

***VALENTINE SIR
CHIROL***



***INDIA,
OLD AND
NEW***

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India, Old and New

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FOREWORD

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It is little more than ten years since I wrote my *Indian Unrest*. But they have been years that may well count for decades in the history of the world, and not least in the history of India. Much has happened in India to confirm many of the views which I then expressed. Much has happened also to lead me to modify others, and to recognise more clearly to-day the shortcomings of a system of government, in many ways unrivalled, but subject to the inevitable limitations of alien rule.

At a very early stage of the Great War the Prime Minister warned the British people that, after the splendid demonstration India was already giving of her loyalty to the cause for which the whole Empire was then in arms, our relations with her would have henceforth to be approached from "a new angle of vision." The phrase he used acquired a deeper meaning still as the war developed from year to year into a life-and-death struggle not merely between nations but between ideals, and India claimed for herself the benefit of the ideals for which she too fought and helped the British

Commonwealth to victory. When victory was assured, could India's claim be denied after she had been called in, with all the members of the British Commonwealth, to the War Councils of the Empire in the hour of need, and again been associated with them in the making of peace? The British people have answered that question as all the best traditions of British governance in India, and all the principles for which they had fought and endured through four and a half years of frightful war, bade them answer it.

The answer finally took shape in the great constitutional experiment of which I witnessed the inauguration during my visit to India this winter. It promises to rally as seldom before in active support of the British connection those classes that British rule brought within the orbit of Western civilisation by the introduction of English education, just about a century ago. It has not disarmed all the reactionary elements which, even when disguised in a modern garb, draw their inspiration from an ancient civilisation, remote indeed from, though not in its better aspects irreconcilable with, our own. A century is but a short moment of time in the long span of Indian history, and the antagonism between two different types of civilisation cannot be easily or swiftly lived down. It would be folly to underrate forces of resistance which are by no means altogether ignoble, and in this volume I have studied their origin and their vitality because they underlie the strange "Non-co-operation" movement which has consciously or unconsciously arrayed every form of racial and religious and economic and political discontent, not merely against British rule, but against the progressive forces which contact with Western civilisation

has slowly brought into existence under British rule in India itself. These forces have been stirred to new endeavour by the goal now definitely placed within their reach. That we were bound to set that goal and no other before them I have tried to show by reviewing the consistent evolution of British policy in India for the last 150 years, keeping, imperfectly sometimes, but in the main surely, abreast of our own national and political evolution at home and throughout the Empire. Once placed in its proper perspective, this great experiment, though fraught with many dangers and difficulties, is one of which the ultimate issue can be looked forward to hopefully as the not unworthy sequel to the long series of bold and on the whole wonderfully successful experiments that make up the unique story of British rule in India.

I have to express my thanks to the proprietors of *The Times* for allowing me to use some of the letters which I wrote for that paper whilst I was in India last winter, and also to the Royal Society of Arts for permission to reproduce the main portions of a lecture delivered by me last year on Hinduism as the first of the Memorial Lectures instituted in honour of the late Sir George Birdwood, to whom I owe as much for the deeper understanding which he gave me of old India as I do to the late Mr. G.K. Gokhale for the clearer insight I gained from him into the spirit of new India whilst we were colleagues from 1912 to 1915 on the Royal Commission on Indian Public Services.

VALENTINE CHIROL.

34 CARLYLE SQUARE, CHELSEA,
AUGUST 24, 1921.

CHAPTER I

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THE CLASH OF TWO CIVILISATIONS

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On February 9, 1921, three hundred and twenty-one years after Queen Elizabeth granted to her trusty "Merchant-venturers" of London the charter out of which the East India Company and the British Empire of India were to grow up, His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught inaugurated at Delhi, in the King-Emperor's name, the new representative institutions that are to lead India onward towards complete self-government as an equal partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations. To bring home to every Indian the full significance of the occasion, the King-Emperor did not shrink from using in his Royal Message an Indian word which not long ago was held to bear no other than a seditious construction. His Majesty gave it a new and finer meaning. "For years—it may be for generations—patriotic and loyal Indians have dreamed of *Swaraj* for their motherland. To-day you have the beginnings of *Swaraj* within my Empire, and the widest scope and ample opportunity for progress to the liberty which my other Dominions enjoy."

