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MAHATMA GANDHI and BIHAR

some reminiscences

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Rajendra Prasad

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Babu Rajendra Prasad, as is well known, was closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi as a trusted lieutenant for over three decades. He is thus in a position to give us just those intimate details, incidents and anecdotes which throw revealing light on the Mahatma's inspiring personality and enable us to better understand and appreciate him and his methods.

In the following pages Rajen Babu has recorded his reminiscences of Gandhiji from 1917 to 1948. He gives us here an account of the Satyagraha Campaign of Champaran in Bihar where Gandhiji demonstrated the efficacy of his new technique for the first time ; of the various political and social reform movements initiated by him ; of his Constructive Programme which formed an integral part of his work—in short, of India's struggle for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the mighty non-violent revolution brought about by him in the course of thirty years.

Rajen Babu tells us also of the devastating Bihar Earthquake of 1934 and the

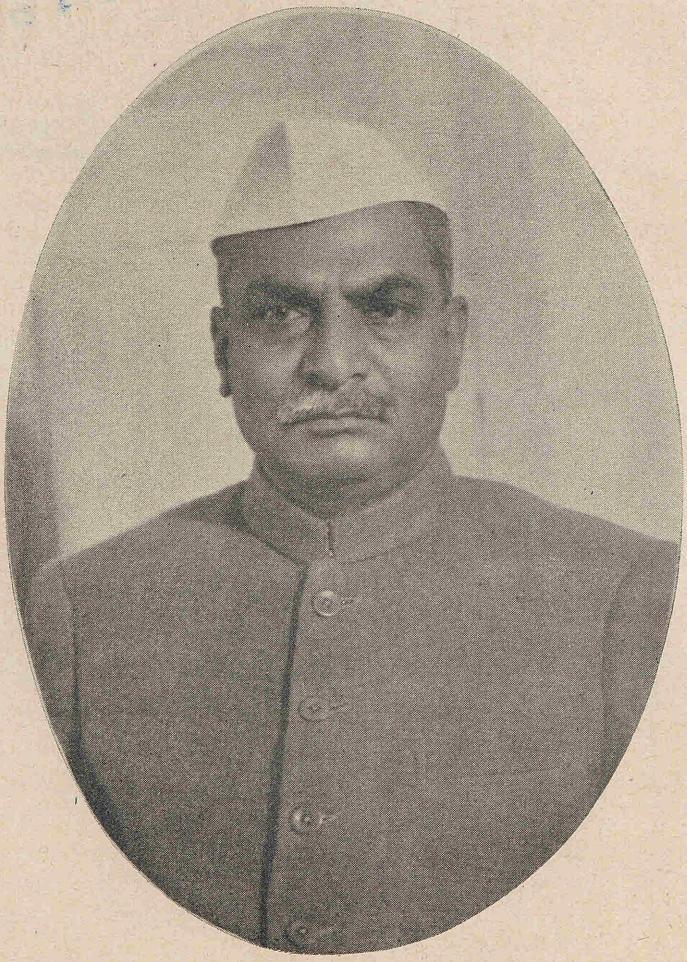
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DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

MAHATMA GANDHI
AND
BIHAR

SOME REMINISCENCES

By
RAJENDRA PRASAD
President, Indian Constituent Assembly

HIND KITABS LIMITED
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PREFACE

The first fifteen chapters of this book were written in 1931 and published in the *Searchlight* of Patna as a series of articles. The remaining chapters have been written now to complete the story. But the earlier chapters have been left untouched as they were originally written. The reader will thus find references to what was then hoped for in the future, but what has since been achieved as an accomplished fact. I have purposely refrained from revising the earlier chapters just to enable the reader to appreciate the faith that inspired and the hope that sustained us during the struggle.

Mahatma Gandhi has often said that the people of Bihar are simple and instantaneously expressed their faith in him and in his method by their action on the very first contact they had with him. He transformed the Province by his short stay of a few months in 1917-18 and the occasional tours which he undertook in later years. If he had stayed on there, as he did at Wardha and Sevagram, I have no doubt that Bihar with its receptivity would have been an altogether different province and would have furnished to the country and the world the model of a society based on his ideals and teachings. But there was nobody in Bihar with the love and devotion of a Jamnalal Bajaj to attract him and tie him down there. Besides, he chose Wardha in Maharashtra deliberately, because he considered it a difficult area. He could not ask others to tackle it unless he was prepared himself to undertake the task.

But it is no use speculating about what would have been. We should feel satisfied and grateful that Bihar was privileged to earn his confidence. Let us strive to deserve it by fashioning the present and the future after the image of what he wanted Bharat to be.

New Delhi,
Dec. 4, 1949.

RAJENDRA PRASAD

NUHAVIRUL ISLAM HIGH SCHOOL
Date
ERNAKULAM.

I

It was in 1917 that Mahatma Gandhi first visited Bihar. It was not a visit by choice but forced by the insistent demand of the suffering peasantry of Champaran.

Indigo cultivation was introduced into Bihar in the early years of the nineteenth century. It grew in extent and was a source of great profit to the European planters. But it was equally a source of oppression and untold misery to the tenantry who made several abortive attempts to get rid of it by the crude method of fighting the planters on the plane of physical force. With the introduction of chemical dyes, indigo cultivation ceased to be a paying industry to the planters. By imposing enhancements of rent on their tenants in their *mokarri* villages in Champaran and realizing *tawan* from those in their temporarily leased villages, the planters transferred the heavy losses from their own heads to the weak shoulders of the hapless and helpless tenants. The Government officials had, from time to time, tried to solve the apparently insoluble indigo problem. In sheer desperation and in a moment of happy inspiration the tenants had approached the then little-known leader of the great Satyagraha campaign of South Africa and had succeeded in securing from him at the Lucknow session of the Congress, in December 1916, a promise to visit Champaran at an early date. In fulfilment of that promise he visited Champaran in the following April, and the age-long suffering of the peasants was mitigated as a result of that first illustration of Satyagraha, he gave to the people of India. It will take much space to recount all this here in detail. This is past history and the curious can read it if they turn to the contemporary files of newspapers and a book on *Champaran and Mahatma*

Gandhi, originally written in Hindi and since also translated into English. I desire to show how Mahatma Gandhi's influence has permeated this Province and how it has marched from the position of an obscure "sleepy hollow" in the politics of India to a place of honour by its humble service and sacrifice.

Bihar emerged as a hopeful young Province ever growing from strength to strength, only after Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1917. To say so, however, is no disparagement of the services of those old stalwarts of the Province who had created a consciousness among our people and had succeeded in obtaining recognition of a separate existence for Bihar both in the administration of the country and in the constitution of the Congress. Many of the old stalwarts are, alas, no more—but happily there are some who are still amongst us to guide and inspire us. May they live long to see the full fruition of the dreams which they dreamt in their younger days working amidst indifference and opposition to make them realities.

I am not acquainted with conditions prevailing in other provinces before 1917 to be able to make comparisons with what they are today, but I can speak of Bihar with intimate knowledge of facts. We had in 1917 two Provincial organizations working more or less through branches in the districts with a central representative body with its headquarters at Patna. The older, more active and livelier was the Biharee Students' Conference with its Central and Branch associations thoroughly representative of all that was best in the students of the Province. It gave them ample room and opportunity for supplementing the education given them in schools and colleges and also offered them that kind of higher culture which goes to make up what is compendiously called the 'character' of man. The other was the political organization of the Province with a Provincial Congress Committee at Patna and branches in the districts. It used

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to have a Provincial Political Conference which was not exactly a Provincial edition of the Congress, as it included among its members and delegates not only those who were Congressmen but also others who did not formally join the Congress but were agreed with the Congressmen of the Province on all public questions of provincial interest. But it is no secret that the Congress Committees in those days were not organized on that democratic basis on which they are organized today. Nor is it a secret that we did not have any whole time worker in any public cause in this Province. Our leaders had to divide their time and attention between public work and their profession. This is not to minimize the value of their services. I am only stating a fact that till 1917 there was not one single known man in the Province to whom the people could point as living solely and wholly for them. No wonder then that we did not have any public institution run for the benefit of the people on lines of sacrifice by its organizers. We had a paper which had a most precarious career under the late Babu Mahesh Narayan, who had inherited from his talented brother not only his patriotism but also his great capacity for organization and journalism. Our politics of those days, like the politics of several other provinces, began and ended with "resolutions" on questions of public interest leading spasmodically to representations to Government.

The question of Champaran had engaged the constant attention of our leaders and had been raised on several occasions in the Legislative Councils and in Provincial Conferences. But we had not learnt to do anything beyond passing resolutions and making representations which were sometimes treated with scant courtesy. When Mahatma Gandhi first set foot in Champaran he found the population seething with discontent, the Government preoccupied with the Great War, our leaders willing to help but unable to comprehend his

methods, and a number of young men fully devoted to him and ready to take everything on trust even when they did not fully understand what was then a new method in Indian politics.

II

Mahatma Gandhi came to Bihar with the express purpose of acquainting himself with the condition of the peasants of Champaran. He wanted to find out how far the reports he had received about their oppression at the hands of planters were justified. His object was to ascertain the truth. He had hoped that he would be able to complete the enquiry within a few days and would not be required to make a prolonged stay. He was, therefore, anxious to get to Champaran as quickly as possible but thought it necessary to stop at Muzaffarpur and see the Commissioner of the Division as also the Secretary of the Planters' Association so that he might explain to them the object of his mission. His object was, however, misunderstood and misinterpreted. He discovered that he would have to face obstruction, if nothing worse, in case he proceeded to Champaran. He utilized his short stay at Muzaffarpur in visiting some neighbouring villages where he saw how the people lived, what they ate, what they used to wear, how their children were looked after, and so forth.

He remarked that there could be no meaning in Swaraj unless the condition of these people was improved. That has been the key of his politics—the improvement of the condition of the poor.

Apart from the obstruction he anticipated from Government officials and planters he had other difficulties to face

He was later on a good speaker in Hindi and addressed meetings with as much ease, felicity and even eloquence as any other public man, but in 1917 his knowledge of Hindi was limited; and so far as the dialect of Champaran was concerned, it was entirely new to him and he could not follow the conversation of the tenants without the help of an interpreter. In those days he was living practically on groundnuts and dates. Milk of the cow or buffalo was tabooed and even goat's milk had not yet been recommended for his use. He would occasionally take rice or bread with boiled vegetables without spices, salt, ghee or oil. Among vegetables his favourite diet was *karaila* boiled in water with which he would mix the rice, as we do with dal. He was under the vow to take not more than five things in a day, and no meal was to be taken after sunset. He was as regular then in rising at 4 o'clock in the morning as he always has been. In those days he used to wear a *kurta* and what has become so well known as the Gandhi cap. On special occasions he would wear a *bandi* or *chapkan* and a Kathiawadi turban. He had already discovered the *Charkha* and was wearing only hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. But he had not taken to spinning as a religious duty every day. He was physically very much stronger then. Those who have had opportunities of joining him in his morning or evening walks know how difficult it was to keep pace with him even latterly. In those days when he was physically very much stronger the pace of his walk was naturally quite as brisk, if not brisker, and he never cared or waited for a conveyance when he could go walking. Such was the man, with his strange habits and stranger method of work, that appeared all on a sudden almost unannounced on the political platform of Bihar.

The difficulty about language was easily solved by some of our friends offering to serve as interpreters. Others were found ready to help him in recording statements of tenants

during the course of his enquiry. It was a remarkable thing that men could be found at such short notice to take up this work. But a more remarkable thing happened when he reached Champaran and was called upon by the District Magistrate under orders from the Commissioner to leave the district by the first available train. *He disobeyed that order.* This was the first lesson in civil disobedience to the country and it was a rare good luck that it was administered for the first time in Bihar by the author of Satyagraha. The question that naturally rose before Mahatma Gandhi and his co-workers in Champaran was as to what would happen after he was clapped into jail as was expected to happen. Those of us who did not know his methods thought the order was illegal and he could not be convicted for disobeying an illegal order. Immersed in law and in rulings of courts we knew no other course than that of defending the case and winning it if not in the Magistrate's court, to be sure, in the High Court. We used to have in those days a pitiful faith in the judgements of courts. But the question before Mahatma Gandhi was not of defence, successful or otherwise, before the Magistrate or the High Court, but of the ways and means of carrying on the enquiry when he was removed from the scene. He put a direct question to his co-workers and wanted a direct answer. He certainly got a direct answer. He wanted to know what they would do after he was imprisoned. He was told that they had come to assist him by acting as interpreters and that if he was imprisoned there would be none to interpret to and they would go home! It was a smart answer but not a satisfactory one and it satisfied neither the questioner nor the answerer. On a second consideration the workers offered to continue the enquiry until they were ordered by the Government to leave the district in which case they would obey the order and leave the district. They promised, however, to send others to conduct the enquiry till

they were similarly ordered to leave. It contemplated a continuation of the work by successive batches of workers without their being required to face the hardship of jail life. This pleased Mahatmaji as it was good enough for the time being. The idea of going to jail was novel in those days and Mahatmaji was practical enough not to blame others if they could not take it up the moment it was presented to them. The workers, however, were not themselves quite satisfied even with this answer. They kept awake the whole night contemplating : "This man who was an utter stranger had come all the way from Gujerat. He did not know the people of Champaran—did not even know their language—and had absolutely no previous connection of any kind with them or with Bihar. He was prepared to undergo the hardships of jail life for their sake—while we who are of them and have all kinds of connection with them were keeping ourselves safe. This ought not to be—this could not be. But we had a family, many of us had children. We were legal practitioners. What would happen to us, and to our children and to our practice at the bar ? What would people think of us ? What fools were we to go to jail giving up a comfortable life and the bright prospects before us ? Yet would we be so callous as to leave this strange stranger alone ? After all what would happen if we went to jail ?" And so on and so forth they reasoned and reconsidered till the next morning came and Mahatma Gandhi got ready to go to court to stand his trial for disobedience. They were torn between conflicting passions. But ultimately the nobler instinct won. They made up their minds to follow him to jail and when they were on their way to court with him they announced their final decision. Mahatmaji was highly pleased and said at once that the battle was won. They heard it but could not comprehend its meaning. They were, however, content not to probe deeper into the pros and cons of this *ipse dixit* and took it on

trust from him. Bihar had been initiated into Satyagraha. It had learnt its first lesson.

III

As soon as the news of Mahatma Gandhi's prosecution for disobedience of the order under sec. 144 Cr. P. C. became known there was a great stir throughout the country. Mahatma Gandhi took care to ask all friends not to create any agitation about the matter, but the whole phenomenon was so new that it could not but create a first-class sensation. Bihar could not remain unaffected. Offers of help came from all over the Province and many young lawyers came forward to assist him in the enquiry. The Government ultimately withdrew the case after Mahatma Gandhi had pleaded guilty in a statement remarkable at once as an indictment of the methods pursued by the Government and as a justification of the step he had taken of disobeying the order with a full sense of responsibility and wholly prepared to take the punishment which the Court would inflict. After his discharge the enquiry proceeded.

During the enquiry we used to hear many sensational developments from day to day. In spite of the fact that the Local Government had ordered withdrawal of the case and directed the District authorities to help the enquiry, there were many occasions when a break-down was imminent. We saw with what energy and tact Mahatmaji conducted it. He never delivered a public speech on the situation in Champaran nor did he allow anything relating to the very damaging disclosures made during the enquiry to find their way to the Press. While he was keeping many of the promi-

nent leaders, as also many of the editors of nationalist papers of the country fully informed of the course of events, he took care to couple with the information a request that no public use should be made of it until such time as he desired it to be published. He thus kept the public men and the Press fully informed of facts so that if the occasion arose for a public agitation they should not have to wait for information nor be led into making statements which might be challenged.

On the other hand he was keeping himself in touch with local officials and the planters. His idea was not to create trouble, but at the same time he was determined to see the grievances of the tenants removed. He was anxious to set the planters and officials at ease regarding his object and would not allow any opportunity to pass which would help him in doing so. To us it was all so new. We could hardly imagine how one whose success meant heavy losses, if not ruin, to many of the planters, could win their confidence and esteem. But he used to tell them and the Government officials that he was not their enemy, that he was keen on securing relief for the tenants but that he was equally keen that there should be no bitterness left after he had completed his work. And he succeeded in securing relief and avoiding bitterness to a very great extent. It was no small achievement to get the representative of the planters to sign a unanimous report to which Mahatma Gandhi as the tenants' representative, as also Government representatives and the Zamindars' representatives appended their signatures. It was this report that abolished the compulsory system of indigo cultivation on a portion of their holdings by the tenants which was known as the 'Tinkathia' system. This system was universally regarded as the root of all evils in Champaran and with its abolition as a result of Mahatma Gandhi's labours indigo cultivation practically ceased. Those who were associated with him were studying his novel method of political work and imbibing

slowly the spirit of Satyagraha. On one occasion when Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya visited Bihar, he told us that it was our rare and valued privilege to serve under Mahatma Gandhi and when I look back upon the period that has since elapsed and the work that has since been done in the country I feel as if we are enacting the Champaran drama on a very much vaster scale.

I will mention some incidents which bring out how we received training in his method of work. At an early stage of the enquiry after the prosecution had been withdrawn we were taught a lesson about how we should treat the police. A large number of tenants used to come with their grievances and we used to record their statements after cross-examination. Some police officers used always to be about watching and noting what was happening. Some of the officers even used to go a bit further and try to get an inside view of things in ways not quite straightforward. One morning while one of us was engaged in recording statements surrounded by a number of ryots a Police Sub-Inspector came and sat close to him. He did not like it. He felt uneasy perhaps because he thought the presence of the Sub-Inspector might terrify the ryots who would not speak as freely as they would otherwise do, and removed himself and the tenants from that place to another. The Sub-Inspector, nothing daunted, followed him to the new place and seated himself next to him. He could not tolerate this any longer and told the officer to keep away. The officer complained of this to Mahatmaji who sent for all of us. The tenants were also there. He asked the worker concerned if he had behaved as had been reported by the Sub-Inspector. The fact was, of course, admitted and an explanation offered. Mahatmaji then asked him whether he was not surrounded on all sides by a number of tenants and the answer was in the affirmative. Then he said : "Why do you object to the presence of one man more in the crowd ?

Why do you make any distinction between the ryots and the Sub-Inspector ? Is it because you think the ryots will become unnerved by his presence and will not be as communicative as they would otherwise be ? You should cease to fear the Police and learn to do your work unmindful of their presence. The ryots should also be taught to speak the truth fearlessly in the presence of the Police and the planters. There can be no redress of their grievances unless they shed fear." We saw that he had read the true feeling of our hearts and touched the real weakness that was there, and I can say that since that day the presence or absence of a policeman has not made the slightest difference in our method of work with most of us. The Sub-Inspector, on the other hand, did not appreciate the doubtful compliment of being treated as one of the crowd and later on maintained his dignity by keeping at a safe distance.

Before Mahatma Gandhi visited Champaran the ryots were so much demoralized that they would not easily make complaints to Magistrates and give evidence against their oppressors. The boast of one of the *zabardast* planters before the Enquiry Committee was that the records of Courts would show that except for a few recalcitrant tenants, his ryots were so happy and contented that there was hardly any case from his *Elaka* in Courts—either against him and his servants or even against other ryots. The remark was true and it would apparently seem to be a sign of contentment. But the fact was that the ryots dared not go to court. There were instances where they were actually dragged down forcibly from the presence of Magistrates by the servants of the factory if any showed the temerity to approach a court of justice ; and then followed well-known methods of teaching them lessons not to repeat the mistake. After Mahatma Gandhi's arrival there was something which instinctively heartened the ryots who came in large numbers to give their statements. We re-

corded the statements of something like 25,000 ryots from one end of the district to the other and there was hardly a planter whose ryots had not come to us in their hundreds and had not acquainted us with the minutest details of their grievances. The planter referred to above boastfully told Mahatma Gandhi that he was certain Mahatma Gandhi could not have heard anything against his administration, as none of his tenants could have come to him. Mahatmaji had the statements of some five hundred ryots against him who had fully disclosed all their grievances and had further stated that they dared not go to court for fear of being punished for having done so. Being confronted with this the planter found that he had been living under a false sense of security and that the prestige based on sheer oppression had been already shaken. The ryots had already learnt how to shed their fear of the planter.

IV

On one occasion Mahatmaji was taken by a planter to his *Dehat* (villages in his possession). His claim was that his men were quite happy and satisfied and Mahatmaji would not hear any complaints from them. Mahatmaji's practice was that whenever he was approached with a request of this nature to visit the *Dehat* of a particular factory, he would ask us to give him the heads of grievances of the ryots there. We had built up a regular secretariat and we could, at a moment's notice, find out from our records the grievances of the ryots of each particular factory with the necessary documentary and other proofs. We had been keeping the vast material we were collecting well sorted and fully indexed. The planter had

stage-managed a show and collected a number of his men coached to say that they were perfectly contented and happy, that it was all milk and honey around them, and that the Saheb was the very paragon of virtue. We of course knew that it was not so and Mahatmaji posted himself with facts relating to that area before starting for the place after his morning prayer at 4 a.m. He walked the distance of six or seven miles although we had a conveyance with us. On our way a number of tenants in an excited mood met him and told him that the Saheb had arranged to collect a number of men who would only praise him and Mahatmaji might come away with a wrong impression. Mahatmaji of course knew their grievances as we had hundreds of recorded statements supported by documents. But he asked them if they had anything to say against the Saheb. They repeated all that was on record. Mahatmaji asked them: "If that is so why should not you also say what you have to say? Is it because you are afraid of the Saheb? If what you have told me is true, have you not the courage to repeat it in the presence of the Saheb?" They all said in one voice that they would not fear the Saheb and would state the truth in his presence. When we arrived, there were four to five hundred ryots. The Saheb also came followed a little later by the Magistrate. The Saheb's men related how well they were treated by the Saheb, and how happily they were living under his regime. One old man of about eighty was particularly mentioned by the Saheb to Mahatmaji as a most respectable person in the locality, and parrot-like the old man repeated the story. But no sooner had he uttered a sentence or two than a large section of the crowd began to protest and curse that this man, with one foot in the grave, was selling himself and trying to perpetuate their misery by making false statements. It was not until Mahatmaji impressed upon them the necessity of holding their souls in patience till their turn came that they could be made

to keep quiet. The few tutored ryots had soon said their say as they had not much to declare. Then came the turn of the so-called malcontents. They poured forth their miseries and sufferings in a language and with an emphasis which could not fail to impress. The circumstantial details of incidents of which they had themselves been victims could not fail to carry conviction. As they were relating their grievances they would now and then turn to the Saheb himself and put to him directly if he himself had not done such and such a thing. One old man who was lame and was using a lathi as a crutch came out of the crowd and put it point blank to the Saheb, if he himself on horse-back had not supervised the looting of his house when all that was in it was taken away or scattered and even the roof of it was pulled down. Turning to the Magistrate who was sitting, watching and listening, the old man accused him also of partiality and said that when he had gone to lodge a complaint, the Magistrate had turned him out and threatened him with his cane. To complete the picture, turning to Mahatmaji, he said that all "topiwallahs", meaning people wearing hats, were one and there was no justice to be expected from them. He rounded off his statement with an invitation to all to come and see his house which still bore marks of the depredations he had described and which had taken place only a short time before. The Magistrate left the place in a huff and the planter looked very much crestfallen as his whole plan had miscarried. He lost a big annual income to which he was not entitled in law but which he had been extorting every year from the ryots who had been powerless to resist. We saw fearlessness among ryots at its st.

