going to the polls, Congress met and decided that it must elect a dynamic leader. For most of the party, there was one obvious choice. This was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the strong man from Bombay. Patel was the man who ran the Congress Party machine, held rebels and recalcitrants in line, and kept the policy of the party respectable enough to keep the contributions flowing in from pro-Congress millionaires. He was eager to lead his party into the elections and determined to have the presidency, especially since his views, though similar to those of Nehru so far as Indian independence was concerned, were diametrically opposed so far as what should be done in India once freedom was won. He was a middle-of-the-road capitalist. Nehru was a socialist. There is little doubt that, by use of the party machine, he could have swung enough support behind himself to win the day. But at the last minute, on the eve of the Party Congress Gandhi called Patel to a conference and pleaded with him to withdraw his candidacy and support Nehru instead, because Nehru’s personality would make more appeal to the people. Patel at length agreed, but, with great reluctance. He had neither liking nor admiration for Nehru—and his feelings were to grow stronger as the years passed—but he gave way, for such was Gandhi’s tremendous hold over his followers.

Patel told the Congress delegates that ‘on some vital matters my views are in conflict with those held by Jawaharlalji’, and he gave a warning to Nehru not to try him too far by adding: ‘The Congress does not part with its ample powers by electing any individual, no matter who he is.’ But he ended by asking the delegates to elect Nehru.

From Nehru’s point of view, it could not have come at a better time. He swung into the election campaign and stumped the country, speaking with great fervour and brilliance, gathering mass support for himself and his views. Before, he had been one of the intellectuals behind the scenes. Now the people had a chance to see him. He
met the people and the people met him, and thereafter he never looked back.

Once more, when there was a chance that Nehru’s star might wane, fate stepped in to keep it shining, and that was in 1946. As has been briefly mentioned in this story, that was the year when Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Muslim President of Congress, decided that the time had come to resign his office. There was a strong contingent in the party which urged him to continue as leader of the party. ‘But I sensed that there was some difference of opinion in the inner circles of the Congress High Command,’ he wrote in India Wins Freedom. ‘I found that Sardar Patel and his friends wished that he should be elected President.’

This was indeed the case. Patel had waited a long time for power, and this, he felt, was his moment—the moment when negotiations for freedom were beginning to bear fruit. Unfortunately, Azad did not like Patel. In personality, background and culture, they were completely opposed. Azad was the studious, scholarly advocate of reason and logic, an apostle of patience and compromise. Patel was the iron fist of Congress, which rarely even bothered to wear a velvet glove. He believed in hammering out agreements by sheer force and weight of numbers. At this moment, Azad believed he would be the wrong man to face the crises looming ahead; and he decided to back Nehru, a subtle man like himself (or so he thought) instead.

‘I was anxious that the next President,’ Azad wrote, ‘should be one who agreed with my point of view and would carry out the same policy as I had pursued. After weighing the pros and cons, I came to the conclusion that Jawaharlal should be the next President. Accordingly, on the 26 April 1946, I issued a statement proposing his name for the Presidency and appealing to Congressmen that they should elect Jawaharlal unanimously.’

It was not necessarily a fait accompli, as all Congress knew. Until this moment, Patel had been sure that Gandhi favoured his election, for when they had talked of it pre-
viously, the Mahatma had indicated that he would welcome it. Now, like the rest of the Congress delegates, he waited for Gandhi to give a sign; and he was sufficiently confident that the sign would be against Nehru and for him that he made no overt move himself to secure it.

But the day of the Congress elections came, and Gandhi made no sign. Mortified, well aware that, at his age, the chance would never come again, Patel had to sit back and watch his rival once more take the presidency from him—and this time at the most important moment of all. He never forgave Azad for the events of 1946. He moved away from Gandhi, whose devoted disciple he had always been. And he resolved to bide his time, let Nehru make his mistakes, as he had no doubt he would, and wait for the opportunity to reassert his domination over Congress, Nehru and all.

It was Lord Mountbatten who eventually provided him with his opportunity.

Jawaharlal Nehru was 57 years old in 1947. He rarely wore his smart English clothes any more, but dressed almost invariably in a Gandhi cap and khaddar breeches and tunic, but there was always a red rosebud in his lapel. His figure had already begun to be slightly bent and his face in repose looked weary, with smudges of dark brown skin under his eyes. His temper was short (as it still is) and he suffered fools badly; but he was highly susceptible to those who flattered him, those who talked to him about poetry, or a pretty woman. He liked a sherry in the evening, could not stand the vegetarian diet of the Hindu extremists (though for Gandhi's sake, he had tried hard to follow it) and fretted because one of his favourite English papers, the New Statesman, was always late in arriving or did not arrive at all. He was still incredibly handsome and extremely proud of his appearance. Prison had left its mark upon him for, unlike Gandhi, he had hated every moment of it,* and it had certainly increased his suspi-

* Though it produced one of his best books, Discovery of India.
cions of everything British. His attitude towards the latest developments could perhaps be summed up in a passage from a favourite work, Euripides' *Alcestis*:

There be many shapes of mystery;
And many things God brings to be,
Past hope or fear.
And the end man looketh for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought.

Or perhaps in a passage he wrote in prison:

‘There was a time, many years ago, when I lived for considerable periods in a state of emotional exaltation, wrapped up in action which absorbed me. Those days of my youth seem far away now, not merely because of the passage of years but far more so because of the ocean of experience and painful thought that separates them from today. The old exuberance is much less now, the almost uncontrollable impulses have toned down, and passion and feeling are much more in check. The burden of thought is often a hindrance, and in the mind where there was once certainty doubt creeps in. Perhaps it is just age...’

Nehru in 1947, as I have said, was 57. Sometimes he sounded much more.

And yet there were also moments when his spirits rose and he looked and acted like a matinee idol, bestriding the Indian political scene like a sunburned Ivor Novello. He was still subject, no matter what his self-conviction, to the same uncontrollable impulses which had got him (and his party) into trouble in the past. His blunder over the Cabinet Mission Plan was not an isolated one. He could not take Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League seriously, and though members of Congress warned him repeatedly that the Muslim League strength was building up throughout India and the Muslim friends of Congress were deserting them for Jinnah, he angrily refused to believe it.

‘How can we be losing our Muslim supporters,’ he said, ‘when Congress still rules in the North West Frontier Province, where they are all Muslims?’
It was suggested to him that Congress’ hold there was loosening rapidly, that the Party machine there was running down fast.

‘Then I will go and wind it up again,’ he said, and told his secretary to prepare for a journey to Peshawar. He was convinced that a wave of his hand and a few rallying speeches would revive the fortunes of the flagging local Congress administration. What he got instead were rioting crowds, a threatening situation in which revolvers had to be fired, and a shower of bricks from the mob. He returned to Delhi chastened, but still not convinced—he never would be convinced—it the power of the Muslim League was anything but a confidence trick.

For Nehru, there was one welcome personal aspect about the arrival of Lord Mountbatten as the new Viceroy. Someone had told him the story of how, during the 1945 election, a Labour Party canvasser arrived to interview Lord and Lady Mountbatten. ‘Oh, you don’t have to convince us,’ said Mountbatten. ‘But you’re going to have a devil of a job in the kitchen. The butler and the staff are all out-and-out Tories.’

‘After all these Hindus,’ said Nehru, with a patronizing wave of his hand towards his fellow Congressmen, ‘it will be good to meet a straightforward English Socialist again.’

There is not much more to say about Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel than has already been mentioned in these pages (for the moment that is) except to stress his importance in the Congress Party and his iron control over the Party machine. He was a man of great personal ambition, but, as has been seen, such was Gandhi’s influence over him until 1946 that he twice allowed himself to be superseded by Nehru in the leadership of the Party, though convinced that Nehru was a temperamental dreamer and he himself was the better man.

It is a curious coincidence, and perhaps food for the psychiatrists, that the three most important political leaders in India in 1947—if you discount Gandhi—were all widowers. The story goes that Patel was in the middle of a
final speech for the defence in a Bombay court case when a messenger came in with a telegram announcing the death of his wife. He read it, stuffed it in his pocket, and went on with his speech. Like Nehru, he was thenceforward looked after by a devoted daughter.

Patel was well aware that he was regarded by the Left Wing of the Congress Party as a die-hard capitalist whose constant attention to the practical side of Congress administration was the typical activity of a non-idealistic and non-intellectual (the terms are from Congress documents, not from me). Congress sometimes took more pride in the scholastic achievements of its hierarchy than it did in its relations with the masses. Of the eleven members of the Party who were imprisoned by the British in 1942, Nehru wrote:

‘Nearly all the principal living Indian languages as well as the classical languages which have powerfully influenced India in the past and present were represented and the standard was often that of the high scholarship. Among the classical languages were Sanskrit and Pali, Arabic and Persian.’

Nonetheless, it was Patel—who spoke only Gujerati and English—who kept the Party going with regular infusions of money from the big Hindu millionaires, and with frequent purgings and oilings of the political machine of a nature with which Nehru would never have been asked to soil his hands.

When it was announced that Mountbatten would be the new Viceroy, Patel sent for a report on him from his correspondents in London. He was told that Mountbatten was ‘a Liberal aristocrat with revolutionary leanings’. His reaction to the news was: ‘He will be a toy for Jawaharlalji to play with—while we arrange the revolution.’

I turned out to be somewhat different from that, but it still went the way that Sardar Patel was thinking. He was 72 in 1947.

There were other distinguished names in the Congress Party, but, in the context of the fight for independence,
they played minor roles. Rajagopalachari of Madras had pleaded, from the start, for some sort of recognition of the Muslim League that would give them at worst a securely protected role in a federal India, or at best, their own independent Pakistan. Like the premature anti-Fascists of pre-war Europe and America, he spoke too forthrightly and too soon to be heeded. But he remained, quick-witted, Churchillian in manner and speech (though he never smoked a cigar or drank a brandy in his life), an influence behind the scenes, though never quite strong enough to tip the scales towards common-sense when the rest of Congress were plumping for excess.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s influence on Congress, while President, had been great and his influence upon Congress-Muslim League negotiations did much to hold religious antipathies in check. It was only after he relinquished the presidency that the floodgates of hatred opened. There are those in India today who still believe that if only Azad could have been persuaded to keep the leadership of Congress during the last days of the negotiations for independence, most of the melancholy events which followed could have been avoided. His eclipse, according to these students of Indian history, signalized for the Muslims the end of Muslim influence in the Congress Party and the certainty that independence would be independence for the Hindus only. There is little doubt that his decision to resign the leadership of the Party in 1946 was a cardinal error; and though Azad himself realized it afterwards, there should have been some members, at least, in the Congress Party who realized it before—and realized, too, that they had no better card to play in their claim to represent all parties, all races, and all creeds in India than a distinguished and perfervidly pro-Congress Muslim at their head. So long as Azad was their President, how could anyone claim that Congress was anti-Muslim?

Perhaps more than any other subordinate member of Congress, Azad still continued to play his part. He remained from first to last a firm believer in a unitary India,
in a nation which need not be divided by religious factions, in the need to compromise to achieve independence. When Wavell was sacked by the Labour Government, he found himself in a minority in Congress in his feelings of sorrow. Nehru, particularly, believed that Wavell was under the thumb of pro-Muslim League influences. Patel thought Wavell’s anxiety to prevent civil war in India and establish a common feeling between the peoples would keep the British in power for another ten years. Only Azad shared Wavell’s desperate wish to bring the warring factions together, to negotiate, wait, argue, negotiate, wait, argue and then negotiate again, in a determined and wholehearted effort to make the Hindus and Muslims learn to live together. To a great extent, he shot his bolt as an important Congress leader by issuing a statement when Wavell’s resignation was announced. It was not endorsed by any other Congress leader. It said, in part:

‘I do not know what communications passed between Lord Wavell and H.M.G. in the last two or three weeks. Obviously there were some differences which led to his resignation. We may differ from his appraisement of the situation. But we cannot doubt his sincerity or integrity of purpose. Nor can I forget that the credit for the changed atmosphere in Indo-British relations today must be traced back to the step which he so courageously took in June 1945. After the failure of the Cripps Mission, Churchill’s Government had made up their mind to put the India question in cold storage for the duration of the war. Indian opinion could also find no way out and events after 1942 had further increased the bitterness. To Lord Wavell must belong the credit for opening the closed door . . . I am confident that India will never forget this service of Lord Wavell and when the time comes for the historian of independent India to appraise the relations of India and England, he will give Lord Wavell the credit for opening a new chapter in those relations.’

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born in Mecca in 1888, which made him 59 in 1947, a year-and-a-half older than
Nehru. He was a distinguished scholar in Arabic (he had studied at Al Azhar, in Cairo), Urdu, Hindi, Sanskrit and English. Nehru once said of him: ‘Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, whose vast erudition invariably delighted me but sometimes also rather overwhelmed me.’

He had fought the British all his life, but admired them greatly. He had an abounding faith in their honesty and goodwill. Until the new Viceroy arrived, that is.

This is the place, I think, to mention two other Indians who played a significant part in the struggle for independence, particularly since the shape of it would have been different had it not been for them. Neither of them was a member of Congress or the Muslim League, though one was a Hindu and the other a Muslim.

Both were members of the Indian Government Service, but not the ICS. Chaudri Mohammed Ali was a Muslim, born near Lucknow in the United Provinces, who went to London University and the London School of Economics and also (need I say?) was called to the Bar. He joined the Indian Audit and Accounts Service as a junior clerk and worked his way through the Finance Department until, in 1946, he was assistant head of the department, and, in the words of his English chief, ‘a most expert, able administrator, as well as a damned good economist’.

Chaudri Mohammed Ali now maintains that he always believed in the idea of Pakistan right from the days of his youth in England. Be that as it may, it was not until he met Mr Jinnah in 1946 that he allowed Muslim League politics to obtrude into his work in the Indian Government. Influenced by Jinnah’s personality and League propaganda, he soon became such a partial member of the Finance Department that his chief began to greet him, whenever he came into the office, with the cry of Pakistan Zindabad!*

* Which did not, as some facetious correspondents later translated it, mean ‘Pakistan’s in the bag’ but ‘Hail to Pakistan’.

B. R.—4
‘Actually,’ said Chaudri, ‘my conversion had taken place before this. I knew my worth as a financial expert and I was pleased when my chief, who is now a director of one of the great English banks, proposed me as a director of the Federal Bank of India, whose board at that time was composed of Hindus and Parsis. I would have been the first Muslim director. They agreed to have me enthusiastically at first. But then my chief made the mistake of pointing out how skilled I was at finance, how much experience I had, how valuable and perceptive I would be. The more he advanced my credentials, the less warm they grew, until finally they found an excuse to reject me. You see, they wouldn’t have minded a Muslim so long as he was stupid or amenable. It would have given the show a semblance of racial and communal unity. But the moment they thought I might be efficient, they backed down. It was the same with Congress. They didn’t mind Muslims. What they were afraid of were intelligent or able Muslims.’*

The big moment in Chaudri Mohammed Ali’s career, so far as the fight for freedom was concerned, came shortly before Lord Mountbatten’s arrival. The Muslim League had by this time taken up its five places in the interim Government and there was discussion between them, Congress and the Viceroy as to the chief Cabinet post which should be given to them. Jinnah had signified that he would take no part in the Cabinet himself but he had assigned Liaquat Ali Khan and expected him to be given a position of some consequence. The Viceroy suggested that Liaquat should be appointed Home Member (the equivalent of a British Home Secretary) with power to deal with judicial and police affairs, as well as other matters of domestic administration. It so happened that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had made himself Home Member and found it a useful post for controlling Congress Party patronage and policies. He was urged to give it up to Liaquat but angrily refused; it was rather like asking an

* In a conversation with the author.
old-time Postmaster General in an American administra-
tion to hand over to a Republican. He suggested instead
that Liaquat should be given the portfolio of Finance Mem-
ber (or Chancellor of the Exchequer in British parlance).
Patel thought this would give Liaquat a high-sounding
post, but no say in the politics of the interim Government.

