# CHAPTER III

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I A R R i v e d at the New Delhi airport on June 25th, 1946, and

drove to the Imperial Hotel. I was tired from the flight from

Cairo; 1 needed a bath and shave. But I had an uncontrollable

impulse to see Gandhi immediately. My first act in India, I felt,

should be to have a word with Gandhi. So instead of making

sure I had a room in the hotel, I left my luggage in the lobby

and took a taxi to Gandhi’s little stone hut in the Harijan

colony.

He was at his evening prayer meeting in an open space outside

the hut. Approximately a thousand persons were at the services.

Gandhi in loincloth, a moist white pad on his head, his feet on

his thighs, sat in the centre of a large elevated wooden platform

with several disciples. His eyes were closed. Occasionally he

opened them and beat time with his hands to the singing. On

the ground, in front of the platform, sat the women worshippers;

behind them the men. The curious stood around on the periphery

of the congregation. The Indian and foreign correspondents

were there, also Mrdula Sarabhai, Nehru and Lady Cripps.

I posted myself at the foot of the three wooden steps where

Gandhi would descend from the prayer platform. ‘Ah, there you

are,’ he said; ‘well, I have not grown better-looking in these

four years.’

‘I would not dare to differ with you,’ I replied. He threw back

his head and laughed. Taking me by the elbow, he walked to¬

wards his hut; he asked about my trip, my health and my family.

Then, probably sensing that I would like to stay for a talk, he

said, ‘Lady Cripps is here to see me. Will you walk with me to¬

morrow morning?’

Later that evening I went to the house of Abul Kalam Azad,

the Congress president, for dinner with him, Nehru, Mr. Asaf Ali

and other members of the Congress Working Committee. They

seemed tense, and listened with special attention to the govern¬

ment news broadcast. Earlier that day, Congress had finally

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communicated its decisions to the Cabinet Mission and Wavell,

but no public announcement had yet been made.

The Working Committee had decided, I learned, to accept the

British plan for the future constitution of India but not to partici¬

pate in the provisional government.

The next morning I was up early enough to sip a cup of luke¬

warm black tea and eat a banana and find a taxi which brought

me to Gandhi’s hut at 5.30. We walked for half an hour. He

talked most of the time about the negotiations with the Cabinet

Mission.

I lunched with Patel and Rajagopalachari in Birla House, talked

for an hour in the same mansion with Miss Slade, and spent the

evening with Patel.

The following day, June 27th, I went to Gandhi again at

5.30 a.m. and walked with him for thirty minutes. Sir Stafford

and Lady Cripps received me at 9.30 for a friendly andjielpful

interview. I kept the taxi because I had an appointment with

Jinnah for 1 0.30.

After going a short distance, the taxi coughed and coughed and

stood still. The Sikh driver tinkered under the bonnet, but as the

time of my meeting with Jinnah drew near I became increasingly

alarmed and finally, after trying in vain to persuade the chauffeur

of a government car to earn some extra money, hired a tonga.

Hunger had apparently made the horse unresponsive to whips

and oaths and I arrived at Jinnah’s house thirty-five minutes late.

I was admitted into his study after a short wait. I offered profuse

apologies, explained that my taxi had broken down, that no other

taxi was available, that the tonga was slow and that I loathed

being unpunctual. He said frigidly, T trust you are not hurt.’ I

said it was not that kind of breakdown; the mechanism had simply

refused to function. He was sympathetic but formal and continued

to talk about the incident.

When I could disentangle myself from the discussion of taxi

and tonga I remarked, Tt seems India is about to become

independent.’

He did not answer. He did not say anything. He pulled in his

chin, looked sternly at me, stood up, extended his hand and said,

‘I will have to go now.’

I once more apologized for keeping him waiting, I had not

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reckoned with the taxi difficulty and could I see him another day

in New Delhi? No, he would be busy. He was going to Bombay

and I would soon be in Bombay; could I see him there? No, he

would be too busy. He had by this time brought me to the door.

I shall never know whether he was offended by my being late or

by my statement on the imminence of India’s freedom.

Over the week-end, I absorbed as much as possible about the

political situation. Patel’s sharp mind was my best help. On

Monday, July ist, I flew to Bombay and on Tuesday evening I

commenced a three-day sojourn at Dr. Dinshah Mehta’s nature-

cure clinic in Poona where Gandhi was staying. Part of the time,

Nehru was there.

I travelled with Gandhi to Bombay on July 5th and spent the

6th and 7th at the sessions of the All-India Congress Committee

which debated the Working Committee’s decisions on the Cabinet

Mission plan and listened to the Mahatma on the subject.

Later that month I toured Maharashtra with Jaiprakash

Narayan, the Socialist leader, and arrived at Panchgani, in the

rain-soaked hills, on July 16th, for a forty-eight-hour visit to Gandhi.

Gandhi did not seem to have aged since 1942; his stride was not

as long and lusty, but walking did not tire him nor did days of

interviews. He was in almost constant good humour.

At the beginning of my first morning stroll with him in New

Delhi he asked about the rumours of war with Russia. I said

there was a good deal of talk about war but perhaps it was only

talk. ‘You should turn your attention to the West,’ I added.

‘I?’ he replied. ‘I have not convinced India. There is violence

all around us. I am a spent bullet.’

Since the end of the second World War, I suggested, many

Europeans and Americans were conscious of a spiritual emptiness.

He might fill a corner of it. India needs material goods and

perhaps had the illusion that they brought happiness. We had

the material goods but knew they did not bring happiness. The

West was groping for a solution.

‘But I am an Asiatic,’ he commented. ‘A mere Asiatic.’ He

laughed; then after a pause, ‘Jesus was an Asiatic.’

