CHAPTER ONE

AIDE MEMOIRE

You do not need to be a chemist, nor do you need to be in India for very long, before you realize that its widely disparate peoples have one thing in common: a remarkably low boiling point so far as political temper is concerned. Nowhere in the world does a mob respond so quickly or so savagely to a firebrand’s call for action; and in the unlovely city of Calcutta the cauldron, if so lighted, bubbles faster and more sulphurously than in any other city in the sub-Continent.

Between dawn on the morning of 16 August 1946 and dusk three days later, the people of Calcutta hacked, battered, burned, stabbed or shot 6,000 of each other to death, and raped and maimed another 20,000. This may not seem to be a considerable figure to students of India’s recent history. Three million people died of starvation during the great famine of 1943 in Bengal alone. Close to three-quarters of a million Punjabis massacred each other during the first days of Indian independence in 1947.

But the filthy and dreadful slaughter which turned Calcutta into a charnel house for seventy-two hours in August 1946 is important because it did more than murder innocent people. It murdered hopes too. It changed the shape of India and the course of history. The corpses of men, women and children lay stinking in the gutters of Chowringhee Square until the only reliable garbage collectors of India, the vultures, picked them clean; and with every mouthful, they picked away the fabric of a unitary India, which Britain had painstakingly built up over more than a century and a half, and finally tore it in two.
The tragedy of the Calcutta massacre is not simply that it was unnecessary (that could probably be said of most bloody riots in India's history), but that it disfigured a summer which had hitherto seemed full of hope and optimism. Both in India and Pakistan today you will discover, in the higher circles of government, that 1946 is remembered as a black and abysmal year in which their struggle for independence seemed far, far away and no gleam of light showed anywhere.

Yet, in fact, that summer they came nearer to the goal of most Indians than ever before—the goal of a united, independent India—and then they missed it by a series of monumental blunders, underhand tricks and political manoeuvres which culminated in appalling bloodshed. As a preamble to the story of the last days of the British as overlords in India, an aide memoire is necessary to remind everyone (the protagonists and participants, perhaps, especially) of what they were doing, how they were fixed, and who was negotiating with whom in those last days before the situation began to quicken.

One thing should be said at the start to make the situation clear: from the moment, in 1945, when the war was over and the post-war world began to reshape itself, no one of clear mind had any doubt that the Indian peoples would achieve the independence from British rule for which they had been fighting, from a practical point of view, since 1917 (when Gandhi took over Congress) and, from a neo-Indian point of view, since the days of the Mutiny. Even the government of Winston Churchill had grumblingly and reluctantly conceded—not, it is true, without some goading from the United States—the need to accord to India the same hopes of freedom as those which British and Indian soldiers fought to achieve in Europe and Asia. With the advent in Britain in 1945 of a Socialist Government under Clement Attlee, the question of India's freedom was never in doubt. To prise the Indian jewel from the British crown and hand it back to the Indians had always been one of the main objectives
of Socialist policy; it was a policy, moreover, with which
the bulk of the electorate at the time agreed; and, from a
purely practical point of view, even the diehards at home
and the imperialist British in India could do little to stop
it. The processes of Indianization of government had
begun before the war and were now reaching their culmina-
tion; by 1948 only three hundred civil servants of British
nationality, even if independence did not come, would still
remain. The British troops, which might hold the country
against rebellion and insurrection, were clamouring, after
years of fighting, to go home. And, above all, British
power and prestige, in spite of victory, had been diminished
by the war. The campaigns in Asia had shown up
Britain’s weaknesses. After Singapore, Burma and the
sinking of her finest ships by the Japanese, Britain would
never again be able to demonstrate in Asia the background
of strength and influence—the **macht-politik**—which had
for so long enabled her to rule a million people with one-
man-on-the-spot.

The men on the spot in India after 1945 were still men
of great influence, but it was an influence which depended
more upon their skill than their strength, their goodwill
than their nationality, their personal prestige rather than
the might of the once all-powerful British raj. And, wait-
ing to step into their shoes, all over India, were Indians.

Yet such was the spirit of goodwill among the British
people—a remarkable reaction to the pangs, pains and
restrictions which they themselves had suffered during the
war—that the question of giving freedom to India was
never viewed by them simply as a hard-headed acceptance
of facts, but was rather a spontaneous desire to set people
free, as they were free. It was as simple as the action
of a child who sees a bird in a cage and wants to open
the door and let it fly away. In no sense was the Govern-
ment ahead of the people in 1945, when it announced that
independence for India was a principal part of its pro-
gramme, to be fulfilled as rapidly as possible; even though
it may have been ahead of some members of the Opposition.

But independence for whom? And in what circumstances?

India at the end of the war was a country divided not into two parts but into two factions. Its 350,000,000 people, approximately one-fifth of the population of the world, spoke many languages and subscribed to every kind of religion, principally Hinduism and Mohammedanism, but also everything from Christianity to animism; but so far as politics were concerned, the country was run (always under the control of the British, of course) by two main parties. The most powerful was the Congress Party, which claimed to be a secular party speaking for the whole of the people no matter what their religion or class; presided over by a Muslim, but dominated by Hindus. The Opposition was the Muslim League, which made no bones about representing the interests of none but those of Mohammedan belief. To attempt to equate Congress and the Muslim League with, say, the Tory and Labour Parties in Britain or the Democrats and Republicans in the United States is, the way things were after the war, impossible. The situation between the two factions was not that of two parties fighting each other for political supremacy at the polls. Since the Muslims were a minority in India—90,000,000 against some 250,000,000 Hindus—the British had given them a separate electoral roll. This meant that Congress, its members and supporters being overwhelmingly Hindu, always carried those provinces which contained a majority of Hindus, which meant most of India. They also put up pro-Congress Muslims to fight the Muslim League in the Muslim sector, thus proving—with some success until 1946—that they were genuinely non-sectarian and represented all Indians no matter of what race or religion.

But by 1946 it could be said that something over ninety per cent of India’s Muslims supported the Muslim League and its all-powerful leader, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. In the North West Frontier Province a pro-Congress Muslim
Government was in power, but precariously, by the skin of its teeth. As I have said, the President of Congress at the time was himself a Muslim, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. But by a combination of driving, dominating personality and coercion, both physical and psychological, Mohammed Ali Jinnah was rapidly bringing most hesitant Muslims under his banner.

Like the Congress Party, the Muslim League under Jinnah wanted independence from the British. But unlike Congress, whose battle cry hurled at the British was simply ‘Quit India’, the League cried ‘Divide and Quit’. In other words, they wanted not only freedom from the British but also freedom from the Hindus, who, they claimed, had dominated and exploited them for too long. The main plank in the League’s platform was the partition of India and the achievement of a separate state—Pakistan—comprising those parts of India where there was a majority of Muslims: in Bengal, the Punjab, Sind and the North West Frontier Province.

It was a policy which no leader of the Congress Party, right until the last, would take seriously. To accept Jinnah’s aim of Pakistan would be to admit that the Muslims in India were not only members of a different religion but also members of a different race. And, as every Congress leader—Azad, Gandhi, Nehru, Patel—constantly pointed out, they were not. The majority of Indian Muslims had been converted to Islam either by Moghul invaders or because, as Untouchables or members of the lower classes, they had found greater freedom of opportunity under Mohammedan law than within the strangling circles of the Hindu caste system. Nehru drew attention to the fact that Jinnah was himself only a second-generation Muslim whose grandfather had been a Hindu. The battle cry for Pakistan, maintained the Congress leaders, was synthetic and artificial; it had been raised by Jinnah simply out of greed for power and a desire to revenge himself on Congress. (Jinnah had once been a
member of the Congress Party, but had resigned after failing to gain ascendency among the leaders.)

But whether the Muslim League’s claim to their own Pakistan was ethnically invalid or not, the British, whose task it was after the war to give India her independence, certainly accepted it as a reality. Congress maintained that they did so because it was ‘convenient’ politically. So long as India was embroiled in the Hindu-Muslim battle, so long could the British say: ‘How can we give India her freedom, when the Indians themselves cannot decide in which form freedom shall come? If we accept the Congress viewpoint and hand over the whole of India, the Muslims will revolt and there will be civil war. If we accept Pakistan, the Congress will rally their forces and fight against partition.’ And Congress accused the British in India of artificially stimulating and helping the Muslim League in order to prolong the conflict and thus preserve their own hold on the sub-Continent.

Now it is certainly true that there were many British officials in India, some very high officials, who did not wish to see the end of the British raj and were prepared to use every stratagem possible to preserve British hegemony, and their own jobs, as long as possible. One British governor of an important Indian province successfully wrecked a conference at Simla at which the Hindus and Muslims had come together, first by advising Jinnah on tactics and then using his influence on the Viceroy to make sure that the tactics worked.

It is also true that, emotionally, the majority of British civil servants in India were pro-Muslim. He was easier to get on with. He was less arrogant (the Hindus would say he was more subservient) and more gregarious. A British official could visit a Muslim in his home and take a meal without feeling, as in the case of a Hindu, that afterwards a whole ritual of ‘purification’ would have to be gone through because the house had been sullied by the presence of a foreigner. The British suspected (wrongly, in the case of the Congress leaders who abhorred
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the caste system) that their meetings with the Hindu were superficial contacts with men who despised them. They suspected that most Hindus considered them inferior, and they knew that many Hindus considered them unclean. (It occurred to only a few of them that most Hindus resented them not because they were British, or unclean, but because they were overlords.)

Above all else, however, pro-Muslim feeling among most British in India was encouraged by the events which had taken place during the war. When war came, the Congress Party refused to co-operate whereas the Muslim League responded at once. Congress had good solid reasons for their attitude, for India was pitchforked into war in 1939 by a simple declaration from the Viceroy without any consultation with the people or the Party, and they could, with good reason, point out that Britain had no right to use them in a struggle for freedom in faraway Europe when they were denied freedom for themselves at home. But later on, in 1942, when Japan was knocking at the gates of India itself and the safety of India’s own people was threatened, Congress still refused to join in the war effort. The idea that the Hindus would be prepared to accept Japanese occupation out of sheer resentment of the British was more than most British officials could stomach. They shuddered at the idea of the Indian sub-Continent in the hands of men like Gandhi, the Congress leader, who, in 1942, calmly contemplated a Japanese victory and sent a message to the British people expressing his abhorrence of German Nazism and Italian Fascism but hoping that they would submit without fighting to both. Not unnaturally, they were inclined to embrace the Muslim League which not only supported the war effort enthusiastically but encouraged its members to join the armed forces and fight. In fact, sixty-five per cent of the soldiers of the Indian Army who fought in North Africa, Italy, Malaya and Burma were Muslims—which means that there were thirteen Muslims to every seven Hindus in
the fighting forces, though there were only nine Muslims to every twenty-four Hindus in India.

So most British officials, especially after 1942, were pro-Muslim. But were they pro-Pakistan?

Pakistan was something else again. As I have said, there may well have been substance in the Congress charge that certain among the British wished to stoke the fires of Hindu-Muslim animosity in order to justify the status quo. But the bulk of the Britons who ran the machinery of government in India were men not only of great and dedicated skill but also of goodwill. It is true to say that they loved India. They may well have had fears for India's future once they no longer guided its destiny, for all men are human in thinking that their successors will not be prepared to give so much and will probably not do so well. All of them were, however, resigned to the fact that India was one day, very soon now, about to pass from British control. It was a very rare official indeed—and one, certainly, not steeped in the traditions of his service—who could contemplate without distress the prospect of the partition of the country into what would obviously be artificial divisions, economically, geographically, and even sociologically. By much sweat, blood and brain-work the British in India had worked to achieve unity; to the enormous benefit of the coffers at home, it is true. They had taken warring tribes, diverse religions, disputatious people and arrogant princes and welded them into a viable nation larger than any other in the world, with the exception of China.

That their work should end in the division of the country into two separate nations was not something which any sincere British official in India could contemplate without abhorrence. Liking the Muslims or not, he could not swallow their desire for this vivisection; and such was the British reluctance to face up to the possibility that, in March 1946, there was not a single paper in the official archives in Delhi preparing the ground for what would have to be done if partition should come. In that month,
on his own initiative; one was written and submitted by Lieut. General Sir Francis Tuker, at the time General Officer Commanding the Eastern Command in India. His viewpoint was purely that of a soldier, but he did make the point that if Indian independence was rushed, partition would inevitably follow; and that, therefore, certain measures should be taken in advance to prepare for such an eventuality. He got a note back (dated 9 April 1946) from Mr Ambrose Dundas, Secretary to the War Department in Delhi, saying: 'I find your note on "Defence—Hindustan and Pakistan" most interesting. It is also extremely practical ... Unfortunately, it is out of your hands and mine to decide how much weight is to be given to practical conditions and how much they are to be ignored to suit sentiment or appearances. Well, we shall know soon, of course!' But no action was taken on the note though Dundas had, of course, forwarded it to his superiors; and, as we shall see, if it had been 600,000 lives might have been saved eighteen months later.

The Viceroy in 1946 was Field Marshal Lord Wavell. To him, the prospect of an India torn artificially in two by a misguided (sincere, perhaps, but still misguided) clash of religious beliefs and political ambitions was particularly distressing. As a student of history, he believed that the division of India into Hindustan and Pakistan would inevitably be followed by a gradual Balkanization if not fragmentation of the sub-Continent; that once religion had been accepted as a basis for partition, the Sikhs would one day follow the Muslims into separation; and that then India would start to break up into a series of linguistic states. As a student of war, he believed partition would dangerously weaken India’s defences and lay her open to attack from Russia in the north and China in the east. And as a soldier, he realized that partition would mean the break-up of that magnificent instrument of war and defence, the Indian Army.

At first sight, the appointment of Field Marshal Lord Wavell as Viceroy of India had been a strange one indeed.
His record as a commander in the field, brilliant, distinguished though he might be, had been one of disappointment and setback; he had seen the armies under his command driven back in both Africa and Asia, and though no soldier could possibly have done better with the resources at his disposal, he had inevitably been saddled with the responsibility for defeat.

Wavell had always maintained that he was nothing but a simple soldier (who wrote a little, studied a little, considered a little), and if the quality of a statesman is to be supple of mind, visionary in concept and bold in execution, he was far from being a statesman. Moreover, he had one quality which in India might well have been considered a fundamental fault for one who would be engaged in continuous discussion, argument, and negotiation. He did not know how to talk.

In a land filled with politicians, who often did not know when to keep their mouths shut, he found it almost impossible to open his. The Indian leaders, Hindu and Muslim alike, were loquacious. Words fell like drops of saliva from their tongues. They spoke like poets at their best and like Welsh Baptists at their worst; but one thing was certain, they were never at a loss for words or quotations. One by one, they would troop in to see him, Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Azad and Liaquat and they would spray him with jets of eloquent argument.

It so happened that every single one of the Indian leaders, of both sides, was a lawyer. As a soldier, Wavell had been trained to suspect all lawyers. His particular _bête noire_ was Gandhi. To India (as to many beyond India) Mahatma Gandhi was a saint, but to the Viceroy he was an irksome obscurantist. Wavell was too intelligent a man to be contemptuous of Gandhi; he had no doubt of his great power and influence for good, and he admired his indefatigable work for the betterment of his people. But he found personal contact with him both disturbing and irritating, and he complained that he could never pin him down to a straightforward statement of fact or inten-
tion. At the end of one interview with him, he said: ‘He spoke to me for half an hour, and I am still not sure what he meant to tell me. Every sentence he spoke could be interpreted in at least two different ways. I would be happier were I convinced that he knew what he was saying himself, but I cannot even be sure of that.’

