# CHAPTER II

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G andhi had been saying that he wanted to live a hundred

and twenty-five years but without becoming ‘an animated

corpse, a burden to one’s relations and society’. How would

he keep physically fit? He first explained how he had kept physic¬

ally fit. In 1901 he threw away the medicine bottle and substituted

nature cures and regular habits of eating, drinking and sleeping.

More important, he developed ‘detachment of mind’, the key to

longevity. ‘Everyone,’ Gandhi said, ‘has a right and should

desire to live 125 years while performing service without an eye

to result.’ Dedication to service and renunciation of the fruits

thereof are ‘an ineffable joy’, a ‘nectar’ which sustains life. It

leaves ‘no room for worry or impatience’. Egoism is the killer;

unselfishness the life preserver.

The Mahatma now adopted an additional cause: nature cure.

He called it his ‘latest born’; the older children — khadi, village

industries, the development of a national language, food-growing,

independence for India, freedom for Indians and world peace —

continued to receive his energetic care. For the new baby, a

trust was set up with Gandhi as one of three trustees. Dr. Dinshah

Mehta, Gandhi’s physician, had a nature-cure clinic in the city of

Poona and it was therefore agreed, as the trust’s first venture, to

expand the clinic into a nature-cure university.

But one silent Monday Gandhi abruptly decided to abandon

the project. It ‘dawned upon me’, he confessed, ‘that I was a fool

to think that I could ever hope to make an institute for the poor

in a town’. He had to carry nature cure to the poor and not

expect the poor to come to him. This. mistake had a moral:

‘Never take anything for gospel truth even if it comes from a

Mahatma unless it appeals to both . . . head and heart.’ Gandhi

disliked automatic obedience.

He would start nature-cure work in a village; ‘that is real India,’

he wrote, ‘my India, for which I live’. He did so immediately.

He settled down for a short while in Uruli, a village of three

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thousand inhabitants on the Poona-Sholapur railway line with

plenty of water, a good climate, fruit farms, a telegraph and post

office, but no telephone.

The first day, thirty peasants appeared at the nature cure

centre. Gandhi himself examined six. In each case, he prescribed

the same thing: the continuous recitation of God’s name, sun

baths, friction and hip baths,- cow’s milk, buttermilk, fruit juices

and plenty of water. The reciting of God’s name, however, should

be more than lip movement; it must absorb the entire being

throughout the recitation and throughout life. ‘All mental and

physical ailments,’ Gandhi explained simply, ‘are due to one

common cause. It is therefore but natural that there should be a

common remedy.’ Almost everyone is sick in body or mind, he

said. Repeating ‘Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama’ while

intensively concentrating on godliness, goodness, service and

selflessness paves the way for the remedial functions of mudpacks,

sitz baths and massage.

Gandhi was himself a proof of the power of mind and mood

over matter.

Gandhi was occupied with health throughout his entire adult

life and indeed in his youth when he nursed his dying father. He

doctored everyone within reach. Pain in others pained him. He

was capable of boundless compassion.

The loving mother fervently yet vainly wishes she could take

her child’s illness upon herself. Gandhi’s fasts were suffering self-

inflicted in the hope of alleviating the sufferings of untouchables,

strikers, Hindus and Moslems. He did penance for those who

inflicted pain.

The inner compulsion to relieve misery and assuage pain comes

very close to being Gandhi’s deepest urge. It is the kin of love,

the root of non-violence, the spur to service. Gandhi believed his

mission was to heal. He was India’s doctor. The India of the

last two years of his life gave him ample work.

There was famine in the land, food and clothing famine. ‘Grain

and cloth dealers must not hoard, must not speculate,’ he wrote

on February 17th, 1946. ‘Food should be grown on all cultivable

areas wherever water is or is made available . . . All ceremonial

functions should be stopped. . . .\*

He had been wandering over Bengal, Assam and Madras. In

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one locality, six hundred thousand people came to a meeting.

‘Grow More Food 5 was his slogan. ‘Spin,’ he begged. ‘Every

pint of water, whether from bathing and ablutions or from the

kitchen should be turned into backyard vegetable beds, 5 he told

townspeople. ‘Vegetables could be grown in earthen pots and even

in old discarded tins. 5

Hunger raised the question of the nation’s high birth rate. ‘Let

me say, 5 he stated, fihat propagation of the race rabbit-wise must

undoubtedly be stopped, but not so as to bring greater evils in its

train. It should be stopped by methods which in themselves

ennoble the race, 5 by ‘the sovereign remedy of self-control. 5

Shortages provoked looting of shops and other violent outbursts.

Heavy rioting took place in Bombay. In Calcutta, Delhi and other

cities mobs engaged in arson, compelled passers-by to shout slo¬

gans, and forced Englishmen to remove their hats. Gandhi

reprimanded them severely. Indian sailors in the British navy in

the harbour of Bombay mutinied and were only with difficulty

persuaded by Congress leaders to desist.

