# CHAPTER XXII

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL VERSUS

MOHANDAS K. GANDHI

T h e day the second World War started, England took India

into the war by proclamation without consulting any Indians.

India resented this additional proof of foreign control. The

next day, nevertheless, Gandhi boarded the first Delhi train to

Simla in response to a telegraphic summons from the Viceroy,

Lord Linlithgow, to come to the summer capital. ‘We Do Not

Want Any Understanding’, the public at the station chanted as

the Mahatma walked to the train. It was his day of silence, so he

smiled and departed.

The Viceroy and the Mahatma discussed the nature of the

coming hostilities, ‘and as I was picturing before him the House

of Parliament and the Westminster Abbey and their possible

destruction, I broke down. I have become disconsolate. In the

secret of my heart I am in perpetual quarrel with God that He

should allow such things to go on’.

Gandhi had a ‘daily quarrel’ with God; non-violence had failed;

God had failed. But at the end of each quarrel, the Mahatma

decided that ‘neither God nor non-violence is impotent. Im¬

potence is in men. I must try on without losing faith’.

Gandhi blamed Hitler for the war. ‘Rightly or wrongly, and

irrespective of what the other powers have done before under

similar circumstances,’ he wrote in Harijan of September 16th,

1939, l have come to the conclusion that Herr Hitler is responsible

for the war. I do not judge his claim. It is highly probabje that

his right to incorporate Danzig is beyond question if the Danzig

Germans desire to give up their independent status. It may be

that his claim to appropriate the Polish Corridor is a just claim.

My complaint is that he will not let the claim be examined by an

independent tribunal.’

Critics said he had talked ‘sentimental twaddle’ in the Simla

interview with the Viceroy. ‘My sympathy for England and

France,’ Gandhi replied, ‘is not the result of momentary emotion

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or, in cruder language, of hysteria.’ Equally, ‘My whole heart is

with the Poles in the unequal struggle in which they are engaged

for the sake of their freedom.’

Hitlerism, Gandhi declared, ‘means naked ruthless force reduced

to an exact science and worked with scientific precision\*. It was

thoroughly abhorrent to him.

But what could he do? In addition to his daily debate with

God, Gandhi was involved in an interminable argument with

Congress which, he admitted, echoed the views of most articulate

Indians. With Gandhi non-violence was a creed, with Congress

it ‘was always a policy’. Congress adopted non-violence for the

expected gains. Gandhi wanted non-violence irrespective of the

fruits.

The day after war’s beginning, Gandhi pledged publicly that

he would not embarrass the British government. He would also

lend moral support to England and her allies; even one who dis¬

approves of war should distinguish between aggressor and de¬

fender. Further than this, however, he could not go; he could not

participate in the war effort nor would he defend India against

an aggressor. He did not want India to have an army or to use

police against Hindu-Moslem rioters. A constabulary to deal

gently with bandits and professional hooligans was the maximum

violence he might countenance.

Congress, on the other hand, was ready to support the war

effort if specified conditions were satisfied.

From these different positions, Gandhi and Congress fought a

friendly but hard battle.

On September 14th, 1939, the Working or Executive Committee

of Congress issued a manifesto which condemned Fascist aggres¬

sion in Poland yet recalled that the Western democracies had

condoned or not opposed similar developments in Manchuria,

Abyssinia, Spain and Czechoslovakia; it said the Western demo¬

cracies must shed their own imperialism before they could con¬

vincingly contend that they were fighting imperialism and not

merely rivals. ‘A free democratic India will gladly associate herself

with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and

for economic co-operation. . . .’

