History of the Indian National Congress

VOLUME I

(1885—1935)

BY

B. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

RAJENDRA PRASAD

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whose embodied spirit
hath
guided the destinies
of
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and
in whose service
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of
Hindustan
have cheerfully made
heavy sacrifices
for
The Emancipation
of
Their Motherland

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

GANDHI AND GANDHISM (2 volumes)

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THE HISTORY OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
Vol. 2 (1935

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

The preparation of the book was not undertaken by the author s of set purpose. It was the unwitting result of the scribbling of dle hours during the hot summer of the year and the notes of lessons iven by him to the students of the Andhra Jatheeya Kalasala, lasulipatam, on the History of the Congress. A casual enquiry ddressed to him on an allied matter by the Secretary of the A.I.C.C. rom Allahabad happened to bring this little venture, through him, to the notice of the President who placed the matter before the Working Committee. The author expresses his sense of profound gratitude to the Working Committee for undertaking its publication on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the great national organisation.

The plan of the book will be evident from a cursory glance at he synopsis that precedes each part. There was not much of plot to nravel in the story of the first thirty years, the happenings in hich are dealt with subject by subject and character by character. he past twenty years have been treated year by year. The reso- itions of the different sessions have not been categorically quoted. hat alone would cover half the size of the volume in hand, which as already run into unexpected proportions.

The book is abounding in defects of which the author is only oo well aware, and which the readers are requested to bear with. hese are defects of plan as well as penmanship which might have een partly, at any rate, avoided by greater leisure and better atten- on. But the work had to be put through in a hurry. And hurry ever conduces to perfection. Yet, during the all-too-short period of me available, the book has been gone through by the President, wice over, and the thanks of the public, no less than of the author, re due to him for the hard work which the task of revision and orrection entailed upon him. Equally exacting was the strain im- osed upon Syt. J. B. Kripalani, the General Secretary of the Con- ress, and Syt. Krishnadas, Secretary, on whom fell the onerous uty of priming up the whole matter for the Press, and to whom the ountry's thanks are due.

The author acknowledges his obligations to the printers—The aw Printing House, Madras,—who have put their whole capacity

and good cheer into the task and raced against time in printing volume which has run up to one and a half times the anticipate size. Besides the printers, several others have rendered conside able help. The Proprietors of *The Hindu*, Madras, have kindly le the photo-blocks of the Presidents of the Congress. Syt. T. Ram Rao, General Manager, The Hindusthan Mutual Insurance Co., Ltd Masulipatam, has performed the laborious task of reading throug the type-script and the proofs and preparing the Index, Syt. K Ramakotiswara Rau, Editor, *Triveni*, Madras, has read through th type-script once again before passing it on to the Press, part by part His meticulous sense of get-up has been pressed into service in th arrangement of matter and the correction of final proofs. The Notes on the Satyagraha in Kaira and the Ahmedabad Mill Strike have been prepared by Syt. Mahadev Desai; on the Gujarat floods by Swami Anand; on the Mulshi Satyagraha by Syt. T. R. Deogirikar; and those on Champaran and the Bihar Earthquake by Babu Rajendra Prasad. Our gratitude is due to them all.

Masulipatam,
20th December, 1935

B. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

Fifty years ago the Indian National Congress met for the first time in Bombay with a small number of delegates who could hardly be called elected representatives, but who were nevertheless true servants of the people. Ever since then it has been striving for winning freedom for the people of India. In the beginning its aim was indefinite but it has always insisted on a democratic form of Government responsible to the people of India and representative of all communities and classes inhabiting this vast country. It started with the hope and confidence that British statesmanship and the British Government would rise equal to the occasion and establish truly representative institutions giving the right to the people of India to govern India in the interest of India. The early history of the Congress is full of resolutions and speeches giving expression to this faith and confidence. The very demands of the Congress took the form of resolutions suggesting reforms and removal of objectionable measures—all having as their basis a hope that, if the British public and Parliament could be fully informed of this position in India and of the desire of Indians, they would set things right and ultimately confer on them the inestimable boon of Self-Government.

That hope and confidence have been gradually but nonetheless completely shattered by the action of the British Government in India and in England. The attitude of the British Government has become more and more stiff as the national consciousness has become more and more expressive. The initial confidence in the intentions of the British Rule received a shock during the administration of Lord Curzon who partitioned Bengal, and the great agitation that followed against that ill-fated measure was an index of the rising tide of popular national consciousness which had not a little been influenced by world events, such as the victory of Japan over Russia in the beginning of the 20th century. But India had not yet lost faith and during the great war, partly as a result of this faith resuscitated by the annulment of the partition of Bengal and partly on account of want of proper appreciation of the situation as a whole, the country responded to the call of the British Government to help the British Empire in its time of need. India's splendid help was acknowledged by all British statesmen and hope was engendered that the war, which was being ostensibly fought for the principle of

self-determination of nations and for making democracy safe, would result in the establishment of Responsible Government in India. The announcement made by the Secretary of State for India on behalf of the British Government in 1917 promising Self-Government by stages occasioned difference of opinion amongst Indians which became more and more acute as the result of investigations undertaken by the Secretary of State and the Viceroy became known and the Bill, which ultimately became the Government of India Act in 1920, took shape and form. During this time of incubation of the Bill the war had ended in a victory for the British, and the feeling grew in India that as the pressure in Europe had relaxed on account of the successful termination of the war for Britain, the British attitude had changed for the worse towards India. This feeling was confirmed and strengthened by what was regarded as breach of faith with the Mussalmans in the matter of the Khilaphat and by the passing, in spite of the unanimous protest of the country at large, of what were known as the Rowlatt Bills, whereby the stringent provisions of the Defence of India Act which had been tolerated during the war were sought to be perpetuated, depriving the people of the elementary rights of free citizenship.

These naturally created an intensive agitation in the whole country, and Satyagraha, which had been tried in South Africa, and in a small way in Champaran and in Kaira in India, was put forward by Mahatma Gandhi for the first time as a method to be adopted by the country whereby to secure redress of these and other grievances. There were unfortunate popular disturbances in the Punjab and Ahmedabad resulting in loss of life and property which were followed by the Jallianwala-bagh massacre and the horrors of the Martial Law regime in the Punjab. There was naturally great indignation throughout the country which was not assuaged by the Report of the Hunter Committee appointed to investigate into these happenings and was considerably intensified by the debate on the Report in Parliament. This Non-co-operation movement was inaugurated with its programme of resignation of titles of honour granted by the Government, boycott of Legislative bodies, Government-recognised educational institutions and Law Courts and of foreign cloth on the one hand, and on the other the establishment of Congress Committees, enrolment of Congress members, collection of Tilak Swaraj Fund, opening of national educational institutions, establishment of Panchayats for decision of village disputes and the revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving,—all to culminate by

stages in a campaign of Civil Disobedience and non-payment of taxes. The Congress Constitution was changed and its object was defined as the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means. There was country-wide awakening followed by repression by Government, when thousands of men and women including some of the most reputed leaders were imprisoned towards the end of 1921. Efforts at bringing about a settlement with the Government did not fructify and the programme of non-payment of taxes in Bardoli had to be suspended on account of serious disturbances at Chauri Chaura in the United Provinces. Subsequently the other items of the Non-co-operation programme were one after another suspended or withdrawn, and Congress members entered the Legislatures.

The appointment by the British Parliament of what is known as the Simon Commission, from which Indians were excluded, for the purpose of investigating the working of the Constitution of 1920, led to another serious upheaval in the country and the Congress in association with other public bodies framed a Constitution with Dominion Status as the objective for India for the acceptance of the Government. In the absence of any adequate response by the Government, the Congress at its session at Lahore in December, 1929, changed its objective as the attainment of *Purna Swaraj* (Complete Independence) by legitimate and peaceful means, and organised a campaign of Civil Disobedience of non-moral laws and non-payment of taxes, in the beginning of 1930. The Government of England on the one hand called a Conference in London to which it nominated certain Indians to advise it about a Constitution for India, and on the other adopted repressive measures, including the promulgation of a number of most drastic Ordinances for suppressing the Civil Disobedience movement in India. In March, 1931, there was a Pact entered into by Lord Irwin the Viceroy representing the Government, and Mahatma Gandhi representing the Congress, as a result of which Civil Disobedience was suspended and Mahatma Gandhi attended the Round Table Conference in London towards the end of 1931. As was to be expected, nothing came out of the Conference and the Congress was forced to revive the movement early in 1932 and carried it on till 1934, when it was suspended again. In the two movements of 1930 and 1932 hundreds of thousands of men and women and even children courted imprisonment, received *lathi* blows and other kinds of torture and suffered loss of property. Many were killed as a result of firing by the Government forces on crowds. The Satyagrahis showed remarkable power of organisation and

suffering and were on the whole, completely non-violent in the face of the greatest provocation. Congress organisation showed great vitality and powers of adaptability and survived the great attack made on it by the Government. The country has come out of the fiery ordeal with credit but without achieving its great objective of *Purna Swaraj*.

