed. Its majestic edifice subsided into scattered heaps of worthless rubble. In Macaulay's pigmented prose the spectacle confronting the men from England was of 'nominal sovereigns sunk in indolence and debauchery... chewing bang, fondling concubines and listening to buffoons.' The Company, to be thought of by this time as one among the several country powers jockeying for position, saw its advantage in the confusion and promptly exploited it. France, our sole remaining European rival, was still to be reckoned with, for thanks to the energies of Dupleix she had established her hold on the Deccan or 'South'. But in several collisions with us in the middle years of this (eighteenth) century, she was either outmanoeuvred or outfought. In 1770 the French formally dissolved their *Compagnie des Indes;* it had been, Voltaire said, as maladroit in commerce as in war. Be that as it may, for our own Company the coast was clear— and not only the coast either. We had grown out of our seaboard ambitions; we aspired now to the supremacy of India herself. In 1757 one of the 'Writers' or clerks turned soldier, Clive by name, secured Bengal by his victory at Plassey. It was a 'Bengal' stretching in those days right up to Allahabad. So now we possessed the narrow territories focussed on Bombay and Madras; the elongated coastal strip well to the north of the second of these, known as the Sircars; and, dwarfing all, this sprawling Bengal where our power would for a long future have its hub. The contest would go on between the English and certain native princes, but the issue would not be in doubt.

The administration which it fell to the Company, when eventually mistress of the situation, to take over was Muslim, going back to the thirteenth century. But obviously the first Muslim conquerors themselves could not have imposed an entirely foreign system on their Indian subjects. A metaphor is tempting here. The administration was a palimpsest: the lower text was Indian, the upper Muslim. It was based on the theory of royal remuneration: in exchange for protection, the peasants paid a share of their produce to the king. In practice such a system nursed the seeds of oppression; nevertheless it is a wry reflection that under the

enlightened Akbar, the King's share was less than the percentage of gross income an ageing pensioner in my own condition is nowadays required to surrender! Between the King and the Peasant, of course, there had to be intermediaries and one of these, a key-man, bore a designation which literally translated is 'Collector'. His function was defined by his title. He was there to collect—to do that and sit back.

The Company proceeded to clothe itself in the discarded apparel of this Mughal colossus; but it did not assume the latter's mentality. Its servants, as already noticed, had learned that commerce could not prosper without a degree of order and justice, and they had put the lesson to excellent account. Wait some years and they would operate the Mughal machinery according to the rule of law. The Collector would busy himself quite as much with the rights as with the obligations of the peasant, establishing each man's title to his acres, committing everything to paper for subsequent guidance, and so forth. And since wherever there is law there are lawbreakers, the Collector will have to deal with those as well. This meant investing him with magisterial powers. His designation from then on—and I think it was about a century before I received the designation myself—will be 'Collector and Magistrate' or, if preferred, the other way round: 'Magistrate and Collector'. Either way he was head of his territory and monarch, or very nearly, of all he surveyed.

The Company has ceased to be a trading association: in future it will be exercising administrative authority.

While these developments were taking place, the boundaries of Empire were being steadily advanced. The process, spaced over a period of exactly one hundred years from Clive's victories, culminated in the major annexations, at close intervals in the midnineteenth century, of Sind, the Punjab and Oudh. It is wrong, intellectually as well as morally wrong, to measure the thoughts and actions of men in the past by a rod not invented until af ter they were dead. We must therefore make an effort to detach ourselves from the assumptions of our own day in order to understand those of an age when Empire was not something to apologize for. Nor were those giants of our imperial past so wanting in humanity as, lifted out of context, they are apt to appear. Napier's laconic message *Peccavi* reporting that he had Sind may be apocryphal, nobody quite knows. What is authentic is his more communicative gloss that the annexation was 'a very advantageous, useful, humane piece of rascality'. Weacted in the spirit of St Augustine who, looking out from his *City of God* and asking whether it was fitting for good men to rejoice in the

expansion of Empire, answered that to extend rulership is to bad men felicity but to good men a necessity.