It was a bold pronouncement inaugurating another, some say the boldest, of all the many bold adventures which make up the marvellous history of British rule in India. The simplicity, rare in the East, of the ceremony itself enhanced

its significance. It was not held, like the opening of the Chamber of Princes, in the splendid Hall of Public Audience in the old Fort where the Moghul Emperors once sat on the Peacock Throne, nor were there the flash of jewels and blaze of colour that faced the Duke when he addressed the feudatory chiefs who still rule their states on ancient lines beyond the limits of direct British administration. The members of the new Indian Legislatures, most of them in sober European attire, though many of them retained their own distinctive head-dress, were assembled within the white and unadorned walls of the temporary building in which they will continue to sit until the statelier home to be built for them in new Delhi is ready to receive them. But Delhi itself with all its age-long memories was around one to provide the historic setting for an historic scene, and Delhi still stands under the sign of the Kutub Minar, the splendid minaret—a landmark for miles and miles around—which dominates the vast graveyard of fallen dynasties at its feet and the whole of the great plain beyond where the fate of India, and not of India alone, has so often been decided.

On that plain were fought out, in prehistoric times, the fierce conflicts of ancient Aryan races, Pandavas and Kauravas, around which the poetic genius of India has woven the wonderful epos of the Mahabharata. Only a couple of miles south of the modern city, the walls of the Purana Kilat, the fortress built by Humayun, cover the site but have not obliterated the ancient name of Indraprastha, or Indrapat, the city founded by the Pandavas themselves, when Yudhisthira celebrated their final victory by performing on the banks of the Jumna, in token of the Pandava claim to

Empire, the *Asvamedha*, or great Horse Sacrifice, originated by Brahma himself. There too, on a mound beyond Indrapat, stands the granite shaft of one of Asoka's pillars, on which, with a fine faith that the world has never yet justified, the great Buddhist Apostle-Emperor of India inscribed over 2000 years ago his edicts prohibiting the taking of life. At the very foot of the Kutub Minar the famous Iron Pillar commemorates the victories of the "Sun of Power," the Hindu Emperor of the Gupta dynasty with whose name, under the more popular form of Raja Bikram, Indian legend associates the vague memories of a golden age of Hindu civilisation in the fifth and sixth centuries. The Pillar was brought there by one of the Rajput princes who founded in the middle of the eleventh century the first city really known to history as Delhi. There Prithvi Raja reigned, who still lives in Indian minstrelsy as the embodiment of Hindu chivalry, equally gallant and daring in love and in war—the last to make a stand in northern India against the successive waves of Mahomedan conquest which Central Asia had begun to pour in upon India in 1001, with the first of Mahmud Ghazni's seventeen raids. In the next century an Afghan wave swept down on the top of the original Turki wave, and Kutub-ed-Din, having proclaimed himself Emperor of Delhi in 1206, built the great Mosque of *Kuwwet-el-Islam*, "The Power of Islam," and the lofty minaret, still known by his name, from which for six centuries the Moslem call to prayer went forth to proclaim Mahomedan domination over India.

With the monumental wreckage of those early Mahomedan dynasties, steeped in treachery and bloodshed,

the plain of Delhi is still strewn. The annals of Indian history testify more scantily but not less eloquently to their infamy until the supremacy of Delhi, but not of Islam, was shaken for two centuries by Timur, who appeared out of the wild spaces of Tartary and within a year disappeared into them again like a devastating meteor. From his stock, nevertheless, was to proceed the long line of Moghul Emperors who first under Baber and then under Akbar won the Empire of Hindustan at the gates of Delhi, and for a time succeeded in bringing almost the whole of India under their sway. But their splendid marble halls in the great Fort of Delhi recall not only the magnificence of the Moghul Empire, but its slow and sure decay, until it became a suitor for the protection of the British power, which, at first a mere trading power that had once sued humbly enough for its protection, had risen to be the greatest military and political power in India. It was at Delhi at the beginning of the nineteenth century that Lord Lake rescued a Moghul Emperor from the hands of Mahratta jailers, and it was at Delhi again that in 1857 the last semblance of Moghul rulership disappeared out of history in the tempest of the Mutiny. It was on the plain of Delhi that the assumption by Queen Victoria of the imperial title was solemnly proclaimed in 1878, and, with still greater pomp, King Edward's accession in 1903. There again in 1911 King George, the first of his line to visit his Indian Empire as King-Emperor, received in person the fealty of princes and peoples and restored Delhi to her former pride of place as its imperial capital.