By a resolution passed at Karachi the Congress has assured to all Indians certain fundamental rights and has drawn up an economic and social programme. It has made it clear that, in order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions and has laid down fundamental rights of citizenship, such as freedom of speech and association, of person and property, of religion and conscience. It has also laid down that the interests of industrial labour shall be safeguarded by securing for them healthy conditions of work, limited hours of labour, suitable machinery for settlement of disputes and protection against economic consequencecs of old age, sickness and unemployment and the right to form unions. It has assured the peasants to secure equitable adjustments of the burden on agricultural land by reduction of rent and revenue and exemption from rent or revenue for uneconomic holdings, with such relief as may be just and necessary to holders of small estates affected by such exemption or reduction in rent. It has also provided for a graded tax on net incomes from land above a reasonable minimum, death duties on a graduated scale on property above a fixed income, and drastic reduction of expenditure on military and defence and civil administration, fixing the salary of State servants at a maximum of Rs. 500 per month. It has also laid down an economic and social programme of excluding foreign cloth, protecting indigenous industries, prohibition of intoxicating drugs and drinks, State control of key industries, relief to agricultural indebtedness, regulation of currency and exchange in the interest of the country and provision for the military training of citizens for national defence.

The last session of the Congress at Bombay in October, 1934, endorsed the policy of entering the Legislatures and laid down a constructive programme including revival of and encouragement to hand-spinning and hand-weaving, promotion of useful village and small industries, re-construction of village life in its economic, educational, social and hygienic aspects, removal of untouchability, promotion of inter-communal unity, total abstinence, national education,

spread of useful knowledge among the adult population, organisation of industrial labour and peasants and strengthening of the Congress organisation. Under a revised Constitution it reduced the number of delegates and made it proportionate to the number of primary members on the Congress roll and insisted on manual labour and habitual wearing of Khadi on all elected members and office-bearers of Congress Committees.

The Congress has thus marched on from stage to stage and covers practically every sphere of national activity. It is at present engaged in constructive work which is calculated not only to improve the economic condition of the masses but also to create that self-confidence among them which can be born of work accomplished and which can enable them to win *Purna Swaraj*. Starting as a small organisation it now covers the entire country with a net-work of branches and enjoys the confidence of the masses of the country. It has called forth sacrifice on an extensive scale for the attainment of Swaraj from people of all classes and has a remarkable record of work and achievement. The organisation itself is a great national asset which it should be the duty of every Indian to increase and preserve. It is bound to play an ever-increasing part in the struggle for freedom that still lies ahead. This is no time for resting on our oars. The work yet to be accomplished is great and needs much patient toil, endless sacrifice and unflinching determination. It is nothing less than the attainment of *Purna Swaraj*. Let us bow down our heads to all those men, women, and children, known and unknown, who have laid down their lives, who have suffered woes and privations, and who are still paying the penalty for loving their Motherland.

Let us also in grateful reverence recall the services of those who sowed the seeds of this mighty organisation, who nurtured it with their unremitting labour and sacrifice. The small seedling that was planted fifty years ago has now grown into a mighty tree with branches spreading over this vast country and has now blossomed in the sacrifice of countless men and women. It is for those that are now left behind to nourish the tree by their further services and sacrifice, so that it may bear fruit and make India the free and prosperous country that Nature intended her to be.

The pages that follow relate the story of the growth of the Indian National Congress. The author's knowledge and experience of the men and affairs of the Congress is wide. He himself has played

no inconsiderable part in the later phases of its development. He is not a detached historian writing after the events and basing his conclusions on cold recorded facts. He has seen things with his own eyes and has himself acted and re-acted on them. He is writing not only with knowledge but also with faith. His conclusions and opinions are therefore his own, and need not be treated as in every case representing the official view of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress which publishes the book and sends it out to the world. It is hoped, however, that it contains a faithful record of facts and will be found helpful to students of contemporary history.

RAJENDRA PRASAD

Camp—WARDHA,
12th December, 1935

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Hardly are any words necessary to reintroduce the first volume of this History to the public. Events have developed fast in the decade (and more) that has elapsed since it was published in 1936 (January) and their consummation in a Provisional National Government followed by the convening of the Constituent Assembly has invested the first volume with added interest. Indeed the history of the Congress has become classical enough to be divided into three sections relating to the 'ancient' period, the 'middle' ages and the 'modern' era. The windy, vapoury rhetoric of the first period has given place to the inchoate but well thought out plans of the second which were followed by their taking shape and in time landing India on the threshold of Independence.

Ten years ago the reader that finished the perusal of the first volume was left in doubt and dismay regarding the future of Hindusthan. A general upsurge for freedom covering the whole of India and bearing proof of a widespread popular yearning for Swaraj was still a mirage if not a phantasy that could not slake his thirst for Independence. Was non-co-operation, after all, a fool's paradise, was passive resistance an act of puerile obstinacy, was civil disobedience a leap into the unknown depths of an unfathomable abyss, was Satyagraha itself a Utopian ideal conceived by an unpractical saint who has descended into the domain of mundane politics? We were like people who lost their way in the invisible dark of a wilderness. But without losing hope and faith, we marched on with the lodestar of non-violence as our sole guide and at last an effulgent ray of light divulged itself proving the correctness of our direction and asserting the certainty of our destination The march of events in a decade has constituted a new chapter of History embodied in a second volume which comes as a necessary sequel to the first and the pages of which have set at nought all the doubts and solved all the difficulties that harassed the readers of the first volume. In one word the publication of the second volume has whetted the appetite of the public for the first and compelled a second edition thereof. To-day then, the struggle of India for her emancipation from the foreign yoke may be said to have been described in two thousand pages which abound in perpetual interest not merely to India's future generations who will have inherited the rich heritage of a free India, but to the many nations of South East Asia, of

the Middle East and of Africa who have yet to achieve their own freedom through a bloodless revolution. It will, therefore, be a source of genuine gratification to all concerned, notably to the publishers to whose pressing initiative the second edition owes its publication, if these pages take back the reader to the genesis of the Indian Struggle and its numerous vicissitudes on its way to freedom and Independence.

Masulipatam,
6th November, 1946.

B. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA

THE HISTORY OF THE CONGRESS

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THE HISTORY OF THE CONGRESS

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF THE CONGRESS

The History of the Congress is really the history of India's struggle for freedom. For centuries the Indian Nation has been under foreign supremacy and the Congress has striven for half a century to free the country from this subjection, the beginnings of which in its latest phase may be traced to the advent to India of a trading concern.

The East India Company had during nearly a hundred years of commercial and political activity acquired large tracts of the country in India and had begun to enjoy the rights of a ruling power. After 1772 its activities were subject to scrutiny from time to time by the British Parliament and every renewal of its Charter was preceded by an inquiry on behalf of the British Government. As the commercial aspect of its activity had gone more and more into the background and the political aspect come more and more into the forefront, this scrutiny had become more and more searching. While it would not be right to imagine that anything like a close supervision was maintained, there were not men wanting among the British who studied the Indian problem in great detail, followed the action and programme of the East India Company with care and vigilance, and were not slow to bring them before Parliament for consideration and redress. The great interest which Edmund Burke, Sheridan and Fox exhibited in the last quarter of the 18th century served to focus public opinion on the misdeeds of the Company's agents. Although the impeachment of Warren Hastings failed in its objective, it exposed the oppression and tyranny which used to be practised. Every periodical inquiry preceding renewal of the Charter resulted in the enunciation of some principles of far-reaching consequence, even though these principles were not followed in practice. More than once it was laid down as the policy to be followed that the agents of the Company should not attempt to extend its territorial acquisitions, but every time, an opportunity occurred or was created which enabled them to disregard the injunction, and the territories went on expanding. It is not necessary here to go into the history, full of black and treacherous deeds, full of the exhibition of low and rapacious human nature, full of the wreckages of broken engagements and treaties, of the acquisition of India by the East India Company. Nor is it necessary to go into an examination of the treachery and faithlessness of the Indians as amongst themselves, or of the ways and means employed by the agents of the Company to amass huge fortunes for

themselves, apart from what they made available to the Company and its Directors. Suffice it to say that immense wealth was acquired, and formed in due course the nucleus, and perhaps the bulk, of that capital which enabled England on the advent of the steam engine and the machine to establish her industrial supremacy in the world in the nineteenth century.

