

Part Three

SPEECH ON RETURN TO LONDON FROM INDIA

29 June, 1948

Speech to the members of the East India Association, made at a reception at the Imperial Institute in London, immediately after Lord Mountbatten's return from India.

29 JUNE 1948

I SHOULD like on behalf of my wife and myself to express our deep sense of gratitude to the East India Association for honouring us at this reception this afternoon.

I was in a slight quandary when I accepted the invitation because it involved speaking on India. I pointed out to Lord Scarbrough that it would be difficult, if not improper, for me to discuss in any detail what had occurred during the time I was a servant of free India. But he replied that on account of the limited size of the newspapers and the amount of positive news that comes through about India it would not be unwelcome if I spoke in some detail about the period of my Viceroyalty and more briefly on the constitutional period which followed.

In March of last year when I was sworn in as Viceroy and Governor-General in Delhi, although I found there was no space in the programme for a speech, I nevertheless did say a few words on that occasion in order to convey a message to the people of India. I said I was under no illusion as to the immense difficulty of the task confronting me, and pointed out that this task could be brought to a successful conclusion only if there was the utmost goodwill from the greatest number of people. I asked India for that goodwill. During the course of my talk to-day I hope you will see that I got a full measure of that goodwill, more than anyone could have expected or deserved.

Before I left for India there were discussions in London with the Prime Minister and the India-Burma Committee of the Cabinet, and we agreed upon a programme or rather a time-table on how the transfer of power was to be handled. We

came to the conclusion that my first six or seven months there should be spent in studying the problem on the spot. Before the end of 1947 I was to communicate back my proposals for the transfer of power to enable legislation to be introduced early in 1948, so that the actual transfer could take place this month, June, 1948.

When I got out to India I realized (as had so often been my past experience in war) that when one gets up to the front the situation looks a little different from the way it appeared in London. I found that, although we in London had visualized the programme of transfer for June, 1948, to be moving at lightning speed, in India it was regarded as being much too slow. Everybody there was agreed on this point: the leaders, leading British officials, my staff advisers. Everybody was certain that an early and correct decision as well as an early announcement on the position would have to be made if we were going to arrest the increasing swing of the pendulum. There were riots and reprisals for riots. They had already occurred in three Provinces and had started in the North-West Frontier Province the month I arrived out there.

Looking at the problem, the first thing that struck me (and an opinion which I have not changed) was that the right answer would have been to have kept a united India.

The admirable Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 was accepted by every party in India at one time or another, though never by all parties at the same time. It was, in fact, one of those plans that could be made to work only by the active will and co-operation of all parties. It could not be enforced on the people any more than one could force a horse to drink after it had been led to the water.

I started off by seeing as many of the leaders as I could. I went on hour after hour, day after day, and when I first had interviews with people like Gandhi, Jinnah, and Nehru I refused to talk business at all. I simply got to know them. They told me about their early days. Gandhi went right through his history in South Africa and his early days in London. Jinnah told me the tale of his life at the Bar in London. It was several hours before I would talk about India at all. But after we got

to know one another and had made friends we were able to progress fairly quickly. I soon realized that nothing I could do or say could deflect the Muslim League from its intention to insist absolutely on partition of the country. No other solution would have been peacefully accepted by the Muslim League.

The next problem was to see if the Congress Party, who had always stood for united India, would be prepared to consider partition as the price for a quick transfer of power and the restoration of peace. The Congress Party have always stood for non-coercion, and they said that, provided that no non-Muslim majority community went into the partition areas against its will, they would raise no objection. It was pointed out that in the case of Provinces like the Punjab and Bengal partition would undoubtedly be involved. When this was put to Jinnah he was against the performance of a surgical operation on Provinces which had ancient histories of unity. A man was a Punjabi or a Bengali before he was a Muslim or a Hindu. I agreed. I said that the feeling invoked in his heart by the prospect of the partition of these Provinces was the feeling invoked in my heart and the heart of Congress against the partition of India itself. And so we went, as one might say, around the mulberry bush, always coming back to the same point.