It was a monumental error which was to have Himalayan
repercussions. Liaquat had no sense of the job’s tactical
and strategic importance when he took it. But then
Chaudri Mohammed Ali stepped in. He pointed out that
the Congress Party, through Nehru, proclaimed its sym-
pathy for Socialism and its eagerness to promote the wel-
fare of the people and share the wealth of India among
them. But the financial backing of the Congress Party
came almost entirely from millionaires, who had made for-
tunes during the war. Chaudri proposed to Liaquat that
he should draw up a Budget which would squeeze the
rich backers of the Congress Party until, as Geddes once
said, ‘you could hear the pips squeak’.

It did more than that. It made Nehru and Patel scream
with rage, too. And, as will be seen, it profoundly changed
their attitude towards the question of India’s future.

Chaudri Mohammed Ali subsequently became one of
Pakistan’s prime ministers and is now head of an insurance
company. He is at present writing his own history of
Indian independence, and it should contain some fascinat-
ing revelations. The only man he really admired in the
Congress Party was Gandhi. ‘He had great subtlety of
mind and a lawyer’s wiliness behind all that simplicity,’
he said. ‘I am told that some people also considered him
a saint.’*

V. P. Menon† has the happy distinction of having played
a major role—some would say the all-important role—in
the drama of India’s independence without having been

* In a conversation with the author.
† No relation to Krishna Menon, K. P. S. Menon or any of
the other Menons who figure so frequently in Indian politics.
(a) to school in England, (b) to university anywhere and (c) without being a lawyer.

He was Reforms Commissioner and Constitutional Adviser to Linlithgow, Wavell and Mountbatten, the highest position in the Indian Government Service ever to have been held by an Indian, and an even more remarkable achievement when you consider his background. He was born in Malabar in 1889, a member of one of those Jain family tribes which farm the fertile slopes of this loveliest corner of India. At the age of fifteen he fell seriously ill with typhoid and was away from school for several months. He still sat for his matriculation examination, however and passed; but he had, through his illness, not put in the requisite time at school and he was not allowed to receive his certificate without attending for another year. It so happened that this was a time when his family was going through a period of grave financial crisis; his father, the head of the clan, had died and there were innumerable brothers and cousins still to be educated. Menon decided that there was only one thing to do: leave home, earn his own living, and send back money to help his family. He set off, unmatriculated, into a land where a certificate of education can mean the difference between a comfortable living and starvation. Time and again he demonstrated to Hindu employers that he could read and write, was fluent in English, good at figures; and time and again he was thrown out of their offices when he could not produce the all-important scroll. He was down to work in the railway shops and rapidly wasting away on a thin diet when an Englishman rescued him. Menon saw an advertisement in the Madras Mail for a clerk to work in the Kolar Goldfields, in Mysore; beneath it, another advertisement from the same organization for a contract overseer to work in the mines themselves. He decided to apply for both jobs and was told to come for an interview.

The English manager took a fancy to young Menon and waved away the confession that he was uncertificated. He advised Menon to take on the safe, steady job as a clerk
in the office and promised him good prospects if he worked hard; but Menon had heard stories of the huge sums to be made by contract overseers and was determined, despite warnings that there were hazards, to have a try. He was given a sum of money by the manager, told to go out and hire himself a gang of coolies, and get to work in the mine. He would be paid a percentage of all the gold his gang brought up. ‘The harder you work them,’ the manager said, ‘the more you’ll make. But don’t work them too hard, or you’ll kill them.’

Menon was not the type. For the first few weeks, his coolies laboured splendidly for him. He was making nearly a thousand rupees a week and sending most of it home. Then he made the error of increasing the rations of his coolies and giving them time off with pay when they fell sick. The coolies decided that he was an easy mark. They would descend to the second or third level of the mine, where it was cool, and go off to sleep instead of to work. Week after week, the amount of gold dropped below Menon’s quota. At the end of three months, he was heavily in debt to the management, and hourly waiting for the summons that would turn him into an employee himself until he had paid off what he owed. Instead, the Englishman called him in to his office.

‘I told you not to be a damned fool,’ he said. ‘Too bloody nice, that’s your trouble. Well, it’s all up, my lad. Here, take this—and get out and don’t come back.’

He handed Menon an envelope. Inside were two 100 rupee notes, and a letter to a tobacco firm manager in Bangalore. He was never asked to repay his debt.

It was an Englishman, too, who gave V. P. Menon his start in the Government Service. Years later, once more on the verge of starvation, Menon had borrowed sufficient money to take the train back to Malabar and was on his way to the station when an Englishman he had met while clerking in Bombay crossed the road to greet him. He was head of the Home Department in Delhi. When he heard
of Menon's plight, he got him a job in the department and encouraged him to study at night school.

By 1940, Menon had made himself an expert on Indian affairs and well-nigh indispensable to the administration. In 1941 he drew up a scheme for the Federation of the Princely States with the rest of India in which the States would have acceded to British India on a limited basis, retaining their own internal administration but passing Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications to the Central Government. It was a plan which would have laid the foundations for a Unitary India of the future. Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, locked the plan away in his famous Little Black Box (which he was reputed to take with him to the toilet, in case someone tried to look inside) and never even acknowledged it.

'It's all very well for you to hang around, Menon,' he said on one occasion. 'You expect me to make you Reforms Commissioner when the job comes up, don't you? You had better get it out of your mind. It is not a job for an Indian.'

When the office fell vacant, H. V. Hodson was jumped into the position over Menon's head. Menon never held it against him, and they became firm friends; nor did it cool Menon's warm regard and admiration for the British, though he did not necessarily learn to love Lord Linlithgow. But he bided his time. In 1943, H. V. Hodson quarrelled with the Viceroy and departed for Britain (where he subsequently became the distinguished Editor of the London Sunday Times) and Linlithgow looked around for an Englishman to fill his place. His advisers informed him that there was none in the whole of India who could approach V. P. Menon in the breadth of his knowledge of Indian affairs, law, civil administration and relations with the Princely States. Linlithgow righted the earlier injustice and summoned Menon. He got one of the best Reforms Commissioners in the history of the Indian Government and he and his successors leaned heavily on his shoulders from that moment on. Few of them, however,
ever realized how much he did for them, just as few people realize how great was his part in the achievement of independence.

One thing is certain. V. P. Menon was certainly the most unusual Indian ever to rise to the top of the Government Services. He had no university degree. He came into the service by the backdoor. He was outspoken. He was, also unlike many Indians, a man completely without guile and would never genuflect to anyone, no matter what their position, if he thought they were in the wrong. He could, over India’s wrongs (though never over his own) work himself into quite a state, one of the few characteristics he shared with Nehru. ‘Your only weakness,’ Mountbatten was to write to him later, ‘which is shared by so many of the greatest in India, is that you lose your sense of balance in emotional periods. Fortunately, unlike many others, you yourself recover your balance long before any wrong decisions have been taken. You have been kind enough to attribute this recovery of your balance to my influence but unless you had inherent stability in you, I could not have helped you. If ever you find yourself under great emotional strain and are about to fly off the handle, pause for a moment and say: “What would Mountbatten have said?”’

With the attainment of the office of Reforms Commissioner, V. P. Menon fulfilled the personal ambition of his life. He wanted to see only one other thing come about—Indian independence during his lifetime.

In 1946 he met Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel for the first time, and the two men swiftly became close friends and (so far as Menon’s job made it possible) collaborators. It was an association which had much more to do with the shaping of India’s future than has hitherto been realized.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAST CHUKKA

Viscount and Viscountess Mountbatten arrived in New Delhi on 22 March 1947, and were installed as the last Viceroy and Vicereine* of India forty-eight hours later. It is a ceremony which is as near to a Coronation as you can get without a king, and since there would be no more after this one, the Viceroy’s Staff made sure that it lacked nothing in pomp, circumstance and splendid colour. At Mountbatten’s suggestion it was also photographed for the first and last time, and, for the benefit of the assembled Congressmen, Muslim Leaguers and bejewelled and sparkling Princes—as well as an international radio hook-up—he made one break with tradition. He delivered a short speech in which he emphasized his role as a passer-on of, rather than a clinger-on to, power. His manner was crisp and confident and there was no sign of any emotion as he spoke of the approaching twilight of the British Raj. His voice and bearing caused a quickening of interest among the leaders of both parties, and gave several of the Princes shudders of apprehension, for he had the air of a man who had come to make a deal—and no nonsense about sentiment.

In marked contrast was the expression of dismal gloom on the face of Field Marshal Lord Ismay, who had volunteered to accompany Mountbatten to India as his Chief of Staff. Ismay’s formative years had been spent as a young soldier in India and the land truly was, for him, a precious jewel in Britain’s Crown. He was depressed

* ‘Isn’t it delicious?’ commented Lady Mountbatten to a friend. ‘Some of the old hands around here refer to me as the Vice Queen. It makes me feel like Mrs Meyrick.’
by the changes he had found in modern India compared with the glorious Raj he had known in his youth. (His state of mind can be guessed from the remark he made to Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander in Chief of the Indian Army, when he met him at the airport. Auchinleck was wearing a beret. ‘Good God, Claude,’ exclaimed Ismay. ‘Where’s your topee?’)* He did not share Mountbatten’s optimism, and he described his task as ‘one of the most delicate and perhaps distasteful assignments imaginable’. He added: ‘We would be going out to the last chukka twelve goals down.’

The Staff the new Viceroy had brought to India with him was a powerful one. In Ismay himself he had an ally of enormous influence, for as Churchill’s wartime aide he was admired and trusted by just those elements who were apt to suspect Mountbatten’s technique. The new Viceroy was too well aware of his own skill and charm to doubt his ability to handle relations between himself, the public and the Labour Government. But he was not so sure of his skill with the Tories. He was relying upon Ismay to handle them.

Second-in-Command to Ismay was Sir Eric Mieville, another old India hand but one rather less romantic about it than Ismay. He had once been Private Secretary to Lord Willingdon when he was Viceroy, and had served, thereafter, as Assistant Private Secretary to King George the Sixth, and had given up his job as Something in the City to accompany Mountbatten.

There were four other members of the Staff: old-time aides of Mountbatten in Burma and at Combined Operations during the War, unswervingly loyal subordinates, a talented quadrumvirate of ‘front men’, whose main task was the projection of their chief’s personality as the image of achievement. They were Captain Ronald Brockman, RN, an ex-submariner, Commander George Nicholls, RN, Lieut-Colonel Vernon Erskine Crum, Scots Guards, and

Alan Campbell-Johnson, in charge of Public Relations. Campbell-Johnson was perhaps the most important of them. He was an expert on publicity. During the War he had been the keeper of Mountbatten’s diaries and the defender of his policies. It had not escaped the new Viceroy’s notice that the Viceregal Staff had never hitherto possessed a wholetime spokesman, and much of Wavell’s remoteness from the public could possibly be explained by the fact that there was never anyone available to ‘interpret’ or ‘project’ him to the Press. Mountbatten had no intention of hiding his own personality under any bushel, Indian or otherwise. It was Campbell-Johnson’s job to keep ramming home, to Press and public alike, that the name of Mountbatten was synonymous with success.

These four Mountbatten men were all on intimate, first-name terms with their chief, and, at times, were derisively known among other members of the Administration as ‘the Dickie Birds’.

In addition, Mountbatten had taken on some of the senior members of Wavell’s staff, the two most notable being Mr George Abell, a distinguished scholar and triple Blue whose knowledge of India and Indians was great, and Rao Bahadur V. P. Menon, the Reforms Commissioner, a remarkable Hindu to whom reference has already been made.

Each morning these members of the Viceroy’s entourage (with one exception) met after breakfast for an informal conference at which the day’s tactics were decided. It was very much a Mountbatten speciality, modelled on his wartime conferences in Burma, at which the others were expected to indulge in a game of verbal ping-pong, batting the problems of Indian independence back and forth across the table, while the Viceroy looked on and acted as a sort of amiable umpire. It was a cosy, British oasis of badinage and cross-talk of a kind which would have appalled any foreigner who listened to it. On serious subjects, it was almost mandatory to be flippant. The Indians were referred to as ‘the bods’, Gandhi as ‘His Nibs’ and Jinnah
as ‘Gimlet’. V. P. Menon was not at first invited to these meetings, at Abell’s suggestion, because ‘continual consultation with him, a Hindu, will convince the Muslims that we are becoming too partial to Congress’. Menon, fuming in the anteroom, retorted that the presence of Abell ‘will convince anyone who knows the way his mind works that there is already a pro-Muslim League element at the meeting—so why not a Hindu to balance it?’ It was not until much later that he was called in, and then only infrequently, and on these occasions the proceedings became much more serious and formal.

It was the time of the year when the energies of most Indians begin to flag. The temperature in March in Delhi mounts every day from 100 degrees to 103, and from 103 to 106, until, soaked with sweat, the newcomer asks himself: ‘Surely it can’t get any hotter than this?’ But it does. The bare red bones of the Delhi landscape shimmer as if they were boiling in some enormous cosmic stewpot. In Old Delhi, there is bustle in the pink coolness of early morning, and again at night when an occasional breeze fans the skin, but otherwise people make for shade and uneasy sleep. In New Delhi, the walls of Lutyens’ Secretariat building suck in the heat, ready to throw it out again at night-time, and inside, the Civil Servants work amidst a mad hurricane of flailing fans flapping weighted-down papers, and envy their wives gone to summer in the hills.

It is in the summer that Indian politicians lose their grip, their resolutions, and their tempers. It is to be remembered that the leaders of both Indian political parties were elderly men of whom Nehru was the youngest at 57. Mohammed Ali Jinnah was already suffering (though he did not know it) from the cancer of the lung which would eventually kill him. Nehru confessed that, in spite of early morning yoga exercises, he was ‘tired and dispirited’. None of them lived in air-conditioned houses or worked in air-conditioned offices, and for many of them—Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, for instance—the prospect of fighting another
battle for independence in the stupefying heat of New Delhi was almost too much to contemplate.

Heat was, on the other hand, something upon which the new Viceroy thrived. He was not, of course, the first or even the last Englishman who found the dizzy heights of Delhi's summer temperatures—anything from 115 to 120 degrees—stimulating and challenging, but as Lady Mountbatten once said: 'I think both Dickie and I have something the matter with our glands. We never seem to get tired. But I get headaches and swollen feet, whereas Dickie only has a mild hangover if he has had too many drinks the night before.'

Delhi's furnace heat acted like a blow-torch on his skin, and galvanized him into activity. True, he had air-conditioning for all the rooms in which he did his most important work. He had his study and his bedroom redecorated and refurnished in his favourite shade of cool green. He had a staff of no less than 7,500 (including 250 gardeners and a permanently-employed plucker of chickens) to look after the Viceroyal House and attend to his every request.*

But his energy was, as Campbell-Johnson remarked, demonic. To Ismay and Mieville there were days when they felt like old retainers who were putting a great and ancient house in order, ready for the sale of itself and all its treasures; and on those days, the workmanlike attitude of the Viceroy, bustling through the corridors, reminded them uncomfortably of an auctioneer with a mallet in his hand. 'By God,' said one of his Staff later, 'you would be surprised how cut-and-dried he made it all seem.'

He had written to Gandhi and Jinnah to come and see him even before he was sworn in as Viceroy, but it was,

* Except the most menial ones. The hoariest story is only too true of how Lady Linlithgow's dog, just before a banquet, made a mess on the carpet. She summoned servants to wipe it up. It took so long to find a servant of low enough rank that she was cleaning it up herself when the first guests arrived.
in fact, Nehru who was his first official visitor. They had
met once before, in Malaya shortly before the end of the
War, when Nehru had flown out to visit troops of the
Indian Army, and the attraction between the two men was
mutual. They had, of course, much in common. Both
were proud men. Both were aristocrats who had esp-
poused popular causes and believed in public welfare rather
than inherited privilege. The deeper thought and sensiti-
vity belonged to Nehru; he was a man, even in triumph,
who was often consumed by doubt and self-accusation. It
was therefore natural, perhaps, that he should be enor-
mously attracted to the personality of the new Viceroy, so
serenely self-confident, so utterly devoid of doubt so com-
pletely in control of himself and all who came into his
orbit.

