THE NEW SPIRIT IN INDIA

BY

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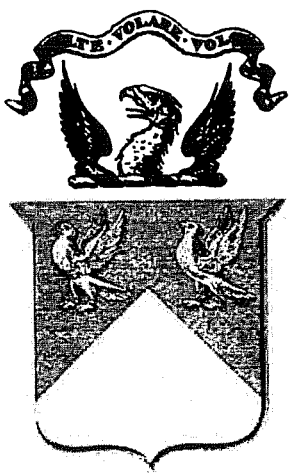

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XI

The Nawab

Dacca still wears something of a Mohammedan air, for Akbar's long arm reached to Eastern Bengal, and the inheritors of his empire here built a fort, a palace, and a capital. Passing one day among its enclosed gardens, mouldering lengths of wall, and dying mosques, I had begun to imagine myself back in some Turkish town like Ochrida or Monastir, when I was suddenly recalled to the streams of Brahmaputra by the appearance of a large wooden cage under a tree in an open court. It was bigger than the cages in which Louis XI. swung his political opponents in the castles of Touraine. It would have held a bull as well as an eagle, and was firmly set upon a base of stone, daubed with vermillion, as is the Hindu way. Life in a cage has always seemed to me so curious a choice when this nutshell of a planet is itself so small, that I stopped to contemplate it, and, observing my interest, the Brahman who accompanied me began to knock with a stone upon a large wooden box, which occupied

one corner of the interior. The summons appeared to be recognized, like the call to a menagerie's wild beast at feeding time. There was a stir inside, a lid opened, and presently a human head emerged shaggy as John the Baptist's, with black hair.

It was the city anchorite, whose sleep or meditation we had rather rudely disturbed. But he took it in good part, as one accustomed to allow for grosser natures, and, raising himself deftly from his lair, he stood naked before us, contemplating this garish muddle of a world with shy and melancholy eyes. Human speech was distasteful to him, but he had come, he said, from a distant province, the name of which did not concern a mind set upon infinity. All his life now he meditated, not directly upon God, but upon the remembered words of his Guru, or spiritual master, which in time might lead him to the meditation upon God Himself. He was unwilling to say more, and, being in haste, I gave him six annas (sixpence) as an endowment of meditation, which appears to me far the most difficult achievement of the human mind, and he crept back into his box to continue it.

I was in haste, because I had an appointment with the Nawab Salimulla of Dacca, certainly the most influential personality in the city, and perhaps in the province. For the population of Eastern Bengal, though nearly all Bengali, is about three-fifths Mohammedan, and, owing to his father's

wealth, wisdom, and public munificence, the Nawab is regarded by the Mohammedans as their natural leader. It is an instance of mankind's touching belief in heredity, for the present Nawab is not specially conspicuous for those three claims to recognition. His munificence has been largely private, and, added to certain peculiarities on the part of his guardian, it has so much reduced his father's wealth, that he has been compelled to hand over the remainder to the Government Court of Wards, having publicly declared himself a "disqualified proprietor," incapable of managing his own affairs. This cannot, however, in itself imply any lack of wisdom, for since that public declaration the Government of India has reappointed him a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, as one peculiarly capable of managing the affairs of an Empire. And, indeed, with regard to the burning question of the Partition, he has shown wisdom's reasonable and open mind. When the Partition was first suggested, he was as much opposed to it as any Bengali could be, and I was told that, in his simple-hearted way, he described it as "beastly." But such prejudice was not proof against reason, and it began to dissolve under the influence of Lord Curzon's visit, and the speeches in which he promised that the Partition "would invest the Mohammedans of Eastern Bengal with a unity which they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman viceroys and kings."

The Nawab

Shortly after the Partition the Government of India advanced a loan to relieve the Nawab's private munificence from bankruptcy—a loan amounting to about £100,000, at what was, for India, a very low rate of interest. This benevolent action, combined with certain privileges granted to Mohammedans, was supposed by many Hindus to have encouraged the Nawab and his co-religionists in taking a still more favourable view of the Partition itself.

