# CHAPTER XIV

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Gandhi never despaired of the worst reprobate. During the

South African struggle, Gandhi learned that one of his close

Indian associates was a government informer. Later the

man openly opposed Gandhi, yet when he became ill and impe¬

cunious Gandhi visited him and gave him financial aid. In time,

the backslider repented.

It was not easy for Gandhi to hold his followers. Government

punitive measures caused many Satyagrahis to abandon the

movement. Some resisters were deported to India with loss of

property. Satyagraha put even the strongest character to a

withering test. At one time, of the thirteen thousand Indians in the

Transvaal, twenty-five hundred were in jail and six thousand had

fled the province. Only as self-abnegating, high-minded, deter¬

mined and indefatigable a leader as Gandhi could have kept the

movement alive. The worst setbacks did not shake his faith in

victory. This faith, plus the fact that in and out of jail he shared

his followers’ hardships and thereby won their love, was the bind¬

ing cement of the loyal band which at times dwindled alarmingly.

Some resisters served five prison terms in quick succession, court¬

ing a new sentence the moment they finished the old one. They

merely left the Transvaal for Natal and immediately crossed into the

Transvaal again. That, under the immigration ban, was their crime.

Presently, a bigger danger loomed: a federal Union of South

Africa was projected; it might, probably would, enact anti-Indian

legislation like that of the Transvaal. Gandhi decided to lobby

in London. Generals Botha and Smuts were already there making

arrangements for the creation of the Union.

Gandhi always set his sights high. This time he won the active

support of Lord Ampthill, former Governor of Madras and acting

Viceroy of India in 1904. From his arrival in England on July

10th, 1909, until his return to South Africa in November, Gandhi

met editors, M.P.s, officials and private citizens of all races; his

fervour fascinated and infected many of them.

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Liberal Englishmen regretted overt colour discrimination in

an empire overwhelmingly non-white. Imperialistic Englishmen

were concerned with the effects of South African and anti-Indian

legislation on India. While Gandhi worked in England, Henry

Polak was in India explaining the Transvaal situation and stirring

protests which echoed in Whitehall. The British government in

London tried to reconcile the differences between Smuts and

Gandhi; but the general yielded too little. Smuts was ready to

repeal the compulsory registration act and permit the immigration

into the Transvaal of a limited number of English-speaking,

educated, professional Indians to serve the Indian community.

Gandhi, however, asked for the removal of the ‘badge of inferior¬

ity’ and the ‘implied racial taint’; he wanted ‘legal or theoretical

equality in respect of immigration’. Small material concessions

neither impressed nor mollified him. When, therefore, Lord

Crewe, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, informed

Gandhi in writing that ‘Mr. Smuts was unable to accept the

claim that Asiatics should be placed in a position of equality with

Europeans in respect of right of entry or otherwise’, the militant

barrister, admitting defeat in diplomatic negotiation, foresaw a

renewal of civil disobedience.

Gandhi’s trip to England nevertheless made the South African

Indian question a major imperial concern. Therein lay a seed of

ultimate triumph in South Africa.

Moreover, and apparently for the first time, Gandhi began,

during his London sojourn, to connect himself with the problem

of India’s independence. In England he sought out Indians of all

shades of political belief: nationalists, Home-Rulers, anarchists

and advocates of assassination. While he debated with them far

into many nights, his own political views and philosophy were

taking shape. Some of the tenets which later formed the tissue of

the Mahatma’s creed found their first expression in a letter

addressed to Lord Ampthill by Gandhi on October gth, 1909,

from Westminster Palace Hotel.

Judging by the Indians in England, Gandhi wrote, impatience

with British rule was widespread in India as was Indian hatred of

the British. Partisans of violence were gaining ground. Against

this, repression would be futile. Yet he feared that ‘the British

rulers will not give liberally and in time. The British people seem

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to be obsessed by the demon of commercial selfishness. The fault

is not of men but of the system . . . India is exploited in the

interests of foreign capitalists. The true remedy lies, in my humble

opinion, in England discarding modern civilization . . . which is a

negation of the spirit of Christianity’. One hears Tolstoy’s gentle

voice here and echoes, too, of the raucous voices of Indian

students in Bloomsbury.

