

## CHAPTER V

### GANDHI—THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE

**M**OHANDASS KARAMCHAND GANDHI is today the acknowledged leader of three hundred million inhabitants of India. He is the author of the Non-violent Non-coöperation movement, adopted by the Indian National Congress as a weapon of passive resistance wherewith to win India's freedom. In March, 1922, because of his public activities in India as a leader of this movement, Gandhi was convicted on the charge of promoting disaffection towards the British crown, and was sentenced to six years' incarceration. He was released from prison, however, in 1924 by a special order of the British Labor Government. Since that time he has remained the most powerful and beloved public figure in the nationalist movement of India.

His movement has aroused great interest among the different peoples of the world. But the information given to the outside public has been so vague and disconnected that it has led to very erroneous conclusions. So much of pure nonsense in the form of praise and ridicule of Gandhi and his activities has been passed around that it has become difficult for the earnest student to separate the real from the fictitious. Therefore it is only fitting that we should make a careful study of the man and his message.

A sufficient number of scholars, students, missionaries, travelers, and writers have studied him care-

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fully enough to enable them to form a reliable opinion. Irrespective of their missions, opinions, and designations, these investigators all agree as to the magnetic personality of Gandhi and to the purity of his private and public life. "His sweet, subtle sense of humor, and his profound confidence in the ultimate triumph of truth and justice as against falsehood and oppression never fail to influence and inspire everyone who comes his way." Even the very judge who, seven years ago, sentenced him to six years' incarceration could not resist the temptation to call him "a great patriot and a great leader," and to pay him the tribute: "Even those who differ from you in politics look up to you as a man of high ideals and as leading a noble and even saintly life."

Gandhi, born at Ahmedabad (India) in October, 1869, had all the advantages of an early education under careful guidance. His father, Karamchand Gandhi, a wealthy man and a statesman by profession, combined in himself the highest political wisdom and learning together with an utter simplicity of manner. He was respected throughout Deccan, in which (province) he was prime minister of a native state, as a just man and an uncompromising champion of the weak. "Gandhi's mother was an orthodox Hindu lady, with stubborn religious conceptions. She led a very simple and dignified life after the teachings of the Hindu Vedas." She was a very jealous and affectionate mother and took a deep interest in the bringing up of her children. Gandhi, the favorite "Mohan" of his parents, was the center of all the cares and discipline of his loving relatives. He inherited from his father

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a determination of purpose and the tenacity of a powerful will, and from his mother a sense of religious and moral purity of life. After graduating from a native school in his home town, he was sent to England to finish his education. He fitted himself for the bar at the University of London, and on his return to India was admitted as an advocate of the High Court of Bombay. While still in London, Gandhi acquired the habit of passing the best part of his days in solitude. From the temptations of the boisterous London life he could find escape only when he sat alone by his window, violin in his lap, and thought of an unconquered spiritual world in his mind. A product of the early favorable circumstances and all the advanced education, Gandhi is thus a highly cultured gentleman with finished manners. He possesses a happy temperament with but a tinge of melancholy pervading his life and conduct.

As a patriot and leader of an oppressed people struggling for freedom, Gandhi belongs in the category of the world's great liberators with such men as Washington, Lincoln, and Mazzini. As a saintly person who has dedicated his life to preaching the gospel of love and truth, and who has actually lived up to his preachings, he ranks among such of the world's great sages as Buddha, Jesus, and Socrates. On the one hand a dangerous political agitator, an untiring and unrelenting promoter of a huge mass revolution; yet on the other an uncompromising champion of non-violence, a saint with the motto, "Love thine enemies," Gandhi stands unique, supreme, unequalled, and unsurpassed.



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His theory of a non-violent mass revolution aiming at the dethronement of a powerful, militaristic government like the British Bureaucracy in India, though strange and impractical at first thought, is yet very simple and straightforward.