Gandhi was present, as a guest, during the four days of discus¬

sion that fathered this manifesto. After its adoption, he revealed

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that Jawaharlal Nehru had drafted it. ‘I was sorry, 5 Gandhi

commented, ‘to find myself alone in thinking that whatever

support was to be given to the British should be given uncondi¬

tionally 5 and non-violently. Gandhi disliked the tit-for-tat offer:

India will fight if you make India free. Nevertheless, he com¬

mended the manifesto to the country: ‘I hope that the state¬

ment will receive the unanimous support of all parties among

Congressmen. 5

How could he do this, the critics howled; how could he appeal

for support of a view he had opposed? ‘I would not serve the

cause of non-violence, 5 he replied, ‘if I deserted my best co¬

workers because they could not follow me in an extended applica¬

tion of non-violence. I therefore remain with them in the faith

that their departure from the non-violent method will be confined

to the narrowest field and will be temporary. 5

Haven’t you changed your mind since 1918, some chided.

‘At the time of writing, 5 he retorted, ‘I never think of what I

have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous

statements on a given question, but to be consistent with the

truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result

is that I have grown from truth to truth. . . .’

Gandhi went beyond his plea for support of a manifesto that

conflicted with his views; he made himself its spokesman in an

interview with the Viceroy on September 26th. Lord Linlithgow

replied on October 17th; England could not yet define her war

aims. He cautioned India against a too rapid advance towards

self-government. After the war, there would be changes in the

direction of Dominion Status, he said.

Five days later, accordingly, the Working Committee voted

against aiding Britain. It also instructed the Congress ministries of

the provinces to resign. Gandhi saw Congress coming closer to him.

Hitler overran Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium.

France was next. Britain’s stock was low in India. ‘Let us strike

now, 5 many Indians urged.

Gandhi replied in Harijan on June 1st, 1940: ‘I am of the

opinion that we should wait till the heat of the battle in the heart

of the Allied countries subsides and the future is clearer than it is.

We do not seek our independence out of Britain’s ruin. That is

not the way of non-violence. 5

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Time was working for Indian independence. ‘We are nearing

our goal without having fired a single shot/ Gandhi said. He

wanted only the right to preach non-violence.

France surrendered to Hitler. Panic, and in places hope, seized

India. There were runs on banks. Gandhi called for order.

Soberly he predicted that ‘Britain will die hard and heroically

even if she has to. We may hear of reverses, but we will not hear

of demoralization.’

Whenever Congress rejected Gandhi’s pacifism and volunteered

to aid the British, he did not interfere. Whenever Congress agreed

with him and wanted to hinder the war effort, he objected.

The Working Committee met in Wardha to review the war

crisis. On June 21st, 1940, it plainly stated that it could not ‘go

to the full length with Gandhi’ on non-violence. ‘So, for the first

time,’ Nehru wrote in his autobiography, Gandhi ‘went one way

and the Congress Working Committee another. . . .’

‘I am both happy and unhappy over the result,’ Gandhi

affirmed. ‘Happy because I have been able to bear the strain of

the break and have been given the strength to stand alone. Un¬

happy because my word seemed to lose the power to carry with

me those whom it was my proud privilege to carry all these many

years.’

The Viceroy summoned the Mahatma for another audience

on June 29th. Lord Linlithgow recognized Gandhi’s indestruct¬

ible influence; he intimated that Britain was ready to grant Indians

a broader share in the Indian government.

The Working Committee met in Delhi early in July to weigh

the offer. Gandhi had no use for it. He encountered the astute

opposition of Rajagopalachari, the Mahatma’s warm friend.

Rajagopalachari converted Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the

Mahatma’s loyal lieutenant. Only Ghaffar Khan, the ‘Frontier

Gandhi’, sided with the Mahatma.

Gandhi printed a report of the proceedings: Rajagopalachari

‘thinks that I suffer from obsession owing to too much brooding on

non-violence. He almost thinks that my vision is blurred. It was

no use returning the compliment though half-joking I did ... I

at once saw as clear as daylight that, if my position was not accept¬

able, Rajaji’s was the only real alternative. I therefore encouraged

him to persist in his effort, though all the time I held him to be

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hopelessly in the wrong’. Rajaji, or Rajagopalachari, won a big

majority; five abstained.