The incident was shortly afterwards followed by a report to Government and created a crisis. Mahatma Gandhi was summoned to the Government House to be heard before the Government finally made up their mind as to the desirability

of his continued stay in Champaran. His interview with the Lieutenant-Governor, however, took a most unexpected turn. We were expecting his externment or internment under the Defence of India Act which was then in force but it ended with the appointment of a Commission to enquire into the grievances of the tenants on which Mahatmaji had a seat.

Soon after our arrival in Champaran we received a lesson which has remained impressed on my memory. After the adjournment of the prosecution against Mahatmaji for judgement, Mr. C. F. Andrews arrived in Champaran. We were anticipating that the case would be withdrawn but we were not yet certain about it. Mr. Andrews was bound to sail for Fiji in a few days. We felt it would be desirable to detain him. We requested Mr. Andrews to stay for some time. He said he could, if Mahatmaji wanted him to. The matter was mentioned to Mahatmaji, who said it was for Mr. Andrews to decide. If he felt that his stay in Champaran was more urgently required than his visit to Fiji, he might stay but he must decide on the comparative merits of the two claims on his time. We pressed Mr. Andrews and he almost agreed but could not finally decide without mentioning to Mahatmaji that we were insistent on his stay. On hearing this Mahatmaji spoke out and said that Mr. Andrews must not stay precisely because we were insistent that he should. He said: "You are anxious to secure Mr. Andrews' stay as you have fear in your hearts. You think the fight is with European planters. Mr. Andrews is an Englishman and in a fight with Englishmen he should act as a shield. You must get rid of this fear and learn to stand by yourself without the protection of an Englishman, even though that Englishman happens to be no other than Mr. Andrews." "I had", he continued, "half a mind to let Mr. Andrews stay. But now when I read your minds, I think Mr. Andrews will by his stay do more harm than good to the cause and so he must go." He had correctly read

our minds and Mr. Andrews did go by the next available train.

Mahatmaji's scrupulous regard for truth was carried to such an extent that he would not allow any one to remain under a false impression even though such false impression might be of no consequence. It was on account of this scrupulousness that he had won not only the esteem but also the confidence of the officials. Even when they were making the most damaging reports against him they would show him the courtesy of sending him an advance copy. He too on his part never made a report to the Government against any planter without first letting him have a copy of what he had to say against him. On one occasion a confidential report, which was being submitted to Government by the Magistrate, contained a reference to one of our co-workers. As usual the Magistrate sent it to Mahatmaji for such remarks or explanations as he desired to offer. He read it and as usual showed it to us and returned it to the Magistrate. It struck the Magistrate that the document being marked confidential might not have been shown by Mahatmaji to the co-worker concerned and it was fair that he also should know what the Magistrate had to say about him. So he sent the report a second time with a note that it should be shown to that gentleman also. The report was duly returned. But Mahatmaji felt that the officer was under a wrong impression that such confidential documents were not seen by Mahatmaji's co-workers and that this misapprehension of his should be removed. So he wrote to him saying that all papers which he received were always seen by his co-workers, by which term was meant a limited number of persons assisting him in the enquiry. They would continue to do that in future. They did not understand by 'confidential' that the papers were not to be seen even by those who were engaged in the work so long as they did not abuse the trust, of which there was no fear. In case the Magistrate did not like their seeing any document, he need

not trouble to send it to him as he would not like to see things which he could not show to his co-workers. We feared this would unnecessarily rub the Magistrate the wrong way. But Mahatmaji said it was necessary that he should know the truth. The letter, however, did not produce any bad results.

On another occasion an officious friend managed to obtain a copy of a confidential document surreptitiously and brought it to Mahatmaji hoping that his enterprise would be appreciated. When he mentioned the matter to him, Mahatmaji wanted to know how he had come by it and if he would permit him to write to the proper authorities to find out if he could use it. This of course was out of the question as the gentleman could not face such a contingency. Mahatmaji thereupon resolutely refused to even look at it and told us also not to read it. He said it was not by such surreptitious means, however clever, that we could gain our object. Our dealings must be above board.

I remember an incident which will show how firmly and yet politely he would deal even with our own respected leaders. As I have stated above, nothing was kept secret from the co-workers; at the same time nothing was allowed to leak out to those who were not directly connected with the enquiry. Whenever any situation arose, Mahatmaji would call all his workers together and discuss the pros and cons with them. He would take his own decision but would listen patiently to everything that others said. Very often he made us see the error of our judgement. On one occasion we were busy discussing some important question, which had cropped up, when a gentleman well known for his services to the country came to see Mahatmaji. Mahatmaji sent word to him that he was busy discussing an important question and would see him as soon as he was free. The visitor was cut to the quick. He felt that there could be nothing in Champaran which required to be kept secret from him and it was showing distrust of him

not to allow him to be present at the discussion. He showed temper just as any one of us would have done under similar circumstances. When it was reported that the visitor was upset by being asked to wait, Mahatmaji sent another messenger to explain things to him and went on with the discussion. The second messenger could not improve matters and the visitor was positively angry. In the mean time the discussion was finished and the visitor was asked to come in. When he appeared Mahatmaji asked him why he felt cut up and was told in reply that there was no reason to distrust him. He was a public worker and there was nothing that should be kept secret from him. Mahatmaji coolly told him that there was no question of distrust. He was not acquainted with the details of the problem we had been discussing and his participation in the discussion would not, in the circumstances, be of any assistance. It did not follow that those who participated in the discussion were more trustworthy. It only meant that they were in a better position than the respected visitor to assist. In public work we should not be so touchy but must be prepared to know our place with regard to every matter and not try to meddle with matters with which we were not concerned. The visitor at once saw the reasonableness of his remarks and was easily satisfied. Since then I have personally never felt cut up when I have been required to retire from a committee or discussion where for some reason my presence was not considered necessary or helpful. It is a lesson which all of us should learn and save many an unfortunate misunderstanding.

V

Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Champaran synchronized with the great push given to the Home Rule movement by

that great and indefatigable worker in the cause of Indian uplift, Mrs. Annie Besant. Throughout the country a large number of workers were going about delivering lectures and rousing and organizing the people. Bihar too had its share of political agitation. We used to read reports in the papers how many of our friends and co-workers in other districts were busy going about holding meetings and delivering lectures, and sometimes felt tempted to follow the same course in Champaran also. But Mahatmaji had sealed his own as well as our lips and we were not permitted to deliver public speeches either on the Champaran situation or in connection with the Home Rule movement. We expressed our desire to take part in the movement which was convulsing the whole country, particularly after the internment of Mrs. Besant. He used to tell us that by our very silence we were doing the highest kind of Home Rule work. After all, it was work among the masses that would bring Home Rule, especially work of the nature we were engaged in at the time. And the more I think of that kind of work the more I feel convinced of the truth of the remark and the greater becomes my regret that we did not from that very time devote ourselves to the work of village reconstruction.

While we were thus being trained the villagers of Champaran also were getting their training. They were being constantly told—not so much by word of mouth as by actual practice—to become fearless and self-reliant and disciplined. When the Agrarian Committee met at Bettiah some twenty or thirty thousand tenants had assembled there to witness and watch the proceedings and to lay their grievances before it. It was a problem to control them, as they all wanted to appear before the Committee. On the eve of the commencement of the enquiry by the Committee, Mahatmaji collected all of them and delivered a short public speech. He asked

them to be patient and disciplined, not to follow him wherever he went, not to shout and make noise but to wait and watch in silence. He assured them that he had got the statements of thousands of them and knew all their grievances. He had a large number of documents which he would place before the Committee when necessary, and would also call such of them as witnesses as he thought fit. This pacified them, and every day they would line the streets from the Dharmshala, where we were staying, to the building where the Committee was sitting and would allow Mahatmaji and others to pass without hindrance or trouble. There would be no shouting and no scramble for touching his feet, as we later heard and saw wherever he went. It was a lesson in crowd management to us.

As a result of the enquiry a unanimous report was submitted to Government. It was in fact a compromise between Mahatmaji, representing the ryots, and the planters. Long and apparently interminable discussions took place. There we saw Mahatmaji for the first time as a negotiator and peacemaker. He would not yield an inch on questions of principle but would go a long way to meet the planters in questions of details. His object, as I have stated before, was to obtain relief and at the same time to leave as little bitterness as possible. The principal grievances were two. The planters claimed a right, which had been recognized, that they could compel ryots to grow indigo for them on a certain portion of their holdings, viz., on 3 *kathas* for every *bigha** of land they held. This was known as *Tinkathia*. They had secured from the Government the enactment of a particular section in the Tenancy Act whereby the ryot was enabled to agree by

* Bigha and katha are units of land measurement, one bigha being equal to twenty kathas. As the tenants were forced to cultivate indigo on *three kathas* (out of the twenty comprising a bigha) this practice came to be known as *Tinkathia*.

contract to any enhancement in his rent in consideration of being released from this obligation to grow a particular crop for the benefit of his landlord. Ordinarily a tenant's freedom to agree to enhancement of rent by contract is limited and he cannot agree to an enhancement of more than two annas per rupee, but by this particular section the restriction was removed. The planters, taking advantage of this, had obtained contracts from the ryots agreeing to large enhancements. They released them from the obligation to grow indigo when cultivation and manufacture of indigo had ceased to be profitable on account of the import of chemical dyes from Germany. There had thus been a very large addition to the rent payable by the ryots. The contention of these ryots was that all these agreements for enhancement— *sharah beshi* agreements as they were called—were obtained from them under coercion and that they had not been voluntarily given. There was reason on their side. It was well known that indigo manufacture was no longer profitable and it was in the interests of the planters not to manufacture it. They would, sooner or later, of their own accord cease manufacturing it and the tenants would automatically be released from this so-called obligation. Why should they in the circumstances agree voluntarily to a permanent addition to their burden ? The planters were cleverer and more resourceful and had the support of the Government. They managed to extort thousands of such *sharah beshi* agreements for registration for which Government had appointed additional Registrars who held their offices at places convenient to the planters. While we had no doubt that coercion had been used on a very extensive scale in obtaining those so-called agreements, it was no easy matter to prove coercion or undue influence in a court of law. Some of the tenants had fought about nine test cases and after a great deal of expense and worry had succeeded in getting decrees from the lower courts in four or five of

them. The Survey and Settlement authorities had by one stroke of the pen held all these agreements to be valid.

Where, on account of the temporary nature of their own interests in some villages, the planters considered it unprofitable to take agreements for enhancement which would accrue to the benefit of the superior landlord when their lease expired, they had hit upon the expedient of taking cash payments, which they called *tawan*, for releasing the tenants from the so-called obligation to grow indigo. It was calculated that they had realized something like Rs. 12 lacs in cash in this way and had considerably added to their income by *sharah beshi* agreements.

The question was—what was to be done? Mahatmaji had to come to terms. It was unsuitable that thousands of cases should be fought out in court for rescinding these *sharah beshi* agreements. The tenants did not possess the resources for any such undertaking. And even if they did, what guarantee was there that they would succeed? The burden of proof would be on them to show that these agreements were given under coercion and undue influence or fraud. Would courts accept their evidence against that of the planters? The Survey and Settlement authorities had rejected the ryots' plea and upheld all these agreements. If anything could be achieved, it was only by compromise. There was no difficulty in the Committee as a body agreeing to legislation abolishing this so-called right to compel the ryot to grow a particular crop for the benefit of the landlord and abolishing the *Tinkathia* system altogether. The real trouble was about the *sharah beshi* and the *tawan*. After a great deal of discussion and negotiation it was agreed that a certain percentage of the *tawan* realized would be refunded. The percentage of reduction in enhancements was arrived at after a great deal of calculation. When the report was published many felt that Mahatmaji had yielded too much, and that the

reduction in enhancements was not commensurate with the high hopes which had been formed. As regards the refund of *tawan* also, it was said that the whole of it should have been refunded, as the planters had absolutely no right to it. Some of the planters on their side began to repudiate their representative who had agreed to all this, and one of them who had been particularly consulted by the Committee and had agreed to the terms of the report was most vociferous. The report was accepted by the Government and made the basis of legislation which was in due course passed by the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council at Patna. It is not necessary to go into further details regarding other reliefs which the ryots got. I have dealt with the question of *sharah beshi* and *tawan* at some length with a particular object in view. The whole discussion has a lesson for us on the larger issues of Swaraj and Mahatmaji's capacity for negotiation and compromise. We shall do well to bear this in mind, when we feel inclined to be critical about the negotiations that he was engaged in later.

It is true that by compromise only a small portion of the enhancements—I forget the exact figure but it was a little less than 25 per cent—was cut down and only 25 per cent of the *tawan* realized was refunded. But the prestige of the planters was gone for ever and it was prestige which had sustained them. It was not that every ryot had been oppressed by them. But if the ryots in any village showed an inclination to be recalcitrant some of the principal ones among them were selected and broken by various means, and that created a moral impression and cowed down the rest. For the first time the planters had a reverse and had to refund money, albeit a small portion of what they had realized. The ryots felt that they were after all impregnable. Any one who goes to Champaran can see the result of this moral victory of the ryots. The biggest factories disappeared in less than five years. The very bricks and tiles of their palatial

houses have been sold out and their beautiful flower gardens have now come into the possession of local people who are growing corn on them. There is hardly any planter problem in Champaran now. The whole of their system was built on prestige; when once that received a shock the whole of the edifice tumbled down like a house of cards. May not the same scene be repeated on a very much vaster scale in India ? Let us not therefore be very critical about details. The real thing to achieve is to organize the masses and make them fearless.

VI

I have so far written only about the semi-political work which Mahatmaji did in Champaran and in which he trained us. His purely social work was no less remarkable though it did not attract much attention at the time. Bihar was a province in which orthodoxy reigned supreme among the Hindus. We also have our mode of living which, we found, was not helpful in the kind of work we were engaged in. As soon as Mahatmaji discovered that a large number of workers would be required to assist him who would have to make a prolonged stay with him, he made up his mind that we should have a separate house and establishment where we could stay and work instead of billeting ourselves on friends as we did on our arrival at Motihari. He said a house must be found and, if necessary, taken on rent, and he fixed the day on which we should shift. A house was found and everything was ready for removal, but according to our habits of procrastination, and busy as we had been the whole day, we felt it would be better if we shifted the next day. But Mahatmaji had

fixed the day for removal and that day had passed and it was about 9 o'clock at night. He felt that if we did not move that night the first decision of moving that day would remain unfulfilled on account of our laziness. The next day we would have again a large number of ryots anxious to get their statements recorded who would have to be kept waiting while we were busy shifting to another house. So at about 10 o'clock at night the order went forth that we must move the same night and when he found us hesitating and discussing how to get a carriage or labourers to carry our things, he rose, packed his bedding and started, carrying the load. We had no option but to run after him with whatever we could carry. Fortunately, the new house was at a short distance. On reaching there we found that it was not as clean as it should be. He immediately took a broom and started sweeping. We were shamed into taking away the broom from him and sweeping the house clean. This was the first of the many lessons which we had to learn from him.

It is an inveterate habit with Biharees to depend upon servants for personal service even in small matters. We had several of us our own servants and so the number of inmates of the camp or Ashram, as you might call it, was practically double that of workers. We had besides a cook who came a few days later. Our orthodoxy was such that none of us had taken *kachi* food from the hands of anyone except a Brahmin or a fellow caste-man. And this we had carried and preserved in spite of the fact that some of us had been educated in Calcutta and spent years in that big metropolis, and in spite of the fact that some of us had taken part in the agitation for the readmission of England-returned gentlemen to caste. The question was—were we going to keep our caste intact ? Mahatmaji was of course living on groundnuts, dates and fresh fruits and so when this question arose, there was no difficulty on his account. Mahatmaji saw our orthodoxy and told us

that when we were engaged in public work of the kind we were doing in Champaran, we all became of one caste, namely, the caste of the co-workers, and it was not desirable for us to stick to the lifeless custom of not eating particular things touched by particular persons. At any rate so long as we were in Champaran, our work should not be allowed to suffer, our time should not be wasted and the expenses of establishment should not be permitted to mount up just for the sake of preserving our castes. And so for the first time we began to eat rice and dal touched by others without distinction, although we happened to have amongst us Kayasthas, Rajputs, Agarwals, Goalas, Gujerati Banias, and possibly some others whom I forget now. We discovered soon afterwards that this change in our habits was necessary and useful as without it we would have found great difficulty in carrying on the work which became more and more heavy and exacting.

The next question was about the servants—should we keep so many of them ? Mahatmaji again told us that if we wanted to serve the country this dependence on servants should also go. In any case we could not afford to have so many servants in the camp both because it was expensive and because there was not sufficient accommodation. Besides, it was wholly unnecessary.

One after another the servants were sent away and only one kitchen servant was employed to clean and wash and help in sundry other ways. We were thrown upon our own resources for everything else. It thus became necessary for us to draw water for our use from the well, to wash our own clothes after bath, to wash our plates after meals and to clean the rooms. It was a novel experience to all of us and though it was irksome to begin with, we easily reconciled ourselves to it. It had a splendid effect on the ryots who used to assemble in their hundreds every day to give their statements.

The cook was also sent away afterwards when Srimati

Kasturba Gandhi (Mahatmaji's wife) arrived. He told us that she would cook for all and that some of us would only have to assist her. It appeared to us to be hard on her to have to cook for so many of us, and when we protested, he silenced us by saying that she was used to cook for larger numbers and there would be no difficulty. So some of us had to help her in the kitchen and we used to see how with our wood-fuel she would be busy in the kitchen fanning the fire which would smoke and cause tears in her and her assistant's eyes. Mahatmaji also used to help in feeding us, as he took it upon himself to serve out the food when we sat for dinner, particularly at the evening meal. He would take particular pleasure in doing so. It was a sight to see about a dozen of us seated with our plates, Mahatmaji serving out rice and dal, and Ba, as we soon learnt to call her, handing over the different dishes to him to serve. Before and after meals we were required to clean and wash our utensils and to wash the floor where we used to dine, and restore the whole place to a clean and tidy condition. I remember that there were occasions when we had to wash the cooking pots also during the absence or indisposition of the single servant who was retained for the purpose.

I remember a funny story. One morning I was busy cleaning a tiffin-carrier at the well. It had been left unwashed for some days and it was taking time to make it quite clean and bright. Mahatmaji came to the well for water and seeing that I was hard at work, laughed his usual hearty laugh and said : "Well, is it not creditable that I have made High Court Vakils scrape and wash their pots ?" And so it was. It used to be an interesting sight for the villagers to see us doing all this with our own hands. They knew many of us as Vakil Sahebs who had houses and establishments and servants and cooks of our own at our homes, but we were drudging like common folks. Many of them would offer to help us

and do all that for us. But Mahatmaji said we were having a lesson in self-help and should not spoil it by taking service from villagers even when voluntarily offered. Were we not there to serve them ? Why then should we take service from them ?

But this was not all. There was a corresponding change in our food also. In the beginning Mahatmaji was living on groundnuts, dates and fresh fruits. Later on he began to take rice and boiled vegetables without salt and without any spices. Our food also became very simple. Although our vegetables were not merely boiled with water—there used to be some ghee added–spices, except perhaps for turmeric (*haldi*) and salt, were practically excluded. We thus used to have two simple and healthy meals, one at about 8.30 or 9 in the morning and the other at about 5 o'clock in the evening before sunset. In between we used sometimes to have some fruits or other things of the season but this was irregular and occasional. The principal meals were in the morning and evening. We ate nothing during the night. The result was that in spite of the hard work we had to put in, we preserved excellent health and our living was cheap.

Apart from occasional visits, which we had to pay to villages either with Mahatmaji or by ourselves, our routine used to be a full day's work. We used to rise early, Mahatmaji earliest of all. We did not have congregational prayers then as we used to have later, wherever we happened to be with Mahatmaji. He would have his prayers while we were all asleep in the small hours of the morning and after morning ablutions, would begin writing or reading. We would rise later, yet early enough to be ready for bath, etc. by about 6.30, and sit to work. We would have put in about two hours' work before breakfast between 8 and 9 and thereafter we would continue our work till it was time for the evening meal, with occasional breaks according to the exigencies of work during the after-

noon. By the time the evening meal was finished the day's post would have arrived along with newspapers. About 6.30 or 7 p.m. we would go out with Mahatmaji for a walk of about 2 or 3 miles. This used to be the time when we would talk to Mahatmaji about various matters not necessarily connected with the enquiry and discuss items of news published in the papers. After returning we would again sit to work for an hour or more, according as the work for the day was light or heavy, and then retire about 9 or 10 at night to rise the next day and continue as on the day before. Mahatmaji would not waste a single minute of his time and his hard work used to help and inspire us when we were inclined to be lazy.

VII

When the enquiry was nearing its end Mahatmaji began to discuss with us and with the officials and the planters the desirability of social work among the ryots. He wanted to have village schools where highly cultured men and women would give voluntary service as teachers.

These schools were not to be what we ordinarily understand by schools these days. They were not to be institutions where children would come at stated hours and the teacher would give them instruction in the three Rs, more with the help of his rod than anything else; and after the stated hours the teacher would be busy with his own affairs and the children would go home to return the next day. Mahatmaji's conception of the school was that it should be a centre of light in the gloom of the village. The teacher would serve as friend, philosopher and guide to the men and women of the village.

His or her function would be to attend to the instruction of not only the children but also the adult men and women. The instruction was to be not only in the traditional three Rs but also in rural economy and sanitation. The teacher would also serve as a village physician and distribute medicines amongst the villagers where necessary and possible, but would rather try to prevent disease by improving the sanitation of the village. This last would consist in keeping the village clean, teaching people not to make it dirty by evacuating anywhere and everywhere, keeping the surroundings of the village well clean, improving the drains of the village, sweeping the village roads, teaching the people proper methods of disposing of the refuse matter, teaching the women how to keep the children clean, etc., etc. The teacher was also expected to advise the villagers in all matters affecting their welfare and to serve as an interpreter between them and the planter or the landlord or the Government. There was of course to be hand-spinning and hand-weaving where suitable teachers could be found.

The first difficulty was to secure the blessings of the Government officials and the planters to this noble work of village uplift. They were only too apt to look askance on such efforts. Mahatmaji managed to secure such blessings from some of the planters but others, while not actively opposing, preferred to wait and watch. The Government officials could not and did not object to the kind of work he was undertaking, particularly because really and avowedly political agitation was not the motive which actuated Mahatmaji in opening these schools.

The next and perhaps the greater difficulty was to secure teachers of the kind and with the qualifications needed to be able to discharge the functions above mentioned. It was clear that ordinary teachers of the sort employed in the primary schools would not do. What was wanted was a set

of men and women with high culture and a will and determination to busy themselves in villages and devote the best in them to the uplift of the men and women there. It would have given Mahatmaji great and genuine satisfaction if he could find among Biharees men and women willing to devote themselves to this work. Unfortunately Bihar was not able to give more than one family for six months. The reason is not far to seek. This kind of quiet, unobtrusive work, without remunerative reward and without even that advertisement which is regarded as its own reward and is no small incentive to many a man in politics, was wholly unknown and unfamiliar perhaps to the whole country and certainly to Bihar. No wonder if the so-called cultured men with worldly prospects and political ambitions could not make up their minds at the time to accept this as their life-work. Nothing daunted, Mahatmaji brought a number of ladies and gentlemen from Maharashtra and Gujerat pledged to the work for six months within which time it was hoped by him local workers of the right stamp would be available.