One formal step, logical and overdue, it remained to take. In 1858 the Crown superseded the Company, and our Collector, once upon a time a merchant and nabob-to-be, but latterly a Civil Servant of the Honourable East India Company writing H.E.I.C.S. after his name, was absorbed into the service of his Queen and entitled henceforward to the three initials 'I.C.S.' —the 'C' standing no longer for 'Company' but for 'Civil'. It is hard to believe it today, but the few hundred of my narrative had coined for themselves a new term 'civil servant', that would be borrowed and used thereafter wherever their mother tongue had currency.

It may be easier now to appreciate that we were a sort of contact cadre. In very many of the Districts—of which there were ultimately four hundred between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin, between Karachi and Chittagong—we might well be the only Englishman our Indian charges had any prospect of meeting face to face in the whole of their lives; often enough, moreover, the only one they would even set eyes on. And as a corollary to this, the Englishman in many a District would see no other white face except his own in the mirror. Few of us who had this experience, and it was twice to be mine, did not learn to value it. The system took a cloistered English youth straight from a bookish education, twelve or thirteen years of it, consecrated to the cultures of Rome and Greece; discouraged him from marriage; and set him down in Bara Banki or Sitapur. It was in such places, remote from the great cities and centred on a miniature headquarters town, that his earlier years of service were likely to be spent. It was in such places reached by no railway, lacking electricity, laced by no telephone wires, and where water to wash and to drink was brought in a goatskin from the well at the bottom of the garden, that 'the District' would so come to command his energies and fill his thoughts that the prospect of leaving it on transfer or promotion even, dismayed him. Its people, scamps (of which there were usually very many) included, he came to consider as belonging to him. He would not willingly say goodbye to them, and when at last he had to, it would seldom be without a tugging at the heart strings.

Looking back I have little doubt that this happiness sprang from what I am terming the 'contact'. Extended in open order in the ratio of one to every million or two Indians we readily developed a belief in the dignity and importance of what we were doing. If by the age of thirty you are accustomed to the exercise of authority which nobody below you or above you—for this was the case—

questions, inevitably you will tend to think and act like a despot. But the point I am making here is that if you are alone in your glory (alone, that is, of your race) amidst the million or two you rule over, two things are bound to happen. The first is that you will be drawn insensibly towards the people you are among and become attached to them. The people of your District are better than the people of any other District, are better farmers, have a better sense of humour, are better company, are better looking. And all for no other reason than that they are yours and not anybody else's. One saw it a dozen times—the man who wouldn't hear a word against his Jats or his Pathans or his Rajputs or whoever they were in his particular area. How could it be otherwise? Each morning they would be there, squatting in groups in front of your house or around your tent as near as the sentry would allow them to get, ready to waylay you as you came out; and every time you visited a village there they would be again, magically warned of your approach, waiting to run alongside your trotting horse for the last half mile. One of their number, thanks to his status or venerable years, would be hanging on to your leathers as you rode. So long as you lived, their pleading voices would not be stilled: 'If *you* do not help us, who will help us? If *you* do not listen, who will?'

And the second thing is that from earliest weeks you will learn to delegate; will have to resist the temptation, once you've given your order, to associate yourself in the slightest degree with its execution; will have to put implicit trust in the loyalty of your subordinates. There is no explaining the British Raj without postulating this factor of loyalty, and I am not sure that the historians have yet had time to stand back from the canvas and view things in the correct perspective. This is not a work of research and there will be no illustrative charts, no statistical tables in it. Such figures as occur are rough and from memory. But consider for a minute. We had an Indian Army, meaning an Army of Indian troops, Englishofficered, of some 200,000 supported by British units doing their Indian stint totalling, say, 50,000; this for the security of a continent which would obliterate all Europe on the map. Look up, out of curiosity, the strength of the standing army considered appropriate to Belgium, let us say, or to one of the Scandinavian countries between the wars. And since this paragraph is about loyalty, it is the place to add that we had no recruiting difficulty during the Second War in increasing this modest peacetime force tenfold; so that it became at two million far and away the largest volunteer army of which history has record. Troops would be quartered either in large strategically