Not only so, but priestly mullahs went through the country preaching the revival of Islam, and proclaiming to the villagers that the British Government was on the Mohammedan side, that the Law Courts had been specially suspended for three months, and no penalty would be exacted for violence done to Hindus, or for the loot of Hindu shops, or the abduction of Hindu widows. A Red Pamphlet was everywhere circulated, maintaining the same wild doctrines. It was seen that a large proportion of Government posts were set aside for Mohammedans, and some were even kept vacant because there was no Mohammedan qualified to fill them. Sir Bampfylde Fuller said in jest that of his two wives (meaning the Moslem and Hindu sections of his province) the Mohammedan was the favourite. The jest was taken in earnest, and the Mussulmans genuinely believed that the British authorities were ready to forgive them all excesses.

Some two years after his departure from India Lord Curzon wrote to the *Times* that it was "a wicked falsehood" to say that by the Partition he intended to carve out a Mohammedan State, to drive a wedge between Mohammedan and Hindu, or to arouse racial feuds. Certainly no one would willingly accuse another of such desperate wickedness, but a statesman of better judgment might have foreseen that, not a racial, but a religious feud would probably be the result of the measure. What might have been expected followed. In Comilla, Jamalpur, and a few other places, rather serious riots occurred. A few lives were lost, temples were desecrated, images broken, shops plundered, and many Hindu widows carried off. Some of the towns were deserted, the Hindu population took refuge in any "pukka" house (*i.e.* house with brick or stone walls), women spent nights hidden in tanks, the crime known as "group-rape" increased, and throughout the country districts there reigned a general terror, which still prevailed at the time of my visit. Thus a new religious feud was established in Eastern Bengal, and when Mr. Morley said in the Commons that the disturbance was due to the refusal of Hindus to sell British goods to Mohammedans, it was a grotesque instance of the power that officials have of misleading their Chief.

The largest of the Nawab's palaces, looking over the river, is built in the French style of Louis

XIV., but is not so old, having been probably constructed by the present Nawab's rich and prudent father. Similarly, the large collection of knightly armour in the entrance hall, recalling the onsets of Cressy and Agincourt, do not suggest that the present owner's ancestors were engaged in those famous battles, as they would in an English millionaire's house. As a matter of fact, I believe the present Nawab's grandfather or great-grandfather came from peaceful Kashmir and established the family fortunes originally on carpets. Since his time, while the family fortunes have developed, the family taste has developed too, and the enormous vaulted room into which I was shown was stuffed with the expensive sweepings of European furniture shops. A huge armchair in cut glass especially fascinated my gaze, and in spite of my haste I had full time to be fascinated, because the Nawab was an hour and a half late for his appointment, having been detained at another palace where a wife dwelt to whom he was much attached—more attached, I I was told, than to any other.

So there was every excuse for his unpunctuality, and he made none, but swept into the room with a smile of benign complacency. He was a well-developed man of middle age—something of Falstaff's prominent personality, but preserving the childlike air of innocence and candour which nursemaids call "engaging." Round his large and serene

face, which smiled almost perpetually, hung a loose black fringe of beard. He was dressed in little purple slippers, thin pyjamas of white silk, a vest of exquisitely fine Dacca muslin "sprigged" (as they say in the china trade) with delicate rosebuds, a copious turban of the same, and a long purple coat or cloak of flowered brocade, with a white border embroidered with passion flowers.

"My own design!" he exclaimed with justifiable pride, as soon as the formal greetings were over, holding up the stuff for my inspection and slowly turning round that I might enjoy its full effect.

I soon discovered that though his mind was much occupied with Imperial politics, he retained a human interest in home life and the domestic arts. Like the elder Dumas, he was particularly proud of his skill in cooking, and he told me of many wonderful dishes he could make.