Schools were opened in three parts of the district and were conducted on the lines laid down by Mahatmaji and indicated above. The workers were of the ideal sort, actuated by a high sense of duty, highly cultured, ever willing and ready to do the lowliest work. Thus they would not hesitate for a moment to take a spade in hand and make the village road clean and smooth. They would readily take a broom and sweep the private houses of villagers or the village road to show them how these should be kept free from dirt and filth. One of the things which they attended to particularly was the cleanliness of the surroundings of village wells. We know that there is hardly any arrangement for drainage round a well. People come, draw water and bathe near the well with the result that a part of the water from their bodies goes back into the well and the rest flows in all directions

making the whole place muddy and dirty. All this was sought to be improved. The people in the villages where they were working could not fail to notice the cleanliness and the generally cheerful appearance of the whole place.

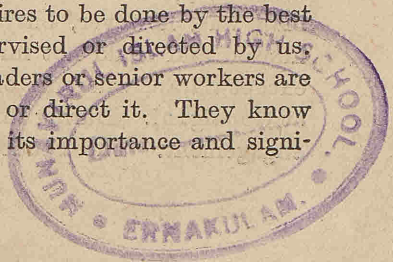
While instruction in letters was not neglected, the charkha, which was then just beginning to be studied by Mahatmaji's co-workers, was also sought to be introduced in one of the centres where one of the workers knew something about it. The women of the villages became special objects of attention and the lady volunteers easily found entrance into their homes and soon won their confidence. Even grown-up women used to come to the Ashrams for instruction and *purdah* seemed to be distinctly dissolving. The women began to feel free. They started not only to learn spinning which some of them knew already and reading and writing, but also to join in village functions, such as Ramayan parties which used now and then to be held, and in the Ashram prayers.

To illustrate the enthusiasm of the workers I will mention one incident. One of the schools was near the Nepal Terai in a rather unhealthy locality. Its presence was not liked by the planter of the place. It consisted of a number of straw huts in some of which the workers slept or cooked their food and in others, children used to be taught. One night one of the huts caught fire and was reduced to ashes. It is not necessary now to enquire into the cause of the fire. The workers had their own suspicions but felt they would be better employed in building a pucca house in place of the straw hut destroyed rather than in trying to investigate and discover whether it was a case of accident or of incendiarism. They set to work the very next day. They began by bringing bricks and materials for the house and were seen carrying these on their heads. This shamed the villagers who soon came to their help. In no time there rose up a small clean little building which stands even today on its site—a

memorial to the splendid work done.

The first batch of workers remained at its post for six months and was replaced at the end of that period by a second batch. It has always been a source of regret and shame that this noble work did not attract workers from Bihar, and when the workers from Gujerat and Maharashtra went back, it languished and in course of time disappeared altogether. We tried to keep it up with the help of teachers who were employed as they are in other Board or Government schools. The work was essentially of a different character and these teachers had neither the capacity nor the liveliness of the volunteers, men and women, who came from outside. I am writing this from Bardoli sitting in the house where the famous Bardoli resolution of 1922 calling off Civil Disobedience was passed. Since then many Ashrams have grown up in this Taluka with their buildings, workshops, dispensaries and, above all, bands of devoted and selfless workers. No wonder Bardoli has played such a noble part in the war of self-effacement. If Bihar had the capacity and foresight to see the value of the quiet work Mahatmaji initiated and the spirit of sacrifice to carry it on, Bihar today would have been very different from what it is. We have undoubtedly many Ashrams now in villages in several districts. Many selfless workers are devoting themselves to them and a great deal of service is being rendered to the people by these Ashrams. But I feel a vacuum —a sense of something wanting in them. Most of our prominent public workers are not yet attached to them. We have not yet got rid of the lure of towns. We are not yet free from the feeling that our sphere of work is in cities.

The work of village uplift requires to be done by the best amongst us and not merely supervised or directed by us. As a matter of fact the so-called leaders or senior workers are utterly incompetent to supervise or direct it. They know little about it. And ignorance of its importance and signi-



ficance and lack of acquaintance with its details can hardly be regarded as qualifications for supervisors. Mahatmaji expected and insisted on certain qualifications in the volunteers engaged in village work, and every one who serves in the village ought to strive to acquire these qualifications. We can make a useful contribution to village uplift by running our existing Ashrams or Sewa Mandirs and opening new ones on the lines indicated by Mahatmaji. Would to God that He would give us the imagination to see and the strength and character to prove ourselves worthy of the first lessons that Mahatmaji gave us and worthy of the great service that those noble men and women of Gujerat and Maharashtra did. How else can Bihar repay even a part of that heavy debt which it owes to them ?

VIII

Mahatma Gandhi's work and stay in Champaran for nearly eight months at one stretch and then his occasional visits to see the schools started by him and in connection with the legislation undertaken by the Government in pursuance of the report of the Agrarian Committee, created a profound impression on the Province as a whole and the Tirhut Division in particular. Ryots from the districts of Muzaffarpur, Saran and Darbhanga used to come to Bettiah and Motihari to see Mahatmaji and to invite him to their own districts. Mahatmaji was, however, busy with the work he had set before himself and could not find time to visit any of these places except Saran, where he once went and had a public meeting at Gopalgunj. During this period he accepted another public engagement. The Students' Conference was meeting that

year at Bhagalpur and he was persuaded to preside over it. His presence naturally attracted a record attendance not only of students but also of others. In his usual manner his speech was short and full of suggestions for improvements in the everyday life of the students. This was his first contact with the youth of Bihar and naturally created great enthusiasm among them.

Before he had had time to complete his work in Champaran including the work of education, he was called away to Gujerat by reason of the Satyagraha of the agriculturists of the district of Kaira. I have heard it from his own mouth that it was one of his regrets that he could not give more time to the educational work which remained half-done. He left Bihar with a good opinion of the Province and has said publicly several times that he regarded Champaran as his adopted home.

On one occasion when I was returning with him from a village to which he had gone on a visit, we started talking about various matters and I asked him what he thought of Bihar. He told me he had a good opinion and high hopes about it. I was surprised. I told him there was hardly any public life here worth the name, we had no institutions run on the lines of self-sacrifice and hardly any worker who was giving all his time to public work. I asked him what his reasons for such an opinion could be. He gave me an answer which was wholly unintelligible to me and which made me laugh heartily at the time, and I doubt not it will make the reader of these lines laugh. He said, "Biharees do not eat much spices and particularly chillies." I have often pondered over what his meaning could be. He possibly regarded spices and chillies as signs and symbols of luxury and his meaning might well be that our life was simple on the whole. Ever since then, he retained a soft corner for Bihar in his heart and whenever any occasion arose in the larger struggle which

he was engaged in, he counted upon Bihar for support and expected it to play its part. God be praised that Bihar has tried to do its humble best.

Our stay with Mahatmaji could not fail to rouse in us a desire to devote ourselves to the service of the public. During our leisure hours in Champaran we used to discuss what practical shape this desire should take and what organization should be made the medium through which service was to be rendered. We thought we should start a college which should be run on the lines of the Fergusson College of Poona. We had heard about the sacrifice of its Professors and particularly of the late Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the then Principal Mr. (now Sir) R. P. Paranjpye. We had heard how in the prime of their lives they had decided to give up all prospects of earning money for themselves, how they had taken vows to serve the institution on subsistence allowance and how the institution had prospered and created an atmosphere of service and sacrifice in Maharashtra. We began seriously to consider who would join a similar institution when it was started in Bihar, how to raise funds and where to locate it. We made some progress and actually collected some money. We also succeeded in securing promises from suitable persons who were willing to join the staff on subsistence allowance. We discussed it with Mahatmaji also. While he appreciated our desire for service he did not approve of the idea of an affiliated institution. He told us even then that this affiliation would cramp its growth, and as such it could not be as useful as we wished it to be. At that time we were unable to fully grasp the significance of his opinion and we pursued our plan for some time even after he had expressed his opinion. It was only an accident that this plan of a college did not actually fructify. When I think of it now, I realize how profoundly correct Mahatmaji was, how limited our vision of service in those days used to be, how in our ignorance we

thought of serving through a college only the microscopic English-educated middle-classes, and how in spite of his work in Champaran and splendid example of service of the villagers who constitute the masses of this vast country, we were still unable to realize its significance or its methods. The plan of the college was, however, given up shortly afterwards not on account of a realization of these shortcomings in our own plans and view point, but the exigencies of other work, both personal and public. And the money we had collected for the purpose was refunded to the donors.

Mahatmaji's first call on the country as a whole came in 1919 in connection with the Rowlatt Bill agitation. Like other provinces, Bihar was deeply agitated and the large meetings which were held all over were the precursors of those vast gatherings which have become a feature of our public life since the non-co-operation days of 1921. When Mahatmaji called for signatures on the Satyagraha pledge to resist civilly the Rowlatt Act by disobeying such laws as a Committee might fix, Bihar did not lag behind other provinces. The demonstrations on the 6th of April were unique throughout the Province. In Patna we had one of the biggest processions and meetings we have ever had and the whole city was fasting for twenty-four hours according to Mahatmaji's instructions. There was a complete 'hartal'—not a shop was open, not a vehicle was plying in the whole town from noon till evening. In villages the response was no less splendid and spontaneous. It was not only shopkeepers who observed the 'hartal'. Agriculturists too did not work in their fields and plough cattle and draft bullocks were given a holiday. All this was so spontaneous! We did not have an extensive Congress organization then as we have now. The only propaganda done was through the medium of newspapers, which were not as widely read in Bihar in those days as they are now, and through meetings. We have had many 'hartals'

since then on various occasions. This was the first of its kind on a nation-wide scale, and Bihar like other provinces showed that it was no less ready to follow the lead of the new Star rising on the Indian political firmament.

It is not within the scope of these pages to show how this demonstration was followed by ugly incidents in the Punjab and Ahmedabad, and how the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy was enacted followed by the horrors of martial law in the Punjab. Nor is it necessary to recount how Muslim feeling was deeply agitated over the Khilafat question. I shall assume that the reader is familiar with the causes which led to the inauguration of the Non-co-operation Movement and shall deal in the following pages with the part Bihar played in it.

IX

About the middle of the year 1920, Non-co-operation began to be talked of as a practical proposition and programme. It was at first thought of only in relation to the Khilafat. Subsequently, when the report of the Hunter Committee was published and found to be a most disappointing document and when the very halting action of the Government practically amounting to a white-washing of the atrocities committed during the martial law days in the Punjab was known, public indignation became intense. Non-co-operation came gradually to be recognized as the one means of securing redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs. There was talk of it throughout the country and the Khilafat Conference actually adopted it. It was formally inaugurated by the Khilafatists from 1st August 1920. Moulana Shaukat Ali visited Bihar and

was given a great reception and promised support. It was about this time that a special session of the Congress was announced to meet in Calcutta to consider this question.

There were two Provincial Conferences which met just less than a week before the Congress session. One was in Gujerat and it adopted the Non-co-operation programme and recommended it to the Congress for adoption. The second was in Bihar. It is not generally known that the Bihar Conference also gave its support to the Non-co-operation programme before the Congress adopted it. I say it is not generally known because I have seen an otherwise accurate chronicle of events of those days omitting this. Having come into rather close contact with Mahatmaji and having seen something of his method of working, some of us required no arguments to induce us to accept Non-co-operation. It was as if we could instinctively see that it was the only method open to us if we wanted to make the Government bend. As fate would have it, I was elected to preside over the Bihar Conference which was meeting at Bhagalpur in the last week of August 1920. I knew my own mind and that of some of our friends who had worked with Mahatmaji in Champaran. But I was not sure what the Province and the Provincial Conference would think. I knew that the leaders of the Province were one and all doubtful if not actually opposed to it. I felt some difficulty in accepting the honour. I thought it would not be right for me in my capacity as President to commit the whole Province to a programme which was so utterly new, especially when I knew that the leaders who had been guiding its political activities were opposed to it. At the same time I could not pass it over and leave the Conference to consider it without any lead from the President. I consulted the leaders and they advised me to accept the honour. They suggested that I should express my own personal opinion on the burning topic of the day but make it

clear that it was my personal opinion and that the Conference should come to its own conclusion after considering the matter. Accordingly, I put in a strong plea for Non-co-operation in my address which was in Hindi. The composition of the delegates to the Conference did not leave much room for doubt as to its final decision. It was for the first time that the delegates to the Conference were drawn largely from outside the professional classes. A large number of delegates came from the villages and although it was not the first Conference in which ryots' representatives took part, it was certainly the first which they attended in such large numbers. We had both points of view fully represented. After a prolonged discussion, Non-co-operation with certain reservations regarding its details and the stages in which it should be given effect to, was passed by an overwhelming majority by the Conference.

Before it was passed some of us met for a private discussion. We had learnt from Gandhiji that it was not right to ask others to do what one was not prepared to do oneself. The question was whether we were prepared to suspend our practice as lawyers which was one of the items included in the practical programme from the very beginning. We felt there was no option if we supported it, and support it we must, as we thought it was the right course and the only course. The late Shah Muhammad Zubair had already suspended practice and perhaps also the late Muzharul Haque Saheb. A pretty large number amongst those attending the Conference decided to follow suit subject to certain prior commitments they had.

I may add another interesting incident. Non-co-operation till then was generally being thought of only in connection with the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs. Mahatmaji had so often said then and since that if he could make the British Government accept the nation's demand in regard to these two wrongs, that would be tantamount to Swaraj, as it would

involve our developing strength enough to make the British Government bend to the popular will. And even though formal transfer of power might not take place, the essence of Self-Government consisted in making the powers that be carry out the behests of the people. It is well to remember this even today, as we very often think more of the form than of the substance. Not that form is unimportant. It is important, and if we can have both the form and the substance of power, nothing could be better. But Mahatmaji with his usual insight has always laid greater emphasis on the substance than on the form.

However that may be, the Bihar Provincial Conference was the first, under the inspiration of that veteran and far-sighted custodian of our politics, Babu Brajkishore Prasad, to add the attainment of Swaraj to the redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs as one of the objects for which Non-co-operation was going to be adopted as the method. It was later adopted by the Congress also and today we see how wise it was to do so. I remember distinctly the discussion we had among ourselves. Some of us argued that the redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs would be a comparatively simple thing and the British Government might be induced to yield on those points. But the establishment of Swaraj would be a very difficult and prolonged affair and those who joined the movement then would be in for an indefinite period of service, suffering and sacrifice. The fact is that many of us were unable to see the implications of the struggle the country was then launching upon and equally unable to contemplate with equanimity the sacrifice that would be demanded. We were unable, too, to make a correct estimate of the strength that the people at large would show. But we decided, and no one can say today after eleven years that the decision was not right, to stand behind Mahatma Gandhi; the Province as a whole was committed to his programme. It would have been strange if

it had been otherwise. Had not Bihar alone of all the provinces of India had the privilege of working under him and enjoying some of the fruits of that memorable struggle in Champaran ?

No wonder then that the Calcutta Congress was attended by an enormous number of delegates from Bihar. In a body, with hardly any exception, they all voted solidly for the Non-co-operation resolution of Mahatmaji. They added not inconsiderably to the large majority he commanded in that Congress in spite of the opposition of some of the most prominent leaders. These delegates not only voted solidly but, after their return from Calcutta, began seriously to work for what they had voted for there. They brought with them a store of inspiration which led the Province on from one stage of progress to another in that wonderful year of unprecedented awakening.

X

Between the special session of the Congress at Calcutta in September 1920 and the ordinary session at Nagpur in December the same year, Mahatma Gandhi paid a flying visit to the province of Bihar. He visited only a few places early in December. This had the effect of rousing the whole Province. The principal item of the programme to which attention was being paid at the time was that of boycott of schools and colleges. Mahatmaji was accompanied by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. He addressed not only public meetings but also special gatherings of students. We were all in a state of indecision as to what should be done. We had not made up our minds as to whether we should start a national college or

not. In some places advantage was taken of Mahatmaji's presence to start national schools, and some existing schools were nationalized by repudiating affiliation to the University and refusing grants-in-aid from the Government. But we were still in doubt about a national college. We naturally revived our old plan of a college and were discussing among ourselves the desirability and practicability of starting it. The first and foremost difficulty that we had then, as we always have in regard to all public work in Bihar, was funds. Seeing that the senior leaders had all parted company on the question of Non-co-operation and not having yet learnt to rely on the masses for pecuniary support, we were in a fix. Mahatmaji's decisive opinion that we must have a national college settled the question once for all. He also told us that there would be no difficulty about funds, if we rightly set about the work. During his tour of three or four districts, which alone he could do at the time, he raised some seven or eight thousand rupees and left it with us to run the college when it was started. After completing the preliminary arrangements, the National College or Rashtriya Mahavidyalaya was opened in the first week of January in a rented house. We had a few students to begin with, but Mahatmaji had left behind him his appeal to the young men who were all deeply pondering over it. Soon afterwards some of the best students of the University, who were most of them scholarship holders and prizemen, came out of the Government College and marched in a body to the National College where they were welcomed by us. We had hardly anything to offer them to compare with what they had left behind except a nobler ideal to work and live for. Some of them stuck to us and are still doing national work. Others, however, worked for a year or more, then went back and some of them are holding responsible posts in Government service today.

The Nagpur Congress also was very largely attended by

Bihar delegates. It is no exaggeration to say that ever since the Special Congress at Calcutta, Bihar has not inconsiderably influenced Congress decisions by its votes which have always been cast on the side supported by Mahatmaji or believed to be consistent with his principles and programme. The movement which now convulsed the whole country threw out workers from amongst the masses and the middle-classes who took up the programme in right earnest and carried the message of Swaraj from village to village and house to house. A network of schools free from Government control and supported and maintained entirely out of funds supplied by the public grew up. Mahatmaji paid a second flying visit in February 1921, and opened the Bihar Vidyapitha for which he had collected some sixty thousand rupees at Jharia on the previous day. We thus owe the National College and the Vidyapitha directly to the efforts of Mahatmaji. Our only regret is that we have not been able to keep up the many schools which were then started or to maintain and improve the Vidyapitha which was founded by him.

But the new movement did not find expression through national educational institutions alone. To give a comprehensive account of its progress will require a detailed history of Bihar from the Congress point of view. We can content ourselves with some of the outstanding events. The Indian National Congress owes its present constitution, like so many other things, to Mahatma Gandhi. It was at Nagpur that the present constitution was adopted, and since then, with the exception of some minor changes, it has been the constitution of the Congress and has been acted upon. Bihar like other provinces took up seriously the work of organizing Congress committees in terms of the constitution. We framed the Provincial committee rules so as to make them consonant with the All-India constitution and soon after engaged ourselves in establishing Congress committees. It is no exag-

geration to say that by the end of June, by which time elections according to new rules had to be held, we had for the first time a network of Congress committees in all the districts of Bihar. These were strictly in accordance with the rules. For the first time in its history (in Bihar at least) the Congress was a truly representative body duly elected by members who had signed the Congress pledge, paid their subscriptions and participated in the elections. The foundations that were then laid are still the foundations of the entire Congress organization in Bihar. We have had lean years when the membership has gone down in the districts but the framework remains intact and its strength and capacity have been tested from time to time.

The first test came even while the organization was in the course of building. The Bezwada programme accepted by the A.-I. C. C. in March 1921 required the collection of one crore of rupees for the Swarajya Fund, enrolment of one crore of members and the introduction of 10 lacs of charkhas. Bihar is a poor province. It has no traditions of donations by the rich and well-to-do for public work. The charity of its rich men had found an all-absorbing object in religious temples, *dharmashalas*, etc. and where it had taken a turn in favour of other public objects it had been largely outside Bihar, e.g. endowments to the Calcutta University. Educational institutions founded by Biharees within the province had to carry on a precarious existence until they became solely dependent on Government support and ceased to be anything but Government institutions. The Congress too has had a difficult time. The All-India Congress Committee used to levy a tax of Rs. 1,500 every year on the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and I know the difficulty which Mr. N. Subbarao, the then Secretary of the Congress used to have in realizing this yearly subscription from Bihar. The Bihar Committee in its turn had hit upon the expedient of levying

Rs. 100 per head from the members sent by it as its representatives to the All-India Congress Committee. Many of these representatives did not pay their share of a hundred rupees, and others had to make up for them. There was hardly any office worth the name and the only time when the Committee woke up was when the time came to elect delegates to the Congress and members to the All-India Congress Committee. In between its annual meetings for this purpose it would occasionally pass a resolution or two on some important topic of the day. It was out of touch with the people; there was no regular day-to-day work. A session of the Congress had been held at Patna in 1912 but it was a failure from many points of view. Attendance of delegates was poor. Financially the Secretary of the Reception Committee and some other members had to make up for a large deficit. It was such a province which was called upon not only to organize itself but also to contribute its quota to the Tilak Swarajya Fund of one crore and to enlist its share of members and start the charkhas according to its quota. We were, not without reason, diffident about our capacity and the hesitation in starting a national college was not without justification.

Mahatma Gandhi's magnetism had put life into the Province. The electric rapidity with which schools were growing up, workers coming out from everywhere to take up the work of organization and to carry the message of Swaraj and non-cooperation, and village people assembling in huge gatherings to listen to speeches of these workers, put faith into us all. We felt we must do our best to carry the programme through. It must be freely admitted that we did not have the good fortune of having a great personality like Deshbandhu C. R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, Pandit Motilal Nehru or Rajagopalachari. It was all to be done by ordinary people who had not only to work but also to gain experience and build up a reputation for the organization which they were setting on foot. And it

must be said to the credit of the workers, who were all new to the work, that they did it well. It is as well that we did not have any great personalities. Bihar was a poor province, and remains so today, doing its humble best, keeping itself in the background.

If credit is due to the workers, even greater credit is due to the people. The Province raised about Rs. 7½ lacs for the Tilak Swarajya Fund, a not very discreditable figure considering our difficulties, and enrolled a large number of members—I forget the figures now. It also laid the foundation for that khadi work which has, with ups and downs natural to a new industry, made great progress and succeeded in finding employment for some 15,000 women and more than a thousand weavers, besides about a hundred men engaged in the work of organization. But above all by the end of June we had built up a Congress organization which has stood the test of time and Government repression. When the All-India Congress Committee, elected under the new rules, met in July 1921, Bihar had already become a province known to other provinces and worthy of being given a seat on the All-India Working Committee. It was a miracle, and it had been done under the Mahatma's inspiration.