‘But this is a large order,’ Gandhi admits. ‘The railways,

machineries and the corresponding increase of indulgent habits

are the true badge of slavery of the Indian people, as they are of

Europeans. I therefore have no quarrel with the rulers. I have

every quarrel with their methods ... To me the rise of cities like

Calcutta and Bombay is a matter of sorrow rather than con¬

gratulations. India has lost in having broken up a part of her

village system.

‘Holding these views,’ Gandhi continues, prophetically though

unconsciously enunciating the programme of his entire career in

India, ‘I share the National spirit, but I totally dissent from the

methods, whether of the extremists or of the moderates, for either

party relies on violence ultimately. Violent methods must mean

an acceptance of modern civilization and therefore of the same

ruinous competition we notice here and the consequent destruc¬

tion of morality. I should be uninterested in the fact as to who

rules. I should expect rulers to rule according to my wish, other¬

wise I cease to help them to rule me. I become a passive resister

against them.’

Long before Gandhi had any warrant to regard himself as a

factor or leader in the liberation of India he knew, and indicated

in this letter to Ampthill, that his aim Was not merely substitution

of Indian rule for British rule. Not governments but methods and

objectives interested him, not whether a William or a Chandra

sat in the seat of power but whose deeds were more civilized.

This is what distinguished Gandhi from other politicians. The

argument — Was Gandhi a saint or politician? — is endless yet

barren. Polak quotes Gandhi as having said in South Africa,

‘Men say I am a saint losing myself in politics. The fact is that I

am a politician trying my hardest to be a saint.’ The important

fact is that in politics Gandhi always cleaved to religious and moral

considerations and as a saint he never thought his place was in a

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cave or cloister but rather in the hurly-burly of the popular

struggle for rights and right. Gandhi’s religion cannot be divorced

from his politics. His religion made him political. His politics

were religious.

When Gandhi returned from England to South Africa at the

end of 1909, political necessity forced him to establish ‘a sort of

co-operative commonwealth’ on a diminutive scale where civil

resisters ‘would be trained to live a new and simple life in harmony

with one another’. There he took further steps towards sainthood,

mahatma-ship, and Gita detachment.

Previously, when Satyagrahis were imprisoned, the organiza¬

tion attempted to support their dependants in their accustomed

style of living. This led to inequality and sometimes to fraud.

Gandhi consequently decided that the movement needed a rural

commune for civil resisters and their familes. Phoenix Farm was

thirty hours by train and hence too remote from the epicentre of

the Transvaal struggle.

Accordingly, Herman Kallenbach bought 1100 acres of land at

Lawley, twenty-one miles outside Johannesburg and, on May 30th,

1910, gave it to the Satyagrahis free of any rent or charge. Here

religion was wed to politics. Gandhi called it The Tolstoy Farm.

The farm had over a thousand orange, apricot and plum trees,

two wells, a spring and one house. Additional houses were built

of corrugated iron. Gandhi and his family came to live on the

farm and so did Kallenbach.

‘I prepare the bread that is required on the farm,’ Gandhi

wrote to a friend in India. ‘The general opinion about it is that it

is well made. We put in no yeast and no baking powder. We

grind our own wheat. We have just prepared some marmalade

from the oranges grown on the farm. I have also learned how to

prepare caramel coffee. It can be given as a beverage even to

babies. The passive resisters on the farm have given up the use of

tea and coffee, and taken to caramel coffee prepared on the farm.

It is made from wheat which is first baked in a certain way and

then ground. We intend to sell our surplus production of the

above three articles to the public later on. Just at present, we are

working as labourers on the construction work . . .’ There were

no servants.