"Man is born free, and yet," lamented Rousseau, "he is everywhere in chains." "Man is born free, why should he refuse to live free?" questions Gandhi. Freedom is man's birthright. With unlimited liberty in thought and action man could live in perfect peace and harmony on condition that all men would rigidly observe their own duties and keep within their own rights. "But men as they are and not as they should be, possess a certain amount of animal nature. In some it is subdued, while in others, let loose, it becomes the cause of disturbance and dislocates all freedom." To safeguard against the encroachment of such natures on the "natural rights" and privileges of others, men have organized themselves into groups called states. "By so doing, each voluntary member of this state foregoes some of his personal rights in exchange for certain individual privileges and communal rights to be secured under its protection. The government of a country is thus a matter of voluntary choice by its people and is organized to carry on such functions as shall conduce to the highest good of the maximum number." When it becomes corrupt, when instead of protecting its members from every form of evil and disorder, it becomes an instrument of the forces of darkness and a tool of corruption, citizens have an inalienable right to demand a change in the existing order. They might first attempt peaceful reform, but

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should such attempts come to nought, the right of revolution is theirs. It is indeed their right to refuse their coöperation, direct or indirect, with a government which has been responsible for the spiritual decadence and political degeneracy of their country. Gandhi explains his attitude thus:

"We must refuse to wait for the wrong to be righted till the wrong-doer has been roused to a sense of his iniquity. We must not, for fear of ourselves or others having to suffer, remain participators in it. But we must combat the wrong by ceasing to assist the wrong-doer directly or indirectly.

"If a father does an injustice, it is the duty of his children to leave the parental roof. If the head-master of a school conducts his institution on an immoral basis, the pupils must leave school. If the chairman of a corporation is corrupt, the members must wash their hands clean of his corruption by withdrawing from it; even so, if a government does a grave injustice, the subject must withdraw coöperation, wholly or partially, sufficiently to wean the ruler from his wickedness. In each of the cases conceived by me, there is an element of suffering whether mental or physical. Without such suffering, it is impossible to attain freedom."

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"The business of every god-fearing person is to dissociate himself from evil in total disregard of consequences. He must have faith in a good deed producing only a good result; that in my opinion is the Gita doctrine of work without attachment. God does not permit him to peep into the future. He follows truth although the following of it may endanger his very life. He knows

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that it is better to die in the way of God than to live in the way of Satan. Therefore whoever is satisfied that this Government represents the activity of Satan has no choice left to him but to dissociate himself from it. . . . ”

For a period of more than twenty-five years, Gandhi coöperated with the British Empire whenever it was threatened and stood in need. Though he vehemently criticized it when it went wrong, yet he did not wish its destruction until his final decision of non-coöperation in 1920. “He felt, that in spite of its abuses and shortcomings, the system was mainly and intrinsically good.” Gandhi joined in the World War on the side of the Allies. When the war started, he was in England, where he organized an Ambulance Corps from among the group of his compatriots residing there. Later on, in India, he accepted a position in the British Recruiting Service as an honorary officer, and strained himself to the breaking point in his efforts to assist Great Britain.

“Gandhi gave proofs of his loyalty to the Empire and of his faith in British justice by valuable services also on the occasion of the Anglo-Boer war (1899) and the Zulu revolt (1906). In recognition of his services on the two latter occasions he was awarded gold medals, and his name was each time mentioned in the dispatches. Later, on his return to India, he was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal by Lord Hardinge in recognition of his humanitarian services in South Africa.” These medals he determinedly, though regretfully, returned to the Viceroy of India



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on August 1, 1920. The letter that accompanied them besides other things contained this statement:

"Your Excellency's light-hearted treatment of the official crime, your exoneration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Mr. Montague's dispatch and above all the shameful ignorance of the Punjab events and callous disregard of the feelings of Indians betrayed by the House of Lords, have filled me with the gravest misgivings regarding the future of the Empire, have estranged me completely from the present Government and have disabled me from tendering, as I have hitherto whole-heartedly tendered, my loyal coöperation."