He found it easy to talk to Mountbatten, and he talked
without stint or reservation. The Viceroy was shrewd
enough to spot from the start one of Nehru’s weaknesses;
he cannot help, when encouraged, being gossipy and malici-
sious about his friends and colleagues. It was from Nehru
that Mountbatten obtained much of the ammunition which
he subsequently used upon other Congress leaders, and
when he led Nehru on to talk to Jinnah, he found him no
less frank. ‘A mediocre lawyer with an obsession for
Pakistan,’ said Nehru contemptuously. Not one of us, he
seemed to infer.

By the end of their three-hour talk, Nehru was com-
pletely won over and Mountbatten had the measure of
his man. He could be flattered. He could be persuaded.
‘Mr Nehru,’ he said, as they parted, ‘I want you to regard
me not as the last Viceroy winding up the British Raj, but
as the first to lead the way to the new India.’

Nehru was intensely moved. ‘Now I know,’ he said,
‘what they mean about your charm being so dangerous.’

But he was Mountbatten’s man from that moment on,
and his attachment to the Mountbatten menage was much
increased by his subsequent contact with Lady Mount-
batten. He had long been a widower, and he was a lone-
ly man. Lady Mountbatten filled an important gap in his life. He began by admiring her for the way she queened it over the great Viceroyal banquets or vast garden parties; but it was her obvious sympathy for India and her practical desire to help the Indian people which stirred in him emotions which were soon much stronger than mere admiration.

The combination of Mountbatten’s charm and Edwina’s sympathy was not so successful on Gandhi, but even he was not impervious to it. The Mahatma was in Bihar on a pilgrimage of penance in the riot-areas when the Viceroy’s invitation arrived.

‘You have rightly gauged my difficulty about moving out of Bihar,’ he wrote in reply, ‘but I dare not resist your kind call. I am just leaving for one of the disturbed areas of Bihar. Will you therefore forgive me if I do not send you the exact date of my departure for Delhi? I return from this third Bihar tour on the 28th inst. My departure will therefore be as quickly as I can arrange it after the 28th.’

For this meeting, which Mountbatten considered all important, he was prepared to give all the time Gandhi desired. In fact, they met on two consecutive days. On the first day, Gandhi talked for almost three hours, but it was almost entirely about his early life and struggles. For Mountbatten, who believes that no man needs more than an hour in which to explain himself, it must have been something of a strain to give it his whole attention as he thought of the wreckage of his timetable. On the following day, Gandhi became (for him) more practical. He produced a plan—but it was just the kind of plan which was apt to make Wavell writhe in agony and call him an ‘obscurantist’. He proposed that the Congress-Muslim League deadlock might be solved by a simple solution: the Viceroy should call upon Mr Jinnah to set up a Government immediately, leaving him to decide whether it should be all Muslims or contain both Muslims and Hindus; and this Government should be allowed an abso-
lutely free hand, with the exception of a Viceregal power of veto, to rule India.

The Viceroy replied at once that he found the plan ‘attractive’, and promised to regard it sympathetically if Congress, too, agreed to its feasibility. He posed for smiling portraits with Gandhi and Lady Mountbatten, and introduced his daughter, Pamela. ‘I shall be sending her to your prayer meeting tomorrow,’ he said. Gandhiji returned from the meeting, in the words of his biographer, Pyarelal, greatly impressed by the Viceroy’s sincerity, gentlemanliness and nobility of character’. He was not so impressed a little later. He found his plan rudely rebuffed by Congress, and the Viceroy wrote to him to point out that there had been a ‘misunderstanding’ about his own reception of it. What happened, in fact, was that immediately after the meeting Mountbatten and his staff set to work to sabotage the plan, which they (and many Congress leaders) considered unworkable. The sabotage was so effective that Gandhi shortly afterwards informed Congress that he would take no further part in the discussions with the Viceroy or play anything other than a minor advisory role in Congress affairs, and he departed once more for his healing mission in Bihar. Within a fortnight of his arrival, the Viceroy had eliminated him from the negotiations for Indian independence. It was an elimination of enormous importance and gravity for India. For Gandhi was one of the only two members of the Congress Party who, despite all propaganda and pressure, remained unshakably against the partition of India into Pakistan and Hindustan.

Of his first meeting with Jinnah, the Viceroy afterwards said: ‘My God, he was cold! It took all my efforts to unfreeze him.’ He quickly discovered that here was a man completely impervious to his charm. Jinnah began the interview by brusquely saying: ‘I will enter into this discussion on one condition only . . .

The Viceroy ‘immediately saw,’ as one of his Staff put it later, ‘that this was an occasion for the old soft soap.’ He interrupted with the smiling remark: ‘Mr Jinnah, I am
not prepared to discuss conditions, or indeed the present situation, until I have had the chance of making your acquaintance and hearing more about you, yourself.'

It was an approach which would have dissolved most suspicions and breached most defences, but Mr Jinnah at seventy had reached a stage when he was not prepared to lower the drawbridge to anyone, least of all to someone whom he suspected of being a playboy, a pro-Hindu and an anti-Muslim. The Viceroy may have imagined that he was unfrozen by the end of the interview, but the icicles were still visibly clinging to him when he emerged from the Viceroy's House to say to reporters: 'The Viceroy just does not understand.'

That, however, is unfair. The Viceroy understood only too well. No matter what else may be said about the Mountbatten Mission to India, this should be emphasized at the beginning. Within three weeks of his arrival in India, Mountbatten never had any doubt as to what should be done in order to turn his mission into a success. Even earlier than that, V. P. Menon wrote of him after his first meeting (on 28 March):

'Even that early, only four days after his arrival, I got the feeling that he had decided which way he was going, what solution he had in mind. I told him on this occasion that in my view, Jinnah and the Muslim League would be willing to accept even a truncated Pakistan rather than go into a central Government. He seized upon the point right away. I left him feeling that he had come to India armed with plenipotentiary powers and if the parties were not able to come together, the decision would ultimately have to be given by His Excellency. The decision, I think, will not be palatable to either party.'*

Mountbatten had one great strength—a strength which enabled him to make it clear, immediately upon arriving in Delhi, that though a caretaker Viceroy he was master in the house so long as he remained. Mr Attlee, the

* V. P. Menon, The Transfer of Power.
Labour Prime Minister, had given him the straightforward direction for which his predecessor, Wavell, had repeatedly asked in vain. He brought with him to India a message from Attlee which set out the terms and scope of his mission in such a way that he never had any doubt of the extent of his discretion.

'It is the definite object of His Majesty’s Government,' the Prime Minister had written, 'to obtain a unitary Government of India within the British Commonwealth, through the medium of a Constituent Assembly, set up and run in accordance with the Cabinet Mission’s Plan, and you should do the utmost in your power to persuade all Parties to work together to this end, and advise His Majesty’s Government, in the light of developments, as to the steps that will have to be taken.'

But he went on:

'Since, however, this plan can only become operative in respect of British India by agreement between the major Parties, there can be no question of compelling either Party to accept it. If by October 1 you consider that there is no prospect of reaching a settlement on the basis of a unitary Government for British India, either with or without the co-operation of the Indian States, you should report to His Majesty’s Government on the steps which you consider should be taken for the handing over of power on the due date.'

There was more to the Instruction than this, but this was the kernel. He had been given both authority and room for manoeuvre, and he made the speediest possible use of it. By the end of his first three weeks in India, the Viceroy may not have decided that a unitary India was impossible, but he had certainly reached the conclusion that the attainment of it would be a long and ticklish job, fraught with danger and uncertainty. And Lord Mountbatten was in India not to risk failure but to achieve success, and quickly. As V. P. Menon puts it in *The Transfer of Power in India:*
‘Lord Mountbatten was required by his directive to find an agreed solution for a united India on the basis of the Cabinet Mission Plan and he set about most expeditiously and zealously on this path. But in the course of his talks with the party leaders, particularly with Jinnah and his colleagues, he became more and more convinced that there was no prospect of an agreed solution on that basis and that an alternative plan for the transfer of power had to be found and implemented without loss of time.’

The only alternative was, of course, partition—and Pakistan. But how to sell partition to the Congress leaders and particularly Gandhi and Nehru, who were adamantly against it? How to sell it to the Government at home? And how to sell it to soldiers and civil servants who would have the dreadful job of cutting the country in two?

With Gandhi, the problem was not a difficult one. The Viceroy’s clever manœuvring after his first two meetings with the Mahatma had already exiled him to the periphery of the Congress movement. ‘He is not a practical man,’ Mountbatten said in effect to the Congress leaders. ‘Look at the silly plan he produced to hand India over to Jinnah. This is no time for idealistic gestures—this is the time for action.’ From this time onwards Congress began more and more frequently to take important decisions without consulting him. One of those decisions was contained in a Resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee at the beginning of March, and it played straight into the Viceroy’s hands.

The author of the Resolution was Sardar Patel, and he alone, perhaps, of all his colleagues was aware exactly what he was doing. For the Resolution, proposed by Patel and adopted by the Congress Working Committee, recommended the partition of the great granary-province of the Punjab into two communal states, Muslim and Hindu, with freedom to the Sikhs to choose in which community they would live and work. The significance of such a decision was surely obvious: that if Congress was willing to accept
partition of a province, then it could not claim any longer to be against the partition of the country. Patel saw it in no other way. For he had made up his mind. So far as he was concerned, the Muslims could go and take their majority territories with them. As organizer and controller of the Congress Party machine, he saw nothing but trouble ahead if independent India included the Muslim League as Opposition, thwarting his plans, holding up legislation. The actions of Liaquat Ali Khan—the Muslim League deputy leader—as Finance Member of the interim Government had given him the fright of his life, for, it will be remembered, Liaquat’s Budget had heavily soaked the millionaire backers of Congress and shown up the hypocrisy of the Party’s claim to be Socialist. Patel not only campaigned to get the Budget modified (which, with the help of the Viceroy, he succeeded in doing) but he resolved never to be trapped into a such situation again.

Not that Patel explained his attitude to his colleagues with quite such brutal clarity. For them he had another line of reasoning more calculated to appeal to their desire to preserve Indian unity at all costs.

‘If the League insists on Pakistan,’ he wrote to one of the Working Committee, ‘the only alternative is the division of the Punjab and Bengal ... I do not think that the British Government will agree to division. In the end, they will see the wisdom of handing over the reins of Government to the strongest party. Even if they do not, it will not matter. A strong Centre with the whole of India—except E. Bengal and part of the Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan—enjoying full autonomy under the Centre will be so powerful that the remaining portions will eventually come in.’

It was this line of reasoning which particularly appealed to Pandit Nehru. It was no use; he could not take Jinnah and the Muslim League seriously. The aim was to discredit them once and for all, and to demonstrate to India’s Muslims that only Congress could protect their further welfare.
To him, Patel's Resolution was a stratagem rather than an admittance of the fact of partition. It was with his active connivance that the Congress Working Committee met and signified their approval of a partition of the Punjab. It was far from representing the crossing of the Rubicon, he thought; it would merely show the Muslims what must be faced if they insisted upon their agitation for Pakistan. Even Mr Jinnah himself would realize that his agitation could only lead to a truncated State so painfully mutilated that it could never be viable. A date was chosen for the passing of the Resolution when Gandhi was immersed in his healing mission in Bihar and when the only important Muslim member of the Congress hierarchy, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was ill and absent, for Patel and Nehru knew that both of them would be against it and would use all their influence to stop it from going through. And even after it was passed, steps were taken to keep it secret and no message was sent to Gandhi to tell him what had taken place.

'I have long intended to write to you asking you about the Working Committee resolution on the possible partition of the Punjab,' he wrote to Nehru, nearly three weeks later. 'I would like to know the reason for it. I have to speak about it. I have done so in the absence of full facts with the greatest caution. Kripalani (who had now taken the Congress presidency from Nehru) said in answer to a question in Madras that it was possible that the principle might also be applied to Bengal. I was asked by a Muslim Leaguer of note . . . if it was applicable to the Muslim-majority provinces why it should not be so to Congress-majority provinces like Bihar. I think I did not know the reason behind the Working Committee's resolution. Nor had I the opportunity. I could only give my own view which was against any partition based on communal grounds and the two-nation theory. Anything was possible by compulsion. But willing consent required an appeal to reason and heart. Compulsion or show of it had no place in voluntariness.'
He wrote at the same time to Sardar Patel asking him to explain the ‘Punjab resolution’.

Patel was the first to reply, and it was a response disingenuous in the extreme:

‘It has been difficult to explain to you the resolution about the Punjab. It was adopted after the deepest deliberation. Nothing has been done in a hurry or without full thought. That you had expressed your views against it, we learned only from the papers.* But you are of course entitled to say what you feel right. The situation in the Punjab is far worse than in Bihar. The military has taken over control. As a result, on the surface things seem to have quietened down somewhat. But no one can say when there may be a bust-up again. If that happens, I am afraid even Delhi will not remain unaffected. But here of course we shall be able to deal with it.’

Pandit Nehru’s reply, which followed a day later, was much more lame.

‘About our proposal to divide Punjab,’ he wrote, ‘this flows naturally from our previous decisions. These were negative previously, but now the time for a decision has come and merely passing resolutions giving expression to our views means little. I feel convinced, and so did most of the members of the Working Committee, that we must press for this immediate division so that reality might be brought into the picture. Indeed, this is the only answer to partition as demanded by Jinnah.’†

He still could not be convinced that Jinnah would rather have a ‘moth-eaten Pakistan’, as he was to call it later, than no Pakistan at all.

Neither George Abell nor V. P. Menon were slow in drawing the Viceroy’s attention to the Congress Resolution and stressing the fundamental change which it represented (whether the members realized it or not) in Congress strategy. He at once sent for Patel and carefully

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* My italics—L. M. Gandhi had never left anyone—least of all Patel—in doubt of his objection to any form of partition.

† My italics—L. M.
sounded him on the motives which had been behind the Punjab Resolution. It was no part of Patel's technique to play the game of Indian independence with his cards face up on the table, and for most of the interview he was the somewhat naive Hindu politician only half aware of what the Resolution meant. There were far too important stakes in the games ahead for him to worry about being thought a sucker in this one. It was with surprise and a small show of dismay that he allowed it to be demonstrated to him that by accepting the division of the Punjab he had recognized the principle of Indian partition; and it was even more slowly and unwillingly that he appeared to accept Mountbatten's contention that this was, perhaps, the way out after all. Think of the peace if the Muslims could be banished once and for all to their own (very small and unworkable) country. No opposition to Congress plans. No cunning campaigns against the owners of the Congress money-bags. A free India under a one-party regime, free to carry out its plans without interference.

Grudgingly, Patel allowed himself to be persuaded that here, perhaps, was the way out. Jubilantly, Mountbatten emerged from the meeting to tell his Staff. 'It worked! He seemed like such a hard nut—yet once I cracked the shell, he was all pulp inside!'

Neither V. P. Menon, who heard this remark, or Patel himself, ever revealed to the Viceroy that they had talked of the real meaning of the Resolution long before it was submitted; that, in fact (as it will be seen), while ostensibly walking innocently into Mountbatten's parlour, Sardar Patel was busily spinning a web of his own.

'As soon as Sardar Patel had been convinced,' wrote Maulana Abul Kalam Azad later, 'Lord Mountbatten turned his attention to Jawaharlal. Jawaharlal was not at first at all willing and reacted violently against the very idea of partition, but Lord Mountbatten persisted till step by step Jawaharlal's opposition was torn down. Within a month of Lord Mountbatten's arrival in India, Jawaharlal,
the firm opponent of partition, had become if not a supporter at least acquiescent towards the idea.'