Gandhi was baker and caramel and marmalade maker and much

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more besides. Kallenbach went to stay in a Trappist monastery

for German Catholic monks to master the art of sandal making.

This he then taught to Gandhi who taught it to others. Surplus

sandals were sold to friends. As an architect, Kallenbach knew

something of carpentry and headed that department. Gandhi

learned to make cabinets, chests of drawers and school benches.

But they had no chairs and no beds; everybody slept on the ground

and, except in inclement weather, in the open. Each person got

two blankets and a wooden pillow. Gandhi likewise sewed jackets

for his wife and he later boasted that she wore them.

Gandhi was general manager. The population of the farm,

which varied with arrests and other circumstances, consisted

originally of forty young men, three old men, five women and

between twenty and thirty children, of whom five were girls.

There were Hindus, Moslems, Christians and Parsis among them,

vegetarians and meat-eaters, smokers and non-smokers and they

spoke Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, etc. As if these conditions did

not create enough problems, Gandhi created some more.

Smoking and alcohol drinking were strictly prohibited. Resi¬

dents could have meat if they wished but, after a little propaganda

from the general manager, none ever asked for it. Gandhi assisted

in the cookhouse and kept the women there from quarrelling.

He also supervised the sanitation, which was primitive, and

taught people not to spit. ‘Leaving nightsoil, cleaning the nose, or

spitting on the road is a sin against God and humanity,’ he told

the community.

Occasionally, Kallenbach had business in town and Gandhi

still had legal cases. The rule was that if you went on an errand

or shopping trip for the commune you could travel by train, third

class; but if the journey was private or for fun (children liked to

go on picnics to Johannesburg) you had to walk and, for economy,

take dry refreshments with you. Gandhi frequently walked the

twenty-one miles to the city, starting at 2 a.m. and returning

the same night. He said it did them all a lot of good. One day,

he recalls, ‘I walked fifty miles on foot.’

Gandhi attributed his physical stamina and that of the other

communards to pure living and healthy diet. Breakfast was at

7, lunch at ii, dinner at 5.30, prayers at 7.30, bedtime at 9. All

meals were light. But to make them lighter still, Gandhi and

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Kallenbach resolved to avoid cooked food and limit themselves to

a ‘fruitarian’ menu of bananas, dates, lemons, peanuts, oranges

and olive oil. Gandhi had read somewhere of the cruelties

practised in India to make cows and water buffaloes yield the

maximum in milk. So he and Kallenbach dispensed with milk.

Kallenbach, who owned a beautiful and spacious house on a hill¬

top above Johannesburg, and who always had lived in luxury,

shared every deprivation, chore and dietary experiment on the

farm. He also divided with Gandhi the task of teaching the

children religion, geography, history, arithmetic, etc., and very

rudimentary it all was.

Gandhi’s ideas on co-education were unconventional. He

encouraged boys and girls, some of them adolescents, to bathe at

the spring at the same time. For the girls’ safety, he was always

present and ‘My eyes followed the girls as a mother’s eye follows

a daughter.’ No doubt, the boys’ eyes did likewise and less

innocently. At night, everybody slept on an open veranda and

the young folks grouped their sleeping places around Gandhi.

Beds were only three feet apart. But Gandhi said the young folks

knew he loved them ‘with a mother’s love’, and hadn’t he ex¬

plained the duty of self-restraint to them?

After an incident involving two girls, he searched for a method

‘to sterilize the sinner’s eye’ of males. The quest kept him awake

all night, but in the morning he had it: he summoned the girls

and suggested that they shave their heads. They were shocked,

but he had an irresistible way and finally they consented. He

himself did the cutting.

Years later, Gandhi explained this innocence by ignorance, but

he did not explain why he should have been ignorant. He

dispelled some of the mystery by adding that his ‘faith and courage

were at their highest in Tolstoy Farm’. Boundless faith in human

beings sometimes blinded him to their faults. It was the sort of

blindness which blots out obstacles and thus leads to brave

ventures. He measured other people’s capacities by his own.