When the Regulating Act was passed in 1774 and a Board of Control was appointed over the Court of Directors of the Company, and a Governor-General with a Council, the British Parliament for the first time took some responsibility for the administration of the territories already acquired. This control grew in course of time and another Act in 1785 followed. The Charter was renewed after investigations in 1793, 1813, 1833 and 1853. In 1833 it was enacted that "no native of the said territories, nor any natural born subject of His Majesty resident therein, shall, by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the said Company" and the Court of Directors explained its import as follows:—

> "The Court conceive this section to mean that there shall be no governing caste in British India; that whatever other tests of qualification may be adopted, distinction of race or religion shall not be of the number; that no subject of the King, whether of Indian or British or mixed descent, shall be excluded from the posts usually conferred on uncovenanted servants in India, or from the covenanted service itself, provided he be otherwise eligible."

By the same Act the rights of the Company to trade in India were abolished and it became divested henceforth of its character as a trading concern and became entirely a ruling authority.

A controversy arose about this time regarding the introduction of English education into India. With the powerful support of Raja Rammohan Roy among Indians and Macaulay among the Britishers, it was set at rest in favour of English education as against education in Indian languages and literature. Thus were laid the foundations of that system which continues to this day.

There was no Press in those days except such as was conducted by Englishmen, some of whom had to suffer even deportation from India. Lord William Bentinck's Governor-Generalship was remarkable for the aforesaid reforms and was also lenient towards the Press. His successor, Sir Charles Metcalfe, removed the restrictions against the Press which remained free till the Viceroyalty of Lord Lytton, with the exception of a brief period during the time of the Revolt of 1857.

Between 1833 and 1853 the Punjab and Sindh had been conquered, and the policy of Lord Dalhousie resulting in the annexation of the States of those rulers who died without issue, and of Oudh on the ground of maladministration by the then ruler, had added considerably to the territories of the Company, making the extent of British India what it has

remained ever since. The economic drain resulting in the impoverishment of the people, the loss of territory and the establishment of a foreign rule had created resentment and discontent, and the Revolt of 1857 was the last armed attempt to throw off the foreign yoke. It was undoubtedly tinged with some religious motive, but the fact that the titular Emperor of Delhi, the descendant of Akbar and Aurangzeb, and the descendant of the Peshwa of Poona were the rallying points round whom the effort to establish an Indian Raj revolved, shows that the Revolt represented not only the accumulated effect of all that had been perpetrated during a hundred years since the battle of Plassey in 1757, but also the natural desire in the human breast of every country and community to be ruled by its own people and no others. The Revolt failed but with it also disappeared the East India Company, and the Government of India directly passed into the hands of the British Crown, that is, the British Parliament. The Queen's Proclamation issued on this occasion went a great way in creating an atmosphere of calm and faith which kept the country in a condition of peace. Whatever discontent there was became absolutely helpless. The nobility, particularly the Muslim nobility, was practically crushed out of existence and there was not even a titular person left to serve as a rallying point in any future adventure like that of 1857. The British Rule came to be recognised as a dispensation of Providence and India settled down with that resignation which is one of our national characteristics.

The Government of India, even after its assumption by the Crown, continued to carry on much in the same way as before except that there were no wars for twenty years to disturb the even tenor of its rule.

This does not mean that there was no trouble and no discontent. There were serious defects in British administration which were pointed out and sought to be remedied by sympathetic British officials like Mr. Hume.

As has been stated earlier the Act of 1833 had made Indians eligible for all posts for which they were qualified. When the Charter was under consideration in 1853 it was freely stated in Parliament that, although the Act of 1833 had theoretically made Indians eligible, they had not been in practice given any posts which they would not have occupied before that Act. When the system of competitive examination for the Civil Service was introduced in 1853, it was pointed out that that would put a great handicap on Indians, as they would find it practically impossible to come to England to compete with English boys in an examination in English language and literature on the off-chance of securing posts. In spite of the handicaps Indians, though few, crossed the seas and succeeded, and it was left to Lord Salisbury to reduce the age at which students could compete, thus enhancing the handicap on Indians who, with the support of Englishmen, had been crying for simultaneous examinations in India and England. Lord Lytton in India muzzled the Vernacular Press, along with the English Press, had enjoyed freedom since the days of Metcalfe. He further passed an Arms Act which not only deprived Indians of the right of bearing arms but also introduced another galling distinction between Indians and Europeans.

Then there were famines which showed that it was not so much scarcity of foodgrains as the lack of the wherewithal to purchase them that resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of people all over the country. There was also the expensive Afghan War. While famine and death were stalking the land it was considered fit to hold a Durbar at Delhi at which the Queen assumed the title of the Empress of India. "Economic, in addition to political, troubles were actively at work throughout the country. The physical suffering of the many, acted on by the apathy and selfishness of the few, was rapidly bringing popular unrest to the danger point."

The peasantry was oppressed by certain "notorious practical grievances" referred to by Mr. Hume in his celebrated letter to Sir Auckland Colvin. They led to complaints not loud but deep with regard to (a) the costly and unsuitable Civil Courts, (b) the corrupt and oppressive Police, (c) the rigid Revenue system, and (d) the galling administration of the Arms Act and the Forest Act. People prayed for but despaired of getting (a) justice cheap, sure and speedy, (b) a Police they could look up to as friends and protectors, (c) a Land Revenue system more elastic and sympathetic, and (d) a less harsh administration of the Arms and Forest Laws. That was in fact the situation towards the beginning of the eighties. Indeed it was such that Sir W. Wedderburn says that the bureaucracy had not only done their best to prevent new concessions; they had also, when opportunity offered, taken away the privileges inherited from a former generation of reformers,—the liberty of the Press, the right of public meeting, Municipal Self-Government and the independence of the Universities. "These ill-starred measures of reaction," writes Sir William, "combined with Russian methods of Police repression brought India under Lord Lytton within measurable distance of a Revolutionary outbreak and it was only in time that Mr. Hume was inspired to intervene." Something more: Mr. Hume had unimpeachable evidence that the political discontent was going underground. He came into possession of seven volumes containing reports of the seething revolt incubating in various districts, based upon the communications of the disciples of various *gurus* to their religious heads. This was towards the end of Lord Lytton's rule, the seventies of the last century. The reports were arranged according to districts, sub-districts, sub-divisions, and the cities, towns and villages included in these. Not that an organised mutiny was ahead, but that the people pervaded with a sense of hopelessness, wanted to do something, by which was merely meant, "a sudden violent outbreak of sporadic crime, murders of obnoxious persons, robbery of bankers and looting of bazaars, acts really of lawlessness which by a due coalescense of forces might any day develop into a National Revolt." Such were the agrarian riots of the Deccan in Bombay. Hume thereupon resolved to open a safety valve for this unrest and the Congress was such an outlet. It was at this time that he conceived the idea of bringing into existence a national gathering of Indians and to that end addressed to the graduates of the Calcutta University, on the 1st of March 1883, a soul-stirring letter in which he asked for fifty men, good and true, men of unselfishness, moral courage, self-control and active spirit of benevolence. "If only fifty men, good and true, can be found to join as founders, the thing can be estab-

lished and the further development will be comparatively easy." And what was the ideal placed before these men? A democratic constitution, freedom from personal ambitions and the dictum that "he that is greatest amongst you, let him be your servant." Hume did not mince matters at all but frankly told them that "if they cannot renounce personal ease and pleasure, then at present at any rate all hopes of progress are at an end; and India truly neither desires nor deserves any better Government than she enjoys."

