2. INDIA AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

By PROF. C. A. W. MANNING

. . . Of all the States-members of the League of Nations, India is the one whose Government probably finds it the most difficult to justify the contribution which it makes. That contribution . . . is higher than that of any of the States-members of the League which do not sit permanently on the Council, while the proportion of the work of the League which can be truly described as of special value or interest to India is far from corresponding to India's contribution to the expenses of the League. . . .

I must remind the members of this Assembly that the question is often being asked in India whether membership of the League is really worth the price.

THE EARL OF LYTTON (India),
addressing the League Assembly, 1928

GOODWILL is a poor substitute for specialised knowledge. While not hoping to transfer to the importunate editors the responsibility for a promise which has proved easier to give than to fulfil, the writer feels bound to declare plainly that this chapter contains nothing more authoritative than some impressions collected, by one who has seen nothing of India, mainly from a most cursory survey of part of the published material on a subject which deserved, by its intrinsic importance, a more scholarly, not to say leisurely, treatment.

A diplomat would possibly open with a reference to the immemorial ties by which his own country was indissolubly linked in affection and friendship with India. A mere politician might produce from his heart a long-cherished yearning to visit, and, peradventure, to understand, that wonderful sub-continent. The writer is neither of these.

There once was—or there probably was—a professor who, being asked the time, answered, "Tell me, little boy, what do we mean by time?" Sceptics may ask whether India exists—otherwise than as a geographical expression. What, indeed, *is* India? What is France? What is Germany? What is the League? Evidence may be adduced of a growing national consciousness in India to-day; but the "India" which belongs to the League is the "India" which appeared in 1919 at the Peace Conference, and in 1917 at the Imperial War Conference. In so far as such "India" exists to-day, it existed then. In the theory, and for the purposes, of the League constitution, a unitary "India," embracing all that we see on the map, the Indian States included, is, and has from the first been, *deemed* to exist, not less fully than have its fellow members, France, for instance, or the British Empire. On this peculiar plane the question of national consciousness is neither here nor there. India was among the "original members"; and the Covenant's

phrases, "*se gouverne librement*" and "fully self-governing," whatever they may mean, apply technically to future applicants only and not to those who got in on the ground floor.

The reason India as a *whole* was represented at the Imperial War Conference was because, along with the Dominions, that country had been an important source of voluntary man- and money-power to the Allied cause. When, as attesting India's aptitude for service in Geneva, allusion is fittingly made to the pacificism declared to be widespread among her peoples, there is pathos in the reflection that, historically, her membership is an outcome of the martial spirit manifested among certain of her minorities.

"Very early in the meetings of the [League of Nations] Commission [in 1919]," says Mr. Hunter Miller, "it had been agreed that India should be a member of the League. Mr. Wilson had acquiesced and no one else seemed to care." Over the coming of the Dominions to Paris the French, after a struggle, had given way. Once the portals of Versailles, and hence of Geneva, had been opened to these ill-classified British hangers-on, what was one more among so many? Continental metaphysics will hardly in those days have been capable of arguing from the doubtfully intelligible distinction between Dominion status proper and the then position of India.

"No one by any stretch of imagination," says Mr. Hunter Miller, could say that India, like Canada, was "in all essentials" a self-governing country. "The answer," he adds, is that "India contains three hundred million people, and to say that those people should have no representatives of their own in the League of Nations would be carrying the logic of governmental representation very far." One may doubt, however, if the point was really approached in this manner. As between India and other non-self-governing parts of the Empire, the numerical test would have furnished no more than a difference of degree.

So much for history. Mr. Miller summed up India's membership as "an anomaly among anomalies." In a volume devoted to "analysis," we have now to examine in what the anomaly consists—and in what way it works.

Being aware that at present India is not a self-governing Dominion, still less an independent sovereign State, and being aware that the Secretary of State, a member of the British Cabinet, is technically the superior of the Governor-General in Council, a student may reasonably begin with the question: What in substance does India's "separate" membership mean except a second vote at the disposition of England? Quotations can certainly be so selected as to support the simple answer:

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"It is obvious that India, under her present constitution, cannot have a separate foreign policy of her own"—thus the India Office memorandum to the Simon Commission. In 1924 the Indian delegates remarked that in the discussions on the Geneva Protocol their part had "necessarily" been one of "subordinate" co-operation with the British Empire. And yet in 1921 we read that "the absolute independence of India"—at least in certain respects—"was fully recognised" at the Assembly; and, in 1929, the delegation refer to certain incidents as showing "the reality of India's independence as a member of the League." Are these ideas as difficult to reconcile as superficially they seem?