This often spurred them to unwonted effort. It was good peda¬

gogy if it worked; it worked better with adults and little children

than with adolescents.

In October 1912, Krishna Gopal Gokhale, Professor of English

and Economics, President of the Servants of India Society in India,

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came to South Africa for a month in order to assess the Indian

community’s condition and assist Gandhi in ameliorating it.

Gokhale and Lokamanya Tilak were Gandhi’s forerunners in

pre-Gandhian India. Gokhale was a revered leader of the Indian

Nationalist movement, a brilliant intellectual and an impressive

person. Gandhi acknowledged him an excellent judge of char¬

acter. In South Africa, Gokhale once said to Gandhi, ‘You will

always have your own way. And there is no help for me as I am

here at your mercy.’ The dictum was spoken in friendship and in

earnest.

Gandhi’s selflessness fortified his assurance. Certain in his

heart that he sought neither material gain, nor power, nor praise,

he had none of the guilty and deterring feeling which might have

prevented him from insisting on his point of view. Sure he was

right, he was sure of victory. Then why yield? When Gokhale

asked for a list of the really reliable civil resisters, Gandhi wrote

down sixty-six names. That was maximum. The number,

however, might sink to sixteen. This was Gandhi’s ‘army of

peace’. Yet he never flinched; the Government would surrender.

Gokhale’s tour was a triumphal procession through South

Africa. Gandhi was always by his side. In Cape Town, where

Gokhale landed, the Schreiners welcomed him, and Europeans as

well as Indians attended his big public meeting. From the Trans¬

vaal frontier to Johannesburg he travelled by special train. At

every town he stopped for a meeting over which the local mayor

presided. The principal railway stations had been decorated by

Indians. At the Park Terminus in Johannesburg a large orna¬

mental arch designed by Kallenbach was erected. During his

stay in Johannesburg Gokhale had the use of the mayor’s car.

At Pretoria, capital of the Transvaal, the Government entertained

him.

The South African authorities wanted Gokhale to carry back a

good impression to India.

After making many speeches and talking to many Indians and

whites, Gokhale had a two-hour interview with Generals Botha

and Smuts, the heads, now, of the Union government. Gandhi,

of his own accord, absented himself; he was a controversial figure

who might spoil the atmosphere.

When Gokhale came back from the interview, he reported that

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the racial bar in the Immigration Act would be removed together

with the three-pound annual tax collected from indentured

labourers who remained in South Africa but did not continue

their indenture.

T doubt it very much/ Gandhi retorted. ‘You do not know the

Ministers as I do. 5

‘What I have told you is bound to come to pass/ Gokhale cried.

‘General Botha promised me that the Black Act would be repealed

and the three-pound tax abolished. You must return to India

within twelve months and I will not have any of your excuses.\*

Gandhi was glad of the Government’s promise; it proved the

justice of the Indian cause. But he did not think his job in the

Union of South Africa would be completed before many more

Indians, and he too, had again gone to prison.

At Gokhale’s request, GaUdhi and Kallenbach took the steamer

with him as far as Zanzibar in Tanganyika. On board, Gokhale

talked at length about Indian politics, economics, superstitions,

problems. He was introducing Gandhi to the future. Then Gok¬

hale sailed on to India, and Gandhi and Kallenbach returned to

Natal for the final struggle.

Addressing an assembly in Bombay Town Hall in December

1912, Gokhale said, ‘Gandhi has in him the marvellous spiritual

power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs.’

Gokhale, who looked critically at Gandhi and sometimes rebuked

him, added that in Gandhi’s presence one is ‘ashamed to do

anything unworthy’, indeed one is ‘afraid of thinking anything

unworthy’.

Gandhi proved this to the hilt in the final chapter of the South

Africa epic.

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