In this, and in subsequent conversations, I thought I detected

a despondent note with an optimistic undertone: if he lived 125

years he would have enough time to finish his work,

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It was 8.30 in the evening when I arrived at the stone building

of the Poona nature-cure clinic. I was shown his room and

walked in. He was sitting on a pallet; a white shawl enveloped

him from neck to ankles. He did not look up. When he finished

writing the postcard, he raised his head and said, ‘Ah.’ I knelt

in front of him and we shook hands. He had a way, which none

of his heirs has inherited, of figuratively putting his arms around

you and making you feel welcome to his house and India.

‘You have come by the Deccan Queen ,’ he remarked. ‘On that

train there is no food.’

I said I didn’t mind, I had already been promised dinner. ‘The

weather here seems wonderful,’ I volunteered. ‘You tortured

yourself in the summer heat of Sevagram,’ where I had seen him

in 1942.

‘No,’ he objected, ‘it wasn’t torture. But in New Delhi I would

melt ice in the bath and sit in it as you did in Sevagram. I was

even unashamed to receive people in my bath and dictate in the

bath. Here in Poona the weather is delightful.’ He appeared

very relaxed.

Presently, without any question from me, he spoke at length

about violence. ‘First,’ he said, ‘there is South Africa. A man

has been killed there in connection with the recent disturbances.

He was innocent. Also, they have tied Indians to trees and

whipped them. This is lynch law. And now these riots in Ahmed-

abad between Hindus and Moslems. The trouble is that one side

begins stabbing and killing and then the other does likewise. If

one side did not avenge its deaths the thing would stop. It is the

same in Palestine. The Jews have a good case. I told Sidney

Silverman, the British M.P., that the Jews have a good case. If

the Arabs have a claim to Palestine the Jews have a prior claim,

because they were there first. Jesus was a Jew. He was the finest

flower of Judaism. You can see that from the four stories of the

four apostles. They had untutored minds. They told the truth

about Jesus. Paul was not a Jew, he was a Greek, he had an

oratorical mind, a dialectical mind and he distorted Jesus. Jesus

possessed a great force, the love force, but Christianity became

disfigured when it went to the West. It became the religion of

kings.’

He reverted to the Jewish question in Hitler Germany.\* ‘But I

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did not intend talking with you tonight,’ he declared, ‘and you

have not eaten.’

I rose to go. ‘Sleep well,’ I said.

‘I always sleep well. Today was rny day of silence and I slept

four times. I fell asleep while I was on the rack.’

‘During his massage,’ a woman doctor interpreted.

‘You must get massage here,’ Gandhi urged.

After dinner, I passed Gandhi’s bed on the open-air stone

terrace. Two women disciples were massaging his feet and shins.

His bed w T as a mattress-covered wooden plank with two bricks

under it to raise the head higher than the feet. A mosquito net

hung over the bed. Several young women were sitting on the

mats near him and laughing. He called out to me, ‘I hope you

will be up in time to have breakfast with me.’ He said first break¬

fast was at 4.

‘I’d rather be excused from that one.’

‘Then second breakfast at 5.’

I made a face and everybody laughed.

‘You had better have third breakfast with me at 9,’ he said.

‘Get up at 6.’

I was up at 6.30. When I stepped out into the courtyard,

Gandhi was chatting with an Indian. He greeted me and we

started on his morning walk.

‘You said last night,’ I recalled, ‘that Paul altered the teachings

of Jesus. Will the people around you do the same?’

‘You are not the first to mention this possibility,’ he replied. ‘I

see through them. Yes, I know they may try to do just that. I

know India is not with me. I have not convinced enough Indians

of the wisdom of non-violence.’

Again he talked at length about the persecution of coloured

races in South Africa. He inquired about the treatment of Negroes

in the United States. ‘A civilization,’ he said, ‘is to be judged by

its treatment of minorities.’

After a massage by a powerful Ceylonese who kneaded the

muscles till they ached, I felt better and looked into Gandhi’s

room. It had no door, only a curtain which I pushed aside. He

noticed me and said, ‘Gome in, you are always welcome.’ He

was writing an article for Harijan and submitting to questions in

the vernacular by three Indians. I went in and out until 11 a.m,

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Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a Christian princess who served him as

first English-language secretary, was reading Reuters news bulle¬

tins to him. Now and then he muttered ‘Hm. 5 The South

African items made him shake his head sadly. ‘President Tru¬

man’, a flash radiogram stated, ‘yesterday signed the Indian

immigration and naturalization bill. 5 Gandhi asked about the

provisions of the new law. How many Indians would be granted

citizenship and how many could immigrate? Are Chinese and

Japanese admitted into the United States?

‘More than anyone else, 5 I said to Gandhi, ‘the man who is

responsible for the passage of the bill is the President of the India

League of America, J. J. Singh. Would you write him a letter? 5

He promised and gave me the letter a few days later.

Gulbai, Dr. Mehta’s wife, brought me a heaped bowl of peeled

and sliced fruit and placed it on the mat. Gandhi had already

had his third breakfast, so I ate while he talked. He said he was

trying to create a classless and casteless India. He yearned for the

day when there would be only one caste and Brahmans would

marry Harijans. ‘I am a social revolutionist, 5 he asserted. ‘Vio¬

lence is bred by inequality, non-violence by equality. 5 Gandhi’s

religion merged with his sociology.

I said I knew that the mounting prejudice against coloured

peoples in South Africa disturbed him; he had fought it for twenty

years. ‘But I hope, 5 I added, ‘you will do nothing violent in this

connection. You are. a violent man. 5 He laughed. ‘Some of your

fasts are violent, 5 I continued.

‘You want me to confine myself to violent words, 5 he com¬

mented.