There came a time when the prospect of another talk with Gandhi filled him with so much mental discomfort that he could not sleep the night before. ‘He would sit there,’ recalled one of his secretaries, ‘while the little man prattled on, and the expression on his face was one of sheer misery. He would fiddle with his pencil and I could see his single eye gradually beginning to glaze, and at the end of it, all he could think of to say would be: “I see. Thank you.”’

Yet despite the catalogue of faults which could be filed against Wavell—his tongue-tied manner, his lack of political suppleness, his shyness, his awkwardness in argument and discussion—he had one great virtue which was badly needed in India in the years after the war. Of all the actors in the drama of Indian independence, he was the only one who always spoke the truth. I am not suggesting that the others were liars; but they were politicians and lawyers, and for them truth had many sides. Gandhi was once asked to describe his policy. ‘I will write it down for you in five sentences,’ he replied. The reporter took the message away with him and discovered that each sentence contradicted the one before it. Nehru had a way of speaking and writing with forthright sincerity, but (as we shall see) he always left himself a way out. And Jinnah, when given something for which he had asked, went away apparently satisfied, but shortly afterwards returned to ask for more.

When Wavell said he wanted to see an independent India, he not only meant it; he sincerely tried to achieve it. His methods may have lacked the subtlety which those on

* In a conversation with the author.
the Indian side expected in a negotiator; he may never have descended to the market place and haggled; he may have been slow to exploit a situation; but he was always aware of the goal ahead, and right until the last he was determined to achieve it.

In the summer of 1946, he came so close that subsequent events are tragic indeed. On 15 March 1946 Mr Clement (now Earl) Attlee announced in the House of Commons that the Labour Government was sending a Cabinet Mission to India with the intention of making a supreme effort to break the deadlock between Britain and the Indians on the one hand, and Congress and the Muslim League on the other. In a private telegram to Lord Wavell, Mr Attlee made it clear that his government was not trying to bypass the Viceroy but felt that a delegation from home, armed with the power to make decisions on the spot—as the Cripps Mission of 1942, sent by Churchill, for instance, had not been armed—would give the negotiations a shot in the arm and convince the Indians, suspicious as they still were of British intentions, that this time we really meant business. He asked for the Viceroy’s fullest help and co-operation. Wavell’s commentary on that was: ‘He didn’t think I would withhold it, did he? What does he think I have been working for?’

The Cabinet Mission consisted of Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, and Mr A. V. Alexander. Cripps was a political theorist with a brilliant mind who had studied the Indian problem from every standpoint except the emotional one; this, in the opinion of some, meant that he would never really be able to understand it. He was a great expert at the preparation of plans. He took all factors into consideration: religious antipathies, regional rivalries, political standpoints, racial susceptibilities and suspicions. But there were those who felt that he always forgot the importance of the human element, and he was continually disappointed that his plans, perfect on paper, never seemed to succeed in practice.
He had with him on this occasion, however, a man who appealed to all Indians who met him, Hindu and Muslim alike. Lord Pethick Lawrence was liked, even loved, by both sides because he wore his heart on his sleeve; he loved India, he genuinely enjoyed being with Indians, and he was emotionally anxious to help India's aims for freedom in any way possible. The Cabinet Mission arrived in Delhi towards the end of March, when the Indian summer begins to scorch the earth, the skin and the mind. Though he was an old man, Pethick Lawrence never complained. He sweated through temperatures of 115 degrees and once, at an important conference, fainted from heat prostration. He returned after a short rest and apologized for his 'stupid weakness'.

In the discussions which began almost immediately after the Cabinet Mission's arrival, Mr A. V. Alexander was not much more than a passenger. He never had any really serious contribution to make to the discussions. The two serious members of the Mission were Cripps and Pethick Lawrence, and, in the event, they proved to be a combination of great intelligence and broad-mindedness. Mixed with the milk of human kindness which Pethick Lawrence dispensed, Cripps's cold-water logic became potable to Indian leaders, if not entirely pleasant.

The aim of the Cabinet Mission was to talk to the Indian leaders and endeavour to persuade them to formulate their own scheme for independence. It did not take more than a few days to convince all three of them that this way led to hopeless deadlock. Jinnah depressed them by his cold, arrogant, insistent demand for Pakistan or nothing. An encounter with Jinnah cast them down, for he always appeared before them in immaculately cut clothes, his sapling-thin figure always spry, his eyes clear and bright, his skin dry even when they, in the heat of the day, were dripping with sweat. 'He is the only man I know', Alexander commented, 'who walks around with a built-in-air-cooler.' And never once did he relax, no matter what friendly overture they made to him.
They gained their greatest comfort from Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the President of Congress, and not simply because he felt the heat as much as they did.*

He was a Muslim. He sympathized with the fears of India’s 90,000,000 Muslims that, in the event of independence, they would be swamped by the all-powerful Hindu majority; that they might well become a persecuted minority in a Hindu raj. But he always refused to believe that Jinnah’s plan for Pakistan was a solution. After consulting his Hindu colleagues in the Congress Party, he drew up his own idea of how communal differences might be resolved and a unitary India preserved. He had several consultations with the Cabinet Mission, and, on 15 April 1946, he issued a statement which is worthy of reproduction here, since it is conveniently forgotten in India today.

‘I have considered from every possible point of view’, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote, ‘the scheme of Pakistan as formulated by the Muslim League. As an Indian, I have examined its implications for the future of India as a whole. As a Muslim, I have examined its likely effect upon the fortunes of Muslims in India. Considering the scheme in all its aspects, I have come to the conclusion that it is harmful not only for India as a whole but for Muslims in particular. And in fact it creates more problems than it solves.

‘I must confess that the very term Pakistan goes against my grain. It suggests that some portions of the world are pure while others are impure. Such a division of territories into pure and impure is un-Islamic and a repudiation of the very spirit of Islam. Islam recognizes no such division and the Prophet says, “God has made the whole world a mosque for me.” Further, it seems to me

* Maulana Azad was a great admirer of Lord Wavell, and almost the only criticism he ever voiced of him was his insistence on carrying on the Cabinet Mission negotiations in the furnace heat of Delhi instead of the coolness of Simla. ‘My comment was that Delhi presented no difficulty for him as the Viceregal Lodge was air-conditioned and he never moved out of it.’
that the scheme for Pakistan is a symbol of defeatism and has been built up on the analogy of the Jewish demand for a national home. It is a confession that Indian Muslims cannot hold their own in India as a whole and would be content to withdraw to a corner specially reserved for them. One can sympathize with the aspirations of the Jews for such a national home, as they are scattered over the world and cannot in any region have any effective voice in the administration. The condition of Indian Muslims is quite otherwise. Over 90 millions in number they are in quantity and quality a sufficiently important element in Indian life to influence decisively all questions of administration and policy. Nature has further helped them by concentrating them in certain areas.

'In such context, the demand for Pakistan loses all force. As a Muslim, I for one am not prepared for a moment to give up my right to treat the whole of India as my domain and to share in the shaping of its political and economic life. To me it seems a sure sign of cowardice to give up what is my patrimony and content myself with a mere fragment of it.'

Azad proposed instead a formula which he had already persuaded the Working Committee of the Congress to accept, one which secured whatever merit the Pakistan scheme contained, while all its defects—displacement of population, particularly—were avoided. Azad realized, as many of his Hindu colleagues did not, that a major fear of the Muslims was that if a unitary India came into existence the Hindu-controlled administration at the Centre would dominate, interfere, bully, economically oppress and politically smother the Muslim minority. His scheme was to meet this fear by proposing that both sides should accept a solution which 'ensures that Muslim majority provinces are internally free to develop as they will, but can at the same time influence the Centre on all issues which affect India as a whole.

'The situation in India', Azad went on, 'is such that all attempts to establish a centralized government
are bound to fail. Equally doomed to failure is the attempt to divide India into two States. After considering all aspects of the questions, I have come to the conclusion that the only solution can be on the lines embodied in the Congress formula which allows room for development both to the provinces and to India as a whole . . . I am one of those who consider the present chapter of communal bitterness and differences as a transient phase in Indian life. I firmly hold that they will disappear when India assumes the responsibility of her own destiny. I am reminded of a saying of Gladstone that the best cure for a man’s fear of water is to throw him into it. Similarly, India must assume responsibility and administer her own affairs before fears and suspicions can be fully allayed. When India attains her destiny, she will forget the present chapter of communal suspicion and conflict and face the problems of modern life from a modern point of view. Differences will no doubt persist but they will be economic, not communal. Opposition among political parties will continue, but they will be based not on religion but on economic and political issues. Class and not community will be the basis of future alignments and policies will be shaped accordingly. If it be argued that this is only a faith which events may not justify I would say that in any case the nine crores [90,000,000] of Muslims constitute a factor which nobody can ignore and whatever the circumstances, they are strong enough to safeguard their own destiny.*

Here was a statement written from the heart. Such views coming from the President of Congress made a profound impression on both the Viceroy and the Cabinet Mission. When they discovered the impossibility of persuading the two opposing sides to find a solution between them, the Mission produced a scheme of its own. Basically, it followed the lines of Azad’s proposals. A unitary India would be formed, but the central government would be responsible for only three subjects—Defence, Foreign

* In a memorandum to the Viceroy and Congress.
Affairs and Communications. For the rest, the country would be divided into three main administrative groups. Group A would comprise the great slab of India where the Hindus were in the majority. Group B would be composed of the Punjab, Sind, the North West Frontier Province and British Baluchistan, where the Muslims were in a majority. And Group C would consist of Bengal a. Assam, where the Muslims would have a small majority. Thus the Muslim minority would have charge of their own domestic affairs and would be protected from Hindu domination.

To everyone’s astonishment, and to the great joy of the Viceroy and the Cabinet Mission, both sides accepted the proposals. Both Congress and the Muslim League had certain reservations; but the working committees of the two organizations signified their willingness to go ahead with the Plan. Though Gandhi no longer had any official position in the Congress Party, his influence upon its members was still as powerful as ever. He described the Cabinet Mission proposals as “the seed to convert this land of sorrow into one without sorrow or suffering . . ." After four days of searching examination of the State paper issued by the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy on behalf of the British Government, my conviction abides that it is the best document that the British Government could have produced in the circumstances."

The air seemed bright with promise. Delegates of the Congress Party from all over India gathered for their annual conference, and there, after a moving speech from Azad, the opposition from the Left Wing of the party was mowed down and the Mission Plan’s scheme for independence accepted. So far as the Muslim League was concerned, there was no need for a conference. The influence of Mr Jinnah was all-powerful. What he said was law with the members of his working committee; and he told them that the Mission Plan was the nearest to Pakistan that the Muslims could hope to get.
Peace at last? Independence for India, after 150 years of British rule? The end of communal differences and fratricidal strife? It looked like it.

At which point, the bull came lumbering into the china shop.

It should always be remembered that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Muslim leader, was intensely suspicious of Congress motives and intentions. His Hindu opponents called him a cold, arrogant, inflexible man, and so he could be; but he believed, not without reason, that Congress was flexible in quite a different way. He did not trust the party leaders. In the past, the Muslim League had made political agreements with Congress and—as in the United Provinces before the war—had fought elections on a joint platform, with the stipulation that when the elections were won the Muslim League would have its share of places in the Cabinet. But wherever Congress secured a majority of seats on its own, and therefore no longer needed Muslim League help, it had repudiated the agreements and offered the Muslims a single, unimportant seat—or none at all.

Now that he had made the gesture of accepting the Cabinet Mission Plan, Jinnah was as highly strung as a lean and hungry jockey who has conceded a couple of pounds in order to keep in the race. The use of racing parlance to describe his attitude would have shocked him, but it is not inapt in the context in which it is used. He suspected that certain members of Congress were out to ‘nobble’ the Muslim League, and that he was determined to prevent at all costs. To his way of thinking, his acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan had been a great concession; it meant, if carried through, the abandonment of his conception of a separate state of Pakistan. He and his fellow Muslims would have regional independence in their provinces, but they would still be part of a Hindu-dominated raj, and he was determined to keep every safeguard for the protection of his people which the Cabinet Mission Plan had suggested. This the Congress Party, at
their conference, had seemed to have accepted by an over-
whelming majority.

But would they keep their word?

The Cabinet Mission sailed back to England, convinced
that they had done a good job and that there was hope
for India in the future. Both Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord
Pethick Lawrence were so sure that the way ahead would
be smooth that they telegraphed their congratulations and
good wishes to Azad for the way in which he had secured
the acceptance of their Plan by Congress. They wrote too
soon. At the same conference which approved the Plan,
the presidency of the party changed. Rightwing elements
in Congress were canvassing for the appointment of Sardar
Vallabhbhai Patel, the party’s strong-man, as Azad’s suc-
cessor as president. Azad himself (to his lasting sorrow)
decided that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would be the better
man, and circulated a memorandum urging all members
of Congress to vote for Nehru and elect him new president
by acclamation. This, in fact, is what happened.

Nehru had been one of the Congress high command who
had voted to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan, but his sub-
sequent actions would seem to indicate that he did so
only because Gandhi was for it, and he felt he would
be outvoted if he opposed it. Now he was President he
showed his real feelings. The way his mind was working
at this time would tend to suggest that, even this late in
the day, he had no real conception of the power of Mr
Jinnah and the enormous influence which he had built up
as leader of the Muslim community. He decided on a
show-down. His contempt for Jinnah was ill-concealed
(the contempt was reciprocated) and his dislike of the
aims and intentions of the Muslim League was such that
he seriously underestimated its strength. Of the Muslim
League he once said, in a conversation with the author:
‘It was an organization which was both very strong and
very weak. It could always bring its followers out on the
streets, always cause trouble, always threaten violence.
But it had no other raison d’etre than a negative anti-
Hindu feeling.’ And of Jinnah he said: ‘You know, the real reason why Jinnah left the Congress was because, about 1920, it suddenly broadened its base and began appealing to the masses. Jinnah did not like this. Congress was no longer a party for gentlemen. Jinnah always thought that membership should be confined to those Indians who had passed matriculation—a standard which would have been high for any country, but for India meant that the masses could never come in. He was a snob. When the peasants began to join Congress, he was annoyed. Why, many of them did not even speak English. They dressed in peasant clothes. It was no party for him.’ And, of Jinnah’s assumption of leadership of the Muslim League, he said: ‘He had no real feelings about the Muslims. He wasn’t really a Muslim at all. I know Muslims. I know the Koran. I have Muslim relatives and friends. Jinnah couldn’t even recite a Muslim prayer and had certainly never read the Koran. But when he was offered the leadership of the Muslim League, he saw the opportunity and accepted it. He had been a comparative failure as a lawyer in England, and this was a way out. But his attitude could be summed up by a story I once heard about him when he first went to England and was asked if he was going into politics. He said he had thought of it. He was then asked whether he would be a Conservative or a Liberal. “I haven’t made up my mind, yet,” he said. Jinnah had no qualities, except that he succeeded.’

Now thus summing up of Jinnah’s character (and I will be dealing with some other facets of it later in this story) may well have contained some elements of truth. But it is one thing to despise your opponent in politics and quite another to underestimate him. Jinnah had faults, but he also had strength and implacable determination. And in the summer of 1946 (not for the last time) Jawaharlal Nehru seriously miscalculated his potential. He could not believe that Jinnah spoke for all the Muslims in India. He still believed that Congress, under his presidency, could unseat him.
And on 10 July, after he had been elected President, he called the Press together for a conference to discuss his policy as the new head of Congress. It was a moment in history when circumspection should have been the order of the day. There was much to be gained by silence. The fortunes of India were in the balance, and one false move could upset them. Nehru chose this moment to launch into what his biographer, Michael Brecher, has described as ‘one of the most fiery and provocative statements in his forty years of public life’. He was asked by Press representatives whether the approval by Congress of the Cabinet Mission Plan meant that they had accepted it in toto. Nehru replied with some petulance that Congress was ‘completely unfettered by agreements and free to meet all situations as they arise’. He was then asked if this meant that the Cabinet Mission Plan could be modified.