XI

The N. C. O. programme had a great response throughout Bihar. After the July meeting of the A.-I. C. C. in Bombay we had to concentrate on the boycott of foreign cloth and the production of khaddar. But before Bihar could throw itself into this, it had to ensure peace and good will during the following Bakr-Id festival. Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana

Mahommad Ali and Maulana Azad Subhani toured through the district of Shahabad which was regarded as the danger spot in Bihar and which had been the scene of a most distressing communal fight some years earlier. Their tour had the desired effect and both communities showed the utmost good will to each other. It is gratifying to note that, in spite of some minor fracas and disturbances, Bihar has through these years, on the whole, maintained communal peace, and we trust that with a will and determination to maintain it we shall continue to do so. In this connection I do not need to be reminded of some occurrences which have taken place in the last ten years in several places in the Province. I say advisedly that we have, on the whole, succeeded in maintaining communal peace, when I recall how in other places we have had scenes enacted which have not only besmirched the good name of Indians but are a disgrace to humanity itself. I can only express the hope that members of both the communities will continue to remember that nothing is gained by breaking heads and that wisdom and good sense demand that all questions on which differences might arise, as they are bound to arise, will be best dealt with by the method of mutual discussion backed by a genuine desire to arrive at a settlement.

After the Bakr-Id passed off peacefully our attention was concentrated on the boycott of foreign cloth and the organization of khadi work. This last was a difficult job. No one had any experience of the work, none among the Congress workers could claim any business experience. We could not command any capital either. It was again Mahatma Gandhi's influence which helped us to get over the difficulty regarding capital by securing for the Provincial Committee a substantial grant from the All-India Swarajya Fund and a substantial loan to the Gandhi Kutir which was engaged in khadi production. In this matter also we had underestimated the capacity of the

Province. The experience of the last ten years, though obtained at a heavy price in the shape of losses incurred in khaddar work, convinces one of the vast possibilities of khaddar, in which the actual achievement in spite of lack of local business talent and experience has not been by any means negligible.

But before we had made much headway the district of Saran was the scene of devastating floods which caused great misery to a large tract. Here again it was Gandhiji's influence which procured a pretty large sum from Bombay and Gujerat for relief work which was so well organized.

The second test came, however, during the winter months. The whole country was bubbling over with enthusiasm and preparing for civil disobedience on a mass scale as the end of the year was drawing nigh. The visit of the Prince of Wales was also approaching and preparations were being made to bring about a complete boycott of the functions connected with it. The Government on its side was ready to strike a heavy blow. When it became known that Provincial Committees should get particular areas in their jurisdiction ready for civil disobedience, Bihar also selected some areas. I remember there was a regular contest among the districts for being selected for the sacrifice and as we had to select only one or two places to begin with, the others had to be consoled with the hope that their turn might come next, if they showed better preparations next time.

When the Government declared the volunteer organizations unlawful, we felt this was a challenge which we could not but take up. Prominent members of the Congress Committees in all districts became volunteers, notified the fact to the Government officials and arrests on a wholesale scale started in some districts. But these did not last long in Bihar. Only after a week or so, within which period some of the most respected leaders and workers were arrested, the Government

stopped further arrests. It was rather an accident that it so happened. The readers might recollect that about that time negotiations were going on between Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Reading, as also between Deshbandhu Das, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and other leaders in jail and the Government, and at one time it seemed as if the notifications declaring the volunteer organizations unlawful under the Criminal Law Amendment Act would be withdrawn and the prisoners released. It may be that not only the public but also the Bihar Government expected a settlement and hence relaxed their vigour in making arrests. The Province had, however, once again been tested, this time not by the Congress but by the Government, and had not been found wanting.

Ahmedabad became the centre of attention in the last week of December when the Congress was held amidst scenes of unprecedented grandeur and gloom. Many of the leaders like Deshbandhu Das, who was to preside, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, the Ali Brothers and others were in jail. Many of the prominent workers in the provinces were also behind prison bars. Rumours were afloat that the Congress itself would be forcibly dispersed. Hakim Ajmal Khan was elected acting President in place of Deshbandhu Das and the Congress finished its business-like session in two days, after passing a resolution throwing defiance in the face of the Government. It was moved by Mahatma Gandhi in a memorable speech which remained imprinted on the minds of all who had the privilege of listening to it.

Disobedience of the Government Notification continued in Bihar as elsewhere but no arrests were made. Particularly noticeable was the repetition in hundreds of meetings by lacs of people word per word of the *Fatwa* and the resolution which had been the subject matter of the prosecution of Sri Sankaracharya, the Ali Brothers, and some other Muslim leaders and divines. The Government did not consider it worth

while to arrest all those who participated in these meetings and openly challenged its authority.

This is not the place to recount how the Bombay riots forced Mahatmaji's hands to withhold the launching of Civil Disobedience. Bihar can legitimately claim that in spite of the great upheaval and tension of feeling it kept its head cool and the Government could not point to any serious incidents involving violence on the part of the people in the whole Province. There was one minor incident at Giridih early in the year 1921, but it was a case more of being sinned against than sinning. The people had their own version of the incident exculpating them. The Prince's visit to Patna coincided with the Congress session at Ahmedabad. In spite of the absence of most of the leaders who were away either at Ahmedabad for the Congress or in jail, the boycott was as complete as anywhere else in the country, and there was no untoward incident to mar the beauty of Gandhiji's programme.

The Ahmedabad Congress was followed by negotiations initiated by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya for a Round Table Conference. Bihar went on making preparations for carrying out whatever orders came from the headquarters of the All-India Congress Committee and was on the tiptoe of expectancy about the order to "march" to Bardoli, when the Chaurichaura tragedy occurred compelling Mahatmaji to call a halt. This was followed by what is known as the Bardoli Resolution of the Working Committee and the subsequent meeting of the A.-I. C. C. at Delhi at which it was confirmed. In effect, it called off Civil Disobedience and asked the Congress to concentrate on constructive work and thus prepare for a final struggle to be undertaken later. It roused a storm of opposition among Congressmen and some prominent leaders from jail sent angry letters protesting against Mahatmaji's decision. The A.-I. C. C. had to listen to a full-dress debate on a motion of censure on Mahatma Gandhi. We saw

Mahatmaji working with a composure and confidence—which was at once a lesson and an inspiration—in the midst of that gloom when it seemed he was deserted even by his nearest co-workers and colleagues. The censure motion failed, although Mahatmaji did not allow any speakers to defend him. But it was apparent that differences in the Congress ranks had made the Government's position easy and it was not slow to arrest him a short time later. Let me state here as my conviction that of the many invaluable services which the Mahatma has rendered to the country not the least significant is that he was instrumental in calling off Civil Disobedience after Chaurichaura. Not to do so would have led the country to chaos and confusion, caused as much by the forces of disorder let loose by Government under the plea of law and order as by the unruly elements amongst the people who had not yet imbibed fully the lesson of non-violence nor sufficiently learnt to suffer without bending before Government repression. I fancy Bihar saw the essential correctness of Mahatmaji's move and did not raise any objection and supported him as a solid block at the Delhi A.-I. C. C. meeting. We were contemplating non-payment of punitive tax in the Sitamarhi sub-division of Muzaffarpur and took care to ascertain that the Bardoli Resolution as finally passed by the Delhi A.-I. C. C. would not stand in our way, if we wanted to do so. Mahatmaji was soon after put into prison leaving the country with a message emphasizing the importance of constructive work. How I wish we had devoted ourselves as did the people of Gujerat, and particularly of Bardoli, to such work. Here it was, after Mahatmaji's incarceration, that the network of Ashrams was established and intensive constructive work was carried out which enabled the population to put up the strong fight it did in 1928 and again in 1931. Writing as I am from Bardoli, sitting in the Swaraj Ashram, I confess to a sense of regret and shame that we failed to appreciate fully

the significance of Mahatmaji's message and have consequently been deprived of the privilege of serving the country to a much larger extent than we have been able to do.

XII

It was at the Ahmedabad Congress that Bihar invited the next session of the national assembly to be held in Bihar. In this enterprise we had the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. We were not unaware of the experience of the previous session of the Congress held at Patna ten years earlier, in 1912. But 1921 had given us a new confidence in ourselves and in the people and although we had recently collected such a large sum for the Tilak Swarajya Fund we did not hesitate to undertake the additional heavy responsibility and expenses of a Congress session. Wecould not fix upon the place where it should be held and left it to be decided later on. After Mahatmaji's incarceration there was a lull in the country. Bihar also suffered. But Bihar had to holda session of the Congress and therefore had rather hard and continuous work to put through. We felt that in Mahatmaji's absence we were all the more put to our honour to make the session successful. We held a meeting of the Provincial Committee rather early in the year and decided to have the Congress at Gaya and formed a Reception Committee. Gaya thereafter practically became the headquarters of the Provincial Committee for the remaining months of the year.

The holding of a Congress session is no easy matter in these days when you have to arrange not only for a pandal to accommodate some 20 to 25 thousand delegates and visitors but also to find boarding and lodging for some 5 to 6 thousand delegates and generally to make arrangements for sanitation

when nearly a lac of people assemble. Our first problem was to find a suitable site and with some difficulty we could fix one which was a long way off from the railway station. The next difficulty was our want of experience. At Ahmedabad the Congress had done away with chairs and tables for the delegates and visitors in the pandal. It had also simplified accommodation and had made the work easier. But with all that it required great organizing capacity to build up practically a new town. And above all we had to find the money and to spend it as economically as possible. We started collecting funds early, but before we had made much progress rains intervened and going about for collection became difficult. As we were fully alive to the difficulties of raising money, especially after the event in case of a deficit, we made it a rule not to incur any liability unless we had put enough money in the bank to meet it. It was a very wise thing that we made this rule. It proved of immense help to us later on.

While we were thus busy thinking about the session of the Congress and had our hands full, the All-India Congress Committee in an evil moment appointed a committee to find out the country's preparedness for civil disobedience. Mahatma Gandhi had advised the country to concentrate on the constructive programme for some time and not to think of launching civil disobedience. Many Congressmen found constructive work dull and uninspiring and wanted a more exciting programme. They were keen on trying civil disobedience. The one man who knew all about it and who was expected to guide the country through it was locked up in Yeravda Jail and had advised against it. But others were not satisfied and insisted that something should be done. In the absence of anything better they hit upon the plan of a committee to investigate how far the country was prepared. The Committee went round hearing evidence from Congressmen all over the country just like any commission appointed by

the Government.

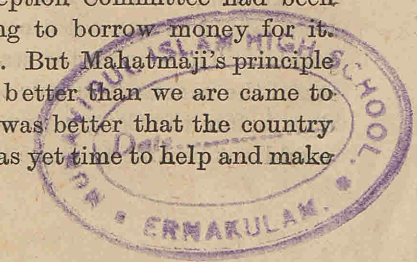
By a curious logic some of the members brought in the question of lifting the ban on council entry. And the witnesses were practically forced to the position that if the country was not prepared for civil disobedience it should be prepared to lift the ban on council entry. The more the Committee toured, the more it became apparent that the workers did not consider a campaign of civil disobedience advisable, and the more the question of council entry was pushed into the foreground by those who believed in it. Bihar was solidly for Mahatmaji's Non-co-operation programme, one of the main items of which was boycott of councils. In the November of 1920 after the Calcutta Congress, the first elections under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms had been held and the Congress had advised Congressmen not to stand for election and the voters not to vote at the elections. The response in Bihar had been splendid and a very small percentage of voters had visited the polls and cast their votes. Bihar was not prepared in 1922 to go back upon that programme. It was not only convinced of the futility of council entry but also felt that it would be letting down the great leader, who had conceived the programme as one whole, while he was away in prison. If not common sense, common loyalty to him demanded that unless we were fully convinced that he was wrong we should not easily tamper with his programme. It had been hoped by some, when the Civil Disobedience Committee had been appointed, that the tour of prominent leaders through the country would rouse its drooping spirits and help the people to devote themselves more whole-heartedly to the constructive programme as a necessary preliminary to the starting of civil disobedience, if it was found that it could not be started at once. But unfortunately it had the opposite effect. It raised a controversy and Congress became a house divided against itself. Patna was the last place to be visited

by the Committee for recording evidence and so far as I remember there was no one in support of council entry in Bihar. I think it is not generally known that till then the majority of the Committee was against council entry. Pandit Motilal Nehru had a long discussion with me which left the distinct impression on my mind that he would have to lead the anti-council-entry party at the Gaya Congress. Although Deshbandhu Das had not yet been released, the impression had gone abroad that he favoured council entry and this impression was strengthened by a reference to the Presidential speech which Srimati Basanti Devi had delivered at the Bengal Provincial Conference. Much importance had not been attached to this part of the speech when it had been delivered, but when the question of council entry was made a live question by the Civil Disobedience Committee, it naturally began to be interpreted as an expression not only of her own personal views but also the views of her husband, Deshbandhu Das. I do not know at what particular time Pandit Motilalji finally made up his mind to support council entry, but it must have been after the Committee had visited Patna and closed taking evidence. It is not unlikely that the discussions which he had with Deshbandhu Das after his release and the discussions in the Committee itself in which Mr. Vithalbhai Patel was the great protagonist of council entry led him finally to make up his mind to support it. Anyway the Committee after a long delay published its report which became the starting point of a long and bitter controversy.

It is not my intention to revive its memory. Bihar was in a very difficult and delicate position. It had to hold the Congress session. Deshbandhu Das was to preside over it. His views became publicly known and it was no secret that he supported council entry. Bihar was practically unanimous in its opposition and was expected to vote solidly

against it. It was torn between conflicting feelings. It would have to throw overboard either the most honoured guest, the President, or the idol of its heart—the Mahatma whose inspiration had lifted it. In doing the latter it would have to go also against its better judgement. When the Congress met, feelings were high and the delegates were divided into two camps.

But I have skipped over details which may be of some use to those who may have the responsibility of holding a Congress session again in Bihar. I have stated above that we had early made a rule not to incur any liability unless we had money in the bank to meet it. The result of strictly enforcing this rule was that we could not give contracts for the erection of the pandal or delegates' camps and sundry other things unless we had sufficient funds to meet all this liability. Enough money was not collected before the rains and the rainy season is not a suitable time for raising funds. When the rains were over we had little time left and then we did not have money. We were writing to Congress workers in the districts but it seemed they were not serious about the matter, and days and weeks passed without much response. We became anxious and had to do something immediately if the Congress session was to be held. After great deliberation we thought it wise to relax the rule mentioned above, but we decided to borrow money from a bank on the personal responsibility of some of the prominent members. We did not like to publish it to the world that Bihar was not enthusiastic about the Congress session, that it was not prepared to find money for it, and that the Reception Committee had been reduced to the position of having to borrow money for it. At the sametime there was no help. But Mahatmaji's principle that it was no use trying to look better than we are came to our help and we resolved that it was better that the country knew the truth then when there was yet time to help and make



amends rather than later when it would be too late.

We also felt that the Province would have a just cause for complaint against the Reception Committee if it mismanaged the session for want of funds without letting it know the difficulties and giving it a chance to meet them. We published the resolution and its publication had an electric effect. Gujerat with its characteristic generosity came to our rescue and offered to advance the amount we needed. But the Province and the workers all over were also put to their honour and began collecting funds in right earnest. Offers began to pour in from all directions, followed by actual cash. In less than a fortnight's time the financial difficulty had been solved without borrowing either from a bank or from Gujerat. I must record here that Mahatmaji's work in Bihar has established a sort of affinity between us and Gujerat, and on every occasion of need Gujerat has given generous help. The affinity is deeper. On most questions of public importance the two provinces also think and feel alike. It is because both have drunk deep out of the same fountain of love.

The council entry controversy had one side-effect which is worth recording. It attracted a record number of delegates and visitors, and whatever doubts and difficulties we had regarding the finances of the Congress were all solved and we had a surplus left at the end. The difficulties in organizing the big show were great, and although we were inexperienced we managed it rather well in the end. I flatter myself that the arrangements were satisfactory, and although we had a very prolonged session there was no break-down.

It is worth while mentioning one or two other points. We were late in giving out a contract for the construction of the pandal. The contractor was also slow and unable to command the necessary labour to complete it. Just two or three days before the Congress was to open, it became clear that he would not be able to make it ready in time. The earth work

particularly was not done at all. We had to fall back on our own resources. We had about 1,500 volunteers and their services had to be requisitioned for completing the earth work. It must be recorded as a matter of pride that they took it up not only without demur but with enthusiasm. They cut earth and carried it in baskets on their heads and in two days' time we found that what the contractor had failed to do with paid labour, the volunteers had done. In this not only the village volunteers, who formed the majority, but also volunteers drawn from the ranks of the so-called educated people, who are ordinarily physically more delicate, took part.

Our volunteers, as stated above, were drawn largely from villages and were rather orthodox in the matter of eating and drinking. When they first came they wanted separate kitchens and *chowkas* and Brahmin cooks and a strict observance of the kitchen rules. We had to comply with their wishes. But as the work increased and they began to realize the difficulties in our way, their orthodoxy gradually started dwindling away. After the arrival of the delegates they had to work day and night, and without any conscious effort these orthodox manners disappeared. This does not mean that they discarded all considerations of cleanliness. Only rules of untouchability in the matter of kitchens, eating and drinking were of no consideration. The experiment of Champaran was tried here on a much larger scale. All the volunteers seemed to merge into one caste—the caste of volunteers. The 1930 movement and consequent improvements decided, of course, once for all, that amongst Congressmen there are no separate castes.

The Gaya Congress decided against council entry. Each and every delegate from Bihar chose the way shown by Mahatma Gandhi and though they showed full faith in and great regard for Deshbandhu Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru, yet they adopted the course which they considered best and right.

The Swaraj Party started its work after the Gaya Congress was over. To bring round the Congress in favour of council entry, this party was founded by Deshbandhu Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru, and some provinces strongly supported its programme. Gradually Congressmen from various other provinces joined this party and it gained in strength with the result that, for some time, there continued a sharp controversy between the supporters and the opponents of the "Council Entry" programme. Due to this controversy and unsettled policy, no progress could be made both with the constructive programme as well as with the civil disobedience movement.

Bihar, Orissa, Andhra and Madras provinces became strongholds of the "No-changers". After the Gaya Congress, I was made the General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, and so long as I occupied that post its office was transferred to Patna. There is no need to go into the details or probe the finer points of the controversy between the two groups or to mention the efforts made to arrive at a solution; but it is necessary to mention that the Working Committee which was elected after the Gaya Congress had to resign after a few months, and a new Committee was formed. Later on this new Committee also had to resign, and a third Committee was elected which called for a special session of the Congress at Delhi in the summer of 1923.

The intervening period between the Gaya and Delhi sessions of the Congress was not allowed to go waste. It was a very difficult period for the "No-changers". Though most of the Congressmen supported this group, against it were ranged famous and popular leaders such as Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, and Hakim Ajmal Khan recently released from jail. Furthermore the Swaraj Party programme was attractive as it entailed little hardship or sacrifice. No doubt, many of its supporters and specially its founders had

nothing but the good of the country at heart. They thought that through the activities of the Councils the country would benefit more, and they would prepare the country further for civil disobedience. But looking to the results, it was discovered that many people were attracted to join the group due to council entry, and, therefore, the number of its supporters kept on increasing. On the other hand, the constructive programme of the "No-changers" as compared to the Swaraj Party programme, was uninteresting, difficult and unattractive. The so-called momentary understanding between the two groups was arrived at and in the mean time efforts were made to collect funds for the constructive programme. The whole country most readily responded to the call, with the result that within a fortnight or so about Rs. 15 lacs were collected. But the controversy which had cooled down during this period flared up again, and it became difficult, if not impossible, to proceed with the constructive programme. During this very period, the Flag Satyagraha movement in C. P., in the shape of a new movement, sprang up before the Congress.

In Jubbulpore there was a dispute between the Congress Committee and the Government officials on the question of hoisting the national flag over municipal buildings, and the then President of the C. P. Congress Committee, Pandit Sunderlal, launched a Satyagraha movement. But the scene of activities at once shifted to Nagpur where in the civil lines a ban had been imposed on a procession carrying the flag. This movement attracted the attention of the whole country and in the midst of the bitter controversy it became an all-India question. Seth Jamnalal Bajaj assumed its leadership and was arrested. After this, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel took over its reigns and, in spite of adverse circumstances, he continued the movement with great tact and zeal. There was a commotion amongst the "No-changers" all over

the country and from every corner of the land different batches of volunteers proceeded to Nagpur to be arrested. On this occasion also, Bihar kept up its reputation. It contributed its mite towards the fund that was being collected and sent hundreds of volunteers to Nagpur, where they took part in the Satyagraha and were arrested. One of them also died in the Nagpur Jail which was probably the first offering at the altar of the completely non-violent movement. The Swaraj Party had also a branch in Bihar but it could not wield any influence there or attract anyone.

In these circumstances, the special session of the Congress was held in Delhi. The "No-changers" were fed up with these wranglings, and considered it futile to prolong the bitter controversy. If they had wished they could have contested the issue with the Swaraj Party. It was my belief then, as it is even today, that if votes had been taken on the issue, it could not be said with any amount of certainty that the "No-changers" would have been defeated. On this very momentous occasion, Maulana Mohammad Ali was released from jail. It was thought that he was an opponent of "Council Entry". As he had been the staunchest supporter of Mahatma Gandhi before going to jail, we considered it proper that he should take up the leadership of this group. He decided to arrive at a settlement with the Swaraj Party and we quietly acquiesced in the matter. A certain group opposed this decision but it was all futile. In the end the Delhi Congress removed the restriction imposed on "Council Entry" though it was not made a part of the Congress programme.

Just after the Delhi Congress, elections to the Assembly and Council were held. As the Swaraj Party wielded little influence in Bihar, and according to the resolution adopted by the Delhi Congress the Congress Committee was neutral in the matter, the Party could find few persons to go to the Council. But as those people had worked in the Congress in

1921, and they had acquired a reputation for loyalty and patriotism, they were successful in defeating their most powerful opponents. There was no question of the Swaraj Party being in the majority in Bihar. Amongst other provinces only in C. P. did the Swaraj Party have a visible majority. In Bengal, in coalition with various other groups, it often wielded a majority. Similarly, in the Assembly, on special occasions, it could defeat the Government only in coalition with various other groups. The programme of a continuous opposition to all measures of the Government could not be instituted and gradually the Party was reduced to only a constitutional opposition. But it always kept itself aloof from the temptations which beset the paths of those who hover around the Government House, and it always kept up its prestige and reputation which elicited the grudging admiration of the Treasury benches (Government Party). The credit for all this goes to the leaders of the Swaraj Party. In the province of Bihar also, where their number was very small, their ideal conduct had considerably more influence than their votes.

In the beginning of 1924, when, after a serious illness, Mahatma Gandhi was released from the Yeravda Jail, it was thought that he would restart his previous programme, which would also include council entry. But he gave up this idea. Though holding firmly to his views, he admitted that "he had to bow down and sustained a defeat". Nevertheless he obtained a victory for himself by entrusting the Congress to the Swaraj Party, to make the "Council Entry" programme a success. So at the next elections the Congress took a leading part in them and the number of Congress members was definitely more than earlier. In Bihar, probably, there was not a single seat in the general constituencies which was not won by the Congress. In the Assembly the Congress won all the seats in the general constituencies. In the Council

of State also, the Congress obtained 3 out of 4 seats. Thus it was proved that Congress had a complete hold on Bihar. But the constitutional limitations of the Council were such that in spite of wielding a majority, the Congress was helpless in either defeating the Government (Executive Council) or preventing them from enforcing any measure. The Government members, the nominated members, and the members elected from reserved and special constituencies, jointly were more powerful than the popular Congress group.