The concluding portion of this memorable letter runs as follows:—

"And if even the leaders of thought are all either such poor creatures, or so selfishly wedded to personal concerns that they dare not strike a blow for their country's sake, then justly and rightly are they kept down and trampled on, for they deserve nothing better. Every nation secures precisely as good a Government as it merits. If you, the picked men, the most highly educated of the nation, cannot, scorning personal ease and selfish objects, make a resolute struggle to secure greater freedom for yourselves and your country, a more impartial administration, a larger share in the management of your own affairs, then we, your friends, are wrong and our adversaries right, then are Lord Ripon's noble aspirations for your good fruitless and visionary, then, at present at any rate all hopes of progress are at an end and India truly neither desires nor deserves any better Government than she enjoys. Only, if this be so, let us hear no more factious, peevish complaints that you are kept in leading strings and treated like children, for you will have proved yourself such. *Men* know how to act. Let there be no more complaining of Englishmen being preferred to you in all important offices, for if you lack that public spirit, that highest form of altruistic devotion that leads men to subordinate private ease to the public weal, that patriotism that has made Englishmen what they are,—then rightly are these preferred to you, rightly and inevitably have they become your rulers. And rulers and task-masters they must continue, let the yoke gall your shoulders never so sorely, until you realise and stand prepared to act upon the eternal truth that self-sacrifice and unselfishness are the only unfailing guides to freedom and happiness."

Before we proceed to narrate the details relating to the birth of the Congress, it is but meet to recall the names of certain pre-Congress Elders whose labours in a way had laid the foundations of public life in this country.

The British Indian Association in Bengal was started in 1851 and was the institution in whose name men like Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra and Ramgopal Ghose had carried on public work for decades. The Association itself was an active power in the land for nearly half a century. In Bombay the organ of public work was the Bombay Association which had a shorter career than its fellow in Bengal, but had an equally vigorous record of work to its credit under the leadership of men like Sir Mangaldoss Nathubhai and Mr. Naoroji Furdunji. The Association owed its

origin to Dadabhai Naoroji and Mr. Juggannath Sankar Seth. The East India Association, however, superseded this body in the seventies of the last century. In the South, public life was really inaugurated by *The Hindu* amongst whose founders were the honoured names of Messrs. M. Veeraraghavachariar, the Hon'ble Rangiah Naidu, G. Subrahmania Aiyar and N. Subbarau Pantulu. In Maharashtra, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha which sprang up about the same time as *The Hindu*, was the medium through which public work was carried on by men like Messrs. Rao Bahadur K. L. Nulkar and S. H. Chiplonkar.

In Bengal the Indian Association was founded in the year 1876, the moving spirit of the new body being Surendra Nath Banerjea and the first secretary being Ananda Mohan Bose. It must be noted that even in the seventies, public life was beginning to make itself felt by the authorities though it was not well-organised. The newspapers were already a powerful factor in it, for in 1875 there were as many as 475 newspapers, mostly in the provincial languages. Surendra Nath Banerjea, who by a fortunate chance for the country was relieved of his duties as a member of the Indian Civil Service, made his first political tour in Northern India covering the Punjab and the North-West Provinces (U.P.). He was present at the great Darbar held in Delhi, in 1877, and met the leading Princes and people of India at that assembly. It is believed that the idea of organising a vast political gathering was first conceived by Surendra Nath Banerjea under the inspiration furnished by that gathering of the Princes and people of India in 1877. In 1878 S. N. Banerjea visited the Bombay and Madras Presidencies in order to stimulate public opinion on the reactionary policy pursued by Lord Salisbury in reducing the age limit for the Civil Service Examination to 19 years, and to prepare an All-India Memorial to be presented to the House of Commons on the Civil Service question.

It was at this time that Lord Lytton inaugurated his reactionary rule, which was characterised by the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, the Afghan War, the costly Indian Darbar (1877) and the sacrifice of cotton import duties (1877). Lord Lytton was succeeded by Lord Ripon, who inaugurated a new era by concluding a treaty with the Amir of Afghanistan, by repealing the Vernacular Press Act, by promoting Local Self-Government and by introducing the Ilbert Bill. The last was a Bill introduced in 1883 by Mr. Ilbert, the Law Member of the Government of India at the time, the object of which was to remove the bar against the Indian Magistracy trying European and likewise American offenders. This was greatly resented by the Anglo-Indians, some of whom entered into a conspiracy "to overpower the sentries of the Government House and to put the Viceroy on board a steamer at Chand Pal Ghat and send him to England *via* the Cape." This conspiracy had been formed by a number of men in Calcutta "who had bound themselves to carry out the aforesaid plan in the event of Government adhering to their projected legislation." The original Bill was almost abandoned in 1883 in favour of a bare recognition of the principle in the case of the District Magistrates and Sessions Judges only. When Lord Ripon retired he was given a farewell by Indians from one end of the country to the other, which was at once the envy of Eng-

lishmen and an eye-opener to many of them. Sir Auckland Colvin, says Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea in his 'A Nation in the Making' exclaimed, "If it be real, what does it mean?"

The success of the Anglo-Indians awakened the Indians who were not slow to realise that the inwardness of the opposition to the Bill was based on an assertion of racial superiority and its perpetuation. It taught the public men of India at the time the lessons of organisation; and immediately in the year 1883 there was held a political Conference at the Albert Hall in Calcutta, at which both S. N. Banerjea and A. M. Bose were present. It was at this meeting that S. N. Banerjea specifically referred, in his opening address, to the Delhi assemblage as furnishing the model for a like political organisation intended to espouse the country's cause. Mr. Ambika Charan Mazumdar writes in his book 'Indian National Evolution' that "it was an unique spectacle, of which the writer of these pages still retains a vivid impression, of immense enthusiasm and earnestness which throughout characterised the three days' session of the Conference, and at the end of which every one present seemed to have received a new light and a novel inspiration." It was in the following year that the International Exhibition was held in Calcutta to which the Rev. John Murdoch traces the original inspiration for the Indian National Congress. It was in 1881 that the Madras Mahajana Sabha was established and Madras held a Provincial Conference in its turn. In the west the Bombay Presidency Association was started on 31st Jan. 1885 by that famous group of elders,—Mehta, Telang and Tyabji.

It is thus clear that India was feeling the need for some sort of an all-India organisation. It is shrouded in mystery as to who originated this idea of an All-India Congress. Apart from the great Darbar of 1877 or the International Exhibition in Calcutta, which, as stated above, are supposed to have furnished the model for the great national assemblage, it is also said that the idea was conceived in a private meeting of seventeen men after the Theosophical Convention held at Madras in December 1884. The Indian Union started by Mr. Hume after his retirement from the Civil Service is also supposed to have been instrumental in convening the Congress. Whatever the origin, and whoever the originator of the idea, we come to this conclusion, that the idea was in the air, that the need of such an organisation was being felt, that Mr. Allan Octavian Hume took the initiative, and that it was in March 1885, when the first notice was issued convening the first Indian National Union to meet at Poona in the following December, that what had been a vague idea floating generally in the air and influencing simultaneously the thought of thoughtful Indians in the north and the south, the east and the west, assumed a definite shape and became a practical programme of action.