He made it clear in his next words that he, as President of Congress, had every intention of modifying the Plan. ‘We shall, no doubt, succeed in solving it [the problem of the minorities],’ he said, ‘but we accept no interference in it; certainly not the British Government’s interference.’ As to the Cabinet Mission’s Plan for the division of India into three groups (a plan which Congress a few days before had voted to accept) he said:

‘The big probability is, from any approach to the question, there will be no grouping. Obviously, section A [the Hindus] will decide against grouping. Speaking in betting language, there is a four to one chance of the North West Frontier Province deciding against grouping.* That means Group B collapses. It is highly likely that Bengal and Assam will decide against grouping . . . Thus you will see

* A completely wrong reading of the odds, as it turned out. Though the North West Frontier Province still had a pro-Congress Muslim government at the time, its hold on the masses was loosening fast; it became ninety per cent pro-Muslim League and anti-Congress shortly afterwards, and would, therefore, have opted for Group B.
that this grouping business approached from any point of view does not get us on at all.’

Did Nehru realize what he was saying? He was telling the world that once in power, Congress would use its strength at the Centre to alter the Cabinet Mission Plan as it thought fit. But the Muslim League (as had Congress) had accepted the Plan as a cut and dried scheme to meet objections from both sides. It was a compromise plan which obviously could not afterwards be altered in favour of one side or another. In the circumstances, Nehru’s remarks were a direct act of sabotage. Whether he meant them to be so, in the mistaken belief that Jinnah and the Muslim League were not really a force to be reckoned with, or whether they were the ham-handed remarks of a politician who did not know when to keep his mouth shut will never be known. It is a subject upon which Nehru nowadays prefers to keep his own counsel. But certainly his speech, as Brecher, his biographer, describes it, was ‘a serious tactical error. Jinnah was given an incomparable wedge to press more openly for Pakistan on the grounds of Congress “tyranny”’.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad went further and wrote:

‘Jawaharlal is one of my dearest friends and his contribution to India’s national life is second to none. He has worked and suffered for Indian freedom, and since attainment of independence he has become the symbol of our national unity and progress. I have nevertheless to say with regret that he is at times apt to be carried away by his feelings. Not only so, but sometimes he is so impressed by theoretical considerations that he is apt to underestimate the realities of a situation. The mistake of 1946 proved . . . costly.’

It did indeed. Mr Jinnah reacted to Nehru’s statement like an army leader who has come in for armistice discussions under a flag of truce and finds himself looking down the barrel of a cocked revolver. He dived for cover.

screaming treachery as he did so. It did not take him long to convince himself and his followers that the whole thing had been a great mistake; that in accepting the Cabinet Mission Plan and compromising with his goal of an independent Pakistan he had made a fundamental error: that Congress was just as tricky and dangerous as ever.

The consequences of the Nehru speech were profound and tragic. On 27 July 1946 the Muslim League met and at Jinnah’s behest withdrew its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. This was bad enough; it shattered India’s hopes of independence within a reasonably distant future; it put Hindus and Muslims back in two fuming, suspicious camps. The Viceroy tried desperately to bring the two sides together again, and Congress itself, urged on by Wavell, passed a resolution reiterating its faith in the Cabinet Mission Plan and deprecating (it felt it could hardly condemn) Nehru’s remarks.

But Jinnah had had enough. He was through with flirting with the Hindus once and for all, he said. And he drew up a resolution—which was, of course, passed without dissent—in which he called upon the Muslim League to renounce all the titles they held from the British Government and to set aside 16 August 1946 as ‘Direct Action Day’ when the Muslims of India would demonstrate their determination to achieve a partition of India and a Pakistan of their own.

‘What we have done today’, he declared, afterwards, ‘is the most historic act in our history. Never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by constitutional methods and by constitutionalism. But now we are obliged and forced into this position. This day we bid good-bye to constitutional methods... Today we have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it.’

On the morning of 16 August 1946 Nehru drove to Jinnah’s ugly, sumptuous house on Malabar Hill, in Bombay, for a talk with the Muslim League leader. He had come reluctantly in response to an urgent appeal from the Viceroy, who had asked him to make one last attempt to
bridge the gulf between the two contending parties. In accordance with the provisions of the Cabinet Mission plan, an interim Government was in process of formation, and five places in the Cabinet had been reserved for the Muslim League. So long as the British still remained in India, the Viceroy, in an emergency, could exercise a power of veto; but otherwise the new Government would run the central administration, and Pandit Nehru would be its head. It was his task on this fateful morning to plead with Jinnah to forget ‘Direct Action’ and bring his League into the Government.

It is unlikely that anyone, at this juncture, could have persuaded Mr Jinnah to change his mind, but it is difficult to think of anyone less likely to succeed than Pandit Nehru. Here were two men who had no common meeting ground (not even the future of India) and no respect for each other. Nehru, the Harrow and Oxford-educated intellectual, lover of poetry, writer of books, despised Jinnah as a narrow-minded racialist. ‘He had no real education,’ he once said, ‘He was not what you call an educated man. He had read law books and an occasional work of light fiction, but he never read and real book.’ Jinnah, intensely proud, constantly on the look-out for snubs, was unlikely to unbend in the presence of a man he had once described as ‘an arrogant Brahmin who covers his Hindu trickiness with a veneer of Western education. When he makes promises, he always leaves a loophole, and when he cannot find a loophole, he just lies.’

The encounter between the two leaders lasted for eighty minutes, but encounter was what it was and not a meeting of minds. It would be less than just to Nehru to say that he did not try; he may have had his own ideas of how an independent India should be run, but there is no doubt of his desperate eagerness to achieve it. He had spent most of his life (a considerable part of it in jail) campaigning to rid India of the British, and, suspicious though he still was of British intentions, he was now almost convinced that they were at last ready to go. To have to ask
favours of the man whose stubbornness was blocking the road to freedom must have been hard to bear; to have to admit to himself that his own maladroitness was responsible for the present situation must have been even harder; but he made the effort, with all the eloquence at his command. The response was absolutely null. Jinnah was polite but unyielding. The interview was not only abortive; after it was over, the antipathy between the two men was greater than ever. Pandit Nehru departed more convinced than ever that only this man really stood in the way of India’s freedom, more determined than ever to destroy him and the ‘myth of Pakistan’ which he had created; and yet still unaware of how strong Jinnah really was, how powerful was his hold on Muslim India.

As he drove away from Malabar Hill, the Congress president could see the black flags of mourning—the banners proclaiming ‘Direct Action Day’—flying from Muslim houses and outside shuttered Muslim shops. But Bombay was a Hindu majority area; the streets were quiet and there was no trouble. Karachi and the Punjab, two of the greatest Muslim areas of India, were also under control, the first because the Chief Secretary of the Sind Government had refused to allow the day to be proclaimed a public holiday, the second because the province was under the quietly efficient control of the British Governor, Sir Evan Jenkins, and a reasonably stable provincial government.

In India, however, there was one provincial government under control of the Muslims. This was Bengal, whose capital, Calcutta, is India’s largest city (population, 1946: 2,500,000). The Muslims in Bengal not only outnumbered the Hindus and other minor religions (33,000,000 Muslims against 27,315,000 others) and were thus able to assure themselves a majority at the polls, but they were also given extra seats under the ‘weightage’ system introduced by the British to ensure fair representation for minorities. This meant that even when their supporters
did not vote in overwhelming numbers, they could always be certain of controlling the provincial legislature.*

The British Governor of Bengal was Sir Frederick Burrows, an ex-railwayman and union official, who had been appointed by the Labour Government in February 1946 to succeed Mr R. G. Casey. He was an able and amiable administrator who got on well with Hindus and Muslims alike, and was popular with the local British Army Command; but he was not exactly a man of great strength or quickness of mind. As a personality he was certainly no match for the Chief Minister of Bengal, Mr Shaheed Suhrarwardy, an Oriental politician of considerable shrewdness, deviousness of mind, and great natural charm. Mr Suhrarwardy was a member of the Working Committee of the Muslim League, and therefore might have been expected to jump at the crack of Mr Jinnah's whip with the same alacrity as the other Muslim satraps. In fact, he exercised considerable independence and made it clear to Mr Jinnah that he would brook no interference in his administration. Mr Jinnah did not like him, particularly since he suspected that Suhrarwardy—though he was always careful to pay lip-service to the idea of Pakistan—secretly cherished an ambition of his own: to carve an independent Bengal out of free India and run it as a separate state, outside Jinnah's control.

Mr Suhrarwardy was a party 'boss' of the type who believes that no politician need ever be out of office once his strong-arm squads have gained control of the polling booths; that no minister should ever suffer financially by being in public life; that no relative or political cohort should ever go unrewarded. He loved money, champagne, Polish blondes and dancing the tango in nightclubs, and

* Under this same 'weightage', the 20,000 British residents of Bengal also had a representation in the legislature far beyond that justified by their numbers.
he was reputed to have made a fortune during the war.*
He loved Calcutta, including its filthy, festering slums, and it was from the noisome alleyways of Howrah that he picked the goondus who accompanied him everywhere as a bodyguard.

To this outwardly affable but inwardly ruthless politico, the decision of Mr Jinnah to declare 16 August 1946 as ‘Direct Action Day’ seemed a golden opportunity to demonstrate his power over Bengal’s Muslims and his enthusiasm for Pakistan. He announced that 16 August would be a general holiday in Calcutta for Muslims and Hindus alike; and when Hindu members of the provincial legislature protested that they had no wish to share in a Muslim political hartal, he ordered his party machine to vote them down. On 5 August, under the nom-de-plume of ‘Shaheed’, he wrote an article in the Statesman, Calcutta, in which he said, ominously as it turned out: ‘Bloodshed and disorder are not necessarily evil in themselves, if resorted to for a noble cause. Among Muslims today, no cause is dearer or nobler than Pakistan.’ In a speech in Delhi on 10 August, he threatened to turn Bengal into a separate government if Congress went ahead and formed an interim government on its own. ‘We will see that no revenue is derived from Bengal for such a Central Government, and will consider ourselves as a separate government having no connection with the Centre,’ he declared. And in a declaration on the eve of ‘Direct Action Day’, one of his aides called upon the Muslims to adopt the slogan of Lor ke linge Pakistan! which could be translated as ‘Pakistan by force!’

* Before he left India for Pakistan, income tax officials in Delhi began an investigation into his wartime earnings. Subsequently, after he became Prime Minister of Pakistan, he planned a trip to East Pakistan but discovered that his plane would have to stop at Calcutta on the way. He wrote to the Indian premier, Mr. Nehru, and asked for an Indian assurance that he would not be met by tax officials when he landed.
The stage was set for the demonstration that was to split India in two.

Chicago, Chicago may well be, as the song says, a wonderful town, but Calcutta definitely is not. It is a thriving port and a rich business centre; it has been both a black hole and a splendid provider of wealth for the British in India; and its inhabitants are among the most fluent, intelligent, poetic and most successfully acquisitive in the sub-continent. But only a businessman or a political boss—or a Bengali—could really love Calcutta, for it is a city of poverty, drabness, disease and despair. I can think of no more squalid place in which to live, or a more terrifyingly ugly and lonely place in which to die. The city is built on the mudflats along the banks of the Hooghly River, and to Western ears there could not be a more appropriate name. In the centre are the great buildings, the palaces, administrative headquarters, the broad squares, the fountains and the monuments, which the British built to give a heavily majestic look to the city whose natural resources they had exploited; but the central showground is surrounded by the most leprous slums in the world. Here live the underprivileged deluded human termites whom politicians love because they are poor, they are ignorant, they are fearful and superstitious, and they are pathetically easy to exploit.

It would be stupid to ignore Bengal’s contribution to the cause of Indian freedom, or to India’s intellectual and cultural life. Rabindranath Tagore, the great poet, was a Bengali, as was Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the father of modern Indian poetry, and Rammohun Roy, Swami Vivekananda, and Bankim Chandra Chatteri, the founders of Hindu nationalism. But the Bengalis who counted on 16 August were the mobs from the slums.

They crossed the Hooghly River from Howrah into Calcutta soon after dawn. They were armed with lathis (long sticks), knives, bottles and automobile cranks or other kinds of iron bars. Most of them at this time were Muslims. They waited in doorways and alleyways until
it was time for shops to open, and then they watched to see which shops did open (in the circumstances, they were bound to be non-Muslim). The doorkeeper who opened the shop was swiftly clubbed down, or kicked, or stabbed; then the contents of the shop were smashed or looted.

It began quietly at first, and scarcely anyone realized what terrible things were happening. A British cycling across Chowringhee Square on his way to a hospital where he worked, saw a sweeper running towards him, pursued by a mob. At the moment he dismounted, one of the mob reached the sweeper and whacked him so hard across the legs that the crack of his broken bones could be clearly heard. The moment he touched the ground, another member of the mob leaned down and cut the man’s throat and then sliced off his ear. Then the rest of the mob came up, nodded and smiled and touched their hearts and foreheads to the Englishman, saying: ‘Good day to you, sir’ before turning to make off across the square. It all happened so swiftly that the Englishman found it hard to believe that it had happened at all.

In the beginning there were isolated incidents. An old woman was stopped, taunted, tossed from hand to hand, and then suddenly, when she scratched or bit or kicked, cracked over the head with a lathi. There was sport to be had with legless and armless cripples, of whom there are plenty in Calcutta. They were tipped off their wheeltrays and left helpless in the road, or stuffed into a sandbin and left to yelp. There were small girls and old men who were frog-marched to a place where a cow—one of Calcutta’s wandering sacred cows—had been caught and they were forced to hold the knife that cut its throat; a terrible act of sacrilege for a Hindu. (Even in the Bengal famine, no Hindu deliberately killed and certainly never ate a cow.)

By noon however, the small, evil spurts of violence had begun to develop into flames and fires. It was catching. At first, it had been only groups of goondas who killed
and battered, while small scatterings of wary onlookers followed them and looted smashed shops or helped to overturn cars. But, gradually, the onlookers became participants in the killings. Now, from many parts of Calcutta, the noise of human voices began to be heard; voices raised in anger or in pain, a steadily increasing keening sound that rose and fell, like the voice of hell, for the next four days to come.

At two o'clock on the afternoon of 16 August 1946, Mr Shaheed Suhrarwardy addressed a mass meeting in the Maidan, Calcutta's main square. He was in an ebullient mood and thanked his listeners for their numbers, their enthusiasm and their active work for Pakistan. While he spoke, men were being killed a couple of streets away. The smoke from fires started by the mob (who had broken into petrol stations by now, and were spraying nearby shops with fuel) could be plainly seen from the square, but neither Mr Suhrarwardy nor his considerable police bodyguard seemed to be aware of them.

In truth, the Calcutta police were finding the job of putting down the riots an almost insuperable one. There was the psychological difficulty at first (when the acts of murder were being mostly committed by Muslims) that the killers and violators were of their own religion, for most of the Calcutta police were Muslims. But by afternoon, the bellows of artificial fury had done the work and the Hindus and Sikhs came out on to the streets too, red hot for revenge and reprisal. They came out not to meet the Muslim goondas in head-on clashes, nor even to protect their own people and put down the rioting. That is not the way Calcutta mobs work. While the Muslim gangs went on hunting isolated Hindus and looting Hindu shops, Hindus and Sikhs went out on a hunt for helpless Muslims. It was always the old men, the children and the women that they were after. The women lost their breasts. The old men had their legs snapped. The children had their hands or arms cut off. The only pitched battle which took place between Muslims and Hindus happened at Ripon
College, when the Muslims hoisted a Muslim League flag on the pole. A Hindu shinned up and replaced it with the Congress banner, while below the mobs fought briefly - and then swiftly retired. They were not there to get hurt themselves but to kill and maim the unarmed among their enemies. And though the police managed to clear the main streets by firing tear-gas on the gangs, they reappeared as soon as the patrols had passed; there is always an alleyway in Calcutta down which you can disappear until the police have gone through.