I shall conclude after mentioning one fact about the Swaraj Party and Congressmen in Bihar. Here we never allowed any conflict to creep in between the "Changers" and "No-changers"—our relations were always cordial and we were content to suppress our differences. Keeping before us our own point of view and principles, we tried to work together as far as possible and to help each other. I think this is something over which we have a right to commend ourselves, though, outside the province, some people considered it as a lack of life and awakening.

After making over the Congress and its machinery to the Swaraj Party, Mahatma Gandhi practically retired from active, that is to say, demonstrative politics and devoted himself entirely to the furtherance of the constructive programme, particularly the revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving. He never ceased to be a member of the highest executive of the Congress, viz., the Working Committee. But he was there more to avoid it being said that the Swaraj Party had lost his support rather than to influence or shape its policy, although it must be said that on all matters of importance he was consulted and his opinion was given the greatest weight by the Swarajists.

Within this period Mahatma Gandhi undertook a rather detailed tour of the province of Bihar in two instalments, covering the entire province and visiting many important

centres in each district. This in fact was his first tour in the province on an extensive scale. It was instrumental in demonstrating that in spite of the apparent slackness and lack of enthusiasm on account of the absence of an exciting programme like that of 1921 and in spite of his practical retirement into the background, the masses of Bihar as also its workers held true to his teaching and were entirely under the charm of his great magnetic personality. The tour was intended to collect funds for khaddar work and was successful in raising more than a lac in this province, poor as it is, which was all allotted to khaddar work. It is not necessary to go into the details of this most exciting tour. For a detailed description of a part of it, the reader is referred to Sj. Mahadev Desai's *Gandhiji in Indian Villages*. I shall content myself with mentioning only a few important points arising out of it.

It will be recalled that it was at Patna that the All-India Spinners' Association was started as an integral part of the Congress, but with independent funds and powers to carry out, in an organized manner, the programme for the propagation and production of khaddar. An all-India Board had been doing this. It was felt that now that the Congress was going to be predominantly a Swarajist organization with a programme which included many items, the khaddar programme might not get the attention it required for fostering it in its early stage. The Swarajists were also good enough to agree to a transfer of all the assets, investments and liabilities of the Khaddar Board to the All-India Spinners' Association. Ever since then the A.-I. S. A. has been concentrating on one item of the Congress programme for which it was created and the Congress in its turn has been relieved of a great deal of detailed and, in some respects, technical work which has been undertaken by the A.-I. S. A. Those who have followed the fortunes of khadi know what tremendous progress has been made in all directions. In Bihar we have not

only considerably enhanced the quantity of khadi produced but also improved its quality. When we started in 1921 we hardly produced any but coarse cloth of a very low count and had great difficulty in inducing weavers to weave hand-spun yarn. True, *kokti* was produced on a small scale in the Darbhanga district and used to command a sale in that district and in Nepal. But its demand was diminishing and fraud had crept into its manufacture. Unscrupulous weavers had begun to use coloured mill-yarn and pass off the cloth made as genuine *kokti* which as is well known is made of a particular variety of cotton which has that natural colour. But apart from *kokti* spinning, fine spinning had almost gone out of vogue, if not out of existence. We have succeeded in improving the spinning to an extent unconceived at the time we started work. Today Bihar is producing fine muslin of 100 to 120 counts yarn which may well compare with Andhra fine khadi and bids fair to revive the art and skill that produced the world famous *Shabnam* and *Abrawan* of old. Ordinary khadi also has improved generally in texture and fineness. Above all we have reduced the prices substantially. We were able to give maintenance to some 15,000 spinners and 1,290 weavers besides a host of others engaged in subsidiary work connected with the revival of khadi, such as carpenters and smiths who make and repair charkhas, charkha parts, gins and carding bows, and gut-makers, Chamars, Dhobies, dyers and printers. The Bihar Branch also employs about 100 young men who are engaged in organizing work and in the numerous khadi shops spread all over the Province. The A.-I. S. A. through its Bihar Branch has distributed lacs of rupees every year among the poor not as charity but in a form which enables them to keep their self-respect intact. It has provided work for the workers and thus enabled the unemployed to earn a living. All this has been possible under the inspiration of the Mahatma who has been taking keen

interest in the smallest details of the organization.

I may be permitted even at the risk of being misunderstood and misinterpreted to point out that in this work which is organized and run mostly by Congressmen who are Hindus, the persons to be benefited are mostly Musalmans. More than seventy per cent of our spinners and nearly cent per cent of our weavers are Musalmans, and it is the spinners and weavers who are poor and who need most just the kind of help that the A.-I. S. A. has been able to afford them. I may point out that we have distributed not less than 15 lacs of rupees among the spinners and weavers in the shape of their wages. All this has been possible with money, the bulk of which has been contributed by Hindus. I have no desire to raise a Hindu-Muslim controversy in this connection. What the A.-I. S. A. has been doing, it has been doing under a sense of duty to the poor and the starving among whom there is no scramble for seats in councils or for proportionate representation in well-paid services. Neither the A.-I. S. A. nor Mahatma Gandhi, under whose inspiration and supervision it has been working, has ever claimed any credit for this work. But it is as well to remember these facts when people who cannot claim to have found bread for a single starving brother or sister—whether Hindu, Musalman or of any other community—claim that they alone represent their communities when it comes to sharing the loaves and fishes of office. It is also well to remember these facts when one hears threats of picketing of khadi shops by some ill-informed persons in a place like Delhi as a retaliatory measure against the Congress picketing of foreign cloth shops owned by well-to-do merchants of any particular community. Our workers engaged in khadi work not only in this Province but all over India have worked and are working with a devotion and singleness of purpose without any distinction of caste or creed among those whom they serve. I hope I shall not be accused of bitterness when I say

that these workers feel not a little dejected when they see that in this Province very few Musalmans care to purchase the stuff that is made by their co-religionists, thousands of whom would be left starving if their yarn and khaddar were not consumed by the followers and admirers of the one man who is now looked upon as a great stumbling block in the way of their progress—if not as an actual enemy—by many a rich and well-placed "leader". My plea is not for Mahatma Gandhi whose services need no advertisement and are in themselves his greatest reward. My plea is for those poor and starving spinners and weavers whose living depends upon the sale of the khaddar that they produce and to whom its revival has been a veritable godsend. I can end this with the hope that the A.-I. S. A. and its supporters and all those who have been using khaddar will continue to do all they can to help, irrespective of what others may or may not do.

Mahatma Gandhi's tour was remarkable for rousing the masses. The themes on which he harped in all the meetings —whether of men or women—were charkha, removal of untouchability and drink evil. To women he appealed everywhere to emulate the noble example of Sita and Savitri, and occasionally he asked them also to give up the use of ornaments and the *purdah*. The response to his appeals in these meetings for funds to help, as he used to say, the "Daridra-narayan" used to be spontaneous and immense. We did not get much from rich people, although here and there we got lump sums. But the humble and the poor contributed in copper in their thousands and it was literally a fact that at times it became a problem to carry the copper that was contributed at these huge meetings. If my memory serves me right we got at one meeting pice coins worth about a thousand rupees. The reader can well imagine the load which the car that was carrying us had to bear! In several places we had huge gatherings reaching some fifty thousands, and it was an

ocular demonstration of the great hold which the Mahatma had on the masses, further proof of which even under strain of Government repression was furnished in 1930 throughout this Province. It was one of our regrets that Mahatmaji's programme had to be cut short on one occasion as his health broke down. On the second occasion also he just succeeded in finishing his tour of this Province and broke down in Maharashtra which he was touring later.

XIV

The appointment of a Statutory Commission to enquire into the working of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and to recommend changes in the constitution was the signal to start an agitation in which most of the political parties in India joined. For one thing, all Indians were excluded from the Commission and there were many among the advanced politicians who were opposed, on principle, to the very idea of a commission to judge the fitness of India for Swaraj. The Liberals no less than Swarajists and Congressmen boycotted the Commission by refusing to appear before it and lead evidence and otherwise assist it. Congressmen, including Swarajists, went further and organized demonstrations against the Commission. Wherever Sir John Simon and his colleagues of the Commission and its subsidiary Committees went, they were welcomed with black flags and with cries of "Simon, go back". In some places the demonstrators were roughly handled by the police and not even the great personalities of Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were spared. With the show of force on the part of the Government the popular opposition and boycott stiffened. The Commission

visited Patna in December 1928, and there was a great demonstration against it. The Patna demonstration was unique in the sense that it was a demonstration on behalf of the Province as a whole. It came just after the Provincial Conference which met at Patna and was largely attended by representatives from all over the Province on account of the excitement caused by the most unwarranted and unjustifiable suppression of the District Board of Gaya by the Minister of Local Self-Government. Most of the delegates, who had come for the Conference, stayed on to join the demonstration, and people from most of the districts came to give expression to their feelings against the unwanted Commission. The result was that there was a concourse of something like 30,000 people to greet the Commission with "Go back, Simon", on that cold December morning when the special train arrived at the special platform opposite the Hardinge Park. As a matter of fact, thousands had been waiting there from 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. The attempt to make a counter-show by arranging a reception fell flat on account of the very arrangement made by the authorities to separate on one side of the road those who had assembled to welcome the Commission from those on the other side who had assembled to demonstrate against it. It was a sight to see a few stragglers, many of them liveried servants of Zamindars and rich men, ready to offer their welcome to the Commission in striking contrast to the vast mass of humanity shouting its slogans. It was not only a most successful demonstration against the Commission but a demonstration of the fact that the people were all with the Congress which had organized it. It was also a most orderly demonstration. Credit is due also to the police that no untoward incident of the kind witnessed in other parts of the country marred its beauty.

When the Calcutta Congress met in December 1928, the country had already shown its great awakening in demonstra-

tions against the Simon Commission. It had also shown its constructive statesmanship in having organized the All Parties Conference and hammered out the Nehru Report which laid down the foundations of a Swaraj Constitution for India. Simultaneously with the Congress in Calcutta there also met the All Parties Convention to consider and give final shape and authority to the Nehru Report. The air was full of enthusiasm and it seemed a new wave of popular upheaval was coming.

The Nehru Report recommended Dominion Status as the objective of India's political struggle. In Congress circles there was a sharp division of opinion, one party being satisfied with the Report and the other claiming nothing less than Independence as India's immediate goal. There was of course the other running sore of the Indian body politic—the communal problem. Its solution as proposed by the Nehru Report was not acceptable to some of the minorities and led to bitter controversy.

It was at this stage that Mahatma Gandhi, for the first time after several years, appeared on the scene to lead the Congress once again as he had done at the special session in Calcutta and at Ahmedabad. He prepared a resolution which was at one time adopted by his opponents also and as such was regarded as a compromise resolution; ultimately, however, it was opposed by the latter but passed by an overwhelming majority of the Congress. But the Congress accepted the constitution as adopted by the All Parties Convention including its solution of the communal problem and Dominion Status as the objective of our political struggle. It laid down, however, that in case the British Government did not accept this constitution within a year, the Congress would be free to adopt any other constitution and to pursue such course as recommended itself to it for attaining its objective. Mahatma Gandhi, in moving the resolution, made it

quite clear that it was not a mere empty threat that was being held out but that the nation would be in honour bound to adopt measures in case the Government did not see its way to grant Dominion Status as laid down in the Nehru constitution.

In the Congress itself the controversy centred round the point of Dominion Status versus Independence, and the communal problem did not loom so large as it did later when some of the communities, the Sikhs and the Musalmans in particular, expressed themselves against the solution proposed by the Nehru Report. At the time of voting, Bihar again solidly supported Mahatma Gandhi. I was told that by doing so its delegates incurred the displeasure of some of the enthusiasts on the other side. Once again, it may be fairly claimed, the Bihar votes influenced not a little the decision of the All-India Congress.

It is necessary to point out here that in Bihar the so-called "leaders" seldom, if ever, attempt to exercise their personal influence at the time of voting. The votes that are cast always represent the personal inclinations and opinions of the delegates, uninfluenced by any considerations other than those addressed to their reason by the speakers for and against. And this is so not only at the sessions of the Congress but also at elections. I claim for the Province that this is one of the reasons why we have never had any election dispute which has been carried to the A.-I. C. C., nor have any of our provincial troubles ever been responsible for wasting the time of the Congress or its executives. We have learnt this under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. We have also learnt from him how to take a decision when once it is reached by the Congress; and, once it has passed out of the range of controversy and become a resolution to be given effect to by the Congress organization, how to do our best to carry it out. We have thus never allowed ourselves to be deflected from the course

which appeared right to us even under the gibes and taunts of friends from more advanced provinces.

The Calcutta Congress became the source of a new current of life. Enthusiasm and awakening on a large scale became visible all round. Congress workers who returned from Calcutta came back with a new faith and confidence. Now that Mahatma Gandhi had once again assumed the leadership of the Congress, something was going to happen and they must prepare themselves and the country for it. They spread themselves all over the Province, and work on the lines of 1921 was started everywhere. Its first fruits were seen in the sudden increase in the demand for khadi and in large attendance at mass meetings which were addressed even by ordinary workers, not to speak of the stalwarts of the Congress. Every one began to talk seriously as to what would happen in case the Government turned a deaf ear to the Congress demand of Dominion Status within a year. There was a stir all round and as month after month of the year 1929 passed, not only public curiosity but public anxiety became more and more intense. There was also a corresponding stiffening of the national consciousness in favour of the national demand. It must be said to the credit of Bihar that its workers did not waste the year but utilized it in strengthening the organization of the Congress. On the 1st of November the Viceroy made his famous announcement declaring that Dominion Status was implicit in the declarations of British policy in India and announcing the intention of the Government to call a Round Table Conference. This announcement was hailed with great enthusiasm by the Liberals, and Congress leaders also gave it their measured and conditional support. It was expected that before the Congress met again at Lahore in December 1929, the British Government would do something to meet the Congress demand and thus render it unnecessary for the

Congress to adopt any drastic steps as it was bound to do if it was to be true to its pledge given to the nation at Calcutta.

While the country was in this state of flux the Bihar Provincial Conference met at Monghyr early in December 1929 and, against the advice of the 'elders', adopted a resolution in favour of Independence. I am mentioning this only to emphasize the point I have already made that the voting at our meetings is always free and represents the feelings and opinions of the delegates and members. The difference in the view points was really due to the fact that while the elderly people did not like to precipitate matters and preferred to wait until the Congress had given a lead, the younger men expressed themselves in favour of influencing the voting at the Congress itself. When Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Motilal Nehru met the Viceroy on the eve of the Lahore Congress and came away disappointed, there was of course no chance left for any one not to go forward, and the Lahore Congress resolution became a matter of course.

At Lahore the Congress was again divided. This was not on the question of Dominion Status versus Independence as Mahatmaji himself sponsored the Independence resolution, but on other grounds which it was not easy to understand. Bihar again voted solidly for Mahatmaji and thus pledged itself by its vote to carry out such programme as he might in course of time place before the country. It is a matter of thankfulness and gratification that it did keep its pledge in the eventful year of 1930.

XV

I desire to close with a note that whatever Bihar was capable of doing in 1930 was the result of that slow

and unostentatious absorption by the people of Bihar of Mahatma Gandhi's principles and teachings which has been going on all these years. As I stated in the very beginning, in the year 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi first set his foot on the soil of Bihar there was hardly one single worker in the whole Province giving his entire time to national work. Today there is hardly a district which has not got many such workers. Of these, several were lawyers who had been enjoying lucrative practice or had bright prospects before them, and they gave up all that and preferred the more difficult but more creditable path of service of the country. Many were hopeful young students who would have been either in well-paid Government jobs, as some of their contemporaries and friends are, or shining lights at the bar or in other professions or in trade and business. But apart from these, there is a very large number of village workers, unknown to fame, giving the best in them to the work of village reconstruction. They are drawn from all classes—small zamindars, agriculturists, traders and others. Many of them belong to the class from which village schoolmasters are recruited. Those village workers constitute the backbone of the Gandhi Movement in Bihar. Their life is simple, their wants are few, they do not have high personal ambition. Many of them manage to live on the small earnings of their family folk and do not have the cares of supporting families. The Congress organization can hardly find enough funds to run its usual routine business and seldom, if ever, afford to pay even subsistence allowance to its workers. The utmost that it can do is to feed such of its workers as happen to live in its offices and ashrams. The food, too, that is given in these ashrams is of the simplest kind. Our workers are, therefore, volunteers in the strictest sense of the term.

In 1917, we had hardly any public institution run entirely by the people without Government aid. Today, if one went

round, one would come across schools and ashrams dotting the Province from end to end. They have sprung up since 1921, and although they cannot be compared either in organization or grandeur with those in Gujerat and some other parts of the country, it is no exaggeration to say that, simple and unassuming as these are, they are at once the source and cementing force which revitalizes and keeps intact the Congress organization. But it would be a mistake to suppose that in the absence of these ashrams the Congress organization would break to pieces. On the contrary, they represent only the life-current of the locality where they have been established. That life-current is sure to exhibit and express itself in some other shape or form, the moment these ashrams cease to exist or are forcibly broken up.

Before 1917, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee could hardly afford to pay the Rs. 1,500 per year that had to be paid to the All-India Congress Committee. From 1921 to 1930 we have paid over Rs. 1½ lacs to the A.-I. C. C. Besides we were able to run a national college and a number of schools and ashrams and could also depend upon the Province to find the huge funds required to run a big campaign like the one of 1930. When the Civil Disobedience movement was to be started in 1930 we had hardly any funds either in the Provincial office or in the districts. As the movement progressed, funds poured in from all sides. Although we were not in affluent circumstances at any time, at no time was the work allowed to languish for want of funds. I believe the expenses must have run into lacs if we added up all that was spent from the villages up to the Provincial headquarters. And yet, I believe that Bihar spent the least and conducted its campaign in the most economical way possible. It is my belief that whenever any work is seriously taken in hand it attracts funds. This belief has grown on me as a result of Mahatmaji's teaching. Whenever anyone complained to him about lack

of public support to any organization or institution he used to tell him that the fault must be in the organization or the institution itself and not in the public. It was an article of faith with him that no work suffered for want of funds. If I find that some of our institutions are languishing, as some undoubtedly are, I realize that they are not up to the mark and the public are not altogether unjustified in withholding liberal contributions. The experience of 1930 only seems to confirm this impression. When I was spending a fortnight with Mahatma Gandhi at Borsad in Gujerat some time ago, I happened to talk to him during one of our evening walks about the plentiful supply of money in Gujerat and the lack of it in Bihar. He immediately said that that was a weak point in Gujerat and our own strong point. It may be difficult to understand this when we see with our own eyes our institutions languishing and our workers actually starving. But I have no doubt that it is a true statement. It really means that we can manage our affairs inexpensively and that is exactly what India needs—the India of the poor and the starving. If we had to find funds on the scale of Gujerat and then start work, it would plainly be difficult, if not impossible, to do any work at all. And yet we are not far behind other provinces in the great struggle for freedom.

In 1917, Bihar could not claim to have taken any prominent part in any country-wide public work, either as part of Bengal before 1912 or as an independent Province after that year. Since 1917, there has hardly been a movement in which Bihar has not played its humble part. I have shown how at successive Congress sessions it has influenced decisions by its votes. We know that its part in 1921 was not negligible, and the country recognizes that its contribution in 1930 was not less than that of any province, save the city of Bombay, the Congress Province of Gujerat and the N.-W. F. Province. Our sacrifices were considerable and it is no mere boast to say

that our organization stood the test of Government repression well. In some respects we can claim superiority over many provinces. Our work was well spread over practically the whole Province. And while it is easy enough to point to some districts as being better organized than others, it is equally true that no district save one was altogether a failure.

Lastly, in spite of the great agitation and greater provocations, the Province as a whole maintained non-violence to a remarkable degree. I am free to confess that in the beginning I was not so sure of the people remaining entirely non-violent and was ever anxious to impress upon the workers and the public that non-violence was absolutely necessary. In such matters we have to take risks and we had decided to take them. But it was up to us that nothing should be left undone to secure a strict observance of non-violence and we did it. But when I saw with my own eyes what happened in the streets of Patna without provoking retaliation, and when I similarly experienced what was happening from day to day at Bihpur which is full of notoriously inflammable material, all doubts were dissolved and thereafter I was confident that perfect peace would be maintained. And so it was. I say this in spite of the fact that according to Government versions in many places there was rioting and scuffle with the police. I am not aware that the Government were able to point to any cases in which their men were alleged to have suffered any serious injuries. I was told there was one case in the Santhal Parganas but the people had their own version of it. I have not investigated the matter to be able to give a definite opinion on its merits. But when we consider the vast extent of the movement and the depth of feeling behind it, when we consider that all this went on for nearly a year, we cannot but feel that there was no outburst because the masses had imbibed the principle of non-violence as a practical measure and had learnt that deviation from it would lead

to disaster.

Bihar is new in public life; its gait is accordingly not steady. It sometimes falters, sometimes wavers. The workers we have are not drawn from English-educated classes. We are in perpetual need of funds and there is hardly any worker who may be said to be free from care. With all these weaknesses we are privileged to make our humble contribution. We are now passing through a period of truce. God alone knows what is concealed in the womb of the future. It may be that India may be called upon to undergo further suffering before she can come into her own. It may be that the sacrifice demanded may be very much greater than anything offered in the past. It may be that the sufferings of the people may have to be intensely bitter and hard. For all this, Bihar has to be prepared in common with the rest of the country.

I have heard it often said from public platforms that people should be prepared to sacrifice their very lives for the sake of the country. While I know that that may be necessary, I often wonder if at present there is not a greater need for us to *live* every moment of our lives for the sake of the country. To one who so dedicates himself, danger of death makes no difference. Thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, his programme is intended and calculated to achieve freedom with the least suffering and sacrifice to ourselves and by causing even less suffering and sacrifice to our opponents. But it requires devotion and dedication to the cause. It requires thousands upon thousands to bury themselves alive in work and in service. It requires a kind of heroism which is infinitely greater than that demanded of the soldier on the battlefield. Let me hope and pray that the great lesson of Truth and Ahimsa on which the whole fabric of the Mahatma's programme is based will be followed in practice by the people of this Province in all their dealings and in everything they may do for achieving India's freedom.

The immediate past of Bihar is immersed in obscurity —but not so its distant past. At one time the history of India was but the history of Bihar writ large. Would to God that under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi, Bihar will once again be in the vanguard of service and sacrifice. Times are propitious. If Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment on the sacred soil of Bihar and created forces which are living even today and shaping the lives of hundreds of millions of people the world over, if Gautama Buddha's followers hundreds of years afterwards established empires with their far-flung wings based and buttressed not on armaments but held together by the silken cords of love, may not the inspiration of a Gandhi be instrumental in rousing the conscience of the world and achieving victory through peace more glorious than any achieved by war ? Will not Bihar which was the pivot and centre for a thousand years and more of a world empire based on spiritual culture, the signs of which are visible on all sides, play a part worthy of its great past ? Our destiny is great. With humility but with firmness let us follow in the great leader's footsteps and, God willing, we shall fulfil it.

XVI

In carrying the story further I propose to mention some incidents which would show how the people at large in Bihar had imbibed the lesson of non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi and how they listened to him whenever he called their attention to any lapses on their part.