sited concentrations such as Quetta or in a variety of smallish cantonments adjacent to certain cities of importance, and it followed that in the immense majority of the four hundred Districts of which we have been speaking not a single Sepoy, let alone a Tommy, would be visible. The nearest regiment might be a hundred miles off, or more. The only military uniform I remember to have seen in either of the two remoter Districts I held, was that of the odd soldier returning to his village on leave. The same economy of numbers applied in the case of the Police. The force was around 180,000 for the whole of British India, which contained, besides the great cities of which everyone has heard, half a million villages each potentially the scene of an affray or some other, and more heinous, crime. In my first District I had about 800 policemen or one to every two thousand of my people—and in law-abiding Britain, as I write, we complain that one policeman to every 500 inhabitants is not enough. Of the official class composing the bureaucracy in every tier of its structure I am not prepared to cite the figure—was it half a million at the turn of the century swelling to a couple of million by the time we left? It does not matter. What I am prepared to affirm is that a degree of devotion was commonly exhibited by our Indian assistants from the highest to the humblest which never ceased to astonish and not seldom moved the Englishman who leaned on them. The British Raj assumed the loyalty of all who ate its salt—and held together because it received it.

Yes, it stood to reason that you had to delegate. And this after all was precisely the way you were yourself being treated. No Viceroy, no Governor, breathed down your neck when you were doing your best to quell a riot, no Secretary ever came poking his nose into your job. I am not going to describe the Secretariat, and only need record that in a Province as large as the United Kingdom there would be ten or twelve of us in it; not more. At the Centre, which was Delhi, perhaps around fifty. These brother officers would be comparable to Whitehall civil servants in terms of their tasks but not comparable numerically (as has just been indicated) nor in their propensity to delegate. Their habits of thought and action derived from 'the District' and not from London, for each of them was a quondam Collector and might, moreover, resume his role. It was a saving grace. Meantime they led an urban and much more social private life, and on ceremonial occasions might be seen resplendent in a blue coatee decorated with plenty of gold lace, white silk knee breeches, cotton stockings and buckled shoes. An earnest, probably priggish, young Collector, booted and spurred, on his horse at dawn when the dew was on the fields, felt

a certain condescension whenever he thought of them. But this was a passing mood, and he did concede that they left hirn to his own devices. One day, too, he would perhaps be switched to the Secretariat himself, live in a house without good stabling for his three ponies, have to go out of an evening not to marvel how the setting sun turns the yellow rape to gold but to assist at some glittering reception dressed as for the Congress of Vienna. Pending which— his own devices. All we were required to do according to the book was submit a Fortnightly Report, and the joy of it was that we were sole arbiters of what went into this. There was a premium on eccentricity as a result. Of two illustrations that come to my mind, and there is no room for more, the first belongs arguably to legend since I cannot myself authenticate it. The hero, obliged to perform a journey in the course of duty, presented his bill for travel expenses in the normal way, but an incautious clerk questioned the distances quoted and returned the claim for corroboration. This, in the sequel, arrived in the shape of milestones piled high on a string of bullock carts drawn up outside the Accountant General's office. In my second example I knew the man, I knew the place. A centralized health department grown too big for its boots asked him to fill in a pond where, it was foreseen, mosquitoes were likely to breed. He protested that, the country round about being flat, in order to fill in one hollow another must be dug. But this objection was brushed aside and an inspector of the department who visited the locality some months later sneaked that the offending pond was still there. 'Wrong,' was the rejoinder, 'a new pond created by filling in the old.' The moral in both these cases was the same: you don't harry the Collector.

No wonder the benevolent despot of nearly thirty, far away now from the halls of Oxford and Cambridge, was tempted to feel that some special providence had guided his steps to India. Misgiving, undeniably, there had been that day when he came down the main staircase at Burlington Gardens after the Competition, but it was momentary and had not recurred. The compensation for loss, no point in pretending otherwise, had been rich. Compensation for exile, for material discomfort, for the occasional bout of malaria. He had not seen his mother these three years; he was ten thousand miles from all the things that had made his world; the idea of marrying he had been obliged to push beyond the limits of thought. But he was being looked after with unbelievable solicitude by a dozen turbaned servants, had a syce for each of his ponies, had orderlies in scarlet gowns to fetch and carry for him. Everybody salaamed or saluted when he passed; a neighbouring

Raja had lent him an elephant for the whole winter; and when the other day he had dined in the mess at the nearest military station the Commanding Officer (just promoted admittedly but greying at the temples) kept on addressing him as 'sir'.

