gested that the Well at Cawnpore should be turned into a cemetery and the Cross on Massacre Ghat be removed and buried.

‘And what,’ asked Lord Ismay, ‘do we do about the Union Jack at Lucknow? It has flown from the Residency and never been hauled down since the days of the Mutiny.’

The United Provinces Government meanwhile issued a note to the populace saying: ‘In order to uplift the cultural life of the people, certain changes will be made in the spelling of certain places in the State. A large number of names of rivers and towns have been transliterated as a result of the way in which they are mispronounced by foreigners. Reformed spelling will now be used in all official correspondence and records. Examples; Benares will now be known as Banaras, Cawnpore will be Konnanpur, Ganges will become Ganga, Jumna will be the Yamuna.’

There were other more sinister things happening, too, and not all of them communal. While the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims jabbered at each other in the Punjab, the sun was burning up the crops around them. The cracking and splitting of the baked land was almost audible, and still no rain came. It looked as if this year—this vital year for India—there would be no monsoon to fill the Five Rivers and give them the water to feed the crops that would in turn be needed to feed India. ‘There are other problems bothering us here in addition to Independence,’ wrote a British official from Madras. ‘This city has food for only fifteen days. The whole of South India may be said to be living from ship to mouth.’

In Delhi, they were already beginning to put up the ornate gilded arches and plan the procession and festivities with which Independence Day would be celebrated, and there were committees sitting to decide which public parks and open spaces should be allotted to singing and dancing. To the annoyance of the Delhi City Council, certain open spaces were already filled, and filled, moreover, by those who were aliens in the city and alien to the celebrations.
In Urdu Park, opposite a Muslim mosque, were encamped 4,000 refugees, and in the fields between the Great Mosque and the Red Fort were several thousand others. The newspapers were being circumspect. No one was saying why they were here, except that they were Meos, a Muslim sect from Alwar, who had suddenly fled the State. It seemed that what was going on in Alwar now was not the burning of racehorses but the firing of villages. Sir Evan Jenkins, the Punjab Governor, part of whose territory abutted on Alwar and also contained communities of Meos, had been in contact with his Intelligence agents in Alwar State to try to find out what was happening; but for the moment his sources had dried up. No one was saying anything. Villages were put to flames and their populations butchered; but then the bodies were carefully taken out into the fields and buried, or stuffed down wells. It was impossible to discover who was behind the massacres, or how to pin the killers down. The Maharajah and his Dewan, a fiery little character of belligerent pro-Hindu persuasion named Dr Khare, strenuously denied any responsibility for the killings. But they were certainly having one effect for which Dr Khare, a member of the extremist Mahasabha Party, had campaigned: the Muslims were leaving Alwar, and in their panic, leaving their lands and their belongings behind them.* They had begun pouring into Delhi at the rate of several hundreds a day, and the City Council's principal worry was how to feed them, and what to do with them on Independence Day.

It was this daily infiltration into the city of the victims of communal excess which gradually planted in the minds of both Viceroy and politicians the realization that, by the time the transfer of power took place, they would have a grave problem on their hands. To some extent, Mountbatten and his Staff still believed that the main troubles, if any, would come in Bengal, which had been the scene

* The Maharajah of Alwar was removed from his State by the Indian States Department (on the advice of V. P. Menon) after Independence. Dr. Khare also lost his Dewan-ship.
of such horrible atrocities the year before. It was only
the presence of distress around them, plus the continual
nagging of Sir Evans Jenkins from his uncomfortable perch
over the furnace in the Punjab, which gradually brought
them face to face with the possibility that perhaps it was
here that the holocaust might come.

Sir Evan Jenkins was the epitome of all that is best in
a servant of the British Crown in foreign places. He had
been in India since just after the first World war, when
he was appointed a district officer in the Punjab. He
learned from that moment on to love the Punjabis, though
not blindly. From forty years of experience among what
obviously, after a time, became his people, he arrogated to
himself no superiority other than that given to his position.
‘All civil officials were quite accustomed to serving under
Indians,’ he pointed out.* ‘I joined the ICS in 1920 and
my immediate superiors were frequently Indians, both offi-
cials and politicians. In fact, the feeling within the ICS
was excellent. The idea that any one of us would object
if our boss was an Indian was ridiculous, or that we would
refuse to obey one of his orders.’

Jenkins was, in these last days of the British Raj, one
of its most important and knowledgeable servants. He was
a great friend of India. Yet the remarkable thing is that
the Punjab was all that he knew of the country. He was a
supreme example of the India Office practice of putting a
man into an area and giving him a lifetime’s chance to
learn about the people among whom he would have to live,
advise and rule. He never really moved out of it, except
to go on leave to Britain.

He knew the Punjabis for their vices as well as their
virtues, and in the summer of 1947 it was their vice with
which he was most concerned. Sir Evan Jenkins had never
made any secret of the fact that he did not believe in
(a) the partition of India, and particularly (b) the parti-
tion of the Punjab. He repeatedly pointed out to the politi-
cians of the Province, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh alike, that

* In a note to the author.
a division of their land would end its importance for India. He stressed the fact that it was not only the most prosperous State in the sub-Continent but also the most viable. The Punjab, possibly alone among all the other Indian States, was self-sufficient, could supply its own food, run its own industries, finance its own building, export its products, educate its own people. He emphasized this not as an argument (as Sir Fred Burrows and Suhrarwardy were doing in Bengal) for independence, for breaking off from the two new Dominions, but as a plea to keep the Punjab intact, somehow, for the benefit not only of its own people but for Independent India as a whole.

He was attacked and vilified in the vernacular Press, as a result, as a conspirator to preserve British rule. It was manifestly not true, but there it was. Meanwhile, his main obsession was with Delhi. How could he keep the Viceroy and the Indian politicians aware of the situation into which they had got themselves by their precipitate decision to split an unsplittable Province? There was danger ahead, and only ruthlessly clear minds would avert catastrophe.

On 10 July, he asked if Lord Ismay would meet him to discuss 'the serious situation' and convey its purport to the Viceroy. Abell went to meet him instead in Simla and produced the following report:

'I had a long talk with the Governor of the Punjab, Jenkins, last night (July 10). There is no doubt that the Sikhs are in a very dangerous mood... The Muslims and the Hindus are in touch about everything except law and order. The problem of law and order related primarily to Lahore and Amritsar. These, and especially Lahore, are disquieted cities. The Sikhs and the Hindus are reluctant to set up any Government at all until August 15 except in Lahore. They consider that a move from Lahore would prejudice their claim to the city... Your Excellency should talk to Nehru and Patel and pray them to get the Congress and the Sikhs to drop their claim to stay in
Lahore and hold up all the partitioning proceedings until the Boundary Commission reports.*

But this was not strong enough for Jenkins. He began to write his own reports. He had a State on his hands which had taken years to build up into its present prosperity, and would soon crash into ruin. How could he save it? Obviously, the decisions of Sir Cyril Radcliffe and his Boundary Commission could not help; for if realistic lines were drawn through the Punjab, assigning the West to Pakistan and the East to India, the great Sikh communities in the Western Punjab would be left stranded, puddles of anti-Muslim life in a Muslim country. He wrote to the Viceroy on 10 July:

'Dear Lord Mountbatten,—I think your Excellency may be interested in the record of a conversation which I have just had with Gianni Khartar Singh [spokesman for the Sikhs]. The Gianni was extremely frank about the intentions of the Sikhs. What he said confirms my view that they mean to make trouble if the decision based on the Boundary Commission is not to their liking, or if the new Governments of Pakistan and India are set up before the decision is given...'

To this he attached a confidential report which read, in part:

'Gianni Khartar Singh came to see me today... He said he had come to see me about the Indian Independence Bill and the Boundary Commission... He said that in the Punjab there would have to be an exchange of populations on a large scale. Were the British ready to enforce this? He doubted if they were, and if no regard was paid to Sikh solidarity a fight was inevitable. The British had said for years that they intended to protect the minorities and what had happened? The present situation was a clear breach of faith by the British.

'I replied that I realized that the Sikhs were dissatisfied, but when independence came to any country some classes, who had formerly regarded themselves as protected, in-

* Government of India Records.
evitably suffered. At the same time, I thought that the Sikhs had only themselves to blame for their present position. The Gianni himself had insisted on partition and Baldev Singh had accepted the Plan...

'Gianni then said neither had viewed partition as being based on population alone. The Sikhs were entitled to their own land just as much as the Hindus or the Muslims. They must have their shrine at Nankana Sahib, at least one canal system, and finally arrangements must be made so as to bring at least three-quarters of the Sikh population from West to East Punjab. Property must be taken into account as well as population in the exchange, as the Sikhs on the whole were better off than the Muslims. Gianni said that unless it was recognised by His Majesty's Government, the Viceroy and the Party leaders that the fate of the Sikhs was a vital issue, there would be trouble... they would be obliged to fight... that the Sikhs realised that they would be in a bad position, but would have to fight on revolutionary lines by murdering officials, cutting railway lines, destroying canal headworks and so on.

'I reiterated that this would be a very foolish policy, to which Gianni replied that if Britain were invaded, no doubt my feelings would be much the same as his... The Muslims were now putting out some conciliatory propaganda about their attitude towards the Sikhs in their midst, but their intention was that of a sportsman who is careful not to disturb the birds he means to shoot. He believed the Muslims would try to make the Sikhs of West Punjab feel secure and then set about them in earnest.'

Sir Evan Jenkins ended his dispatch:

'Finally, the Gianni appealed to me to do all I could to help the Sikhs during a period of great trial. He said I surely could not wish to abandon the Punjab to tears and bloodshed. There would be tears and bloodshed here if the boundary problem was not suitably solved. The Gianni was matter of fact and quiet throughout our conversation but wept when he made his final appeal. This is
the nearest thing to an ultimatum yet given by the Sikhs. They are undoubtedly puzzled and unhappy. I see no reason to suppose that they have lost the nuisance value they have in the past possessed over a century.*

On 13 July Jenkins wrote yet another letter to Mountbatten, reinforcing his warning of the dangers of the situation. ‘The communal feeling is now unbelievably bad,’ he said. ‘The Sikhs believe that they will be expropriated and massacred in West Punjab and smothered by the Hindus and Congress generally in East Punjab. They threaten a violent rising immediately…’

He asked the Viceroy at all costs to get hold of Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s report and announce it before 15 August, to stop panic and the mad hurrying to and fro of populations from one Dominion to the other. He suggested that a force be moved into the area along the likely line of the new border to preserve peace. And he ended:

‘I believe that if the representatives of the future Dominions can make it clear now that there is no question of a chaotic changeover, that they mean business, and that they are sending an imposing organisation here to protect the people, with appropriate publicity, it will do much to steady the Punjab. For it is the Dominion Boundary that is in question and not a Provincial Boundary only.’*

At long last the Viceroy began to take the danger in the Punjab seriously. On the morning of 15 July, he called a meeting of his Staff to discuss the Punjab situation. On 20 July he visited Lahore and talked to Jenkins and to members of the Punjab Partition Committee, which was dividing the assets of the Province. He appears to have gained the impression from the Committee that ‘things were going very well’, in marked contrast to Jenkins’s impression that ‘hatred and suspicion are entirely undisguised. Partition goes very slowly indeed. Meetings of the Partition Committee resemble a peace conference with a new war in sight.’ But once more the Viceroy was urged, by

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* Government of India Records.
the members of the Committee this time, to get hold of the Boundary Award and announce it before 15 August.