‘Yes. 5

‘I do not know when I am going to fast, 5 he explained. ‘It is

God who determines that. It comes to me suddenly. But I will

not act rashly. I have no desire to die. 5

Sudhir Ghosh, a youthful Cambridge University graduate,

came in to bid Gandhi goodbye. He was going to England and

the Mahatma was giving him a letter of introduction to Prime

Minister Attlee. Gandhi’s go-between with the Cabinet Mission,

Ghosh had so distinguished himself by his intelligent and gracious

handling of delicate diplomatic tasks that Gandhi was asking him

to be his liaison with Attlee, Cripps, Pethick-Lawrence and others

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in London. Like many a head of state, Gandhi wished to be his

own ‘foreign minister’. Usually, the official foreign minister

resents the intrusion.

That afternoon, before the prayer meeting, an Indian in his

twenties approached me and said he was the editor of a Hindu

Mahasabha weekly published in Poona and would I give him a

message. I said I did not approve of the Hindu Mahasabha any

more than I approved of the Moslem League; both stood for

religion in politics. ‘The Hindu Mahasabha,’ I declared with

some acerbity, ‘stands for Hindu supremacy. Do you like white

supremacy?’ We parted.

Hundreds of Poona citizens stood in a field on the other side of

the clinic’s low fence while Gandhi and his friends conducted the

services on a wooden platform on this side of the fence. During the

singing it commenced to rain; worshippers put up their black

umbrellas. A murmur of protest arose from those in the rear and

all umbrellas were lowered. Somebody held one over Gandhi. A

few hundred yards away two Indian teams in white flannels were

playing cricket.

Before dinner, Gandhi invited me to walk with him. ‘Surely you

are not going to walk in the rain,’ I protested lightly.

‘Come along, old man,’ he said and stretched out his arm.

I had been given a private room that opened on the terrace

where Gandhi slept. Late in the evening, when I was about to

retire, I passed Gandhi’s bed. I greeted him silently with a raised

hand but he called out, ‘You must sleep well tonight. But we

will disturb you with our prayers at 4.’

‘I hope not,’ I said and approached him.

He addressed himself to Mrs. Mehta in Hindustani or Gujarati,

and I thought he was scolding her. ‘We are talking about you

and you are curious,’ Gandhi remarked.

‘Somehow I knew it,’ I replied. ‘Now you have made it worse

by telling me but not disclosing what you were talking about. I

should offer Satyagraha against you until you tell me.’

‘All right,’ he laughed.

‘I will sit by your bed all night.’

‘Come along,’ he said with a lilt.

‘I will sit here and sing American songs.’

‘All right, you will sing me to sleep.’

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Everybody was enjoying the fun.

Gandhi’s laughter was physical and mental; it was amusement

plus agreement or at least amusement plus tolerance. It was the

laughter of a man who is not afraid to be caught with his visor

up and his guard down.

It had grown late and I wished them good night. I talked to

Mrs. Mehta. Gandhi had scolded her because she served my

breakfast in his room at 11 instead of 9 and this had held up the

noonday meal of the others and besides she had given me special

food; no one should receive privileged treatment.

I awoke very fit and went to Gandhi’s room. He invited me to

walk. I requested his views on the next step in the Indian political

situation. ‘The British,’ he answered with alacrity, ‘must ask

Congress to form a coalition government. All the minorities will

co-operate.’

‘Would you include members of the Moslem League?’

‘Of course’, he replied. ‘Mr. Jinnah can have a highly import¬

ant post.’

He left me for a while to talk to a young Indian woman. I had

noticed him walking up and down the terrace with her the day

before in agitated conversation. Then she had gone away and a

young mah stepped to Gandhi’s side and they talked together

for about a quarter of an hour. Pyarelal told me who they were.

She was an untouchable and limped from an accident. The young

man, likewise a Harijan, was her husband and he had had a fore¬

arm amputated. They were having marital difficulties and Gandhi

wanted to patch up their relations.

When we resumed our constitutional, he began a discussion of

Europe and Russia. I said Moscow had nothing to give the world;

it had gone nationalistic, imperialistic and Pan-Slav. This could

not feed the West. The democracies were beginning to realize that

world peace would only come with internationalism and spiritual

regeneration.

‘Why do you want me to go to the West?’

‘Not go to the West, but speak to the West.’

‘Why does the West need me to tell them that two times two are

four? If they realize that the way of violence and war is evil

why am I necessary to point out the obvious truth? Besides, I

have unfinished work here.’

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‘Nevertheless, 5 I said, ‘the West needs you. You are the anti¬

thesis to materialism and therefore the antidote to Stalinism and

statism.\* He talked about the increase of the spirit of violence in

India since 1942.

Pedestrians gathered to watch Gandhi as we moved to and fro

on the path that led to the city. There were factories near by and

occasionally their whistles blew, but he never stopped talking;

nor did he lift his voice; he talked through the noise.

I asked whether he had read my book A Week with Gandhi . He

had, and apart from a few minor errors (I mis-stated Kasturbai’s

age, for instance) he thought well of it. He had also read my Men

and Politics ; he read it in his ‘library 5 , as he called the lavatory

where he kept a shelf of books.

Nehru arrived at the clinic with Krishna Menon who later

became Indian High Commissioner in London. ‘Nehru, 5 Gandhi

said to me, ‘has an oratorical mind. 5 Menon, Nehru, I and several

others lunched together in the large common dining-room. I was

served mutton chops. By request, I shared my portion with

Nehru.