II

It was not merely the political forces and the sense of political subjection that gave birth to the Congress. The Congress doubtless had its political objective, but it also was the organ and exponent of a movement of national renaissance. For fifty years and more before the birth of the

Congress, the leaven of national rejuvenation had been at work. In fact national life in its protean aspects was in a state of ferment so early as in the times of Rammohan Roy, who may in one sense be regarded as the prophet of Indian Nationalism and the Father of modern India. He had a wide vision and a broad outlook. While it is true that the socio-religious condition of his day was the subject of his special attention in his reformist activities, he had nevertheless a keen sense of the grave political wrongs by which his country was afflicted at the time and made a strenuous effort to seek an early redress of those wrongs. Rammohan Roy was born in 1776 and passed away at Bristol in 1833. His name is associated with two great reforms in India; namely, the abolition of *Sati* or *Sahagamanam* and the introduction of Western learning into the country. In the acute controversy that raged in the thirties of the nineteenth century, Rammohan Roy took no small part and the final decision of Lord William Bentinck in 1835 in favour of Western learning, even as against the recommendations of the Court of Directors in London, was largely due to Rammohan Roy's own bias towards the Occidentalists and the influence he exercised over the public opinion of the day. In the closing period of his life he chose to visit England, and his passion for liberty was so great that when he reached the Cape of Good Hope he insisted on his being carried to a French vessel where he saw the flag of liberty flying so that he might be able to do homage to that flag, and when he saw the flag he shouted, "Glory, Glory, Glory to the flag!" Although he had gone to England primarily as the ambassador of the Moghul Emperor to plead his cause in London, yet he took the opportunity to place some of the pressing Indian grievances before a Committee of the House of Commons. He submitted three papers, on the Revenue system of India, the Judicial system of India, and the Material condition of India. He was honoured by the East India Company with a public dinner. When in 1832 the Charter Act was before Parliament, he vowed that if the Bill was not passed he would give up his residence in the British dominion and reside in America. During his time he had witnessed the worst repression of the Press in India. "The good days of Indian Journalism inaugurated by Lord Hastings, the Governor-General, by relaxing the severe Press restrictions of former times were soon clouded by the temporary accession to the post of Governor-General, in 1823, of Mr. John Adam, a member of the Civil Service." As a result one Mr. Buckingham, the Editor of *The Calcutta Journal*, was deported from India on two months' notice and Mr. Sanford Arnot, his assistant, was arrested in his office and put on board an England going vessel,—all this for some criticisms of the administration made by them. A Press Ordinance was passed on the 14th March 1823 which imposed the severest censorship upon the entire Press, both Anglo-Indian and Indian, and made it obligatory on the part of intending publishers and proprietors of newspapers to obtain a licence from the Governor-General. The Ordinance was pushed through the Supreme Court according to the Law then existing after only 20 days' publication in that Court.

Rammohan Roy fought against it in the Court by engaging the services of two lawyers, and when he failed he got up a public petition to the King

of England with no better result. But the seed that he sowed bore fruit in 1835 when Sir Charles Metcalfe liberated the Indian Press once again. While in England Rammohan Roy had the satisfaction of seeing the appeal of his adversaries against the abolition of *Sati* rejected by Parliament and also of seeing the Charter Act passed.

The story of the 'Indian Mutiny' so-called, arising primarily from the policy of Lord Dalhousie in denying the right of adoption to the widows of certain Princes and declaring their States escheat is well-known. The suppression of the rebellion was followed by the establishment of the Universities in 1858, and of the High Courts and the Legislative Councils in India between 1861 and 1863. Just before the 'mutiny' the 'Widow Remarriage Act' was passed as also the Act relating to conversion into Christianity. In the sixties of the nineteenth century then, intimate contact was established with Western learning and literature. Western legal insitutions and Parliamentary methods were inaugurated, to mark a new era in the field of law and legislation. The impact of Western civilization on the East could not but leave a deep impress upon the beliefs and sentiments of the Indian people who came directly under its influence. The germs of religious reform planted in the days of Rammohan Roy, became broadcast erelong. Keshab Chandra Sen, on whose shoulders fell the mantle of Rammohan Roy, spread the gospel of the Brahmo Samaj far and wide and gave a new social orientation to its tenets. He turned his attention to the temperance movement and made common cause with the temperance reformers in England. He was largely responsible for the passing of the Civil Marriage Act,—III of 1872—which allowed a form of civil marriage to non-Christians, provided they declared themselves as not belonging to any of the following communities—Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Parsee or Jew. This Act abolished early marriage, made polygamy penal and sanctioned widow marriages and inter-caste marriages. He interested himself further in trying to raise the marriageable age of girls and prepared a Bill in 1872 on the subject which adopted 14 as the minimum age.

Erelong schisms arose in the Brahmo Samaj on account of the early marriage of Keshab Chandra Sen's daughter with the Maharaja of Cooch Bihar, which evoked protests amongst his fellow workers and led to the carving out of a protestant section under the name of 'Sadharan Brahmo Samaj' under the leadership of Ananda Mohan Bose. It is interesting to note that Ananda Mohan Bose later became the President of the Congress in 1898. The Brahmo Samaj of Bengal had its repercussions all over the country. In Poona, the movement assumed the name of Prarthana Samaj under the leadership of M. G. Ranade, who, it will be remembered, was the founder of the Social Reform movement which for long years continued to be an adjunct of the Congress. One feature however of this reformist movement was a certain disregard for the past and a spirit of revolt from the time-honoured and traditional beliefs of the country, which arose from an undue glamour presented by the Western institutions and heightened greatly by the political prestige associated with them. Naturally then, there was bound to be a reaction, at any rate a correction, to the denationalising tendencies engendered by the reformist movements. The Arya Samaj in the north-west, founded by the venerable

Swami Dayanada Saraswati, and the Theosophical movement from the south, furnished the necessary corrective to the spirit of heterodoxy and even heresy which the Western learning brought with it. Both of them were intensely Nationalist movements; only, the Arya Samaj movement which owed its birth to the inspiration of the great Dayananda Saraswati was aggressive in its patriotic zeal, and while holding fast to the cult of the infallibility of the Vedas and the superiority of the Vedic culture, was at the same time not inimical to broad social reform. It thus developed a virile manhood in the Nation which was the synthesis of what was best in its heredity, with what is best in its environment. It fought some of the prevailing social evils and religious superstitions in Hinduism much as the Brahmo Samaj had battled against polytheism, idolatry and polygamy. Of course, as was to be expected, there arose two schools in the Arya Samaj itself, composed of those of the Gurukula cult who stood for the Vedic ideals of Brahmacharya and religious service, and those who sought to regenerate society imbibing in due measure modern Western culture through the modern type of educational institutions. Swami Shraddhananda, the Martyr, and Lala Lajpat Rai, the Hero, stand out to us as marked exponents of the respective cults. The Theosophical movement, while it extended its studies and sympathies to the wide world, laid special emphasis on a rediscovery, as well as a rehabilitation of all that was great and glorious in the Oriental culture. It was this passion that led Mrs. Besant to start a college in Benares, the holy city of India. The Theosophical activities, while developing a spirit of international brotherhood, helped to check that sense of rationalist superiority of the West and planted anew a cultural centre in India which attracted the savants and the scholars of the West once again to this ancient land.

The latest phase of national renaissance in India prior to the Congress was inaugurated in Bengal by that great sage, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who later found in Swami Vivekananda, his chief apostle carrying his gospel East and West. The Ramakrishna Mission is not merely an organisation wedded to occultism on the one hand or realism on the other, but to a profound transcendentalism which, however, does not ignore the supreme duty of 'Loka-Sangraha' or social service. It also supplied the key to the solution of the many socio-political problems that confront the nations of the world to-day. All these movements were really so many threads in the strand of Indian Nationalism and the Nation's duty was to evolve a synthesis so as to be able to dispel prejudice and superstition, to renovate and purify the old faith, and Vedantic idealism, and reconcile it with the Nationalism of the new age. The Indian National Congress was destined to fulfil this great mission. How far it has been able to do it during the past half a century, it is for us to study.

III

It was in the midst of these conditions that the establishment of the great Indian National Congress was conceived. Mr. Hume's idea was originally to allow provincial organisations like the Indian Association of Calcutta, the Presidency Association of Bombay, and the Mahajana Sabha

of Madras to take up political questions, and the All-India National Union to concentrate more or less on social questions. He consulted Lord Dufferin who had recently come out as Viceroy, and the advice he gave cannot be better rendered than in the words of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee who wrote in his 'Introduction to Indian Politics', published in 1898, as follows:—

"It will probably be news to many that the Indian National Congress, as it was originally started and as it has since been carried on, is in reality the work of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava when that nobleman was the Governor-General of India. Mr. A. O. Hume, C. B., had in 1884, conceived the idea that it would be of great advantage to the country if leading Indian politicians could be brought together once a year to discuss social matters and be upon friendly footing with one another. He did not desire that politics should form part of their discussion, for, there were recognised political bodies in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and other parts of India, and he thought that these bodies might suffer in importance if, when Indian politicians from different parts of the country came together, they discussed politics. His idea further was that the Governor of the Province where the politicians met should be asked to preside over their deliberations, and that thereby great cordiality should be established between the official classes and the non-official Indian politicians. Full of these ideas he saw the noble Marquis when he went to Simla early in 1885, after Lord Dufferin had in the December previous assumed the Viceroyalty of India. Lord Dufferin took great interest in the matter and after considering over it for some time he sent for Mr. Hume and told him that, in his opinion, Mr. Hume's project would not be of much use. He said there was no body of persons in this country who performed the functions which Her Majesty's Opposition did in England. The newspapers, even if they really represented the views of the people, were not reliable and as the English were necessarily ignorant of what was thought of them and their policy in Native circles, it would be very desirable in their interests as well as the interests of the ruled that Indian politicians should meet yearly and point out to the Government in what respects the administration was defective and how it could be improved, and he added that an assembly such as he proposed should not be presided over by the Local Governor, for in his presence the people might not like to speak out their minds. Mr. Hume was convinced by Lord Dufferin's arguments and when he placed the two schemes, his own and Lord Dufferin's, before leading politicians in Calcutta, Bombay Madras, and other parts of the country, the latter unanimously accepted Lord Dufferin's scheme and proceeded to give effect to it. Lord Dufferin had made it a condition with Mr. Hume that his name in connection with the scheme of the Congress should not be divulged so long as he remained in the country, and his condition was faithfully maintained and none but the men consulted by Mr. Hume knew anything about the matter."