Azad added: 'I have often wondered how Jawaharlal was won over by Lord Mountbatten.'

There were, in fact, a great many factors involved in his astonishing change of front, but one of them was certainly Lady Mountbatten.

From the very beginning, the Viceroy and his Staff worked as a team, and very much part of the team was his wife and—in a lesser way—their daughter, Pamela. Each day, in addition to their ordinary administrative duties, the Staff proliferated over Delhi to spread Viceroyal goodwill and oil the wheels of negotiation. Campbell-Johnson maintained a fairly close liaison with the Nehru household and became a welcome guest at the Nehru breakfast table, a firm friend of Nehru’s daughter, Indira—whose influence on her father was considerable—and a successful lubricant of the Nehru-Mountbatten axis. He also moved with notable effect among those Indian intellectuals, like Pannikar, who were not officially members of Congress but had a great deal of influence on Congress thinking.

Lord Ismay’s job was the rather more difficult one of advocating the Viceroy’s good intentions among the Muslims, and in this he was aided by George Abell. Most of Ismay’s military life in India had been spent among Muslim troops and he made no secret of the fact that he vastly preferred them to the Hindus. He was a manifestly good and well-meaning man,* and though he never did succeed in penetrating Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s armour of reserve and suspicion, he was much more successful with Liaquat Ali Khan. All the other members of the entourage worked

* It is typical of him that he had, for more than twenty years, been supplementing his old Muslim batman’s Army pension with one of his own. Just before he arrived in India, his bank manager wrote to tell him that the pension hadn’t been collected for weeks. He realized why when he reached Delhi. His batman, hearing of his appointment on the radio, had set out on foot and walked for weeks—and was waiting in Delhi to serve him again.
like eager beavers, nibbling their way into Indian hearts.

For his own family, the Viceroy had tasks assigned, too; although, if the truth be told, Lady Mountbatten did not need assignments. She responded immediately to the challenge of India, and had no intention of confining her activities to the running of the Viceroy’s House and its 7,500 servants, or to the occasional banquets and garden parties which were part of the programme of a Viceregal year, even as exceptional a one as this. She briefed her daughter, Pamela, in Indian politics and then told her to go out and ‘breathe friendship and goodwill on everyone’. Pamela became a familiar figure at Gandhi prayer meetings when they took place in Delhi and an animated speaker at Young Indian discussion groups.

Lady Mountbatten’s chief stock-in-trade, as she well knew, was charm and sympathy. She shared with her husband a need to be liked, to be successful, but hers was an ambition which got its impetus much more from the heart than from the head. She was shrewd enough to realize that even the most anti-British Indians dearly love a Lady and are dazzled by even the reflected light of royalty, and she used her background, her personality and her beauty for all they were worth in making contacts. But once made, she genuinely enjoyed them. She liked the Indians and was completely devoid of the colour-consciousness and class-consciousness of so many British mem-sahibs. She made friends of most of the Indian leaders and their wives, and much of her enthusiastic support of her husband’s policies and ideas communicated itself to them in the most subtly convincing way.

One of her closest friends now was Pandit Nehru, and, in the words of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, more than the influence of Patel or Mountbatten upon him ‘was the influence of Lady Mountbatten . . . She admired her husband greatly and in many cases tried to interpret his thought to those who would not at first agree with him.’

It was not Lady Mountbatten alone, however, but a combination of circumstances in which she played her part
which eventually turned Nehru’s troubled and uncertain mind to the solution of Pakistan. He had himself traveled to the Punjab and seen something of the communal riots which, in March and April, caused the deaths of at least 2,000 people. India was rapidly becoming an unholy mess of bloodshed and hatred, and Nehru was consumed with a sense of hopelessness in the face of it. ‘I have seen ghastly sights and I have heard of behaviour by human beings which would degrade brutes,’ he wrote. A few years before it would not have daunted him; rather would he have accepted it as a challenge to his own leadership and Congress policy, and gone out personally to fight it. But now... he was tired. He felt out of touch with the people.

‘Conditions all over India to some extent are very unsatisfactory,’ he wrote to Gandhi. ‘There is a certain disruptive tendency at work which affects our work in every direction. The whole Congress organization is suffering from it and we, who are in the Government, have not time at all to give to any work except the immediate problems which confront us... What I am worrying about is the rapidly deteriorating state of the Congress organization. Those of us who are in the Government have given and can give no time at all to the Congress work. We are losing touch with the people.’

It was while he was in this state of mind that Lady Mountbatten came back from a tour of the Punjab, which she had made by plane and car through most of the worst riot areas. It was the first time she had really ventured out of the air-conditioned coolness of the Viceroy’s House into the dust-filled furnace of an Indian summer, and she was appalled by what she saw and felt. ‘This summer,’ she wrote in a report to the St John Ambulance Brigade, ‘has been the most trying on record, the temperature varying from up to 114 in the shade (with a night temperature rarely dropping below 95) to the middle nineties where it now seems to have settled, but with humidity rising all the time... This has made active work, particularly out
in towns and villages where there are often no such things as fans, very trying indeed, and I have often found myself wringing out my hair two or three times in the day, in fact one forgets what it is to be dry.’

In her visits to hospitals and riot-wrecked villages, she encountered all the horrors of communal savagery—a child with its hands chopped off, a pregnant mother disembowelled, a family wiped out save for a small baby. She came back to Delhi in great distress, appalled by her confrontation with communal hatred and convinced that her husband and his advisers were right and that partition was the only way. It was while she was in this wretched state of numbed horror and despair that Mountbatten sent her to see Nehru. They grieved together over India’s misery. A few days after this Nehru went round to see Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. ‘Jawaharlal asked me in despair,’ wrote Azad afterwards, ‘what other alternative was there to accepting partition. . . . He recognized that partition was evil, but he held that circumstances were inevitably leading in that direction . . . and asked me to give up my opposition to partition. He said that it was inevitable and it would be wisdom not to oppose what was bound to happen. He also said that it would not be wise for me to oppose Lord Mountbatten on this issue.’*

It was done. The man who had fought so long for a free and unitary India, who had mocked Jinnah and despised the Muslim League, had been won over by Mountbatten’s charm and Lady Mountbatten’s distress in less than a month; and though, of course, there were other factors involved—particularly the weariness of many Congress leaders and Sardar Patel’s determination to be rid of the Muslims once and for all—there was no doubt in anyone’s mind in India that the Viceroy, in persuading Nehru, had performed the confidence trick of the century. For Nehru’s conversion was the key. Without his con-

* My italics—L. M.
sent, the Congress would never have accepted the idea of partition.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah preserved a cool and dignified attitude in public and accepted Nehru's *volte face* as a tardy recognition of undeniable facts; but in private, he could hardly contain himself. His satisfaction was as great as the Viceroy's. He had never expected recognition of Pakistan by Congress to come so soon. In fact, many who knew him maintained that he had never really expected Pakistan to come, either. And now here he was, standing on its threshold.

On 11 April 1947 Lord Ismay sent the following letter to V. P. Menon, the Reforms Commissioner, from the Viceroy's House:

'My dear Menon,—I send you herewith the bare bones of a possible plan for the transfer of power. The Viceroy would be glad if you would *a.* amend the draft in any way you think right and put some flesh on it; *b.* consider what the procedure would be immediately after HMG had made their announcement. For example, would a general election throughout India be necessary? How would we set about the partition of the Punjab, Bengal and Assam? Presumably, the decision will be left to HE and will not be open to argument. What will be the machinery for those groups who wish to get together to frame their constitution and so on and so forth? *c.* Work out a rough timetable. I ought to explain that nothing very precise is required at this stage but only to give HE an idea of how this plan would be implemented if adopted, and how long it would take. Yours very sincerely, Ismay.'

Menon's draft was circulated a few days later to the Governors of India's eleven provinces who had been summoned to Delhi for a conference with the Viceroy. The moment they read it, they realized that their days were numbered. 'The blighter's pulled it off,' one of them said. 'What is he—a swami or something?' But even Sir Evan Jenkins, the Governor of the Punjab and a fervid opponent of the partition of that province, raised no objections
to the draft. Only Sir Frederick Burrows, Governor of Bengal, who was absent owing to illness, indicated his opposition and hinted that he was lending his support to agitation in Calcutta for a separate State of Bengal, independent of both Pakistan and Hindustan (and, of course, led by that cheerful political boss, Mr Shaheed Suhrarwardy).* Otherwise, the Governors gave the Viceroy carte blanche to go ahead. The main concern of a considerable number of them was not the future of India but the safety of British nationals once independence was proclaimed; they appeared to believe that a massacre of the sahibs would automatically follow.

The Viceroy dined them and their ladies in the great banqueting hall on Viceroyal silver, and though the food was frugal (for Lady Mountbatten had initiated an austerity regime as a gesture to ‘starving India’) the reminiscences were rich and sentimental, for all were aware that there would never again be such a function. From the walls, the portraits of past Viceroys looked down on the farewell supper, and as he glanced up at them occasionally, at least one Governor wondered, sadly, what Lord Curzon would have thought about it all.

It was, nonetheless, a triumph of no mean order for the Viceroy. It may have been charm, it may have been confidence trickery, it may have been a ruthless use of snobbery and salesmanship on the susceptible Indians, but it had certainly changed the situation in less than a month from hopeless deadlock to hopeful settlement.

For personal reason, Mountbatten had good reason to be satisfied. To the world, the choice of 1 June 1948 as the date when power would irrevocably be handed over to the Indians had been chosen by the Prime Minister,

* ‘I’ll probably stay on to run the railways,’ joked Sir Frederick. (He was fond of reminding the Indians that he was an old railway worker. ‘The folks you usually get out here are experts on huntin’ and shootin’;’ he told them. ‘Well, I’m an expert on shuntin’ and hootin’.’ )
Mr Attlee, as one which would best shock the Indian leaders into a sense of reality. So, if official spokesmen have their way, will the date go down in history. In fact, it was not Mr Attlee who chose the date but Lord Mountbatten, and it was not chosen for reasons of Indian policy but to conform with the Viceroy’s personal plans. When the Labour Party premier first asked him to assume the task of being India’s last Viceroy, Mountbatten refused for the genuine reason that he felt it was time he got back to the Navy and resumed his career*. Attlee pleaded with him. He said that he had been thinking along the lines of giving the Indians a time limit to put their house in order, and had thought that they should be told that two years would be as much as the British Government would be prepared to endure the present situation.

Mountbatten replied that two years was far too long for him to be away from the Navy. The Prime Minister then asked him how long he would be prepared to give to the task if the Government guaranteed that his rank, seniority and opportunities for promotion in the Royal Navy were preserved. Mountbatten asked permission to think it over, and went off to talk about the prospects of the job to a number of his friends—and to the King.

Next day, he saw Mr Attlee again and asked him whether the job could not be done in twelve months, which was the maximum time he felt he could spare, even for the disposal of the Indian Empire. The premier replied that, after some thought, he had come to the conclusion that eighteen months would be long enough—but perhaps a compromise could be arranged.

The compromise resulted in a ring round the calendar for 1 June 1948, fifteen months after the assumption of

* Mountbatten’s father, Prince Louis of Battenberg, was forced to resign as First Lord of the Admiralty during the Great War because of his name and German parentage. His son was determined to vindicate him by becoming First Lord himself, an ambition which he has since achieved and surpassed.
office. Within thirty days of that date, Mr Attlee assured Mountbatten, he would be back in the Navy.

'Too soon, too soon,' Churchill had cried, when the date of 1 June 1948 was first mentioned in the House of Commons. But the way things were going, one month after Mountbatten's arrival, it looked like being even sooner. Thanks to his methods, the opposition to his plans was just melting away.

CHAPTER FIVE

NEW DEAL AT SIMLA

It is perhaps significant that in the last few days of April and the first week of May 1947 Mountbatten was able to give two hours a day to work on his family tree; while Nehru's daughter, Indira, reported that her father was talking loudly in his sleep again. With the former, a compilation of his more remote ancestry was a favourite hobby when things were going well, and with the latter somniloquy was a symptom that things were going badly.

Having proved to his own satisfaction that the Indians were largely paper tigers when confronted by the right kind of bluff, the Viceroy gathered his British Staff around him and told them to rush through details of the Draft Scheme for Independence without delay. The idea was to jostle a settlement through before either Congress or the Muslim League had too much time to think about it, and before any really effective opposition to the partition of the country had time to develop.

It might have been expected that either Lord Ismay or George Abell, two great lovers of India, would have protested against the sudden unseemly rush to reach a settlement. Ismay had agreed to accompany the new Viceroy
to India because he knew the task was one of fantastic difficulty and responsibility and because he suspected that Mountbatten might be inclined to rush it. ‘You’ll be a fool to go,’ Churchill said to him, when Ismay told him of his decision. ‘You’ll get nothing out of it.’ The idea that he might be going in order to get himself a decoration or a preferment in the peerage had filled Ismay with unaccustomed rage, and for once he had lashed out at his old chief with the angry remark: ‘I’m going anyway, and you can go to hell!’ It was always his idea that he would be Mountbatten’s counsellor of caution, the hand upon his shoulder, the foot upon the brake when the juggernaut seemed to be moving too fast.

But a month in India had changed all that. Far from counselling hesitation and reflection, his was the voice which urged Mountbatten to make haste. ‘The communal feeling I found’, he said later to Hector Bolitho, ‘I just did not believe possible. It tore at you, all the time. There was slaughter everywhere. We British had all the responsibility and none of the power. The police force was already undermined, and the civil service were frustrated and madly anxious. They were blamed by both Nehru and Jinnah for everything that went wrong. This was one reason why to delay partition would be to increase the disasters. There was another reason: the Viceroy’s Executive Council, which had been composed of six or eight wise men, had disappeared. We had instead a Cabinet of nine Congress leaders and five Muslim League leaders who could agree on only one thought—that the British should quit India.*

To George Abell, too, the spectre of an India torn by civil war was very real. The news from the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province was very bad: private armies forming in the former, Muslim League agitation (against the tottering pro-Congress Government) in the latter. June 1948 seemed a very long way away and when it came, the whole of India might well be in chaos.

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* H. Bolitho, Jinnah—a Biography.
So the Viceroy’s two chief advisers believed. It was a panicky state of mind which made them easy prey for the Mountbatten policy of ‘let’s get it over with and get out quickly’. They were embittered and disillusioned. For neither of them was this any longer the India they had known and loved, and their attitude was rather like that of a madly doting father whose daughter has run away with the wrong man. ‘After all I’ve done for her!’ mourned Ismay. ‘Call the lawyer—I’m going to change my will!’ said Abell.

What they were doing was not so much handling India her freedom but washing their hands of her; and once the mood of disillusion was upon them, they would listen to no voices which counselled calm, reflection, deliberation. They were at one with Mountbatten in agreeing ‘that the need for the political solution is much more pressing than was apparent when we were in London, and that the June 1948 limit, far from being not long enough, is already too remote a deadline’.* The Viceroy, Ismay, Abell, Mieville and ‘The Dickie Birds’ formed a tight circle around the anvil in the Viceroy’s House and set to work with a will and an almost desperate eagerness to hammer out a detailed Plan for Indian Independence for Ismay to take to London. It was to be an all-British plan in the drawing up of which all Indians, including V. P. Menon, the Reforms Commissioner, were excluded; and this was to prove important in the days to come. They worked at it night and day and in great secrecy. This was the great Plan which would solve everything.