He returned to Delhi with his fingers sufficiently scorched by the fires of communal hatred to persuade him that a fire brigade was necessary. He held immediate consultations with Sir Claude Auchinleck, now the Supreme Commander of the emerging Pakistan and Indian armies. From this meeting came the decision to form the Punjab Boundary Force which would have the job of ensuring peace in the Province both before and after the announcement of Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s Award. On 22 July, the Viceroy presided over a meeting at which Sardar Patel and the Honourable Rajendra Prasad were present for the future Government of India, Mr Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan for the future Government of Pakistan and Baldev Singh for the Sikhs. They issued a statement afterwards which was supposed to make everything all right from now on.

‘Now that the decision to set up two independent Dominions from August 15 has finally been taken,’ it said, ‘the members of the Partition Council, on behalf of the future Governments, declare that they are determined to establish peaceful conditions in which the processes of partition may be completed and the many urgent tasks of administration and economic reconstruction may be taken in hand.

‘Both the Congress and the Muslim League have undertaken to give fair and equitable treatment to the minorities after the transfer of power. The two future Governments reaffirm these assurances. It is their intention to safeguard the legitimate interests of all citizens irrespective of religion, caste or sex. In the exercise of their normal civic rights all citizens will be regarded as equal and both the Governments will assure to all people within their territories the exercise of liberties such as freedom of speech, the right to form associations, the right to worship in their own way and the protection of their language and culture.'
Both the Governments further undertake that there shall be no discrimination against those who before August 15 may have been political opponents.

The guarantee of protection which both Governments give to the citizens of their respective countries implies that in no circumstances will violence be tolerated in any form in either territory. The two Governments wish to emphasise that they are united in this determination.

To safeguard the peace in the Punjab during the period of the change over to the new conditions, both Governments have agreed on the setting up of a special Military Command from August 1, covering the civil districts of Sialkot, Gujranwala, Sheikhapura, Lyallpur, Montgomery, Lahore, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Hoshiapur, Jullundur, Ferozepur and Ludhiana. With their concurrence, Major-General Rees has been nominated as Military Commander for this purpose and Brigadier Digambhar Singh (India) and Colonel Ayub Khan* (Pakistan) have been attached to him in an advisory capacity. After August 15, Major-General Rees will control operationally the forces of both the new States in this area and will be responsible through the Supreme Commander and the Joint Defence Council, to the two Governments. The two Governments will not hesitate to set up a similar organisation in Bengal should they consider it necessary.

Both Governments have pledged themselves to accept the awards of the Boundary Commission, whatever these may be. The Boundary Commissions are already in session; if they are to discharge their duties satisfactorily, it is essential that they should not be hampered by public speeches or writing, threatening boycott or direct action, or otherwise interfering with their work. Both Governments will take appropriate steps to secure this end; and, as soon as the awards are announced, both Governments will enforce them impartially and at once.'

* Now President of Pakistan.
It was an admirable document. Indeed, Mountbatten’s Boswell, Campbell-Johnson,* described the Viceroy as regarding it as a ‘Charter of Liberties for all communities’, though he also added the comment that ‘he is greatly excited over this coup, but frankly does not believe that either Party really knew what it was signing’. V. P. Menon** went even further and commented:

‘This statement was the first joint declaration of policy by the spokesmen of the two Governments on a matter of fundamental importance. It had a reassuring effect throughout the Punjab and Bengal for the time being, and was regarded as a charter of rights by the minorities in both Dominions. The Boundary Force, set up on August 1, consisted of about 50,000 officers and men, a high proportion of the officers being British. This was possibly the greatest military force ever assembled for the express purpose of maintaining civil peace and it gave everyone a feeling of confidence.†

If ever there was confidence misplaced, this was the occasion. Rarely had a military force of such strength worked so hard or fought so bravely to achieve so little.

The nucleus of the Punjab Boundary Force was provided by the 4th Indian Division, a fighting machine which all who saw it in action during the War—in Eritrea, in the Western Desert and in Italy—will acknowledge as one of the most intrepid and efficient of all. It far surpassed any British or American division in its willingness to take risks and ensure casualties. Against the bitter escarpment which blocked its path into Italian East Africa at Keren, in the minefields beyond Alamein, and on the slopes of Monte Cassino, the 4th Indian always achieved the tasks—no matter how bloody—which were assigned to it. In Major-General ‘Pete’ Rees they had a cocky and belligerent little commander who had no doubt of his capacity for success.

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** In The Transfer of Power in India.
† My italics—L. M.,
But this time there was only failure and disaster ahead of them; and though they would be the instrument of failure, the responsibility would not lie with them, for rarely has a pacifying and protective force been sent into action with such a misreading of the situation as that which would confront them.

From this moment on, the history of the transfer of power to India is one of over-confidence, half-thought-out enthusiasms, blunders, stupidities, carelessness and mistake after mistake.

To the Viceroy, the situation was now in hand. He told one of his Staff conferences that the announcement of the Boundaries Award would bring the whole thing into the open. At the moment the communal disorders were sporadic and disorganized, and, therefore, difficult to cope with. But the Award was bound to bring matters to the boil. A general outburst of fury and violence would inevitably result, possibly from the Muslims, almost certainly from the Sikhs. This the Punjab Boundary Force would swiftly put down.

He had assured Maulana Abul Kalam Azad several weeks before that ‘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 . . . I will order the Army and the Air Force to act and I will use tanks and aeroplanes to suppress anybody who wants to create trouble.’

Well, with the Punjab Boundary Force, he had kept his promise.

On 30 July, he flew to Bengal to look over the situation there. Suhrawardy took him by the lapel and made a last effort to persuade him to accept an independent Bengal. Suhrawardy knew by this time that he himself had no future in Pakistan, for Jinnah had already indicated that another Muslim, Nazimuddin, would become leader in East Pakistan. Suhrawardy planned to remain in India, in his beloved Calcutta, anyway; it would be nice if he could
stay on as boss of his own independent domain. The Viceroy, as he guessed, brushed him off.

Mountbatten then approached Lieutenant-General Tuker, the British Commander, and asked him whether he, too, would like an equivalent of the Punjab Boundary Force. Tuker replied with a brisk thank you, no; he would handle his situation with the troops he had got, though they were much less than 50,000; and he would personally guarantee that this time, since he would be in command, there would be no repetition of the atrocities of a year ago.

There was a chance to avert the catastrophe in the Punjab as late as the beginning of August, with as little as a fortnight to go before the two new Dominions were on their own. Here was a last opportunity for the Viceroy to exercise what Gandhi called ‘your magic’ upon both Congress and Muslim League leaders. He had now been warned repeatedly by Sir Evan Jenkins of the dreadful dangers ahead; already the skirmishings were increasing in what would soon become an outright war of succession.

V. P. Menon made the suggestion that Jinnah should be approached and persuaded to declare Nankana Sahib, the great Sikh shrine in Western Punjab, ‘a sort of Vatican’. It was a gesture which might have had a calming effect upon the highly emotional Sikhs, and one which it would have cost Jinnah little to concede. The Viceroy and his Staff were well aware of what Nankana Sahib meant to the Sikhs. On 27 July, they had received a report which said:

‘Information from a reliable source has been received that if Nankana Sahib, about twelve miles north of Lahore, is not included in the Boundary Award to East Punjab, the Sikhs intend to start trouble on a big scale. It is reported that the Sikhs intend to act on or about 7 August, and during the ten days before this, large meetings will be held to work up agitation. It is already known that the Sikhs have collected large quantities of arms. It is also reported that the Muslims are fully aware of the preparations and are, in fact, making counter-preparations. Both sides have
attempted to subvert troops in the area and several of these attempts are said to have been not wholly unsuccessful. Promises of assistance from some troops have been received.'

Menon’s suggestion was noted but there is no indication that it was ever acted upon.

Sir Evan Jenkins urged the Viceroy to go even further. He asked him to contact the political leaders immediately and ask them to make concessions at once, without waiting for the Boundary Award. Nehru and Patel could, for instance, be persuaded to say publicly that they were waiving their claim to Lahore. It would be by no means an expensive gesture, for it was almost certain that Lahore would be awarded to Pakistan; but to concede it before hand would create the maximum goodwill. He asked Mountbatten to approach Jinnah for an important concession too.

‘I believe there is quite a lot in the claims of the Sikhs, and, for that matter, of the other residents of the East Punjab for a share in the canal colonies of the West,’ he wrote, ‘and the Gianni’s idea that the Montgomery district should be allotted to the East is by no means as ridiculous as it sounds. The district if so allotted to the East could be recolonised so as to concentrate the non-Muslims there, and transfer Muslims to Lyallpur.*

But this, he emphasized, could not be decided by the Boundary Commission. Though Montgomery and district, for instance, contained nearly a million Sikhs to only a quarter of a million Muslims, it was geographically indubitably in West Punjab. Its fate should be settled, like all the other problems, by negotiations ‘out of court’. And he asked the Viceroy to bring the parties together at once.

It was a mission which, two months earlier, Mountbatten would have relished as a supreme challenge to his powers as a persuader. To reconcile the two brothers at the moment of parting by cajoling them into a final act

* Government of India Records.
of mutual goodwill would have filled his beaker of achievement to the brim. Why then did he not attempt it?

There is evidence that, in the case of Nehru and Patel, he did make an approach, though without much conviction. The Congress leaders were certainly in no mood to make even empty concessions to Jinnah. Having given him Pakistan, their mood was to say: 'Enough! Begone! And do not dare to ask for more!'

Jinnah was in a mood too, but there is evidence that, at this particular moment, it was a serene rather than an intractable one. Having achieved what he had always secretly regarded as impossible, and seen the birth of Pakistan by his own hand in his own lifetime, he might well have been susceptible to a last appeal to his magnanimity.

That he was not asked may have been due to the Viceroy's fatigue. He had been working a 16-hour day since March and even air-conditioned offices could not protect him entirely from Delhi's scorching heat. (It averaged 105 degrees in the shade throughout July.) There was also the psychological factor. Mountbatten was not the kind of character who takes kindly to a snub, and he positively loathed failure. He had been snubbed and he had failed over the question of the joint Governor Generalship. His temperament at the time may well have persuaded him that it was better not to attempt another battle with the old man, rather than fail again.

So no concessions were asked or given. The gestures that might have calmed or mollified the Sikhs did not come. The storing of arms, the sharpening of kirpans, and the plans for battle went on.

The incidents in the Punjab until this moment had followed no set pattern. There had been the ruthless massacre of the Sikhs in Rawalpindi in March, when the Muslims turned upon them and, in a welter of ferocity, murdered 2,000 of them. But since that time the killings had been only sporadic, and most demonstrations of inter-communal fury had been confined to pyromania. It was easy, both sides discovered, to set fire to an Indian city.
town or village. In the narrow alleyways of the bazaar section of Lahore or in the tortuous streets of Amritsar, all a fire-raiser needed to do was to climb upon a roof, set it ablaze with a torch, and then decamp swiftly down an alleyway; leaving a fire that would often destroy a whole district. In Lahore alone in seven days the fire brigades were called out to 167 fires. From an airplane at night, one could pick out the villages by the flames of the burning huts.