On the shelf opposite me where I write, rests, long undisturbed, a copy of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*. Leaning back these last fifteen minutes and trying to decide what detail, so to speak, of the wide canvas I ought to isolate next, I find myself staring at it idly. Seventy years ago that book made fashionable reading in England and America: Tagore had won the Nobel Prize, was a literary lion of the age, his admirers were to be reckoned in their millions. My own mother was among them, and as I reach for the little volume and open it at the fly-leaf I read, with eyes growing a bit misty: 'For Edith from Lilian, 1914.'

I can pick up my pen—and the thread. I shall attend to the presence in Indian society all that while ago of an élite whose members I consider to have been the *real* Anglo-Indians. The 'Sahibs', conventionally labelled so, were not the real AngloIndians. These people were. It is high time to recognize this fact; and high time, incidentally, for me to introduce them. Not all were celebrities like Radhakrishnan, Zafrullah Khan, Sapru, Sarojini Naidu, Jinnah, Nehru—if I may list half-a-dozen I am lucky enough to be able to recall personally—but all had this in common, that they were socially advantaged and intellectually enriched by our English culture, yet cornered politically. The more they took to us, the more they wanted to be rid of us.

In the beginning we had hesitated for fifty years, unable to make up our minds which of two lines to take in India: whether to encourage the cream of her sons to adopt our English speech and ways, or whether to foster a revival of India's own civilization. Of this last we were dimly aware and already Burke in the eighteenth century was reminding Parliament that we had on our hands a people cultivated by all the arts of polished life while we were yet in the woods. So we started off by being, as someone put it, 'wet nurse to Vishnu and churchwarden to Juggernaut'. The Company would work on Sundays, close on Indian holidays, and let its soldiers parade in honour of goodness knows how many pagan deities. By the date of the Fall of the Bastille we had founded an Islamic Madrasa at Calcutta, were preparing to found the Sanskrit College at Benares. Then, all of a sudden, a change of direction. I do not myself accept the verdict of the books which inform us that Indian culture was just then at a pitiably low ebb—their authors ought to read the Urdu poets of that golden age, contemplate the architecture of not a few buildings at Lucknow, Jaipur, Jodhpur—

or even leaf through an album of the paintings of the Rajput school. The explanation surely was different. The fact was that at the juncture we are here visualizing, when the Mughal masonry had crumbled into India's dust, the whole country was at best gasping for breath, at worst in turmoil or engaged in bloody conflict. In such a state of affairs it became easier to argue the case for westernization than for orientalism, and Nineteenth-Century England preferred to listen to Macaulay's sneering rhetoric than to recall Burke's more sympathetic sentences. Hear Macaulay asking whether

> we shall countenance at the public expense medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding-school, history abounding with Kings thirty feet high and reigns 30,000 years long, and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

The phase of tender regard was over.

Picture then the grandfathers of the talented celebrities whose names have been instanced a page or two above, prompted no doubt by material considerations, urging their sons to apply themselves diligently to the acquisition of what was offered them by the Wise men from the West. In our own country a notable teacher of the classics like Dean Gaisford could end a Christmas sermon to the undergraduates of Oxford with the inspiring words: 'Nor can I do better, in conclusion, than impress upon you the study of Greek literature, which not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument.' Put 'English' for 'Greek' and that, we may be sure, is precisely how the Indian parent of good standing in society would counsel and exhort his promising offspring at the same period.

How does our despot view all this? I have already insisted on a pronounced streak of benevolence in his character, have shown him doing the most undespotic things imaginable such as substituting law for whim and delegating his authority right and left. Those of us of the I.C.S. who survive take pride today in the fact— well documented luckily, for otherwise who would credit it? —that it was not the British politician or the Parliament or the Public of the time, but our predecessors in the Company who perceived what was implicit in the deliberate resolve of the rulers to build an Indian élite in their own image. 'The most desirable death', wrote one of them—and several others whom I shall not stop to quote were to echo him—

> the most desirable death for us to die should be the improvement of the natives reaching such a pitch as would render it impossible for a foreign nation to retain the government.