Until this moment, V. P. Menon had been frequently consulted by the Viceroy and his Staff, but for the present he had, in Campbell-Johnson’s phrase, ‘suffered a period of eclipse’. It was difficult to explain why. There was, of course, the obvious reason that being a Hindu his too-close connexion with the conception of the Plan might arouse Muslim suspicions (though this becomes ridiculous

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* Quoted by Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mission with Mountbatten.
in the light of what happened later). The more likely reason is that some of the Viceroy’s Staff considered him rather too sure of himself and not subservient enough for their liking. The position of Reforms Commissioner and Constitutional Adviser to the Viceroy had, when held by an Englishman, always been one of the most important in the Indian administration, but to some of the most senior officials there is little doubt that the influence diminished now that an Indian held it. Menon knew, for example, that one of the problems which troubled Mountbatten and his Staff was the question of Dominion status for a divided India. Congress had always made it plain that when they asked for independence, they meant complete independence, with absolutely no connexion with the British Commonwealth. To the great mass of Indians, the status of a Dominion within the Commonwealth meant—in spite of how things had changed—a continuance of British subjection. The idea of owing allegiance to the British Crown was anathema to them.

On the other hand, Pakistan not only was willing to remain in the Commonwealth but Jinnah actively insisted on it. But what was to happen when India was divided? The Viceroy’s view was that Dominion status could not possibly be given to one of the two new States (Pakistan) if the other (Hindustan) did not want it. That would immediately start the whole thing off on the wrong basis and create suspicion between the two States.

Ismay replied that you couldn’t chuck Pakistan out of the Commonwealth just because the Hindus didn’t want to come in. Think of the effect on the Muslim world in the Middle East if we insulted Jinnah in this fashion.

Mieville mentioned at this point that Menon had said *en passant* that he had talked with Sardar Patel on this very problem, and the Congress wasn’t so hostile to Dominion status, after all; they might even consider it.

This remark was made with such lack of emphasis and with such obvious ignorance of its vital importance that no one on the Viceroy’s Staff took any notice of it. Who
cared about what Menon said, anyway? They went on with their drafting of the great Plan, carefully skirting the difficult question of Dominion status and presuming that Congress policy was still that of complete independence from Commonwealth and Crown. They did not realize that they were digging a pit for the Viceroy to fall in; nor did it occur to them to call in Menon and ask him what he meant when, in putting ‘the flesh’ on the Draft Plan, as he had been asked to do by Ismay, he had appended his own opinion that the Plan was a bad one and certainly would not work.

From his dunce’s stool in the anteroom, V. P. Menon made an attempt to rescue his British colleagues from the consequence of their stupidity, and also to restore his own position. He wrote to George Abell to complain:

‘Dear Abell,—I have been thinking of writing to you about the difficult position in which I am placed as Reforms Commissioner. I would not have raised this issue but for important practical reasons of great urgency. Since power has to be transferred not later than June 1948, it is essential that there should be some organization to evolve a plan of operation and then implement it. I have so far assumed that the Reforms Office acting under HE’s orders would be that organization. However, if the Reforms Office is to do this work it is essential that I should be kept in touch with all the relevant developments. Unless I am able to view all issues in their true mutual relationship and have sufficient background information, I cannot advice HE with full knowledge. . . . Surely our general approach has to be settled before we start settling the details. There is very little time and a great many problems to solve. There is a grave danger of lack of coordination if departments work in water-tight compartments. . . . It is essential that there should be an automatic procedure by which I am kept informed of developments.’

It should in fairness be pointed out that Menon’s interest in what was happening inside the Viceregal parlour was not entirely disinterested. He was a devoted civil servant
and a loyal admirer of the British. But he was also, naturally, a passionate believer in Indian independence and, much more important, a close friend and fervent admirer of Sardar Patel, the Congress Party strongman. He was surely not the first civil servant, however, to have strong views and partialities, and there is certainly no evidence that he ever let them affect his work for the Government of India. What is surprising is that the Viceroy’s Staff should, at such a critical moment, have excluded from their counsels a direct channel of communication with the Congress Party who could have warned them when they were going wrong. But for some members of Mountbatten’s staff, an Indian was still an Indian.

On 2 May 1947 Lord Ismay and Mr George Abell departed for London with what might be called the ‘Dickie Bird Plan’ for Indian independence.

As V. P. Menon described it in *The Transfer of Power in India*, in a chapter headed ‘Lord Mountbatten’s Draft Plan’, the Viceroy had revised his tentative plan ‘in the light of his discussions with the Governors and party leaders and sent this revised plan to London with Lord Ismay and George Abell on 2 May... In all his discussions with party leaders and others, despite the divergent views which he was forced to adjust and reconcile, there was nowhere any evidence of an attempt to question either his own impartiality or the bona fides of His Majesty’s Government.’

But Menon added: ‘I had always been opposed to the plan which Lord Ismay and George Abell had taken to London. The theory that the provinces should become initially independent successor States was particularly abhorrent to me. But my protests and my views in the discussion with the Viceroy’s advisers went in vain.’

The Mountbatten Draft Plan was, in fact, and adaptation of the Cabinet Mission Plan—in this instance, to transfer power unilaterally, without the willing consent of the party leaders, and with a federal rather than a strong central government.
The task of the two senior members of the Viceroy’s Staff was to go over the Plan clause by clause with the Cabinet in London and secure their approval of it. They took with them assurances from Mountbatten that this was the Plan which would be accepted by both parties, and that all that was needed was the approval of Mr Attlee and his colleagues to set the machinery for independence in motion.

It is true that the Viceroy did have a sudden qualm, after Ismay’s departure, that perhaps the Plan might run into trouble after all—not from Congress, but from the Muslims and particularly Mr Jinnah. He sent an urgent message by telegram to Ismay saying:

‘In recent conversations which Mieville and I have had with Jinnah, the latter did not appear seriously to contest the idea of a truncated Pakistan. In fact, the general impression which Jinnah has given me throughout, and I think you will confirm he gave you before you left, was that he did not intend to reject the Plan contained in the draft announcement. In my interviews with Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan I have always watched them carefully for any indication of an intention to reject the Plan, and I have seen no such indication. In fact, every test which I have applied has passed off successfully and has led me to believe that they are likely to accept the Plan. If Jinnah intends to spring a surprise on me by rejecting the Plan at the last moment, he could not have played his part better towards making this surprise complete. I am of the opinion that the statement issued to the Press by Jinnah on 30 April opposing the partition of the provinces was a counterblast to extreme Hindu and Sikh demands, but it would be unwise to bank on this assumption. I have purposely refrained from asking him outright whether he would accept a truncated or ‘moth-eaten’ Pakistan, as he calls it, because I have felt he could certainly have said no, in the mistaken belief or hope that I would go further and recommend to HMG the full Pakistan that he desires. Therefore, we must still be on our guard against this con-
tingency. I know full well that Jinnah is a hard bargainer and the possibility of his intention to lead me up the garden path has got to be catered for."

It should be remembered that, at this juncture, neither the Muslim League nor the Congress (nor, of course, the Sikhs) had so far seen the 'Dickie Bird Plan' but had only been told in broad outline of its nature. The Viceroy seemed to have no fears at all of its reception by Congress, but the possibility of trickery by Jinnah nagged at him. A few hours after sending his cable to Ismay, he asked his Staff to prepare a memorandum for him as to what action could be taken if Jinnah did, in fact, doublecross him at the last moment. He received the following document:

1. If Mr Jinnah does not accept the draft announcement proposed by Your Excellency there are two alternatives for parting with power:

   a. That power will be parted with to the Central Government as at present constituted, on a Dominion basis.

   N.B. This will be attacked by the Conservative Party as handing over Jinnah to the tender mercy of the Hindus. It might also attract the attention of Muslim countries outside India, particularly if it is followed by Muslim League propaganda.

   b. To transfer power to the existing Central Government on a Dominion status basis subject to one stipulation. The Muslim demand for a Province-wise Pakistan could not be sustained on any equitable argument. We came down as a defensible proposition on a truncated Pakistan. Jinnah has rejected this proposition. Therefore in order to meet the possible attack both from the Conservatives in England and outside India, I would include a condition in the Government of India Act 1935 or in the Treaty that will be concluded between Great Britain and India, that in the event of the Muslim League changing their opinion within 3 years and demanding a truncated Pakistan, it will be open to the Governor-General under the procedure laid down in the Announcement, to authorise legislation by

* Government of India Records.
which Muslim majority areas could form a Government of their own. Till that takes place the power will be parted to the existing Central Government who will be responsible for the administration of India, including Pakistan.*

But as the days passed, the Viceroy became cheerfully confident that this hypothetical plan to counter Jinnah would not be necessary, and that all would go through smoothly. Even Gandhi was not powerful enough any longer to dam or divert the course of events. The Mahatma had, in fact, hurried north from Bengal when he heard of the changed trend of Congress thinking on the question of partition; but he had come too late. Patel, who normally gave way before Gandhi’s persuasion, had made up his mind and had the power to make Congress conform. Nehru saw no other way but partition, though he admitted to Gandhi that it was ‘tragic and evil’. In an interview with the Viceroy, the Mahatma pleaded with him to fight at all costs for a unitary India and to revise the Cabinet Mission Plan once more. Mountbatten told him that it was out of his hands and that his only hope was to convince Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League. He had arranged his talk with Gandhi so that it overlapped one with Jinnah, and the two former Congress colleagues met again for the first time for many years. They greeted each other cordially, if warily, and under the Viceroy’s prodding agreed to have a conference together at a future date. They met at Jinnah’s house in Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi, on 6 May 1947, in a room on the wall of which was a silver map of India, with Pakistan painted on it in green. The two old men talked together for three hours (all Indians always seem to talk for three hours at official meetings) and a communique was issued afterwards. It said:

‘We discussed two matters. One was the question of the division of India into Pakistan and Hindustan, and Mr Gandhi does not accept the principle of division. He thinks that division is not inevitable, whereas in my opinion

* Government of India Records.
not only is Pakistan inevitable but is the only practical solution of India’s political problem.

‘The second matter which we discussed was the letter which we have both signed jointly appealing to the people to maintain peace; we have both come to the conclusion that we must do our best in our respective spheres to see that that appeal of ours is carried out and we will make every effort for this purpose.’

In other words, the conference had gone nowhere. Little wonder that the Viceroy began to have diminishing fears of any slip-up. It was just a question of waiting for the decision of the Cabinet in London—and he had not much doubt that Attlee would be behind him.

It was time, the Viceroy decided, to get away from the exhausting red-hot atmosphere of New Delhi to the coolness of the hills, and he instructed Campbell-Johnson to announce that he was leaving for a few days’ rest at the Viceregal Lodge in Simla. It was to be more than a rest, in fact, for Mountbatten planned to take the next step towards independence while in the hills; and when the Viceregal cavalcade set out, no fewer than 350 servants and retainers accompanied him. For two days, Mountbatten and Lady Mountbatten—who was increasingly subject to headaches and neuralgia at this time—luxuriated in the fresh breezes and chilly nights of Simla, breathing the cold air blowing down upon them from the snowcapped Himalayas which ran, a rampart between India and Tibet, along the blue horizon.

But among those who had accompanied the Viceroy to Simla was V. P. Menon (and also Sir Eric Mieville), and for Menon this was the first opportunity since Mountbatten’s arrival in India when he could talk to him freely and openly. On all previous occasions, the interviews had been formal, arranged by Ismay, stop-watched by Abell, and carefully screened by Mieville, and little deviation had been allowed from the prescribed line of talk.

In Simla’s relaxing air, with the watchdogs called off,*

* They were in London with the ‘Dickie Bird Plan’.
Menon at last found an opportunity to expound his ideas and his theories. When Mountbatten raised the vexed question of the future status of India as a member (or not a member) of the Commonwealth community, Menon raised his bushy eyebrows in pained surprise. 'Did no one ever tell you', he said to the Viceroy, 'that I have already drawn up a scheme to solve the problem? Surely you must know about it? I told Lord Wavell about it. I told The India Office about it. I told Sir Eric Mieville about it.'

Well, yes, Mountbatten finally admitted, Mieville did say something but exactly what he couldn't really remember.

At which point V. P. Menon came into his own.

It was late in December 1946, he told the Viceroy, that he had a long talk with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel about the Cabinet Mission Plan. In spite of what everyone else thought, Menon considered that the Cabinet Mission Plan would never work; the three-tiered constitutional set-up offended his orderly mind as unwieldy and unworkable; and it was certainly not the Plan which he visualized for an independent India. In addition to this, he believed, from a long association with Jinnah and an assessment of the way his mind worked, that he would never back down from his claim to a separate Pakistan.

'I told Patel that he had better face the fact that Jinnah had the support of influential British opinion in his claim to Pakistan,' Menon told the Viceroy, 'and, more important, he was supported by most of the high officers of the Army in India. My personal view was that it was better to divide India rather than let it gravitate towards civil war. If we agreed to partition, Jinnah could obviously not ask for those portions of the Punjab, Bengal and Assam which were predominantly non-Muslim. The crucial problem was the basis on which power could be transferred.'

'In a divided India', Menon went on, 'this could best be two central governments—and here', he told Mountbatten, 'is the point which should interest you—on the basis of Dominion status. By consenting to accept Do-
minion status, the Congress would be gaining three great advantages. Firstly, it would ensure a peaceful transfer of power. Secondly, such acceptance would be warmly welcomed in Britain, and Congress would by this single act have gained British friendship and goodwill. Thirdly, the civil services in India were manned, in the higher posts, largely by Britons, and they would be encouraged to help if India stayed in the Commonwealth. Fourthly, the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy were mainly officered by Britons, and they would be persuaded to stay and help in the interim period. Fifthly, the Princely States, which are so fond of their connection with the Crown, would be reassured and more willing to federate.’

‘And what have we got to lose?’ Menon asked Patel. ‘Whatever constitution India eventually makes for herself will be unaffected by Dominion status. If we get Dominion status, we can have power immediately, and when we are on our own feet, we can walk out of the Commonwealth at any time we like.’

Sardar Patel was at once impressed with Menon’s scheme. ‘He assured me,’ Menon told the Viceroy, ‘that if power could be transferred at once on the basis of Dominion status, he would use his influence to see that Congress accepted it.’

Menon, in Patel’s presence, dictated an outline of the plan and sent it by special messenger to the Secretary of State for India—omitting only the detail that Patel had seen and approved it.

He had never heard anything about it since.

In the face of this revelation, the Viceroy behaved rather like a small boy who is ecstatically happy playing with a round pink balloon until he sees another boy playing with one that is sausage-shaped, and green. His confidence in his own Plan at once began to wane a little.

‘What do you think of my Plan which Ismay has taken to London?’ he asked Menon.

‘I wish you had asked me that before,’ his Reforms Commissioner replied. ‘I don’t like it a bit.’
On 8 May, Pandit Nehru and a friend and confidant, Krishna Menon, arrived in Simla to stay at the Viceregal Lodge as the Viceroy’s guests. This was the period when Krishna Menon was busily fighting and intriguing his way from the junior to the senior ranks of the Congress Party hierarchy, and he, too—having nostrils sensitive to every change of wind—had sensed that the question of Dominion status might loom large in the discussions to come. He had, therefore, been propagating a scheme of his own with Nehru for some sort of sovereign state within the British Commonwealth. When Mountbatten heard about it, he quickly summoned V. P. Menon and told him to talk to Nehru at once about his Dominion status formula. ‘But under no circumstances’, ordered the Viceroy, ‘are you to say anything at all about the Plan which Ismay has taken to London.’

V. P. Menon had a long talk with Nehru the next morning. It was a meeting which began extremely frigidly, for Nehru had learned that this was a scheme which Menon had discussed with Patel over four months earlier, and the revelation that the Sardar had been intriguing behind his back was a hard one for Nehru to swallow. But he was so impressed that he agreed to attend a formal meeting the next day, 10 May, to discuss it further in the presence of the Viceroy. They met the following morning in Mountbatten’s green-walled, air-cooled study, and in addition to the Viceroy, Nehru and V. P. Menon, Sir Eric Mieville and Lieut-Colonel Erskine Crum were also present.