Gandhi failed to convince Congress of the wisdom of pure paci¬

fism in the midst of a war. All acknowledged that he could have

killed Rajaji’s resolution; indeed, one firm request from the

Mahatma and Rajaji would probably have withdrawn it. That

would have been dictation, however, and Gandhi believed too

much in personal liberty to exploit his power to make men vote

or act against their will. He preferred to break with Congress

rather than break its leaders.

The Rajaji resolution, adopted, despite Gandhi’s disapproval,

on July 7th, announced that if India were given complete in¬

dependence and a central Indian government ‘it will enable

Congress to throw its full weight in the efforts for the effective

organization of the defence of the country’; free India would wage

war as one of the allies.

Winston Churchill was Prime Minister of Great Britain and

stirring England to gallant resistance. He had, through the years,

made numerous statements against Indian independence. He

now had the power to prevent it. On August 8th, accordingly,

Linlithgow stated that he would invite a number of Indians to

join his Executive Council and establish a War Advisory Council

to meet regularly, but, in the paraphrase of Lord Pethick-

Lawrence who became Secretary of State for India in 1945,

‘Britain could not divest herself of the responsibilities which her

long association with India had imposed on her.’ This fore¬

shadowed Churchill’s famous dictum of November 10th, 1942:

‘I have not become the King’s First Minister in order to preside

at the liquidation of the British Empire.’

Nor, said Linlithgow, could His Majesty’s Government con¬

template the transfer of their present responsibilities to any

Indian government whose authority was directly denied by large

and powerful elements of the population. This indicated that

Britain would not allow Congress to rule India without Moslem

consent. It was the first time Britain, gave the Moslem com¬

munity a veto on India’s political future.

Thoroughly incensed, the Working Committee, according to

Lord Pethick-Lawrence’s summary of its resolution, ‘accused the

British government of rejecting their friendly and patriotic offer

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of co-operation and making the issue of the minorities an insuper¬

able barrier to India’s progress’.

Thanks to Churchill, Congress again came back to Gandhi.

Gandhi explained the new position in a speech to the All-

India Congress Committee on September 15th, 1940, in Bombay:

T do not want England to be defeated or humiliated. It hurts me

to find St. Paul’s Cathedral damaged ... It is not because I love

the British nation and hate the German. I do not think the

Germans as a nation are any worse than the English or the

Italians. We are all tarred with the same brush; we are all

members of the vast human family. I decline to draw any distinc¬

tions. I cannot claim any superiority for Indians ... I can keep

India intact and its freedom intact only if I have goodwill to¬

wards the whole of the human family and not merely for the

human family which inhabits this little spot of the earth called

India.’

He would ask to see the Viceroy. T will tell him that this is the

position to which we have been reduced: We do not want to

embarrass you and deflect you from your purpose in regard to the

war effort. We go our way and you go yours . . .’ But Congress

must have freedom to preach. ‘If we carry the people with us,

there will be no war effort on the part of our people. If, on the

other hand, without using any but moral pressure, you find that

the people help the war effort, we can have no cause for grumb¬

ling. If you get assistance from the Princes, from the landlords,

from anybody high or low, you can have it, but let our voice also

be heard. If you accept my proposal... it will certainly be a

feather in your cap. It will be honourable of you, although you

are engaged in a life and death struggle, that you have given us

this liberty. . . .

‘The Viceroy’, Gandhi anticipated, ‘may say, “you are a

visionary”. I may fail in my mission, but we will not quarrel.

If he says he is helpless, I will not feel helpless.’

The Viceroy said no, orally and in a confirming letter.

Rebuffed and eager to protest against the war and India’s

helplessness, Gandhi proposed to fast, but he allowed himself to

be dissuaded by Mahadev Desai and chose instead the alternative

of civil disobedience. He did not, however, launch a campaign of

mass Satyagraha. He adopted a milder symbolic form which

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could not impede the war effort; he called on individuals selected

by him by name to defy the official ban on propaganda against

the war. He first pointed to Vinoba Bhave, a quiet, scholarly

Gandhian. Bhave engaged in anti-war propaganda, was arrested,

tried and sentenced to three months’ imprisonment.