Gandhi knew that Nehru ate meat and smoked; he did not

object. But Nehru never smoked in Gandhi’s presence. (Only

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad did, and Gandhi always reminded the

girls in advance to bring in an ashtray.) Nehru has infinite charm,

grace, tenderness and talent to express himself in words. Gandhi

called him an artist. His years at Harrow and Cambridge made

him very British and other years in prison made him very

bitter. During his long imprisonment between 1942 and 1945 he

had grown completely grey and completely bald but no less

handsome. In his private life and public life he has suffered

much. His smile, which reveals two rows of fine white teeth,

melts the heart alike by its cheer and its unintended sadness.

Gandhi loved Nehru as a son and Nehru loved Gandhi as a

father. Nehru never hid the deep difference between his outlook

and Gandhi’s. He spoke and wrote about it frequently. Gandhi

welcomed the frankness. Their affection for one another did not

depend on agreement.

Something far down in Nehru’s psyche rebels against surrender.

He was repelled by the unquestioning obedience which most

Indian leaders gave Gandhi. He questioned and argued and

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resisted — and finally surrendered. He fights for the independ¬

ence of his personality. He balks against conquest. When he

submits he does so with meekness and grace. Gandhi knew his

frailties and he himself has come to recognize his limitations. In

politics all his life, Nehru never mastered the intricacies of party

politics as the Mahatma and Patel did. He is the tribune not the

organizer, a spokesman to the outside, not the manipulator inside.

He appeals most to intellectuals but not with intellect; his appeal

is to the heart. In India, that is an asset. He is an aristocrat

whose love for aristocrats is no impediment to his love of the

people. One of the world’s foremost statesmen, he is not a

statesman at all. He is a good person lost among statesmen. The

people give him adulation; he lends it to those who run the machine

of government.

In India Nehru is addicted to gusts of temper and bursts of in¬

dignation. On occasions, he bodily assaulted men who aroused

his indignation. He has endless physical courage. Sometimes, in

press conferences, he makes unconsidered statements of defiance.

These may all be strivings towards strength. There can be no

doubt that it was Gandhi’s vast inner strength and clarity, among

other things, that so fascinated and captivated Jawaharlal.

Nehru’s books show beauty of soul, nobility of ideal and ego¬

centrism. Gandhi seemed entirely extrovert; he was no burden

to himself. Nehru must always cope with his own problem.

In the afternoon of that second day at the nature-cure clinic,

Nehru sat cross-legged on my bed for an hour while I occupied the

only chair. He had gone to his beloved native Kashmir on a

visit; the Maharaja forbade his entry. He grappled with an

Indian soldier, equipped with bayoneted rifle, who barred his

way at the frontier post. Now he said, T am convinced that the

British Agent would not have kept me out of Kashmir while I

was engaged in the Cabinet Mission negotiations without first

consulting the Viceroy, and, that being so, it does not appear that

they are getting ready to leave India.’

Krishna Menon shared this scepticism.

I asked Nehru whether he considered himself a Socialist. T am

a Socialist but not a Marxist,’ he replied. T am a Socialist but I

don’t believe in any dogma.’ (In 1948, in New Delhi, he told me

that as he grew older he judged people ‘more by their personal

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character than their isms\* and that he had moved ‘closer to Christ

and Buddha, especially Buddha’, and further, therefore, from

Marx, Lenin and Stalin and closer to Gandhi.)

Nehru spent several hours of the afternoon alone with Gandhi;

nobody disturbed them. Late in the afternoon, I went to Gandhi’s

room and found him spinning. I said I thought he had abandoned

spinning. ‘No, how could I?’ he asked. ‘There are four hundred

million Indians. Subtract one hundred million children, waifs

and others; if the remaining three hundred million would spin an

hour each day we would have Swaraj.’

‘Because of the economic or spiritual effect?’ I asked.

‘Both,’ he said. ‘If three hundred million people did the same

thing once a day not because a Hitler ordered it but because they

were inspired by the same ideal we would have enough unity of

purpose to achieve independence.’

‘When you stop spinning to talk to me you are delaying Swaraj.’

‘Yes,’ he agreed, ‘you have postponed Swaraj by six yards.’

Prime Minister Kher of Bombay province and Morarji Desai,

the Home Member of the province, visited Gandhi to report on

the continuing Ahmedabad intercommunity riots. At nine in the

evening I accompanied Nehru and Menon to Desai’s residence in

Poona. Desai blamed Moslems for the disturbances. Shortly

before midnight, Nehru and Menon took the train to Bombay.

The next morning Gandhi and about ten companions and I

walked to the Poona station and boarded the express to Bombay.

The party had the use of a special third-class carriage with a

hard wooden bench down the length of each outer wall and

another down the centre of the carriage. It rained heavily

throughout the journey, and soon water began to pour from the

roof and through openings in the window frames and door.

Large puddles formed bn the floor. At a number of stops en route,

local Congress leaders boarded the train for conferences with

Gandhi. Between times, he wrote a brief article for Harijan and

corrected another article. He looked up at me once and smiled

and we exchanged a few remarks. When his editorial work was

finished he stretched out on the wooden'bench and in a moment

he was sleeping serenely. He slept for about fifteen minutes.

Gandhi occupied a place near a window. At all stations im¬

mense crowds gathered despite the downpour. At one stop, two

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boys, about fourteen years of age, wet to their brown skins, their

hair dripping, jumped up and down outside Gandhi’s window,

moved their bent arms up and down and yelled, ‘Gandhiji,

Gandhiji, Gandhiji.’ He smiled.

I said, ‘What are you to them?’

He put his fists with thumbs upward to his temples and replied,

‘A man with horns, a spectacle.’

Gandhi left the train at a suburban station to avoid the crowd at

the Bombay terminus. He and the other Congress leaders were

congregating in Bombay for a meeting of the All-India Congress

Committee (A.I.C.C.) which would debate the Working Com¬

mittee decisions to accept the Cabinet Mission’s long-term plan for

a constitution but to refuse participation in the interim government.