The Viceroy formally explained that Menon had been working on a scheme for the early transfer of power on a Dominion status basis long before he, the Viceroy, had come to India. He said he would like to give Menon an opportunity of explaining it in some detail to himself and Pandit Nehru.

Menon, thereupon, repeated much of what he had already said to Mountbatten and Nehru. The broad outlines of the scheme were that the Muslim majority areas should be separated from India. The transfer of power should
then be made to two Central Governments, one Pakistan, one Hindustan, each having its own Governor-General. Pending the drafting of a Constitution by the respective Constituent Assemblies, the interim Constitution for each of the two Dominions should be based on the Government of India Act of 1935, suitably adapted. And from that moment on, the two new countries would be ready to go.

The Viceroy underlined the simplicity and the importance of the scheme by pointing out that with such straightforward arrangements there would be no need to wait until June 1948 to hand over power. It could be passed on the moment that the Cabinet in Britain agreed to the scheme.

Nehru was obviously more impressed than ever, though he could not resist a series of reservations. ‘You must realize’, he said, rather testily, ‘that there is an overwhelming opinion in India in favour of complete independence. The words “Dominion status” are likely to irritate people because of their past association. I know that in theory it can be shown that Dominion status is equivalent to complete independence, but such fine points are not, however, understood by the people.’

V. P. Menon interrupted. ‘There would be an arrangement in my scheme to drop the word “Emperor” from the title of King-Emperor, by an Order in Council.’*

Nehru replied that he was afraid that such phraseology might still mean to many the continuation of indirect domination. And then he perked up. ‘Still,’ he said, ‘I myself have always been most anxious for sentimental reasons to have the closest possible relationship with the British Commonwealth. I am still not clear what form the relationship should take, but I think and I hope it will be possible for the relationship to continue—but without the offending phraseology.’ And then he added: ‘But, of course, under Dominion status India would always have the power to leave the Commonwealth when she wished.’

* Government of India Records.
Mountbatten. 'I agree. I also think that this fact should be emphasized, as well as a target for the termination of Dominion status.'*

One would have thought that, from all this discussion, the next step would have been the formal adoption of the Plan as the formula for the transfer of power. But how could that be? There was already another Plan in existence. It had been taken to London by Ismay to be approved by the Cabinet. It was this Plan—the 'Dickie Bird Plan'—upon which the Viceroy was resting his hopes for a settlement of the Indian deadlock and the handing over of power.

One wonders what can possibly have been passing through his mind that, in such circumstances, he allowed V. P. Menon's Plan to be put on what was a semi-official basis and to have a formal discussion about it, to be recorded in the Viceregal Minutes, with Pandit Nehru. It was asking for trouble—and trouble is what he got.

Among the other qualities which Lord Mountbatten possesses, however, in addition to intelligence, shrewdness, a formidable memory, a genius for organization, and charm, charm, charm was also luck, luck, luck.

And luck was certainly with him at Simla.

The meeting with Nehru over, the Viceroy called in his Press adviser, Campbell-Johnson, and told him to announce to the world Press that a vital meeting would be held in New Delhi on the morning of 17 May 1947. To this meeting the Viceroy had invited the leaders of all the organizations vitally concerned with the transfer of power—Nehru and Patel for the Congress, Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan for the Muslims, and Baldev Singh for the Sikhs. 'On that morning', the announcement said, 'the Viceroy will present to the five leaders the Plan which His Majesty's Government has approved for the transfer of power to Indian hands.'

This plan was, of course, 'the Dickie Bird Plan'. For the moment, the Viceroy had banished V. P. Menon's

* Government of India Records.
scheme from his mind. He was basing his future on the Plan which he and his British advisers had cooked up for themselves. And, even at this stage, having talked to Menon, having talked to Nehru, he was still confident enough in it to send a digest to London of the remarks he would make to the five Indian leaders when they met him on 17 May. He would say that, 'since both parties have not seen their way to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan, it is clear that the Indian people, through their elected representatives in their Provinces, must be given the opportunity of deciding on their own future. When I first arrived as Viceroy with the mission of transferring power, I thought that the beginning of 1948 would be early enough to reach a settlement, but you have all in our individual discussions pressed upon me and convinced me of the necessity of speed. In consequence I and my staff have been working night and day to achieve a quick and right decision. We have produced the plan which I am about to read to you. It is the best we have been able to produce in the time. We have embodied as far as possible all the suggestions which have been put forward in our individual conversations. The Plan was taken back by Lord Ismay to London a fortnight ago to be examined closely by the Cabinet. HMG has given it priority over all other matters of State and has approved of it in quicker time than any matter of this importance has ever been dealt with before. Lord Ismay arrived back with HMG's approval a few hours ago. Parliament rises for the Whitsun recess on 23 May, so it is essential that the plan should be announced before 22 May. I wish to make it clear that this plan is and will remain even after it is announced open to amendment on any point.'*

This, remember, was only a precis of the remarks he intended to make at the meeting of the Indian leaders on 17 May. Its intention was to keep the Cabinet, and Lord Ismay and Abell, in the picture.

* Government of India Records.
The fact that it was cabled to London is, however, a proof of the Viceroy’s confidence, even at this last moment, in the ‘Dickie Bird Plan’. The Plan had by this time (10 May) been cabled back to him from London. It contained a number of amendments which had been inserted at the insistence of Mr Attlee and the Cabinet, but its basic principles had not been altered, and certainly Mountbatten did not consider them important enough to hesitate about his schedule. On top of the announcement of the forthcoming conference with the leaders, he approved a Press conference which was given to Indian and foreign correspondents on the morning of 10 May by Sir Eric Mieville, in which he stressed the importance of the 17 May summit meeting and the agreement which it would bring forth. The political prospect seemed to be as fragrant with hope and as idyllically calm as the scented Simla afternoon. Nehru accompanied the Viceroy and Vicereine to Campbell-Johnson’s house, an eyrie called ‘The Retreat’ tucked at the end of a mule-track in a fold of the hills, and he was in high spirits. He showed the company how to save breath and muscle by walking up steep hills backward, romped with the children, laughed at the antics of the local apes, and only wrinkled his brow with distaste when he passed through Simla itself on the way back to the Viceregal Lodge.*

* It was said that Nehru hated Simla because its principal form of passenger transport is coolie-drawn rickshas, which he considered an affront to human dignity. In fact, the whole conception of Simla aroused his contempt, for it was so determinedly pseudo-English and suburban. The main street was known as the Mall. One of its loveliest slopes was called Elysium Hill ‘as a compliment to the sisters of Lord Auckland, who resided there with their brother’. The granite, red-roofed Secretariat was called ‘Gorton Castle’, and the Army Commander’s house was known as ‘Snowdon’. This within a hundred miles of the borders of Tibet.
On the evening of 10 May 1947 Mountbatten asked Nehru to join him in the Viceregal study for an after-dinner whiskey-and-soda. Nothing had happened over dinner to cause him anxiety. But as the two men talked, Mountbatten had what he afterwards called a ‘sudden hunch’. He was not supposed to show the plan which, with its amendments, had now been cabled back from London, to anyone until the meeting on 17 May. The Viceroy, however, had an impulse. He went over to his safe, opened it and took out the Plan, and asked Nehru to read it.

The next thirty minutes were probably the most uncomfortable of his life. Nehru has a transparent face and never dissimulates when he is in the grip of strong emotion. Mountbatten had the unhappy experience of watching the Indian leader’s face go first red with anger and then green with distress. At the end of his reading, he made as if to fling the Plan on the ground, then recollected himself and tossed it on to the Viceroy’s desk.

‘It won’t do,’ he said. ‘I will never accept a plan like this! Congress will never accept it! And India will never accept it, either!’

Mountbatten looked at him in bewilderment and distress. ‘I thought that I knew what was in Nehru’s mind,’ he said (to the author) later. ‘But the Hindus are strange. You can never tell. I had talked to all of them, and then I sat down and drafted a Plan which I thought expressed their ideas. I was completely wrong.’

But what was to be done now? After riddling the ‘Dickie Bird Plan’ with some of his choicest grapeshot, Nehru departed for his bedroom, no doubt to talk louder in his sleep than ever before. Mountbatten stayed behind to contemplate the warm drink in his glass and the ruin of his hopes and ambitions. It is likely that even his unfailingly peaceful sleep was somewhat troubled on this occasion.

Nor did the following morning produce a political prospect to match the sunshine outside. Nehru had obviously brooded and worked through most of the night, and to
the Viceroy’s breakfast table came a memorandum, couched in heated words, condemning the Plan. ‘The picture presented by the proposals in the plan is an ominous one,’ wrote Nehru. ‘Not only do they menace India but they endanger the future relations between Britain and India. Instead of producing any sense of certainty, security and stability, they would encourage disruptive tendencies everywhere and chaos and weakness. They would particularly endanger important strategic areas. . . . The inevitable consequences of the proposals would be to invite the Balkanization of India; to provoke certain civil conflict and add to violence and disorder; to cause a further breakdown of the central authority, which could alone prevent the growing chaos, and to demoralize the army, the police and the central services. . . . If it was indeed His Majesty’s Government’s sole purpose to ascertain the wishes of the people of India and to transfer power with the least possible dislocation, the purpose would not be advanced or achieved by these proposals. Before the people chose they should have a proper picture of what they were choosing. [This plan] with no clear background would produce nothing but confusion, and the transfer of power, instead of being made without dislocation, would be obstructed by violence, by a mass of complications, and by weakness of the central Government and its organs. . . . I have no doubt that Congress will not accept the proposals.’*

The Viceroy might have been forgiven if he had given vent to a schoolboyish ‘phew!’ after reading this document. His Staff had well and truly dropped him in the mire.

But Lord Mountbatten, as will have been seen from his Indian adventures alone, was not without resilience and bounce and audacity. With the mud still plastered in his hair, he at once crawled back into the fight. He was certainly not ready to admit defeat yet.

* Government of India Records.
First, he sent out an immediate call for V. P. Menon. Menon was having morning coffee with Nehru and finding the going difficult. The Indian leader was resentful because Menon had not told him beforehand what was in the ‘Dickie Bird Plan’; Menon could not explain that the Viceroy had ordered him not to; it was all very sticky, and Menon was glad to hurry away to the Viceregal Lodge. There he found Mountbatten in a state as close to panic as he is ever likely to be. He explained what had happened and desperately asked what he should do next.

‘I told him,’ said Menon, ‘that the most promising line of action was to proceed on the basis of my plan. This proposition was almost certain to be accepted by Congress, because it would ensure an early demission of power. The only question was whether Jinnah would accept a truncated Pakistan—and I reminded the Viceroy that he himself had gained the impression that Jinnah was reconciled to the idea of the partition of the Punjab and Bengal.’*

Before Menon had finished speaking, Mountbatten had made up his mind. The panic was gone and he was full of confidence again. He told Menon to summon a Staff meeting at once, and to send an invitation to Nehru to attend it. At this meeting, Nehru’s objection to the ‘Dickie Bird Plan’ was formally read into the Minutes. Then both the Viceroy and V. P. Menon once more expounded the benefits of the Menon Plan for Dominion Status, and the Viceroy ended the meeting by saying:

‘I would like to ask you a straight question, Pandit Nehru. Will Congress accept a new draft Plan if it is amended in the light of these discussions?’

Nehru: ‘I cannot say. I would prefer to see the new draft first.’†

The meeting adjourned and Nehru departed, but the Viceroy and V. P. Menon stayed behind to talk. Menon had anticipated that there would now be some delay while

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* In a conversation with the author.
† Government of India Records.
a draft of his Plan was drawn up; but Mountbatten was determined that no more time must be lost. He explained to Menon that Nehru was leaving that evening for Delhi, and it was vital that he should see and approve a draft of the new Plan before he left—otherwise it might be impossible to pin him down for weeks, and everything would be ruined. Could V. P. get out the draft in time for Nehru to see and read it before his train departed?

It was by now 2 p.m. V. P. Menon walked to his hotel, poured himself a stiff whisky (he had never before had a whisky before six in the evening) and settled down to work. Meanwhile, the Viceroy was busy. He had called Campbell-Johnson and told him to put out a second communiqué to the Press announcing the postponement of the 17 May meeting. ‘Give any excuse you like,’ he said. Campbell-Johnson replied that the announcement would have to be co-ordinated with London, and urgent cipher cables ripped back and forth through the lunch hour. One of them from Mountbatten to Mr Attlee said, in effect: The Draft Plan which you have approved is hereby cancelled. Please stand by for revised plan. Another came back from Ismay saying, in effect: What in hell is going on? Eventually, Campbell-Johnson put out an agreed communiqué which said: ‘Owing to the imminence of the Parliamentary recess in London, it has been found necessary to postpone HE the Viceroy’s meeting with the Indian leaders announced to begin on Saturday 17th May to Monday 2nd June.’ It deceived no one, for, as Campbell-Johnson remarked, ‘the weakness of our position is that we have told the truth, but it is not the whole truth and nothing but the truth’.*

At 6 p.m. V. P. Menon finished the last sentence of the Draft Plan and had it snatched from his hands by Sir Eric Mieville, who was leaning over him.

Menon, who now had a splitting headache, took four aspirins and went to bed. It was not until nine o’clock

* Mission with Mountbatten.
that evening, at a banquet at Viceregal Lodge, that he got
the first hint of the result of his labours. His wife was at
one end of the receiving line when the Viceroy and Vice-
reine came in and he was at the other. He watched the
Mountbattens make a bee-line for Mrs Menon and warmly
greet her. Then he had to wait for another five minutes,
until Lady Mountbatten came up to him, gave him an
affectionate peck on the cheek while she whispered in his
ear:

‘He accepted it, V.P.’

It had taken one man exactly four hours to draw up the
Plan which was to change the face of India, and the world.

It was not, of course, as easily accomplished as all that.
Nehru might be satisfied. Mountbatten was confident now,
with this hurdle surmounted, that he could take care of
the Indians. But in the meantime, from London, urgent
requests were coming in for explanations.

The Viceroy returned to New Delhi on 14 May to find
a message from the Cabinet summoning him to London.
There were also personal cables from Ismay pleading for
guidance. Mountbatten called in V. P. Menon and said:

‘They want me to come back to London and explain my-
self. I’ve decided not to go. I shall cable them that either
they accept the new Draft Plan which I have cabled to
them, as it is, and without me there, or I shall resign.’*

He was in a defensive mood and, unlike him, ready to
bluster.

Menon told him not to be too precipitate. In his view,
the Viceroy’s best course was to tell the Cabinet in Lon-
don the whole truth about what had happened, keeping
back absolutely nothing; and to signify his willingness to
return and stand by the new Plan.

To this Mountbatten eventually agreed, but only after
some hesitation plus a lecture from Lady Mountbatten on
the necessity of presenting a bold front.

* In a conversation recalled by the participants.
But the attack of nerves was short, and he told Attlee on the evening of 14 May that he was returning to explain the new Plan personally. He cabled Ismay to send back his personal aircraft.

On 18 May 1947 Lord and Lady Mountbatten left Palam Airport for London, and they took V. P. Menon with them.

Ismay and Abell were there to meet them on arrival, and they fought long and hard against the Menon Plan. They still preferred their own. Mr Attlee and the Cabinet, however, accepted it at a meeting at 10 Downing Street which lasted exactly five minutes.

It had been a remarkable combination of patience, brilliant planning and remarkable flexibility of mind on the part of V. P. Menon (with Sardar Patel always in the background) which had got the new Plan through. Little wonder that Mountbatten wrote to him later: ‘It was indeed fortunate that you were Reforms Commissioner on my Staff, and that thus we were brought together into close association with one another at a very early stage, for you were the first person I met who entirely agreed with the idea of Dominion status, and you found the solution which I had not thought of, of making it acceptable by a very early transfer of power. History must always rate that decision very high, and I owe it to your advice; advice given in the teeth of considerable opposition from other advisers.’