"You should taste my nougat!" he cried, and leaning forward like a diplomast with a State secret, he added, "Only this morning I composed a new almond toffee!"

I was not surprised that, with these natural gifts only waiting to be recognized, he was keenly alive to a lack of sympathy in his family circle.

"My wife," (he used the singular, and sighed)—"you have no idea what difficulty I have in getting my wife to try a new dish. With her it is always mutton, mutton, mutton! She has been brought

up on mutton, and Indian women have so little enterprise. She will not try my dishes."

"Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear," I quoted in sympathy, and he sighed again.

"Our Indian women are very backward," he went on. "Now, there is my retired groom, my livery man—what a woman his English wife is! How finished! What pleasantness! How much nicer a home she makes for him than I can ever get! I will show you the difference."

He called an attendant who had been keeping his eye on me from behind a glass door, and presently the attendant returned with heavy gold ornaments — bracelets, anklets, and necklaces— thickly sprinkled with small turquoises and pearls.

"I gave these jewels as presents to my wife," he said. "They are my own design too. I bought the pearls cheap when the plague was very bad here, and people were glad to sell everything."

I commended this one evidence of ancestral thrift.

"Then I took the pearls and turquoises and gold to Paris," he went on, "and drew out a design for the Parisian jewellers to follow. You see the result. What grace! What finish! You cannot get finish in the East. It is the same with our women. They are backward; they have no finish."

By a mere slip of the tongue I said I greatly

admired what I had seen of Hindu ladies, and added something about seclusion and purdah.

"Hindu ladies!" he cried indignantly. "They don't understand what purdah is. They might just as well live shamelessly in public. It is only Mohammedan ladies who practise strict purdah, and seclude themselves with absolute delicacy and refinement."

I assured him I had supposed no less, and his aspect cleared again. Resuming his lightsome smile, he continued—

"For myself I am singularly happy. I suppose even the Emperor can hardly be happier than I am?"

He said this in a tentative way, as though appealing to my personal acquaintanceship with King Edward. But as I could offer no opinion upon the Emperor's happiness, he went on—

"Every morning I feel like a bird. I wake after my sweet sleep, when the birds are waking too. I like to hear them sing, because I know that I am as happy as they can be. I have my troubles of course. I never can induce the gardeners to water my flowers at the right time. They will water them in the evening when the cool night is coming. I tell them they ought to water in the morning, as a protection against the hot days. They promise to obey, and next evening out they go again with their water-pots, as their fathers did

before them. There is no science in the East, no progress, no reason."

For an instant this lamentable truth depressed him, but he revived at the recollection of his own assured happiness.

"I trust entirely to God," he said. "I leave everything in His hands, and all goes well. He has always helped me very much. Hitherto He has helped me so that I hardly ever have to work. He has never let me work very much, and I trust everything to His care. I think that is why I am so happy, and feel like a bird in the morning after my sweet sleep."

I suggested that an easy conscience conduces to sleep and happiness, and he agreed it was so.

He then turned to more general subjects, and, like Lord Curzon, he much regretted the Bengali tendency to lying. It was corrupting even the Mohammedans, and nearly all Indian children were brought up in deception, usually to escape punishment or to give pleasure. I remarked that even in Europe these motives sometimes lead to deceit, but he had formed an ideal of English education, such as the Greeks formed of Persian. English boys, he said, were taught to ride, shoot, and tell the truth. It was a fine testimony from a man of education so different from our own.

Of Hindus in general, and of Mohammedans who had lost their faith, he expressed deep distrust,

pointing the moral from the fate of a near relation, who, through associating with women and Hindus, was now no better than one of the lost. This grieved me very much, for I had heard that relation highly spoken of in the town, and he had made me various offers of kindness. But the Nawab was inflexible in virtue.

"You must fear God," he said, becoming for a moment almost grave. "There is no good in praying to God, for He needs nothing that we could give Him in exchange for His gifts. But we know that He is pleased with truth, and we must tell it."