Mr Jinnah had called the 'Direct Action Day' a demonstration against the British for their refusal to recognize Pakistan, but of all the communities in Calcutta once the rioting began, the British were the only ones who were safe. A number of them were besieged in the Grand Hotel, in Chowringhee Square, by a large gang of goondas. Presently, the leaders of the gang approached the hotel and offered to let the British guests go but would guarantee no safe passage for the Indians. The British held a meeting and decided to stay. Late that afternoon, they watched through the windows and saw a group of shouting, laughing Sikhs slowly chopping a live Muslim to pieces with their knives. 'I have a stomach made strong by experiences of a war hospital, but war was never like this,' wrote Mr Kim Christen later. 'I made my way on a cycle, up Chittaranjan Avenue, to the Medical College.* There I hoped to use my wartime experience in hospitals to do whatever I could to help. There had been a mob killing two hundred yards south of the Medical College, and bodies lay about in the roads amid the wreckage of burning cars. I waited awhile until the mob moved towards a side street and then continued to the hospital, where I first realized the enormity of the situation. Ambulances, Friend's service units, police trucks emptied themselves of

* There was no transport, of course. Tramcars and buses had stopped, since they are the first things that Calcutta mobs overturn and burn when angry.
bleeding, shattered, wounded, while open carts were piled with those who had not survived the journey back. I approached a Red Cross truck and joined a group of young medical students. They pinned a paper cross to my shirt and then drove to the Mirzapur area, dismounted when the bodies grew thick, and searched among them for any flicker of life in the pulse. They were few, and they were lifted on to stretchers, already red and sodden, to be taken to a hospital already overcrowded. This search for survivors continued throughout the day and night. We went North and East, over the canal, gathering broken heads and stricken bodies, and took them to whatever hospital was nearest. Weapons of every shape and size had been gathered by the mobs—heavy tools, iron bars, spikes tied to lathis, while barrel loads of bricks were wheeled to the edge of the encounters. One man whose back was streaming with blood, having been hurled through a plate glass window behind him, squatted on the kerb. I saw him, while still bleeding, tear strips of cloth from his shirt and tie a piece of glass to the split of a stick, so as to use it as an axe. All the hospitals had hung ‘Full’ notices outside. Doctors and nurses operated continuously, and medical students whose medical books were still clean were called upon to exercise their knowledge in the most practical of schools. The ambulances were told to refuse all pleas for refuge and confine their loads to those not yet dead.

At the end of the first forty-eight hours, an air of death and desolation hung over Calcutta. It was muggily hot and raining slightly. The smoke from fires hung heavy on the air. Only an occasional cycle (usually ridden by an Englishman) or a military jeep, canopied in wire netting, rushed by. The city had come to a standstill. No more trains were coming into Howrah or Sealdah from the country. The sewers overflowed; and in the foetid gutters the bodies of dead men and women and dead cows lay side by side, being picked over by the vultures.
There were already 4,000 dead and countless numbers of wounded, but it was not over yet. The military (that is, the Army under British command) had been called in by now, and more troops were being rushed in from up-country garrisons. The sight of British or Gurkha troops was always a signal for the mob to stop their depredations, and often they received a cheer; they moved about the city, calmly moving barricades, breaking up demonstrations, stopping to investigate and rescue whenever they heard a cry from a house. But they had been called in too late to have the great psychological impact which might have put down the rioting right from the start. From now on, they would be able to stop the big riots and keep the gangs off the main streets, but there was little they could do to prevent the knifings and batterings which still went on in the alleyways.

The first Army troops had not been called upon to deal with the situation until the second day of the great Calcutta killings. Sir Frederick Burrows had made his own tour of the riot area on the first day, but the mobs squeezed back into the woodwork whenever he passed, and the Chief Minister, Suhrarwardy, had been able to persuade him that all was under control. It was only when the Hindus and Sikhs had come out in retaliation that the Chief Minister had called for military aid, afraid for the first time of the enormity of the tragic events which had been set in train. It was a misfortune for Calcutta that the GOC of the British and Indian forces in this area of India, Lieut General Sir Francis Tuker, had been called back to Britain for a staff conference, and military decisions were in the hands of his subordinates. Tuker had no great admiration for many Indian leaders or for the fighting qualities of the Bengalis,* but he was not the man to sit back and wait for orders when men, women and children were being massacred on the streets. He made it quite clear upon his return that he would have telephon-

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* Bengalis were never recruited as fighting men into the Indian Army.
ed Sir Frederick Burrows and insisted upon intervening the moment it became obvious, on the first day, that the riots were serious; and, as he proved a year later, he had a short, sharp and effective way of dealing with goondas. But this was a job his subordinates had to handle—and they were hesitant and uncertain.

Slowly, very slowly, the great city of Calcutta began to recover. The fever died down, though the place was still one great festering scab.

‘When we wrote two days ago,’ said the British-owned Statesman, ‘conditions in Calcutta were horrifying. They have gone beyond that since. Whatever the appropriate adjective is, they were nothing in comparison with what we have subsequently seen. The latest estimate of dead is 3,000, who have lain thick about the streets. The injured number many thousand and it is impossible to say how many business houses and private dwellings have been destroyed. This is not a riot. It needs a word found in mediaeval history, a fury. Yet fury sounds spontaneous, and there must have been some deliberation and organization to set this fury on its way. The horde who ran about battering and killing with lathis may have found them lying about or brought them out of their own pockets, but that is not to be believed. We have already commented on the bands who found it easy to get petrol and vehicles when no others were permitted on the streets. It is not mere supposition that men were brought into Calcutta to make an impression... Thousands have been brutally hurt, smashed eyes, smashed jaws, smashed limbs, of men, women and children—these are the kind of political argument the twentieth century does not expect.’

The Amrita Bazar Patrika, a pro-Hindu paper, said: ‘Hindus and Muslims must hang down their heads in shame that exhibitions of such unmitigated beastliness should have been allowed to occur in our modern city. The tallest among us must look small in the eyes of the outside world.’

There was blame for the holocaust to be apportioned. The Statesman, whose Editor at the time was reputed to
be pro-Muslim, wrote: 'What befell India's largest city last week was no mere communal riot, as we have hither-to understood the sanguinary term. For three days, the city concentrated on unrestrained civil war. Upon whom the main guilt for it rests is manifest. There has been criticism of the Governor [Sir Frederick Burrows]. We do not think he has emerged particularly well. But none except a very great man holding his traditionally constitutional office during such a swift crisis could have done so. Where the primary blame lies is where we have squarely put it—upon the provincial Muslim League Cabinet which carries responsibility for law and order in Bengal, and particularly upon the one able man of large administrative experience there, the Chief Minister [Suhrarwardy]. That in the whole of India the only Province where carnage occurred, on the League's professed peaceful Direct Action Day, should have been in Bengal, where a League Ministry holds office, astounds us.'

Suhrarwardy himself made no statement in reply. It seems certain, from the actions he took later, that even he was appalled by the great massacre. Both Mr Nehru and Mr Jinnah were quick to condemn it. The Muslim League leader issued a statement saying: 'I unreservedly condemn the acts of violence and deeply sympathise with those who have suffered. At present I do not know who are responsible for the resultant loss of life and property which has been reported in the Press. Those who are guilty of resorting to indefensible conduct must be dealt with according to the law, as their actions, as far as the Muslim League is concerned, are contrary to instructions. They play into the hands of the enemy. They may be the actions of agents provocateurs.'

But though he may have condemned the orgy of violence, Mr Jinnah cannot have been anything but satisfied by the lessons that were inevitably drawn from it. Could anything prove more ruthlessly the validity of his claim that, in an independent India, Hindus and Muslims
could no longer live together; that civil war would be the result?

One might have thought that the Indian leaders, Nehru of Congress and Jinnah of the League, would have come to Calcutta immediately and possibly shown themselves together to demonstrate their common abhorrence of violence and bloodshed for political purposes. But both of them were too busy for that. Mr Jinnah was in conference with the working committee of the Muslim League, planning new tactics in his fight with Congress. Pandit Nehru was holding the first meetings to pick the Cabinet (minus the Muslims) of the new interim Government.*

Only the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, came to Calcutta to mourn with its citizens and grieve at what he saw. It was he who listened to stories of how, in the midst of the carnage, when Muslim was killing Hindu, and Hindu Muslim, there had still been a gleam of light in the midst of the gloom. All over the city, examples were becoming known of Hindus who had died to save Muslims, of Muslims who had sheltered Hindus at the risk of their own lives and of how, towards the end, bands of mixed Muslim-Hindu young people had marched through the streets, dispersing mobs, crying Hindu-Muslim ek ho (Hindus and Muslims unite), with the flags of the Congress and the League tied together.

It had been a moving demonstration that there was still some civilization left in the ugly city of Calcutta, and that there were still some Indians who could work and fight together, despite their religious differences. For them the bodies in the gutter were symbols of hope rather than despair, for they might jolt some sense of civilization—some common humanity—into the muddle-headed Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs of India.

There were many lessons, hard, bitter, bloody and practical lessons, to be learned from the massacre of August 1946.

* Both Congress and Muslim leaders did go later—when rioting spread to Bihar.
A few weeks later, however, you would have found it difficult to believe that anyone (with the possible exception of Mahatma Gandhi) had taken any notice of them at all.

Not the Hindus. Not the Muslims. Not the British.

CHAPTER TWO

'THEY'VE SACKED ME, GEORGE'

If it comes to a question of pinning down the exact day the Congress Party decided that they must get rid of Lord Wavell as Viceroy of India, a serious student would probably choose 27 August 1946.

That evening, Wavell called Gandhi and Nehru in to see him, and had they not been so concerned with their own affairs, they would have noticed that he was labouring under a burden of considerable distress. It has been noted before that the Viceroy was a man who did not find it easy to talk. He had no gift for conversation, and when he spoke it was because he had something important to say.

At the meeting on 27 August, he spoke at what, for him, was considerable length. 'I have just come back from Calcutta,' he said, 'and I am appalled at what I have seen.' He described to the two Hindu leaders the enormity of the crime against humanity and civilization which had been committed by Muslims and Hindus alike in Calcutta during recent days, and stressed the guiltiness of both communities for it. He admitted that, as an Englishman, he had no right to judge the actions of the Indian political parties, even though he condemned and was cast down by the barbarities which had been committed in their name.
But so long as he was Viceroy of India, he went on, he felt it necessary to do all in his power to prevent any more massacres of this kind. Neither as an Englishman nor as a human being could he stomach such savagery and bestiality. He would be abdicating his responsibilities if he did not make a supreme effort to bring the two communities, Hindu and Muslim, together and persuade them that working together was the only sure way to freedom.

'This,' he said to Gandhi and Nehru, 'is an appeal to you to help me to bring it about.'

While in Calcutta, Wavell had spent some time in consultation with a Muslim League leader named Khwaja Nazimuddin, who was a member of the League Working Committee and had the ear of Mr Jinnah. Nazimuddin had come forward with a proposition. The Cabinet Mission's Plan for Indian independence had been based on the idea of a Federal India based on three Groups: A (Hindu dominated), B (Muslim dominated) and C (with a slight domination in favour of the Muslims). The most important element in India would, of course, be Group A, controlled by an overwhelming majority of Hindus, which would always be more powerful than Groups B and C.

This was an arrangement which the Muslim League had accepted until Nehru's maladroit repudiation of the grouping scheme. Nazimuddin now proposed that Congress should make a declaration. They should announce that they had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan not as they interpreted it, but as the Cabinet Mission had intended it. They should also guarantee that no minorities in the Groups should be allowed to opt out of them before the ten-year period specified by the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Scheme, in other words, should be given a chance to work.

In these circumstances, Nazimuddin told Wavell, the Muslim League might reconsider its rejection of the scheme and decide to come into the interim Government.
Wavell put the question frankly to Gandhi and Nehru: *Will you give me the guarantee the Muslim League is asking for?*

He was almost immediately plunged into the most difficult argument he had ever had with Gandhi, who chose this day to be at his most polemical and devious. Here was a saint who could, in his ashram, dispense great wisdom and counsel tolerance, understanding and the necessity to give rather than take. But on this evening he spoke purely and simply as a Congress politician.

"Give me a simple guarantee that you accept the Cabinet Mission Plan," asked Wavell.

"We have already said that we accept it," replied Gandhi, "but we are not prepared to guarantee that we accept it in the way that the Cabinet Mission set it out. We have our own interpretations of what they propose."

Said Wavell: "Even if those interpretations differ from what the Cabinet Mission intended?"

Replied Gandhi: "But of course. In any case, what the Cabinet Mission Plan really means is not what the Cabinet Mission thinks but what the interim Government thinks it means."

Wavell pointed out that the interim Government's opinion, as things were at the moment, would almost inevitably be pro-Congress and anti-Muslim League, since the League was boycotting the Government. How could it be unbiased?

Gandhi replied that he was not concerned with bias. He was simply concerned with the legal basis of the discussion. Legally, this was a matter for the interim Government to decide. Once the interim Government was in power, such matters as the Muslim League's ambitions and artificial anxieties could be voted upon; but not before.

"But don't you see," exploded Wavell, in an unusual burst of temper, "it will be a Congress Government! They are bound to be lacking in impartiality."

Pandit Nehru interrupted at this point. "You misunderstand the composition of the Congress Party, your
Excellency, not, I may say, for the first time. The Congress is not pro-Hindu or anti-Muslim. It is for all the peoples of India. It will never legislate against the interests of the Muslims.’

Replied Wavell: ‘But whose Muslims, Pandit Nehru? Yours, the Congress Muslims, the so-called stooges? Or those of the Muslim League? Can’t you see that the necessity of this moment is to satisfy the Muslim League that you are not trying to do them down? It is a moment—possibly the last we have—to bring the League and the Congress together. And all I ask is a guarantee. Will the Congress commit itself to a declaration, a declaration which will satisfy the Muslim League and assure the continuation of a stable and unitary government?’ He reached into his drawer and pulled out a paper. ‘This is what I have in mind.’

The declaration ran thus: ‘The Congress are prepared in the interests of communal harmony to accept the intention of the statement of 16 May [the Cabinet Mission statement] that provinces cannot exercise any option affecting their membership of the sections or of the groups if formed, until the decision contemplated in paragraph 19 (vii) of the Statement of 16 May is taken by the new legislature after the new constitutional arrangements have come into operation and the first general elections have been held.’*

Gandhi handed it over to Nehru, who read it through and said:

‘To accept this is tantamount to asking Congress to put itself in fetters.’

Wavell replied:

‘So far as the Cabinet Mission Plan is concerned, that is what I feel you should do. When Congress accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan in the first place, I cannot believe that you did so not knowing its implications. If so, why did you accept it at all? The plan for dividing the

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country into groups was implicit. You cannot now turn round and say that you did not realize that is what was intended."

Gandhi: ‘What the Cabinet Mission intended and the way we interpret what they intended may not necessarily be the same.’

‘This is lawyer’s talk,’ said Wavell. ‘Talk to me in plain English. I am a simple soldier and you confuse me with these legalistic arguments.’

Nehru: ‘We cannot help it if we are lawyers.’

Wavell: ‘No, but you can talk to me like honest men who are interested in India’s future and welfare. Dammit, the Cabinet Mission made its intentions as clear as daylight. Surely we don’t need to go to law about that or split legal hairs, either. As a plain man, the situation seems to me simple. If Congress will give me the guarantee for which I ask, I think I can persuade Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League to reconsider their refusal to join the interim Government. We need them in the Government; India needs them, and, if you are seriously concerned over the dangers of civil war—and you must know as well as I that the danger is great—then you need them too. In the circumstances, I feel that it would be unwise, even perilous, if I allowed Congress to form an interim Government on its own.’