The Viceroy had reason to be grateful. Otherwise, as he said to Campbell-Johnson: ‘Dickie Mountbatten would have been sunk, and could have packed his bags.’

But it is all very well to draw up a plan to divide India in four hours and accept it in five minutes.

How, in a land consisting of 250,000,000 Hindus, 90,000,000 Muslims, 10,000,000 Christians and—particularly and—5,000,000 simmering Sikhs, do you implement it?
CHAPTER SIX

'PLEASE, MR JINNAH!'

On the evening of 3 June 1947 the leaders of the three parties mainly concerned, the Congress, the Muslim League and the Sikhs, followed Lord Mountbatten to the microphones of All India Radio to broadcast—not to the nation, for from now on there was no longer an Indian nation, but to their people to tell them what was in store for them a little over two months ahead.

The intervening days since the Viceroy’s arrival back in India with the Cabinet’s approval of the new Plan had not been without their bluff, counterbluff and political hurly-burly. Jinnah suddenly announced that he would need a thousand-mile long corridor through Indian territory to link the western and eastern territories of Pakistan. Congress reacted to the demand with the startled yelps of a pack of dogs among which a firecracker has been thrown, but they quickly regained their composure on discovering that it was all noise and no damage. Gandhi was still vehemently proclaiming his adamant opposition to the partition of the country. ‘Let it not be said that Gandhi was a party to India’s vivisection,’ he said. ‘But everyone today is impatient for independence. Congress has practically decided to accept partition. They have been handed a wooden loaf in this new plan. If they eat it, they die of colic. If they leave it, they starve.’

He made yet one more journey from Bihar and Bengal to Delhi to appeal for time and reflection before the irrevocable decision was made. On the journey north, while he slept, someone stole his watch from under Gandhi’s pillow. It was almost symbolic. If they could rob the Mahatma of his beloved watch—he had treasured it for years, and it was one of his few worldly possessions—they
could also steal India from him. At Delhi station, he said: 'I have been a fighter all my life. I am come to Delhi to fight a losing battle.'

At this juncture, Gandhi’s arrival was the one thing Mountbatten feared. It is true that in the past few weeks he had, by playing on the hopes and ambitions of Nehru and Patel, successfully manoeuvred the Mahatma out of the main stream of Indian politics; but there was no knowing with this shrewd, able, magnificent old man. By the exercise of his remarkable personality and the potent projection of his fundamental goodness, he still had the power to hypnotize his colleagues in the Congress. By a word or by a fast, he could wreck all the Viceroy’s schemes. Mountbatten dreaded his coming. He need not have done. When Gandhi came to see him, he announced—by writing on a scrap of paper—that this was his day of silence, and that he had nothing to say. ‘You don’t really want me to say anything, do you?’ he wrote. The crisis was past, and there would be no trouble with Gandhi.

With the Muslim member of the Congress hierarchy, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, there was less to be feared. Azad’s stubborn fight against partition and his repeated warnings of its evil consequences had by this time become monotonous and irritating to his colleagues, eager as they were for the prospects of power. His dire forebodings fell on deaf ears.

In desperation, just before the final decision was taken, he went to the Viceroy to plead with him to think again about partition.

‘I also asked Lord Mountbatten to take into consideration the likely consequences of the partition of the country,’ he wrote afterwards. ‘Even without partition, there had been riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, Bombay and the Punjab. Hindus had attacked Muslims and Muslims had attacked Hindus. If the country was divided in such an atmosphere there would be rivers of blood flowing in
different parts of the country and the British would be responsible for the carnage.*

The Viceroy gave him the verbal equivalent of a reassuring slap on the back. Mountbatten certainly had no forebodings about the future. And then he made a remarkable statement which, in view of what was to happen a few weeks later, appears to have received amazingly little attention from those historians who have so far dealt with the period.

‘At least on this one question [carnage],’ said the Viceroy, ‘I shall give you complete assurance. I shall see to it that there is no bloodshed and riot. I am a soldier, not a civilian. Once partition is accepted in principle, I shall issue orders to see that there are no communal disturbances in the country. If there should be the slightest agitation, I shall adopt the sternest measures to nip the trouble in the bud. I shall not use even the armed police. I will order the Army and Air Force to act and I will use tanks and aeroplanes to suppress anybody who wants to create trouble.’

For a moment, the Viceroy had good reason to feel optimistic. Why should there be trouble? At the meeting on 2 June, about which he had previously worried so much, everything went off more smoothly than he could have hoped. He had gone to great trouble to damp down the blaze of publicity with which most of his activities had been associated since his arrival in India, and there was only one photographer (an Indian) present when Congress, Muslim League and Sikh leaders met him, though there were echoes of the furious quarrel going on in the ante-room as members of the world Press protested furiously at their exclusion. The leaders sat around the round table in the Viceregal study, with Nehru on Mountbatten’s right and Jinnah on his left, and the others, Patel and Kripalani, Nishtar and Liaquat Ali Khan, edged close to their leaders, with the Sikh delegate, Baldev Singh, not inappropriately

in the middle. He did not seem to be aware that he would shortly be the meat in the sandwich that was being cut.

Behind the table sat two senior members of Mountbatten’s Staff, Lord Ismay and Sir Eric Mieville. In the circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that V. P. Menon, author of the Plan which the delegates were going to swallow, with varying degrees of satisfaction, was not present.

Lord Ismay’s account of the proceedings, in his Memoirs, suggests an air of dramatic tension which was really not there. ‘I woke up on 2 June feeling rather like I had done on the various D-Days during the war,’ he writes, ‘but on this occasion I had less confidence in the result.’ Mountbatten was, in fact, completely master of the situation from start to finish. He was in the powerful position of having extracted concessions from all of them, even Jinnah (who had had to accept a split Punjab and Bengal to get Pakistan) and with great charm, subtlety and finesse he exploited the weakness of their various positions. By the end of the first meeting, he had already extracted a tentative promise from Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh that they would go on the radio and urge their communities to support the Plan. True, Jinnah made a last effort to preserve his dignity by humming and haa-ing, pointing out that he (of all the Indian leaders!) was only a servant of his people, and that he could not make any definite promises before consulting first the Working Committee of the Muslim League, and then the full League Council. He arranged to see the Viceroy later that evening to convey the Working Committee’s opinion—though he knew, and he knew that the Viceroy knew, that his was only a fusspot gesture to make his acquiescence seem harder to get.

On the morning of 3 June, reporting to London on the results of the first day, Mountbatten was far from giving the impression that the day had been a struggle.

‘Jinnah saw me for an hour from 11 last night,’ he reported, ‘and I had letters during the night from Congress
and the Sikhs. All three naturally emphasized points which they did not like, but their conclusions were generally favourable. . . . Jinnah reiterated that he would support me personally and promised to do his utmost to get the plan accepted."

He summed up Jinnah's attitude by saying: 'His delight was un concealed.'

True, there was some trouble next morning. Congress had inserted two paragraphs in their letter of acceptance, one dealing with Dominion status and the other with the North West Frontier Province, which well illustrated a bitter remark made by Jinnah about them: 'The trouble with the Hindus is that they always try to get seventeen annas for their rupee.' The first paragraph, reported the Viceroy, 'seemed to me so dangerous that it might well have wrecked the whole chance of agreement, since it was clear that Congress wanted HMG to give an assurance that Pakistan would be expelled from the Commonwealth if the rest of India wished to secede. V. P. Menon, whose services in all these negotiations have been beyond price, rushed round to Patel and pointed out that HMG could never be expected to agree to such a proposal which negatives the whole principle of Dominion status, and urged him to drop it. I sent for Nehru half an hour before the meeting and told him the same thing. I told him that I did not even intend to mention at the meeting that this suggestion had been made. Both Patel and Nehru agreed to this course.'*

Congress tried a little sleight of hand over the North West Frontier Province by suggesting that the referendum which was to take place there under the terms of the Plan should not be simply to decide whether the population should choose Pakistan or Hindustan, but also whether it should become an independent State. The NWFP was still in the hands of the pro-Congress Muslims, whose leader, Khan Sahib, had begun propagating the idea of a separate

* Government of India Records.
Pakhtoonistan or Pathanistan. But he knew, and Congress knew, that the province could not exist independently; and once more the Mountbatten-Menon axis went into operation. ‘V. P. Menon pointed out to Patel,’ reported the Viceroy, ‘and I pointed out to Nehru that since it was at Nehru’s own request that I had dropped the original proposal to vote for Pakistan, Hindustan or independence (the basis of the Dickie Bird Plan) they could hardly expect me to reintroduce it at this stage. Nehru quite openly admitted that the NWFP could not possibly stand by itself, and it became clear to me that this was a device to free Khan Sahib’s party from the odium [in a largely Muslim province] of being connected with Congress during the referendum period, since Nehru spoke about Khan Sahib wishing to join the Union of India at a subsequent stage. I told Nehru I had no intention of raising this at the meeting, and he accepted my ruling on this.’*

Jinnah made a feint, too. He wanted a referendum for independence in Bengal, too—for he believed that the Untouchables would vote with the Muslims rather than the Hindus; but the Viceroy talked him out of it.

The only delegate who might possibly have had something of genuine moment to say at the meeting—other than the words, ‘I agree’—was Baldev Singh, the Sikh. For in the Plan the partition of the Punjab was implicit. Baldev Singh, who was never one of the most brilliant minds produced by his people, did not seem to realize what this was going to mean. The Sikhs were spread all over the Punjab. They had been there for generations. They owned and tilled the land. They had built the great system of canals. Their shrines and places of pilgrimage were in western rather than eastern Punjab. It might have seemed likely that any far-seeing Sikh, realizing the situation which would probably result from partition, would have cut his throat or gone to war rather than accept it. But then, as an Englishman later on bitterly remarked, ‘is there any such

* Government of India Records.
thing as a far-seeing Sikh?’ Baldev Singh was acting under instructions from his committee, who were obviously as astigmatic as he was. But he kept largely silent during the all-important meeting, except to agree to the Plan that would cut the jugular vein of his people. ‘Baldev Singh wanted the instructions to the Boundary Commission’, reported the Viceroy, coolly, ‘included in the printed plan, and wished them to take Sikh interests more fully into consideration. I rejected this at the meeting and he accepted my ruling.’

He added: ‘One of my difficulties has been to prevent the leaders from talking too much. For example, Liaquat started an attack on Gandhi in the second meeting which nearly wrecked the proceedings. When I think of the number of points over which the meeting could have been shipwrecked, I realize how miraculously lucky we have been.’*

Confronted by the actual approach of independence—or, perhaps in one or two cases, guilt-ridden by the vivisection to which they were being a party—the Indian leaders were actually too stunned to wreck anything now. The last phase of the second days’ meeting was made particularly piquant by a gesture—thought up by an Indian Civil Servant named John Christie—to present them, the moment they agreed to the Plan which gave them their freedom, with a document entitled The Administrative Consequences of Partition.

They all suddenly looked like goldfish out of water.

‘I have given them copies of the paper to take away with them,’ reported the Viceroy, and added: ‘It was clear from the reactions at the meeting that none of the leaders present had even begun to think of the complications with which we are all going to be faced.’ To which he appended the cheerful postscript: ‘Perhaps this is lucky, since it will enable us to hold the initiative in Viceroy’s House during the coming difficult period.’*

* Government of India Records.
So they trooped to the radio to announce the news to the Indian peoples. 'For more than a hundred years,' said Mountbatten, 'hundreds of millions of you have lived together, and this country has been administered as a single entity. . . . It has been impossible to obtain agreement . . . on any plan that would preserve the unity of India. But there can be no question of coercing any large areas in which one community has a majority to live against their will under a Government in which another community has a majority. The only alternative to coercion is Partition.'

Nehru followed, and, as always on an emotional occasion of this kind, was at his best. 'It is with no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals,' he said, 'though I have no doubt in my mind that it is the best course.' And of the part played in the struggle by himself and his colleagues, he added: 'We are little men serving great causes, but because the cause is great some of that greatness falls upon us also.'

Jinnah was clipped, dry and cold. If this was a great occasion for him—and, of course, it was—he was certainly not going to betray it to a radio audience. 'It is for us to consider,' he said, 'whether the Plan as presented to us by His Majesty's Government should be accepted by us as a compromise or as a settlement.' And, except for a crisp cry of 'Pakistan Zindabad!' that was all he was prepared to concede to the drama of the occasion.

Baldev Singh, in spite of what the Plan would do to his people, had no doubts about it. This was not a compromise, he said, but a settlement. 'It does not please everybody, not the Sikh community, but it is certainly something worth while. Let us take it at that.'

There. It was achieved. The Indian leaders had accepted the Plan. The Government at home had accepted the Plan. And even Winston Churchill and the Conservative Opposition had accepted the Plan. But did all of them know exactly what it was that they had accepted?

Did the Government and Opposition in Britain, for instance, realize that in giving the Viceroy permission to go
ahead with the Plan, they had also handed him complete freedom to choose the date upon which it would be implemented? It is true that one of the points Mountbatten had made in London, when talking to the Prime Minister about the Plan, was that the Dominion status formula would enable the transfer of power to be made much sooner than had been visualised under the Cabinet Mission plan.* There is much evidence to confirm that even Mr Attlee was shocked when the Viceroy announced, at a Press conference held in Delhi on 4 June 1947, that the transfer of power would actually be made on 15 August only nine weeks ahead—in other words, some ten months earlier than he had first calculated when he first appointed Mountbatten to the Viceroyalty. There is also reason to believe that neither Churchill nor other Tory leaders, when Mountbatten had consulted them in London about the Plan in May 1947, would have given their promise to back it had they realized what a hell-for-leather rush to implement it would follow. But both parties had publicly announced their support for the Plan, and they were committed to get the Bill passed through Parliament in the next session. The Draft Bill was drawn up in record time and cabled to Mountbatten on 22 June. The British parliamentary machinery had rarely had to revolve so quickly. But in the Draft Bill there was absolutely no mention of 15 August as the exact date for the transfer of power. Was Attlee hoping that it could be quietly forgotten? The Viceroy was certainly not going to let him do so. He cabled back on 28 June to say ‘in view of assurance given by me at Press conference and to Leaders I strongly urge that the appointed day should be 15 August. Any later date will psychologically have adverse effect on present delicate position.’†

* But the date he indicated was probably 1 October. This is the date he gave Jinnah at an interview on 17 May, the day before he left for London.
† Government of India Records.
The Prime Minister fell in with his wishes and stuck the 15 August date in the Draft Bill. The Opposition did not vote against it.

‘Thus,’ wrote V. P. Menon, ‘was the plan accepted. . . . But acceptance was one thing; its implementation was a different matter altogether. Here was a task which normally should have taken years to accomplish but which had to be compressed into the short space of a few weeks! It was a task before which anybody would have quailed, for it was one which seemed verily to tempt the Gods.’

‘Quail?’ the Viceroy could well have replied. ‘We do not know the meaning of the word!’

But there were others who did and they were quailing all right. Among them was Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, G.C.B., G.C.I.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., LL.D., Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. Sir Claude was a soldier who, like Wavell, had suffered more than his share of setbacks in the fortunes of war. It is the argument of his biographer, Mr John Connell, that he rather than General Montgomery (as he then was) was the architect of victory in Africa in the last war by creating the strategy by which Montgomery subsequently won the Battle of Alamein. He is generally (and genuinely) believed by many to have been one of the great soldiers of the last war who was, unfortunately, always given what Wavell called ‘the dirty end of the stick’ and never had the right amount of troops or weapons or supplies at the right moment. This may well have been true. He was certainly pulled out of the command of the Eighth Army in the Middle East in 1942 by Churchill shortly before the tide turned and we began to win, and to that extent he was extremely unlucky.