Next, Gandhi designated Nehru. He was arrested and tried.

The judge gave him four years.

Patel was chosen next; he informed the Government of his

intention and was arrested before he could make his speech.

As a Christmas gesture and in order that harassed British offi¬

cials might enjoy their holiday without being called out to make

arrests, Gandhi suspended the civil disobedience from December

25th, 1940, to January 4th, 1941. In the interval, however, the

Government seized Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the president of

Congress.

After a while, provincial and local Congress committees started

submitting to Gandhi lists of potential resisters. In sum, 23,223

persons were arrested, most of them in Nehru’s United Provinces.

Gandhi had promised Congress to stay out of jail.

The person-by-person civil disobedience continued for about a

year to the end of 1941. It generated little public enthusiasm.

People were tired of going to jail.

In December 1941, the British government released those

members of the Working Committee who had been imprisoned.

The second World War had taken a menacing turn.

On December 7th, Japan struck at Pearl Harbour; the next

day, Japanese forces occupied Shanghai and Siam (Thailand)

and made a landing in British Malaya. Twenty-four hours later,

the Tokyo navy sank two British battleships, the Repulse and the

Prince of Wales , thus crippling England’s naval strength in the

Pacific.

The war was moving closer to India. The situation uncovered

the old split in Congress between the Gandhian non-violent non-

co-operators and those who would barter support of the war effort

for an Indian national government. Gandhi, accordingly, with¬

drew once more from the Congress leadership.

Hong Kong fell to the Japanese late in December 1941. The

great British base of Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in

February 1942. In March, Japan occupied most of Java, Sum-

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atra and other islands of the Dutch East Indies. On March gth,

an imperial Tokyo communique announced that Rangoon, the

capital of Burma, India’s neighbour, had been seized.

In North Africa, Nazi General Rommel was moving east to¬

wards Egypt. The Arabs of Palestine were preparing a friendly

welcome for him. Observers talked of a possible German-

Japanese junction in India. From Cairo to Calcutta gloom

brooded over the fortunes of the United Nations at; war.

The American public was disturbed by the low war morale of

the Indian people; having been a colony of Britain the United

States understood India’s aspirations despite the propaganda fog.

President Roosevelt sent Colonel Louis Johnson as his personal

envoy to India; this was an extraordinary act, for India was not a

sovereign state, and therefore all the more calculated to impress

the British government with America’s concern. In London,

United States Ambassador John G. Winant tried unsuccessfully

to dissuade Prime Minister Churchill from stating publicly that

the Atlantic Charter’s self-government clause did not apply to

India. Face-to-face at the White House and in transatlantic

telephone conversations, Roosevelt had discussed India with

Churchill and urged him to make an acceptable offer to the

Indian people. Churchill never appreciated these prods.

Chiang Kai-shek, then in a key war position, made direct

representations to President Roosevelt and to the British govern¬

ment in favour of Indian independence.

The Labour party was in the British war-time coalition govern¬

ment. Many of its members were friends of Indian freedom;

Labour ministers reflected this attitude in Cabinet deliberations.

Pressed on all sides, Churchill consented to send Sir Stafford

Cripps to New Delhi with a proposal. But though the British

Empire and the Dutch had lost valuable outposts, the optimistic,

resilient British Prime Minister had more faith than ever in ulti¬

mate military victory, and for the cogent reason that Russia and

the United States were now England’s partners. He was neither

depressed nor defeatist about war prospects when Cripps went out

to India.

Tall, thin, austere vegetarian, son of a Labour Lord and nephew

of Beatrice Webb, the famous Fabian Socialist writer, Stafford

Cripps attended exclusive schools and became an unorthodox,

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left-wing Labour Member of Parliament. A brilliant lawyer, he

gave a large part of his huge professional income to political causes.