Where else in the world can such a procession of the ages pass before one's eyes, from the great "Horse

Sacrifice" of the Pandavas at the dawn of history to the inauguration by a British prince in the King-Emperor's name of modern political institutions conceived in the democratic spirit of British freedom?

Yet at the very time when an Indian-elected assembly, representing as far as possible all creeds and classes and communities, and above all the Western-educated classes who are the intellectual offspring of British rule, were gathered together to hear delivered to them in English—the one language in which, as a result of British rule, and by no means the least valuable, Indians from all parts of a vast polyglot country are able to hold converse—the Royal message throwing open to the people of India the road to *Swaraj* within the British Empire, the imperial city of Delhi went into mourning as a sign of angry protest, and the vast majority of its citizens, mostly, it must be remembered, Mahomedans, very strictly observed a complete boycott of the Royal visit in accordance with Mr. Gandhi's "Non-co-operation" campaign, and went out in immense crowds to greet the strange Hindu saint and leader who had come to preach to them his own very different message—a message of revolt, not indeed by violence but by "soul force," against the soulless civilisation of the West.

In no other city in India would such an alliance between Hindus and Mahomedans have seemed only a few years ago more unthinkable. For nowhere else have we such a vision as in Delhi of the ruthlessness as well as of the splendour of Mahomedan domination in India. Nowhere can one measure as in Delhi the greatness of its fall, and its fall had begun before it ever came into conflict with the rising British

power. It had been shaken to its foundations by the far more ancient power of Hinduism, which Islam had subdued but never destroyed. In the seventeenth century Shivaji, the hero still to-day of the Hindu revival of which Mr. Gandhi is the latest apostle, led out for the first time his Mahrattas in open rebellion against Delhi and started the continuous process of disintegration from which the Moghul Emperors were driven to purchase their only possible respite under British protection. Since India finally passed not under Mahratta, but under British rule, Hinduism has never again been subjected to the oppression which the fierce monotheism of Islam itself taught all her Mahomedan rulers, with the one noble exception of Akbar, to inflict upon an "idolatrous" race. British rule introduced into India not only a new reign of law and order but the principles of equal tolerance and justice for all which had struck root in our own civilisation. Nevertheless, at the very moment at which we were attempting to extend a wide and generous application of those principles to the domain of political rights and liberties, we were being confronted with unexpected forces of resistance which, even in Mahomedan Delhi, drew their chief inspiration from Hinduism.

But, it might be argued, Delhi, though restored to the primacy it had lost under British rule as the capital city of India, has continued to live on the memories of the past and has been scarcely touched by the breath of modern civilisation. For the full effect of close contact with the West, ought one not to look to the great cities that have grown up under British rule—to Calcutta, for instance, the seat until a few years ago of British Government in India, itself a

creation of the British, and if not to-day a more prosperous centre of European enterprise than Bombay, a larger and more populous city, in which the Hindus are in an overwhelming majority? But in the life even of Calcutta features are not lacking to remind one how persistent are the forces of resistance to the whole spirit of the West which Mr. Gandhi mustered in Delhi to protest against the purpose of the Duke of Connaught's mission. Had not a great part of Calcutta itself also observed the *Hartal* proclaimed by Mr. Gandhi during the Prince's visit?

