

# MR. GANDHI'S SWAN SONG

By EVELYN ROY.

That the leadership of the Indian nationalist movement has passed definitely out of the hands of Mr. Gandhi and the orthodox school of Non-Co-operation, was proven by the session just concluded of the All-Indian Congress Committee at Ahmedabad. This is the first official deliberation in which Mr. Gandhi has participated, since his release from prison in January of this year, when he was operated upon for appendicitis, and has since been undergoing a slow convalescence. The two years which have intervened between his arrest and conviction to six years' rigorous imprisonment, have brought many changes in the program and tactics of the Indian National Congress. The Swaraj Party, headed by Mr. C. R. Das, of Bengal, succeeded in having an amendment passed to the Non-Co-operation Program, permitting those who desired to take part in the elections to the Legislative Councils, for the purpose of carrying on obstruction to the government. The elections of 1923 were contested by the Swaraj Party, which succeeded in capturing about half the seats in the provincial and All-India Legislatures. By an agreement arrived at with the Independent Nationalists, whose demands are not so extreme as the Swarajists but who occupy a centre position between the Liberals or Moderates and the Non-Co-operators, the Swarajists were able to command a small majority of votes in the Central Legislatures and several of the provinces, and to defeat practically all the government measures brought before those bodies for approval. Thus, the center of gravity of the national struggle has shifted, during the past six months, from the orthodox Gandhists to the Swarajists, who still claim to be a part of the Indian National Congress, formerly entirely controlled by Mr. Gandhi and his followers.

The release of the Mahatma from prison, by an act of grace of the Labor Government soon after the latter assumed office, was regarded as the dawn of a new era in Indian political life. The lost leader had returned to his followers; the Non-co-operation movement which had fallen into stagnation since his arrest, would be revived and become once more a powerful revolutionary force, which would sweep the Swaraj Party into the background of the struggle. Six months passed without any change in the situation, due to the feeble health of the Mahatma, and his desire to acquaint himself with the details of the situation, with which he had lost touch for two years. Private conversations with the various leaders of the National Congress, representing different schools of thought, were held at Juhu, the little seaside resort where Mr. Gandhi was convalescing, but strict secrecy was observed as to the

nature of these discussions. Thus the first official pronouncement of the Mahatma was made just a few weeks previous to the Ahmedabad session of the All-India Congress Committee—the supreme executive body of the Indian National Congress.

This official pronouncement took the form of a simultaneous statement of policy on the part of Mr. Gandhi, for the orthodox Non-Co-operators, known as the "No-Changers," and of the two chief leaders of the Swaraj faction, or "Pro-Changers," Messrs. C. R. Das and Moti Lal Nehru. This statement, which followed a series of prolonged conversations between the rival factions within the National Congress, aroused a great sensation throughout India. In it, for the first time, a frank difference of opinion was expressed on the tactics and program of the national struggle, and an inability to arrive at any agreement between the two schools of thought. Mr. Gandhi reiterated his faith in the "Constructive Program" which he had laid down at Bardoli in February of 1922, and which limited the activities of the National Congress to the, Charka (spinning wheel), Khaddar, (the wearing of homespun cloth), and social reform activities, such as the removal of "untouchability" of the lower castes, the campaign against the drink-evil, and village-education. The absolute boycott of government schools, law courts and legislative councils was insisted upon, as well as the boycott of foreign cloth.

To this program, the Swarajists opposed their own, which was to enter the Legislative Councils with the object of carrying on obstruction to government measures, until their demand for Swaraj (self-government) should be granted. They agreed to carry on the constructive program of Gandhism outside the councils, and to enforce the boycott of merely British, as opposed to all foreign cloth. To these modifications in his program, Mr. Gandhi could not agree, and the statement of difference was issued to the country as a means of testing public opinion before the session of the All-India Congress Committee in June, which would have to decide between the two factions.

It was the first time that Mr. Gandhi's word had been challenged upon an issue of national importance. The gauntlet had been thrown down; the leadership of the Indian National movement hung in the balance. Mr. Gandhi had declared that if his program were rejected, he would retire from politics and devote himself to social reform. The choice therefore, was clear and uncompromising. He further announced that he would submit a resolution, declaring that all persons who did not spin for half an hour a day, and who did not observe the five-fold boycott of Legislative Councils, Law-Courts, Govern-

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ent Schools, titles and mill-made cloth, would be forced to resign from the All-India Congress Committee. His resolution, if carried, would automatically exclude the Swarajists from power, and restore the leadership of the Congress to the orthodox Non-co-operators.

The All-India Congress Committee met at Ahmedabad—Mr. Gandhi's own province and seat of authority—on June 27, and continued its deliberations for three days. Mr. Gandhi submitted his famous "self-denying ordinance," despite the heated opposition of the Swarajists, and even that of some of his own followers, who vainly sought to reach a compromise beforehand. It was a dramatic moment; Mahatma Gandhi, the idol of the Indian people, stood at bay, defied by the opposition within the congress ranks. It fell to the lot of the Pundit Moti Lal Nehu to state the case for the Swarajists:

"We decline to make a fetish of the spinning wheel, or to subscribe to the doctrine that only thru that wheel can we obtain Swaraj. Discipline is desirable, but it is not discipline for the majority to expel the minority. We are unable to forget our man-

hood and our self-respect, and to say that we are willing to submit to Mr. Gandhi's orders. The congress is as much ours as our opponents, and we will return with a greater majority to sweep away those who stand for this resolution."

With these words, Pundit Nehru and Deshbandhu Das left the hall taking with them fifty-five Swarajists. One hundred and ten persons remained; when the resolution was put to vote, it was carried by 67 for and 37 against, with six abstentions. This apparent victory of the Gandhists is merely apparent; had the Swarajists remained in the hall, the resolution would have been defeated by about twenty votes.

As a result of this vote, Mr. Gandhi recognized defeat. After hurried consultation with his followers, he agreed to drop his resolution on compulsory spinning and the five-fold boycotts, making it only advisory in nature, and with these and other concessions, the Swarajists were persuaded to rejoin the session. Thus, the defeat of orthodox Gandhism is complete and final; the Swarajists have won the day and Mr. Gandhi, as leader of the Indian National struggle, has sung his swan-song.