When the second World War opened, Sir Stafford abandoned

his lucrative law practice and in November 1939 undertook a

trip around the world to discover what people were thinking. He

spent eighteen days in India, saw Jinnah, Linlithgow, Tagore,

Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi. (Cripps was the same

age as Nehru and twenty years younger than Gandhi.) The

Mahatma lay ill on the floor of his hut, but as ‘a concession to

your English bones’ he provided a stool for Cripps.

Sir Stafford drafted a plan for Indian constitutional changes

which he presented to Lord Halifax, the former Lord Irwin, now

British Foreign Secretary, who filed it in the archives. Cripps’s

interest in India was recalled when crisis clouds darkened the

horizon of Asia in the winter of 1942. Meanwhile, his prestige had

risen enormously because he was serving as British Ambassador in

Moscow when Hitler invaded Russia. He had been appointed to

the small inner War Cabinet and was often mentioned as

Churchill’s successor.

Cripps arrived in New Delhi on March 22nd, 1942, and the same

day commenced his conferences with British officials. On the

25th, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad called at 3 Queen Victoria

Road, where Cripps was staying. Therewith began the negotia¬

tions with representative Indians.

Gandhi was in his ashram. He received a telegram from

Cripps politely asking him to come to Delhi. T did not wish to

go,’ Gandhi said to me in June 1942, when I interviewed him at

Sevagram, ‘but I went because I thought it would do some good.’

On March 27th, at 2.15 p.m., Gandhi arrived at 3 Queen

Victoria Road and remained with Cripps until 4.25 p.m. Sir

Stafford showed the Mahatma the as-yet-unpublished proposals

of His Majesty’s Government. ‘After a brief study,’ Gandhi told

me in Sevagram, ‘I said to Cripps, “Why did you come if this is

what you have to offer? If this is your entire proposal to India, I

would advise you to take the next plane home.” ’

‘I will consider that,’ Cripps replied.

Cripps did not go home. He proceeded with the conversations.

Gandhi went home to Sevagram. After that first talk, he had no

further contact with Cripps.

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The deliberations continued until April 9th when Congress

finally rejected the Cripps offer. Later, the Moslem League, the

Sikhs, Hindu Mahasabha, the Harijans and Liberals rejected it.

Nobody accepted it. The Cripps Mission failed.

On April 12th, Sir Stafford went home.

The ‘Draft Declaration by His Majesty’s Government’ brought

to India by Cripps consisted of Articles A, B, C and D which

dealt with the post-war period and Article E which dealt with

India’s war effort. The first four articles provided for a full-

fledged Dominion which, as Cripps explained to a press con¬

ference, could vote itself out of the Commonwealth.

Congress, and Gandhi, would have accepted that.

An assembly consisting entirely of Indians would, after the war,

frame a constitution for India; the representatives in that body of

British India would be elected. But one-third of the constituent

assembly would be appointed by the princes of India with

whom the British had considerable influence.

This did not satisfy Indians who feared that England would seek

to retain power in India by manipulating the autocratic maharajas.

Moreover, any province could, if it did not like the future

constitution, refuse to accede to the Indian Union. ‘With such

non-acceding Provinces,’ reads the Draft Declaration, ‘should

they desire, His Majesty’s Government will be prepared to agree

upon a new constitution, giving them the same full status as the

Indian Union. . . .’

This could have led to the establishment of many Indias, a

Hindu India, a Moslem India, a Princely India, perhaps a Sikh

India. But Gandhi had said that the vivisection of India was a sin.

The Cripps terms of the future post-war settlement violated

basic Congress and Gandhian principles. That Azad, Nehru and

Rajagopalachari, the Congress spokesmen, should nevertheless

have negotiated with Cripps shows how eager they were to come

to an agreement about the present.

Article E regarding the immediate war-time arrangement stated:

‘His Majesty’s Government must inevitably bear the responsibility

for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part

of the total war effort’ but invited the leaders of the Indian people

to participate in it.

Gandhi did not wish to fight this war and therefore Article E

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was to him unacceptable. Congress did wish to contribute to the

war effort. But it found Article E vague and restrictive. All

documents show that throughout the pourparlers with Cripps

the efforts of Azad, Nehru and Rajagopalaehari were directed to

expanding the responsibility and activity of Indians in the war

effort; the British, on the other hand, sought to limit them. It was

on this point that the talks broke down.