Mahatma Gandhi initiated the Satyagraha movement in 1930 by undertaking a march on foot with some eighty members of his Ashram at Sabarmati (Ahmedabad) to a place called Dandi, some 150 miles away on the sea coast. A meeting of the Congress Working Committee had decided that in pursuance of the Lahore Congress resolution to start a Civil Disobedience movement for attaining Swaraj, we should civilly disobey the salt laws and thus either render them nugatory and futile or get imprisoned.

The salt laws were specially selected by Mahatma Gandhi because they affected every individual in the country from the highest to the lowest, from the richest man to the poorest beggar who had to eat a pinch of salt with every meal that he took. India has a vast sea coast where salt can be had for nothing—simply for the collecting of it. The sea in many places throws out salt on the coast. In other places, water has to be collected and allowed to evaporate in order to leave behind salt as a sediment. But there was a law prohibiting the people from making salt. Even the poorest man on the coast who could get it for nothing had to purchase it from a shopkeeper who in turn had to buy it from the manufacturer. The manufacturer had to pay a heavy duty on the salt that he manufactured. At first it was felt that it would be difficult to disobey the salt laws: apart from people on the sea coast it would not be possible for others to disobey these laws

in the interior. It was also felt by many that it would not enthuse the people as, even after paying the rather heavy duty which made salt sell at something like four to five times the cost of its actual manufacture, salt was not after all an expensive commodity. In any case the expense on salt was not perceptible as the total quantity of it consumed by an individual in a year was small and the duty paid on it per head formed such a small proportion of the entire cost of his food that even the poorest man did not feel the pinch. But Mahatma Gandhi who felt the pulse of the masses most accurately was sure that it would appeal to the masses and rouse them as nothing else would do. There were some direct taxes—for example, the 'Chowkidari tax' in Bihar which caused hardship to every family that had to pay it. But he preferred the salt tax to any other taxes for the purposes of Satyagraha, because, if it was difficult to disobey the salt laws, the Government would also be hard put to it to suppress the disobedience with vigour and rigour. If any other tax was selected, the hand of repression would be heavier; and as he was initiating the country as a whole into Satyagraha, he did not like to take the risk of severe repression which might demoralize the masses.

I mentioned to him the difficulty in Bihar which is an inland province, where there is no sea coast and where salt is manufactured on a small scale only as a by-product by people who make saltpetre out of earth found in some localities. Besides, this work of manufacturing saltpetre is only seasonal and cannot be done during the rainy season. I therefore suggested to him to permit Bihar to take to non-payment of the 'Chowkidari tax'. This is a tax on each household in a village, the proceeds of which are utilized for maintaining a Government servant in the village whose duty it is to keep a watch and to report to the Government all happenings in the village, ranging from births and deaths

to thefts and other offences against the Penal Law and also acts of nature like floods, etc. He is in fact the only link which a village in Bihar has with the Government. There are no village revenue officials, as Bihar is a permanently settled province and the revenue of each village is paid directly by the Zamindar who holds the village as a proprietor, subject only to the payment of a revenue fixed in perpetuity. The Government is concerned only with the Zamindar and does not come in contact with the actual tiller of the soil. But Mahatmaji advised me not to attempt it, at any rate to begin with, as the Government would come down with a heavy hand and it was possible the people might not be able to stand the pressure that would follow non-payment of the Chowkidari tax.

We soon discovered that the disobedience of salt laws was adopted by the country at large, and in Bihar in many of the districts there was hardly a village where people did not attempt to make salt by collecting together a little earth and trying to get salt and saltpetre out of it, the manufacture of both of which was prohibited. Whether they succeeded in making the salt or not, the law was disobeyed all the same and Government repression was severe. But the Province stood it. The movement for disobeying the salt law had started in April and lasted till the end of June, after which the rainy season usually commences in Bihar. During this period civil disobedience was carried on on a very wide scale and Government repression was equally widespread. But the morale of the people was maintained. When the rainy season approached I felt that salt laws could no longer be disobeyed, because it would become physically impossible to collect the kind of earth required and so even the attempt to make salt could not be resorted to. I, therefore, advised that our people should take to the non-payment of the Chowkidari tax.

Another item which had been more successfully undertaken in the interval was the boycott of foreign cloth. Mahatma Gandhi had held that spinning was a natural subsidiary occupation for all cultivators, and had, therefore, preached the revival of the spinning-wheel and along with it the boycott of foreign cloth. He had, however, not advised the boycott of English cloth alone, as he felt that while boycotting all foreign cloth was a measure of self-help and self-rehabilitation involving the revival of the spinning-wheel and the propagation of hand-made cloth, the boycott of English cloth alone as distinct from all foreign cloth involved an element of violence. It might well be that the boycott of English cloth might result in larger imports of cloth from other countries and not in the revival of the hand-spinning and weaving industry at all. If directed against the English people alone there was also an element of violence in it. So in this Satyagraha movement, boycott of all foreign cloth with a corresponding propagation of hand-made khaddar had become an important item.

So also prohibition and boycott of all intoxicating drugs and drinks. Congress volunteers had been asked to preach these boycotts and also to picket shops selling them. Many of them were arrested and imprisoned. They disobeyed the orders prohibiting picketting, processions and public meetings in connection with these items. One result which had been achieved was that even shopkeepers dealing in foreign cloth had been induced to join in the movement. They felt that they owed a duty to the country in its struggle for freedom. Disregarding their own losses, they, in a body, in most places in the country, refused to place further orders for foreign cloth. They even voluntarily tied up in bundles the stocks they had in their shops and godowns and had them sealed by the Congress Committees as a proof of their determination not to sell them or expose them for sale with-

out the permission of the Congress. This had been done in a remarkably short time and very largely as a result of the work of women volunteers.

When Mahatma Gandhi started Satyagraha he set apart two things to which he asked the women of the country to devote themselves. These were the boycott of foreign cloth and the boycott of intoxicants. He did so because he felt that women could do it perhaps more successfully than men. Boycott of foreign cloth could succeed only if there was a corresponding supply of hand-made cloth which could be achieved only with the help of the spinning-wheel. All over the country it was the women who had the peculiar gift of spinning. He naturally hoped that while on the one hand they would help in producing cloth, on the other, they would help in effecting its boycott by picketting foreign cloth shops. Similarly it is the women and their little ones who suffer most when their husbands become addicts to drink, especially amongst the poorer classes. He felt that their influence would be exercised not only on the vendor of the intoxicants, but also on the consumers, who would be their husbands, brothers or sons. His instinct in both the cases was right and they undertook the work with so much zeal that its success became apparent within a very short time.

XVII

I shall give a few instances from Bihar as to how the work was accomplished. As stated above, salt was manufactured or attempted to be manufactured in numberless places in Bihar. Patna is the capital city of the Province and the people decided to manufacture salt there also. Just

to give the authorities notice that the law was going to be disobeyed, they decided to take out a small procession of half a dozen volunteers who would manufacture salt. The volunteers marched with small national flags in their hands to the appointed place. The police had prohibited all processions of this kind and they were stopped on the way. The police did not like to arrest them, because they did not like to give them cheap martyrdom by sending them to jail. And so they simply stopped them on the road. Instead of turning back the boys remained standing on the road. The police would not allow them to go further and they would not turn back. They were prohibited from using force of any kind. So they would not push aside the police even if they could. They remained standing for some hours and naturally crowds began to collect. They remained standing the whole day and till late in the night. The police guards changed from time to time, but the boys remained either standing or sitting on the road. The neighbours brought them food and at night they spread some mattresses for them to sleep on which they did in the middle of the road.

I had been away to see how the salt laws were being disobeyed in other parts of the Province and arrived at about midnight and saw the boys fast asleep on the road and the policemen standing around. Nothing happened at night. Early next morning I went to see if there were any further developments. A large crowd had collected there and the police force had also been increased. The District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police were present. Hearing that I had come they sent for me and asked me to withdraw the boys. Otherwise they would have to take drastic steps. I said they could do what they liked, but the boys would not be withdrawn. They gave me a few minutes' time to consult my other co-workers and when I was leaving the place, the District Magistrate wanted me to correct my watch with

reference to his, so that he might carry out the threat which he had given exactly to the minute according to his watch! I came away telling him that it was unnecessary for me to regulate my watch and if he did not get any reply from me on the telephone within the stipulated time, he might do what he liked.

My mind was made up, but I went to consult my friends who were living then at the 'Sadakat Ashram' some three miles away from the place where the boys were squatting. There could be no withdrawing from the position we had taken up and long before the minutes that had been given to me were over, I communicated our decision to the District Magistrate over the telephone and proceeded to the place to see what was going to happen. I apprehended that there might be some serious incident as armed police and cavalry had been called and apart from the few volunteers a large crowd had also collected. While I was going I saw the District Magistrate passing in his car. He smiled and I felt that probably nothing serious had happened. When I went there I was told that he had ordered the horsemen to charge the boys from a distance. They came riding on their horses at a high speed. When the boys saw them coming, instead of running away or making way, they simply lay flat on the road making it impossible for the horses to pass without trampling over them. The horses came running but stopped just a few feet away from the boys. The horsemen made several attempts like this. However, as the boys did not move, this was stopped, and they were then formally arrested and put in a motor van and removed to jail. The crowd was dispersing and the Magistrate had left when I reached there.

We decided to send out batches of volunteers three times a day at stated hours informing the Magistrate accordingly. When the volunteers started they were obstructed on the way by the police and were sometimes arrested, and s

beaten and then arrested. Things went on for a day or two like this. As this was being done at certain fixed hours, large crowds of people used to collect at the place where the police would obstruct the volunteers and start beating the crowd instead of the volunteers. I used to go every time to see that there was no violence on the part of the people. We had requested them to submit to the beatings of the police without retaliation. The police on horseback would charge the crowds and beat them right and left. They did not leave out anybody who came in their way. These policemen were not local people at all. They were from Baluchistan and were all Muslims, whereas the crowd used to be composed mostly of Hindus, although there were some Muslims present. The Government probably thought that these Muslim horsemen would not hesitate to beat the Hindu crowd.

Prof. Abdul Bari was a person who could be easily recognized as a Muslim by his beard. He was a gentleman of high stature and had a stout body in which beat an equally stout heart. He and I were in the crowd on one of these afternoons when the police gave some blows to him also. He did not mind them of course, but the wonder was not that he did not mind the blows, but that the crowd also kept quiet. One of the policemen on horseback pushed him and then led him along the road as if he were under arrest. He whispered to Abdul Bari: "You are a Musalman. How is it that you are in this crowd?" Prof. Abdul Bari said: "Allah has sent me here for you." The man felt thoroughly upset and left him alone.

It so happened that Good Friday came in the middle. On Friday Muslims offer their congregational prayers at noon and this particular Friday, being Good Friday, was a solemn day for Christians also. Among the policemen, as I have said, the men were all Muslims and the officers who commanded them were two Englishmen who I believed were Christians.

So it struck me that it would be a good gesture if on Good Friday we did not send our batch of volunteers and thus gave the Muslims time to offer their prayer and the Christians to observe the day in their own solemn way. The thought came to me more or less spontaneously and I wrote a letter to the District Magistrate who was an Englishman and Christian informing him that there would be no Satyagraha on the following day on account of its being a Friday and Good Friday too. He got the letter in the evening. He felt some doubt about my motive and telephoned to me if I was really serious in what I had said and if so he would like to meet me if I would go to his house the next day. I told him that I was perfectly serious and that I would see him. I went to his house. He received me well and after talking to me for some time asked me as to how it was that I had written a letter like that. Did I really want the Musalmans and the Christians to observe the day for their religious prayer or was it only a pretext to get out of the difficulty which I had created myself ? Perhaps, I could not send the boys any more and wanted to use Good Friday as a face-saving device. I assured him that it was not so and he felt impressed. He then began to discuss with me alternative routes for the procession of the volunteers. I told him that it was no use discussing any alternative routes, because we must have our volunteers pass by that very route. I came away without any agreement but with the impression that he had felt impressed by me and was keen on finding a way out.

Our volunteers went on the following Saturday. They were arrested, but there was no attack on the crowd as usual. A day later, the volunteers were allowed to pass without any obstruction. The police had orders to withdraw and not to obstruct them. This Satyagraha proved successful. It tested the power of the people to submit to bodily injury without retaliation and also awakened in the hearts of the

principal persons on the other side who had threatened and blustered, a respect for the demands of the Congress.

I shall give another illustration in which Prof. Abdul Bari was again involved. There is a place called Bihpur in the province of Bihar near Bhagalpur on the banks of the river Ganga. There is an area on both sides of the river which always gets inundated during the rainy season. A constant quarrel was going on amongst the people there as all boundary marks used to be washed away by the floods and by the changes in the course of the river during almost every rainy season. The land on both the sides is very fertile as the floods leave rich silt behind. Near this place there used to be a European who owned a big area. He had constant quarrels with the villagers round about with regard to the '*diara* land', as land exposed to such floods is called in these parts. Being a European he had naturally more influence with Government officials, and being a rich man he could employ a large number of guards for protecting his land against the villagers. He also indulged in a great deal of litigation. The people of this area are a fighting lot who do not hesitate to break one another's heads or the head of any one who challenges them. To guard his land the European proprietor had employed some twenty to twenty-five Goorkhas from Nepal who are very faithful as watchmen. The people one night killed all these Goorkhas and threw away their dead bodies in the flooded river, and no trace could be found of them. I am stating these facts to show how fierce these people were.

In this place also Satyagraha was started. I had visited the place some months before the Satyagraha movement was started and had found the people in high spirits and great enthusiasm. I had then formed the opinion that if Satyagraha was started there, the people would give a very good account of themselves. Bihpur has a railway station

and from there a branch line goes a short distance to the river Ganga where people cross over to the town of Bhagalpur on a ferry steamer. Bhagalpur is the headquarters of the Commissioner of the Division and of the District Magistrate of the district. We had a small place near the railway station where spinning-wheels, their accessories and khaddar cloth used to be kept for sale. It served also as the Congress office where Congress volunteers were housed. Near the station there was also a shop where *Ganja*, an intoxicating drug, used to be sold. Volunteers started picketting this *Ganja* shop. The police one day beat the volunteers, took them under arrest and also went and occupied the Ashram where we had the khaddar shop and the Congress office. All the khaddar and spinning-wheels and their accessories were thrown hither and thither. The volunteers were driven out of the place and it was forcibly occupied by the police.

The people of the locality hit upon a plan of offering Satyagraha there by sending a batch of volunteers every day to capture and take possession of the Ashram. The volunteers used to be boys. They would have small national flags in their hands and no weapons of any kind. It was only a symbolic raid which they were making and nobody imagined that they would be able to drive away the police from there by force. But they would disobey the orders of the police by this symbolic raid of theirs and the Government could not tolerate this open defiance. So they started arresting the boys or beating them. The people of the locality began to assemble in large numbers just to see these symbolic raids every afternoon and they began to receive beatings from the police just like the crowd in Patna as described above.

On receiving news about this I decided to go there with some friends just to see how the people and the police were behaving. The news spread that I was coming. On the day we went there, there was a specially large crowd of some twenty

thousand or more standing on both sides of the road from the railway station up to the opening which led to the Ashram. The *Ganja* shop had, of course, been closed as the shopkeeper had fled in order to avoid getting himself embroiled in this quarrel between the police and the volunteers. The police as usual led by the Superintendent of Police who was an Englishman came out of the Ashram. They had thick sticks or *lathis* in their hands and they started beating the crowd on both sides of the road indiscriminately. No one raised a cry. No one attempted to retaliate. They came to the place where I and my other friends were standing. Prof. Bari was standing behind, a few yards away from me. The Police Superintendent was leading the constables and when they approached us they stopped for a while, just as if to reconnoitre the ground, and then started beating us. All of us received blows and Prof. Abdul Bari received some heavy blows and fell down. I did not see this because he was behind me. The blows on me were not as severe as they could have been, as a Congress volunteer had deliberately thrust himself between me and the *lathi* of the policeman and received the blows on himself. When the policemen had passed after administering the beating, we discovered Abdul Bari lying on the ground. We brought him to a place where we squatted on the grass waiting for a Doctor to dress the injuries received. After the beating, the volunteers were arrested and the crowd dispersed. We who had come from Bhagalpur and some of the crowd remained there waiting for the evening train to take us to Bhagalpur.

While we were waiting, a man who was pretty aged came to me and began to cry like a child. He said : "It is a shame for us that we have to see people like you beaten. Thousands of us are standing and watching. But we are helpless. We are not the people to stand this kind of thing and even a man of my age could have beaten away all these policemen if only

I had a *lathi* in my hand. But Gandhiji by his words has tied down our hands and we are unable to do anything." He also reminded me of how they had been fighting among themselves breaking each other's heads without hesitation. I could see at once how sincere the old man was and I felt how deep the teachings of Gandhiji had penetrated.

We came away to Bhagalpur. Next morning I went to the river Ganga for a bath. A number of police constables had also come there for bathing. They were from among those who had participated in the beating at Bihpur on the previous evening. After one of the constables had given a severe *lathi* blow to Prof. Abdul Bari who fell dazed, he wanted to give another blow, but some of these other constables had stopped him from doing so and as a protest given the assailant a *lathi* blow. He wanted to complain about this to the Superintendent of Police, but the others forestalled him and reported to the Superintendent that some of the constables did not know how to use *lathis* and had by mistake beaten one of themselves while beating the crowds. The Superintendent could at once see the situation and instead of taking any action against the persons complained against transferred them to the Lines at the headquarters. So they had returned to Bhagalpur the previous evening. This incident showed how the police also were affected.

I sent a khadi worker to see the police officer in charge of Bihpur and to ask him to allow us to take charge of the spinning-wheels and khaddar stocks which had been lying about in the compound. This officer was an Inspector who had accompanied the Superintendent the previous evening to arrest one of our friends when we were squatting on the grass waiting for a Doctor to attend to our injuries. I did not recognize him, but he had recognized me. However, when his name was mentioned to me, I remembered that he had been an old friend and class-mate of mine in school some

thirty years ago. The messenger who went there had heard this from me. So when he met the Inspector of Police, he mentioned to him that I thought he was the same gentleman who had been my class-mate. As soon as he mentioned this, tears came to the eyes of the Inspector whom I had not met for thirty years after we both left school. He felt very much distressed over the fact that the beating had taken place while he was there. He wanted to talk about the work for which the messenger had gone, namely, disposal of the spinning-wheels and khadi, but the messenger, however, now and then reminded him of my old connection and every time he became restless.

While I was staying at Bhagalpur I received a message from the District Magistrate of the place who was an Indian and whose family I had known very well. One of his brothers had been in the movement and had courted imprisonment. Just a few days after his release he had died of an illness which he had contracted while in jail, and on account of which he was released. The District Magistrate was anxious to see me but was afraid of his superior officer—the Commissioner—who was an Englishman. He sent for me and I managed to meet him. As soon as he saw me he caught hold of my feet and began to cry like a child. He said that although he was the District Magistrate, he was a helpless witness to what had been happening there. He, of course, did not approve of the beating because the crowd and the volunteers were all wholly non-violent. He would not hesitate to arrest the volunteers if they disobeyed the law, but he could not bear the sight of people like Prof. Abdul Bari and myself being beaten with *lathis* in a district of which he was supposed to be the head. I have mentioned this incident to show how non-violence was working in unexpected quarters and how the people at large had adopted non-violence.

XVIII

It is not necessary to relate the happenings in London at the Second Round Table Conference. The British Government was anxious to take Mahatma Gandhi to attend it and succeeded in doing so. It will suffice to say that he found himself more or less completely isolated. He failed to secure unanimity amongst Indians for their demands. The delegates had been chosen as representing their particular community and could not be persuaded to agree. In India, in the mean time, a situation had been created which made a revival of civil disobedience inevitable. Repression on a large scale had started in Bengal and the North-West Frontier Province. The agrarian situation had deteriorated in the United Provinces. By the time Mahatma Gandhi returned, leaders like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Dr. Khan Sahib had been arrested and detained. We were all going to Bombay to receive Gandhiji. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru with some of his co-workers was arrested on the way and so could not reach Bombay. Immediately on his arrival Mahatma Gandhi was apprised of the situation. But, nothing daunted, he wanted to have an interview with Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy, to discuss the situation and to find an honourable way out. But Lord Willingdon, with the advice of his Councillors, had prepared a plan for smashing the Satyagraha movement completely, and bluntly refused to see Gandhiji.

It became obvious that Gandhiji would be arrested and all other prominent workers would also be imprisoned. So just after a few hours' stay in Bombay and after discussing the situation with Gandhiji, we left for our respective places expecting arrest immediately on arrival. I wired from one of the railway stations on the way to friends in Bihar to meet me at Patna on the following day when I arrived there. I had hoped that we would be able to discuss and prepare a

plan of civil disobedience for the Province before Government took action against us. We had done nothing till then for which we could be arrested. But, as a matter of fact, some of my telegrams had been intercepted and had not reached the addressees while those who had received the telegrams, or otherwise been informed, came to Patna. We met immediately after my arrival, advancing the time of the meeting which I had mentioned in my telegram by about two hours. We finished our meeting and those who had come from outside returned. Soon after, the police arrived, surrounded the Ashram, arrested all of us and declared the Ashram an unlawful institution. The Provincial Congress Committee and its subordinate Committees all over the Province were also declared unlawful. All our prominent workers in the districts were arrested and within a day or two there was no one left outside who could be called a leader and to whom people could look for guidance.

This time the Government in Bihar adopted a technique which they had derived from their experience of the last campaign. They had found that mere imprisonment had no effect and even beating with *lathis* or otherwise had become stale and ineffective. They tried shooting also, but on a small scale and in just a few places, but without much effect. They discovered, however, that when heavy fines were imposed and realized and property attached, it had a demoralizing effect, not so much on the particular person punished as on his family as a whole. We have the joint family system amongst Hindus. Although it was illegal, as was declared by the High Court, to confiscate or attach property belonging to the joint family for realizing a fine imposed on any one member of the family, they resorted to heavy fines and put to auction property belonging not to the convicted individual alone, but to the whole family. So on this occasion they avoided sending people to prison except where

they belonged to the leader class, and resorted more to beating and shooting and imposition of heavy fines. They imposed not only fines on individuals but also collective fines and punitive fines on whole villages and areas which proved recalcitrant.

There were many occasions where people faced bullets most valiantly. I may mention one instance. We have already seen that Champaran had been the scene of Mahatma Gandhi's first Satyagraha in Bihar. At Motihari, the headquarters of the district, they had a place where the Congress office was located. This was a small house with a big compound for holding open air public meetings. The police took possession of this place as they did in the case of other Congress offices and Ashrams throughout the Province declaring them all illegal associations. The people of the district assembled and squatted in thousands on the open ground in the compound. The police wanted them to disperse and beat them with *lathis*, but failed to disperse them. Then they resorted to firing. The people would not budge from the place and several persons were killed on the spot, while others were injured. This also had no effect and the people remained sitting there. The police saw that it was no use killing more people and left them alone. They remained there for the night. The police had, of course, left the place, but the people returned to their village homes only after staying long enough to demonstrate that they did not disperse because of the police firing. Instances like this occurred in several places.

