

CHAPTER LVI.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV.

The First Round Table Conference.

The first Indian Round Table Conference was inaugurated by His Majesty the King-Emperor, George V, in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords on the 12th November 1930 and remained in session till January 19th 1931. In opening the conference and in offering a welcome to the members, His Majesty said:—

“..... More than once has the sovereign summoned historic assemblies on the soil of India, but never before have British and Indian statesmen and Rulers of Indian States met, as you now meet, in one place and round one table, to discuss the future system of government for India and seek agreement for the guidance of my Parliament as to the foundations upon which it must stand. Nearly ten years ago, in a message to my Indian Legislature I dwelt upon the significance of its establishment in the constitutional progress of India. Ten years is but a brief span in the life of any nation, but this decade has witnessed, not only in India but throughout all the nations forming the British Commonwealth, a quickening and growth in ideals and aspirations of nationhood which defy the customary measurement of time. It should therefore be no matter of surprise to the men of this generation that, as was then contemplated, it should have become necessary to estimate and review the results of what was begun ten years ago and to make further provision for the future. Such a review has been lately carried out by the Statutory Commission appointed by me for the purpose and you will have before you the outcome of their labours, together with other contributions which have been or can be made to the solution of the great problem confronting you. No words of mine are needed to bring home to you the momentous character of the task to which you have set your hands. Each one of you will, with me, be profoundly conscious how much depends for the whole of the British Commonwealth on the issue of your consultations. This community of interest leads me to count it as of happy augury that there should be present to-day the representa-

tives of my Governments in all the sister-States of that Commonwealth..... I cannot doubt that the true foundation of self-government is in the fusion of divergent claims into mutual obligations and in their recognition and fulfilment. It is my hope that the future government of India based on this foundation will give expression to her honourable aspirations."

After the King left the Royal Gallery, on the proposal of the Maharaja of Patiala, the Prime Minister Mr. Ramsay Macdonald was appointed chairman of the Conference. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald said, among other things, that the association of the Princes for the first time in joint conclave with the representatives of the people of British India was symbolical of the gradual moulding together of India into one whole. Referring to the British Indian delegates, the Prime Minister said that though he was mindful of India's different communities, languages and interests, at the same time he was also aware of the quickening and unifying influences which had grown up irresistibly from her contact with Great Britain and also of the aspirations for a united India which were in the minds of her philosophers and rulers before the first English trader set foot on her shores. The simple fact that the Indians had come to their country to sit at one table with the set and sole purpose of India's advancement within the companionship of the Commonwealth was in itself an undeniable sign of progress towards that end and also an inspiring challenge to reach agreement.

With the appointment of a committee to advise the conference on the conduct of business, the session adjourned to the 17th November. On that day the conference met at St. James' Palace and there was a general discussion on the question whether the future constitution of India was to be on a federal or unitary basis. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was the first speaker and in an able and lucid speech he stated that in his opinion a federal form of government for India was most acceptable. Sir Tej Bahadur further said that never before was India governed by agents and sub-agents as it was being done at present and even Mahomedans who came as invaders soon settled down in the country and became part and

parcel of the Indian social system. The system established by the British however was that of Parliamentary Sovereignty,—sovereignty exercised by some 600 and odd members of Parliament on behalf of a population of 45 millions over 320 millions of people living 6000 miles away from England. Ordinary members of Parliament had neither the necessary time, nor the necessary capacity, nor the necessary vision to understand the mind or feelings of India, and the Secretary of State, however distinguished he was, was one of those 600 men and necessarily had to depend upon the advice of men in the India Office. The Civil Servants might be entitled to considerable regard, but while they could be very good servants, at the same time they were very bad masters. Thus it came down to the sovereignty of half a dozen men in England and half a dozen men in India and that was how the theory of Parliamentary Sovereignty worked out. It was therefore natural for India to seek freedom within her own borders as an integral part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. What India wanted and was determined to achieve was a status of equality with the other members of the British Commonwealth—an equality which would give it a government not merely responsive to but responsible to the popular voice. It would not do for the British Government merely to offer Provincial Autonomy, unless it was coupled with a decided and clear change in the constitution of the Central Government made responsible to the legislature. At that stage it might no doubt well be asked—what was to be the relation of that responsible Central Government to the Provinces and to the States. This question gave rise to a further question whether the constitution was to be of a federal or of any other character. The Indian Princes were every inch as patriotic as any others and Sir Tej Bahadur's appeal to them was that their vision should not be confined only to that part of India which formed their territories, but that they should move forward with the vision of India as one whole, each part of which might be autonomous and might enjoy absolute independence within its own borders, regulated by proper relations with the rest. If there was agreement as regards responsibility in the Centre, it was inevitable that a federal form of government afforded the best