The man who wrote that was born in 1779. Oh, there would be some backsliding now and again, some diehards here and there, and in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857 a sizable group of Christians who, more mindful of the Old Testament than of the New, maintained that India had earned the wrath of God. But by and large, the day's work done and the temperature dropping a trifle, 'Civilians' were apt to be kindlier men, less stiff and formal than the governing set at home—or those representatives of it who simply came out for a brief spell. 'We have to answer the helm,' proclaimed the most dazzling of these Satraps, 'and it is an imperial helm, down all the tides of Time.' As might be guessed that was Curzon, Lord Curzon, who at the Coronation Durbar in 1903 overruled a proposal for the singing of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' on the occasion, not on the ground that our soldiers in India in their huge majority were either Hindu or Muslim—for this side to it did not apparently bother him—but because the hymn bids us reflect that 'Crowns and Thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane.'

To go by my own experience of living among her people both in India's districts and in her capital city, familiarity breeds respect. I cannot believe that the response of my predecessors was different. They recognized, as we did in our generation, at least in pensive mood, that they were trustees who when the wards grew up must quit with becoming grace. Had the Indians been 'lesser breeds', hundreds of millions of benighted savages—why then, of course we could say: 'make them swallow the medicine, whether they like it or whether they don't.' If on the contrary that is manifestly not the case, if one person in ten in that vast continent has profited by some degree of schooling, and if a million or so are using our language with uncanny facility and sharing our ideals, the time is fast approaching when they will have the right to decide for themselves what suits them and what does not. And until it arrives we can rejoice for our part that about a battalion of our wards have so reacted to our stimulus as to be beating us at our own game; sending us, let us say, a Spalding Professor for Oxford; or a member of the judicial committee of the Privy Council; or a girl not out of her teens who can write stanza after stanza as flawless as this:

Still barred thy doors! The far east glows
The morning wind blows fresh and free.
Should not the hour that wakes the rose
Awaken also thee?

In the earlier 1920s my mother and I were staying at a house where G.P.Gooch, the historian, editor of the *Contemporary Review* and an outspoken Liberal in politics, happened to be the other guest. Hearing that I was bound for India, Dr Gooch pinpointed for my benefit the issues raised by Indian nationalism. He had a habit of removing his pumps, those light-weight patent leather shoes with bows that went at the time with evening clothes, and warming his right and left foot alternately in front of the fire as he talked. I see him now, this nearly omniscient man, one hand on the mantelpiece to steady himself and the other jabbing a slipper at me as he progressed from the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of ten years later. The constitutional problem and the efforts to unravel it will not be discussed in this book, and I only recapture that particular weekend for the sake of the one word 'nationalism'.

Who then were the Nationalists? In the sense of wanting one's nation to attain independence all literate Indians, which meant around ten per cent of the population, or 35 million, were nationalist in the 1920s. In the sense, however, of rejecting British direction as inadmissible a single day longer, very few were nationalist. It has to be borne in mind that large numbers ranging from the highly educated to the scantily schooled, Hindus or Muslims, rich or poor, found nothing in their religions that forbade the acceptance of an authority which was not of their choosing; positively the reverse. So these tended to echo the injunction of St Peter's Epistle: 'Fear God and honour the King.' This was the easier seeing that George V by all accounts—and that included Gandhi's own—was a thorough gentleman. This infinitely graded middle class, therefore, which kept the wheels of commerce and industry and—let this never be forgotten—of the administration itself turning, did not hate the Union Jack. On the contrary, that foreign flag enabled it to shelve some rather disquieting thoughts. As to the illiterate, wholly untutored villagers, perhaps 300 million souls who composed the remainder of India's children—these had no conception of nationhood whatsoever. Their group loyalties were all. Under such unfavourable conditions how could a National Movement worthy of the name be launched? That it got under way and maintained,