Lord Willingdon had hoped to crush the movement in a few days, as he had been advised that if the leaders were all sent to jail, the movement would collapse for want of guidance. But to his great astonishment this did not happen. New leaders were thrown up from the masses and the Civil Disobedience Movement was carried on in the midst of great

difficulties. Orders and Ordinances had been issued by Government declaring all Congress, as well as all allied and affiliated organizations illegal, rendering every member thereof liable to imprisonment. Moreover, people generally were prohibited from supplying them conveyances or food or shelter. Even conveyances which were ordinarily available on hire were prohibited to them. The Post and Telegraph Offices and even railway trains could not be used by them freely. Of course, no one was to give them any monetary help and no one was to give any kind of assistance whatsoever. But in spite of all these prohibitions the movement flourished and those who were out of prison found occasions created by the Government orders themselves for carrying on the Civil Disobedience Movement. Any order passed by the Government became a target for disobedience and no one was put to any difficulty in having to hunt for laws which could be disobeyed civilly. This happened all over the country and Bihar also proved true to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. There was hardly ever any case of violence on the side of the people in spite of great provocations. Heavy fines and penalties were imposed but people would not voluntarily pay them and would allow property worth much more than the amount of the fines imposed to be auctioned by the Government to realize them. This, continued for more than two years, with ups and downs, till the movement was formally withdrawn in 1934.

XIX

The movement was carried on as stated above for nearly two years and thereafter languished. It is not possible to go into details here but it may be mentioned that it was while

the movement was going on that Mahatma Gandhi had to undertake a fast unto death unless the British Government altered its decision to give separate electorates to what are known as the 'Depressed Classes' or 'Harijans'. They are a part and parcel of Hindu society but have for long been treated as 'untouchables'. Mahatma Gandhi always treated this custom as a blot on Hinduism and Hindu society and tried in his characteristically practical manner to remove it. For this purpose, propaganda on an extensive scale was being done. Many occasions and opportunities for physical contacts with the so-called untouchables were actually established and created, and several Hindu temples which they were not permitted to visit for worship, even though they were Hindus, were opened to them. A great awakening had come among them and some of them had naturally become embittered against the Hindu society. They easily furnished recruits for conversion to Christian missionaries, but in the South where Missionary activity had been most widespread their status in society in many places remained what it was before their conversion, that is, they remained untouchables living in segregated localities and carrying on the same lowly occupations as they used to do before they became Christians. Awakening amongst them had led some of their organizations to demand not only the removal of the wicked custom but also a separate existence and separate political rights from the Hindus. Gandhiji's view was that they were Hindus and should not be treated separately from them. It was for Hindus to reform their society and to get rid of the evil custom. Hindu society was engaged in this work although it was difficult and it took time on account of the custom being long established. At the Round Table Conference there was one single representative of these classes, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and he demanded that they should have separate electorates from the Hindus for electing their

own representatives to the Legislatures under any system of political reforms that might be introduced. The Muslims had already got and enjoyed separate electorates for about twenty years. As there could be no agreement on this and other similar matters relating to minorities among the representatives of India, the Prime Minister of England, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald gave a decision in which one of the items was reservation of seats for the depressed classes to be filled by election on the basis of separate electorates. Mahatma Gandhi had vehemently protested against any such move, which would result in perpetuating untouchability by segregating the untouchables from the rest of the Hindu community and hence nullify all efforts to rid Hinduism and Hindu society of this evil. In the course of discussion he had even said that if any attempt were made to segregate them by giving them separate electorates, he would resist it with his life. This remark like everything that he said was made by him in all seriousness but nobody had attached importance to it at that time. When Mr. Macdonald's decision was published Gandhiji wrote to the Government that unless the provision relating to the depressed classes was changed he would undertake a fast unto death. He started his fast on the announced date. The country was convulsed by the news. The depressed classes were themselves no less agitated as they had found in him a leader who had pitched his whole might against the evil and was doing his best for them. They were as anxious that his life must be saved as others in the country. Fortunately there was a clause in the decision to the effect that if the parties concerned and affected wanted an alteration in any of the provisions relating to them, it could be changed. A Conference was convened which was attended by all the leaders of the Congress who were out of jail at the time and others outside the Congress and also representatives of the depressed classes from all over

the country including Bihar. As a result, an agreement was reached whereby separate electorates for the 'untouchables' were to be given up but seats in proportion to their population were to be reserved for them. A device was adopted to ensure that their voice in the choice of their representatives was not ignored, although all Hindus participated in the choice just as they participated in the choice of other members. The decision of the Conference was accepted by the British Government and the Prime Minister's decision revised in accordance with it. Mahatma Gandhi's fast was successful not only in getting rid of a vicious provision in the proposed constitution so far as the untouchables were concerned but also in rousing the conscience of Hindu society as nothing else would have done. It became apparent that by their segregation the country had nearly lost its greatest leader and an organization was set up to help the removal of untouchability and to improve the general condition of the depressed classes. Mahatma Gandhi was permitted to carry on propaganda from inside the prison in favour of this movement. On account of obstruction to his activity in furtherance of this great movement for the uplift of the untouchables he had to undertake another fast in jail and the Government released him. He was so scrupulous in his behaviour that even after his release he did not utter or write one word about the political movement and the Satyagraha which were still going on. He confined all his activities to the movement for the uplift of the 'Harijans' as he called the depressed classes. He felt and declared that although he had been released he was still a prisoner so far as other matters were concerned and was free only to conduct this movement as he had been permitted to do even from behind the bars. The result of his activity was a tremendous awakening in the whole country in favour of this reform. This movement was specially strong in the South where 'untouchability' in

its worst forms prevailed. He undertook a tour and was moving about in the South when a calamity visited Bihar and he had to hurry to that Province to help in the work of bringing relief to the sufferers.

XX

Most of the prominent Congress workers of Bihar were in prison, undergoing various terms of imprisonment as a result of their first or second conviction on account of Satyagraha, when a severe earthquake shook Bihar and caused unprecedented havoc over a great part of the Province on the afternoon of the 15th January, 1934. I was undergoing my second term of imprisonment and was at the time of the earthquake in hospital at Patna where I had been transferred on account of serious illness for treatment from the Hazaribagh Central Jail. On the recommendation of a Medical Board which it had appointed, the Government had decided earlier in the day on the same date to release me. The news had just reached me that I was going to be released as soon as formal orders were communicated to the jail authorities, when suddenly the 'quake came causing widespread devastation. Parts of the hospital came down crashing within my sight and hearing, but the house in which I was lodged had only some cracks in its walls and escaped more serious damage. The tower of the Provincial Government Secretariat tumbled down upsetting all Government work there. The railway and telegraph lines suffered tremendous damage, roads were upset and in some places bodily shifted like some houses from their original sites. All communication was rendered impossible for some days. Countless houses including Govern-

ment buildings collapsed or sank into the ground. Several thousands of persons died. As the 'quake came in the afternoon during the cold season when people were generally outside their houses working in the fields or enjoying the sun, the death-roll was not as great as it would have been if the disaster had overtaken them at night when they were all inside their houses. But even as it was it rose to something like 25,000. Vast areas became covered with water which gushed out of the bowels of the earth and carried with it a vast quantity of sand which covered millions of acres of rich cultivated land. As all means of communications had completely broken down over a large portion of the Province, news about the havoc came slowly and in dribblets and several days elapsed before detailed information could reach Patna, the headquarters of the Province, about the distress in the worst affected parts.

I was released two days later on account of the decision taken by the Government before the Earthquake on the recommendation of the Medical Board. But it was generally believed that I was released on account of the Earthquake to organize relief. As a matter of fact, however, the Earthquake had only delayed my release as the Secretariat was unable to function for some time. But it is true that some days later the Government released many of the political prisoners, specially those who came from the affected parts. I was still very weak but I issued an appeal for help from the hospital and when my released co-workers came we organized a Relief Committee. Mahatma Gandhi read about the disaster in the newspapers and made telegraphic inquiries from me even before I could wire or write to him. He supported my appeal and the country responded most generously. The Viceroy also opened a Relief Fund and it looked as if there was rivalry between the non-official fund and the Viceroy's fund. We got not only money but also food, cloth,

utensils and other necessaries of life, all of which had been destroyed or damaged by the 'quake.

The first thing was to give immediate relief to the sufferers by supplying them with food, clothing and shelter. Thousands of volunteers spread themselves all over the vast area and gave relief of this kind. However, our one great regret remained. Our work was organized too late for extricating and rescuing people who had got buried underneath buildings which had crashed. Government servants did what they could and our volunteers, too, tried their best when once they took up the work. In one of our towns, Monghyr, where the death-roll was very heavy and where practically the whole town had become a heap of bricks and shambles, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had hurried to our rescue himself led a batch of volunteers with spades in their hands to dig out dead bodies from the debris of fallen houses. Some days later, Mahatma Gandhi on receiving some details of the havoc cut short his tour in the South and came post-haste to Bihar. Already a large batch of volunteers including some of the leading Congressmen from all over the country had come to our help. Others followed Gandhiji's arrival. We had thus men, money and material for relief work. The Relief Committee which had started work was reorganized as a Central Relief Committee to which were affiliated a large number of other relief organizations which had come from different parts of the country and which were already working there. The Central Relief Committee had its own branches in all the affected districts.

As stated above, for nearly two months the work of immediate relief was continued. Then we had to think in what way we could best utilize the money and material we had received for rehabilitating the sufferers. There were many problems facing them. Houses had to be rebuilt. ources of water-supply like wells and tanks had become

silted with sand and masonry work had been smashed. There was great scarcity of drinking water, although vast areas were inundated with water which had gushed out through geysers from the earth. So new wells required to be sunk or old wells repaired. Tanks needed redigging. Vast areas of cultivated land had become covered with sand and it was feared that unless something was done to free the land from this sand, the whole area would be rendered into a desert. Either the land should be cleared of sand or large populations would have to be shifted, as land alone gave them the means of subsistence. The courses of rivers had changed and their beds had become silted or been raised with the result that during the rainy season they would not be able to drain off the heavy rain-water as they used to do before. Large areas would thus be exposed to floods which might prove as disastrous as the Earthquake itself. We had to look ahead and provide for relief in case of floods even though it was impossible to prevent them. Any one of these was a big enough job for all our resources in men and money and we were hard put to it to decide what we should and could undertake. Mahatma Gandhi immediately on his arrival made a tour of the affected areas and saw the devastation and the sufferings of the people. At the meeting of the Central Relief Committee he advised us to offer unconditional co-operation to Government in its relief work, although the Civil Disobedience Movement and Satyagraha were still going on. He also told us to concentrate on restoring water-supply as far as that was possible and, only after doing whatever we could in that line, to undertake anything else, such as helping in the rebuilding of houses, etc. He ruled out any attempt at reclamation of sand-covered land. Some experiments on small plots had proved very expensive and the problem of disposing of the sand still remained. All that could be done was to dig out the sand from the surface so

that the cultivated land again became cultivable. The sand so dug out could only be dumped in the neighbourhood and there was no knowing that these sand dunes, as they would become, would not again be blown into the fields and cover them once again during the hot weather with its strong winds. Help in house-building would require dealing with individual cases. Whatever we did, we would not be able to help all who needed help in this and we could not escape being charged with partiality in selecting the cases for help and in making grants. But if we undertook water-supply, it would not be to individuals but to villages as a whole and there would be no room for discriminating between one individual sufferer and another. Besides, water was a prime necessity of life and could justly claim priority even over food. We at once saw the wisdom and practicability of Gandhiji's suggestions. The Relief Committee sank or repaired some twenty-five thousand wells in about three months with the help of the people. Sinking and construction of a well requires some skill but many villagers have the skill. We requisitioned the voluntary services of the people and our wells were constructed at incredibly cheap cost and with incredible speed. Several hundred tanks were reconstructed and repaired. Mahatma Gandhi with his band of workers remained in the Province for several months guiding and supervising relief work, and came into close contact with the people of a very much larger area than he had done seventeen years earlier when he had spent several months in Champaran in 1917. Along with relief work he carried on his practical propaganda for the uplift of the depressed classes and removal of untouchability.

XXI

Mahatma Gandhi's stay in Bihar in 1934 became important politically also. It was while he was in Bihar that a deputation of some Congress leaders met him and asked him to revise the programme of non-co-operation and to allow the Congress to re-enter legislatures by contesting the elections to be held under the new Constitution which was then under consideration of Parliament in England as a result of the Round Table Conferences. He accepted the suggestion and ultimately a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was held at Patna which practically and formally suspended Satyagraha and the Civil Disobedience Movement which had become ineffective by that time.

It is not necessary here to give details of the Congress activities from 1934 to 1937. Suffice it to say that there was bitter controversy regarding the communal decision of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald and also on the question whether Congressmen should take up ministerships after entering the Legislatures under the new Constitution which was considered disappointing and unsatisfactory. The Congress organization had suffered terribly under Government repression during the Satyagraha movement. It was revived and built up.

It fell to my lot, a man from Bihar, to preside over the session of the Congress held in Bombay in October 1934, and to remain its President till April 1936. Apart from my weak health and the heavy work in connection with Earthquake Relief, I had a serious personal blow on account of the death of my elder brother who had relieved me of all anxiety about the family and allowed me to devote my whole time and energy to Congress work ever since 1920 when I first joined the non-co-operation movement and gave up my practice

at the Bar. But Mahatma Gandhi insisted that I could not refuse to undertake the responsibility when the people wanted that I should take it up, and I had to yield.

All-India work kept me engaged outside the Province of Bihar after I had finished and wound up the Relief work. When elections under the new Constitution of 1935 were held in 1937, Bihar gave an overwhelming majority to the Congress in the Provincial Legislative Assembly and all the seats allotted to it in the Central Legislative Assembly. Bihar like other provinces refused to take office unless the Viceroy gave an assurance that the Governors would not interfere with the ministers in their work. One of the objections against the Constitution was that it gave too much power to the Governors who could interfere with the ministers in the administration of the provinces. The assurance asked for would practically reduce the Governor to the position of a Constitutional head. The Viceroy at first refused to give an assurance. The Congress which commanded a majority therefore kept out of office and ministers who did not command a majority in the Legislative Assemblies of most of the provinces were appointed. But such minority ministries could not last for more than six months as they had to meet the Legislatures under the Constitution within that period and it was not possible for them to face the Legislatures.

Later on, before the six months were over, the Viceroy gave assurances which were considered sufficient for enabling the Congress to form ministries. So Congress ministries were appointed and Bihar, like other provinces in which Congress commanded a majority either by itself or in combination with other Parties in the Provincial Assembly, got a popular ministry which carried on the administration on the lines indicated by the Congress Election Manifesto until it had to resign in the last quarter of 1939 after the outbreak of World War II.

Amongst the beneficial measures for which the Bihar Ministry got credit were the introduction of prohibition of intoxicants and the initiation of agrarian reforms which apart from other reliefs gave to the tenants a general reduction in rent payable by them to Zamindars which came on an average for the province as a whole to nearly 25 per cent of what was payable before. Prohibition of intoxicants had been one of the prominent items in the Congress programme and thousands of men and women had been imprisoned during the various movements since 1920 for picketting liquor shops. It was in the fitness of things, therefore, that Bihar should adopt it, even though it was introduced only in parts of the Province. The result, too, from all reports was found to be satisfactory particularly in the coal-fields where many labourers were addicted to drink and spent a large part of their earnings on it causing great distress to their families and detriment to production.

XXII

World War II presented a most difficult problem before the Congress. For many years the Congress had been passing resolutions declaring that it would not join or help in any imperialist war. Immediately after war was declared against Germany by England, India was also declared to be at war by the British Government without even the semblance of any consultation with the representatives of the people of India. Under the Act of 1935, there was a Central Legislature functioning in which Congress members predominated. In the provinces there were Congress Ministries functioning. They all found themselves in a most difficult position.

Lord Linlithgow made an appeal asking for help in the conduct of the war. There were many amongst Congressmen and in the country at large who sympathized with England. But it was difficult for anyone to render help on behalf of the people, particularly because India had been made a belligerent without her consent and because, in World War I, promises and pledges given during the war had not been kept and fulfilled. Lord Linlithgow invited Mahatma Gandhi who expressed his sympathy and even offered unconditional support by which he really meant moral support and not actual help in the conduct of the war with men, money and material.

The Congress Working Committee after a long deliberation came to the conclusion that the British Government should be asked to make clear their war aims and what the position of India was to be in the new set-up; failing which it would ask the Congress Ministries to resign office. The problem before the Congress was whether it could help in a violent war with men and material in the face of its own creed of non-violence and of its own resolutions. Could it, even if it chose to disregard its own creed and resolutions, offer help without a definite arrangement with the British Government, whereby it could be enabled actually to render help? It was clear that during the period of war every other function of the Government would be subordinated to the conduct of the war and, therefore, the Ministries whether in the provinces or in the Centre would have to concentrate on the war effort. It was not possible to enthuse the people in favour of such effort unless they could feel that the war brought freedom to them. It was not possible to rouse them to make sacrifices for saving the freedom of other people while they themselves were not free and were not going to be made free on account of the war.

Mahatma Gandhi's view was that the mere fact that

India with her teeming millions gave moral support was enough to create a situation in the world which should lead to the victory of the allies, and he would not care to bargain for giving such moral support and would leave the moral law to work on its own plane and bring freedom to India as a result. The Working Committee, however, took a somewhat different view : in asking for a declaration in clear terms of war aims by Britain and in asking its Ministries to withdraw if a satisfactory declaration was not made, it practically promised help in the war effort in case its demand was conceded. Thus at the very commencement of the war an undercurrent of difference based on the principle of non-violence started between Mahatma Gandhi on the one side and some members of the Working Committee on the other. The British Government did not accede to the demand for a clear declaration of war aims and the Congress Ministries resigned in the provinces.

For some months the Viceroy and the Governors waited to see if the Congress would not come back to office after fuller realization of the implications of the situation. But when they found after the session of the Congress which was held at Ramgarh in Bihar in March 1940, that that was not to be, they firmly took action under a provision of the Government of India Act, whereby the Governors could take over the administration of the provinces. As the Congress commanded a large majority in most of the Provincial Legislatures, no other Ministry could function. There was really no alternative left to the Governors but to take over the administration unless they decided to dissolve the Assemblies and order fresh elections. This was unthinkable not only because there was a war on, but also because the Congress was sure to be returned at the polls again and the Government would have to face a more serious situation than before. So rule by the Governors began and continued till after the

end of the war when elections were held and Ministries again formed in the provinces in April 1946.

Although the Governors had taken over charge of the administration, the British Government on its part and the Congress Working Committee in its own way did not give up the idea of arriving at some settlement which would be satisfactory to both. Some months after the Ramgarh Congress, the Working Committee supported by the All-India Congress Committee made another effort by making a clear-cut offer to help the war effort if power in the Centre was conferred on popular representatives and an assurance was given about constitutional changes in due course. Mahatma Gandhi was not prepared to make such an offer on behalf of the people and the Congress, and he did not, as a matter of fact, attend the session of the A.-I.C.C. which was held for this purpose. The difference was fundamental, but as the British Government did not accept the offer and summarily rejected it, the difference was automatically bridged as the practical question of helping the war effort did not arise.

Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress, however, were not prepared to take things lying down. It was decided under his guidance by the All-India Congress Committee that since the British Government did not care for the Congress view point and had dragged India into the war without her consent, the Congress must assert its right to preach against the war effort. This was bound to lead to conflict, but Mahatma Gandhi was careful enough to see that while asserting this right the Congress did not create a situation which would involve violence. The All-India Congress Committee asked him to start civil disobedience and this he did, not on a mass basis but on an individual basis. This meant that every one was not expected or required to offer civil disobedience as had been done during the movement of 1930, but only

those persons who were selected could do so. The British Government had been raising money and recruits for its forces in India and it was necessary to show that all this was being done without the consent of the people. The civil disobedience, therefore, took the form of preaching against war effort by individuals who in themselves had representative capacity. Thus all those who had held the posts of Ministers or who had been elected to the Legislatures or held other elective posts in the District and Municipal Boards and in the Congress organizations were called upon individually to offer civil disobedience. It was thus possible to confine the movement to a comparatively small number of persons and to prevent it from assuming a violent form which it might have assumed when feelings ran high. This is known as the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement of 1940.

The call was responded to with alacrity by most of those who came under the various categories required to offer civil disobedience. But the mere fact that the men belonging to the category had been called out was not considered sufficient to enable a person to offer civil disobedience, but he was required to obtain the approval of Mahatma Gandhi who insisted upon certain other conditions—namely, fulfilment by him in his own person of the constructive programme of the Congress. Those who for reasons of health or for any other reasons were unable to offer civil disobedience were given exemption by Mahatma Gandhi. He himself was not arrested, although he conducted the whole campaign. Bihar gave as good an account of itself in this movement as it had done on previous occasions, and most of its workers and men prominent in public life found themselves in prison soon after the movement was started. I was told by Mahatma Gandhi not to join the movement on account of my indifferent health and it fell to me to spend much of my time in 1940-41 at Sevagram assisting him in

conducting the movement.

I may mention here one incident in Bihar. It occurred on the very first day when civil disobedience was to be offered by Babu Shrikrishna Sinha who had been the Premier of the Province in the Congress Ministry. He formally went to a public place and preached against the war effort to a large crowd which had assembled there, and he was arrested and taken to jail. The crowd disregarding instructions which had been given followed him to the jail gate and created a situation which might well have led to a riot. At once I saw the danger and in strict compliance with Mahatma Gandhi's instructions I directed civil disobedience to remain suspended and Babu Anugraha Narayan Sinha, the ex-Finance Minister who was to offer civil disobedience the same day in another part of the city, was asked by me not to do so until we could be assured that the crowds would behave better in future and no untoward incident would occur. This had the desired effect and not only were profuse apologies offered, but assurances were publicly given that incidents like those which had occurred on the ex-Premier's arrest would not be repeated. Civil disobedience was re-started some days later and thousands of people in their representative capacity courted imprisonment without any untoward incidents.

XXIII

While discussions for a settlement of the political issue were going on between the Congress on the one side and the British Government on the other, the Muslim League was carrying on its propaganda in favour of Pakistan. It is a

curious fact that this propaganda in favour of Pakistan gained ground first and most in provinces where Muslims were in a minority and could not expect to gain any advantage by the creation of Pakistan, unless they contemplated a wholesale exchange of population or hoped by some means or other to dominate even the provinces where they were a small minority with the help of an independent Pakistan Government.

It was in Bihar and the United Provinces, in neither of which provinces the population of Muslims exceeded 15 per cent of the total population, that the League propaganda was most virulent. In the Punjab the Muslim League had not yet gained grounds and the Ministry that was functioning was of the Unionist Party in which were included not only Muslims, but also Hindus and Sikhs. Individual members of the Unionist Party might have their sympathies with the Muslim League, but the Party, as such, was indifferent, if not opposed to the idea of Pakistan. In Bengal where also the Muslims had a majority, there was a tussle going on between factions of the Muslim League. In the North-West Frontier Province, which was an over-whelmingly Muslim province, a Congress Ministry which was opposed to Pakistan was functioning. In Sind the position was, more or less, the same as in Bengal, and Ministries were formed or broken on issues other than the creation of Pakistan. But there was no question of a League Ministry ever coming into existence in a province like Bihar or the United Provinces or Madras, and it was in these provinces as also in the overwhelmingly Hindu majority province of C. P. & Berar, that the Muslim League found its strongest supporters.