The two-day session took place in a hall built like a theatre.

The floor of the stage was covered with white cotton homespun.

Leaders clothed in somewhat finer white homespun sat on the

floor of the stage and leaned on large bolsters placed against the

scenery. To the left and rear of the centre of the stage was a big

divan covered with white homespun. It was unoccupied. Nehru,

in clinging white cotton trousers, a white blouse reaching half

way down his thighs and an apricot-coloured sleeveless vest,

presided. He used a microphone erected near his chair. Two

hundred and fifty-five voting delegates sat in the hall together

with hundreds of visitors and several score Indian and foreign

journalists.

Access to the stage from the well of the theatre was by a short

flight of wooden steps. A speaker would mount to the top step,

leave his or her sandals there and walk barefoot to the microphone.

During the deliberations, a woman came on the stage from

behind the scenes and put a flat box on the divan. Shortly

after, Gandhi walked on, sat down on the divan, opened the box

and started spinning. His entrance was applauded briefly by the

standing delegates. He acknowledged their welcome with a smile.

It is considered undignified to make too much noise with hand¬

clapping or exclamations.

The second day, Sunday, July 7th, Gandhi, in loincloth,

addressed the Committee from a sitting position on the white

divan. He spoke Hindustani into a microphone but the mechafiism

was defective and he was barely audible.

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The speech, delivered extemporaneously, was published ver¬

batim in Harijan and all Indian dailies. It consisted of about

1700 words and he pronounced them slowly, in approximately

fifteen minutes, as though he were talking to one person in his hut.

He said:

T have been told that some of my previous remarks about the

Cabinet Mission’s proposals have caused a good deal of confusion

in the public mind. As a Satyagrahi it is always my endeavour

to speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I\* never have

a wish to hide anything from you. I hate mental reservations.

But language is at best an imperfect medium of expression. No

man can express fully in words what he feels or thinks. Even

seers and prophets of old have suffered under that disability. . . .

‘I did say in one of my speeches at Delhi in regard to the

Cabinet Mission’s proposals that I saw darkness where I saw light

before. That darkness has not yet lifted. If possible it has deep¬

ened. I could have asked the Working Committee to turn down

the proposal about the Constituent Assembly if I could see my

way clearly. You know my relations with the members of the

Working Committee. Rabu Rajendra Prasad might have been a

High Court Judge, but he chose instead to act as my interpreter

and clerk in Champaran. Then there is the Sardar [Patel]. He

has earned the nickname of being my Yes-man. He does not mind

it. He even flaunts it as a compliment. He is a stormy petrel.

Once he used to dress and dine in the Western style. But ever

since he decided to cast his lot with me my word has been law to

him. But even he cannot see eye to eye with me in this matter.

They both tell me that whereas on all previous occasions I was

able to support my instinct with reason and satisfy their head as

well as heart, this time I have failed to do so. I told them in

reply that whilst my own heart was filled with misgivings I could

not adduce any reason for it or else I would have asked them to

reject the proposals straightaway. It was my duty to place my

misgivings before them to put them on their guard. But they

should examine what I had said in the light of reason and accept

my point of view only if they were convinced of its correctness.’

They were not convinced of its correctness and therefore the

Working Committee took a middle course by approving the

provisions for the future constitution of India but holding aloof

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from the interim government. The Socialist fraction of the

A.I.C.C., and some others, were fighting the Working Committee’s

compromise. They advocated abstention from the Constituent

Assembly as well as from the interim government. They wished

to follow Gandhi’s instinct even though he had not supported it

with rational argument.

‘. . . I am surprised that Jaiprakash Narayan said yesterday’

Gandhi continued, ‘that it would be dangerous to participate in

the proposed Constituent Assembly and therefore you should

reject the Working Committee’s resolution. I was not prepared

to hear such defeatist language from the lips of a tried fighter

like Jaiprakash ... A Satyagrahi knows no defeat.

‘Nor would I expect a Satyagrahi to say that whatever English¬

men do is bad. The English are not necessarily bad. There are

good men and bad men among the English people as among any

other people. We ourselves are not free from defects. The

English could not have risen to their present strength if they had

not some good in them. They have come and exploited India

because we quarrelled amongst ourselves and allowed ourselves

to be exploited. In God’s world unmixed evil never prospers.

God rules even where Satan holds sway because the latter exists

only on His sufferance.’ Then he talked about non-violence and

the 1942 civil disobedience movement.

‘We must have patience and humility and detachment. . . The

Constituent Assembly is going to be no bed of roses but only a

bed of thorns. You may not shirk it. . . .

‘Let us not be cowardly, but approach our task with confidence

and courage . . . Never mind the darkness that fills my mind. He

will turn it into light.’

Everybody handclapped two or three times.

The vote was 204 in favour of the Working Committee’s

compromise and 51 against. The negative poll was considered

large; it reflected the doubts present in Gandhi’s, Nehru’s, in fact

most members’ minds about British intentions. After more than,

a hundred and fifty years of British tutelage and eighty-nine

years of the British Empire, no Indian could completely divest

himself of distrust.

I spent a number of days in the hot, dank Bombay of the mon¬

soon summer and then left with Jaiprakash Narayan and his wife

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Prabhavati to tour the Maharashtra en route to Gandhi’s new

Residence in Panchgani. We travelled to Poona by train and

thence by car.