Then we discussed the Partition, and as I rose to go he exclaimed, "Here in Dacca I have 10,000 men ready to die for me if I raise my little finger. That is how I keep the peace."

How far he expected to please God by that statement I do not know. But probably he was quite sincere, for it is impossible to exhaust or caricature the illusions of mankind.

One would like to discover the causes of a certain "quality" (as country people say of gentlefolk) that appears common to nearly all Mohammedans. I have felt it almost equally in Constantinople and other parts of Turkey, in Asia Minor and Crete, in Morocco, and on the West African coast, in Madras, in the North-West Frontier Province, and even in the rather petted luxury of the Mohammedan College at Aligarh. In all these

places one finds a similar pleasing gravity of manner, courteous address, and an impression of straightforward dealing, which, perhaps, would be more trustworthy if the Sultan were not a Mohammedan. This gentlemanly manner may exist merely as the heritage of a conquering religion; for in all these countries, as in Eastern Bengal, the Mohammedans have come and stayed as conquerors, and it is easy to acquire fine and aristocratic manners when you carry a sword and the other man does not. But at the back of external behaviour there is a queer mixture of simplicity and shrewdness more difficult to account for. It may arise naturally in a mind reared upon a broad and unquestioned basis of belief, free alike from the confusion of mythologies and the distracting details of useful knowledge. There is a well-known letter, written to a friend of Nineveh Layard by a Turkish Cadi, that exactly expresses the finer side of Mohammedan ignorance. For that reason I quote it in the note below,* and

* "My illustrious Friend, and Joy of my Liver! The thing you ask of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor inquired into the number of the inhabitants; and as to what one person loads on his mules and the other stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine. But, above all, as to the previous history of this city, God only knows the amount of dirt and confusion that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam. It were unprofitable for us to inquire.

"Oh, my soul! Oh, my lamb! seek not after the things which concern thee not. Thou camest unto us and we welcomed thee: go in peace.

"Of a truth, thou hast spoken many words; and there is no harm

when to this disregard of unessential phenomena in earth and sky is added an indifference to the controversies, bare facts, and mechanical actions upon which most of us spend our lives, we may look for a certain simplicity tempered by shrewdness. That even in the Nawab, in spite of his Government loan and boasted powers of design, cookery, and the control of men, I should still have been conscious of both those qualities combined, is a remarkable testimonial to the influence of Islam.

done, for the speaker is one and the listener is another. After the fashion of thy people thou hast wandered from one place to another. until thou art happy and content in none. We (praise be to God) were born here, and never desire to quit it. Is it possible then that the idea of a general intercourse between mankind should make any impression on our understanding? God forbid!

"Listen, O my son! There is no wisdom equal to the belief in God. He created the world, and shall we liken ourselves unto Him in seeking to penetrate into the mysteries of His creation? Shall we say, behold this star spinneth round that star, and this other star with a tail goes and comes in so many years? Let it go. He from whose hand it came will guide and direct it.

"But thou wilt say to me, Stand aside, O man, for I am more learned than thou art, and have seen more things. If thou thinkest thou art in this respect better than I am, thou art welcome. I praise God that I seek not that which I require not. Thou art learned in the things I care not for; and as for that which thou hast seen, I defile it. Will much knowledge create thee a double belly, or wilt thou seek Paradise with thine eyes?

"Oh, my friend, if thou wilt be happy, say there is no God but God! Do not evil and then wilt thou fear neither man nor death; for surely thine hour will come.

"The meek in spirit,
"IMAUM ALI ZADE."

Layard's "Nineveh and Babylon," p. 663.