Having worked out the rough outline for partition and how it could be effected, the next problem was to find out whether or not this was really the will of the people. Of course, the right way to have found this out would have been to have taken a plebiscite on the basis of adult franchise, but that would have taken years, not months. The only alternative was to use the Legislative Assemblies, elected as recently as 1946 and presumably, therefore, representing the will of the people. Now I will not go into the details, which were widely publicized, but I would point out that the Plan of June 3, 1947, was a plan created by the process of open diplomacy. Its every stage and every point was the result of frank discussion with all the leaders. The Plan was not put on paper for several weeks, but I kept notes, and at every turn I spoke and tried to reconcile the different points of view and gain points of common ground. I am not going to pretend that the Plan of June 3 was ideal;

I know it was far from satisfactory to all the parties concerned. But, on the other hand, it was quite impossible to give everybody complete satisfaction, for had that been possible my services would never have been required. Long ago the leaders would have found a solution for themselves without the tremendous turmoil and riots then going on in India.

Although we were able to resolve the problem of the major communities, we were left with the problem of one of the minor communities. As you know, the greatest community, the Hindu community, is just under 300,000,000 strong. The Muslim community number just under 100,000,000. Then come the Christians, and fourthly come the Sikhs, numbering just under 6,000,000. They are small but very compact, a warlike and dominating race, and they live entirely in the Punjab. The week before I arrived Congress had put up a resolution on their behalf, which Lord Wavell passed to me, saying that they wished for the Punjab to be partitioned in accordance with the Muslim and non-Muslim majority areas. I naturally accepted that and assumed that the Sikhs knew what they were about. But I was greatly surprised to find upon examining the population map that by their own resolution they were proposing to bisect themselves into almost two equal halves.

It was then too late to change' the basis of partition, and if we were to adhere to the principles concerning Muslim and non-Muslim majority areas, the principles accepted and conceded to both sides, only a miracle could have kept the Sikhs together in one part of India. Well, we were not able to work miracles and we did not find a solution. The best thing we were able to do was to arrange for the leaders, including the Sikh leaders, to nominate a Committee to produce the terms of reference for the Boundary Commissions so that the boundaries might be drawn up on lines acceptable to all those concerned.

The next point that arose was: When was the transfer of power to take place? On that point there was absolutely no difference of opinion at least no difference of opinion that made itself heard to me. Everybody wanted the greatest possible speed, everybody wanted the transfer of power to take place quickly. Indeed, why wait? For in waiting there

would be the risk of continued and increasing riots. There would be increasing friction and difficulty in keeping together the Indian Coalition Government, of which I was virtually the Prime Minister, and which was then running along on completely divergent lines. So we went ahead and fixed a date. It took two years to separate Sind from Bombay. We separated 400,000,000 people in two and a half months. To do that we set up a Partition Council with an immense number of sub-committees, which settled and resolved matters in record time.

But in spite of that I was still left with a major problem (I am coming back to the Plan itself). How was I going to transfer power quickly to one or two nations or countries which had not yet got a Constitution of their own? One of them, it was true, had a Constituent Assembly, so that by June, 1948, they might perhaps have produced a Constitution. With regard to the other we did not know, theoretically at least, if it was even going to come into being. If it did it was not until August 15 that they would be able to set up a Constituent Assembly. It was a legal conundrum of the first magnitude, and a completely new element entered into the situation when we came to try and solve this particular conundrum, because the only solution I could see at the time was to continue to use the existing Constitution. That Constitution had been set up by the 1935 Government of India Act, and was rightly claimed as being one of the most remarkable pieces of legislation of our time. It was said that upwards of 15,000 questions were answered about it by the Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare, before the Joint Select Committee, and not a single clause of the Act had had to be changed.

It was proposed that this would be amended in the way the future Dominion Governments would wish, and that they should be given the power to continue to amend the Act after the transfer of power. This was the only quick way of transfer, and they both readily accepted. I should like to add that I know of no other countries in the world to-day in the fortunate position of having a Constitution that is already a working Constitution, but which can be amended by a stroke of the pen day by day to be made to work more agreeably to themselves,

While all these discussions were going on between both parties in Delhi we must not forget that there was a third party in London. That third party was His Majesty's Government, who were in fact constitutionally responsible. It was therefore clear that before the Plan could be finalized I should have to fly home and see His Majesty's Government. I arrived on a Monday afternoon in May, and by tea-time I was hard at work with the India-Burma Committee of the Cabinet. I was able to give the new proposals for transfer to the Government, and I pointed out that they could be made to work only if the legislation went through that session, which had only two months to run. I was told that it would take seven or eight months before an important Act of that type could be drafted, passed through the committee stages of both Houses, and then become law; if there was opposition it would take longer. I therefore said that, unless all my work in India was to be lost, this had to be passed within two months or not at all. The Prime Minister was encouraging and told me that he would see what he could do. I came back the following day and found the Lord Chancellor and the Law Officers of the Crown in the Cabinet room. They had worked all night on the first rough draft of the Indian Independence Bill, and we went through it together at No. 10 Downing Street.