But in the last fifteen days of the British Raj and on into Independence, the character of the conflict changed. Master Tara Singh came into the picture. This counsellor, elder statesman, father of the Sikhs, had from start to finish been against the partition of the Punjab, against the acceptance of Muslim hegemony in all but a small part of the province, and for a Sikh State which would be carved out of both Dominions. Tara Singh looked and acted like a mixture of an Old Testament Prophet and a witch doctor from a romance by Rider Haggard; and, in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, he talked to his people in language which sounded like a satire on a village soothsayer out of Rudyard Kipling.

'Oh Sikhs,' he cried, 'know ye that our brethren are threatened in the West by those who call us infidels. Our lands are about to be overrun, our women dishonoured, our children forced to take alien vows. It is time for our warriors to arise and once more destroy the Moghul invader. Remember Rawalpindi! Revenge our people! Spare no one who stands in the way of Sikh rights in our land.'

It was language which the Sikhs took seriously, and Master Tara Singh was well aware of it. The Golden Temple at Amritsar was not only a Sikh shrine but also a great communal centre at which the Sikhs gathered to talk and plan as well as pray. A Sikh gurdwara, of which the Golden Temple is a particularly blessed and hallowed example, is more of a community centre than a simple temple of worship. In it the passing stranger can always
find food and lodging for the night. In it the locals gather for their political meetings. And in it, the Sikh leaders conspired in the last days of July and the first days of August 1947, in a belated attempt to wreck the plan for the partition of the Punjab.

It was no idle conspiracy. On the afternoon of 5 August, after a meeting of the Partition Council in the Viceroy’s offices in Delhi, Mountbatten asked Nehru and Patel, and Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan to stay behind. He produced for them a Criminal Investigation Officer from Lahore who had been sent to him by Sir Evan Jenkins—in what was Jenkin’s final effort to make the Viceroy and the politicians in Delhi nip the blossoming revolution in the bud.

The C.I.D. officer brought considerable documentation with him. Trouble-makers had been arrested in Lahore, Amritsar and several other centres in the Punjab. They had been closely questioned. As a result, the C.I.D. were convinced that not only were several Sikh plots afoot to sabotage the plans for partition, but that several of the Sikh leaders were implicated.

He produced letters from a number of Sikh personalities, and copies of leaflets and instructions issued to Sikh gurdwaras. One plan was to blow up the canal system in West Punjab; another was to attack trains proceeding to Pakistan; a third to force Muslim villagers to leave their homes in East Punjab, and then ambush and kill them on the way; and finally, there was a plot to assassinate Mr Jinnah as he rode to power in Karachi in the celebrations of 14 August 1947—the day before Pakistan Independence Day.

The documentation was sufficiently authentic to convince everyone present of its seriousness. Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan at once demanded the arrest of Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders mentioned in the plot. It seemed at least reasonable that, in the face of such proof—backed as it was by repeated warnings of trouble from Jenkins—the Sikh troublemakers should be put out of
the way until the Independence arrangements were completed. For once Jinnah appeared to have right on his side in asking for action to be taken at once.

Yet once more Mountbatten hesitated. On this occasion, Lord Ismay urged him to take action. There was no doubt of the dangerous possibilities in the situation. Master Tara Singh made no secret of his belligerent intentions, and there was ample evidence of the elaborate preparations which had been made for action. Surely, here was an occasion when a heavy hand should have descended upon the trouble-makers and put them out of harm's way.

The Mountbatten of a few weeks ago would not have hesitated. He would have called in Master Tara Singh and his cohorts, secured guarantees from them, and if they were not forthcoming would have put them under restraint. It was still in his power to do it. He was still Viceroy. He was quite aware of the devastation which might come about if troublemakers were allowed to remain free over Independence Day. Yet he refused to take a decision. It is true that Sardar Patel advised against the arrest of Master Tara Singh, on the grounds that it would cause trouble among the Sikhs; but a few words from Mountbatten and Nehru* would have talked him round. In fact, Nehru was not consulted. The Viceroy announced instead that he would confer with Sir Evan Jenkins and the two Governors-designate of East and West Punjab (Sir Chandumal Trivedi and Sir Francis Mudie) and ask them what they would advise.

They agreed in counselling the Viceroy to leave Master Tara Singh and his colleagues free. Sir Evan Jenkins's reason was specious. 'What would have been the good of arresting the old rascal at the beginning of August,' he said 'if in mid-August, when Independence came, he was set free.'

But would he in fact have been set free? Nehru was as anxious as the Viceroy to see the transfer of power

* Who was to fling the fiery old Sikh into jail five times in the next ten years.
come about peacefully. He would (as he subsequently showed) have been more than willing to offend the Sikhs if, by sequestering their leaders, he averted a massacre.

Step by step, Delhi had been advised of the increasing gravity of the situation in the Punjab. The warnings were there. The Viceroy had at least three chances to avert a massacre, and each time—from weariness, from lack of foresight, or from aversion to another clash with Jinnah—he looked the other way. The result was disastrous.

On 6 August 1947 there was a party at the Red Fort in Delhi which brought the curtain at least part of the way down on the drama which was now being played out. That night, officers of the future Indian Army gave what the local newspapers called a ‘Farewell Comrades’ party to Pakistani officers who were leaving shortly for service. After 15 August, with their own Dominion Army. Pandit Nehru, Sardar Baldev Singh, the new Indian Commander-in-Chief, General Cariappa, and a few British senior officers were present.

It was a sentimental occasion, for many of the officers belonged to the same regiment but would henceforth be serving in different armies; but it would be untrue to say that it was a melancholy one for any save the British officers present. For them the splitting of the Indian Army was a tragedy, and this party was the symbol of it. On the other hand, it celebrated for the politicians the end of a hated instrument of British domination, and for the Indian soldiers the beginning of vast new opportunities for promotion. In the light of what was to happen in a few months’ time, the occasion had its ironic moments.

‘We are here to say au revoir,’ said General Cariappa. ‘I say au revoir deliberately as we shall meet each other in future as the best of friends and in the spirit of good comradeship. We have worked together for so long as members of the same team. We will continue to do so, in the same spirit, for the defence of our two Dominions against external aggression. We now serve in two differ-
ent armed forces but we fervently hope that nothing anyone says or does will mar our present spirit of friendship.'

To which Brigadier Raza, on behalf of the Muslim officers, said a fervent 'Amen'. And then they all linked hands, and, some with tears in their eyes, sang: ‘For they are jolly good fellows.’ Three days later, four Muslim officers who attended the party were hacked to death by Sikhs aboard the train taking them to Pakistan. One hundred and fifty Pakistan officials, with their wives and children, were murdered on the same train.

On 7 August 1947, Mr Jinnah flew to Karachi to await the arrival of Independence Day. The Viceroy lent him his official Dakota for the journey, and gave him a farewell present of his Rolls-Royce and his Muslim A.D.C. Lieutenant Ahsan, and he went to the airfield to see him off.

With his departure disappeared the last chance of securing from him some concession in the Punjab. He left Delhi after delivering a conciliatory message in which he appealed to both Hindus and Muslims to 'bury the past' and wished India success and prosperity. He got a bucket of water in his face in return from Sardar Patel who said in Delhi the following day: ‘The poison has been removed from the body of India. We are now one and indivisible. You cannot divide the sea or the waters of the river. As for the Muslims, they have their roots, their sacred places and their centres here. I do not know what they can possibly do in Pakistan. It will not be long before they return to us.’

Jinnah, who had been showing signs of an unusual magnanimity, froze from that moment into his normal attitude of cold hatred and contempt for Congress. Nor was his temper improved when he read a statement from Mr Kripalani, the Congress President, which he interpreted as inciting Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan to practise non-cooperation with the new Dominion. It was one of those monumental misunderstandings which all too often bedevil Indian politics. Kripalani, was in fact, answering a query
from a number of Congress Committees in Pakistan, which had asked whether they should fly the new Indian flag over their headquarters on Independence Day. He had told them to fly no flags and organize no demonstrations. 'This had nothing to do with the celebrations organized by the Pakistan Government,' he explained.

Jinnah and his followers, however, chose to believe otherwise. 'Let me tell Mr Kripalani and other Hindu leaders that they are playing with fire,' declared Liaquat Ali Khan, in a tone as near to thunderous as that amiable roly-poly could get. 'If Hindu leaders like Kripalani succeed in inciting people, it would be foolish to expect that there will be no repercussions. No Government in the world can prevent such repercussions, no matter how undesirable they may be. Unless the Congress President and the Hindu leaders give up these dangerous preachings and join with us in restoring goodwill, and if they fail to stop acts of violence by their people, then God help both Pakistan and Hindustan.'

It was already a situation in the Punjab which seemed beyond the help of anyone but God, and even the efforts of Gandhi were useless. The panic had now set in, and from both sides of the province—Muslims from the East, Sikhs and Hindus from the West—the people were leaving their homes and fleeing to what they hoped would be safety. Gandhi pleaded with them to remain where they were, but in language scarcely calculated to quiet their fears.

'When something they love is dying, people do not run away but die with it,' he cried to an audience of Hindus in Lahore. 'When you suffer from fear, you die before death comes to you. That is not glorious.'

To the Sikhs he said: 'My conception of the Sikh has always been of a brave person who does not fear death or do any harm to an innocent person. If the present painful quarrel between Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs continues, it is an invitation to any foreign power to come and invade India. I therefore make an earnest appeal to the people
to end the present quarrel, which does no credit to either community.’

But he only passed through the Punjab himself. More’s the pity. He went on to Calcutta, and there his achievements were remarkable. But it was in the Punjab that he was really needed. Everyone was needed there in those first days of August—Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Jinnah and the Viceroy himself. Anyone with the power and influence to halt the forces of darkness, which were now mobilizing in every part of the land. They were all well aware of the perils of the situation. Did they really believe that it could be kept in hand by military action alone—from a force which was, in any case, beginning to be riven by communal suspicion?

It was Gandhi who showed them what they might have done in the Punjab. Only, unfortunately, he could not be in two places at once, and his example was in Bengal.

CHAPTER NINE

‘ONE-MAN BOUNDARY FORCE’

In all the brutishness, bestiality and bloodshed amid which the two new Dominions of Pakistan and India were baptized in August 1947, one city, containing a large Hindu-Muslim population, alone remained free from communal killings on a large scale. That city was Calcutta, where 6,000 Muslims and Hindus had hacked each other to death exactly a year before. This was the place, teeming with goondas, gangsters and troublemakers, in which the Viceroy and most Indian politicians had for long believed the worst scenes of violence would occur; which was why during his visit on 30 July, Mountbatten had asked
Lieutenant-General Tuker if he, too, needed a Boundary Force like the one assigned to the Punjab.