Auchinleck was an able administrator and he commanded the Indian Army (a job which he took on after being sacked from the Middle East in 1942) with skill and a sympathetic touch. There is no doubt that he had a great love for the Indians, not only as soldiers but as people, and that he sympathized with their wish for independence
though not with the methods they used to attain it. He was a man of considerable humanity but also a stickler for principle. It was typical of Auchinleck’s rigid sense of justice that he insisted on the prosecution, after the war, of some of the more brutal and notorious leaders of the so-called Indian National Army, which had been formed from captured Indian soldiers and had fought for the Japanese after the British disasters in Singapore and Burma. Some of the leaders of the I.N.A. (Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus alike) used methods of great brutality—killing, beating and maiming—to force their compatriots to abandon their oaths to the Indian Army and join the Japanese puppet Army. Auchinleck considered that the worst of them should be treated as war criminals for their excesses and tried for their lives.

It was pointed out that, in the climate of Indian politics in 1945, nothing was more likely to give the people the martyrs for whom they were clamouring at the time. The fact is that the I.N.A. war criminals had been guilty of crimes against their own comrades would loom less in Indian minds than the fact that they had been fighting against the British, ostensibly for Indian independence. Auchinleck was urged either to forget the war criminals or to have them quietly disciplined when the smoke had died down. He refused to do either. As a man of principle, he insisted on a full-dress court martial for them, sincerely believing that only by doing so would he keep faith with the majority of Indian soldiers who had remained loyal to their oath, even after capture by the enemy. He had the Indian renegade officers tried, in the full glare of publicity, in the Red Fort in Delhi. The result was disastrous. The Indian Press and village agitators immediately turned the accused into heroes, and changed their squalid acts of brutality into deeds of great valour. The Indian political leaders all knew as well as Auchinleck that the accused were at best a bunch of opportunists whose acts certainly could never have been excused by patriotism or anti-British hatred. For these, remember, were only
those Indian officers who had tortured and beaten and killed their own fellow-soldiers, not those who had simply fought on the side of the Japanese. But if Auchinleck was driven by principle to stage the trials, no such finer feelings stirred in the Indian leaders. Though Nehru, for instance, expressed nothing but contempt for the renegades in private, he quickly jumped on the bandwagon, spoke up for the accused, and even donned barrister's robes to defend the accused at the hearings in Red Fort. So did all the other leaders. Never have so many Indian politicians so quickly remembered that they were lawyers, and rushed to the defence of the 'martyrs'.

The result was that the conviction and imprisonment of the officers was hailed throughout India as yet another example of British oppression of true Indian nationalism. Auchinleck's _amour propre_ was satisfied and he could henceforth claim that, in the whole sorry affair, he had been the only honest and straightforward participant, and that it had been a magnificent justification of the principle of British justice. Pyrrhus had a victory of this kind too...

To Auchinleck now, in 1947, came a problem which was possibly more formidable than any which had hitherto confronted him in his gallant but chequered career. That magnificent instrument of war, painstakingly rebuilt by the British after the Mutiny of 1857, the Indian Army, would now have to be split. As Commander-in-Chief, it would be Auchinleck's job to do it. It was not only a heart-breaking task, but one of fantastic difficulty too. After the Mutiny, every Indian regiment was stratified into communal battalions—two Hindu and one Muslim, two Muslim and one Hindu, or one Hindu, one Muslim and one Sikh—so that no sudden upsurge of religious or racial rebellion could get out of hand. There would always be a loyal battalion around to rally round the flag. Moreover, though Indianization had proceeded to such an extent that, by 1947, only 300 Britons remained in the Civil Service, progress had been very much slower in the Indian Army.
A number of Indians had, by sheer guts and skill, risen to the rank of brigadier during the war, but the main cadre of officers—and certainly all the General Staff—was British.

The problem of dividing the Army was a task which took Auchinleck aback. At the final meeting of the Indian leaders on 3 June, Mountbatten reported that 'they agreed that Auchinleck should be invited to broadcast in the near future a steadying message to the Armed Forces giving them a broad outline of their future. I told the leaders that the Working Committees would have to give Auchinleck answers on several points, such as whether the Army was to be divided on a geographical or a communal basis, and whether a Muslim soldier living in Bombay would serve in the Hindustan or Pakistan Army, and, of the latter, whether he would have to transfer his domicile.' *

But how much thought had Auchinleck himself given to the prospect? It cannot have escaped his attention. The indefatigable General Tuker saw to that. 'On my return to India from the Burma front in 1945,' he said (in reply to a question from the author), 'I soon became convinced that an independent India would have to be divided between the mainly Hindu and the mainly Muslim parts, and that therefore the Indian Army itself should be sorted out—and an impartial force should be kept, so that when the division of the country came there would be no violent commotion or fighting or massacre on the frontiers between the two countries. Those views, and the view that a divided India would be strategically stronger than an India which was unwillingly and riotously welded together were put by me in a Paper at the end of 1945.' This Paper was sent to the General Staff at G.H.Q. Since it came from the second most senior general in India, it can hardly have been ignored. 'Then the Parliamentary Mission came out to India,' Tuker proceeded, 'to look things over and decide when we should give India independence. They got the breeze up their trousers and wanted to give India in-

* Government of India Records.
dependence straight away, and that was the view of the Labour Party who were afraid the Indians would chuck us out of the country.’

Tuker went on: ‘When the Cabinet Mission itself was coming out in the spring of 1946, G.H.Q. in Delhi suddenly wanted to know if I had been considering the strategy to be followed if India were divided, and would I send them a Paper. I simply bunged in my original Paper, and I think the sole use they made of it was to get the Viceroy [Wavell] to go to the microphone and explain why it would be fatal to divide India for strategic reasons. My argument was that it was better to divide her than to have two contesting peoples within the country, for whom she had to provide all her armed forces to keep the peace.

‘It was a pity that the Paper was sidetracked in 1946, because it did forecast all the Punjab massacres of 1947. Imagine, if only they had done something then, the Government and G.H.Q. would have had no less than eighteen months in which to have everything ready—an impartial type of civil service appointed for the border regions, a reclassified army, and it could all have been done surreptitiously, even a lot of it on paper only, so as to be ready at the drop of a handkerchief any time when partition was decided upon. But they chose to set the Paper aside, and the consequences were incalculable.’

The salient points in Tuker’s Paper were:

1. India must be partitioned—therefore the Army must be reclassified into communal units;

2. Each communal force must control strong armed police as an internal security force;

3. A central, impartial force must be formed to step in and stop the inevitable row which would blow up in the Sikh-Hindu-Muslim areas, and as a ready force to look after external frontiers;

4. The whole should be within a Commonwealth Defence Region;

5. We should not hurry to Indianize the impartial force, but build it well, militarily and communally, till it became
the nucleus of an Army which might, one day, help to re-unify the sub-Continent; and

6. That before any decision was made about the form of independence, all the above forces must be in position and ready to 'take the bump.'*

If a senior member of the Army General Staff could dispatch a Paper of such importance (and, as it turned out, such prescience) to G.H.Q. both in 1945 and 1946, how is it possible that Sir Claude Auchenleck, the Commander-in-Chief, had made no preparations for the contingencies it prophesied as late as May 1947? Through the months Tuker kept pressing his C.-in-C. ever more urgently with suggestions. One of them was the formation immediately of a force consisting of a small number of British troops, plus the forty Ghurka battalions serving in the Indian Army. Auchenleck curtly turned down the proposal. On 2 June 1947, after dinner with the Viceroy, Tuker buttonholed Lord Ismay and repeated the suggestion to him, pointing out that the troops could be given a proper posting so that they would stay until troubles were over and would not recur.

Ismay shook his head. 'Nehru would never agree to it,' he said.

Nor would Auchenleck agree to divide the Army. After the Indian leaders had decided upon partition, the first thing they demanded was their own armies. Both Mountbatten and Ismay suggested that for the moment, it might be better to retain a single force in the sub-Continent under British command, to ensure impartiality. Jinnah and Nehru bridled at once. It was clear that neither would regard independence as having been obtained until they possessed their own troops, under their own control. August 15 was the day of independence. By 15 August, both Jinnah and Nehru insisted, the Indian Army must be divided and operating under Pakistan and Indian command, respectively.

* My italics—L. M.
Auchinleck had already been called in by Ismay and told to prepare a plan for the reclassification of the forces. The Commander-in-Chief had replied that it was impossible, that to split an instrument like the Indian Army would be to ruin it, and that he had no intention of doing anything about it because he did not believe in it. ‘Can’t you see,’ he said, in effect, ‘that here we have the greatest Army in the world today? It can’t be broken up.’

He was ordered to the Viceroy’s House to see Mountbatten. Mountbatten, it should be remembered, had twice assumed positions of superior rank in spheres where Auchinleck operated, despite the fact that he was, substantially, much junior to him.

He had taken over the job of Supremo in Burma. Now he was Viceroy (and therefore in a position to give orders to the C.-in-C.). He had tried to ease the position by writing to Auchinleck shortly before arriving in India and saying:

‘My Dear Claude, God knows I did everything in my power to be allowed to go back to sea. Since however the King overruled me and I am to come to India I would like you to know that the feeling that I have such a true friend in you makes all the difference to me. I hope we shall see lots of each other. Looking forward to seeing you, Dickie.’*

But by the time partition was decided upon, Mountbatten and Auchinleck were no longer friends and certainly no longer collaborators. The Viceroy ordered the C.-in-C. to get out a plan for the reclassification without delay, ‘and no bloody nonsense about it, Claude’.

Auchinleck’s supporters, including his biographer, all give the impression that the C.-in-C. India was henceforth little more than a victim of high-pressure tactics on the part of the Viceroy and the Indian leaders. That may well have been so. Certainly, Mountbatten had said only a few weeks before (8 April) that there would be no splitting of the Indian Army because ‘the mechanics won’t

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* Quoted in Auchinleck, by John Connell.
permit it, and I won’t.* But that does not account for Auchinleck’s failure to have a plan prepared in advance, just the same. Britain was never invaded by the Germans in 1940, but a plan was nevertheless drawn up by the General Staff, as to what should be done in case we were.

‘In the end,’ said a senior member of Mountbatten’s staff to the author, ‘Claude had to be ordered to do it, and he was very resentful. You would be surprised how long it took him to realize that it was inevitable. . . . The trouble with Claude was that he was a very tender and sensitive plant. Certain letters have been printed from his associates to prove that he was right about everything, and that the praise in these letters proves it. But they don’t. Even when things were going well, Claude was so uncertain that he had to be encouraged. One wrote to him to keep his confidence in himself. One would have been much more salutary if one had wanted to keep history straight. What he is supposed to have done and what we saw him do aren’t the same at all.’

Of the division of the Indian Army, Mr John Connell writes in *Auchinleck*:

‘Without Auchinleck’s personal leadership and his selfless devotion to duty, the whole complex enterprise would have foundered at the outset.’ In fact, it was not until the beginning of July (six weeks before Independence) that the Commander-in-Chief got around to giving the Armed Forces Reconstitution Committee their terms of reference. In view of the way he had hesitated and delayed, it is somewhat ironic to read the note which he attached to the terms of reference, which read as follows:

‘The division of the Indian Armed Forces is bound to be a complicated process. If it is to be accomplished without confusion and without any marked loss of morale and efficiency, it is essential that all the existing forces in India should be under a single administrative control unit until:

(a) they have been finally sorted out into two distinct forces, and

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* A. Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten.*
(b) the two Governments are in a position to administer, i.e. to pay, feed, clothe and equip their respective forces.

2. On the other hand, it is essential that the Union of India* and Pakistan should each have within their own territories forces which:

(a) are with effect from 15 August under their own operational control;

(b) are on 15 August predominantly composed of non-Muslims and Muslims respectively; and

(c) are as soon as possible after 15 August predominantly reconstituted on a territorial basis.

3. The requirements set out in paragraph (c) above necessitate that partition should be in two stages. The first stage would be a more or less rough and ready division of the existing forces on a communal basis. Plans should be made forthwith for the immediate movement to the Pakistan area of all Muslim majority units that may be outside that area, and similarly for the movement to India of all exclusively non-Muslim or non-Muslim majority units at present in the Pakistan area...

4. The next stage would be to comb out the units themselves on a basis of voluntary transfers. All personnel would be entitled to elect which Dominion they choose to serve in. To this, however, there would be one exception, namely that a Muslim from Pakistan now serving in the Armed Forces will not have the option to join the Armed Forces of the Indian Union, and similarly a non-Muslim from the rest of India will not have the option to join the Armed Forces of Pakistan....

*It had been anticipated at first that the two new countries would be known as Pakistan and Hindustan. The Congress leaders objected to this. Their standpoint, which was eventually accepted, was that they represented India, from which parts of certain provinces had seceded to form Pakistan; and that they, therefore, continued to be India. This was accepted by the United Nations, which gave India’s old representation to the new nation, while Pakistan had to apply for membership as a new country.
‘5. If both Governments are to have operational control over their respective Armed Forces by 15 August, they must each have heads for the three Services, i.e. the Navy, the Army and the Air Force, and headquarters staffs, through which to exercise their functions. It is therefore important that these six heads should be selected forthwith.

‘6. So far as central administration is concerned, the Indian Armed Forces as a whole will remain under the administrative control of the present C.-in-C. India who, in his turn, will be under the Joint Defence Council. The Commander-in-Chief in India will have no responsibility for law and order, nor will he have operational control over any units, save those in transit from one Dominion to another; nor will he have any power to move troops within the borders of either Dominion.

‘7. In order to avoid confusion, the existing C.-in-C. in India might be entitled Supreme Commander from 15 August until his work is completed. His existing staff would of course be reduced progressively as his functions diminish.’*

Little wonder that Tuker fumed with frustration in Calcutta and forecast ‘a bloody massacre’ in the Punjab. (But not in Eastern Command, where his writ ran. He had made his own preparations there to deal with any emergency.) When the trouble came, the soldiers who might have been in a position to prevent it were, as one Army officer bitterly put it, ‘playing swops with each other, and were far too busy scrabbling for jobs to bother about communal riots’.

Auchinleck’s main concern, from this moment on, was the safety of the British in India. He had by this time become convinced that Indian independence would be followed by a massacre of the British element in the country. Why he imagined this is hard to understand. It was certainly a misreading of the Indian mind. The Indian peo-

* Government of India, Records.
ples, Hindus and Muslims, were certainly anxious to end British rule in their country. They had certainly rioted for freedom under the slogan of 'Quit India'. And, in their time, they had certainly killed or injured British officials or the odd Briton who got in the way of their demonstrations.

But the British as individuals were far from being hated and—at best—held in great affection. In spite of this, Auchinleck chose to believe that their blood would flow the moment the British Raj came to an end. Can he really have believed this? Or was it merely a way of trying to persuade Mountbatten to keep British troops in India for other purposes—of which the Viceroy was unaware, but certain elements in the War office were?

Whatever the reason, he wrote to Mountbatten earnestly suggesting that a British armed force should be retained in India until at least 1 January 1948, not, as Tuker had suggested, as a trouble-shooting unit there, with the consent of India and Pakistan, to settle communal troubles, but merely to safeguard purely British interests.

Ismay replied to the C.-in-C.'s letter on behalf of the Viceroy in these words:

'The Viceroy has asked me to thank you for your paper COS (47) 29B in regard to the withdrawal of British forces from India. With reference to the recommendation in paragraph 8 (b) His Excellency does not feel that it would be possible to insist on British forces remaining until 1 January 1948. As he sees it, this would necessitate our safeguarding the position by an arrangement whereby the British forces in India would be directly under the C.-in-C., who would be responsible to H.M.G. through the Governor General or Governors General. This safeguard would be demanded by H.M.G. and the Chiefs of Staff but would be most unpalatable to the Governments of both India and Pakistan. It would defeat the object which is uppermost in the Viceroy's mind, namely that from the date of the transfer of power both the new Governments