solution. The association of Indian States with British India was to be welcomed for three reasons:—1. The States would furnish a stabilising factor in the constitution 2. they would begin the process of unification at once and 3. they would furnish a practical experience in matters of defence which was wanting in British India. There might be difficulties in the way of the introduction of responsibility in the Central Government in connection with Law and Order, European interests, Commerce, Finance, Army and a few other subjects. But these difficulties were, however, to be faced and not regarded as insurmountable.

The next speaker was the Maharaja Sir Ganga Singhji of Bikaner who caused a dramatic surprise by declaring the adherence of the Princes in general to the scheme of Federation so enthusiastically urged by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. In connection with the inquiries of the Butler Committee, the attitude of several of the Princes in employing a counsel on their behalf to put forward their side of the case before the committee appeared, said the Maharaja, to have caused misgivings regarding the reforms, which however were as much desired in the Indian States as in British India. This clear pronouncement by the Bikaner Maharaja regarding Federation was acceptable both to the British Government as well as to the inhabitants of the States. His speech dispelled the illusion that the Indian Princes were speaking only for themselves and their dynastic interests and it became clear that they fully deserved the compliment paid to them by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru that the present-day Princes were Indians first and Princes afterwards. The Maharaja spoke on a variety of topics which need not all be referred to here. But a few extracts relating to the establishment of a Federal Government in India may be given here to understand the angle of vision of the Princes regarding Federation. "..... My own conviction is that if we are to build well and truly, we must recognise that associated with its geographical unity India is a land of some diversity. Our starting-point must be sought not in the dead hand of an impossible uniformity but in an associated diversity. For these reasons, the establishment of a unitary State with a sovereign Parliament sitting

at Delhi to which the whole people would look in small things as in large is to my mind impossible. There would be no room in such a constitution for the Indian States; moreover, such a Government would crack under its own imponderability..... We of the Indian States are willing to take our part in and make our contribution to the greater prosperity and contentment of India as a whole. I am convinced that we can best make that contribution through a Federal system of Government composed of the States and British India. These two partners are of different status. The Indian States are already sovereign and autonomous of right having the honour of being linked with the Crown by means of treaties 'of perpetual alliance and friendship' and unity of interests. British India derives whatever measure of authority it may possess by devolution. But it will not be beyond the wealth of experience available at this Table to devise a means of linking these differing units into a powerful Federal administration. As to the question whether if a Federal Government is devised for India the Princes and States will enter into association with it, the final answer must obviously depend on the structure of the Government indicated and on other points involved; such, for instance, as certain necessary safeguards—constitutional and fiscal—for the preservation of the rights and interests of the States and their subjects. Federalism is an elastic term; there are several forms of Federal Government. Conditions in India are unique. We have no historical precedents to guide us, and the position of the Indian States is absolutely without parallel. All these and many other grave questions of policy and of detail will have to be examined and defined and settled first in committee and in informal discussions. But, speaking broadly, the Princes and States realise that an All-India Federation is likely to prove the only satisfactory solution of India's problem..... A period of transition must necessarily intervene before the Federal Government is fully constituted and Federation cannot be achieved by coercion of the States in any form. The Indian Princes will only come into the Federation of their own free will and on terms which will secure the just rights of their States and subjects..... The arrangements between the Central and Provincial Governments in British

India are matters primarily outside the purview of the Indian States. If our co-operation is sought, it will, I am sure, be gladly and freely and honestly given. Our duty is to contribute so far as we can to the evolution of a system of government which will lead to the close and effective association of the Indian States with British India."