From a purely formal standpoint, a vote cast in the Geneva Assembly is simply that of a delegation—but it is assumed in some sense to reflect the attitude of the country represented. Each Government, through the person for the time being holding some appropriate office, appoints its delegates and, with respect to voting, gives them such instructions as it thinks fit. In India's case the competent officer is the Secretary of State, who, with the Cabinet as a whole, is, through Parliament, responsible to the British electorate. From a purely formal standpoint, therefore, it might indeed be supposed that the Indian vote was inevitably the expression of English views. Nevertheless, this

is not the whole story. Students of Indian affairs are familiar with what is termed "the fiscal autonomy convention," a principle of governmental practice whereby India's fiscal policy is related to the wishes of the Indian legislature. If, even in fiscal matters, the Secretary of State is responsible to the English public, we must notice also what it is that he is responsible FOR: and in fiscal matters his substantial responsibility is for giving effect to Indian wishes.

Voting in Geneva concerns a diversity of matters, and whether in regard to these there can or cannot be said to exist a "convention," there is undoubtedly an established practice. On some matters, but only on some, the British and Indian Governments are two minds with but a single thought—and that thought ultimately British. On such matters it may be said that, if an Indian delegate speaks, the voice is the voice of India, but the views are the views of London.

What, then, are these special matters? According to the India Office statement—and a reasonably thorough enquiry has merely confirmed it—such matters are limited to those affecting the interests of the Empire as a whole, including India. That was clearly the case with the Geneva Protocol, on which her delegates described their co-operation as "necessarily" subordinate. The sentimental inconvenience of

having perforce to "keep step" with "the mother country" is obviously not for an outsider to appraise; but the matters in question at any rate appear to be such that in practice it is difficult to see how the system can cause any other sort of important inconvenience.

Meanwhile, on the great majority of questions—including all on which India would normally seem likely to have a special point of view—the Indian Government's responsibility is FOR giving expression through its delegates to specifically Indian, not to British, ideas.

That two Governments constitutionally so related, can genuinely have two different standpoints may seem less strange if we reflect that this is perfectly possible even between separate departments of one and the same Government. Does a spending department in England always see eye to eye with the Treasury? Yet, are not both of them merely instruments to execute the wishes of the same British public?

The practical position seems well enough put by the 1927 Delegation: "The Indian Delegation is not constitutionally in the same position as those of the Dominions, but . . . in our view the actual liberty of the Indian Delegation to follow an independent policy corresponds to the liberty which the Indian Delegation would in fact exercise if the constitutional status of India within the Empire were different." For, in their belief, the obligation to make the

action of the Indian Delegation conform to that of the British Delegation was practically confined to those questions on which the Empire Delegations must of necessity, and in fact did, act together. These last words went perhaps a little too far, but it seems true that "those departments of the work of the League in which India has the greatest practical interest are scarcely, if at all, influenced by political and constitutional relations" and thus that "Indian policy is determined on independent lines in those matters in which India really possesses an independent interest." The 1928 Delegation declared that their experience on this point confirmed the views of their predecessors of 1927. At meetings of British Empire Delegates they "were always accorded treatment on a basis of practical equality and were entirely satisfied with the consideration" which was given to any views expressed by them.

In 1929, it is true, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, as first British delegate, drew, we are told, "no distinction between India and the Dominions in speaking of the importance of voluntary and independent collaboration"; but, as the constitutional position had not in the interval changed, one would hardly be wise to draw any novel deductions from this. Whereas, on big world issues, Canada and England do indeed

tend to behave like partners, India and England, on such issues, are a firm in which, while the partners regularly consult together, the man on the spot—and England is decidedly nearer to the spot in world affairs—has, so to say, a casting vote—and can in that sense be said to "run the show." The Secretary of State, though able to press the ideas of India in the Cabinet, is obliged on these imperial issues to bring the policy of the Indian Government into harmony with that of London—and to instruct India's delegates accordingly. On all other matters it seems that in settling their instructions he is in effect but a vehicle for the views of the Governor-General in Council. And the obvious business of Delhi, in this almost unlimited field, is simply to consider the interests of the peoples of India.

And have those peoples themselves no say? The Governor-General in Council, though an outsider cannot know with what certainty they are able to sense the true feelings of "India," are at least expected to try. On money questions, including tariffs and such projects as the Convention on Financial Assistance, the mind of the legislature can be ascertained: this was why Lord Lytton in 1927 refused to pronounce prematurely India's judgment on the resolutions of the World Economic Conference. The Indian delegates, moreover, have mostly, and since 1929 exclusively, been Indians born,

and presumably competent, where instructions left them liberty, to voice the ideas of their countrymen. It was natural and proper, for instance, that Dr. Hyder, in 1931, should have prefaced certain of his remarks by saying he would speak, not as a delegate representing a Government, but as a representative of the people to whom he belonged. The woman member of the British Delegation may hold forth in any of at least four capacities: as an individual, as a specimen of English womanhood, as an exponent of British public feeling, and as a delegate of her Government. Without intended disrespect to anyone it may be observed that an Indian prince may show a comparable versatility.