Gandhi: ‘But you have already announced that the Government will come into being. You cannot go back on your word now.’

Wavell: ‘The situation has changed. As a result of the killings in Calcutta, India is on the verge of civil war. It is my duty to prevent it. I will not prevent it if I allow Congress to form a Government which excludes the Muslims: they will then decide that Direct Action is the only way, and we shall have the massacre of Bengal all over again.’

Nehru: ‘In other words, you are willing to surrender to the Muslim League’s blackmail.’
Wavell (with great heat): 'For God's sake, man, who are you to talk of blackmail?'

So far as Nehru and Gandhi were concerned, it was the end of Wavell as a Viceroy with whom they could deal. That night both of them sat down to write letters. Gandhi first penned a cable to Mr Attlee, the Labour Prime Minister, in which he expressed concern over the Viceroy's state of mind. He was, he said, 'unnerved owing to the Bengal tragedy'. He needed to be bolstered by 'an abler and legal mind'. He followed this with a letter to Wavell in which he said:

'Several times last evening you repeated that you were a "plain man and a soldier" and that you did not know the law. We are all plain men though we may not all be soldiers and even though some of us may know the law. It is our purpose, I take it, to devise methods to prevent a repetition of the recent terrible happenings in Calcutta. The question before us is how best to do it. Your language last evening was minatory. As representative of the King, you cannot afford to be a military man only, nor to ignore the law, much less the law of your own making. You should be assisted, if necessary, by a legal mind enjoying your full confidence. You threatened not to convene the Constituent Assembly, if the formula you placed before Pandit Nehru and me was not acted upon by Congress. If such be really the case then you should not have made the announcement you did on 12 August [asking Congress to form a government] . . . ?'*

Wavell had made the point that if Congress formed a government on its own, the Muslim League would reply with Direct Action. This would result in further massacres, the British troops would have to intervene to restore order; a possibility, at this juncture, which he was desperately anxious to avoid. Gandhi's reply to this was a typical example of Gandhian reasoning of the kind which made Wavell writhe. *If the Viceroy was really worried about having to use British forces to preserve order,*

* Pyarelal, *Gandhi: The Last Phase.*
his argument ran, the solution was simple. Withdraw them. Leave the matter of keeping the peace to the Congress. It did not seem to occur to Gandhi that such a peace would be a Congress-imposed peace, and the Muslims might well get short shrift from it.

‘If British arms are kept here for internal peace and order,’ Gandhi wrote, ‘your interim Government would be reduced to a farce. The Congress cannot afford to impose its will on warring elements in India through the use of British arms. Nor can the Congress be expected to bend itself and adopt what it considers a wrong course because of the brutal exhibition recently witnessed in Bengal. Such submission would itself lead to an encouragement and repetition of such tragedies. The vindictive spirit on either side would go deeper, biding for an opportunity to exhibit itself more fiercely and more disgracefully when occasion occurs. And all this will be chiefly due to the continued presence in India of a foreign power strong in and proud of its arms.’

Now this was nonsense, and Nehru and the other leaders of the Congress Party knew it, even if Gandhi did not. They had been vociferous in their complaints about the dilatoriness of British military intervention in Calcutta. The strong-man of the party, Sardar Patel, had been to see the Viceroy several times to request military help in restoring order in Bihar, where the Hindus had begun to rape, kill and mutilate in reprisal for their losses in Calcutta. And Congress knew only too well that peace in the Punjab, where there were 16,000,000 Muslims and 12,000,000 non-Muslims, was maintained only because of the tight control exercised by the Governor, Sir Evan Jenkins, and the weapon of British military intervention should trouble begin.

To suggest that the British should withdraw their armies at this moment, when Hindu-Muslim relations were wider apart than ever before, was a counsel no Viceroy could

possibly have accepted. To Wavell it seemed more necessary than ever that the British, before departing, should somehow bring the two opposing sides together in some sort of government, so that they might fight out their differences in the debating chamber rather than the back alleys; that he would be abdicating his responsibility if he allowed Congress to form a government and impose its will, so long as there was a remote chance that the Muslim League could be persuaded to co-operate.

For this attitude he was publicly dubbed pro-Muslim by Gandhi (though he apologized and withdrew the charge later). Pandit Nehru made the same accusation, but he did so in private letters to a number of friends in Britain. Nehru was always a firm believer in negotiation by private correspondence. He had a large number of friends, most of them Liberal or Left Wing, and they had been of considerable help in adumbrating the policies of congress even during the wartime Coalition Government. Now, with a Labour Government in power, they had the ear of the Cabinet and were influential in forming Government opinion. No one could possibly blame Nehru for the tactics he used; as a politician who believed that Congress was right, that Jinnah was a threat to Indian freedom, he was, of course, justified in using every shot in his locker to smash him. And if one of the shots brought down the Viceroy, so much the better, from his viewpoint. So with great eloquence and assiduity, he pointed out in letter after letter—sure that the purport would be conveyed to 10 Downing Street—that though Wavell was an honest man and a sincere man, he was a weak man, too. He had lost all flexibility of mind, and, in his desire to appease Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League, was rapidly leading India to disaster. This, Nehru maintained, was mainly because his two principal advisers, the only two who had any real influence upon him, were enemies of the Congress Party and strongly pro-Muslim and sought every opportunity of manoeuvring Wavell into situations where he favoured the Muslim
League at the expense of Congress, and of India. He called these two the ‘English mullahs’ and named them as Sir Francis Mudie (then Governor of Bombay) and Mr (later Sir) George Abell, the Viceroy’s private secretary. Between them Nehru maintained, they had succeeded in persuading the Viceroy that an interim Government must under no circumstances be formed unless the Muslim League came into it; and their reason was, in the case of Mudie, to help his Muslim friends, and in the case of Abell, because he believed that the British were justified in remaining in India and postponing their promise of Indian independence.

There was certainly some truth in the charge that Sir Francis Mudie was strongly anti-Congress and was a fervid supporter of Jinnah and Pakistan. Abell’s attitude could be summed up as: ‘A plague on both your houses.’ He had less patience than Wavell and grew increasingly exasperated with the twists and turns, the conspiracies, the dialectics and the spate of exhortatory chatter in which both Hindus and Muslims indulged. But the idea that either had any important influence on Wavell’s thinking is to under-estimate the mind of the man, and the independence of his judgment. The only thing which was influencing him at this time was the thought of bloodshed. Calcutta had impressed itself upon him like a stigma. He was appalled at what Indian could do to Indian. The disgust he felt was great; the stench of evil was never out of his nostrils; but as yet it was not great enough to persuade him that there was only one way out for Britain—to cut the cable and let India draft away to perdition on her own.

At home in Britain the propaganda was beginning to do its work. In official Labour Party circles the Viceroy now had few friends left. Mr Attlee had little confidence in him. ‘If I could find a better man,’ he confided to friends, who confided it to Congress, ‘I would replace him.’ He was so lacking in understanding of the communal position that Gandhi’s suggestion that Wavell need-
ed the aid of 'an abler and legal mind' provoked the remark: 'What's wrong with Nehru? He's a lawyer, isn't he?' He might just as well have suggested Jinnah, who was a lawyer too. Only the Secretary of State for India, Lord Pethick Lawrence, continued to sympathize with Wavell's viewpoint and never failed to write him letters of cogent advice and warm appreciation of his sincere attempts to bring about some sort of rapprochement. Pethick Lawrence was far from being pro-Muslim. Jinnah's intractability had sorely tried his patience when they had met earlier in the year. But he saw what Mr Attlee apparently could not see: that there could be no peace, and no future, unless Congress—as the strongest party—made some gesture that would show the Indian Muslims (if not Mr Jinnah and the League) that they genuinely wanted to cooperate and were sincere in their assertions that independent India would not become simply a Hindu raj.

It is not the intention of this book to deal play by play, blow by blow, with the events in India during Wavell's term as Viceroy. The background of events is given here merely to set the scene for the drama that was to follow. So much of the futile squabbling, the litigious argument, the divagations of Congress, the mulishness of Jinnah, the cloudy idealism of Gandhi had no more effect on the eventual outcome than the chatter of birds in a thunderstorm. India in 1946 was a cauldron steeped in every ingredient calculated to produce the worst kind of noxious brew—obstinacy, venom, malevolence, anger, violence, jealousy and resentment. Absent in all hearts was the milk of human kindness. No one—not even Gandhi—was being generous that year.

And perhaps greatest of all the impediments to a solution was mistrust. Jinnah and the Muslim League mistrusted Congress. Congress mistrusted the Viceroy. The Viceroy mistrusted the Government at home, particularly Mr Attlee. Mr Attlee did not necessarily mistrust the Viceroy, but he had certainly lost faith in him. Just be-
fore the end of August 1946, he showed it. In a private telegram, he told Lord Wavell that he was overruling him. Wavell still wished to postpone the swearing-in of the interim Government until the Muslim League could be persuaded to join it. He was convinced that dogged effort and determination—plus a little Congress generosity and increasing pressure upon Jinnah—would get them in. Attlee said that further delay would only exacerbate the tempers of the Congress Party leaders and perhaps lead to a definite break between them and the British authorities, as a result of which civil disobedience and anti-British agitation might once more sweep the country. This was a profound misreading of the state of mind of the Congress leaders; for civil disobedience would mean that they would go to jail again, and, as Nehru pointed out to the author—‘We were tired men. We were not prepared to go to jail again.’ The British Prime Minister did not, however, realize this. He ordered Wavell to bring the interim Government into being, and on 2 September 1946 it was sworn in. Five stooges were sworn in as ‘caretaker’ ministers until such time as the Muslim League decided to enter the Government.

The defeat for the Viceroy was considerable. The British Government, by overruling him, had demonstrated to Congress that they no longer had any confidence in him. From this moment on, neither side in India—Hindus nor Muslims—needed to consider him as a vital figure in their negotiations. It is perhaps difficult to imagine Mr Attlee in the role of Delilah, but by his action of August 1946, he lopped Wavell of most of his strength and left him practically helpless in the face of the increasingly intransigent communal leaders with whom he had to deal. Wavell in this hour of personal humiliation showed remarkable lack of resentment. His instinct was to resign at once, but he was aware of the difficult problem which would confront the British Government if he took this action, and of the crisis it might well provoke in India. He stayed on. He went on with the wearisome round of
interviews, with Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, though he rarely saw Gandhi after this. (The Mahatma had gone to Bihar and Bengal to start his great, saintly, and marvelously effective crusade against communal violence.) With Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat, he flew to London for an abortive conference with Mr Attlee and Lord Pethick Lawrence. He was definitely the odd man out on this expedition: Nehru made a great impression with the inner circles of the Labour Government, who were inclined (with the possible exception of Mr Ernest Bevin) to accept the Congress point of view and had little or no sympathy for the rigid, frigid, intractable Jinnah. Jinnah, on the other hand, found considerable support among the members of the Tory Party, and he stayed on after the conference was over to make speeches about Pakistan which won quite a number of converts to his viewpoint. Wavell’s position was rather like the guest at the family conference who has to be invited because he is the titular head of the clan but has long since been considered a bit of a bore and a nuisance. ‘I felt like a poor relation,’ he said when he got back to India.

The conference in London hardened the attitudes of both Congress and the Muslim League, rather than made them more flexible. The bloody riots which were now beginning to spread across India and the increasing tension between the two communities were doing Jinnah’s work for him. He could now say: ‘Even the Hindus need Pakistan—if only to save their own people from this continual slaughter and destruction.’ There were those even in the Congress Party who were beginning to agree with him, but they did not include either Gandhi or Nehru, and these were the two who were still the most potent influences on Congress thinking.

As he wrestled with mounting problems of communal agitation, political stubbornness and the legal ‘double talk’ of the Hindu and Muslim leaders, Wavell became firmer than ever in one thing: that though the problem of India’s political future now seemed insuperable, he himself would
never be responsible for splitting the land, its people and its army in two. From his viewpoint, there seemed to be now only one way out: a gradual withdrawal of the British administration from India so that bloc by bloc, province by province, the Indians would be faced with the responsibility of settling their own future and making their own peace with each other.

With the help of Mr George Abell, his chief adviser, and a number of British members of the administration, he drew up a plan which might, from its nature, be called Operation Ebb-Tide. It was a plan which, admittedly, contained the fundamental admission that Britain’s day in India was drawing to a close. It was, briefly, a scheme to withdraw British troops and British administration stage by stage from India; but it was by no means a policy of cut-and-run such as some of Wavell’s critics have since described it. Winston Churchill, for instance, was furious when he heard about it. In India, such administrators as Sir Evan Jenkins in the Punjab and General Auchinleck, the Commander in Chief of the Indian Army, were strongly against it—in the case of Jenkins because he thought it would not work, and in the case of Auchinleck because he believed that Britain still had a solemn duty to perform in India, and in spite of the clamour and killings, must not be panicked into withdrawal.

Operation Ebb-Tide was, however, no panic move. As Wavell visualized it, the process of British retreat would never be precipitate. No province would be left until conditions of reasonable safety and security had been gained. But the Operation would make clear, to Indian leaders particularly, that the British were on their way out and they must make a supreme effort to learn to live together before they were left to their own devices.

Wavell despatched Operation Ebb-Tide to Mr Attlee for the consideration of the Cabinet early in 1947. In view of the decision which was taken later, their reaction to it was remarkable. They sheered away from it like frightened rabbits. As Wavell said later, in a letter to King
George VI: ‘their chief difficulty was their reluctance to face Parliament with any proposal which would make it clear that we were withdrawing our control very shortly.’ They were afraid of the right-wing members of their own Party, they were afraid of the Tories, and they were particularly afraid of Winston Churchill. ‘They dropped Wavell’s plan like a hot potato (though very soon afterwards, they were to pick up an even hotter one). Of Operation Ebb-Tide, Earl Attlee (as he had then become) said:

‘Wavell was pretty defeatist by then. He produced a plan worked out by his Indian Civil Service advisers for the evacuation of India, with everybody moving from where they were by stages right up through the Ganges valley till eventually, apparently, they would be collected at Karachi and Bombay, and sail away. Well, I thought that was what Winston would certainly quite properly describe as an ignoble and sordid scuffle and I wouldn’t look at it.’

In the light of what happened later, these are not only hard words but unfair ones, too. They were also un-statesmanlike and ignorant. There is good reason to believe that Operation Ebb-Tide might not only have worked, but might have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. It would have been welcomed by the Congress Party and, with some reservations, by Jinnah and the Muslim League. The battle cry of Congress was still ‘Quit India!’ and, as Gandhi’s biographer and close associate, Pyarelal, says, Gandhi would have welcomed it as a very fair challenge ‘provided the British Government were ready to transfer full power to Indian hands and withdraw their forces from Indian soil with grace and goodwill’. It is true that the Muslim League’s watchword was ‘Divide and Quit!’ But Wavell’s plan would have made adequate arrangement for the protection of minorities during the period of withdrawal and the predominantly Muslim areas of India would be those to which the British would retreat, thus protecting the Muslims until some modus vivendi could be reach-
ed during the interim period. Among some of the British concerned with Wavell’s plan, it was estimated that to preserve peace in India while it was in operation would cost some 30,000 lives. The enormity of this figure caused a number of them to have second thoughts, though it would seem like a mere drop in the ocean of Indian mortality a little over a year later.