As you know, that legislation was passed within two months, which must have been an all-time legislative record. It would not have been possible with opposition. The Prime Minister had authorized me to see the leaders of the Opposition and to answer all their questions freely, and I was able to convince them that a speedy enactment was in the interests of the future of India and the good relations between India and this country, and that it was a national and not a party matter. As I have said, the measure passed through with the approval of both parties in Parliament before the end of the session, and so the Plan of June 3 became a legal possibility. It was accepted by all the leaders, and by August 15 we were able to transfer power.

Nevertheless, after June 3, and after having set up the Partition Council and the machinery to carry out this vast

process, I was left with a problem the magnitude of which I had not appreciated before I went out there. I had not realized that it was going to be such a serious problem. What were we going to do with the 565 Indian States, with upwards of 100,000,000 inhabitants? The only co-ordinating link in the overall administration of India was the fact that one and the same man always happened to hold the offices of Viceroy and Crown Representative. By the Cabinet Mission statement of May 12, 1946, the States were to become independent sovereign states, and up to the middle of June I had not got an inkling of what we were going to do about these 565 States to avoid the greatest possible catastrophe one could imagine—to avoid transferring power to so many different units in a way which might throw the whole sub-continent into a state of chaos.

The first thing it was necessary to do was to set up the machinery whereby the future Dominion Governments could enter into negotiations with the rulers of the various States. I therefore proposed that we should set up two State Departments (now known as State Ministries), one each for the impending Dominions of India and Paldstan. The main object was to negotiate agreements between the States and the future Dominions. In theory any State could remain independent or join either Dominion, but in practice there were, of course, geographical compulsions, and it was obviously necessary to consider the composition of the population. I made this very clear to a practically full house of the Chamber of Princes when I addressed them early in July, and all except three took my advice. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the future Deputy Prime Minister, took over the new Indian States Ministry. At the same time the new Secretaryship of this Ministry was taken over by my own Reforms Commissioner, and between the three of us and the Pakistan representatives we worked out a proposal whereby the States would be offered the opportunity of acceding to the Dominion of their choice.

The proposal was that their accession should be limited to the three subjects laid down in the original Cabinet Mission Plan, which were Defence, External Affairs, and Communica-

tions. In the case of Defence, practically no State wished to conduct its own defence, and indeed no State could really do so. Therefore there was no particular difficulty in getting over that point. That led us to the question of External Affairs. This was inextricably linked with the question of Defence. Although one or two of the largest States might have liked to have their own ambassadors, obviously that would have been a waste of money, and so they nearly all accepted the proposal on that point. On the question of Communications the matter was very vital since it affected the very life-blood of the sub-continent, and obviously they had to come to an understanding with the Central Governments. So an instrument of accession was drawn up. It was amended, discussed, and re-amended by a full meeting of the Chamber of Princes held during the last week of July in Delhi. It was finalized before the end of July, and practically all the States signed up before August 15. Out of the 565 States, the vast majority acceded to the Dominion of India. The remainder, with the exception of three of them, acceded to the Dominion of Pakistan.

With regard to the three exceptions, the first was the State of Junagadh. The strong advice I had given to the effect that the States should join up in accordance with geographical compulsions and the wishes of the majorities of their populations was not taken. Junagadh, with its 82 per cent Hindu population and 18 per cent Muslim population, joined up with Pakistan. As you know, a plebiscite has been held since that time and as a result of an overwhelming majority it has joined up with India, and India has offered to allow U.N.O. to conduct a further plebiscite, if desired, to show whether the result of the first one was correct.