One of the results of the bitter propaganda carried on by the Muslim Leaguers was to rouse passions amongst the Hindus who in some places organized themselves against the Leaguers. It was not, however, expected that any very

serious incidents would take place. In 1941, when most of the Congress leaders were in prison and I was in Patna for a few days, I heard that there was some kind of dispute between the Hindus and the Muslims in the town of Bihar which is in the district of Patna. The District Magistrate who was a Musalman was aware of the dispute and had invited the leaders of both the communities to a Conference which he had asked me also to attend. The situation was discussed in an atmosphere of cordiality and I felt that the differences would be settled amicably. I accordingly left for Wardha as I was required there by Mahatma Gandhi.

But on my arrival there I learnt that serious riots had broken out not only in the town of Bihar but in adjoining villages also. I rushed back to Patna and found that two of the Secretaries of the Provincial Congress Committee, namely, Sri Mathura Prasad and Shah Muhammad Ozair Muneemi had gone to the riot-affected areas to control the situation which had become very serious. The trouble arose out of a procession which the Muslim Leaguers had organized to observe Pakistan Day. It is not necessary to go into the origin of the riots, but the fact remains that a large body of Muslims had come to the town of Bihar and trouble started when they were going back. Some Hindus were killed and some houses belonging to them were damaged. But the retaliation against the Muslims was terrible. Many were killed, and their houses looted not only in the town of Bihar, but even in some other places where there was a Muslim population. The two Congress leaders ran great risks, as they were likely to be misunderstood both by Hindus and Muslims. But they moved about in the affected area day and night calming and controlling people, giving such aid as was possible and trying to quell the disturbances. The police were also active.

As soon as I reached Patna I organized a batch of

volunteers under Prof. Abdul Bari and we spread ourselves over the affected area and the situation was brought under control. Our fear was that the poison might spread far and wide. Besides, the Musalmans, though influential otherwise, were in a minority, particularly in the villages, and they might suffer greatly, as had happened in previous Hindu-Muslim riots in the adjoining district of Shahabad in 1917. But the influence of Mahatma Gandhi was there and the situation was controlled although after some bloodshed, and I returned to Wardha just a few days later. I was asked by a Muslim friend from the Punjab who was holding a very high position in the Congress as to how it was possible to control such an ugly situation in such a short time. I explained to him that it was all due to Mahatma Gandhi's teachings. I have mentioned this incident as I had to see a much greater devastation in the same area some years later when Mahatma Gandhi's direct intervention prevented an even greater disaster.

Shortly afterwards, serious riots occurred in the district of Dacca in East Bengal. When I visited the villages which had suffered I found Hindu houses burnt in large numbers and heard reports of how Hindus who were in a minority had suffered at the hands of Muslim mobs, just as Muslims had suffered at the hands of Hindu mobs elswhere.

Sir Stafford Cripps was sent out by the British Government to find a way out of the Indian impasse. He came with a great reputation. He had been sent to Russia by the British Government after the war had commenced and had succeeded not only in keeping Russia neutral but actually in getting Russia to join the war on the side of Britain. It was hoped that he would be able to influence Indian opinion on account of the liberal views with which he was credited.

He came, and met the members of the Congress Working

Committee and Mahatma Gandhi, as also the leaders of the Muslim League and other prominent Indians. But he ultimately failed, because the British Government had not given him the free hand that was necessary to deal with the situation. Mahatma Gandhi had, at a very early stage of the negotiations, formed the opinion that they were not likely to succeed, but he left it to the Working Committee to conduct the negotiations as best they could, and went away to Wardha. It was the Working Committee which ultimately found it impossible to accept the terms offered, and had to communicate this decision to Sir Stafford Cripps. It is necessary to say this, because it has been suggested in certain quarters that it was Mahatma Gandhi's creed of non-violence which ultimately wrecked the negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps. This is far from the truth. The Working Committee was prepared to take office and to help in all possible ways in the war effort—which really meant giving up the creed of non-violence. But the British Government was not prepared to entrust power to Congressmen which alone could enthuse them and the country in favour of the war effort. The negotiations failed because what was proposed to be transferred to popular ministries was not real power, but only the shadow of it.

It became clear after the failure of the Cripps Mission that the Congress would have to take some action. The Japanese had by that time conquered practically the whole of Malaya and Burma and were almost at the gates of India. The preparations for the defence of the country by the British Government were incomplete, although big efforts were being made to rush war supplies and soldiers from America and England. We were torn by conflicting emotions as the British were not able to defend the country as it seemed then, and they were not prepared to let Indians share the responsibilities of defending it. Should India under the

circumstances submit to a conquest by the Japanese ? There were undoubtedly some Indians who would have preferred the Japanese to the British, but their number was small. The bulk of the people, knowing what the Japanese had done in China, were opposed to them, and in any case, were not prepared to prefer the unknown Japanese to the known Britisher. They all wanted independence, but could not believe that it would come by collaboration with the Japanese. The bitterness against the British, therefore, was all the greater, because it was felt that even in that time of dire distress they were not willing to trust Indians and to let them share power for defending the country. It was also felt that if India wanted to regain independence, she must be prepared to resist aggression ; and there could be no worse aggression than an invasion by the Japanese, who very well knew that India was a helpless partner in the war into which she had been dragged without her consent. It was the time when non-violence at its best could be tested as it had to tread the narrow and straight course of simultaneously resisting both aggression by the Japanese and the British policy of distrust without at the same time doing anything that would embarrass the British. There was difference amongst members of the Working Committee but not so much of opinion as of outlook and approach.

Soon after Sir Stafford Cripps' departure, the All-India Congress Committee met and endorsed the action which the Working Committee had taken. Mahatma Gandhi was not present at the meeting, but he had sent a draft resolution for its consideration. It was not acceptable to the Working Committee. I tried to alter it so as to make it acceptable to all the members of the Committee and went as far as I could, but I found that it was not acceptable to all, although there was a small majority in the Committee with me. Passing the resolution with a small majority would mean

resignation by some of the prominent members of the Committee and the taking up of the responsibility of running the Congress by those who supported it. I felt it was unwise to create a split at a stage when all were thinking of giving a fight to the British for their short-sighted policy. I, therefore, withdrew my resolution and let others pass a resolution which, though not quite satisfactory, was yet considered workable from the view-point of Mahatma Gandhi. When Mahatmaji saw the resolution as it was passed, he accepted it as it left enough scope for work on the lines he wanted.

In those days Gandhiji's writings were emitting fire and the whole country was on the tiptoe of expectancy of great things to happen. I had made up my mind to follow him without any hesitation or reservation and I toured round my province explaining the situation in speeches which were strongly worded. By nature I am a moderate and my speeches generally are couched in moderate terms, but in those days I spoke in a language which was unfamiliar to myself. It was not to embarrass the British that our whole scheme was planned, but to enable the people to resist whoever wanted to dominate India whether it be the British or the Japanese. As I have said above, the indignation was greater because the British distrusted our motives and our actions. So while on the one hand we had to rouse the people to prepare themselves for resistance, we had at the same time to keep them free from bitterness against the British. It was a most difficult task. But I believe, I was successful. The province of Bihar was once again on the point of being tested. It was only a preparation for the great movement of 1942 which followed soon.

Mahatma Gandhi ended his speech at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay which initiated the movement with the words "Do or Die". He and

other members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested that very night and taken to unknown destinations where they were kept in internment for nearly three years. I was unable to attend the meeting on account of ill-health, but was arrested at Patna a few hours later and kept in prison till the middle of June 1945. Whatever happened all over the country as a result of that exhortation of Mahatma Gandhi, happened when we were all in prison and had neither the opportunity of taking any part in the movement, nor even of seeing anything of it. But the country as a whole gave good account of itself. Bihar, in particular, was considered by many outside the province to be at the top.

Many things did happen, no doubt, which perhaps could have been prevented. But considering the bitterness and the indignation that prevailed, the loss of life on the side of the Government was practically negligible, while on the side of the people at the hands of Government agents it was tremendous. One special feature of this movement was interruption of all communications. This was most widespread and effective. In Bihar, for weeks trains did not run, telegraph and post offices did not function and British rule became confined to district towns in a great part of the province. Railway lines and telegraph wires were torn up, railway stations damaged and Police Stations actually taken possession of by the people in many districts of Bihar and the eastern part of the United Provinces. If the Government at the time were not possessed of large military forces and equipments collected for the purpose of defence against the Japanese, it would not have been possible for them to restore communications and to re-establish order for a long time. But even as it was, this condition continued for many weeks and it was only when the Military were employed with all their wartime resources that gradually normal conditions could be restored after months.

All this happened when there was no leader or worker who commanded influence left outside the prison walls to conduct, guide and control the movement. It is true that a few soldiers and a few policemen were killed here and there and it is not necessary to defend the action of the exasperated people by stating that there were great provocations in all such cases. But considering, as I have stated above, the vastness of the movement, it may fairly be declared that it remained on the whole a non-violent movement so far as injury to human life and person was concerned.

It became clear to the British that it was not possible to hold India any longer under the British bayonet. It was only a question of time when they would not only declare it publicly, but also act according to it. We waited in patience behind the prison bars.

XXIV

Mahatma Gandhi was released some months earlier than the members of the Congress Working Committee after he had lost his life-companion Kasturba Gandhi while she was interned with him in the Aga Khan palace. When it appeared that the war was approaching its end, the British Government thought it necessary to reopen negotiations with the Congress. As a first step Lord Linlithgow, who had been the Viceroy for a longer period than the usual term of five years on account of the war, was replaced by Lord Wavell. In June 1945, all the members of the Working Committee were released and a Conference was held to which Premiers of provinces where ministries were functioning and ex-Premiers who had resigned on account of the Congress

resolution in 1939, were invited. This Conference which met in July 1945 at Simla failed.

Soon after, there was a general election in England and the Labour Party came into power. That party had long been committed to granting freedom to India. It took stock of the situation and sent out three of its Ministers—Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. Alexander—to negotiate with Indian Parties and bring about a solution of the Indian problem. There were people in India who did not trust the British Government and who did not like the idea of Congress participating in the Conference convened by Lord Wavell or in the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission which visited India in 1946 and remained here for some months. But Mahatma Gandhi instinctively saw that the British could not but have some sort of settlement with India. In spite of the bitterness that had been left behind by the repressive measures adopted by them from 1942 to 1945, he directed all his energies and great influence towards finding a way out and bringing about an honourable settlement not only between India and England but also between the Congress and the Muslim League. He failed so far as the Muslim League was concerned. But the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission succeeded and bore fruit in that a Constituent Assembly was elected and entrusted with the work of framing a Constitution, and a Cabinet consisting of representatives of the Congress and of the League emerged in the last quarter of 1946, the League joining it some time later than the Congress. Within the Cabinet there were thus two distinct parties—the Congress and the Muslim League—with Lord Wavell as the arbiter between them. It was a most difficult situation and events happened which made it still more difficult.

Just a few days before the Congress took office, severe

and extensive riots started in Calcutta. A day of protest was being observed there by the Muslim Leaguers, and taking advantage of their own preparations and the fact that there was a Muslim League Ministry in office which could be expected not to interfere, Muslim mobs started rioting on an extensive scale. Many Hindus were murdered, houses were looted and burnt, and the 'great killing' continued for two or three days. The Hindus finding themselves helpless and unable to secure Government protection, organized themselves and began to resist. It is said that actually they suffered immensely in the beginning, but the retaliation which they indulged in later on was quite effective and Muslims also suffered so far as human life was concerned. The Government of India was unable to do anything to prevent the havoc or to give protection when once the riots had started. The riots ended practically out of sheer exhaustion on the part of the parties concerned. Later on when a Committee was appointed under the chairmanship of the Chief Justice of the Federal Court to enquire into the riots, evidence was led which did no credit to the Government of Bengal, but the Committee never made a report and so its finding remained a matter of speculation.

During the riots many Hindus from Bihar who were in Calcutta suffered immensely at the hands of Muslim rioters. Calcutta is a cosmopolitan city and there is a very large element of Biharis in its population. They are, generally speaking, poor people belonging very largely to what would be called the labouring classes, who have gone there to earn a living; but they are sturdy and strong. Many of them were killed and many had to flee for their lives to their homes in Bihar. They carried with them stories of the horrors that had been committed on them and on the Hindus generally by the Musalmans in Calcutta and there was great indignation in the villages of Bihar to

which these people had returned from Calcutta.

Because the Musalmans had to some extent been frustrated in Calcutta on account of the resistance which the Hindus latterly offered, another series of riots was started by them in East Bengal in the district of Noakhali and the adjoining areas where the Hindus constituted a small minority and the Musalmans were in an overwhelming majority. The riots spread over a big area and, although it was found later that the number of deaths reported was exaggerated, there is no doubt that in this area the Hindus suffered immensely and many embraced Islam just to save themselves. The reports of these atrocities also gradually spread into Bihar, because there was not an inconsiderable element of Bihari Hindus even in the eastern districts of Bengal where they migrate annually to earn a living.

Mahatma Gandhi was very much upset by these happenings. He went to Noakhali to plead with the Muslims and to console the Hindus. It was just about this time that serious riots started in Bihar. This time it fell to the lot of the Muslims who constituted a small minority to suffer at the hands of the Hindus. The riots spread over a pretty large area and covered great parts of the district of Patna and the adjoining districts of Monghyr and Gaya. On the north of the Ganga there was some trouble in the district of Saran. The Congress had accepted office in the Central Government and the Muslim League had also just joined the Cabinet. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and some of the Muslim members of the Cabinet had gone to Calcutta with a view to restore calm. The riots in Bihar started just when they were on their way back and they stopped at Patna to deal with the situation there. Hearing of the serious happenings I also rushed from Delhi to Patna. We all began to visit the affected areas while the Military had been called and were moving about restoring order.

Lord Wavell also visited Patna while we were still there.

Mahatma Gandhi heard about the happenings in Bihar. In view of the love the people of the province, particularly the Hindus bore to him, he sent out an appeal asking them to desist. He followed up the appeal with a declaration that he would go on fast if the riots did not stop immediately and as a first step he announced that he had reduced his food already. As soon as this news was broadcast and the people informed of the serious step which the Mahatma contemplated on account of their misbehaviour, the people of Bihar rose to the occasion and the riots stopped as it were at the waving of his magic wand. But even during those three or four days that the riots lasted enough damage had been done and Musalmans had suffered very greatly. It is true that the Military were fanning themselves out so as to cover the whole of the affected area and restore order. but it cannot be denied that it was the Mahatma's appeal, followed by his threat of fasting, which immediately brought the situation completely under control. It would not have been possible to do this otherwise. He stayed on for some time longer in Noakhali in spite of the pressure of the Muslim press that his business was not in Noakhali but in Bihar. His presence in Noakhali had heartened the Hindus ; many of them who had renounced their faith to save their lives returned to it and on the whole confidence was restored among them. From there he came to Bihar where he spent some months engaging himself in the relief and rehabilitation of Muslim sufferers.

His work both in Noakhali and in Bihar was similar. In one case it was the Hindus who were to be rehabilitated, in the other it was the Muslims. In Bihar he got the support of the people who were mainly Hindus as also of the Provincial Government, in the work which he had under-

taken and he was thus able to conduct it without obstruction. He had to leave the work at Noakhali incomplete in the hands of co-workers who are still there and carrying on in spite of various kinds of difficulties which they have to experience.

In spite of all his services to the Muslims which he had rendered ever since 1920-21, when he not only threw himself whole-heartedly into the Khilafat movement but also practically brought the Congress and the Hindu community to the aid of the Muslims, he was latterly regarded by many Musalmans as an enemy. Some did not hesitate to describe him as Enemy No. 1. His work in Noakhali and in Bihar was as much for the benefit of the Hindus as of the Muslims as he felt that good treatment, kindness and generosity on the part of the members of one community could not go without evoking response from the members of the other community. He went to Noakhali not because the sufferers were Hindus, but because they were sufferers, just as he went to Bihar not because the sufferers were Muslims, but because they were sufferers. He was, however, misunderstood and misinterpreted. His motives were questioned and he was maligned by some of the tallest amongst the Muslims.

His faith and his influence were tested once again when partition of the country was accepted by the Congress and the Muslim League and was followed by horrors on a scale unsurpassed in modern Indian history. He came to Delhi on the insistence of our Prime Minister at the time when the actual partition was going on. He disapproved of the partition but he reconciled himself to it, although he was never free from misgivings about its result. He had gone to Calcutta just on the eve of the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan on 15th August 1947. There, on the basis of the division, a Congress Ministry had begun to function for some weeks and Hindus, who had been smarting for a year under the sufferings which had been inflicted on them

during the 'great killing' in Calcutta in August 1946, were in a mood to retaliate on the Muslims. Another 'great killing' could easily have happened, had not Mahatma Gandhi been present in Calcutta at the time. What would have easily developed into mass killing was nipped in the bud by his great influence, and Muslims who would have been the worst sufferers were saved. This was rightly described by all as a miracle.

When news about the terrible happenings in Western Pakistan against the Hindus and the Sikhs just following the attainment of independence on 15th August 1947, and the retaliation which had been started in Eastern Punjab and in Delhi reached him, he rushed to Delhi and pitched his whole might against the forces of destruction which were having full play and causing havoc all round. The Provinces of Western Punjab, North-Western Frontier, Baluchistan and very largely Sind were completely freed from Hindus and Sikhs who were forced out of their homes and their lands and had to flee the country which their ancestors had inhabited for unknown generations, leaving everything behind, just to save their lives in India. A similar thing would have happened to the great bulk of the Muslim population all over India who would have been forced to flee to Pakistan for their lives, with immensely greater sufferings to them on account of the very much greater distances they would have to trek and traverse. But a miracle was performed and crores of Muslims remained behind in India and did not share the fate which the Hindus and Sikhs of Western Pakistan had to face. All this was due to the magic influence of the Mahatma under whose inspiration the Government of India, under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, worked hard and fought the forces of disorder and destruction and gave protection to the Muslims. The whole of Eastern Punjab and some of the Indian states adjoining it, however, were freed from Muslims and only

Sikh and Hindu population remained. It is calculated that some 50 to 60 lakhs of Hindus and Sikhs and an equal number of Muslims shifted from Western Pakistan to India and from India to Western Pakistan respectively.

It was only after this heroic act of saving the Muslims in India that many Musalmans who had regarded him as an enemy, and Enemy No. 1 too, revised their opinion and began to look upon him as a true friend of the Muslims who had helped them at tremendous risk to himself. Some fanatical Hindus who could not appreciate his philosophy did not excuse him for this and actually murdered him some months later (30th Jan. 1948) because he had been an instrument in saving Muslims. It was not till after his death that Musalmans recognized in him a martyr who had lost his life for their sake.

His death in the circumstances was not less glorious than his life. One can only hope that the country and the community which had given him birth will follow the path of truth and non-violence which had enabled them to win independence and which more than anything else must be depended upon ultimately to restore and maintain good relations between the Hindus and the Musalmans and all the other communities, big or small, that inhabit this country. The world needs his guidance today more than ever before, and it is for the people of India to prove themselves worthy of the rich legacy which he has left behind by adapting their individual and social life to his message.

XXV

Bihar has a large element in its population of what are known as 'Aboriginal Tribes'. They are concentrated in the five districts of Chota Nagpur and in the district of Santal Parganas, in some of which they constitute the majority of the population. Their total population is round about 50,00,000. They belong to various tribes, such as Moonda, Oraon, Ho, Kheria, Pahadia, etc. Their languages also differ from one another. There has been a great deal of absorption going on of these people by the Hindu society and there is no doubt that many who are no longer treated as belonging to a tribe, did originally come from one. But in spite of this process, there is still a big population which is in many respects distinct from the rest of the people of the province. They have their own customs, modes of worship, dress and way of living which distinguish them from others. They live largely in the hilly and jungly parts and the main source of their livelihood is agriculture. Many of them, however, now go out in search of work to coal-fields, to the gardens and some even to factories, where their work is considered quite satisfactory. They are simple in habits and particularly those living in remote parts are not at all sophisticated. They love freedom and are known to have revolted against the British on more than one occasion.

Christian missionaries have worked among them for a long time and have succeeded in converting nearly two to three lacs to Christianity. All those who have embraced Christianity have had the advantage of education imparted to them by Christian missions which have also provided relief of suffering by establishing dispensaries and hospitals in several places. Educational institutions run by the missions have been spread amongst them for many years. Those that got baptized changed to some extent in their mode

of living and dress also. Education made them different from the uneducated 'Adiwasis' in many respects. The aboriginals also have dealings with the non-aboriginal people that inhabit those parts. The latter have not hesitated to exploit the ignorance and simplicity of the aboriginals, and laws have had to be enacted to give them protection from the exploitation of money-lenders and land grabbers.

Mahatma Gandhi's movement did not fail to reach them and to affect a great many among them. They have a sect known as 'Tana Bhagats' who observe non-violence in life and they were particularly influenced by the movement of 1921. It appealed to them because it coincided with their own view of things on account of its non-violence and the non-co-operation programme was something with which they were familiar—having had to resort to it in their own way in cases of oppression by others. But in their simplicity they carried things to extremes. Thus, for example, they carried the idea of non-violence to the extent of abjuring eating anything red, because blood was red. When they heard that a Mahatma had arisen and was asking people to stick to non-violence, they felt that rearing goats, which would ultimately go to the slaughter-house, was against the creed of non-violence and, therefore, drove all their goats from their homes to the jungles and abandoned them not knowing that there they would become victims to wild animals and to men who were even wilder. These goats were captured in large numbers by people who trade in them and sold to butchers. The result was that these people lost their money without being able to save the goats. They gave up eating red chillies, because they looked red. The song which they sang had a refrain that even an ant has life just as a man has, and so should not be hurt. They became such ardent non-co-operators that many stopped paying rent for the lands which they cultivated even before any

no-rent campaign was sanctioned by the Congress and many of them lost their lands which were sold on account of arrears of rent. They attended the meetings of the Congress Committees and particularly of the Congress, in large numbers. They came to the Gaya Congress—some four or five hundred in number. Their presence did not create any problem, because they brought with them rice and earthen pots as also fuel-wood and all that they wanted was some place under a tree where they could sleep at night. They used to walk in large batches all the way from their homes to the place where the Congress was held. They took part in all the civil disobedience movements and were imprisoned in large numbers in all the movements. Many of them even died in jails. But they never succumbed either to terror or temptation and proved a very valuable asset to the Congress organization during the period of struggle. It is something that the lands which they lost on account of non-payment of rent or for realization of fines during the recent movements have been restored to them.

The name of Mahatma Gandhi acts as a charm amongst large sections among them. This story would have remained incomplete without acknowledging how true, faithful and loyal they have proved all these years.

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[*Continued from front flap*]

relief work organized by him under the Mahatma's guidance.

How in spite of his lifelong efforts to promote Hindu-Muslim concord Gandhiji was regarded by many Musalmans as an enemy, and Enemy No.1 too, and how it was only during the last phase of his life ending with his assassination at the hands of a fanatical Hindu that they came to recognize him as a true friend, is narrated here in vivid detail.

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