Tuker refused the offer on the grounds that he was quite capable of handling any likely outbreak with his own forces, and there is no doubt that this tough, shrewd and unswerving soldier intended to keep his Command area out of the communal battle without help from any outside forces. He felt differently, however, about one reinforcement. It came in the shape of Mohandas Gandhi, and he was to prove a One-Man Boundary Force of far greater efficiency than the 50,000 soldiers, with their guns and armoured cars, who failed so abjectly in the Punjab.

It had been Gandhi’s original intention to be in Noakhali, a centre where Hindus had been cruelly persecuted, in the days leading up to the transfer of power. He had not changed his mind about the evils of partition. He was still convinced that Nehru and Patel had chosen wrongly in accepting the plan for a divided India; and he had no intention of being in Delhi or Karachi for the ‘celebrations’. For him Independence Day would be a day of mourning, and Noakhali, where people were suffering, seemed an appropriate location. But on his way there, he was visited by Sir Frederick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal, and a delegation of Muslims. Sir Frederick was determined that his last days in India (for he would be going home after 15 August) should not be disfigured by the murder and mayhem of the year before and he was prepared to use every weapon at hand, moral as well as military, to prevent it. So were the Muslims with him. They pointed out that the situation in Calcutta was hourly growing more grave for members of their community. Most Muslim officials had left the city to go to East Pakistan. The police force (which had been predominantly Muslim) was now both small and Hindu. Communal frenzy was simmering and would obviously soon boil over.

‘The Hindus feel that this is their opportunity to get even with the Muslims for last year,’ said the bluff Sir Frederick, ‘and they are bloody well going to take it. It’ll
be real carnage this time, if it starts—and buggerall we’ll be able to do about it.’

Both he and the Muslim delegates pleaded with Gandhi to stay in Calcutta for a time and ‘throw a pot of water on the fire’. He promised to think it over.

Next day an even larger delegation of Muslims arrived to see him and renewed their pleas for him to stay. The shrewd old man told them that he would stay, but on one condition. They must guarantee peace in Noakhali.

‘If things go wrong there, my life will be forfeit,’ he said. ‘You will have to face a fast to the death on my part.’

The Muslims went into a hurried conference, and then came back and said they would send emissaries at once to the Muslim League leaders in Noakhali, including Mian Ghulam Sarwar, the chief trouble-maker, to ensure that the Hindus would be protected. Gandhi then agreed to stay. It was the sort of horse-trading at which he was an adept. He was to demonstrate more of it in the days to come.

It so happened that Mr Shaheed Suhrarwardy, the re-doubtable Muslim who had for so long bossed Calcutta, was in Karachi when Gandhi arrived. He was for the moment in eclipse and had been to Karachi to see what was to be done about it. He would, of course, no longer have any power in Calcutta once Congress took over. Nor would he be able to dominate East Pakistan, for Mr Jinnah, who did not admire him, had appointed his rival, Nazimuddin, as Governor-designate of that province. Suhrarwardy had flown to Karachi to find out where he could fit into the new State of Pakistan. He quickly discovered that, at least while Jinnah was alive, he could not. He was out.

The ebullient Mr Suhrarwardy was by no means as cast down by this turn in his fortunes as other men might have been. He was a resilient character. Calcutta he had always considered to be his town; there he could find the night-clubs he loved, the blondes he loved even more; and
there was something about the smell, squalor, poverty and even the wickedness of the city which appealed to his temperament. If he was to be in eclipse, where could it better be endured than in Calcutta, whose alleyways were dark anyway?

Fresh from a session in Karachi with Liaquat Ali Khan, he read in the Muslim League newspaper, Dawn, that Gandhi was going to Noakhali. He left immediately for Calcutta and rushed to see Gandhi and added his pleas to those of the local Muslim leaders, asking Gandhi to stay and help to quell the fires, which might soon be burning in the city.

The old man was only too well aware of Suhrarwardy’s reputation as a ruthless political boss, a hedonist, and one whose hands were not entirely clean of the blood shed in the riots of the year before. But to achieve his goal, he was prepared to trade horses with anyone. He told Suhrarwardy that he would certainly stay—if Suhrarwardy would consent to stay at his side and work with him.

‘But of course,’ said Suhrarwardy.

Gandhi: ‘Perhaps you do not completely understand what I mean. When I say at my side, I mean literally at my side. We will go into those parts of the city where the danger is greatest, and there we will set up our abode. We will live together under the same roof. We will have neither the police nor the military to protect us. And we will together preach that now that partition has come, Muslim and Hindu have no longer any need to hate each other or kill each other.’

Suhrarwardy was about to speak, but Gandhi interrupted him and told him to go home and think it over.

The Muslim leader arrived next day to tell Gandhi that he accepted the offer. At his prayer meeting that evening, Gandhi announced that he had elected to stay for a time in Calcutta and that he and Mr Shaheed Suhrarwardy would work together and do their utmost to restore communal peace. There were murmurs from his congregation
that Suhrarwardy was a dangerous person, not to be relied upon.

'The same has been said about me,' Gandhi drily replied.

He had chosen for the site of his mission the Calcutta slum of Beliaghata, a Muslim district surrounded by Hindu slums equally noisome. It was (and still is) an area of appalling poverty, filth, degradation and crime; hovels, brothels and drinking dens, a breeding ground for every kind of disease and mischief, a sore rubbed red by communal killings and maimings. In its midst, like a crumbling stately Southern home out of a Tennessee Williams play, stood Hydari Mansion, once the property of a rich Muslim merchant who had fled when the scum of the slums began to wash against his door. Here Gandhi decided to set up his headquarters. Two of his girl disciples set to work to scrub the floors clear of excrement and drive out the rats and snakes, but it was rather like bailing out a sinking boat with a teaspoon. The rains had come to Calcutta now, and there was mud and slime and stench everywhere.

'So you have got yourself detained in Calcutta,' wrote Sardar Patel to him on 13 August, 'and that too in a quarter which is a veritable shambles and a notorious den of gangsters and hooligans. And in what choice company, too! It is a terrible risk. But more than that, will your health stand the strain? I'm afraid it must be terribly filthy there. Keep me posted about yourself.'

Gandhi had arranged that he and Suhrarwardy should journey to Hydari Mansion together and made a rendezvous with the Muslim leader for 2.30 in the afternoon. Suhrarwardy has never been on time for an appointment in his life (at least not a day-time one) and this was no exception. Gandhi (who was late for an appointment only once in his life)* decided that he had funked it at the last moment and set out in the car on his own. By the time Suhrarwardy arrived at Hydari Mansion, half an hour late, a great crowd of Hindus had gathered around the festering

* And that, curiously enough, on the last day of his life. He was late for prayers on the evening of his assassination.
house, many of them to greet the Mahatma and ask for _darshan_ or blessing, but others to make trouble. They were young members of the militant Mahasabha Party, the violently reactionary Hindu organization, reinforced by _goondas_ from the district hoping for some bloodshed.

‘Why do you come here to protect the Muslims?’ they cried. ‘Why don’t you go to Noakhali and save the Hindus?’

In the midst of all the noise and shouting, Suhrarwardy arrived. For a time he was trapped inside his car while the crowd gibbered around it crying: ‘Muslim pig!’ and ‘Murderer!’ and ‘Thief!’ Someone raised a cry which could only have been heard in India: ‘Let us hang the cow-killing degenerate!’ He sat through it all with, in the circumstances, admirable sang-froid; but he did not attempt to get out of his car until Gandhi sent out disciples to argue with the angry Hindus. It was finally agreed that if they would allow Suhrarwardy to leave his car, Gandhi would receive a delegation. The Muslim leader descended, and walked into the house through the sullen, glowering mob. It was now seen that he had come on his mission dressed in an open shirt and a pair of tartan shorts.

Rarely have two men of such different quality, temperament, habits and ways of life come together on such a mission. It is typical of Gandhi that though he was a passionate devotee of cleanliness and fastidious in his habits, he did not appear to be disturbed by the noisome nature of his surroundings. It had begun to rain outside, and scores of the demonstrators swarmed into the house. They used the single latrine which the mansion possessed, and they spat phlegm and betel nut juice on the floor. Soon the corridors were awash with excrement, urine and spittle. The stench of it mingled with the disinfectant and bug powder, which the acolytes had sprinkled freely around the house, and produced a stench that turned Suhrarwardy green.

Gandhi: ‘You should not think about it, my friend. Drive all thought of it out of your mind.’
Suhrarwardy: 'How can I drive it out of my mind, when it keeps coming in through my nostrils?'

Yet though the bugs and the filth worried him, the menacing crowd seemed hardly to do so at all. While Gandhi talked to the delegation, the mob began to chuck bricks at the windows; Gandhi went to expostulate with them and ask them to show circumspection, but they shouted:

'Why doesn't Suhrarwardy show himself?'

Suhrarwardy moved to the window, but was told by the Mahatma to remain out of sight for the moment. The next night, however, when demonstrators shouted his name again, he came to the window. Gandhi stood beside him, his hand on his shoulder, while the Muslim cried to the mob:

'It is Bengal's great good fortune that Mahatmaji is in our midst at this hour. Will Bengal realize its high privilege and stop the fratricide?'

A Hindu cried: 'You were responsible for the great Calcutta killing, were you not?'

Replied Suhrarwardy: 'Yes, we all were.'

The crowd: 'Answer the question!'

Suhrarwardy: 'Yes, it was my responsibility.'

He remained facing them, almost daring them to throw their bricks at him, but there was something in the attitude of this arrogant politician which impressed them; but this time it was humility. When next the extremist Hindus came in to argue with Gandhi, there were less outbursts and more questions. From that moment on, Gandhi and Suhrarwardy went together to his prayer meetings, and on several occasions addressed crowds of anything from ten to a hundred thousand people.

The amazing, the miraculous thing was that the magic of Gandhi's personality, plus the shrewdness of his tac-

* It was typical of Gandhi that he persuaded the crowd to cease defiling his abode, not by requesting them to do so, but by taking off his sandals and walking about in the slime barefooted. They became slightly more circumspect, out of shame.
tics, worked. Twenty-four hours after his arrival, 5,000 Muslims and Hindus were walking in joint procession through the slums of Beliaghata, crying slogans no one had ever thought to hear any more:

_Hindu Muslim ek ho!_ and _Hindu Muslim bhai bhai!_ (‘Hindus and Muslims Unite!’ and ‘Hindus and Muslims are Brothers!’)

The killings ceased. Lieutenant-General Tuker had his British and Gurkha ‘fire squadrons’ ready for instant action, but they were not needed. The British population of Calcutta, which had looked on in disgust and despair at the communal slaughter of a year before, now saw Hindus and Muslims embracing each other. And the magic was spreading. In Bihar and in Noakhali the outbreaks of savagery were dying down.

‘Here in the compound,’ wrote Gandhi, ‘numberless Hindus continue to stream in shouting the favourite slogans. One might almost say that the joy of fraternization is leaping up from hour to hour. Is this to be called a miracle or an accident? By whatever name it may be described, it is quite clear that the credit that is being given to me from all sides is quite undeserved; nor can it be said to be deserved by Suhrarwardy. It is not the work of one or two men. We are toys in the house of God. He makes us dance to His tune. The utmost, therefore, that man can do is to refrain from interfering with the dance and that he should tender full obedience to his Maker’s will. Thus considered, it can be said that in this miracle He has used us two as His instruments and as for myself I ask only whether the dream of my youth is to be realised in the evening of my life.’*

It would not be realized, of course. His dream had always been of a free India but also one that was united, irrespective of the religions of its peoples. He could bring Hindus and Muslims together, but he could not rejoin the bleeding India which the politicians had torn in two.