Official British sources blamed the failure of the Cripps mission

on Gandhi’s pacifism. Others blamed Cripps and Churchill.

Nehru said, 'After Gandhiji left Delhi there was no consultation

with him of any kind and it is entirely wrong to imagine that the

rejection was due to his pressure. 5 Nehru reiterated this view in

his book, The Discovery of India , published in 1946, years after the

heat of the Cripps controversy had died away.

In 1946, Gandhi said to me, ‘They have asserted that I had

influenced the negotiations after I left Delhi. But that is a lie. 5

‘Englishmen have told me, 5 I informed him, ‘that you tele¬

phoned from Sevagram to Delhi and instructed Congress to reject

the Cripps offer. They declare they have a record of that con¬

versation. 5

‘It is all a tissue of lies, 5 he declared. ‘If they have a record of

the telephone conversation let them produce it. 5

It is easy to see how Gandhi’s pacifism would mislead people in

interpreting the collapse of the Cripps talks. Gandhi rejected the

Cripps offer because of his pacifism and, too, out of devotion to

the idea of a united India. Since Gandhi could at all times,

whether or not he actively led Congress, bend it to his will, it

would be natural to deduce that in rejecting the Cripps proposal,

Congress obeyed Gandhi. This appears logical but it omits

Gandhi’s psychology. On numerous occasions before Cripps, and

on one subsequent occasion which determined the fate of India,

Gandhi gave Congress a free hand even when he disliked the

intended act of Congress. That was his non-violence. Non¬

violence was more than non-killing to Gandhi, more than non-

hurting. It was freedom. Had he coerced his followers, he would

have been a violent dictator. He knew that many Congress

leaders wished to participate in the conduct of the war. He

would not interfere.

Some day the official British and American reports on the Cripps

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mission (Louis Johnson functioned as intermediary at one stage)

will be published. Several interesting documents have already

been published.

On March ioth, the day before Churchill announced that

Cripps was going to India, Roosevelt sent a long cable to Churchill

about India. Dipping into American history between 1783 and

1789 for an analogy, the President suggested a stopgap govern¬

ment that would function for ‘five or six years’. ‘Perhaps’,

Roosevelt declared, ‘some such method . . . might cause the people

of India to forget hard feelings and to become more loyal to the

British Empire. . . .’

India, Roosevelt added in the cable to Churchill, is ‘none of my

business’ and ‘for the love of Heaven do not bring me into this,

though I do want to be of help’.

Robert E. Sherwood, who quotes this dispatch in his book

Roosevelt and Hopkins , declares, ‘It is probable that the only part

of the cable with which Churchill agreed was Roosevelt’s admis¬

sion that it is ‘none of my business’ . . . ‘Hopkins’, Sherwood

continues, ‘said a long time later that he did not think that any

suggestions from the President to the Prime Minister in the entire

war were so wrathfully received as those relating to the solution

of the Indian problem. As one of Churchill’s closest and most

affectionate associates has said to me, “The President might have

known that India was the one subject on which Winston would

never move a yard”.’ An inch would be more like it.

On Sunday, April 12th, 1942, Harry Hopkins was at Chequers,

the Prime Minister’s country residence, when he received a cable

request from Roosevelt to do everything possible to prevent the

breakdown of the Cripps negotiations; the President also wired

Churchill saying,

I am unable regretfully to agree with the point of view you

express in your message to me that the American public believes

the negotiations have failed on general broad lines. The general

impression here is quite the contrary. The almost universal

feeling is that the deadlock has been due to the unwillingness of

the British government to concede the right of self-government to

the Indian people notwithstanding the Indians’ willingness to

entrust technical military and naval defence control to the

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competent British authorities. American public opinion cannot

understand why, if the British government is willing to permit

component parts of India to secede from the British Empire after

the war, it is not willing to permit them during the war to enjoy

what is tantamount to self-government.

