

SIGNIFICANCE OF 'PURNA' SWARAJ?

NON-VIOLENCE CREED IN PRACTICE

In last week's issue of 'Young India' the following letter from "a fair friend" is published:—

"We are out to win independence by non-violent means. I wonder how we are going to do it. Non-violent means solid preparation without violence. Where is that preparation? And we are incapable of organising a violent revolution. The prospect is as dark as ever. And how does the substitution of the word 'independence' for 'Swaraj' help us any further? To make matters worse the word 'independence' has been translated to mean 'Purna Swaraj'. Frankly this vernacular word stinks in my nostrils. What was there wanting about the beautifully perfect word 'Swaraj' which connotes something more than the word 'independence' can ever do? The prefixing of the adjective 'Purna' is nothing short of violence on the word Swaraj. Two years ago in an article entitled 'Independence' v. 'Swaraj' you yourself said: 'I defy any one to give for independence a common Indian word intelligible to the masses. Our goal at any rate may be known by an indigenous word understood of the three hundred millions. And we have such a word in Swaraj first used in the name of the nation by Dadabhai Naoroji.' That I believe clinches the matter. We should not have disturbed the sacred word 'Swaraj,' sacred both because of its vast implications and wonderful associations, a word which was used by Dadabhai Naoroji and clung to as a rich legacy by Lokamanya, Deshabandhu and yourself."

GANDHIJI'S EXPLANATION

Gandhiji replies thus:—

This letter raises two questions. I shall take the last first. To qualify 'Swaraj' is no doubt doing violence to art. The writer's logic is also irresistible. But very often in national and similar complex matters logic and art have apparently to be sacrificed. In substance that which carries out a good intention is both true logic and true art. 'Swaraj' in the Congress constitution was given a double meaning, it could be within the Empire if possible, without if necessary. A word or an expression had therefore to be found in order to connote the last meaning only. We could not do without the word 'Swaraj.' Hence the expedience of 'Purna Swaraj.' I admit that it does not sound well to the ear. But if it carries out the nation's meaning as it does, it will presently sound well. We could not have managed with a dubious word.

The second question is more difficult to dispose of. But attainment of Swaraj means conquest over all difficulties. Non-violence or rather non-violent men are on their trial. They have to find out the best method of offering battle in spite of the violent atmosphere surrounding them. Non-violence is not of much consequence if it can flourish only in a congenial atmosphere. It is not then non-violence. It may easily be fear of being hurt. But my reading of the national temper is somewhat different from the friend's. Dissensions and squabbles do not affect those who have ultimately to take part in the struggle. The latter will instinctively react to active non-violence. But whether they do or not, the party of non-violence must now use up all its resources. There can be no more waiting without its creed being laughed at or itself being thoroughly and rightly discredited. If it cannot act, it must own its incapacity and retire from the field of battle.