Owing to these pleasant qualities, so attractive to Englishmen sprung like myself from the public-school, country-house, and villa classes, I have almost invariably found English officers and officials on the side of the Mohammedans where there is any rivalry of race or religion at all. And in Eastern Bengal this national inclination is now encouraged by the Government's open resolve to retain the Mohammedan support of the Partition by any means in its power. It was against the Hindus only that all the petty persecution of officialdom was directed. It was they who were excluded from Government posts ; it was Hindu schools from which Government patronage was withdrawn. When Mohammedans rioted, the punitive police ransacked Hindu houses, and companies of little Gurkhas were quartered on Hindu populations. It was the Hindus who in one place were forbidden to sit on the river bank. Of course, the plea was that only the Hindus were opposed to the Government's policy of dividing them from the rest of their race, so that they alone needed suppression. And certainly, after what I had seen in the previous four or five years in Macedonia, Central Africa, Russia, and the Caucasus, this kind of persecution might well appear ludicrously small. But it was the beginning of a dangerous road, to which one could not see the end, and the knowledge that our own country was taking that road aggravated the sense of wrong.

It was the same with espionage. Personally I enjoyed being followed by spies wherever I went. I enjoyed it much more than the spies themselves. It was a pleasure to watch the open-hearted stupidity which never left me in doubt as to their purpose, or to look them tranquilly in the face and see their eyes drop in honourable shame. It was a joyful moment when at Serajganj I turned in wrath upon a man who had been following me all day long in the melodramatic disguise of a black shawl and an umbrella, and watched the poor hired worm grovel away, murmuring tearful appeals about superior orders. In that case I was angry because I was visiting the schools—the same over which Sir Bampfylde Fuller resigned—and it seemed to me unfit that the schoolboys should see our Government's habit of espionage thus illustrated before their faces. But at another place where I arrived in the cold of half-past three in the morning, and found that the telegram to prepare for my arrival had been detained, there was no alloy in the pleasure with which I seized upon the spy detailed to dog me, and compelled him to procure a cart, conduct me to the house where he knew I ought to have been expected, and knock up the sleeping servants to receive me.

When I first landed in Bombay, it appeared to me a little undignified that representatives of the British Government should set police spies to question a Member of Parliament's chauffeur every

morning and evening where he was going or had been, and with whom he had conversed. Of course it made no difference to the Member of Parliament, any more than the delightful spies in Eastern Bengal made any difference to me. But what was a joke to us may be anything but a joke to native Indians who are compelled to live permanently under a system of official surveillance which reads their private letters, detains their telegrams, and hires men to watch their actions. Far worse than the mere annoyance involved is the indignant contempt which our Government thus stores up against itself. Every now and then by such means it may discover the trail of some seditious movement. But the discovery of all the sedition in India would not be worth the loss of reputation to which we expose ourselves by resorting to methods that would exclude a man from any club in our country.

There is something about espionage that stirs indignation more deeply than anything else in the world. But I do not wish to part from that land of great rivers with a mere feeling of bitterness. When I recall the quiet circuit of streams by which I slowly passed from Khulna to Barisal, and on to Dacca; and from Dacca through Mymensingh and Jamalpur and Serajganj and Goalundo, where the Ganges and Brahmaputra are joined, to Faridpur, where trains run back to Calcutta,—I lose the sense of bitterness, though there was plenty in the country. I think

only of the fertile land basking under an uninterrupted sky, or of bright crowds of men in yellow, red, and white standing upon the river bank and shouting their "Bande Mataram" against the sunrise; or of long torchlight processions that conducted some leader of the nation home in his carriage through the blue night; or of little groups of schoolboys who had stayed on the platform till the cold of morning to cheer a passing train, delighted even to shiver for their country. "I fear we shall never meet again on life's rough sea," said a student at one place, being naturally proud of such beautiful English; and, certainly, one cannot hope to visit the Brahmaputra every week-end. But even from a good month's distance, as London is, it seems impossible to believe that one petulant error can for all time produce division and rancorous hatred in so excellent a country and among a people so devoted to the same causes of freedom and nationality that we so much admire.