In March 1885, it was decided to hold a meeting of representatives from all parts of India at the ensuing Christmas. Poona was considered

the most central and the most suitable place. From this meeting was issued the following circular:—

A Conference of the Indian National Union will be held at Poona from the 25th to the 31st December, 1885.

The Conference will be composed of Delegates—leading politicians well-acquainted with the English language—from all parts of the Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies.

The direct objects of the Conference will be: (1) to enable all the most earnest labourers in the cause of national progress to become personally known to each other; (2) to discuss and decide upon the political operations to be undertaken during the ensuing year.

Indirectly, this Conference will form the germ of a Native Parliament, and if properly conducted, will constitute in a few years an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions. The first Conference will decide whether the next shall be again held at Poona, or whether, following the precedent of the British Association, the Conference shall be held year by year at different important centres.

This year the Conference being in Poona, Mr. Chiplonkar and others of the Sarvajanik Sabha have consented to form a Reception Committee, in whose hands will rest the whole of the local arrangements. The Peshwa's Garden near the Parbati Hill will be utilised both as a place of meeting (it contains a fine Hall, like the garden, the property of the Sabha) and as a residence for the delegates, each of whom will be there provided with suitable quarters. Much importance is attached to this, since, when all thus reside together for a week, far greater opportunities for friendly intercourse will be afforded than if the delegates were (as at the time of the late Bombay demonstrations) scattered about in dozens of private lodging houses all over the town.

Delegates are expected to find their own way to and from Poona, but from the time they reach the Poona Railway Station until they again leave it, everything that they can need, carriage, accommodation, food, etc., will be provided for them gratuitously.

The cost thus involved will be defrayed from the Reception Fund, which the Poona Association most liberally offers to provide in the first instance, but to which all delegates, whose means warrant their incurring this further expense, will be at liberty to contribute any sum they please. Any unutilised balance of such donations will be carried forward as a nucleus for next year's Reception Fund.

It is believed that, exclusive of our Poona friends, the Bombay Presidency, including Sindh and the Berars, will furnish about 20 delegates, Madras and Lower Bengal each about the same number,

and the N. W. Province, Oudh, and the Punjab together about half this number.

Having already armed himself with the blessings of the Viceroy in India, Mr. Hume proceeded to England and consulted Lord Ripon, Lord Dalhousie, Sir James Caird, John Bright, Mr. Reid, Mr. Slagg and other eminent men before he started the Congress. Under their advice he organised what became the nucleus of the Indian Parliamentary Committee in England to act for India by obtaining pledges from candidates for Parliamentary election, not that they would help India but only that they would take interest in Indian affairs. He further arranged an Indian Telegraph Union to provide funds to send telegrams on important matters to leading Provincial papers in England, with which he arranged for their publication.

A graphic account of the 1st session of the Congress is given by Mrs. Besant in her publication, 'How India Wrought for Freedom', and we are indebted to her for the following extracts therefrom:—

"The first meeting did not, however, take place at Poona, for, only a few days before Christmas, some sporadic cases of cholera occurred, possibly presaging an outbreak, and it was thought wiser to move the Conference, now call the Congress, to Bombay. The Managers of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College and Boarding House placed the whole of their fine buildings at the disposal of the Congress, and all was ready by the morning of the 27th December for the reception of the Representatives of the Indian Nation. As we glance over the lists of those who were present, how many we see who became famous in the annals of India's struggle for Freedom! Among those who could not act as Representatives we note the Reformer, Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunatha Rao, Deputy Collector of Madras; the Hon. Mr. Mahadev G. Ranade, then member of the Legislative Council and Small Cause Court Judge of Poona, later to be a Judge of the High Court of Bombay, and leader honoured and trusted; Lala Baijnath of Agra was there, to be known as scholar and writer later on; and Professors K. Sundararaman and R. G. Bhandarkar. Among the Representatives may be noted Editors of well-known Indian papers, of *The Dyan Prakash, The Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, The Maratha, The Kesari, The Nababibhakar, The Indian Mirror, The Nassim, The Hindusthani, The Tribune, The Indian Union, The Spectator, The Indu Prakash, The Hindu, The Crescent.* How many names shine out, familiar and honoured: Mr. A. O. Hume is there from Simla; W. C. Bonnerjee and Norendranath Sen from Calcutta; W. S. Apte and G. G. Agarkar from Peona; Gangaprasad Varma from Lucknow; Dadabhai Naoroji, K. T. Telang, Pherozeshah M. Mehta—then, as now, leader of the Bombay Corporation, D. E. Wacha, B. M. Malabari, N. G. Chandavarkar, from Bombay; P. Rangiah Naidu, President of the Mahajana S[illegible] S. Subrahmania Aiyar, P. Ananda Charlu, G. Subrahmani[illegible] Viraraghavachariar, from Madras; P. Kesava Pillai f[illegible]

These are among the earliest who wrought for India's Freedom, and those yet on earth, are working for her still.

"At 12 noon, on December 28th, 1885, in the Hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, the First National Congress met. The first voices heard were those of Mr. A. O. Hume, the Hon. Mr. S. Subrahmania Aiyar and the Hon. Mr. K. T. Telang, who proposed, seconded and supported the election of the first President, Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee. A solemn and historic moment was that in which the first of the long line of men thus honoured by the Motherland took his seat, to preside over her first National Assembly.

"After alluding to the representative and weighty character of the Congress, he laid down under four heads the objects of the Congress:

(a) The promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in our country's cause in the various parts of the Empire.

(b) The eradication, by direct friendly personal intercourse, of all possible race, creed, or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country, and the fuller development and consolidation of those sentiments of national unity that had their origin in our beloved Lord Ripon's ever memorable reign.

(c) The authoritative record, after this has been carefully elicited by the fullest discussion, of the matured opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing of the social questions of the day.

(d) The determination of the lines upon and methods by which during the next twelve months it is desirable for Native politicians to labour in the public interests.

"The nine resolutions of the first National Congress mark the beginning of the formulation of India's demands:

The first asked for a Royal Commission to enquire into the working of Indian administration.

The second for the abolition of the India Council.

The third dealt with the defect of the Legislative Councils in which then all the members were nominated, and asked for the admission of elected members, for the right of interpellation, for the creation of Councils in the N. W. P. and Oudh, and in the Punjab, and for a Standing Committee in the House of Commons to consider formal protests from majorities in the Councils.

The fourth prayed for simultaneous examinations for the I. C. S. and the raising of the age of candidates.

The fifth and sixth dealt with Military expenditure.

The seventh protested against the annexation of Upper Burma and the proposed incorporation of it with India.

The eighth ordered the sending of the resolutions to political Associations, and they were discussed and passed all over the country by political bodies and public meetings, an admirable plan which has fallen into desuetude, they were carried with much enthusiasm, and here and there amended on minor points.

The final resolution fixed the next Congress at Calcutta, on 28th December, 1886.

In Calcutta, a political organisation of middle class Muslims was formed in 1885. It joined with two other groups in organising the second National Congress held that same year also in Calcutta. The Conference later gave way to the Congress. It is true that the 1st Congress of 1885 was attended by only 2 Muslims, the second at Calcutta 33, and 6th session at Calcutta in 1890 by 156 Muslims out of 702 delegates or 22 per cent.