H. H. Sikander Khan, the Nawab of Bhopal, in speaking on the 20th November said:—"..... I note that both Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and other speakers recognise that nothing in a system of Federation connotes any interference with the internal affairs of the States, that their treaties with the Crown will remain unaltered unless and until modified by mutual consent, and that it is in matters of common concern hereafter to be defined by mutual agreement and in nothing else that Federation will be concerned. On that understanding only one feature has to be added to the picture that the Federation shall be equal on both sides and that there can be no question of the status of the States being in any way subordinate to that of the rest of India. On those conditions I entirely agree with the principle of Federation..... A free Indian State must mean the disappearance of that doctrine of Paramountcy which has been imported contrary to our treaties into the relations between the States and the Paramount Power and which has been so much in vogue in comparatively recent times..... That is one of the facts to be kept steadily in mind. On the other side of the case, we Princes have no apprehension as to how the processes at work in the rest of India where we must rely on democracy not being made a cloak for aggression will affect our peoples and we shall be content to leave it to our States to work out their own development. In this connection, seeing that communal troubles have bulked so largely in the news from India thus creating an impression that the country is the cockpit of warring sects and thus standing in the way of her aspirations, I wish to make it clear as the point has not been brought out hitherto that among the Princes no rift exists as between Muslims and Hindus and that in the Indian States communal tension has so rarely occurred that it can be said to be

practically non-existent. This fact brings me to a second point, namely, that there is nothing in our respective religions which should lead to such ill-will and that the reason why it has arisen in British India has been solely political. The various minority movements have exactly the same basis and equally the attitude of the politically-minded in India towards Great Britain which has demonstrated itself at times in ways which are frankly to be deplored is not, believe me, inspired by racial animosity but is solely political and as soon as the foundations of the constitution for a self-governing India are well and truly laid, these differences, we all believe, will automatically disappear. These are facts which I can state from personal knowledge and without risk of contradiction, because we Indian Princes are not isolated in our States but from our very position as rulers are bound to keep in touch with the course of events and the trend of thought in other parts of India. We know fully as well as the people of India represented by the delegates here present, and possibly more clearly than the British authorities, the amazing growth of the national feeling throughout India."

On 20th November 1930 Sir Mirza Ismail said:—"I only wish to say that in the opinion of the States which I am privileged to represent at this conference—Mysore, Travancore, Cochin and Pudukota—the time has come for a radical change in the present system of government in India. That is a change which seems equally necessary in the interests of both countries—not more necessary for India than it is for Great Britain,—Great Britain which is only less dear to us than our own Motherland. To my mind, the success of this conference will be judged mainly by this test—how far have we been able to bring England and India closer together in bonds of true friendship and unity. India wants to remain within the Empire as an equal partner with the rest. She has no desire to sever her connection with Great Britain. As my friend Mr. Jayakar said the other day, this cry of independence is only a cry of despair. I would attach no importance to it save as an indication of the intense desire felt by the people of India generally for greater opportunities of self-expression and self-development.

“ There is, I believe, general agreement with the view, both in this conference and outside, that the future Government of India should be constructed on a Federal basis. What exactly is meant by the term ‘ Federal ’ in its application to the peculiar conditions of India will have to be discussed and determined in committee. That—I mean the constitution of the Central Government—is the fundamental issue before this conference.

“ By agreeing to join an All-India Federation, the Ruling Princes have rendered incalculable service to their Motherland at this most critical juncture in her history. Their attitude has enormously facilitated the work of this conference and has made the whole political problem of India more easy of a satisfactory solution than it would have been otherwise. I am one of those who entertain no doubt whatever that the Princes will never have any reason to regret their decision and that they and their States will occupy an honoured and assured position in the future councils of their Motherland. India is a land of many creeds and many communities and diverse interests ; but I believe that it is this very diversity that will go far to ensure the requisite stability in the democratic institutions that are proposed to be established in our country.

“ Another matter upon which we—I mean the Indian section of the conference—are agreed is that a measure of responsibility should be introduced at the Centre if the constitution is to work satisfactorily and to enjoy an adequate measure of confidence and support from the people. Whatever may be the risks and the difficulties in taking such a step—and they are undoubtedly considerable—the British Government will, we all hope, come to the conclusion that a solution which does not satisfy the people at large is no solution at all. It can neither work smoothly nor endure for any length of time. A constitution which provides for full autonomy in the Provinces, responsibility at the Centre subject to such transitional safeguards as may be necessary and unavoidable and a close association between British India and the States in matters of common concern—this, let us hope, may be the result of

our deliberations here, a result which, I venture to think, would satisfy all reasonable people in India.