On the surface it seems difficult in Calcutta to get even an occasional glimpse of the old India upon which we have superimposed a new India with results that are still in the making. In Bombay, though it proudly calls itself "the Western Gate of India" the glow of Hindu funeral pyres, divided only by a long wall from the fashionable drive which sweeps along Back Bay from the city, still called the Fort, to Malabar Hill, serves to remind one any evening that he is in an oriental world still largely governed as ever by the doctrine of successive rebirths, the dead being merely reborn to fresh life, in some new form according to each one's merits or demerits, out of the flames that consume the body. On Malabar Hill itself, in the very heart of the favourite residential quarter whence the Europeans are being rapidly elbowed out by Indian merchant princes, the finest site of all still encloses the Towers of Silence on which, contrary to the Hindu usage of cremation, the Parsees, holding fire too sacred to be subjected to contact with mortal corruption, expose their dead to be devoured by vultures. Calcutta has no such conspicuous landmarks of the

East to disturb the illusion produced by most of one's surroundings that this is a city which, if not actually European, differs only from the European type in the complexion and dress of its oriental population and the architectural compromises imposed on European buildings by a tropical climate. The Marquess of Wellesley built Government House over a hundred years ago on the model of Kedleston, and it is still the stateliest official residence in British India. Fort William with Olive's ramparts and fosses is still almost untouched, and with an ever-expanding Walhalla of bronze or marble Governors and Viceroy's and Commanders-in-Chief, and at the farther end the white marble walls and domes of the Queen Victoria Memorial Hall—the one noble monument we have built in India—at last nearing completion, the broad expanse of Calcutta's incomparable Maidan is, even more than our London parks, the green playfield and the vital lung of the whole city. Along and behind Chowringhee there are still a few of the old-time mansions of Thackeray's "nabobs," with their deep, pillared verandahs standing well off from the road, each within its discreet "compound," but they are all rapidly making room for "eligible residences," more opulent perhaps but more closely packed, or for huge blocks of residential flats, even less adapted to the climate. The great business quarter round Dalhousie Square has been steadily rebuilt on a scale of massive magnificence scarcely surpassed in the city of London, and many of the shops compare with those of our West End. The river, too, all along the Garden Reach and far below is often almost as crowded as the Pool of London, with ocean-going steamers waiting to

load or unload their cargoes as well as with lumbering native sailing ships and the ferries that ply ceaselessly between the different quarters of the city on both banks of the Hugli. The continuous roar of traffic in the busy streets, the crowded tram-cars, the motors and taxis jostling the ancient bullock-carts, the surging crowds in the semi-Europeanised native quarters, even the pall of smoke that tells of many modern industrial activities are not quite so characteristic of new India as, when I was last there, the sandwich-men with boards inviting a vote for this or that candidate in the elections to the new Indian Councils.

In all the strenuous life and immense wealth of this great city, to which European enterprise first gave and still gives the chief impulse, Indians are taking an increasing share. The Bengalees themselves still hold very much aloof from modern developments of trade and industry, but they were the first to appreciate the value of Western education, and the Calcutta University with all its shortcomings has maintained the high position which Lord Dalhousie foreshadowed for it nearly seventy years ago. In art and literature the modern Bengalee has often known how to borrow from the West without sacrificing either his own originality or the traditions of his race or the spirit of his creed. Some of the finest Bengalee brains have taken for choice to the legal profession and have abundantly justified themselves both as judges in the highest court of the province and as barristers and pleaders. In every branch of the public services open to Indians and in all the liberal professions, as well as in the civic and political life of their country, the Bengalees have played a leading part, not

restricted even to their own province, and in the very distinguished person of Lord Sinha, Bengal has just provided for the first time an Indian to represent the King-Emperor as governor of a province—the neighbouring province of Behar and Orissa. Nor have the women of Bengal been left behind as in so many other parts of India. In Calcutta many highly educated ladies have won such complete release from the ancient restraints imposed upon their sex that they preside to-day over refined and cultured homes from which the subtle atmosphere of the East does not exclude the ease and freedom of Western habits of mind and body.