* _Harijan_, Gandhi’s newspaper.
Mountbatten wrote to him:

'In the Punjab we have 50,000 soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the One-Man Boundary Force, not forgetting his Second-in-Command, Mr Suhrarwardy?'

There was little enough to be happy about in the Indian communal scene during the bloodthirsty days of August 1947, but Calcutta and the rest of Bengal produced events to make men rejoice and hope in a moment when there was so much to arouse feelings of despair.

The inspiration for it came from two men who, as they paddled through the mud and filth of Calcutta on their mission of peace, looked like characters from an Oriental version of an old-time Laurel and Hardy film: Mahatma Gandhi, calm, serene, smiling, in his loincloth; and Shaheed Suhrarwardy, sweating profusely from the unaccustomed exercise, waddling along beside him, in his open shirt and tartan-patterned shorts.

While partition committees squabbled and bickered, Princes bargained for their pensions and politicians began practising before their mirrors for the great day, the Viceroy's office worried over the ceremonies which would be gone through on 15 August. There was no blueprint for the occasion and no precedent either. The British had never given away a slice of their Empire before. They were doing it in haste, but with goodwill. But how and with what ceremonial?

Lord Ismay wrote a note to the Viceroy under the heading, 'Ceremonies on the Day of Transfer of Power' in which he said:

'Ve suggest that this constitutes a major political issue. The following points arise:—

a. There should be ceremonies in the the capitals of both Dominions ... It would be perfectly possible for you to attend a ceremony in Delhi in the morning and in the Pakistan capital, having flown thither, in the afternoon.'
b. We feel that, in connection with the Delhi ceremony, we should go out with the flag flying high. Pandit Nehru may not want too much ostentation and might prefer a simple ceremony. The form of the ceremonies would have to be a question of discussion between you and the two Prime Ministers and we are sure that they would fall in with your wishes.

c. The Durbar Hall would presumably be the venue of the Delhi ceremony. At both it is to be hoped that you would be able to read out a message from His Majesty the King.

d. It is hoped that Dominion representatives will be there.

e. The question of troops to take part in the ceremony arises. It is hoped that each Dominion would, by the date of the transfer of power, have at least one unit composed purely of its own nationals. British troops would take part and units would be available in both capitals.

f. We suggest that a letter should be sent to the India Office seeking guidance.*

But this note was written at the time when it was still believed that Jinnah would allow Mountbatten to be the first Governor-General of Pakistan, and at the time, moreover, when Ismay presumed that Independence Day would be a ceremonial occasion at which Britain—as the hander-on of power—should be and would be the principal participant.

Neither Jinnah nor Nehru had, however, fought for power this long to be willing to share it with the British Raj (though Nehru did show every willingness to share it with Mountbatten). The Muslim League leader let it be known that he would like Pakistan’s Independence Day to be purely his, and suggested that Mountbatten should fly in to Karachi on 14 August for a preliminary ceremony, leaving 15 August to him. This, in fact, suited

* Government of India Records.
Mountbatten admirably, for there was no doubt where he wanted to be on 15 August—in Delhi.

The Labour Government at home did not share Ismay’s confidence that the Indian masses would appreciate a message from King-Emperor George the Sixth.

‘The question of a message from the King seems to me a delicate matter,’ cabled Lord Listowel, the Secretary of State for India. ‘I should have thought that we did not want to lay too great a stress on the position of the King in relation to the two new Dominions. On the other hand, the message could hardly be a farewell message. Unless we can devise some context for it which is merely formal, and which is not likely to give offence in any quarter, British or Indian, it might be better to have no message... There will, of course, anyhow, have to be the formal Proclamation abandoning the style of Emperor of India.’*

And what about the playing of ‘God Save the King’, the British National Anthem? A month before everyone had been in favour of hearing it at the ceremony, but as the last days were torn off the calendar, the Viceroy began to have qualms.

It would be foolish, he indicated, to do anything which might be provocative. In his view, the playing of ‘God Save the King’ should be avoided as far as possible. He suggested that Campbell-Johnson should make discreet inquiries about the Delhi ceremony, and if the British National Anthem was not expected, it might be that a pipe band should take the place of a brass band. He ordered a note to be sent to Provincial Governors in which he said:

‘My general policy about playing the National Anthem after the transfer of power is that playing it in public should be avoided. As far as possible, it should be confined to Governors’ houses. At the ceremony of transfer, Governors are entitled to the Royal Salute and the

* Government of India Records.
first part of the National Anthem.' He added: 'But there is no need to insist on the latter, and there is no intention of insisting here.'*

Nothing, absolutely nothing, must be allowed to mar the ceremonial. On that Mountbatten was determined. He had moved too fast and taken too many risks to allow a blunder or a mistake, or any kind of bad news, to wreck the goodwill which he had built up between the new Dominions and Britain. At all costs 15 August must be a day of rejoicing for the people of India and Pakistan, and as the architect of their happiness Mountbatten was prepared to take a final risk to ensure it.

He had bad news in his pocket, but he refused to have it on his conscience as well. Since 9 August, he had been in possession of Sir Cyril Radcliffe's Boundary Awards. They would alter the lives of millions of people. They would cause shock, despair and insensate fury. In the East of India, Sir Cyril had awarded the Chittagong Hill Tracts to East Pakistan, and that would be bitterly resented by Congress. In the West, he had cut a line boldly down two of the Punjab's five rivers in such a way that most of the great canal systems, which the Sikhs had financed and built, most of the great wheatlands, which they owned, most of the Sikh shrines plus the city of Lahore went to Pakistan. All the places which, in fact, the Sikhs hoped out of hope to get in the end had been awarded to the Muslims.

But there was one award which was obviously bound to anger the Muslims too. The district of Gurdaspur, a No-Man's-Land between the two Dominions, *though one with a Muslim majority population,* † was given to India. Gurdaspur provided the only road and rail link between Kashmir and India, which otherwise would have had none. In the light of subsequent happenings, it seemed to some people, particularly friends of Pakistan, a suspicious decision to have given.

* Government of India Records.
† My Italics—L. M.
Here were the answers to the desperately anxious questions of millions of Indians, particularly in the Punjab. For the Sikhs and Hindus in Western Punjab and the non-Muslim inhabitants of Lahore, it was, of course, vital information; having hopes that the 'other factors' mentioned in Sir Cyril Radcliffe's brief would include the ownership of land or homes, they had stayed on. This Award would be the signal to them to collect up whatever belongings they had and go East. In the mounting glare of communal tension, the sooner they knew their fate the better.

Why then did not Mountbatten release the news of the Awards?

This is where trouble begins.

To anyone who has studied Mountbatten's character, the reason for holding it back was obvious. Campbell-Johnson puts his master's state of mind quite clearly when he writes:

'Various points of view about publication were put forward. On administrative grounds it was argued that earliest possible announcement would be of help to Jenkins and would enable last-minute troop movements to be made into the affected areas in advance of the transfer of power. Alternatively, it was suggested that insofar as the Award would in any case be bound to touch off trouble, the best date to release it would be 14th August. Mountbatten said that if he could exercise some discretion in the matter he would prefer to postpone its appearance until after the Independence Day celebrations, feeling that the problem of its timing was one of psychology, and that the controversy and grief it was bound to arouse on both sides should not be allowed to mar Independence Day itself.\'*

As a man of success, he was, of course, bound to be against anything which would cloud the clear skies of Independence Day. In the light of subsequent events, he was obviously wrong to suppress the report for so

\* Op. cit; my italics—L. M.
many days, and he was obviously even more wrong in failing to take the Indian and Pakistan leaders into his confidence. A prior report would have given millions of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims a chance to pack their bags and leave; a confidential report to Nehru, Jinnah and to the Punjab Boundary Force commander, General Rees, would have made it possible for dispositions and arrangements to be made to allow them to leave in some semblance of order. But Mountbatten took no one into his confidence. He hugged the Awards to himself and suppressed them until after Independence Day. Independence Day was happy. But millions of people died or lost everything as a result.

This is a matter for Mountbatten’s conscience. It obviously did not trouble him—or possibly did not even occur to him—for Campbell-Johnson writes of his mood in the last minutes of the British Raj:

‘As midnight struck, Mountbatten was sitting quietly at his desk. I have known him in most moods; tonight there was an air about him of serenity, almost detachment. The scale of his personal achievement was too great for elation; rather his sense of history and the fitness of things at this dramatic moment, when the old and the new order were reconciled in himself, called forth composure.’

For a man sitting on a revelation which would, in the next few weeks, cause the death of nearly a million people and provoke the greatest and most miserable trek in history, it was a remarkable mood to be in. And yet, as Mountbatten was himself subsequently to say,* what really did anything matter to the Indians except Independence?

What is certain about the suppression of the Boundary Awards is that there was no ulterior motive behind it, as Mr Jinnah and certain Pakistanis were to believe in the days to come. Nor would even they ever have

* To the author.
come to believe it but for a succession of coincidences and mischief-making which, at the time, they were in no position to check.

It so happened that on 8 August, the evening before Mountbatten received the Radcliffe Awards, Sir Evan Jenkins came through from Simla on the telephone to George Abell, in a state of considerable agitation, to ask if the Award for the Punjab was ready. When told it was not, he pleaded with Abell to find out something about it in order that he could disperse his troops and police to meet the inevitable disturbances.

Abell got into touch with Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s office and asked for information. What happened next is a mystery. Certainly Sir Cyril told him nothing. Whether any members of his Secretariat did is another matter, though it seems unlikely. George Abell, however, then sent a ‘rough sketch map’ which had, he said, been ‘taken down over the telephone’ to Sir Evan Jenkins. The sketch-map showed the towns of Ferozepur and Zira on the Pakistan side of the boundary.

When the award was subsequently published, both these towns were awarded to India.

The sketch was, of course, quite unofficial. In any case, to ‘take down a map over the telephone’ is obviously a chancy business. And the matter might have rested there, had it not happened that Sir Evan Jenkins left the sketch-map in his safe when he departed for England on 15 August. The Governor of West Punjab, who took over Jenkins’s office in Lahore, was an Englishman, Sir John Mudie. He found the map. Instead of sending it on to Sir Evan Jenkins or to the India Office Records Department, he passed it on to Mr Jinnah. Mr Jinnah turned it over to his experts. They accepted it immediately as an official map. Noting its date as 8 August, they at once presumed that this was the reason why Mountbatten had held back the Awards until after Independence Day. He wanted Sir Cyril Radcliffe to make alterations which would be more in keeping with Nehru
and India’s wishes; and they charged that in the intervening days, he had not only persuaded Sir Cyril to transfer Ferozepur and Zira from Pakistan to India but also Gurdaspur as well, thus giving India a link with Kashmir which she would not otherwise have had, and without which she could hardly claim connexion with the State.