In any case, the Labour Government would have none of it. So far as Mr Attlee was concerned, it was the end of Wavell as Viceroy. On the morning of 19 February 1947 the Viceroy was having breakfast with George Abell, when the dispatches were brought in. One of the cables marked ‘private and confidential’ was handed to the Viceroy, who opened it, read it through, and then went on eating his egg. Abell was on sufficiently close terms with his Chief to realize, from the set of Wavell’s face, that something had happened, and he waited to be told. There was five minutes’ silence. At last, Abell said:

‘Anything, important, sir?’

Wavell: ‘They’ve sacked me, George.’ A long pause, and then: ‘They were quite right, I suppose.’

I doubt if history will agree with him.

On 20 February 1947, Mr Attlee announced in the House of Commons that power would be transferred into the hands of a responsible Indian Government by a date not later than June 1948. He also announced the resignation of Lord Wavell as Viceroy and his replacement by Admiral Viscount Mountbatten. His tribute to Wavell’s unrelaxing efforts was polite but cool. As he said afterwards, ‘I came to the conclusion that Wavell had shot his bolt.’ There was no mention of Operation Ebb-Tide, or of the fact that Wavell had faced the implications of the Indian dilemma long before Attlee. He announced simply that in return for his services, the retiring Viceroy had been raised in the peerage (that usual British reward for failure or disagreement) to the rank of Earl. Wavell characteristically was too polite to refuse the preferment.
For the next few weeks, he went on doggedly with his job in Delhi, still listening to the Indian leaders, still exhorting the Congress to be generous, still urging the Muslims to be statesmanlike. The only comment he ever made (and that was in private conversation) was, bitterly: ‘I always get the dirty end of the stick, don’t I, George?’

June 1948. A definite date had now been set by the Labour Government for the transfer of British power in India. For Congress, it was a matter for jubilation.

‘The clear and definite declaration that the final transfer of power will take place by a date not later than June 1948’, declared Nehru, ‘not only removes all misconceptions and suspicions, but also brings reality and a certain dynamic quality to the present situation in India. . . . It is a challenge to all of us, and we shall try to meet it bravely in the spirit of that challenge.’

Mr Jinnah’s reaction was shorter. ‘For the moment I refuse to comment,’ he said, ‘except to say that the Muslim League will not yield an inch in its demand for Pakistan.’

There were those in Britain who condemned the announcement of a time-limit as, in the words of Sir John Anderson, ‘a gamble and an unjustifiable gamble’. Viscount Templewood forecast rioting and bloodshed and Lord Simon that ‘the end of this business is not going to be the establishment of peace in India, but rather that it is going to degrade the British name.’ For Winston Churchill, to whom the Congress Party had always been a rabble and Gandhi a little agitator in a nightshirt, the announcement had the effect of an incendiary bomb on a load of hay. ‘In handing over the Government of India to these so-called political classes,’ he said, ‘we are handing over to men of straw of whom in a few years no trace will remain.’ He suggested that instead of fixing a date for withdrawal, the aid of the United Nations should be called in. ‘Many have defended Britain against their foes,’ he ended, ‘none can defend her against herself. But at least let us not add—by shameful flight, by a premature
hurried scuttle—at least let us not add to the pangs of sorrow so many of us feel, the taint and smear of shame.’

Those were extravagant words which, for once, stirred few hearts in Parliament and fell on deaf ears throughout the rest of the world, where the attitude would be summed up in the words: ‘So Britain’s giving away India in June 1948. Thank goodness that’s over.’

But it wasn’t over, of course. And for those who, as the Hindu historian V. P. Menon has pointed out, ‘even in India . . . considered it a leap in the dark,’ and a hurried one too, there were shocks to come.

Mr Attlee had chosen Lord Mountbatten as the new Viceroy because ‘he was an extremely lively, exciting personality. He had an extraordinary faculty for getting on with all kinds of people, as he had shown when he was Supremo in South East Asia. He was also blessed with a very unusual wife.’

He had another quality, too. When he was given a job, he did not like to dawdle on it. Other men might hesitate or cautiously ponder the problem. Mountbatten believed in driving things through, by short cuts if there were any. He approached the problem of Indian independence by June 1948, rather in the manner of a time-and-motion-study expert who has been called into a factory to knock off the wasteful minutes and get out the product before the target date.
and background of the men who made them. It might be useful at this juncture to do exactly what Lord Mountbatten did before he departed for India, and consider with just what sort of leaders and organizations he would have to deal.

There are, of course, many personalities and parties who played their part in the drama of independence who have not yet even been mentioned. They will now begin to figure increasingly in this story, for better or for worse, and it would be as well to know what they were, in order to understand what they did and why.

As must have become clear by this time, the fight for Indian freedom had become by 1947 not so much a battle between Indians and British, but between Indians (Congress) and Indians (the Muslim League), with the British acting as a sort of combatant referee—sometimes intervening in an effort to ensure fair play, sometimes surreptitiously planting a rabbit punch of their own. In addition (to continue the boxing metaphor) the corners of the ring were manned by seconds who were also belligerently inclined, and who, at frequent intervals, dived in to mix it with the two main contenders and turn the title-fight into a free-for-all.

The most frequent and pusillanimous of these were undoubtedly the Sikhs, though their numbers (4,500,000) were small compared with many of the other bodies and organizations involved. The Sikh people were concentrated in the province of the Punjab, the land of the Five Rivers, in the North West of India, and though they were outnumbered in the province by 16,000,000 Muslims and 7,500,000 Hindus, psychologically, economically and socially they could always be relied upon to make their presence felt. They have always been India’s most martial race and were the last to be subdued by the conquering British; since which time (until Independence) they supplied some of their bravest soldiers to that remarkable instrument of the might of the British Raj, the Indian
Army. In the Punjab they built a system of canals, which spread out from the Five Rivers in a great irrigation network which made the land smile and turned the province into the granary of India. They were not only good farmers but, unlike their neighbours, good with machines; and they had a corner in most of the transport (as well as providing drivers, mechanics and policemen for the rest of India).

Religiously the Sikhs differ both from the Muslims and the Hindus and are fiercely proud of the difference. They believe in an indefinable Super Being or God whose principles and tenets have been brought to earth by a succession of ten holy men or gurus, most of whom were also extremely doughty fighters. The places where the gurus breathed their last (usually in battles against the Moghuls and Muslims) are principally in Northern India, the most important being in Western Punjab at Nankhana Sahib. Their Rome, Mecca, Canterbury, call it what you will, is the fabulous Golden Temple at Amritsar, set in a holy lake or tank filled with enormous carp and orfe. But like the other temples or gurdwaras where the Sikhs go to pay their religious respects, the Golden Temple is open to anyone of any religion and a pilgrim can always find food there and shelter for the night (though in times of trouble, a Muslim would have been foolhardy to go near one). Anyone can join the Sikhs by conversion. It is not a ‘difficult’ religion in the sense that there is a great deal of ritual or dogma to be learned, but of its male converts it demands five things and the rejection of another. These are known as the five ‘K’s’—kes or the long hair and beard which distinguishes Sikhs from all other Indians (and makes a male swimming pool filled with bathing Sikhs a wondrous sight to behold); kanghi or a comb to be worn in the hair; kach or short underdrawers; karra or a steel or iron bracelet on the right wrist; and kirpan or a short
but highly lethal knife. These, except possibly the *kanghi* when swimming, must be worn at all times.*

A Sikh may drink any liquor he likes, but he is expressly forbidden to smoke. There was a riot in Bombay some years ago when a newspaper published a cartoon showing a Sikh smoking a hookah. There are some Sikhs who started to cut their hair and shave their beards, but they usually live in the big cities outside the Punjab and are wryly known as ‘mechanised Sikhs’.

On the eve of Mountbatten’s arrival, the Sikhs felt themselves to be the odd men out in the struggle for Indian independence. Most of their four and a half millions were spread throughout all parts of the Punjab, and some of their most costly irrigation canals and richest farming lands were in the extreme West of the province. Their relations with their Muslim neighbours were already strained and there had been a massacre of Sikhs in Rawalpindi shortly before Mountbatten’s arrival. The Sikhs made no bones about their antipathy to the Muslims; the Muslims were equally plain in their envy of the Sikhs. *What is going to happen to us, asked the Sikhs, when independence comes? If Jinnah gets Pakistan, the Punjab—or, at the least, Western Punjab—will go to him. We could never live as a minority under the Muslims. But if we don’t what will happen to our lands, our houses, our canals—and our shrines? Or if freedom comes in the form of the Cabinet Mission Plan, what then? The Punjab will go into the Group B provinces, which will be Muslim dominated. They will grind us down.*

The two political leaders of the Sikhs in the Punjab were Baldev Singh, who had been given the portfolio of Defence in the interim Government, and Gianni Khartar Singh. But the man to be reckoned with in the days to come was

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* This naturally created a crisis whenever there were riots in an area which included Sikhs, for they could always cry religious persecution if the authorities forbade them to carry their knives, or *kirpans*. 
neither of these, but an old man with a white beard, twinkling brown eyes, a voice like a dove in conversation and like a hawk in public speech, with a fierce hatred of the Muslims and an ambition to be the first head of a new independent State called Khalistan. His name was Master Tara Singh. 'Whatever is decided in Delhi,' cried Tara Singh, 'will leave my people like no man’s children in no man’s land!'

Tara Singh was a guru who had earned the courtesy title of Master for his knowledge of the Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture which is lodged in the Golden Temple, and for his teaching of the Sikh way of life, which he once summed up as: 'To eschew idolatry, caste exclusiveness, the burning of widows (suttee), the immurement of women for adultery, the immoderate use of wine and drugs, tobacco smoking, the killing of infants, slander, bathing in the sacred tanks of the Hindus; and to promote loyalty, gratitude, philanthropy, impartiality, justice for all, truth, honesty, decency and gentleness.'

It will be seen later in this story that Master Tara Singh did not always follow these tenets himself, and could, when the occasion presented itself, be an extremely blood-thirsty old man. He was 71 years old in 1947.

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was 54, and, as representative of 50,000,000 Indians or one seventh of the population of the country, might be thought to be one of the most powerful politicians in the land. The Indians whom Ambedkar led were, however, the Untouchables or, as they were dubbed by the British, the 'Scheduled Castes',* and it was one thing to have them as followers and another to persuade them to utilize their undoubted strength at the polling booths. The lot of the Untouchables is somewhat better in India today; they can get jobs in the Government and, in the towns, are allowed to go to school; and there is even an ordinance which provides them with carts so that they need no longer carry away 'night soil'.

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* Gandhi called them Harijans, or Children of God.
as excrement is called, on their heads. But in 1947 the lot of the bulk of India’s Untouchables was frightful.

In the caste society of the Hindus, they were literally the outcasts. They believed in Hindu gods, but no temple was open to them in which to worship. Their children were not allowed in the schools. They could not use the burning ghats to cremate their dead, but had to put them on their own meagre fires, for which there was never enough fuel; so the vultures got them. Theirs were always the menial jobs—the sweepers, the laundry-men, leather workers (all religiously despised trades)—and the future for them and their children was predestined. They could never hope to rise to better things. In country districts, where caste was strictly observed, they had to retreat to a safe distance whenever a man of caste came by, in case their shadow should fall upon him and defile him. In the South, such was their power to defile that they were only—on pain of beating, starvation, or denial of leftover water from Hindu households—able to move out of their huts at night.

Most Englishmen who watched the caste system at work in India, particularly its appalling degradation of the lowest orders, wondered why the Untouchables never left their religion and became Christians or Muslims. In fact, many of them did. But the bulk of India’s 50,000,000 Untouchables were, in spite of everything, devout Hindus who believed in their religion; and therefore believed that if only they bore the sufferings and humiliations of this life with patience, they would be born to better things in the next incarnation.

Such a cowed and submissive section of humanity would hardly seem fertile material for an ambitious politician, and, until Dr Ambedkar came along, it was not. Most of the Untouchables did what the local Hindu politicians told them to, and voted for Congress. And then in their midst appeared a man who was a living proof that there was hope of improvement in this life, even for an Untouchable. Ambedkar was an Untouchable himself. As a
child begging at a race meeting he caught the eye of one of the Gaekwars of Baroda, who was touched by his brightness and quick intelligence, paid for his schooling, and eventually sent him to Columbia University, New York. Thereafter, he studied in Germany and Britain (at the London School of Economics) and returned to India a lawyer (yes, another!) with an ambition to rise in the Civil Service. He got a job as a clerk. Immediately, all the other clerks boycotted him. He roamed around Western India doing a variety of jobs, all of which ended (sometimes abruptly, with a beating) when it was discovered that he was an Untouchable.

By this time he was an embittered man. Burning with hatred against the Hindu Caste system, he resolved to attack it through the Untouchables and he formed a party to represent them, which soon gained large support in the bigger cities. The British began to take an interest in him. They sent him to London to represent the Untouchables at the Round Table Conference, a move which shrewdly cut across Congress’s claims to represent all Indians, or even all Hindus.

Ambedkar’s aim was to draw the Untouchables away from Hinduism and turn them into a party which, like the Muslims, would be put on a separate electoral roll at the elections and given ‘weightage’. This would have immediately turned them into a Third Force along with the Congress and the Muslim League and have made them a power in the land. He succeeded to the extent that in 1932 the British administration announced that a separate roll for the Scheduled Castes was about to be established.

Congress awoke to the danger, for they did not want 50,000,000 Hindus in an anti-Congress camp—and Ambedkar’s inclinations were definitely anti-Congress. Gandhi was called in. He began his famous fast for the Untouchables which, though ostensibly for religious purposes to better their lot, certainly had the added political purpose of persuading them that Congress was for them. The British called off their decision to give the Untouchables
a separate electoral roll, and Gandhi called off his fast, but Ambedkar got an increased representation for his people.

By 1947 he was a quick-tempered, surly and suspicious leader, who had lost some of his hold on the Untouchables, thanks to Gandhi's efforts, but was in the market to make a deal with whichever side—Muslim League or Congress—could offer him the best position of influence.

Even before Independence there were two Indias, not one. There was British India, ruled by the Viceroy from Delhi and with British Governors in all its eleven provinces, but with an interim Government composed entirely of Indians elected by the people at the polls. This was the India where Congress and the Muslim League wrangled, and where Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah moved freely, spoke freely, worked freely, though not yet as freely as they wished.

There was also the India of the Princely States. In area, the States covered two-fifths of the sub-Continent. In population, they contained something over 80,000,000, or just under a quarter of India's total population. There were 601 Princely and native States in all, ranging in size from the vast kingdom of Hyderabad in Central India, with 14,000,000 people and a territory bigger than Britain minus Scotland, to several small States in Kathiawar, West India, with only 900 people and less than ten square miles of land. They were ruled by maharanas, maharajahs, nawabs, rajahs, jagadirs, and by a Gaekwar (of Baroda), a Jam Sahib (of Nawanagar), a Nizam (of Hyderabad), and a Wali of (Swat). They were rich and they were poor. The Nizam of Hyderabad was so rich that he could afford to be a miser. The Maharaja of Kashmir was so rich that he brought hundreds of concubines and dancing girls at £20-£50,000 apiece and once paid £150,000 (in blackmail) for one hour with a female crook in a London hotel bedroom. The rajahs and jagadirs of the Deccan States were so poor that they lived on less than £80 a year.
There were good princes and there were bad princes. The Maharajah of Mysore ran a model state on such civilized lines that the standard of living of his people was far above that of the rest of India. The Maharajah of Travancore was so enlightened that he opened his Hindu temples to Untouchables—a bold step indeed in caste-ridden Southern India. The Maharajah of Kashmir on the other hand, though 95 per cent of his people were Muslims, ran his state as a strictly Hindu kingdom and the beef-eating Muslims got seven years in jail if they were caught killing a cow. The Nawab of Junagadh spent more money per year on his kennels of dogs than on hospitals. The Maharajah of Alwar once poured petrol over a race horse and set fire to it when it failed to win. And a large portion of the princes spent more time in Monte Carlo, Paris and London than they ever did in their own palaces.