Yet these are still exceptions, and even in such a progressive city as Calcutta and even amongst the highest classes the social and domestic life of the majority of Hindus is still largely governed by the laws of Hinduism, and not least with regard to marriage and the seclusion of women. I was once allowed to attend a sort of "scripture lesson" for little high-caste Hindu girls, organised by a benevolent old Brahman lady, who has devoted herself to the cause of infant education on orthodox lines. None of these 40 or 50 little girls had of course reached the age, usually ten, at which they would be cut off from all contact with the other sex except in marriage. They had bright and happy faces, and as it was a Hindu festival most of them were decked out in all their finery with gold and silver bangles on their dainty arms and ankles, sometimes with jewelled nose-rings as well as ear-rings. They went through an elaborate and picturesque ritual with great earnestness and reverence and carefully followed the injunctions of the Brahman, a cultured and Western-educated gentleman who presided over the

ceremony. It was an attractive scene, and would have been entirely pleasant but for the painful contrast afforded by some eight or ten poor little mites with shaven heads and drab-coloured dresses, almost ragged and quite unadorned. They were infant widows, condemned according to the laws of Hinduism by the premature death of their husbands to whom they had been wedded, but whom they had never known, to lifelong widowhood, and therefore in most cases to lifelong contempt and drudgery. For they were debarred henceforth from fulfilling the supreme function of Hindu womanhood, *i.e.* securing the continuity of family rites from father to son by bearing children in legitimate wedlock, itself terribly circumscribed by the narrow limits within which inter-marriage is permissible even between different septs of the same caste. Happily those I saw were probably still too young to realise the full significance of the unkind fate that already differentiated them so markedly from their more fortunate caste-sisters.

Nor has one to go so very far from the heart of Calcutta to be reminded that the "premier city" of modern India derives its name from Kali, the most sinister of Indian goddesses. She was the tutelary deity of Kali-Kata, one of the three villages to which Job Charnock removed the first British settlement in Bengal when he abandoned Hugli in 1690, and her shrine has grown in wealth and fame with the growth of Calcutta. Kali-Kata is to-day only a suburb of the modern city, but in entering it one passes into another world—the world of popular Hinduism. In its narrow streets every shop is stocked with the paraphernalia that Hindus require for their devotions, for everything centres in Kali-Kata round

the popular shrine sacred to Kali, the black goddess of destruction, with a protruding blood-red tongue, who wears a necklace of human skulls and a belt of human hands and tongues, and, holding in one of her many hands a severed human head, tramples under foot the dead bodies of her victims. From the *ghats*, or long flights of steps, that descend to the muddy waters of a narrow creek which claims a more or less remote connection with the sacred Ganges, crowds of pious Hindus go through their ablutions in accordance with a long and complicated ritual, whilst high-caste ladies perform them in mid-stream out of covered boats and behind curtains deftly drawn to protect their *pardah*. Past an ancient banyan tree, from whose branches streamers of coloured stuffs depend with other votive offerings from grateful mothers who have not prayed for male offspring in vain, past the minor shrines of many favourite deities, a road lined with closely packed beggars and ascetics, thrusting forth their sores and their shrivelled limbs in the hope of a few coppers, leads up to the place of sacrifice in front of the temple. The pavement is still red with the blood of goats immolated to the Great Goddess, and her devotees who may have just missed the spectacle can at least embrace the posts to which the victims were tied. On an open pillared platform facing the holy of holies some of the high-caste worshippers await in prayer and meditation the moment when its ponderous bronze doors are from time to time thrown open. One old Brahman lady of singularly refined appearance presses her fingers alternately on her right and her left nostril, whilst she expels through the other, keeping her lips all the time tightly

closed, the unhallowed air which may have contaminated her lungs on her way to the temple. Another worshipper lies full length with his face pressed to the ground in motionless adoration. Between them flit about laughing, bright-eyed little girls, the "daughters" of the temple, still unconscious of the life of temple prostitution to which they have been dedicated from their birth. The court-yard all around is packed with a surging, howling mob of pilgrims, many of them from a great distance, fighting for a vantage point from which they may get a glimpse of the Great Goddess in her inner sanctuary, even if they cannot hope to penetrate into it.