Mountbatten has never denied the Pakistan charges against him in connexion with the ‘sketch-map story’, preferring to let the facts speak for themselves. The author has no doubt, after considerable investigation, that he may have been wrong in holding back the Awards, but that conspiracy is out of the question. To suggest, as many Pakistanis did, that he ‘fiddled’ the Awards in order to revenge himself on Jinnah for his snub over the Governor-Generalship is to misjudge Mountbatten’s character profoundly.

His innocence of conspiracy is manifest. His innocence of considerable lack of judgment in suppressing the Awards is not so clear.

CHAPTER TEN

‘TWO CHEERS FOR BRITAIN’

‘To all British units in Eastern Command,’ wrote Lieutenant-General Tuker on 14 August 1947. ‘Today is the last day on which you perform your duties in India, as British Regiments of all arms have performed them for the last two hundred years. The British Army has been for all these years the firm structure on which our nation has succeeded in building for the first time in all history an India which was one single geographic and administrative whole . . .

B. R.—10
Your famous Regiments now leave India for good.

'Today, therefore, I am thanking you on behalf of every officer and man for all that you have done for us in these past two difficult years... In these last few days of waiting, do well as you have done so far, and leave India with your fame at the peak of its honour. Take with you to Britain the willing spirit of co-operation that you have shown out here in the cause of India, and so strive for your country...'

On that same day, Sir Claude Auchenleck issued his own order:

SPECIAL INDIAN ARMY ORDER

by


This is the last India Army Order.

Auchenleck, who was now Supreme Commander of both the new Pakistan and India Armies, was in no mood for valedictories. On 14 August his plane halted at Lahore on its way to Delhi from Karachi. In another twenty-four hours, India and Pakistan would be free. But what was freedom going to mean in the Punjab?

'As he looked down on the great plain of the Punjab,' wrote John Connell,* 'he saw smoke rising from every village, to the limits of that vast horizon, and along the dusty roads the endless streams of refugees trudging east and west.'

The greatest treks had not yet, in fact, begun. Millions of non-Muslims in West Punjab and millions of Muslims in East Punjab were staying on, hoping against hope that the Boundary Awards would incorporate their villages, homes and land in the new Dominion of their choice. Their leaders—not knowing what only Radcliffe and Mountbatten knew—urged them to stay on, and many did so, in spite of constant and savage intimidation.

* Auchenleck, A Critical Biography.
In Amritsar, whole areas containing Muslim shops were aflame. Auchinleck, General Rees (the Punjab Boundary Force Commander) and Sir Evan Jenkins held an emergency conference at Lahore airport. Even as they talked, Muslims were turning on a crowd of Sikhs queueing for a train at Lahore Station and stabbed dozens of them, while police stood by and watched. Jenkins explained to Auchinleck that his police force had turned into a communal instrument and could no longer be trusted. Ten per cent of the houses in the city had been destroyed. There were not enough officials to maintain martial law, even if it were declared. The Governor was plainly at the end of his rope. In less than twenty-four hours, he would be on a plane flying back to England; but for the moment, as Governor of his beloved Punjab, he carried the whole weight of the crisis on his shoulders and his anguish was plain to see.

So also was the despair of General Rees. His Punjab Boundary Force—upon which Mountbatten and the politicians in Delhi had relied entirely for the peaceful transfer of power—had been in the field for only three weeks, but Rees knew that it was a complete and utter failure. How could it have been otherwise? The 4th Indian Division, which was the nucleus of the Force, was a splendid body of men, but it was now subjected to strains and stresses of a kind which it had never known in war.

As its Muslim members in the Sikh areas saw their fellow-religionists being killed and maimed, they became less and less inclined to succour and protect non-Muslims. The Sikh and Hindu troops were constantly subjected to propaganda from renegade soldiers—most of them ex-members of the pro-Japanese Indian National Army—and urged to desert with their arms or look the other way when an illegal raid was in progress. Each soldier, of no matter what community, worried about the safety of his family, for many a Muslim had his wife and
children in Bombay and many a Hindu’s regiment was based on Rawalpindi or Peshawar.

Not only that, but they knew that their British officers had lost heart and influence. This was not unexpected in view of the fact that tomorrow or the next day they would be on their way back to England. Their prestige and power had been pierced by the end of the British Raj and the division of the Army. They could no longer expect to be obeyed with unswerving and unquestioning loyalty. It was natural, in the circumstances, that when they were confronted by a situation which a sharp burst of machine-gun fire, or a mortar bomb, or a bombardment could have solved, they hesitated. Would their troops obey them? And if they obeyed, and scores of Indians were killed, what would the politicians say? Would they be made the scapegoats and condemned as murderers rather than praised as impartial custodians of the peace?

‘Every day,’ said Jenkins, ‘the local leaders would come in and ask the Force to open fire on looters and raiders, but it was always the other side’s looters and raiders, and they became furious when one suggested a few shots at their own’.*

It so happened that there were two Indian officers attached to the Punjab Boundary Force who were subsequently to rise to high rank in their own countries. One was Brigadier Ayub Khan, later to become Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan, and the other was Brigadier K. S. Thimayya, later to become General Thimayya, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Armed Forces. One was, of course, a Muslim and the other a Hindu. Both, in conversations with the author, shared the opinion that the British officers were in an impossible position and that the Force should never have been sent out into the field. Both agreed that whatever forces were used should have been commanded by Indian officers rather than British; Indian officers who would not have

* In a conversation with the author.
hesitated to order their troops to fire, and would have been implicitly obeyed.

According to the official history of the 4th Indian Division, General Rees at the Lahore Airfield conference "further voiced the opinion that the use of troops, even in prohibitive numbers, would fail to mend the situation. With communities, millions strong, completely out of hand, only the intervention of national and parochial leaders would halt the campaign of extermination."

But the national leaders were too busy preparing for the celebrations of Independence Day.

Rees reported his position roughly as follows: The Sikhs, as they had threatened (and as Delhi had been warned) had opened their campaign of violence in the second week of August. It was as if in realizing at last that they would be the scapegoats of partition, no matter where the new Boundary ran, they could think of only one anodyne for the pain that consumed them, and that was to kill, kill, kill. The killing was both planned and at the same time blind and insensate. The Sikh leaders sat at the feet of their leader, Master Tara Singh, in the Golden Temple at Amritsar and listened to his inflammatory encouragement to violence, and then slipped away to pass the word to the gurdwaras throughout the province. It is ironic that inside the compound of the Golden Temple gurus at one side were reading aloud the words of the Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Book, counselling their people to gentleness and goodwill to all men, while a hundred yards away, within the same sacred precincts, men were being exhorted to murder. They had already formed themselves into murder gangs known as Jathas.

'Jathas were of various kinds,' reported Rees, 'in strength from twenty to thirty men up to five or six hundred or more. When an expedition was of limited

* Lieut-Col. G. R. Stevens, O.B.E., History of the 4th Indian Division.
scope the Jathas did not usually increase beyond the numbers which had originally set out; but if the projected operation was to attack a village, a convoy or a train, the local villagers would join and swell the assailants to several thousands. They had recognized leaders, headquarters which constantly shifted about, and messengers who travelled on foot, on horseback and even by motor transport. The usual method of attack, apart from assaults on villages, was from ambush. Information as to the movement of convoys or trains was relatively easy to obtain. As the crops were high, it was simple to ambush marching columns of refugees. The attackers would remain concealed until the last moment and then would pour in a stampeding volley, usually in the North West Frontier fashion, from the opposite side from where the shock assailants lay in wait. In spite of the best efforts of the escorts to hold them together, the refugees would scatter in panic; whereupon the ambush parties would dash in with sword and spear. With attackers and attacked inextricably mixed, the escort usually was unable to protect its charges.*

The Sikhs were the aggressors and they were better armed and prepared than the Muslims. ‘The kirpan—the token sword which is one of the five characteristic Sikh possessions—had metamorphosed,’ it was reported,* ‘for the purpose of vengeance into a formidable cutlass or dah. It was supplemented by home-made spears, hatchets and battle-axes, by crude bombards and mortars and also by shields and armour... The Jathas possessed hard cores of skilled fighters armed with rifles, grenades, Tommy-guns and machine-guns. Although the Punjab Mussulmans also possessed firearms and trained men, and a nuclear military organization in the Muslim League National Guards, they lacked the cohesiveness of the Sikhs.’

* Stevens, op. cit.
Certainly, the Muslims were nowhere as near ready to strike as the Sikhs. They often met Sikh raids armed only with flails or scythes.

But they learned. In the last days and hours of the Raj, the casualties were mostly Muslim. The Jatha gangs had it all their own way. But though the killing and raping was planned and was successful enough to give even the bloodthirstiest a surfeit of flesh and an engorgement of revenge, it was obviously neither going to be successful in itself nor would it, in the end, do anything but harm to the Sikh people themselves. For the majority of the Sikhs were in West Punjab. Each killing of a Muslim in the East would inevitably menace the life of Sikhs in the West, for the Muslims were at least equally as thirsty for blood and even more ruthless when stimulated by the encouragement of revenge.

This was not a Hindu-Muslim war but a Sikh-Muslim war, and it is all the more difficult to understand why Nehru for Congress and Jinnah for the Muslim League did not intervene. A call to both of them from Mountbatten could surely not have failed to produce some result. As an official report, hitherto suppressed, said of the last few days before Independence Day:

'The influential Hindu community, although suffering heavily at times, played a relatively minor role in this war of vengeance. Extremists of the RSSS (the Hindu extremist storm-troopers, the Rashtarya Swayam Sevak Sangh)* confined their activities to back-alley strangling of Muslims and window smashing in the principal towns . . . but, like point and counter-point of a devilish harmony, the dark alleys and squalid warrens began to re-echo each other, as knives took toll of Sikhs in Lahore and grenades blasted Mussulmans in Amritsar. In the key Sikh area of the Manja, the fruitful triangle of countryside between the junction of the Sutlej and Beas rivers, the first Jathas appeared in the fields and began

* One of whose members later assassinated Gandhi.
to exterminate the Muslim population of the villages. Day by day killings mounted to peak ferocity. At Gujranwala, to the north of Lahore, the Mussulmans struck back and hundreds of Sikhs were hunted to death. From all parts of Central Punjab there flowed fearful tales of destruction.*

The killings were ‘pre-mediaeval’ (to use General Rees’s word) in their ferocity. Lieutenant-Colonel P. S. Mitchison, D.S.O., who took over the 4th Indian Division as G.S.O., described a characteristic scene in this way:

‘Motoring from Beas to Lahore, at a time when 100,000 Mussulmans on foot were making their way westwards through Amritsar, in the course of fifty miles I saw between 400 to 600 dead. One attack on the refugees went in from thick crops while I was nearby. In a few minutes fifty men, women and children were slashed to pieces while thirty others came running back towards us with wounds streaming.

‘We got up a tank of 18th Cavalry which killed six Sikh attackers and took three prisoners. The latter proved most useful as under interrogation they gave the names of the villages responsible for the ambush. These villages were immediately searched and fined.’†

But everyone emphasized that there was one way, and one way only, to bring peace to the Punjab. That was to persuade Nehru for Congress and Jinnah for the Muslim League of its desperate nature. They must be brought personally to the Punjab to see what was going on. They must not only give orders to the ring-leaders to cease their incitement to murder and rape and massacre. They must show themselves as the real rulers of their new Dominions by exercising discipline and control. Jinnah must call off his Muslim raiders. Nehru must

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* Government of India Records.
† 4th Indian Division Intelligence Report.
clamp down on the blind, berserk and blood-drunk Sikhs, even if it meant imprisoning their leaders.

