

PASSIVE RESISTANCE OR SOUL FORCE.

BY BLANCHE WATSON.

“Without Swaraj there is now no possibility of Peace in India.”
M. K. GANDHI.

WHAT is “Swaraj?”

According to Mahatma Gandhi, it is the right of a people to manage their own affairs, i. e., it means Self-government. It has been said that India is not fit to govern itself. To this Gandhi replies, “He who has no right to err, can never be forward. The history of the commons is a history of blunders.” “Swaraj”, says this great leader of the Indian people, “can only be built upon the assumption that most of what is national, is on the whole, sound.” This means that back of and above Swaraj must be the “Swadeshi” spirit, the spirit that is symbolized more particularly by the wearing of the national dress made of Indian-made materials, but which means the cherishing of whatever is inherent in the development of the national life.

In the introduction to his little book *Hind Swaraj** or “Indian Self-Government” Gandhi says:

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“It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul-force against brute force. The booklet is a severe condemnation of ‘modern civilization.’ It was written in 1908. My conviction is deeper today than ever. I feel that if India would discard ‘modern civilization’ she would only gain by doing so.”

This book is a difficult book to interpret with justice both to the author and the reader one sets out to reach. The Western mind needs to re-orient itself to take in the thought and particularly the spirit of this man whose own personal life may be said to have been modelled after the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Godliness, to him, is the fundamental requisite for the carrying out of a scheme of non-co-operation wholly by means of non-violent methods backed by the power of Love.

"Khilafat cannot be saved," he says, "The Punjab humanity cannot be redressed, without godliness—for godliness means change of heart,—in political language changing the angle of vision."

In his own words here is his program :

- (1) Cultivating the spirit of non-violence.
- (2) Setting up Congress organizations in every village.
- (3) Introducing the spinning wheel in every home and manufacturing all the cloth, required for our wants, through the village weaver.
- (4) Collecting as much money as possible.
- (5) Promoting Hindu-Moslem unity and
- (6) Ridding Hinduism of the curse of 'untouchability' and otherwise purifying ourselves by avoiding intoxicating drinks and drugs.

Such a program, followed in the letter and the spirit, Gandhi has said would establish Swaraj in India in nine months. It would do more than that, it would revolutionize Revolution—indeed it would sooner or later revolutionize every phase of the world's activity!

The words "otherwise purifying ourselves", as Gandhi uses them, are of great significance and are capable of wide application. In answering his critics, who had misinterpreted his views on medicine he says:

"The present science of medicine is divorced from religion. . . . A clean spirit must build a clean body. Let us hope and pray that we may witness a definite attempt on the part of physicians to bring about a re-union between the body and the soul."

Article 2 of Gandhi's program may well be taken to heart by all who would in any way change the existing order of things. "What is really needed," he says, "is not a large measure of sacrifice but ability to organize and to take simple concerted action." The reader will notice that he says organize in 'every village.' Every home, he asserts, must have the spinning wheel and 'every village should become self-supporting for its cloth.' And this means Swadeshi!

But it is Article 1 of this remarkable program that rivets one's attention. In a recent issue of his paper, "Young India", Gandhi says:

"The success of our movement depends upon our ability to control all the forces of violence on our side. . . . I want India to realize that she has a soul which cannot perish and which can rise

triumphant over every physical weakness and defy the physical might of the whole world. . . . Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering."

How people have murdered each other from the beginning of history is a matter of record, Gandhi points out. "But", he says, "if this were all that had happened in the world it would have been ended long ago. . . . The fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love. . . . In spite of the wars of the world it still lives on."

His statement that history as written "Is a record of an *interruption* of the course of nature"—that soul force is natural and so, not noted in history—brings to mind the comment of Mr. H. G. Wells on Napoleon, to the effect that he was an "aggravated interruption" and a "pestilential nuisance." And Gandhi's characterization of passive resistance as "refusal to do a thing that violates one's conscience" recalls Thoreau's oft-repeated answer to Emerson's question as to why he was in jail on the charge of refusing to pay his taxes. In this connection it is interesting to note, that, among the books which Gandhi recommends for study and reference are two essays by this little-read and much under-estimated American writer, namely, "Life Without Principle" and "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience." The following words of the great Indian leader are strangely reminiscent of Thoreau:

"A man who has realized his manhood, who fears only God, will fear no one else. . . . If man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man's tyranny will enslave him. This is the key to self-rule."