At last, after much clanging of bells and fierce altercations between the Brahman priests and the faithful as to payment of necessary fees, the bronze doors roll back, and in the dim religious twilight one catches a glint of gold and precious stones, the head-dress of Kali, whose terrific image barely emerges from the depth of the inner sanctuary in which it stands, accessible only to its serving Brahmans. They alone, though strangely enough temple Brahmans as a class enjoy little credit with their fellow-castemen, can approach the idol and wash and dress and feed it with offerings. Whilst the doors are open the frenzy and the noise increases, as the mob of worshippers struggle for a front place and bawl out their special supplications at the top of their voices. Then when they are closed again there is a general unravelling of the tangled knots of perspiring humanity, and those who have achieved the supreme purpose of their pilgrimage gradually disperse to make room for another crowd, one stream succeeding another the

whole day long on special festivals, but on ordinary days mostly between sunrise and noon. At the back of the shrine, as I came away, some privileged worshippers were waiting to drink a few drops of the foul water which trickles out of a small conduit through the wall from the holy of holies. It is the water in which the feet of the idol—and those of the serving Brahmans—have been washed!

It was in this same temple of Kali that only some fifteen years ago, during the violent agitation provoked by the Partition of Bengal, vast crowds used to assemble and take by the name of the Great Goddess the vow of *Swadeshi* as the first step to *Swaraj*, and Bengalee youths, maddened by an inflammatory propaganda, learned to graft on to ancient forms of worship the very modern cult of the bomb. To this same temple resorted only the other day Mr. Gandhi's followers to seek the blessing of the Great Goddess for the more harmless forms of protest by which he exhorted the inhabitants of Calcutta to bring home to the Duke of Connaught during his stay in Calcutta their indignant rejection of the boon which he had been sent out by the King-Emperor to confer on the people of India.

Must we then be driven to the conclusion that there is a gulf never to be bridged between India's ancient civilisation and the modern civilisation which we have brought to her out of the West? In that case the great constitutional adventure on which we have just embarked would be, unlike all our other great adventures in India, foredoomed to failure, and those Englishmen would be right who shudder at its rashness and reiterate with added conviction, since the school of Indian thought for which Mr. Gandhi stands

seems to bear them out, that "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." The whole history of the British connection with India surely excludes such a conclusion of failure and despair. It teaches us, not, as such Englishmen contend, that India was won and has been held and must be retained by the sword alone, but that British rule was established and has been maintained with and by the co-operation of Indians and British, and that in seeking to-day to associate Indians more closely than ever before with the government and administration of the country, we are merely persevering in the same path which, though at times hesitatingly and reluctantly, the British rulers of India have trodden for generations past, always keeping step with the successive stages of our own national and political evolution. The Indian extremists misread equally the whole history of British rule who see in it nothing but a long nightmare of hateful oppression to be finally overcome, according to Mr. Gandhi's preaching, by "Non-co-operation" and the immortal "soul force" of India, rescued at last from the paralysing snares of an alien civilisation. Not for the first time has the cry of "Back to the Vedas" been raised by Indians who, standing in the old ways, watch with hostility and alarm the impact on their ancient but static civilisation of the more dynamic civilisation of the West with which we for the first time brought India into contact. It would be folly to underrate the resistance which the reactionary elements in Hinduism are still capable of putting forth. I have shown how it can still be seen operating in extreme forms, and not upon Hindus alone, in the two pictures which I have drawn from Delhi and Calcutta. It meets one in a lesser degree at

almost every turn all over India. But it would be just as foolish to underrate the progressive forces which show now as ever in the history of Hinduism, that it is also capable of combining with a singular rigidity of structure and with many forms repugnant to all our own beliefs a breadth and elasticity of thought by no means inferior to that of the West.