Here was a last-minute task for the Viceroy which might have given a golden tint to his crown in the last hours of his reign. He had been so unorthodox in the past, that surely here was the moment to make his final envoi as a Viceroy in a blaze of missionary glory. He was hardly ignorant of what was happening in the Punjab. He must have known that the Punjab Boundary Force was a failure. He must have realized that his promise to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to protect the hair and head of every Hindu, Sikh and Muslim was now a hollow mockery.

The Viceroy flew to Karachi on 13 August to convey his greeting and that of the King to the new Dominion of Pakistan, his last official duty as Viceroy, and he was perhaps even more charmingly cool and self-contained than ever. When told that the plot to assassinate Mr Jinnah had now been confirmed and that it was believed a bomb would be thrown at his car during the ceremonial ride on 14 August, Mountbatten at once offered to ride with the Muslim leader. He was unshaken when Jinnah, at a formal banquet in the evening, rose and began to read a long, prepared speech—after Campbell-Johnson had told him there would be no formal speeches. He replied with a ten minute discourse which, though extemporaneous, sounded as if it had been mugged up for weeks.

‘The birth of Pakistan,’ he said, in an address before the Assembly on 14 August, ‘is an event in history. We, who are part of history, and are helping to make it, are not well-placed, even if we wished, to moralize on the event, to look back and survey the sequence of the past that led to it. History seems sometimes to move with the infinite slowness of a glacier and sometimes to rush forward in a torrent. Just now, in this part of the world our united efforts have melted the ice and moved some impediments in the stream, and we are carried onwards
in the full flood. There is no time to look back. There is time only to look forward.

He drove with Jinnah through streets crowded with politely rather than wildly enthusiastic crowds. Jinnah was tense and nervous. The Viceroy had never looked so relaxed. But no one booed and no bomb was thrown, and Mountbatten took it like a gentleman when, at the end of the ride, Jinnah put his hand on his knee and said:

'Thank God I was able to bring you back alive!'

Mountbatten was glad to be able to leave that afternoon and fly back to Delhi. For him Karachi and Pakistan were sideshows, and Delhi was where he wanted to be. He knew, in any case, that Jinnah was determined not to have him around on Independence Day to steal his thunder. He had told his A.D.C., the day he arrived in Karachi:

'I never thought it would happen. I never expected to see Pakistan in my lifetime.'

But it had come to pass. He would see its birth on the morrow, fully aware that it had been a one-man job, supremely conscious that without Jinnah there would certainly never have been a Pakistan. He did not want Mountbatten around in that glorious moment when he could face his people and say:

'Pakistan Jindabad!' or in other words, 'L'Etat, c'est moi!'

The Union Jack, which had flown night and day since 1847 from the Residency at Lucknow, was unobtrusively hauled down on the evening of 13 August 1947, and sent to Field Marshal Auchinleck. He took it back to King George the Sixth to put with other historic British flags in the museum at Windsor Castle. When an Indian procession arrived next day to hoist an Indian Union flag in its place, they discovered that the pole had been severed at the base and removed.

Mountbatten had been cherishing a secret to himself, but now he confided it to his Staff. On Independence
Day, he would be created an Earl for his services as Viceroy.

George Abell had already been knighted for his services in a ceremony conducted by Mountbatten, and the Viceroy had sent his own list of recommendations to London for the consideration of the King. On whom would the accolades fall? Sir Claude Auchinleck, having heard that he had been recommended for a barony, at once wrote a letter of refusal. Lord Ismay called for the list to see that his own subordinates had been rewarded for their work, and, to his astonishment, saw his own name at the head of the list. He had been recommended for a K.G.S.I. (Knight Grand Cross of the Star of India, the highest award in the Indian Empire). It was a decoration for which he had yearned as the summit of achievement when he was a young subaltern in India thirty-five years earlier. But as a true-blue Briton of the old school, he did not consider that the giving away of India was work worthy of being rewarded by his King.

He put a line through his name and went to tell the Viceroy that he could not accept the honour. Mountbatten tartly retorted that it was too late in the day; the recommendation had gone through. Ismay replied that if the Viceroy didn’t cancel it, and at once, by cable, he would do so himself. The cable was sent off at once. The King was furious, but he took Ismay’s name out of the list.

Ismay retired to bed with a bout of dysentery which lasted until the Independence Day festivities were over.

In Delhi now the air throbbed with excitement as well as heat as the last hours of 14 August ticked away. The ceremonial arches were all up now. Flags flew everywhere. Bullock carts packed with peasants crawled into the city, ready for the celebrations. It was doubtful if anyone would sleep in India that night, and, in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, at least, it would be because the mood was one of intense joy and jubilation.

In dhotis newly laundered and proud Gandhi caps, the members of the Legislative Assembly gathered in the even-
ing for a solemn ceremony of welcome to the new Dominion. They would stay there until midnight in an ecstatic vigil of the kind that Indians had never known before and would never know again. Freedom at last. The freedom for which they had given up so much of their lives, for which so many of them had gone to jail. They were nearly all there: Nehru, his saffron face drawn with weariness, rings under his eyes, in a state of sublime exhaustion; Patel, more like a Roman Emperor than ever, wearing his dhoti like a toga and his triumph like a flag; a grinning Rajagopalachari, as near to a state of intoxication as that dedicated old teetotaller will ever be; Prasad, near to tears; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, actually in tears; and only the sad, sad face of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, to whom this occasion was something of a tragedy, sticking out from the sea of happy faces like a gaunt and ravaged rock.

The happy Congressmen ignored him. The only presence which might have disturbed them at this moment was that of the man who had done more than all of them put together to win India her freedom, but for whom, in the last months, the achievement had turned sour. For him, too, this was no occasion for rejoicing. It was true that the country was free. But more important, it was also torn asunder and bleeding. For Mahatma Gandhi, there was only one place to be at this moment—in a noisome slum where he could bring a little peace and comfort, where he could fast for his people’s sins, and where he could mourn the India, united as well as free, for which he had worked and prayed and schemed and dreamed.

It was an occasion to challenge a leader to match his words with the mood and the hour, but Jawaharlal Nehru could always be relied upon to rise to the occasion. When he rose to call upon the Assembly to take the pledge of dedication to the new Dominion of India, he said:

‘Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not
wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.'

Midnight came. It was over. With neither a roar nor a whimper, but with a hardly audible sigh, 182 years of British rule in India came to an end. The British Raj which had ruled the country, unified the country, brought it justice, medicine, good government—and had also exploited its wealth and patronized its people—was no more.

And perhaps the manner of its departure and the arrival of the new order could not be better described than in a naive poem which Mr Chia Luen Lo, the Chinese Ambassador to India, wrote to salute the occasion:

‘India be free  
Won’t that be  
A Himalayan dream?  
How fantastic  
How absurd an idea  
That never occurred to me . . .

Suddenly and incredibly triumphed  
Wisdom  
Where the East and West met on a  
common ground.

What a miracle  
That independence can be  
 Without a war! History will tell you  
It has never happened before.  
Be Brave, forward  
Riders on the chariot of time!  
While approaching the mountain peak  
Redouble your efforts to climb!
Unfailingy you will arrive at your ideal
Lofty and beautiful
Noble and sublime.'

There were many similar sentiments voiced in India on the morning of 15 August. And around the world, in hailing the new Dominions, the statesmen and commentators praised the wisdom of Britain for having given them their freedom. Everyone was happy.

The crowds celebrated in a delirium of delight in Delhi and cried indiscriminately: *Jai Hind and Mountbatten ki Jai* and *Nehru Mountbatten ek ho* whenever they caught a glimpse of their heroes. The bands marching the streets of Bombay felt that they could hardly play 'God Save the King' any more, so they played 'God Bless the Prince of Wales' instead. And far from wreaking any vengeance on the ousted Britons, their hated masters, the Indians rushed to embrace them. ‘After you,’ they cried, in front of doors or lifts. ‘You are our guests now.’ K. M. Munshi, an old Congress fighter, wrote:

‘No power in history but Great Britain would have conceded independence with such grace, and no power but India would have so gracefully acknowledged the debt.’

It was a fairy tale play in which even the villain was reformed and reconciled by the end. Or so it seemed.

But not all India celebrated with such harmless ecstasy on Independence Day. That morning, in the bazar quarter of Amritsar, the Sikhs rounded up a large group of Muslim girls and women, stripped them of their clothes, and then forced them to parade in a circle before the jeering crowd. Then a number of the choicest and youngest were dragged off and raped repeatedly. The others were chopped down by *kirpans*, and out of thirty of them only half a dozen reached the sanctuary of the Golden Temple alive.

In Lahore that evening, a Muslim mob attacked the chief Sikh gurdwara in the city. Scores of Sikhs had taken refuge there. The Muslim authorities in the city had pledged
General Rees to protect them. But their police stood by and did not interfere when the gurdwara was put to the flames and the desperate screams of its trapped inmates began to be heard.

India was free, and in Delhi and Karachi it felt wonderful.

But in the Punjab, independence was something else again.

**EPILOGUE**

In the nine months between August 1947 and the spring of the following year, between fourteen and sixteen million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were forced to leave their homes and flee to safety from blood-crazed mobs. In that same period over 600,000 of them were killed. But no, not just killed. If they were children, they were picked up by the feet and their heads smashed against the wall. If they were female children, they were raped. If they were girls, they were raped and then their breasts were chopped off. And if they were pregnant, they were disembowelled.

It was a period in India’s history when India’s women in the Punjab and the United Provinces and Bihar were reminded of a useful hint handed down through harems and women’s quarters from the time of the Moghuls—that the way to avoid pregnancy as a result of being raped is to struggle, always to struggle.

It was a time when trains were arriving in Lahore Station packed with passengers, all of them dead, with messages scribbled on the sides of the carriages reading: ‘A present from India.’ So, course, the Muslims sent back trainloads of butchered Sikhs and Hindus with the message: ‘A present from Pakistan.’ In a land, which, under Gandhi, had adopted as a national religion the cult of *ahimsa* and non-violence there took place murder, looting, burning and
raping such as the world has not seen since the days of
Jenghis Khan. ‘Freedom must not stink!’ cried an Indian
journalist in a famous pamphlet issued at the time.* But
all India stank—with the stench of countless thousands of
dead bodies, with the stench of evil deeds, with the stench
of fires.

India in 1947 was a bumper year for vultures. They
had no need to look for rotting flesh for it was all around
them, animal and human. One convoy of Sikhs and Hindus
from West Punjab was 74 miles long, and the raiders
who attacked it constantly en route did not need to watch
for it: they could smell its coming, for it was riddled with
cholera and other foul diseases. And such was its mood
that, upon sighting a long Muslim convoy of refugees
coming the other way, the able-bodied members of the
Indian convoy set off to do some killing of their own.