The ancient car broke down several miles outside the town and

we proceeded by a commercial passenger bus. Arrangements had

been made for Socialist delegations to greet Jaiprakash along the

road. Wherever they appeared — six times during the journey —

the bus stopped, Jaiprakash, Prabhavati and I stepped out, the

local folks made little speeches, each of us received a garland of

most fragrant blooms placed around the neck and a tightly

packed bouquet or an armful of bananas to carry. In several

places, after we had returned to the bus, a woman came in and

touched our knuckles with a tiny metal hand covered with a

colourless, perfumed cream. We rode in a cloud of scent.

Throughout the repeated ceremonies, the passengers in the bus

and the driver waited patiently without demur.

Jaiprakash stayed over to address an evening meeting in Satara

while Prabhavati and I, in a borrowed car, drove over the hills

and through the mists to Panchgani. We arrived near midnight;

the town was dark and dead. Stray pedestrians could not tell us

where Gandhi was stopping. We were compelled to get out of the

car at every stone summer villa, walk up the steps to the porch

and see whether anybody was sleeping there. On one porch, we

saw Gandhi lying among his disciples.

In the morning Prabhavati put her head on Gandhi’s feet and

he patted her with sweet affection. About lunchtime, Jaiprakash

arrived. He and I were the only visitors so I had ample oppor¬

tunity for conversation with Gandhi.

He began by asking me what I had learned. I had noticed a

sharp cleavage between those who believed in the Constituent

Assembly and those who did not.

Gandhi: ‘I do not consider the Constituent Assembly non¬

revolutionary. I am convinced that it is a perfect substitute for

civil disobedience.’

L. F.: ‘You think the British are playing the game?’

Gandhi: ‘I think the British will play the game this time.’

L. F.: ‘You believe they are withdrawing from India?’

Gandhi: ‘Yes.’

L. F.: ‘I believe it, too, but I cannot convince Jaiprakash. But

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supposing the British do not leave, you will offer your kind of

protest, not Jaiprakash’s?’

Gandhi: ‘No, Jaiprakash will have to join me. I will not pit

myself against him. In 1942, I said I was sailing out on uncharted

waters. I will not do it now. I did not know the people then. I

know now what I can do and what I cannot.’

L. F.: ‘You did not know in 1942 that there would be violence?’

Gandhi: ‘Correct.’

L. F.: ‘So if the Constituent Assembly fails you will not stage a

civil disobedience campaign?’

Gandhi: ‘Not unless the Socialists and the Communists are

subdued by that time.’

L. F.: ‘That is not likely. . . .’

Gandhi: ‘I cannot think of civil disobedience when there is so

much violence in the air in India. Today some Caste Hindus are

not playing the game by the untouchables.’

L. F.: ‘By some Caste Hindus you mean some Congressmen?’

Gandhi: ‘Not many Congressmen. But there are some who

have not banished untouchability from their hearts. That is the

tragedy . . . The Moslems also feel they arc wronged. In an

orthodox Hindu house a Moslem will not be permitted to sit on

the same carpet with a Hindu and have his meal. That is false

religion. India is falsely religious. It must get true religion.’

L. F.: ‘You have not succeeded with Congress?’

Gandhi: ‘No, I have not. I have failed. Something, however,

has been accomplished. The Harijans are admitted to the

temples in Madura and in many other holy places, and the Caste

Hindus worship in the same temples.’

That Was the end of our morning talk. Gandhi was ‘turning

the searchlight inward’ and instead of finding fault with others

the beam helped him to find the faults of Congress and the Hindus.

Some Hindus did not like it. They preferred to blame Jinnah and

England.

In the early afternoon, Jaiprakash had an hour with Gandhi.

One of the secretaries translated to me part of her notes.

Jaiprakash: ‘Congress is not organizing the strength of the

country. Merit does not count in Congress today. Caste and

family relationships count. This is the main reason we Socialists

will not go into the Constituent Assembly. We felt that the Work-

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ing Committee was overcome by a kind of helplessness. “If we

do not accept the British proposal what can we do?’ 5 they were

saying. This is an attitude of weakness. They expect the British

to devise ways and means of bringing about an agreement be¬

tween Congress and the Moslem League. We should have said

to the British, “You go. We will settle this ourselves!” If the

British do not like it they can put us in jail.\*

Gandhi: ‘Jail is jail for thieves and bandits. For me it is a

palace. I was the originator of jail-going even before I read

Thoreau. Tolstoy wrote that I had discovered something new, he

wrote it in a Russian daily paper. A Russian woman translated it

for me. I have fought the government from inside jails. Jail¬

going can bring Swaraj if the philosophy behind it is correct. . .

But today jail-going would be a farce.’

Jaiprakash: ‘Today we should send Englishmen to jail.’

Gandhi: ‘Why? How? There is no need of it. This is a mere

figure of speech and should not come from lips like yours. Even

after violent warfare it would not be necessary. This is how

Churchill talked of what he would do to Hitler. And witness the

folly and the wickedness of the trial of the Nazi war criminals.

Some of those who try the criminals are just as criminal.’

Congress had formed the governments of a number of provinces,

and Jaiprakash and Gandhi saw mounting corruption and

nepotism there. The Socialists, moreover, together with many

non-Socialist Congressmen, would have gloried in one last struggle

to oust the British. They believed freedom is not real unless you

forcibly expel your master. They suspected that the British

would, with Moslem League connivance, seek to maintain a foot¬

hold in India. Jaiprakash therefore was in an anti-constitutional,

anti-legal mood, a militant mood, whereas Gandhi, disillusioned

by the Socialist and other violence in 1942, 1943 and 1944, was

less militant than ever before in his career. That made his ‘mis¬

givings’ about the Cabinet Mission’s plan all the more painful.

Widespread violence had knocked from his hand the special

weapon he had forged: civil disobedience. The Constituent

Assembly, consequently, was his only alternative.