Yet all these princes had one thing in common. They were independent of Delhi and of any laws passed by the Government in Delhi. They acknowledged only one paramount authority, and that was the British Crown, whose foreign policy they agreed to accept and follow; and though the British retained the right to intervene in the affairs of the Princely States, they rarely did so unless a Maharajah created a public scandal—and even then, it all depended upon what kind of a public scandal. He could spend most of his country’s income on wild living, so long as he did not flaunt his extravagance too boldly in the state, but saved them for Bombay and points abroad; he could dally with cocottes abroad, so long as he did not bring them back with him (though Indian cocottes were allowed); he could even burn racehorses, so long as he did not do it too often; and get away with murder, so long as it was not too openly committed. He had his own private army, he ran and took the revenues from the Customs between his state and British India, the profits from the post-offices (sometimes he printed his own stamps and minted his own money), the rents from the railways which passed through his state. He decided what system of justice
should prevail in his courts (which often meant none at all), what taxes his people should pay, what schools and hospitals they might attend, what jobs they might have.

He ruled, in fact, like a feudal monarch of olden times, and, even in the more enlightened States, he was the absolute arbiter of his people’s destiny.

This anachronistic agglomeration of Princes had another thing in common besides its separation from British India, and that was fear—fear that when freedom came to British India, the States would be absorbed against their will, their titles abolished, their personal power and privileges lopped away, their vast private fortunes suddenly made subject to taxes. In the circumstances, few of them wished for freedom to come to India at all, though the more enlightened of them realized that it was inevitable. For self-protection they had formed themselves, some years before the war, into a Chamber of Princes by which they hoped to present a combined front in face of the political agitations and developments germinating just beyond their frontiers. The Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes in 1947, when Mountbatten arrived as Viceroy, was a Muslim, the Nawab of Bhopal, and in this royal trade union Bhopal was the chief shop steward with whom the new Viceroy would have to deal.* He was a shrewd and able negotiator who had inherited his throne from his mother in 1926 (she abdicated in his favour to prevent another claimant from getting it), and had since run his State with a firm but autocratic hand. India’s Princes usually counted their importance in terms of the number of gun salutes they were entitled to receive on ceremonial occa-

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* Though it should be pointed out that certain States preferred to stay out of the Chamber of Princes—notably Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore. They had their own highly-skilled prime ministers (hired administrators, paid a fixed salary) through whom they preferred to put their case. The Nizam of Hyderabad also retained Sir Walter (now Lord) Monckton to advise him.
tions. There were five 21-gun States. Hyderabad, Mysore, Baroda, Kashmir, and Gwalior. Bhopal was a 19-gun prince, which put him above such rivals as Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner, and this, plus a driving personality, made him a potent influence in a body whose members were apt to be as lackadaisical and apathetic as some trade union members in Britain and America.

Bhopal realized the inevitability of independence, regrettable though that might be. He set out to use the Chamber of Princes as an instrument through which he would make the position of the States vis-a-vis an independent India absolutely clear when the transfer of power came. This he achieved when the Cabinet Mission came to India in 1946. Sir Stafford Cripps (and subsequently Lord Wavell) confirmed that the day Britain left India and British India was set free, the paramountcy or allegiance which the Princely States owed to the British Crown would not automatically be transferred to the newly independent State. In other words, the Princely States would get back all those powers which they had formerly turned over to the British; they would be completely independent; and they would be completely free to make their own arrangements, on their own terms, for federation with the newly-freed India beyond their frontiers. In this way, Bhopal hoped to put the Chamber of Princes in an immensely strong position to bargain for their thrones, their privileges and their fortunes. In the event of a unitary India as envisaged by the Cabinet Mission Plan, he saw the Princely States as a powerful Third Force (it would never have occurred to Bhopal to think of the Untouchables as a Third Force) which could ally itself with the Muslim League and challenge, and possibly even outvote, the Congress Party. He was intensely anti-Congress himself, and rightly suspected that most of the Hindu princes were too. If partition came, and Pakistan was formed, Bhopal hoped to persuade a number of States to band together to form an independent Princely Federation which
would connect itself with Hindustan and Pakistan on only the loosest terms.

In this strategy, however, he miscalculated in three ways. He forgot (or did not sufficiently take into account) the feebleness, the lack of cohesion and the irresponsibility of most of the Indian princes. He did not realize how determined was Congress, once it got India, to get the Princely States too; for which purpose they had infiltrated Congress agitators into most of the States and formed unofficial parties which could organize an agitation or riot at any moment they chose. And he was not prepared for the blandishments of Lord Mountbatten, who, as one Indian commentator later on put it, could ‘not only talk the hind leg off a donkey but also the throne from under a prince’.

There were other States which, as has previously been mentioned, stayed aloof from the Chamber of Princes, preferring to fight their own battles or make their own arrangements with independent India when the time came.

Of these, Hyderabad and its remarkable Nizam was to prove the most important. In addition to being a miser with a private fortune which was reputed to make him the richest man in the world, the Nizam was a Muslim of distinguished lineage, who traced his ancestry back to Ghazi-ud-din-Khan Feroz Jang, one of the generals of the Moghul Emperor, Aurangzeb. He succeeded to his throne in 1911, and in 1918, as a reward for the soldiers from his private army and the money he provided to help Britain in the Great War, he was granted the hereditary title of His Exalted Highness. To this was added an autographed letter from King George V giving him the addition title of ‘Faithful Ally of the British Government’. Of these titles he was inordinately proud. He ran Hyderabad as a completely separate entity from the rest of British India and the other Indian States, printing his own stamps, coining his own money, and running an efficient private army (under British officers) which was armed and equipped from his own factories. He maintained quasi-diplomatic offices in several countries. In Hyderabad, most of his
officials and advisers were Muslims, as also were all the richest manufacturers and landholders in the country. But 90 per cent of his people were Hindus.

The Nizam had no intention of seeing them or himself in even the loosest federation with an independent India, particularly with Congress, whose members he loathed and despised. Congress agitators who came to his State were quickly clapped into jail (though there were, nevertheless, powerful underground Congress and Communist organizations functioning, in spite of the vigilance of his police). Nor, as some Hindus charged later, had he any idea of acceding to Pakistan if it came into being—a situation which would, in Sardar Patel’s phrase, have created ‘an enemy country in the belly of India’. His sympathies were wholly with Jinnah but his ambitions for Hyderabad were otherwise engaged.

The Nizam made it clear to the British authorities long before Mountbatten arrived that he would have not part in an independent India. In 1946 he sent his regent, the Nawab of Chhatari, and his legal adviser, Sir Walter Monckton, to see Lord Wavell in Delhi, an occasion on which he stressed that Hyderabad would assume complete independence after the transfer of power (though he hoped to be allowed to remain as a Dominion in the British Commonwealth) and the only approach he would make to his Indian neighbours would be to lease through them a passage to the sea. He hoped, by an arrangement with the Portuguese Government, to make the Portuguese Indian possession of Goa into Hyderabad’s port.

There was one other personality who played a large part in the struggle of the Indian Princes to preserve their rights and privileges, but he was not a maharajah but an English knight. Sir Conrad Corfield, the son of the Vicar of Finchampstead in Berkshire, was head of the Political Department in Delhi whose task it was to look after the interests of Princely States. It was he who appointed the British Resident to each State to advise the rulers. It was he who acted as liaison between the Chamber of Princes.
and the Viceroy. It was he who had the power to intervene in the affairs of the States when he considered it necessary—and, as late as 1946, he had a ruler removed from his throne for flagrant maladministration. Corfield was, however, a power behind the scenes who rarely intervened unless it was vitally necessary. But his influence on the Princes was considerable, and in the struggle that lay ahead the part he played was dramatic indeed.

By virtue of his position, Sir Conrad Corfield took no overt part in Indian politics, though it can be taken as certain that his sympathies were cool towards the Congress Party and not much more than lukewarm towards the Muslim League. His principal activity in the days before the arrival of Mountbatten was to try to persuade the Princes to bring a measure of democracy and modernity to their States, and to introduce at least some semblance of popular representative government, so that when freedom came to India they would be in a stronger position to resist agitation from the politicians across their frontiers. He was finding it rather like hitting an elephant with a feather.

In the earlier pages of this book, some reference has been made to the character and characteristics of the leaders of the Muslim League and Congress. But a further word is necessary to fill in the picture, to put the flesh on the bones of the men who were to play such a vital part in the drama of the days ahead.

In a physical sense, there is little flesh to put on Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s bones. He was probably the thinnest man ever to lead a political party; he was over six foot in height and he weighed less than 140 pounds. He clothed his spare figure in Savile Row suits of the most immaculate cut, liked to wear the white and brown footwear which used to be known as ‘co-respondent’s shoes’, and occasionally sported a monocle. His leathery, cadaverous face (he had sunken cheeks, even in early middle-age) and bright, burning, luminous eyes gave him the appearance of an emaciated brontosaurus, but when he smiled his face was
transformed, and the expression was of gentle amiability. He was immensely proud of his appearance and he could never avoid a sneer when he had to mix with the khaki-clad members of Congress, who made a fad of their peasant clothes.

‘You like this, don’t you?’ said Gandhi to him once, when the photographers crowded round them after a meeting.

‘Not as much as you do,’ replied Jinnah.

There were more similarities between Jinnah and Gandhi than either of them liked to admit. Both held power over their followers by sheer personality. ‘You have mesmerized the Muslims,’ Gandhi once accused Jinnah. ‘And you have hypnotized the Hindus,’ he replied.

Though Jinnah was actually born in Karachi, his background was the same as Gandhi’s. Both their families were Gujeratis from Kathiawar, that proliferation of Princely States which, until Independence, spread like pieces of an unsolved jigsaw puzzle across the slab of Western India to the North of Bombay. As has been mentioned before, Jinnah’s grandfather was a Hindu. He was from the same caste as Gandhi’s family, the Vaisya, which is third down the scale from the Brahmans. But something happened—no one seems to know quite what—which caused Jinnah’s parents to embrace Islam and move to Karachi.* There Jinnah was born, on Christmas Day, 1876, and brought up a Muslim. But the parallels with Gandhi continued. He was betrothed to a Kathiawar girl and married to her when he was fifteen and she eleven. (Gandhi was thirteen and his wife twelve when they married.) He left her to go to England to study law, as did Gandhi, but Jinnah’s wife—unlike Gandhi’s, who lived on to bear him children—wasted and died while he was in London.

*The Vaisya caste in Kathiawar was very strict, and once expelled Gandhi for going to England. Caste Hindus are not supposed to travel ‘over water’.
Jinnah was only sixteen when he began his studies as a law student in London, and he passed his examinations in the incredibly short period of two years, though due to the formalities he was not admitted to Lincoln’s Inn until he was twenty. He returned to Bombay to build himself a reputation as an astute pleader before the courts, where he soon made a considerable fortune. It was during this time that his friends and enemies alike gave two handles to his name, which never left him for the rest of his life: they began calling him ‘the arrogant Mr Jinnah’, and also ‘the honest Mr Jinnah’.

At the age of thirty, now comfortably off, he joined the Congress Party. A few years later, he also joined the Muslim League. There was no incongruity in this. His main aim was to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity and co-ordinate the drives of both parties towards the goal of Indian independence. He continued to preach Hindu-Muslim unity and continued to rise in the hierarchy of the Congress Party until 1920. But by this time a new star had begun to dazzle the eyes of Congress Party followers—a star which beckoned them along new and dangerous paths to Indian freedom. The star was that of Gandhi, who had come to India fresh from his battles for the rights of Indians in South Africa and convinced that the methods he had experimented with there—of civil disobedience against the authorities—would succeed in India against the British. After one such demonstration of civil disobedience in which the ‘peaceful’ demonstrators indulged in a riot of violence and destruction, Jinnah decided that neither Gandhi nor his methods were for him. He arrived at the Nagpur session of Congress in December 1920, and made what was, for him, a fervid plea to the delegates to show their abhorrence of civil disobedience and stick to constitutional methods to get what they wanted from the British. It was a fellow-Muslim who secured the cheers of the assembly by jumping to his feet and repudiating him by saying: ‘You talk too much of the constitutional way. It reminds me of a story of a young Tory who came out of
the Carlton Club one evening and walked up to Piccadilly Circus, where there was a Salvation Army meeting in progress. The speaker was saying, “Come this way—it is God’s way.” The young Tory interrupted him and said, “How long have you been preaching this?” “Twenty years,” replied the Salvationist. “Well,” said the Tory, “if it’s only got you as far as Piccadilly Circus, I don’t think much of it”.*

From that moment on, Jinnah faded out of the Congress Party. He not only did not agree with Gandhi’s ‘rabble rousing’, as he called it, but also realized that his personality would have no chance of succeeding with Congress and securing him the leadership he coveted so long as its members were dazzled by Gandhi’s ‘Hindu revivalism’. But as late as 1928 he was still pleading for a union between the two great communities in India, and some time before that he said: ‘Foreign rule and its continuance is primarily due to the fact that the people of India, Hindus and Muslims, are not united and do not sufficiently trust each other . . . I am almost inclined to say that India will get Dominion responsible government the day the Hindus and Muslims are united.’

What made him change his mind?

Ambition, say the Hindus. After his parting of the ways with Congress, Jinnah departed for England, where he began to practise before the Privy Council. While there he was seen by Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, a member of the Muslim League, who was in Europe on his honeymoon. Liaquat had always been an admirer of Jinnah and had writhed in furious frustration when he had seen him humiliated and sneered at by Congress leaders, particularly the Muslim members of it. He painted an unhappy picture of the state of the Muslim League in India, wallowing in the trough for want of a strong guiding hand, and asked Jinnah to return and lead it. Jinnah considered, and then said that if Liaquat could find sufficient support he was

to cable him and he would return. Forty-eight hours after he got back to Bombay, Liaquat cabled the single word, ‘Come’.

According to Mr Nehru,* Jinnah accepted only because the leadership of the Muslim League gave him a chance to lash back at Gandhi and those Congress delegates who had snubbed him. And, Nehru added, he subsequently directed the Muslim League’s policy along the road of separatism and anti-Hinduism not because he really believed in Islam and Pakistan, but because it was a policy which would win him easy attention and secular power. This, I think, is an unfortunate misreading of Jinnah’s state of mind, of the same kind which was to lead Nehru into grave errors in dealing with him in 1946-7. He could not believe that Jinnah was sincere. Yet there was always one thing certain about Mohammed Ali Jinnah. He could be arrogantly, stupidly, infuriatingly wrong, but he was always honest and he was never insincere. By the same sort of contemptuous mental process which persuaded Nehru that Jinnah left the Congress Party ‘only because it ceased to be a party for gentlemen, and he was a snob’, the Congress leader chose to go on convincing himself that the Muslim League leader was a sham, that this campaign was illogical and, therefore, easily destructible, that Pakistan was not viable and, therefore, impossible. It was a misjudgement which was to cost India a heavy toll in lives in 1947.

In between his departure from Congress and his assumption of the leadership of the Muslim League, Jinnah married again. He was forty-one when it happened. For some time his name had been linked with the Indian poetess and Congresswoman, Mrs Sarojini Naidu (who was to be the first woman provincial governor in independent India). She was madly in love with him and sent him love poems, in which she wrote such phrases as, ‘in the desolate hours of midnight . . . my soul hungers for thy voice’, which embarrassed him considerably (he was never

* In a conversation with the author.
a man to read poetry). It was not to Mrs Naidu's blandishments that his heart opened. At a reception in Bombay he was introduced to a beautiful girl. Her name was Rutten Pettit. The fact that she was a Parsee and only seventeen years old—and the daughter, moreover, of one of his friends and business associates—did not swerve Jinnah from his determination to marry her. Nor did furious parental opposition.