IV

Great institutions have always had small beginnings, even as the great rivers of the world start as thin streams. At the commencement of their career and course, they progress rapidly, and, as they widen, become slower and steadier. By the confluence of their various tributaries, they are enriched as they flow on, both in volume and content. The evolution of the Indian National Congress presents the same phenomenon. It had to cut its way through mighty obstacles and therefore entertained modest ideals. As it gained a foothold on the affections of the people, it widened its course and absorbed into itself several collateral movements wedded to the solution of social, ethical and economic problems. Its activities were in the earlier stages naturally characterised by a sense of diffidence and doubt. As it attained man's estate it became more and more conscious of its strength and capacity, and its outlook was soon widened. From an attitude of prayerfulness and importunity, it developed self-consciousness and self-assertion. This was followed by an intensive campaign of education and propaganda, which rapidly resulted in extensive organisation of the country and campaigns of direct action. Starting with the humble object of seeking redress of grievances, the Congress erelong developed into the one accredited organ of the Nation that proudly put forth its demands. Limited as its range of vision was in the earlier decades to matters administrative, it soon became a powerful and authoritative exponent of the political ambitions of the people of India. Its doors were thrown open to every class of citizens and to every grade of society. Though in the beginning it fought shy of problems that were described as social, yet in the fulness of time, it recognized no such compartmentalism of life; and surviving the traditional and time-honoured demarcation of life issues as social and political, it has developed a comprehensive ideal in which life is considered as one and indivisible. The Congress then is a National organisation that knows

no difference between British India and Indian India, between one Province and another, between the classes and the masses, between towns and villages, between the rich and the poor, between agricultural and industrial interests, between castes and communities, or religions. This was the claim put forward by Gandhi at the second R. T. C. in his speech before the Federal Structure Committee, and we cannot do better than extract here below the relevant portion of that powerful speech :—

"I am but a poor humble agent acting on behalf of the Indian National Congress; and it might be as well to remind ourselves of what the Congress stands for and what it is. You will then extend your sympathy to me, because I know that the burden that rests upon my shoulders is really very great. The Congress is, if I am not mistaken, the oldest political organisation we have in India. It has had nearly 50 years of life, during which period it has, without any interruption, held its annual session. It is what it means,—National. It represents no particular community, no particular class, no particular interest. It claims to represent all Indian interests and all classes. It is a matter of the greatest pleasure to me to state that it was first conceived in an English brain. Allan Octavian Hume we knew as the Father of the Congress. It was nursed by two great Parsees Pherozeshah Mehta and Dadabhoy Naoroji, whom all India delighted to recognise as its Grand Old Man. From the very commencement the Congress had Mussalmans, Christians, Anglo-Indians, I might say all religions, sects, creeds, represented upon it more or less fully. The late Badruddin Tyabji identified himself with the Congress. We have had Mussalmans as Presidents of the Congress, and Parsees too. I can recall at least one Indian Christian at the present moment. Kali Charan Banerjee (an Indian Christian), than whom I have not had the privilege of knowing a purer Indian, was also thoroughly identified with the Congress. I miss, as I have no doubt all of you miss, the presence in our midst of Mr. K. T. Paul. Although, I do not know, but so far as I know, he never officially belonged to the Congress, he was a Nationalist to the full.

"As you know, the late Maulana Mahomed Ali whose presence also we miss to-day, was a President of the Congress, and at present we have four Mussalmans as members of the Working Committee which consists of 15 members. We have had women as our Presidents; Dr. Annie Besant was the first, and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu followed. We have her as a member of the Working Committee also; and so, if we have no distinctions of class or creed, we have no distinctions of sex either.

"The Congress has from its very commencement taken up the cause of the so-called 'untouchables'. There was a time when the Congress had at every annual session, as its adjunct, the Social Conference, to which the late Ranade had dedicated his energies among his many activities. Headed by him, you will find the programme of the Social Conference, reform in connection with the untouchables taking a prominent place. But in 1920, the Congress took a large

step and brought the question of removal of untouchability as a plank on the political platform, made it an important item of the political programme. Just as the Congress considered Hindu-Muslim unity, thereby meaning unity amongst all the classes, to be indispensable for the attainment of Swaraj, so also did the Congress consider the removal of the curse of untouchability as an indispensable condition for the attainment of full freedom.

"The position the Congress took up in 1920 remains the same today, and so you will see that the Congress has attempted from its very beginning to be what it has described itself to be; namely, National in every sense of the term. If your Highnesses will permit me to say so, in the very early stages, the Congress took up your cause also. Let me remind this Committee that it was the G. O. M. of India who sponsored the cause of Kashmir and Mysore, and these two great Houses, I venture in all humility to submit, owe not a little to the efforts of Dadabhai Naoroji and the Congress.

"Even up to now the Congress has endeavoured to serve the Princes of India by refraining from any interference in their domestic and internal affairs. I hope, therefore, that this brief introduction that I thought fit to give will serve to enable the Sub-Committee and those who are at all interested in the claims of the Congress, to understand that it has endeavoured to deserve the claim that it has made. It has failed, I know, often to live up to the claim, but I venture to submit, that if you were to examine the history of the Congress you would find that it has more often succeeded, and progressively succeeded than failed.

"Above all the Congress represents, in its essence, the dumb semi-starved millions scattered over the length and breadth of the land in its 7,00,000 villages, no matter whether they come from what is called British India, or what is called Indian India. Every interest which, in the opinion of the Congress, is worthy of protection, has to subserve this interest, and if there is a genuine real clash I have no hesitation in saying on behalf of the Congress that the Congress will sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interest of these dumb millions. It is, therefore, essentially a peasant organisation, and it is becoming so progressively. You, and even the Indian members of the Sub-Committee, will perhaps be astonished to find that to-day the Congress, through its organisation, the All-India Spinners' Association, is finding work for nearly 50,000 women in nearly 2,000 villages, and these women are possibly 50 per cent. Mussalman women. Thousands of them belong to the so-called unfouchable class. We have thus, in this constructive manner, penetrated these villages and the effort is being made to cover every one of the 7,00,000 villages. It is a superhuman task, but if human effort can do so, you will presently find the Congress covering all of these villages and bringing to them the message of the spinning wheel."

Here in a nutshell is the description by Gandhi of this great National organisation. If the Congress has achieved nothing else, it has done this,

namely, it has discovered its own destiny, it has focussed the thoughts and activities of the Nation to a single point. It has developed a certain self-consciousness amongst the teeming millions of India and animated them with a sense of unity, hope and self-confidence. The Congress has further given a distinctly national turn to the thoughts and ambitions of the Indians and enabled them to rediscover their common language and literature, their common crafts and arts, and above all their common aspirations and ideals. It has not had a smooth course of progress during the past fifty years, and the graph of its career indicates its own rises and falls, synchronising with the hopes and fears of the people and the victories and reverses of their struggle. To describe the origin of such a virile organisation, to recount the services of the many patriarchs and progenitors that assisted at its birth, to trace the activities of the patriots that nurtured this institution in its formative period of life, to portray the vicissitudes through which the organisation has passed in its adolescence, to delineate the glories and greatness of its achievement in its manhood as well as the sorrows and shame that it has sustained, to review the phases through which its faith and philosophy have passed before the Congress became pledged to "the attainment of Swaraj by all peaceful and legitimate means," these are the objectives held in view in attempting to chronicle the history of the Congress over the past half-century of its existence.

CHAPTER II

A Rapid Review of the Resolutions of the Congress

(1885-1915)

We do not propose in this Chapter to take the sessions of the Congress year by year. It would be better to take up the important matters which formed the subjects for discussion, and resolutions at successive Congresses, and thus show at a glance the course of the Congress policy and programme up to say 1915, after which a new orientation in policy and somewhat different methods of treatment came to be adopted. For this purpose the important subjects of discussion and resolution may be divided into separate main-heads and dealt with one after another.