The second State that did not take my advice was the State of Kashmir. In the case of Kashmir I went up personally and saw the Maharaja. I spent four days with him in July, and on every one of those four days I persisted with the same advice: "Ascertain the will of your people by any means and join whichever Dominion your people wish you to join by August 14 this year." He did not do that, and what happened can be seen. Had he acceded to Pakistan before August 14 the future

Government of India had allowed me to give His Highness an assurance that no objection whatever would be raised by them. Had His Highness acceded to India by August 14, Pakistan did not then exist, and therefore could not have interfered. The only trouble that could have been raised was by non-accession to either side, and this was unfortunately the very course followed by the Maharaja.

The third State I have referred to was Hyderabad, by far the biggest State in India as far as population is concerned. It is not quite so large as Kashmir, which has an area of just over 84,000 square miles, but the population is 17,000,000. It consists of 14 per cent Muslim and 86 per cent Hindu. We had long discussions in trying to bring about a solution for this great State, and these discussions continued until about ten days ago. Sir Walter Monckton, Constitutional Adviser to the Nizam, came to all these discussions and was absolutely first class, because, while being completely loyal to the ruler of Hyderabad, he proved himself to be a high-minded humanitarian. His one object was the same as mine—namely, to find a solution which would avoid friction and possible consequent bloodshed.

The Government of India proved itself to be very high-minded, in my opinion, and was anxious to find a solution. It was heart-breaking to Sir Walter Monckton and myself, quite apart from the people now left with the responsibility in India, that the final proposals were not accepted by Hyderabad. I am very sorry that has happened, and can only hope and pray that a peaceable solution will be found there after all.

That is all I have to say about the period during which I was Viceroy, and I have gone a little beyond it. As for the constitutional period, as I said at the beginning, I was the servant of the Government of India, and it is not my business to discuss the way they have conducted their affairs beyond saying this: The Government of India came into power at a very difficult time, at a time when massacres had started in the Punjab, which spread to Delhi, and the situation was practically out of hand. Any government would have had the greatest difficulty in maintaining control under the conditions facing them. This Government rose magnificently to the occasion.

An Emergency Committee of the Cabinet was formed, and they dealt with matters in an admirable and speedy way at their daily meetings.

My wife took on the work of the co-ordination of all welfare bodies and voluntary relief organizations in India, and did, if I may say so, a most amazing job. All the way through she has been of the utmost value, because she was able to succeed in tapping a very great source of strength in India which hitherto had been hardly touched. I refer to the women of India. My wife was able to make friends of the wives and daughters and friends of the leaders. She was able to do a great deal when the trouble started with the refugees. I have spoken about the goodwill in India, and that goodwill is really wonderful. There has been a warmth of heart, and they have been ready to pay tribute and express gratitude for anything she has done. In the refugee camps during the last week, people who had lost everything scraped together their annas so that one of them could travel by train to bring up their pathetic little gifts which they had made themselves—anything, just as a tribute to show they were grateful.

I must mention the Indian Civil Service, which is now nearly 100 per cent Indian. There are a few Britishers left, but not many. They have been absolutely magnificent, and the professional administrators have carried on loyally and efficiently. There have been far too few of them, because, do not forget, a democracy always requires more Civil Service administrators. They have been greatly overworked, but they have done an absolutely first-class job, which has not yet been fully recognized by the country as a whole.

Finally, I would like to mention Gandhiji. It is impossible to convey what his death has meant to India, but I will say that it did one thing. The shock pulled the country together in a most wonderful way. That effect still exists to a large extent, but, make no mistake, his absence is acutely felt. He was the father of the nation in every sense of the word. Everybody from the Prime Minister downwards went to him for advice, and he held together all the threads of that great country. His passing away caused a particularly heavy burden to be placed on the

Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, a man admirably fitted to deal with that burden. I have no doubt that he is one of the great men, not of this time only, but of any time. Apart from that, he is one of the most delightful and entertaining people one could ever wish to have as a friend. I have great faith in him, knowing that he is a really wise and balanced statesman who is very well fitted for the responsibilities he has to bear.

I am certain that India is going from strength to strength. She is bound to face the most appalling difficulties, which are absolutely inevitable with the sudden accession of self-government and partition at a time when there are such immense difficulties in every part of the world. Nevertheless, I maintain that she is going from strength to strength. The good feeling that India has for this country has never been higher, and nothing short of criminal lunacy in this country would wish to destroy that good feeling. It is there, whatever the future holds, I hope for good.