Biography of Henry Nevinson

Henry Nevinson, the son of George Nevinson, a solicitor, was born in Leicester in 1856. He attended Shrewsbury School and Christ Church, Oxford, where he came under the influence of the Christian Socialists. After university Nevinson moved to London where he worked at Toynbee Hall and lectured on history at Bedford College.

In 1897 Nevinson was appointed to the staff of the *Daily Chronicle*. Nevinson obtained a reputation as an outstanding journalist for his reports of the Boer War. He was also a crusading journalist and his work exposing slavery in Portuguese Angola, was eventually published as a book, *A Modern Slavery* (1906). Nevinson worked in Russia (1905-06) and India (1907-08) for the *Manchester Guardian*. He also reported on the Balkan War for the *Daily Chronicle* and contributed articles to *The Nation*.

Henry and his wife, Margaret Nevinson, were both supporters of the Women's Social and Political Union. After a dispute with Christabel Pankhurst in 1907, Margaret joined the Women's Freedom League. Later that year, Henry Nevinson, Laurence Housman, Henry Brailsford, and 37 others, formed the Men's League for Women's Suffrage. Two years later, Nevinson and Brailsford both resigned from the *Daily News* when the editor refused to condemn forcible feeding.

Nevinson disagreed with the decision of the WSPU and the NUWSS to abandon the campaign for the vote during the First World War. Understandably rejected by the government as one of the six official war correspondents, Nevinson still went to the Western Front to report the war. He also accompanied the expedition to the Dardanelles where he was wounded during the Gallipoli landings. His account of the evacuation of Sulva Bay in December 1915, was held up by the censor for four months.

The father of the artist, Christopher Nevinson, Nevinson wrote over 30 books including *Women's Vote and Men* (1913), *Essays in Freedom and Rebellion* (1921) and three volumes of autobiography, *Changes and Chances* (1925-28). Margaret Nevinson died in 1932 and the following year Henry married the family friend, Evelyn Sharp. Henry Nevinson, who in 1939 became President of the Council for the Defence of Civil Liberties, died in 1941.

Journalism, Justice and War: The life of Henry W. Nevinson

A talk by Angela V. John

.... He undertook a dozen overseas assignments for the paper starting in 1907 as well as covering some controversial issues at home too. .....

Nevinson and the paper's editor C. P. Scott greatly respected each other. The first sustained work was an investigation of 'Unrest' in India in 1907-8. Nevinson was engaged by the MG, the conservative Glasgow Herald and the Daily Chronicle. Against a background of increasingly

confident nationalist sentiment, he was one of a number of progressive politicians and writers who went to India to report on the atmosphere and in the process alarmed the authorities. C. P. Scott was anxious that he 'touch on some of the fundamental questions'. The editor flagged issues he thought would be of interest to readers and they included what he called 'the growth of something like national or at least race self-consciousness'. Nevinson followed in the footsteps of the Independent Labour Party leader, Keir Hardie. But whereas Hardie's controversial tour lasted only a few weeks, Nevinson was in India for almost four months. He succeeded in writing a series of extremely vivid articles for readers at home followed by a weighty tome entitled 'The New Spirit in India', judged by historians to be 'one of the best pieces of contemporary writing on this important period in India's political development'.....

But not all appreciated his efforts. Nevinson's own impassioned speeches around India provoked so much concern that Lord Minto the Viceroy of India told the Secretary of State John Morley that Nevinson seemed to be dangerous and that 'I really think we shall have to send him home to you if we hear much more of his eloquence'. A couple of months later Minto informed the King that whereas Hardie had been honest in his intentions and quite ready to hear the other side, 'a certain Mr Nevinson, who has been here on behalf of some English newspapers, has given vent to utterances calculated to cause endless bad feeling against British rule'. Yet, as I argue in the biography, Nevinson's verbal gymnastics were toned down by the time they were expressed in book form. His eye-witness observations continued to be controversial and innovative.