‘Now that it seems we are coming into our own, 5 Gandhi wrote

on February ioth, 1946, f indiscipline and hooliganism 5 , which

were increasing, ‘ought to go, and calmness, rigid discipline, co¬

operation and goodwill must take their place ... I hug the hope 5 ,

he continued, ‘that when real responsibility comes to the people

and the dead weight of a foreign army of occupation is removed,

we shall be natural, dignified and restrained. . . .

‘Let me affirm that I love the Englishman as well as the Indian, 5

he wrote in March.

Prime Minister Attlee announced that a British Cabinet mission,

consisting of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for

India; Sir Stafford Gripps, President of the Board of Trade; and

Albert V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, were coming

to India to settle the terms of liberation. ‘Emphatically, 5 Gandhi

affirmed, ‘it betrays want of foresight to disbelieve British declara¬

tions and precipitate a quarrel in anticipation. Is the official

deputation coming to deceive a great nation? It is neither manly

nor womanly to think so. 5

The Cabinet Mission arrived from England in New Delhi on

March 23rd and immediately began to interview Indian leaders.

Gandhi came to Delhi to meet the British ministers and ‘at my

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request,’ writes Pethick-Lawrence, ‘in spite of the trying weather

conditions in Delhi during the ensuing months, he remained in

touch with us and with the Congress Working Committee during

the whole progress of the negotiations’. Gandhi stayed in the

untouchables’ slums where Cripps, Pethick-Lawrence and

Alexander, as well as many Indians, visited him regularly. Some¬

times, too, Gandhi went to 2 Willingdon Crescent, the house

occupied by the Mission, and on one occasion, by arrangement, he

encountered Pethick-Lawrence on his evening walk and thus

avoided the publicity that attended every one of Gandhi’s acts.

After weeks of goings and comings with no definite result, the

Cabinet Mission invited the Congress and the Moslem League to

send four delegates each to a conference in Simla. Gandhi was

not a delegate but he made himself available in the summer

capital for consultation. At a subsequent stage Nehru and Jinnah

wrestled with the issues privately. There was no agreement. The

two Indian parties did not wish to accept the onus of devising a

plan or of agreeing with one another.

Finally, Gandhi told the Cabinet Mission to suggest a plan to

the Indian parties.

The Cabinet Mission’s plan, published on May 16th, 1946, was

Britain’s proposal for the liquidation of British power in India.

‘Whether you like the Cabinet delegation’s announcement or

not,’ Gandhi told his prayer meeting that day, ‘it is going to be

the most momentous one in the history of India and therefore

requires careful study.’

Gandhi pondered the announcement for four days and then

stated that after ‘searching examination . . . my conviction abides

that it is the best document the British government could have

produced in the circumstances’.

Rejecting a facile and popular Indian charge, Gandhi said in

Harijan of May 26th, 1946, ‘The Congress and the Moslem League

did not, could not agree. We would err grievously if at this time we

foolishly satisfy ourselves that the differences are a British creation.’

The British government’s ‘one purpose’, the Mahatma said,

‘is to end British rule as early as can be’.

‘Voluminous evidence’, the Cabinet mission’s statement

declared, ‘has shown an almost universal desire, outside the

supporters of the Moslem League, for the unity of India.’

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Nevertheless, ‘We were greatly impressed by the very genuine

and acute anxiety of the Moslems lest they should find themselves

subjected to a perpetual Hindu-majority rule. This has become

so strong and widespread amongst the Moslems that it cannot be

allayed by mere paper safeguards. If there is to be internal peace

in India it must be secured by measures which will insure to the

Moslems a control in all matters vital to their culture, religion and

economic and other interests.’

The Mission therefore examined ‘closely and impartially the

possibility of a partition of India’.

What was the result?

On the basis of statistics given in the statement, the Cabinet

Mission proved that in the north-western area of Pakistan the non-

Moslem minority would constitute 37.93 per cent, and in the north¬

eastern area it would amount to 48.31 per cent, while twenty

million Moslems would remain outside Pakistan as a minority in

the other India. ‘These figures show’, the statement said, ‘that

the setting up of a separate sovereign State of Pakistan on the

lines claimed by the Moslem League would not solve the com¬

munal minority problem.’

The Mission then considered whether a smaller Pakistan, which

excluded non-Moslem areas, was feasible. ‘Such a Pakistan’, the

statement noted, ‘is regarded by the Moslem League as quite

impracticable.’ It would have necessitated the division of the

Punjab, Bengal and Assam between the two new states, whereas

Jinnah demanded those three provinces in their entirety. ‘We

ourselves’, the Ministers affirmed, ‘are also convinced that any

solution which involves a radical partition of the Punjab and

Bengal, as this would do, would be contrary to the wishes of a

very large percentage of the inhabitants of these Provinces. Bengal

and the Punjab each has its own common language and a long

history and tradition. Moreover, any division of the Punjab would

of necessity divide the Sikhs, leaving substantial bodies of Sikhs on

both sides of the boundary.’