THE INDIA COUNCIL

At its very earliest session, the Congress urged the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State as it was constituted, and the proposal was reiterated at two subsequent sessions, the tenth Congress proposing the constitution, in its place, of a Standing Committee of the House of Commons to advise the Secretary of State. But the mover of the resolution, Mr. Eardley Norton, was not free from doubt about this latter proposal. He said:

> "Personally I am not very much enamoured of the suggestion that in lieu of the Secretary of State's Council we should have a Standing Committee of Parliament at Home, because I feel that the Standing Committee may in course of years become the monopoly of the retired Anglo-Indian official who tickles into Parliament . . . . But personally I would sooner embark on any venture; sooner trust to any new tribunal; sooner pin my faith on any proposed combination than entrust anything in which I felt a personal interest to the clutches or the carelessness of the India Council. With me there is no mending that Council. It must be ending. The Standing Committee of the House of Commons will at any rate have this advantage; in the first place it will be very much less expensive, because it will sweep away the £1,200 a year of these gentlemen, and in the second place you will have the advantage of its members speaking in public, subject to public opinion, subject to debate, and subject to criticism. So far as I am concerned this part of the resolution is only tentative. I shall be open to discuss and consider any better substitute for the Council."

Specific proposals of reform were made by the Karachi session held in 1913, which passed the following resolution:—

> That this Congress is of opinion that the Council of the Secretary of State for India, as at present constituted, should be abolished, and makes the following suggestions for its reconstruction:

(a) that the salary of the Secretary of State for India should be placed on the English Estimates;

(b) that with a view to the efficiency and independence of the Council, it is expedient that it should be partly nominated and partly elected;

(c) that the total number of members of the Council should be not less than nine;

(d) that the elected portion of the Council should consist of not less than one-third of the total number of members, who should be non-official Indians chosen by a constituency consisting of the elected members of the Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils;

(e) that the remaining portion of the nominated Councillors should consist of officials who have served in India for not less than ten years and who have not been away from India for more than two years;

(f) that the character of the Council should be advisory and not administrative;

(g) that the term of office of each member should be five years.

The reason for the modified resolutions passed at a few later sessions is not a weakening of conviction that the abolition of the Council is desirable, but the feeling that there was less probability of early abolition than of reform. That the conviction of the inutility of the Council is still there, is proved by the clause advocating its abolition in the scheme of Reforms adopted in 1917.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Few people could lay the charge of immoderation against the Congress at its inception and for a long time thereafter. All that was prayed for at the first Congress was that "the Supreme and existing Local Legislative Councils should be expanded by the admission of a considerable proportion of elected members (and the creation of similar Councils for the N. W. P. and Oudh (U.P.) and also for the Punjab)," holding that all Budgets should be referred to the Councils, that the right of interpellation be granted, and that "a standing Committee of the House of Commons should be constituted to receive and consider any formal protests that may be recorded by majorities of such Councils against the exercise by the Executive of the power, which would be vested in it, of overruling the decision of such majorities." That is to say, in 1885, the Congress wanted a Parliamentary safeguard against bureaucratic actions, such as have been lately witnessed in profusion in the Assembly in respect of the rejection or vetoing of popular demands accepted by a majority, and the certification of Government demands rejected by the people's representatives. The second session of the Congress elaborated a scheme of Council Reform, and while asking for a 50 per cent. elected strength, conceded the principle of indirect election by Municipalities and Local Boards, by the Chambers of Commerce and the Universities, to the Local Councils, and by the Local Councils to the Supreme Council. It further conceded to Government the right of overruling the decisions of the Councils, but

provided for appeals against Executive action to the Government of India and to the Standing Committee of the House of Commons, to which bodies the respective Executives concerned should, within a month of overruling, duly explain their action. The same resolution was repeated in 1887, 1888, 1889. In 1890 the Congress supported the Bill to amend the Indian Councils Act introduced by Charles Bradlaugh as calculated to secure a substantial instalment of Reforms. The Bill, it may be noted in passing, was dropped. In 1891 the Congress reiterated its conviction that India could not be governed well until her people were allowed, through their elected representatives, a potential voice in the Legislatures. Lord Cross's Act of Council Reform was passed in 1892, and then the Congress concentrated upon an attack on the Rules of the Government of India and the practice of Local Governments which necessitated many alterations.

We must not omit to mention the fact that the Reforms of 1892 did not provide for the election of the representatives to the Legislative Councils. The so-called right of election to the Legislatures enjoyed by Local Bodies and by other Electorates amounted merely to nomination by those bodies, and it was up to Government to accept them or to reject them. In practice, however, Government invariably accepted the nominations. The fact was that Lord Lansdowne's Government uniformly resisted the principle of election even of an indirect character. The representation to the Supreme Council was similarly arranged, only four seats being open to be filled up by the recommendation of the non-official members of the four Provincial Legislative Councils then in existence,—Madras, Bombay, Bengal and N. W. P.

In 1892 the Congress, while accepting in a loyal spirit the Indian Councils Act, regretted that the Act itself did not in terms concede to the people the right of electing their own representatives to the Councils. In 1893 it thanked the Government for its liberal spirit in giving effect to the Act but also pointed out material alterations considered necessary, if real effect was to be given to the Act. It also reiterated the demand for a Council for the Punjab. These requests were repeated in 1894 and 1897. The Reforms of 1892, however, conceded the right of interpellation for the members of Councils in 1893, and the Congress asked in 1895 for the right to preface their questions by short explanations which is not permitted even to-day.

THE MORLEY-MINTO REFORMS

It was not till 1904 that the Congress reverted to the subject. In that year a demand was also made in favour of direct representation to the House of Commons, at the rate of two members to each Province, and a further expansion of the Councils in the country, with the right to divide the House on financial matters, the right of veto to the Head of the Government being of course conceded. A plea was also put in for the appointment of Indians to the Council of the Secretary of State and to the Executive Councils in India. In 1905 the Congress again pressed for Reforms and in 1906 expressed the opinion that the system of Government obtaining in the Self-Governing Dominions should be extended

to India, and as steps leading thereto, there should be simultaneous examinations held in England and India, adequate representation of Indians in the Council of the Secretary of State, an expansion of the Supreme and Provincial Legislative Councils, allowing larger and truer representation of the people and larger control over the financial and executive administration of the country, and an increase in the powers of local bodies. In 1908 the Congress began to rejoice over the coming Reforms before time for it, gave a most hearty and unqualified welcome to the Reform proposals, and expressed the hope that the details would be worked out in the same liberal spirit in which the proposals were conceived. Disappointment, however, was in store for the country. Even apart from the measure of representation, there remained the fact that the Regulations passed under the Reforms Statute of 1909 were even less liberal than John Morley had indicated in his Despatch earlier. This reminds us of later events in which the pronouncements of Lord Irwin were toned down by the Round Table Conference of 1930-33, and the plans of the Conferences were further diluted by the White Paper, which in turn was softened by the J. P. C. Report, while the Bill went lower down than the Report, and the Act finally has emerged as an attenuated form of the Bill.

It is necessary at this stage to review rapidly what the Reforms were, which were for a decade associated with the names of Minto and Morley. The Supreme Council consisted of 60 additional members, of whom only 27 were elected representatives. Of the remaining 33, not more than 28 might be officials. But the Governor-General also nominated three non-officials to represent certain specified Communities, and had at his disposal two other seats to be filled by nomination, more to represent interest than territories. The elected seats themselves were partly shared by certain special constituencies, such as the Landowners in seven Provinces, the Muslims in five Provinces, Muslim Land-owners in one Province (at alternative elections only), and two Chambers of Commerce, while the residue of open seats was filled by election by the non-official members of the nine Provincial Legislative Councils. Lord Morley made no secret of the fact that the "Governor-General's Council, in its Legislative as well as its Executive capacity, should continue to be so constituted as to ensure its constant and uninterrupted power to fulfil the constitutional obligations that it owes, and must always owe, to His Majesty's Government and to the Imperial Parliament." Of the Reforms themselves Morley stated: "If it could be said that this chapter of Reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a Parliamentary system in India, I for one would have nothing at all to do with it." But the verdic. of Lord Chelmsford and Mr. Montagu as embodied in their (Montford) Report on these Reforms is doubtless even more authoritative: "They have ceased to satisfy Indian opinion, and their continuance can only lead to a futher cleavage between the Indian members and the Government and a further cultivation of criticism unchecked by Responsibility."

Before dealing with Congress resolutions on the subject, we may here anticipate events and complete the picture.

The Morley-Minto Reforms opened the next stage of the question. Two Indians (since increased to three) were appointed in 1907 as mem-