Meanwhile, we may endorse some further words of the 1927 Delegation. "It would, in our view," they wrote, "be a matter of great regret if the opportunities offered to India by the League towards the development of her status among the nations of the world were imperfectly realised through ignorance or misunderstanding of the facts. For this reason, and because representation needs to be based upon an informed and enlightened public opinion, we feel that great importance should be attached to publicity."

There, then, is our picture: two distinct Governments, concerned for the most part with two distinct sets of interests and for the most

part behaving just as if they were entirely independent of each other, yet having, on what are known as "matters of high policy," only a single attitude, in regard to which the Indian Government has, indeed, a voice, but not a determining voice.

One potential, if not actual, disadvantage in this relationship must in fairness be noted. There sometimes—though, happily for the Dominions and India, not very often—occurs a change of attitude in England. Every member of the League is liable to indulge now and then in a change of attitude, the sequel, as a rule, to a change of Government. While India never in the more familiar sense has a change of Government, she in a certain sense does have a change whenever Britain has one. In the Empire family it is not universally the rule that "when Father says 'Turn,' we all turn"; but, as has been seen, there are matters upon which India, under her present constitution, is bound to turn with Father. As it is, however, all the world can see to what matters this constitutional necessity applies, and seems to appreciate the reason. So on the rare occasions when, without changing the personnel of her Government at the Delhi end, India announces a change of attitude, nobody shows surprise. As yet the only important instance has been that of the "General Act." When, in 1928, the Indian Delegation, like the British, forbore to

move any amendments, this was upon the openly asserted ground that, whether amended or not, the instrument was unlikely to win the approval of "the authorities at home." A change of Government having thereafter taken place in England, both Britain and India eventually executed a volte-face. Though some may regret this position, it is as well to realise that at least in official circles abroad it seems to have passed without comment.

A more radical reason, however, why it is confusing to talk of "India's" absolute independence, even "as a member of the League," is that as between members of the League the question of their independence is technically not in point. The League deals with its members only through their Governments and governmental representatives. It is not concerned to know whether the various Governments, in arriving at their respective policies, are mutually independent or not. Those who have spoken of "absolute independence" have probably had in mind the position, not of the Indian Government, but of the Indian Delegation, in relation to the British. Neither, it seems, takes instructions from the other. Yet neither the Indian Delegation nor, in point of fact, the British, is independent—of instructions; for each is instructed by its Government. Each in this respect is in a similar, if not in the same, boat. It

follows that, in the Geneva forms and practice, no difference need be made between the delegations of India and of any other country. All alike are, not independent delegations, but just—delegations. The position of India in this sense is indistinguishable from that of Canada, and equally from those of Spain and Poland. Suppose she became to-morrow an independent sovereign State like France or Liberia or Sweden or Siam—what difference for formal purposes would it make to her "independence as a member of the League"? None that I can see. What difference would it make to the "freedom" of her delegates in Geneva? None that I can think of.

That her delegates are free enough, in all conscience, will have become particularly evident to the other "Empire" Delegations in early debates on the division of the League's expenses. In this connection, Sir Rennell Rodd and Mr. Stanley Bruce, in 1921, were none too lightly handled. Then, in 1922, poor South Africa was obliged to listen to certain remarks on mandates, which, if irritating, were entirely in order, and some still more troublesome observations on minorities, which, if not entirely in order, were too witty to be irritating. And, next year, it was Italy's turn. None who heard it will ever forget that speech delivered by the late H.H. the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, after the Corfu incident.

During the first nine years this "free"

Delegation of India was invariably headed by a non-Indian. The change-over came when, in 1929, Sir Muhammad Habibullah, an Indian official, was first delegate. Since then H.H. the Maharajah of Bikaner, Sir B. L. Mitter and H.H. the Aga Khan have in succession filled the place. The change will doubtless have commended itself to their countrymen.

It should not, however, be supposed that India had been unique in her use of "foreign" talent. South Africa in the early years had employed Lord Robert Cecil and Professor Gilbert Murray; and New Zealand, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland. Nor was India unworthily served. Two former Viceroys—as well as the Viceroy of to-day—were among her representatives. It is incidentally of interest, in view of his later prominence in another context, that it was for India that Lord Lytton made his début at Geneva.

