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JIC

STOMACH REMEDY

WHY CRIPPS FAILED IN INDIA

(From a BBC talk last week by Professor Reginald Coupland, in the series "Calling New Zealand")

FOR more than 20 years now it has been part of my job to study the development of self-government in India. I went out there last autumn and I travelled through most of the provinces and had long talks with most of the leading politicians of all parties, Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Jinnah, Mr. Nehru, and so on, and I was just on the point of coming home this spring when Sir Stafford Cripps arrived and asked me to stay on and join his staff. So I saw what happened at close quarters.

What did happen? First and foremost Cripps made, on behalf of the British Government, a declaration of Indian independence. "India," he said, "was to be wholly independent, as free as any country in the world, as free as we are in Britain, after the war, as soon as ever the Indian leaders could frame a system of government to take over full power from us. But perhaps I ought to remind you further that the eleven provinces of British India already have a system of parliamentary self-government. In four of the provinces it has been working ever since 1937 and is working now. It could be working in the other seven if their Congress governments hadn't resigned because of the war, and anyone who goes to India can see as I did that it's real self-government. One of the Congress ex-Ministers told me that his province had been as self-governing as a province of the Canadian federation. So it looks as if this provincial system would suit the Indians, and the only question now is that of a central government.



SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS
 A breath of fresh air

declaration completely exploded that theory of insincerity. The affections of the Moslems or the Princes were not to be rallied to the process of national emancipation. If they refused to come in they could stay out. But that wouldn't prevent the attainment of full freedom for all the rest of India. Congress cried out at that of course. You are vivisectioning mother India, it said. But as Cripps pointed out, you can't force those great communities to come in, and the best way to persuade them to come in is to tell them they can stay out if they like.

The Most Remarkable Aspect

And there was a third Congress charge. Somewhere or other, they said, British interests in India prevent India becoming free for fear that they should suffer. Well, that charge was also blown up by Cripps. He was directly questioned about it in public. He at once replied that the British Government would not ask for special provisions or safeguards for British business as a condition of India's freedom. So that was that.

I said that Cripps was questioned in public, and that brings me to what I think was the most remarkable aspect of the whole affair. It was a great public discussion of high policy. Cripps's talks with the Indian party leaders were private of course, but side by side with them he held press conferences every other day. They were attended by some 200 Indian journalists, a great majority of whom were publishers making reports for public use, and Cripps ruled no questions out. Those journalists knew their job. They pressed him hard. But I am used to being heckled, said Cripps. I don't mind being heckled. Well, that was rather startling in India. Here was a leading member of the British War Cabinet inviting Indian pressmen to heckle him in public on any point they liked, and they made the most of it.

Would the promised independence of India be real independence? Would India be free to secede from the British

Why India Can't Agree

Now it isn't easy for the Indians to agree about this central government for two main reasons. First, most of the Indian Moslems (who altogether number about ninety millions) refuse to accept a central government run on the democratic principle of majority rule. It means, they say, their subjection for ever and ever to a Hindu majority. Under Mr. Jinnah's leadership they have now carried the objection to extremes. They demand that the areas where Moslems are in the majority should form a separate independent state under the name of Pakistan. The second difficulty is the Princes, the rulers of those Indian states which cover about two-fifths of the territory of India. These Princes hesitate to join a central government which will be based on democratic principles, and in which Congress, whose leaders are always attacking them, would be the dominant party.

Mr. Gandhi and his associates have long been saying that the British Government's promises were insincere and that they did not mean India to be free; and that they were making the most of the Moslems and the Princes and using them as an excuse for keeping control of the central government indefinitely.

That takes me straight back to Cripps. He showed that the Government's

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