To those who hoped for a more rapid and widespread fusion of Indian and Western ideals, some of the phenomena which have marked the latter-day revival of Hinduism and the shape it has recently assumed in Mr. Gandhi's "Non-co-operation" campaign, may have brought grave disappointment. But the inrush of Western influences was assuredly bound to provoke a strong reaction. For let us not forget that to the abiding power of Hinduism India owes the one great element of stability that enabled her, long before we appeared in India, to weather so many tremendous storms without altogether losing the sense of a great underlying unity stronger and more enduring than all the manifold lines of cleavage which have tended from times immemorial to divide her. Hinduism has not only responded for some forty centuries to the social and religious aspirations of a large and highly endowed portion of the human race, almost wholly shut off until modern times from any intimate contact with our own Western world, but it has been the one great force that has preserved the continuity of Indian life. It withstood six centuries of Mahomedan domination. Could it be expected to yield without a struggle to the new forces, however superior we may consider them and however overwhelming they may ultimately prove,

which British rule has imported into India during a period of transition more momentous than any other through which she has ever passed, but still very brief when compared with all those other periods of Indian history which modern research has only recently rescued from the legendary obscurity of still earlier ages?

We are witnessing to-day a new phase of this great struggle, the clash of conflicting elements in two great civilisations. A constitution has been inaugurated at Delhi to bring India into permanent and equal partnership with a commonwealth of free nations which is the greatest political achievement of Western civilisation, and the latest prophet of Hinduism, applying to it the language of the West, has banned it forthwith as a thing of Satan, the offspring of a Satanic government and of a Satanic civilisation. His appeal to India is intended to strike many and various chords, but it is essentially an appeal to the ancient forces of Hinduism which gave India a great civilisation long before Europe, and least of all Britain, had emerged from the savagery of primitive man. Englishmen find it difficult to understand the strength of that appeal, perhaps because they do not realise how deep and vital are the roots of the civilisation to which it appeals.

CHAPTER II

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THE ENDURING POWER OF HINDUISM

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India's civilisation, intimately bound up from its birth with the great social and religious system which we call Hinduism, is as unique as it is ancient. Its growth and its tenacity are largely due to the geographical position of a great and populous sub-continent, on its land side exposed only to incursions from the north through mountainous and desolate regions, everywhere difficult of access and in some parts impenetrable, and shut in on the other two sides of a roughly isosceles triangle by broad expanses of sea which cut it off from all direct intercourse with the West until, towards the close of the Middle Ages, European navigators opened up new ocean highways to the East. India owes her own peculiar civilisation to the gradual fusion of Aryan races of a higher type that began to flow down from Central Asia before the dawn of history upon the more primitive indigenous populations already in possession. Its early history has only now begun to emerge from the twilight of myths and legends, and cannot even now be traced with any assurance of accuracy nearly as far back as that of other parts of the world which preceded or gave birth to our own much more recent civilisation. The pyramids of Ghizeh and Sakkara and the monumental temples of Thebes bore ample witness to the greatness of Egyptian civilisation long

before the interpretation of her hieroglyphics enabled us to determine its antiquity, and the discovery of its abundant art treasures revealed the high degree of culture to which it reached. Excavations in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates have yielded an almost equally valuable harvest in regard to Babylonian and Assyrian civilisation, and Cnossus has told us its scarcely less wonderful story. Yet the long line of Pharaohs was coming to an end and Egypt was losing the national independence which she has never once recovered; Nineveh had fallen and Jerusalem was destroyed; Greece and even Rome had already started on their great creative careers before any approximately correct date can be assigned to the stages through which Indian civilisation had passed. India only becomes historical with the establishment of the Sasunaga dynasty in the Gangetic kingdom of Magadha, which centred in what is now Behar, about the year 600 B.C.