If the Sikhs were sullen and vicious before independence,
they became mad with rage after the announcement of the
Boundary Awards on 17 August. It was worse even than
they had feared. Their lands, their canals, their homes
in the rich and fertile West would all be within the bound-
aries of the hated Pakistan. They reacted in a monstrous
reflex action, an ejaculation of berserk fury in which they
cut down every Muslim in sight and vowed to kill them,
but not too quickly. Sikh leaders and Sikh princes joined
in exhorting their unhappy followers to ever more extrava-
gerant excesses.

Both sides had signed, on 20 July, at Mountbatten’s
behest, a declaration that they would respect the rights of
minorities. But Mountbatten was right in suspecting that
they did not know what they were signing. The Sikh policy
was to exterminate the Muslims in their midst. The Mus-
lims, with their eyes on the rich Sikh farmlands, were con-
tent to drive the Sikhs out and only massacre those who
insisted on remaining. It is sad to have to admit that in
their deliberate disobedience of their signed pledge they

* D. F. Karaka, Freedom Must Not Stink, Bombay—the ac-
count of a visit to the Punjab.
were encouraged by the British Governor of West Punjab, Sir Francis Mudie, who wrote to Mr Jinnah on 5 September 1947:

'I am telling everyone that I don’t care how the Sikhs get across the border; the great thing is to get rid of them as soon as possible.'

600,000 dead. 14,000,000 driven from their homes. 100,000 young girls kidnapped by both sides, forcibly converted or sold on the auction block.*

In the light of what was achieved in giving India its freedom, the sacrifice was not so much, after all.

That, at least, is what supporters of Earl Mountbatten would say. They make the point that while Mountbatten was Supreme Commander in South East Asia during the War he tried, while continuing to fight the Japanese, to do something for the victims of the great Bengal Famine. He assigned ten per cent of the holds of his ships, bringing supplies to the Fourteenth Army, to food for the Bengalis. Some members of the Government at home were furious when they heard about it.

'If Mountbatten can afford to assign ten per cent of his space to food for the natives,' they said, 'he can afford to do with less ships,' and they sent out an order to cut the 14th Army’s convoys by ten per cent. In the event, even though Mountbatten got the cut restored, between three and four million people died in Bengal.

'If the Government could contemplate that number of dead with complacency,' say Mountbatten’s advocates, 'why should they grumble about 600,000 dead to secure the establishment of a free and friendly India?'

These arguments will have been, it is hoped, completely answered by the facts which have been brought out in this book. No reasonable man will deny that Britain’s decision

* A combined Pakistan-Indian Commission to trace these young women was formed but its efforts petered out; principally, according to the Pakistanis, because the Hindus refused to have their wives and daughters back—they had been defiled.
to give India its freedom was a good one—taken not only because the Indian people could not be much longer kept under British control, but because the British people were no longer willing to keep them under their control. The decision of Prime Minister Clement Attlee to divest Britain of all control over India by June 1948 was a genuine expression of the British people's will even though some Tories, including Churchill, warned that it was too precipitate. There is no evidence that the Indians themselves—Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims—disbelieved Attlee's declaration. They accepted it as a genuine date limit for freedom.

Then why, after Mountbatten's arrival, did it have to be so drastically, shortened to a date ten months earlier?

It had to be, Mountbatten will say, because the situation was becoming beyond control. Conditions almost similar to civil war were brewing. To leave the situation any longer as it was would have produced bloodshed and riot on a large scale.

The advisers of the Labour Government in Britain believed at the time, moreover, that if freedom did not come very quickly indeed, the Congress Party would break up and the Communists would take their place. In the light of the information they possess today, they know this to be a complete travesty of the facts. The stability and solidity of the Congress Party was never in danger. The Communists were never within a continent's distance of attaining power.

Which brings me to the point which seems to me important. 600,000 Indians died for Independence and 14,000,000 lost their homes. Men became brutes. The air over the Indo-Pakistan frontiers was soured for at least a generation. Unnecessarily.

It need not have happened. It would not have happened had independence not been rushed through at such a desperate rate. Never has such a grave moment in the lives of 350,000,000 people been decided with such efficiency, such skill and charm, and without any real consideration of its profound consequences.
This is not to deny the magnitude of Mountbatten’s achievement. As Noel Coward said: ‘When the job’s hopeless, they call in Dickie.’ The Labour Government picked him for the job because they were, in the American phrase, stuck. He was sent in to do a fast job of salesmanship and painless surgery. It would be wrong to blame him for doing a distasteful job as fast as possible —especially as he believed (wrongly) that speed would save lives.

But when one considers how much goodwill there was behind Britain’s wish to give India her freedom, what a stinking bog of unpreparedness, blunders, and appalling lack of planning separated the wish from the achievement.

Mistake after mistake.

Wavell, whose plan would at least have kept India intact and unpartitioned, dismissed out of hand.

Jinnah’s claim for separate rights for the Muslims accepted—but no attempt made to prepare for the consequences. No consideration of where Pakistan would be. No plans for dividing up the Army.

Agreement on partition secured—by a shuffling of the cards at Simla. But no realization of the significance of the decision.

If the Labour Government was prepared to give a united India its freedom by June 1948, how was it possible to promise a divided India freedom ten months earlier? The new date was admittedly an announcement with which to impress a Press conference—at which Mountbatten made it—but did he really expect it to create anything but chaos and the uttermost confusion—even if he could not have envisaged the killing and suffering which would stem from it?

Mistake after mistake, indeed.

Partition of India—announced in May 1947, and no plans for dividing its Army until June, with only six weeks to go to the deadline.

Partition announced in May, but the Commission to decide the boundaries along which the two new States would be divided, not appointed until the end of June.
Partition in May, and Independence in August, but a people desperate to know deliberately kept in ignorance of which country they belonged to until two days after Independence.

These were surely avoidable blunders, and they cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

By those Britons who were the architects of Indian freedom, these criticisms will be swept aside. Mountbatten is convinced that his achievement will go down in history—as it will indeed, though not, perhaps, in quite the way he envisages it. He is backed in his profound conviction that it was not only done for the best but achieved in the best possible way by his Chief of Staff, Lord Ismay. Ismay hated every moment of his Indian assignment. His instinct was to do the job quickly—and damn the consequences. It hardly surprised him when the Indians, released from the benevolent control of the British, reverted to type and began to kill each other. He was too sick at heart at the end of the Indian Empire to have any desire to stop it.

But not all Indians will agree that it had to happen.

There are many who believe—and not only Gandhi’s disciples—that they were the victims of a salesman’s trick which won them freedom but cost them the unity of the country. A little patience and all the troubles might have been avoided. Pakistan was the one-man achievement of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and Jinnah was dead within a year of Pakistan’s foundation. A little patience. A refusal to be rushed. It was Gandhi’s counsel and, of course, from the Indian point of view, it was right.

But for Nehru and Patel and all the Congressmen yearning for the fruits of power, the carrot Mountbatten dangled in front of their noses was too delectable to be refused. They gobbled it down. To Michael Brecher, his biographer, Nehru confessed afterwards (in 1956):

‘Well, I suppose it was the compulsion of events and the feeling that we couldn’t get out of that deadlock or
morass by pursuing the way we had done; it became worse and worse. Further a feeling that even if we got freedom for India with that background, it would be a very weak India, that is a federal India with far too much power in the federating units. A larger India would have constant troubles, constant disintegrating pulls. And also the fact that we saw no other way of getting our freedom—in the near future, I mean. And so we accepted it and said, let us build up a strong India. And if others do not want to be in it, well how can we and why should we force them to be in it?

But perhaps Pandit Nehru came nearer the truth in a conversation with the author in 1960 when he said:

'The truth is that we were tired men, and we were getting on in years too. Few of us could stand the prospect of going to prison again—and if we had stood out for a united India as we wished it, prison obviously awaited us. We saw the fires burning in the Punjab and heard every day of the killings. The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it."

He added: 'But if Gandhi had told us not to, we would have gone on fighting, and waiting. But we accepted. We expected that partition would be temporary, that Pakistan was bound to come back to us. None of us guessed how much the killings and the crisis in Kashmir would embitter relations."

There is little doubt of what events shaped Nehru's opinion. Once, in the summer of 1947, he had said: 'I would rather see every village in India put to the flames than have to call in British troops to protect us.'

But on 17 August 1947, two days after he became premier of Independent India, he flew to Amritsar and toured the Punjab. What he saw there drove him almost to the point of madness. For the first time he saw what the helter-skelter dash to freedom meant in terms of human lives; and he rushed among the butchering Sikhs and murderous Muslims and beat them with his fists in an outbreak of despairing fury.
On that day, he knew that Indian Independence had come just a little too fast. Another few weeks, another few months, a year, perhaps might have made all the difference, and saved so many lives. There is no reason to believe that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is particularly proud of Independence Day, 15 August 1947.

When the liquor’s out, however, why clink the cannikin? India was free. The amputation had been performed and the patient bled; but he would live.

And in the years to come, only those who had lived and worked in India and loved her would regret that the final days of the British Raj were smeared with so much unnecessary blood.

The sub-Continent split into two nations which were soon reduced to bickering, snarling and, at one point, over Kashmir, to the point of war. Pakistan turned into a Balkan State riddled with corruption and intrigue. The Congress crusade for an idealistic India diminished into a squalid fight for political supremacy.

But things would improve. They could hardly get worse.

Meantime, the British who had played their parts in all the events departed one by one for home. Some civil servants and soldiers stayed on in Pakistan, but most of them left India. As Philip Woodruff, himself ex-I.C.S., wrote in *The Guardian*: ‘For most men, perhaps, the prevailing thought was simply that we had done our part and that the time had come to go. To stay could only blur responsibility . . . The cord must be cut. A few Englishmen stayed on in Pakistan, to become as a rule as ardent as any Pakistani; in India most Englishmen felt that it would be in no one’s interest to remain . . . It was over. The long years of partnership and strife were ended and divorce pronounced.’

George Abell and Evan Jenkins departed on Independence Day. So did Sir Cyril Radcliffe, which, in view of
the way his Boundary Awards were received by both States forty-eight hours later, was just as well.

Sir Claude Auchinleck remained until the end of August 1947, when Congress charges of pro-Pakistani bias by himself and the officers of the Punjab Boundary Force brought about his resignation and that of General Rees, and the dispersal of the Force. Auchinleck departed for Britain in a mood of bitter disillusion.

Lord Ismay was the next to go, and he was not much happier. He still could not stomach the idea of an India outside the British Raj. Some time after his return to London, he met the official at the British Court whose task it is to look after recommendations for awards and decorations.

‘You know,’ he said to Ismay, ‘the King was absolutely furious at your last-minute refusal of the G.C.S.I. Thought it a very bad thing. That’s why he didn’t ask you to come and see him at the Palace when you first got back. But it’s all right now. He’s forgiven you. He’s going to give you the Garter.’

Then he took one look at Ismay’s face and hastily added:

‘But not for India, not for India!’

Admiral of the Fleet Earl Mountbatten of Burma stayed on as Governor-General of India for ten months after the transfer of power. He arrived in England in May and immediately reported to the Admiralty. He was back in the Navy by June 1948, just as he had always insisted he must be.
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