Gandhi had entered on the road of anguish that led to his

death.

Gandhi gave me more than an. hour in the afternoon. He re-

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verted to the Negro question in America. After a while, I said,

‘Since my arrival in India, I have met some intelligent people. . . .’

Gandhi: ‘Ah, have you? Not many.’

L. F.: ‘You and two or three others. 5 He laughed. ‘And some

say Hindu-Moslem relations are better and some say they are

worse. 5

Gandhi: ‘JinnaK and other Moslem leaders were once members

of Congress. They left it because they felt the pinch of Hindu

patronizing. In the beginning, the leading Congressmen were theo-

sophists. Mrs. Annie Besant attracted me very much. Theosophy

is the teaching of Madame Blavatsky. It is Hinduism at its best.

Theosophy is the brotherhood of man. They took me to Mrs.

Besant’s [in London]. I was just a student from Bombay. I

could not understand the British accent. It was an ordeal for me. I

felt quite unworthy of going to Mrs. Besant. Cultivated Moslems

joined the theosophists. Later, Congress membership grew and

with it the Hindu patronizing attitude. The Moslems are religious

fanatics, but fanaticism cannot be answered with fanaticism.

Bad manners irritate. Brilliant Moslems in Congress became

disgusted. They did not find the brotherhood of man among the

Hindus. They say Islam is the brotherhood of man. As a matter

of fact, it is the brotherhood of Moslems. Theosophy is the

brotherhood of man. Hindu separatism has played a part in

creating the rift between Congress and the League. Jinnah is an

evil genius. He believes he is a prophet. 5

L. F.: ‘He is a lawyer. 5

Gandhi: ‘You do him an injustice. I give you the testimony of

my eighteen days of talks with him in 1944. He really looks upon

himself as the saviour of Islam. 5

L. F.: ‘The Moslems are rich in temperament and spirit. They

are warm and friendly.'

Gandhi: ‘Yes. 5

L. F.: ‘But Jinnah is cold. He is a thin man. He pleads a case,

he does not preach a cause. 5

Gandhi: ‘I agree he is a thin man. But I don’t consider him a

fraud. He has cast a spell over the Moslem, who is a simple-

minded man. 5

L. F.: ‘Sometimes I think the Moslem-Hindu question is the

problem of finding a place for the new Moslem middle class in an

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underdeveloped India, India is even too underdeveloped to offer

a place to the poor. Jinnah won over the middle class because he

helped it to compete with the older entrenched Hindu middle class.

Now he is bridging the chasm between the landlord and peasant.

He has done it with Pakistan. 5

Gandhi: ‘You are right. But Jinnah has not won the peasant.

He is trying to win him. The peasant has nothing in common

with the landlord or middle class. Landlords crush the peasants.

The franchise does not reach the poor. Even the British electorate

is not informed. 5

L. F.: T think it is. It is better informed than ever. 5

Gandhi: Tt is better informed but not well informed. 5

L. F.: ‘How can Congress, with its Hindu stamp, win the

Moslems? 5

Gandhi: ‘In the twinkling of an eye, by giving equality to

untouchables. Hinduism has to reform itself. I have every hope.

Improvement is very gradual. . . .’

L. F.: ‘I understand there is less contact between Hindus and

Moslems. 5

Gandhi: ‘Political contact in the upper stratum is breaking

down. . . . 5

L. F.: ‘Jinnah told me in 1942 you did not want independence. 5

Gandhi: ‘And what do I want? 5

L. F.: ‘He said you want Hindu rule. 5

Gandhi: ‘He is utterly wrong. That is absurd. I am a Moslem,

a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Christian, a Jew, a Parsi. He does not

know me when he says I want Hindu rule. He is not speaking the

truth. He is speaking like a pettifogging lawyer. Only a maniac

resorts to such charges . . . I believe that the Moslem League will

go into the Assembly. But the Sikhs have refused. They are stiff¬

necked like the Jews. 5

L. F.: ‘You are stiff-necked too. 5

Gandhi: T? 5

L. F.: ‘ You are a stiff-necked man. You are stubborn. You

like everything your way. You are a sweet-tempered dictator. 5

This aroused general laughter among the secretaries and disciples

in which Gandhi heartily joined.

Gandhi: ‘Dictator? I have no power. I have not changed

Congress. I have a catalogue of grievances against it. 5

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L. F.: ‘What did you learn from your eighteen days with

Jinnah?’

Gandhi: T learned that he was a maniac. A maniac leaves off

his mania and becomes reasonable at times. I have never regretted

my talks with him. I have never been too stubborn to learn.

Every one of my failures has been a stepping stone. I could not

make any headway with Jinnah because he is a maniac, but many

Moslems were disgusted with Jinnah for his behaviour during

the talks.’

L. F.: ‘What is the solution?’

Gandhi: ‘Jinnah has twenty-five years more to work.’

L. F.: ‘He wants to live as long as you do.’

Gandhi: ‘Then he must live till I am 125.’

L. F.: ‘You had better not die, it would kill him and then you

would be a murderer.’ (Laughter.) ‘He will die the day after

you.’

Gandhi: ‘Jinnah is incorruptible and brave . . . If Jinnah stays

out of the Constituent Assembly the British should be firm and let

us work the plan alone. The British must not yield to Jinnah’s

force. Churchill did not yield to Hitler.’

L. F.: ‘The British do not yield to force but they yield to the

force of circumstances. . . .’

The next morning, I heard Sushila Pie, a schoolteacher who

had joined Gandhi’s staff, singing in the next room. When she

came out on to the veranda I asked why she had been singing.

‘Because I am happy,’ she replied.

‘And why are you happy?’

‘We are happy because we are near Bapu,’ she said.