As to the state of India before that date, no sort of material evidence has survived, or at any rate has yet been brought to light—no monuments, no inscriptions, very little pottery even, in fact very few traces of the handicraft of man; nor any contemporary records of undoubted authenticity. Fortunately the darkness which would have been otherwise Cimmerian is illuminated, though with a partial and often uncertain light, by the wonderful body of sacred literature which has been handed down to our own times in the Vedas and Brahmanas and Upanishads. To none of these books, which have, for the most part, reached us in various recensions often showing considerable discrepancies and obviously later interpolations, is it

possible to ascribe any definite date. But in them we undoubtedly possess a genuine key to the religious thought and social conceptions, and even inferentially to the political institutions of the Aryan Hindus through the many centuries that rolled by between their first southward migrations into the Indian peninsula and their actual emergence into history. The Vedic writings constitute the most ancient documents available to illustrate the growth of religious beliefs founded on pure Nature-worship, which translated themselves into a polytheistic and pantheistic idea of the universe and, in spite of many subsequent transformations, are found to contain all the germs of modern Hinduism as we know it to-day—and, indeed, of all the religious thought of India. In the Vedic hymns Nature itself is divine, and their pantheon consists of the deified forces of Nature, worshipped now as Agni, the god of Fire; Soma, the god and the elixir of life; Indra, the god of heaven and the national god of the Aryans; and again, under more abstract forms, such as Prajapati, the lord of creation, Asura, the great spirit, Brahmanaspati, the lord of prayer; and sometimes, again, gathered together into the transcendent majesty of one all-absorbing divinity, such as Varuna, whose pre-eminence almost verges on monotheism. But the general impression left on the Western mind is of a fantastic kaleidoscope, in which hundreds and even thousands of deities, male and female, are constantly waxing and waning and changing places, and proceeding from, and merging their identity in, others through an infinite series of processes, partly material and partly metaphysical, but ever more and more subject to the inspiration and the purpose of

the Brahman, alone versed in the knowledge of the gods, and alone competent to propitiate them by sacrificial rites of increasing intricacy, and by prayers of a rigid formalism that gradually assume the shape of mere incantations.

This is the great change to which the Brahmanas bear witness. They show no marked departure from the theology of the Vedas, though many of the old gods continue to be dethroned either to disappear altogether, or to reappear in new shapes, like Varuna, who turns into a god of night to be worshipped no longer for his beneficence, but to be placated for his cruelty; whilst, on the other hand, Prajapati is raised to the highest throne, with Sun, Air, and Fire in close attendance. What the Brahmanas do show is that the Brahman has acquired the overwhelming authority of a sacerdotal status, not vested merely in the learning of a theologian, but in some special attribute of his blood, and therefore transmissible only from father to son. The Brahman was doubtless helped to this fateful pre-eminence by the modifications which the popular tongue had undergone in the course of time, and as the result more especially of migration from the Punjab to the Gangetic plains. The language of the Vedic hymns had ceased to be understood by the masses, and its interpretation became the monopoly of learned families; and this monopoly, like all others, was used by those who enjoyed it for their own aggrandisement. The language that had passed out of common usage acquired an added sanctity. It became a sacred language, and sacred became the Brahman, who alone possessed the key to it, who alone could recite its sacred texts and perform the rites which they prescribed,

and select the prayers which could best meet every distinct and separate emergency in the life of man.

In the Brahmanas we can follow the growth of a luxuriant theology for the use of the masses which, in so far as it was polytheistic, tended to the infinite multiplication of gods and goddesses and godlings of all types, and in so far as it was pantheistic invested not only men, but beasts and insects and rivers and fountains and trees and stones with some living particle of the divine essence pervading all things; and we can follow there also the erection on the basis of that theology, of a formidable ritual of which the exclusive exercise and the material benefits were the appanage of the Brahman. But we have to turn to a later collection of writings known as the Upanishads for our knowledge of the more abstract speculations out of which Hindu thinkers, not always of the Brahmanical caste, were concurrently evolving the esoteric systems of philosophy that have exercised an immense and abiding influence on the spiritual life of India. There is the same difficulty in assigning definite dates to the Upanishads, though many of the later ones bear the post-mark of the various periods of theological evolution with which they coincided. Only some of the earliest ones are held by many competent authorities to be, in the shape in which they have reached us, anterior to the time when India first becomes, in any real sense, historical; but there is no reason to doubt that they represent the progressive evolution into different forms of very ancient germs already present in the Vedas themselves. They abound in the same extravagant eclecticism, leading often to the same confusions and contradictions that Hindu theology presents.