albeit fitfully, its momentum was due to a handful of revolutionaries drawn from the cream of sophisticated society, of whom Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the paragon, working in collaboration with, and often enough using, a holy man of quaint and frequently exasperating attitudes who can only be likened to a medieval saint. It is typical of the whole complex situation that the very organization, viz: the Indian National Congress, the Freedom Party *par excellence,* which the two stormy petrels Gandhi and Nehru, each ruffling the waters in his own contrasting fashion, were to direct throughout the closing twenty-five years of our Rule, had been founded by a member of the Indian Civil Service itself, to enable Indians to give expression to the new (new, that is, in the 1880s) spirit of nationalism! Typical too, and logical in the light of what I have explained earlier in this Introduction, that we were tempted neither to suppress the Congress nor to muster other interests in opposition to it. Typical, lastly, that for all the inspiration and flair at the summit, the Party never managed to enrol more than 5 million members. Out of 350 million this was not impressive for a Party aspiring to speak for the entire nation. And when, as too frequently proved the case, a local committee harboured one or two scallywags of the town whom the local worthies would not be seen dead with, the benevolent young despot of my story could scarcely be expected to hold it much in awe. Remote from its leaders of any calibre, he tended to view the congress with contemptuous indifference.

Alas, it had become quite apparent by around 1928 that this cherished Nationalism was a prey to a congenital sickness that would baffle every one of its apostles no matter how skilled, how conscientious, how persevering. When in that year an All-Party team of these sat down in a praiseworthy attempt to draft a Constitution for the India of tomorrow, they did not get very far. Not much further indeed than the consolatory passage in which they affirmed their certitude that as soon as India was free to face her problems unhampered by British interference, Hindus and Muslims would automatically act in concert. This, they announced, 'is bound to happen'. Among the things I learned in India was never to rub my eyes. For those of us who, as the time ran out, were compelled to expend more and more of our available energy in preventing the hot heads of either community from having at each other, it was impossible to be optimistic. None of us could see India building her future on a foundation of unity. The critics of our Raj had long imputed to us the crafty policy of *Divide and Rule;* they did so from now on more monotonously, more vociferously. Yet I do not believe that in the Districts there

were really very many to endorse that reproach. Most of the callers who filed into my waiting room on Visitors day (which meant three mornings a week) were more inclined to ponder the amendment in the wording of the maxim which the blunt old politician, Muhammed Ali, had suggested: *We* divide and *You* rule. For a good hundred years the adherents of the two warring creeds had acquiesced in the overlordship of foreigners who, so far as could be discovered, had little in the way of religious zeal themselves and might be relied on to be impartial. However, it actually was beginning to look as if the strangers did not intend to stay, and when this dawned upon the India of the bazaars, the India of the electoral rolls, Hindus and Muslims started to stake their separate claims.

The problem of government always and everywhere is how to 'communicate' . It is not enough that the regime should be competent and humane. Some pages back I described the Collector as belonging to a Contact Corps, and I think that is not a false label; but by my generation there were growing signs that the old 'touch' which had for so long guaranteed our success—our *Iqbal* as the Indians had termed it—was rapidly being lost. Between the Collector, therefore, and those committed to his care was the current passing as in bygone days?

In this kind of book, no study, no résumé even, of the principal components of society would be appropriate. I am only concerned to bring out that in certain of them, and these the most influential, westernization had, by the time I set foot in India, advanced to a stage where it was visibly sapping the foundations on which we had built our prestige. It seems to me my best plan will be to instance, to begin with, some areas of human approach in which I felt at ease, and then to cross an imaginary frontier into the area in which I felt—as an official primarily, but sometimes also as a private person—acutely embarrassed. To start with, the peasant. In his presence there was no occasion for restraint. Western habits of mind had not affected him and it would never have occurred to him, had he not been tutored by the politicians, to resent our Raj on the ground that it was foreign. I have introduced him already, with more than a hint at the behaviour of the villager vis-à-vis his Collector, as also at the latter's emotional response to this man who habitually addressed him as his 'Mother and Father' or as 'Cherisher of the Poor'. He will come again into my pages.