Strength, to Gandhi, means the absence of fear, not the quantity of flesh and muscle in one's body, nor the keen edge of one's sword. "Passive Resistance," he declares, "is an all-sided sword; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood, it produces far-reaching results. . . . It is the weapon of strength and power. . . . Those who defy death are free from all fear. That nation is great which rests its head upon death as its pillow!" The English expression "Passive Resistance," Gandhi has declared more recently does not give the exact meaning of what he has in mind. *Satyagraha*, i. e., Truth-force conveys the meaning more correctly. It is soul-force as opposed to the force of arms.

"Both soul force and force of arms," says he, "have received

their due meed of praise. . . . They respectively represent forces of God and Evil. The Indian belief is that there was in this land a time when the forces of Good were predominant. That state still remains our ideal. Europe today furnishes a forcible illustration of predominance of the forces of Evil."

The principle of non-co-operation which is in reality the machinery by which Gandhi's program is being put through in India, was an outgrowth of the twenty-year struggle in South Africa where, with 160,000 of his countrymen behind him he fought for, and gained the full measure of recognition that they had demanded of the British government. Setting aside the negative form of the word, Non-co-operation is in reality the positive part of this singular revolutionary program. Non-co-operation means complete boycott of everything English—an amplified boycott that makes it an act of wrong-doing for an Indian to buy and use anything of English manufacture, to attend English schools, enter English courts or accept honors of any kind from that government.

In a word the rejection side of the program is not all. It is, to be sure, a process of retracing and unlearning, but it is more than that, for concurrently—it provides for the building up of a virile, independent India. It is a call to the Indians *not* to co-operate with the present environment that they may build a new and better one. Side by side with the rejection of the one thing is the acceptance of the other—which is nothing less than a better life, new life and more life for the down-trodden masses of their country. It demands that India return to itself, which must result in the creation of a free self-governing state to supersede the present dependent state. It means the building of the Panchayat or Village organization system, the reviving of Indian industries, the establishment of Indian arbitration courts, the starting of new schools; the creation of the will to live as a free nation. It is a call to the Indians not to co-operate with the present environment, but to build a new one. Says Gandhi to the English:

"Why should we operate with you when we know that by so doing we are being daily enslaved in an increasing degree? . . . I recognize your bravery and know that you will yield to bravery. . . . Bravery on the battlefield is impossible for us. Bravery of the Soul still remains open to us. I am invoking that bravery."

And this does not mean that Gandhi is narrowly-nationalistic. Like all weapons Non-co-operation is to be laid aside as soon as it shall have served its purpose. Co-operation with all nations of

the earth must come after India has proved her worth and taken her right place in the family of nations. A program that is predicted on Love could not conceivably call for national isolation.

And now a word about Gandhi himself. Conel Wedgwood, an Englishman, writes of him in the *London Nation*:

"This saint or Mahatma has India at his feet. The intelligentsia differs from him in private, rarely in public: property differs from and trembles: the Government differs from, because he goes to the root of all government and thinks it best to wait. He is as serious as a child and as pure. One does not think it blasphemous to compare him to Christ. He is a Jain, particularly averse to taking life; and while still a child had already found the efficacy of non-resistance. Such cotton clothes as he has are hand-spun, hand-woven, and hand-made. His food (when not fasting) is too simple to create fear of goal fare. All this shows why he has a hold on India, the land of resignation, and why the fear of him grows."

The remarkable thing about his man is, that while he fights he loves. He is saying to the English, "I would not raise my hand against you even if I had the power. I expect to conquer you by my suffering." It is with the coin of suffering that Gandhi expects India to purchase its freedom. He wants the absolute independence of India, not for the benefit of the India people alone, but for the good of all human kind. The message that was Christ's two thousand years ago is Gandhi's today. On it rests the future of the world,—a world purged of violence and wrong. Gandhi is saying:

"Let the bugles sound the Truce of God to the whole world forever. Not to one people, but to every people let the glad tidings go."