The division of India, the Mission said, would weaken the

country’s defences and violently tear in two its communications

and transport systems. ‘Finally there is the geographical fact that

the two halves of the proposed Pakistan State are separated by

some seven hundred miles and the communications between

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them both in war and peace would be dependent on the goodwill

of Hindustan. . . .

‘We are therefore unable to advise the British government’, the

statement announced, ‘that the power which at present resides in

British hands should be handed over to two entirely separate

sovereign States.’

Instead, the British Ministers recommended a united India,

embracing both British India and the native states, with one

federal government to deal with foreign affairs, defence and

communications. In the national legislature, a majority of those

voting and a majority of the Hindus as well as a majority of the

Moslems voting would be required to decide any major com¬

munal or religious issue.

Newly elected provincial legislatures would elect the members

of a national Constituent Assembly. It would draft India’s

constitution.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet mission announced, Lord Waved would

proceed with the formation of an interim or provisional government.

In a peroration, the Cabinet statement declared that the Indian

people now had ‘the opportunity of complete independence . . .

in the shortest time and with the least danger of internal disturb¬

ance and conflict’.

That same day, May 16th, 1946, Cripps, Pethick-Lawrence and

Waved, speaking on the radio, explained and extolled the plan.

Cripps called attention to the danger of nationwide famine and

the need of preventing a breakdown of administrative machinery.

‘Let no one doubt for one moment our intentions,’ he begged.

Pethick-Lawrence addressed his audience as ‘a great people’.

This term had political significance, for the Moslem leaders always

spoke of ‘peoples’. He pleaded with the Moslems to accept the

plan; it gave them the advantages of a Pakistan without its

disadvantages. Waved spoke of the necessity of maintaining the

union of India and closed with a verse from Longfellow:

Thou too, sail on, O Ship of State,

Sail on, O Union, strong and great,

Humanity with ad its fears,

With ad the hopes of future years

Is hanging breathless on thy Fate.

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Jinnah criticized the Cabinet Mission on May 21st. He insisted

that Pakistan was the only solution and deplored the ‘common¬

place and exploded arguments aimed at it by Pethick-Lawrence,

Cripps and Alexander ... It seems’, he charged, ‘that this was

done by the Mission simply to appease and placate the Congress’.

Jinnah said he would have preferred a Union with no Union

legislature and an executive branch with an equal.number of

Moslems and Hindus. If there was to be a national legislature, it

too should, he felt, consist of as many representatives from

Pakistan as from Hindustan; and ‘in regard to any matter of a

controversial nature’, a three-fourths majority would be necessary

in the executive and the legislature. All these ideas were ignored

by the British ministers, he complained. Small wonder. They

would have made government impossible.

On June 4th, nevertheless, the Moslem League accepted the

Cabinet Mission’s plan.

Everything depended on what the Congress party would do.

The Congress Working Committee withdrew to Mussoorie, a

summer resort in the hills, to escape the debilitating heat and

suffocating dust storms of Delhi, and took Gandhi with them.

India’s eyes were on Mussoorie. The Working Committee

deliberated with Gandhi. The meetings were more fateful than

they knew.

Foreign correspondents followed Gandhi to Mussoorie. ‘What

would you do if you were dictator of India for a day?’ one of them

asked.

If the journalist had expected Gandhi’s answer to contain some

hint of the long-delayed Congress decision, he was disappointed.

‘I would not accept it,’ Gandhi replied, but if he did he would

spend the day cleaning out the hovels of the Harijans in New

Delhi and converting the Viceroy’s palace into a hospital. ‘Why

does the Viceroy need such a big house?’ he exclaimed.

‘Well, sir,’ the journalist persisted, ‘suppose they continue your

dictatorship for a second day?’

‘The second day,’ Gandhi said with a laugh, ‘would be a pro¬

longation of the first.’ This provoked general gaiety among the

Indians present.

Still no word of the Congress response to the Cabinet Mission’s

proposal!

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On June 8th, refreshed by the pine-scented breezes that blew

down from the cool, wooded slopes, Gandhi returned in a car to

New Delhi where the Congress deliberations would be continued.

Rajagopalachari, no longer a member of the Working Committee

(nor was Gandhi), had come from Madras to Delhi to urge

acceptance of the British plan.

A week passed and still no word from Congress on whether it

would accept or reject the Cabinet Mission’s proposal.

On June 16th Lord Wavell announced that Congress and the

Moslem League had failed to agree on the composition of a

provisional government and he was therefore appointing fourteen

Indians to posts in that government.

Congress now had to answer two questions: to join or not to

join the provisional government; to enter or not to enter the

Constituent Assembly and draft a new constitution for a free

united India.

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