Each year the Indian delegates have included one of the ruling princes. Technically he has come simply as a member of the All-India Delegation—not, that is, as a representative of his own State, or of the States collectively. It is said that the princes have not always themselves been very clear on this point. One does not know what happens in regard to Their Highnesses' expenses; but, anyhow, it seems to be the Central Government that foots the bill for India's annual contribution.

At the 1931 Assembly the Indian Delegation, according to their own statement, "found many outlets for their activity." This should not be understood as betraying that, in the eyes of these Indians, activity appeared attractive as an end in itself. The famous Assembly delegate who, knowing nothing of the subject he was being asked to take up, beyond that it was one on which a predecessor had "played a prominent part," replied promptly, "Oh, yes; I'd like to play a prominent part," was not a representative of India.

However, though never seeking the limelight for its own sake, Indian delegates have almost always found plenty to do. In addition to factors already discussed, three distinct sets of preoccupations can be perceived to have governed their conduct. Firstly, and very properly, the special interests of India: it was their duty to ensure that she should be both righteously treated and justly understood. Secondly, the collective interests of the Asiatic, or, in general, the overseas members of the League. And, thirdly, the interests of all members as such, in a word, of the League itself.

In 1920, for example, there were signs of a possible movement with regard to poppy-cultivation, which it was felt might affect unfairly the position of India. There was an attempt, subtle, though not quite subtle

enough, to commit the Assembly, on raw materials, to views which India could not at that moment endorse. At that stage no Indian at all was as yet on the staff of either the League Secretariat or the International Labour Office. For the purpose of representation on the International Labour Office's Governing Body, she had not at that time been recognised as one of "the eight States of chief industrial importance"; yet, for the purpose of contributing to the costs of Geneva, she was unreservedly classed among countries the most important of all! As an Asiatic member she welcomed a Chinese suggestion for reserving one of the non-permanent Council seats for countries not in Europe or America. Finally, in constituting the Advisory Committees of the Health and Transit Organisations, some risk was apparent of undue preponderance being accorded to European member-States.

To all these matters, Sir William Meyer and his colleagues effectively gave their attention. Their most important work, however, in their own declared opinion, was done in the service of the League's own general interests, in the sense of influencing the principles on which the central organisation was to stand—such, for instance, as the principles of sound financial administration and control. Indeed, there can hardly have been a year when India's delegates did more than in 1920.

Human unfairness, in thought as in deed, is probably at least as often the fruit of misunderstanding as of ill will. If foreign opinion has not always done full justice to India, her delegates in discussing that failure have at all times been only too willing to ascribe it to ignorance. Never have they been weary in that form of well-doing which consists in apprising an unimaginative Western world of the special considerations affecting Eastern countries, and more particularly their own. Lord Lytton and other speakers have dwelt on the strategic circumstances of the North-West Frontier in their bearing on India's military needs. Constitutional details in regard to the "transferred" subjects, and to the status of the Indian States, have when necessary been given all appropriate emphasis. The facts of India's immemorial civilisation and cultural seniority have often been brought to the notice of the "authorities" of the Intellectual Co-operation Organisation. Reminders of the place of India's agricultural millions in the world's total economic life have not been withheld. And, when child welfare and other "social" questions have come up for discussion, the dangers have been shown of "planning everything on Western models," of seeking uniformity of practice in spheres where diversity of custom and religious tradition made advisable a more realistic approach. Nor has Geneva been

left in ignorance of recent remarkable progress. One speaker—an Indian prince—in connection with India's "share" in "the work of the League," went so far as to specify that, in his particular State, children were by law forbidden to smoke (not opium-smoking merely: just smoking). An inexperienced reader may wonder if, in giving the Assembly such homely particulars, India's delegates will not sometimes have exceeded the limits of what was relevant to the matters in hand. But a certain modicum of amiable discursiveness is fairly common form in Geneva speeches; and India's contributions have not been reluctantly heard. The Delegation, however, while returning thanks for the patience shown in such cases, have avoided demanding too much of their audience. Wistfully one speaker expressed the hope that the import of his facts would be appreciated—"at least by those" of his hearers who were "acquainted with the East." Finally, in accordance here too with what is common form in Geneva, the task has at all times been blandly confronted of verbalising the notions and emotions of those abstractions conventionally labelled[1] "India" and "the Indian."

For further examples of vigilant and vigorous service to India, reference may be made to Sir William Meyer's struggle for a reduction of India's share in the League's expenses; or to

[1] As, for instance, throughout the present chapter.