I pass, then, without more ado to the clerical personnel in whose company so much of my indoor routine was performed, taking as my model the Office Superintendent. He knew his way

backwards through the bulkiest file and I see him in his brown pillbox cap bending over one now, flicking it open with deft and doublejointed fingers at the wanted page, swivelling the folder towards me and reading the villainous handwriting—English, Urdu or Hindi, it was all the same to him—yes, reading it upside down! He was grave, not gi ven to palling up with the junior clerks seated row upon row in front of him in the central hall of the Cutcherry like so many pupils in a schoolroom and scratching away with their nibs under his frowning gaze. He was distant, expected me to be the same, believed as a good government official should, as a good Hindu should, in distance. At noon a pair of his domestic servants would make their appearance bearing an elaborate luncheon from his home, cooked there by his wife. In the late afternoon his tonga would be waiting outside, a syce at the horse's head idly swatting a fly now and then. And as this notable of the quarter drove from work, the traffic would halt in the narrow thoroughfare, pedestrians stand aside. I knew five of him and can still rattle off their names—three apiece. Each of the five was loyal to the salt he had eaten, each of the five was doing what God had called him to do.

Next let me summon up the members of the legal profession, thick and perhaps too thick on the Indian ground, for with them also the Collector kept close company. I am not thinking of the great advocates, of the Sapru or the Jinnah, I am thinking of the small-town pleader with a law degree and a decent criminal or civil practice who played tennis and bridge with his confrères at the Indian Club, drank a little whisky on occasion and referred to himself as cosmopolitan, meaning by this that he did not mind eating in a railway refreshment room on one of his rare journeys to the provincial capital. In the court room he had all the courtesies of his calling, and I only recollect one serious passage of arms, one in the course of long years, one in how many thousands of hours! Out of court I found him amiable, relaxed in conversation, and—this may surprise—seldom engaged politically; rather bored indeed with the harangues from the distant platforms as reported in the press. There was no local newspaper, remember. All India Radio was in the womb of time, and 'Boggley Wollah' was in the wilds. I think of a man who was always eager to crack a joke with me, who was apt to bring half a platoon of tiny grandchildren to my house dressed in their prettiest clothes on the morning of some festival, and who never omitted to send me a basket of mangoes in season, or the annual Christmas card.

And what of the landed gentry? The Collector mixed freely with the landowners, had to and liked doing so. As I remember them,

they were extroverts and rather indolent for the most part. They prided themselves on being gentlemen, and divided a leisured existence between their estates and their houses in the big city. They were good shots and some were horsemen; and many with these tastes would invite me to share their recreations. Even when the product of an expensive upbringing, they were philistines uninterested in literature and the arts, whether Indian or Western; but they were men whose society was a tonic, bearing in mind that a tonic is to be taken in moderation, and at proper intervals. They did not, I need scarcely add, care a damn for the gibes of the Congress leaders who branded them as our creatures, which is more or less what they were.

I must exchange these countrified surroundings for an urban setting, if I am to meet the industrialist. Here is a man thin on the ground, but whose contribution is immense. Socially he was creating a new order in India, viz: a proletariat; economically he was hoisting a lethargic India out of the Middle Ages. Where numbers are restricted a type scarcely emerges, and the two magnates I shall call up are contrasting characters with a vengeance. One of them, outside the Mills where big crowds had been lapsing into rowdyism for the past few days, is rather too heatedly recommending a bit of healthy 'bloodletting' as the proper treatment, even using the Hindustani word *(khunrezi)* to make it perfectly plain to me what he meant. He had no faith in Gandhi's prescription for human behaviour. No more did the other of my two capitalists, seemingly. For although numbered among the Mahatma's fervent admirers, he applies to me for a gun licence — this mark of the Government's confidence was not granted lightly — and adds, as was usual, his justificatory arguments. He explains that the weapon would be entrusted to a stout fellow at his house, Birla House, in New Delhi for the safety of the saint who is in the habit of staying under his roof. In the first of my two examples the meddlesome unacceptable pressure was attempted by a proGovernment man; in the second, the request, courteous and justified—how justified the tragic sequel some years later was to demonstrate—came f rom a member of the Congress Party. Yet with both these men a dialogue was possible, and I think this was so because both were persons of initiative and high achievement, were given to the exercise of practical reason in all they did, and wer e unresentful, if each in his manner, of my authority over them.