Jaiprakash and I were leaving that day for Bombay; Prabhavati

was staying with Gandhi. She had worked with Gandhi for many

years. The women in the Mahatma’s entourage — Miss Slade,

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sushila Nayyar, Prabhavati Narayan

and others — loved Gandhi and he loved them. It was a father-

daughter relationship of more than usual warmth and inter¬

dependence. Miss Slade became physically ill on a number of

occasions when she was separated from Bapu or when she was

worried about his health. Her bond with him was one of the

remarkable platonic associations of our age. He often said to her,

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‘When this body is no more there will not be separation, but I

shall be nearer to you. The body is a hindrance.’

Rajkumari and Miss Slade would kiss his hand; he would stroke

their cheeks. He said that he deliberately surrounded himself

with women to prove that his mastery over ‘lust’ was not achieved

by avoiding women. But after his ‘lust dream’ in 1936 he took a

six weeks’ silence and did not put his hand on women’s shoulders.

He told his women secretaries about that dream before he wrote

of it in Harijan. He shared his innermost thoughts with them.

Some of the female disciples were jealous when Gandhi appeared

to favour one above the other. He was aware of it and tried to

be impartial. He enjoyed their company and devotion. Whether

they did not marry because of attachment to him or whether they

were attached to him because they would not marry it is folly to

guess. One was married but remained continent. They were all

valiant Amazons of his causes.

Tagore, who loved Gandhi, wrote of the Mahatma, ‘He con¬

demns sexual life as inconsistent with the moral progress of man

and has a horror of sex as great as that of the author of The

Kreutzer Sonata , but, unlike Tolstoy, he betrays no abhorrence of

the sex that tempts his kind. In fact, his tenderness for woman is

one of the noblest and most consistent traits of his character and

he counts among the women of his country some of his best and

truest comrades in the great movement he is leading.’

On July 18th, I had my last talk with the Mahatma. ‘If the

Working Committee had responded to your “groping in the

dark”, or your instinct, as you also called it, they would have

rejected the Cabinet Mission’s plan for the Constituent Assembly?’

I began.

Gandhi: ‘Yes, but I did not let them.’

L. F.: ‘You mean you did not insist.’

Gandhi: ‘More than that. I prevented them from following my

instinct unless they felt likewise. It is no use conjecturing what

would have happened. The fact is, however, that Dr. Rajendra

Prasad asked me, “Does your instinct go so far that you would

prevent us from accepting the long-term proposals whether we

understand you or not?” I said, “No, follow your reason since

my own reason does not support my instinct. My instinct rebels

against my reason. I have placed my misgivings before you/

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because I want to be faithful to you. I myself have not followed

my instinct unless my reason backed it. 5 ”

L. F.: ‘But you told me that you follow your instinct when it

speaks to you on occasions, as, for instance, before certain fasts.’

Gandhi: £ Yes, but even in these cases my reason was there before

the fast began. . . .’

L. F.: 'Then why do you inject your instinct into the present

political situation?’

Gandhi: T did not. But I was loyal. I wanted to retain my

faith in the bona fides of the Cabinet Mission. So I told the

Cabinet Mission that my instinct had misgivings. “Supposing,”

I said to myself, “they meant ill; they would be ashamed. They

will say, ‘He says his instinct tells him this, but we know the

reason.’ Their guilty conscience would prick them.” ’

L. F.: ‘It did not. Does that mean the Cabinet Mission’s

intentions were honest?’

Gandhi: ‘I do not retract anything from the original certificate

I gave them. . . .’

L. F.: ‘You are strongly constitutionalist now because you fear

violence?’

Gandhi: ‘I say we must go into the Assembly and work it. If

the British are dishonest they will be found out. The loss will not

be ours but theirs and humanity’s.’

L. F.: ‘I think you are afraid of the spirit of the Indian National

Army and Subhas Chandra Bose [its hero who went to Germany

and Japan during the second World War]. It is widespread. He

has captured the imagination of the youth and you are aware of

it and you fear that mood. The young generation is indocentric.’

Gandhi: ‘He has not captured the imagination of the country.

It is too wide a term, but a section of the youth and of the women

follow him . . . The Almighty has reserved mildness for India.

“The mild Hindu” is used as a term of reproach. But I take it as

a term of honour, just like Churchill’s “Naked Fakir”. I appro¬

priated it as a compliment and even wrote about it to Churchill.

I told Churchill I would love to be a naked fakir but was not one

as yet.’

L. F.: ‘Did he answer?’

Gandhi: ‘Yes, he acknowledged my letter through the Viceroy

in a courteous manner. But to resume . . . The unsophisticated

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women, untouched and unspoiled by civilization, so-called, are

with me.’

L. F.: ‘But you admire Bose. You believe he is alive. [Fie had

been reported killed in an aeroplane accident.]

Gandhi: ‘I do not encourage the Bose legend. I did not agree

with him. I do not now believe he is alive. Instinct made me

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believe to the contrary at one time, because he had made himself

into a legendary Robin Hood.’

L. F.: ‘My point is this: Bose went to Germany and Japan, both

fascist countries. If he was pro-fascist you can have no sympathy

with him. If he was a patriot and believed that India would be

saved by Germany or Japan, especially in 1944, he was stupid and

statesmen cannot afford to be stupid. 5

Gandhi: ‘You have a high opinion of statesmen. Most of them

are stupid ... I have to work against heavy odds . . . There is an

active mood of violence that has to be combated and I am doing

it in my own way. It is my implicit faith that it is a survival which

will kill itself in time ... It cannot live. It is so contrary to the

spirit of India. But what is the use of talking? I believe in an

inscrutable Providence that presides over our destinies — call it

God or by any name you like.’

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