“In conclusion, I should like to assure my fellow delegates from British India that we of the Indian States whole-heartedly join with them in their appeal to the British nation to set India on the road to self-government. I would, at the same time, venture to ask my countrymen to remember—I hope I shall not be misunderstood, for I think I speak nothing but the obvious truth—that that great journey cannot be accomplished successfully nor can those patriotic aspirations, ours as much as theirs, be fully realised except in company of their compatriots in the States and, may I also add, with the goodwill and co-operation of Great Britain.”

On the 8th January 1931 at the meeting of the Federal Structure sub-committee Sir Mirza elaborated his views on the form of Federation. The question of responsibility at the Centre, he said, was really the crux of the whole problem of further constitutional reforms in India and was the vital issue before the conference. It was because the Simon Commission's Report failed to recommend responsibility at the Centre and it was because the Government of India Despatch, too, had not suggested it that India was so sullen and dissatisfied. Sir Mirza assumed that the future Government of India would be a body responsible to the Legislature in all matters excepting those relating to Defence and Foreign and Political Relations, with such temporary safeguards as might be absolutely necessary in the interest both of Great Britain and India. In his speech which comprehended a number of other subjects also, Sir Mirza touched upon the question of tributes or subsidies that some States paid. Sir Bhupendranath Mitra's suggestion that if the tributes were abolished the States should continue to furnish a fund for meeting expenditure connected with the maintenance of Political Agents and their establishments was opposed, Sir Mirza said, to the facts which brought these subsidies into existence. In the suggestion made by Sir Bhupendranath Mitra he not only lost sight of the fact that the tributes were not instituted for the purpose of maintaining political establishments, but that they were only fixed in return for

internal and external protection. In the future polity of India as the function of protection would devolve on the Government of the Federation of which the States would form an integral part, it was logically right that the tributes must disappear, their place being taken by contributions from the States based on grounds common to all Provinces and States. Lord Sankey who presided, on the conclusion of Sir Mirza's Speech, stated that any advice or any views coming from the Dewan of Mysore would receive the most careful consideration of all of them.

Towards the end of the meeting, the Prime Minister read a declaration which contained, among other matters, a clear enunciation of the policy of the British Government towards India. His Majesty's Government, he said, had taken note of the fact that the deliberations of the conference had proceeded on the basis accepted by all parties that the Central Government should be a Federation of All-India embracing both the Indian States and British India with a bi-cameral legislature. The precise form and structure of the new Federal Government was to be determined after further discussion with the Princes and representatives of British India. The range of subjects to be committed to it also required further discussion, because the Federal Government was to have authority only in such matters concerning the States as would be ceded by their Rulers in agreements made by them on entering into Federation. The connection of the States with the Federation was to remain subject to the basic principle that in regard to all matters not ceded by them to the Federation their relations would be with the Crown acting through the agency of the Viceroy. With a legislature constituted on a Federal basis, His Majesty's Government were prepared to recognise the principle of responsibility of the Executive to the Legislature.

On his return from London from the first Round Table Conference, Sir Mirza Ismail received an ovation from the people of Mysore. On the 1st June 1931 when he presided at the Birthday Session of the Representative Assembly at Mysore, he was accorded a warm welcome by all the members present and two of them Mr. H. C. Dasappa and Mr. Mahomed Imam gave expression to

the feelings of the House on the occasion. Mr. Dasappa said that the people of Mysore had been closely watching the discussions, deliberations and developments at the Round Table Conference and that they were pleased to find that their representative materially contributed to the success of the conference. The Dewan's bold assertion at the very outset that the Indian States would support the formation of a Federated India and equally his pleading for responsibility at the Centre should have gone a long way in dispelling any doubts which the British Indian delegates might have had about the attitude which the Indian States would take. The other member Mr. J. Mahomed Imam also joined Mr. Dasappa in supporting the welcome offered to the Dewan and said that in the selection of Sir Mirza Ismail as the representative of the South Indian States to the Round Table Conference they felt that the whole of Mysore was honoured.