In certain of the large cities—some fifteen, if I am right, in the whole of India—the university student was to be met. Was to be met? I think so. This may come as another surprise, for it might be supposed that the British Raj would resemble an ogre, nothing

less, in the eyes of the insecure and therefore somewhat bobbery youth who typified India's student community. Lest my competence to discuss him at all be doubted, let me state my credentials. In as many as three out of those fifteen cities my lot was to be cast, so that over a long stretch of years I had almost each week something, trivial it could be but something, to do with a student. I was Chairman of the governing body of a college; and admitted I once had the unenviable experience of trying and convicting an Agra undergraduate implicated in the manufacture of bombs, I am compensated by the memory of repeated requests from junior common rooms to address their members. Two invitations from the officebearers of the Allahabad University Students Union have stayed in my mind. Apparently I was *persona grata* even in the city which, as the home of the Nehru family, was in those days the power-house generating the energy of the Congress Party. Unsettled in general, and hence easily swayed, those students were, but of smouldering resentment I could never detect any sign in their ranks. A scene as distant as a winter's night in the early 1930s comes back to me, laid in the streets of that same city of Allahabad. The students are out in nominal support of the norent campaign which the Congress had just started among the villagers. The demonstration was peaceful, but so massive as to require shepherding. Succumbing to the temptation to defy authority, the van of the procession turned aside from the prescribed route at a convenient crossroad. The magistrate's headache in handling these nimble but far from muscular youths was how to insist on obedience without letting his big-boned policemen, who detested them for the airs they gave themselves, go for them with too much gusto. I went forward to remonstrate with the front line. For some teasing rejoinder from the leaders I was quite ready. I was even prepared, being no longer a beginner, for a stream of chewed betel to be ejected from somebody's mouth, into my face or on to my clothing. But I was taken aback by the command, imperious and spirited, that was shouted at me from the second row: 'Give place, Sir! Give place, Sir! This is the King's Highway.'

These boys were not from privileged homes, were not the country's intelligentsia of tomorrow, least of all were they imitation Europeans who had lost their roots in Indian society. Usually they had not escaped from parental control which was heavy in Hindu and Muslim households alike. Fathers, uncles, elder brothers were fond of introducing them to me on visiting days for no specified purpose but on the principle of forward thinking, or timely preparation, *peshbandi* it was called, which is dear to the

Indian. One never could tell, a post might fall vacant somewhere before long, and then there would be a second approach; this to obtain a letter of recommendation in favour of a young man well known to the signatory for a considerable time, of exceptionally polite address, earnest in his studies and of loyal antecedents. By and large the students had one aspiration—government service; this seemed to them worth it, however low the salary, and it would often be pitiably low. And I believe it was the fear that they might be 'plucked'—the English word was constantly on their lips—and thus out of the running for it, that rendered them what I have said they were a page above: insecure, and so apt to be aggressive.

By and large, I am saying, all of these put up with what I stood for —and hence put up with me.

I shall not pretend, it would be absurd to pretend, that I could come face to face with each of them on even terms: that would have been beyond my mandate—nor would it have been desired by them on their side. I am claiming that a dialogue went on between us. A dialogue presupposes two persons who are allowed to talk and two, the same two, who will listen. It does not postulate equality or expect unanimity. I dare say G.D.Birla did not consider me his equal. I dare say Data Din who had never been further than twenty miles from his village did not do so either, being a brahmin. But as to authority, was there a viable alternative? Very likely I may have been the lesser of two evils in their reasoning, some kind of solution.

I have now reached the demarcation line on my imaginary map, and am confronting Indians for whom the British Raj had lost its savour and turned sour. They seemed uniformly to be of the privileged class, people who did not have to think where the next meal was coming from. However, they did not react uniformly. Some decided there was nothing for it but to spew out the nasty taste, and became revolutionaries. Others, the overwhelming majority, felt—and it should have moved us whenever we thought about it— that there was something un-English in conspiracy and bombthrowing and even in the defiance of constitutionally established authority. Psychologically the former experienced Release; the latter endured that state of unrelieved tension which torments the élite of a subject people.

Now our humane despot was, so to speak, *functus officio* in respect of the revolutionaries; washed his hands of them, and was saved embarrassment. Nor were they for their part any less at ease than he was. They had found escape in the fray; breaking the law acted like a tonic, whetting the physical as well as the mental appetite. I can remember how positively jocular and hearty two