The couple stole away, and the first Rutten's father knew of the event was an announcement in the Times of India that she had been received into the Islamic faith and was now the wife of Jinnah. Her parents forgave their daughter, but not Jinnah. Nor was the marriage a great success. One child was born, a daughter. Shortly afterwards, quarrels began. The young wife yearned for gay parties, but was soon cringing under the lash of Jinnah's tongue. After four years, she left his house and went to live in the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay. Shortly after that, she departed with her parents for Europe, a few months before Jinnah himself went to England to practise law. When the reconciliation for which she had hoped did not eventuate, she attempted suicide and Jinnah rushed to her in Paris, arranged for doctors, and stayed with her until she recovered. But their reunion did not last long, and Rutten sailed back to Bombay and Jinnah returned to England, where his devoted sister, Fatimah, was looking after him. In 1928, Rutten died under mysterious circumstances in the Taj Mahal Hotel. Thereafter, his sister was Jinnah's sole companion, and she cared for him with passionate devotion.

Jinnah had no vices—unless you can call Pakistan a vice. He neither smoked nor drank. His temper was short and he never hesitated to insult his opponent if he thought he was being snubbed or neglected. He suffered from chronic bronchitis, and possibly lung cancer, and one of his doctors said: 'He must always have been exhausted, weak, tired.' But no one who faced him, in interviews or at conferences, would have thought so.
had the vigilance of an owl and, on occasion, the sting of an electric eel. In 1947, he was 71 and looked it. But not once you heard him talk. He was known as Quaid-i-Azam, or great leader, and the title was deserved.

There were several members of the Muslim League Working Committee whose names began to crop up in the communiques from 1946 onwards, but none of them needed concern us here with the exception of Liaquat Ali Khan. He was the Muslim Leaguer who persuaded Jinnah to assume leadership of the League, and in that action he epitomised his own lack of ambition and willingness to take second place. He was born a subordinate and had no wish to lead but only to serve,* and he was just as much of a rubber stamp as the rest of the League Working Committee when it came to endorsing the wishes of Jinnah. But he nonetheless played an important part in the apotheosis of Pakistan, and was a right-hand man to his leader and without him much less might have been accomplished. He revered Jinnah to such an extent, with such a schoolboy ‘crush’, that he would never relax when he was present, and though Jinnah would often designate him a spokesman and remain silent, Liaquat would never speak unless he first got a nod of approval from his chief.

In appearance, Liaquat was short, podgy, pudding-faced and bespectacled, and he looked very much the dumpy proletarian when seen beside the tall, lean, aristocratic Jinnah. In fact, he came from a far more distinguished lineage, and had graduated from the famous Muslim University of Aligarh, near Amritsar, to Exeter College, Oxford, after which he became—or need I say it?—a lawyer. He was twenty years younger than Jinnah and an enthusiastic debater and one of those public speakers who loves to ‘mix it’ with a hostile or restive audience. Jinnah never managed to get to a university, and had no great love for

* His instincts may have been right. The moment he exchanged second place for first, and became leader of Pakistan, after Jinnah’s death, he was assassinated.
anything but practical learning; yet on the public platform he spoke like a rather distant and contemptuous don. It was rare for him to show heat or emotion; he always viewed his opponents with a frigid contempt. Liaquat, on the other hand, was a reader and scholar, but a great popular orator too. It was he who took Jinnah's message of Pakistan to the villages and drove it home, and he who kept the local organizations fed with money, enthusiasm, and promises of glory. For this he never asked any more than the opportunity to go on serving Jinnah. Whether he was as eager for Pakistan as his leader is something we will never know; nor will we know whether he would have preferred to have seen a federated India with the Muslims assured of their rights and freedoms. All that is known is that he loved Bombay (which became Indian), and absolutely hated Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi (which became Pakistan).

Liaquat Ali Khan once said of Lord Mountbatten: 'I hear that he has come to India most reluctantly and his real ambition is to be Admiral of the Fleet. If he will grant us Pakistan at once, we will devote our first budget to building him a battleship and will even supply him with a crew—Azad as laundryman, Nehru as steersman (which means he will never come within miles of us), and Gandhi for hot air to breathe into the boilers.'

So much has been written about Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi that no more than a few paragraphs are necessary here to bring back the image of this good and remarkable man. Of all the personalities—statesmen, politicians, soldiers, administrators—involved in the last chapter of Britain's Indian story, he alone emerges with his stature undiminished. It is true that there were times when his behaviour was questionable, his statements equivocal, his actions disingenuous, but in the last days his achievements were immeasurably, triumphantly and devotedly for the good of his people, no matter what their caste or religion.

A psychologist given Gandhi's history without clues to his identity or nationality would almost certainly say that
his career was motivated by the suppression of an unusually strong sex-drive. (They would probably say the same about most other prophets and holy men, too.) In his long autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi writes in intimate and sometimes embarrassing detail of his obsession with sex, which first raised its ugly head for him when he was married by his parents in Porbander, a small princely state in Kathiawar. He was thirteen and his bride was twelve (though Gandhi maintains that she was only ten), and although Kasturbai, his wife, was illiterate and he was anxious to teach her, ‘lustful love left no time’. Gradually, but not until after he had sired three children, Gandhi’s sense of guilt over the potency of his sexual urge crystallized into a determination to eschew it. He came to an agreement with Kasturbai that their relationship would henceforth be on a non-physical plane, an arrangement she may well have found harder to bear than he did, since she had no means of sublimation. Gandhi’s zeal on behalf of his people increased, but so did his sexual needs; he quenched them by adopting a diet of goat’s milk, as being the food least likely to stimulate him; and slowly, painfully, and always conscious of temptation, he learned to live and work in celibacy. It is Gandhi’s own confession of this weakness in him, and his lifelong struggle with it, which helps to make him so much more human and his achievements so much more remarkable.

Gandhi was a lawyer (British trained, of course) like the rest of them. He gave up a prosperous barrister’s practice in South Africa to work for the betterment of the Indians there, and after the Great War returned to India to help in the fight for Indian freedom. Until his arrival, the waxing personality in Congress, the party principally engaged in the fight, was Mohammad Ali Jinnah, whose goal was Dominion status and whose method was strictly constitutional agitation. Gandhi changed all that. He changed the name of the Home Rule Association to Swaraj (or *Our Raj*). He spoke passionately against the British and
advocated Civil Disobedience—and though he was cast down when the Indian people proved to be anything but civil in the way they disobeyed, he gradually turned the act of national non-co-operation into a massive weapon.

He had a great sense of drama, and his leadership galvanized Congress (and drove Jinnah out of it). He led the great March through India which culminated in a ceremonial making of salt on the seashore at Dandi:—a protest not so much against the Government salt monopoly as a symbolic gesture against their very existence. He went to jail, and enjoyed it. He began his first great fast in an effort to bring Hindus and Muslims together, and his closeness to death so gripped the nation that the two peoples jointly pleaded with him—on promise of permanent brotherliness—to eat. He fasted many times after that. He went to jail again. But the time the war came in 1939, he was the greatest influence in the nation.

In many ways, Gandhi was a saint. The three great aims of his life were Indian freedom, the unity of his people, Hindus and Muslims, and the betterment of the lot of the Untouchables. For these three goals, he was willing to suffer and die.

But Gandhi was also a politician and a lawyer. Like Lord Wavell, Jinnah found him impossible to deal with ‘because I can never pin the fellow down. He is as wily as a snake.’ Once he came to an agreement with Gandhi over the issue of a joint statement, but Gandhi subsequently went back on his promise because he said, his ‘inner light’ had told him to change his mind. ‘To hell with his ‘inner light’,’ exploded Jinnah. ‘Why can’t he be honest and admit he made a mistake?’

As we have seen, Gandhi was never above using his spiritual influence to do a little recruiting for the Congress Party, as in the case of the Untouchables. When there were awkward questions to be answered, he often took refuge in a pencilled message saying: ‘This is my day of silence.’ And though his official connexion with Congress ended in 1941, his influence behind the scenes was great
until the last—although, unfortunately, not great enough. He often disagreed with the actions and statements of Congress in the final days, but when there was a memorandum to be written it was to Gandhi that the Congress leaders came and asked him to draft it. Congress memoranda were all written by Gandhi, even those he was against: and they are all masterpieces.

In 1947, when Mountbatten arrived in Delhi, Gandhi was on a peace mission in Bihar, where Hindus had been savagely murdering Muslims and destroying their property. Congress called him back. The Working Committee had a shrewd idea that Mountbatten, unlike Wavell, would be hypnotized by Gandhi’s personality.

In the book which he wrote while imprisoned by the British from 1942-45, *Discovery of India*, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru discussed the campaigns and infiltrations by which the British became masters of India, and commented:

‘Looking back over this period, it almost seems that the British succeeded in dominating India by a succession of fortuitous circumstances and flukes. With remarkably little effort, considering the glittering prize, they won a great empire and enormous wealth . . . It seems easy for a slight turn in events to have taken place which would have dashed their hopes and ended their ambitions.’ After which he adds: ‘And yet a closer scrutiny reveals, in the circumstances then existing, a certain inevitability in what happened.’

They are words, which could be used, simply by changing ‘British’ to ‘Nehru’ (and perhaps eliminating the phrase ‘and enormous wealth’), to describe his own apotheosis in the Congress Party and India. His road to supreme power, to benevolent autocracy, over the Indian people was a pilgrim’s progress full of pitfalls and side-roads, any one of which, but for coincidence and flukes, might have sidetracked him.
It was a coincidence which got him into Congress agitation in the first place. The formative years of his life were spent in an atmosphere calculated to turn him into a copy of a typical, cultivated English gentleman. At home in Allahabad, where his father was a prosperous lawyer, Jawaharlal was brought up in surroundings of great luxury and of continuous English influence. He had a succession of English tutors. The house was always filled with guests, mostly British, although Hindus and Muslims came frequently too. (Nehru's father ran three separate kitchens to cater for their tastes.) He made only scanty progress in Hindi and Sanskrit, but was quickly fluent in English; and from the age of fifteen, when he went to Harrow, until the age of 22, when he returned from Cambridge via London, a lawyer himself, he was soaked in English background and tradition. 'In my heart I rather admired the English,' he wrote later, and his hatred of 'the alien rulers of my country' was against those who misbehaved. 'I had no feeling whatever, so far as I can remember, against individual Englishmen.' He was called to the Bar in 1912, and when he returned to India he was practically a stranger in his own land, but an aristocrat in every sense of the word—a Kashmiri Brahmin with all the culture and education (and habits) of an English peer. 'I am afraid I was a bit of a prig,' he wrote of himself, 'with little to commend me.' He did not, however, like Jinnah, take to a monocle.

And then occurred the Amritsar massacre, in which troops under the command of General Dyer cut down and slaughtered Indians demonstrating for Congress on 13 April, Hindu New Year's Day, 1919. There is no doubt that the Indians were there illegally, for martial law had been declared in the city some days before (after riots in which five Europeans had been killed), and certainly the Congress leaders who incited them to demonstrate in such conditions must share the blame for the tragedy that followed. But General Dyer's method of keeping order was of just the blunderingly ruthless, unimaginative kind to
provoke rather than quiet a tense city. It was enough for him to order curfews and rigid enforcement of the laws against assembly; but he did more than that. An Englishwoman, Miss Alice Sherwood, who had done great work among the Indians as a medical missionary, had been criminally assaulted during the rioting of the previous days, a lamentable act of violence against a real friend of India. But Miss Sherwood would have been the first to protest against the result of her appalling experience: General Dyer enforced an order that all Indians who passed the spot where she had been attacked must do so on hands and knees.

Amritsar is a city of narrow streets where gossip, rumour and alarm can spread (as we shall see) like fire among dry kindling wood. The city simmered into revolt. The Congress leaders—with foolhardy recklessness and criminal stupidity, considering how well they must have known the workings of General Dyer’s ‘whiff of grapeshot’ mind—still called out their followers despite the martial law. And in Jallianwala Bagh, a public park from which there was only one exit, 20,000 of them were suddenly confronted by 150 British soldiers, read the Riot Act by a British officer, and ordered to disperse, an impossibility since the soldiers blocked the only way out. In the subsequent shooting 379 were killed and over 1,000 were wounded.

As late as 1961, to judge from letters which appeared in the Sunday Times, London, there are still those who defend the Amritsar shootings. It was, of course, a tragic dilemma in which the British found themselves—and, as I have said, the guilt of Congress for it is great—but more flexible British soldiers in the past have coped with such problems without having to resort to massacre. What is certain is that the Amritsar shootings turned most Indians, including those who had co-operated willingly before, into resentful and mistrustful minions, conscious that the British who ruled them regarded their lives as unimportant and their race as inferior.
THE MEN WHO MATTERED

It was the greatest recruiting poster for Congress ever to be waved before the Indian people, and they joined up in their thousands. Among them was Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru was returning from a holiday in Simla, the hill station, where he had undergone an experience which was, for him, extremely humiliating. It so happened that he and his wife (whom he had married in 1916) were staying in the same hotel as the one in which an Afghan Delegation was housed while it discussed a peace treaty with the British. Nehru was visited by a British magistrate and crisply informed that his presence was unwelcome—presumably because he was already a member of Mrs Annie Besant’s Home Rule League. He was asked to give an undertaking that he would not contact the Afghans. It was the first time he had heard of them, but Nehru was immediately on his dignity. He refused to give any such pledge.

‘In that case,’ said the magistrate, ‘we give you four hours to leave Simla—or we escort you out.’

On the train going South, a number of British officers joined the train at Amritsar and three of them shared Nehru’s coach. In the way some Britons have when in foreign parts, they talked freely about India and the Indians on the journey to Delhi and did not bother to mind their tongues because there was an Indian present. They took a great pleasure in reciting all the details of the Amritsar killing, and one of them remarked that ‘this will teach the bloody browning a lesson’. By the time the train reached its destination, Jawaharlal Nehru had undergone a transformation. He smouldered with resentment, humiliation, even hatred of the British. From that moment, he threw himself whole-heartedly into the Congress movement and solidly behind Gandhi. Less than a year later, he served his first jail term. Thereafter, he was wholeheartedly a campaigner and fighter for freedom from the English yoke, and all the more sensitively aware of his
peoples' 'inferiority' because his own sense of kinship with the English had been so rudely shattered.*

His burning sense of insult developed into a fierce resolve to rid India of the English after an incident in the Princely State of Nabha, in 1923. He and some companions, who had gone to investigate conditions there, were arrested and thrown into jail. To Nehru's indignation they were first handcuffed together and marched through the streets of the town like common criminals. The prison cell was verminous and live with rats, and the nights in which they scampered across his face stayed in his memory for all time.

The next morning the British Resident, who was in charge of the State, came to see them and offered to let them free if they would apologize publicly. Nehru refused. Thereafter, a trial began. Their applications to import lawyers from British India were refused. The magistrate was obviously ignorant of any known legal system. Nehru's indignation was wafted to fever heat by the sight of the British Resident sitting idly by while the farcical trial went on; a trial which resulted in sentences of eighteen months in prison each. They were subsequently suspended and Nehru and his companions expelled from the State, but Nehru was seriously ill with typhoid for some months afterwards.

These were the events which turned him from a dilettante, carbon-copy Englishman into a Congress fighter.

In 1936, an equally fortuitous sequence of circumstances got him the leadership of the party. It was the year when the first general elections were to take place in India, following the introduction of the reforms of 1935. Before

* Gandhi always took the rudeness of ignorant Englishmen in his stride. Once, when one of them in South Africa called to him on a railway station, 'Hey, coolie, pick up that bag', he obediently trotted with it to the man's carriage. He rather treasured Winston Churchill's description of him as a 'half-naked fakir'.

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