Roosevelt added, ‘I gather that last Thursday night [April

gth], agreement was .almost reached.’

Gripps had been working eagerly for an agreement, and when the

British government’s Draft Declaration was rejected he made a

new offer to Congress. ‘Cripps’, Churchill told Hopkins, ‘had

presented a new proposal to Nehru without consultation with the

Governor General [Viceroy].’

The new offer brought an understanding measurably near. ‘It

was perfectly clear,’ Hopkins reported, ‘that the Governor

General was irritated with the whole business.’ The Viceroy

telegraphed Churchill. Churchill ordered Cripps to withdraw the

new unauthorized proposal and return to England.

Louis Johnson informed Roosevelt. Roosevelt wired Hopkins to

see Churchill and try to reopen the negotiations.

Churchill, ‘probably with some vehemence’, Sherwood suspects,

replied to Roosevelt through Hopkins. The upshot of it was that

he did not trust Congress. ‘Churchill said that he personally was

quite ready to retire to private life if that would be any good in

assuaging American public opinion . . .’ In any case, the negotia¬

tions could not be reopened because Cripps had already left

India. ‘India was one area’, Hopkins felt, ‘where the minds of

Roosevelt and Churchill would never meet.’

Obviously, the minds of Gandhi and Churchill would never meet.

In 1935, Churchill had declared, ‘Gandhism and all that it

stands for must ultimately be grappled with and finally crushed.’

It stood for India’s independence. For the first time since 1935,

Churchill was in office. Cripps, the Labour anti-imperialist, was

the victim of Churchill. He was the envoy of the Churchill

government, and ‘We mean to hold our own’ was Churchill’s

policy on India. Churchill regarded India as Britain’s property.

How could he have authorized Cripps to give it away? Only

when Churchill was replaced by Cripps’s Labour party did India

win independence.

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Churchill and Gandhi were alike in that each gave his life to a

single cause. A great man is all of one piece like good sculpture.

Churchill’s absorbing purpose was the preservation of Britain as

a first-class power. During the war he showed little interest in

peace aims. He was bound to the past. He was a product of the

nineteenth century and he loved it. He loved Empire, royalty and

caste. Lloyd George despised the British upper classes, the

generals, the nobility. He fought them. Churchill wanted to

perpetuate them. His attachment was not so much to them as to

the nineteenth century that made them. The nineteenth century

was the British century, the century of Pax Britannica after the

defeat of Napoleonic France and before the rise of the Kaiser’s

Germany, the century of the flowering of the British Empire

under Queen Victoria. Britain’s past glory was Churchill’s god.

The upper classes were synonymous to him with the greatness of

his country. So was parliamentary democracy. So was India.

Churchill fought the second World War to preserve the heritage

of Britain. Would he permit the half-naked fakir to rob her of

that heritage? If Churchill could help it, Gandhi would not be

striding up the steps of the Viceroy’s palace to negotiate or parley.

From the time he became the King’s First Minister in 1940 to

the day his party went out of office in 1945, Churchill was in con¬

flict with Gandhi. It was a contest between the past of England

and the future of India.

A British cartoonist once drew Churchill in a loincloth and, in

the next panel, Gandhi in top hat, frock coat and striped trousers,

smoking a long cigar and carrying a cane and brief-case. The

device suggested how different they were under the surface.

Churchill is the Byronic Napoleon. Political power is poetry to

him. Gandhi was the sober saint to whom such power was an¬

athema. The British aristocrat and the brown plebeian were

both conservatives, but Gandhi was a non-conformist conserva¬

tive. As he grew older Churchill became more Tory, Gandhi

more revolutionary. Churchill loved social traditions. Gandhi

smashed social barriers. Churchill mixed with every class, but

lived in his own. Gandhi lived with everybody. To Gandhi,

the lowliest Indian was a child of God. To Churchill, all Indians

were the pedestal for a throne. He would have died to keep

England free, but was against those who wanted India free.

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