His statement in court at the time of his conviction in March, 1922, when he pleaded guilty, reads:

"From a staunch loyalist and coöperator, I have become an uncompromising disaffectionist and non-coöperator. . . . To preach disaffection towards the existing system of government has become almost a passion with me. . . . If I were set free, I would still do the same. I would be failing in my duty if I did not do so. . . . I had to submit to a system which has done irreparable harm to my country, or to incur the mad fury of my people, bursting forth when they heard the truth from my lips. . . . I do not ask for mercy. I am here to invite and to submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a crime, but which is the first duty of every citizen. . . . Affection cannot be manufactured or regulated by law. . . . I hold it to be a virtue to be disaffected towards a government which, in its totality, has done more harm to India than any previous system. . . . It is the physical and brutal ill-treatment of humanity which has made many of my co-workers and myself impatient of life itself."

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The chief distinction between Gandhi and other liberators, the chief difference between him and other leaders was that he wanted his countrymen to love their friends, and yet not to hate their enemies. "Hatred ceaseth not by hatred; hatred ceaseth by love" was his sole plea to his fellowmen. He enjoined them to love their oppressors, for through love and suffering alone could these same oppressors be brought to see their mistakes. Thus, following his public announcement of the non-coöperation policy he embarked upon an extensive tour of the country. Wherever he went he preached disaffection towards the existing government.

Gandhi's whole political career is inspired by a deep love for his suffering countrymen. His heart burns with the desire to free his country from its present state of thralldom and helpless servitude. India, the cradle of civilization and culture, for ages the solitary source of light and of wisdom, whence issued the undying message of Buddhist missionaries, where empires flourished under the careful guidance of distinguished statesmen, the land of Asoka and Akbar, lies to-day at the tender mercy of a haughty conqueror, intoxicated and maddened by the conquest of a helpless people. "Her arts degenerated, her literatures dead, her beautiful industries perished, her valor done," she presents but a pitiful picture to the onlooking world. Gandhi, the heroically determined son of India, feels the impulse to save his motherland from the present state of "slow torture, emasculation, and degradation," and suggests to his countrymen the use of the unique yet powerful weapon of peaceful non-



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coöperation. Through this slow process of "self-denial" and "self-purification" he proposes to carry his country forward till the goal of its political emancipation and its spiritual freedom is fully realized. Political freedom might be secured by force, but that is not what Gandhi wishes. Unsatisfied with mere freedom of the body, he soars higher and strives for a sublimer form of liberty, the freedom of the soul. To the question, "Shall India follow the stern example of Europe, and fight out its struggle for political and economic independence?" Gandhi replies with an emphatic and unqualified "No." "What has Europe's powerful military and material organization done to insure its future peace?" Romain Rolland answers: "Half a century ago might dominated right. To-day things are far worse. Might is right. Might has devoured right."

No people, no nation has ever won or ever can win real freedom through violence. "Violence implies the use of force, and the force is oppressive. Those who fight and win with force, ultimately find it both convenient and expedient to follow the line of least resistance; and they continue to rely upon force in time of peace as well, ostensibly to maintain law and order, but practically to suppress and stifle every rising spirit. The power may thus change hands, yet leave the evil process to continue without a moment's break. Non-violence does not carry with it this degeneration which is inherent in the use of violence." Gandhi is highly eloquent on this score when he says:

"They may forget non-coöperation, but they dare not forget non-violence. Indeed, non-coöper-

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ation is non-violence. We are violent when we support a government whose creed is violence. It bases itself finally not on right but might. Its last appeal is not to reason, nor the heart, but to the sword. We are tired of this creed and we have risen against it. Let us ourselves not belie our profession by being violent."

"One must love one's enemies while hating their deeds; hate Satanism while loving Satan" is the principal article of Gandhi's faith, and he has proved himself worthy of this lofty profession by his own personal conduct. Through all the stormy years of his life he has stood firm in his noble convictions, with his love untainted, his faith unchallenged, his veracity unquestioned, and his courage undaunted. "No criticism however sharp, no abuse however bitter, ever affected the loving heart of Gandhi." In the knowledge of his life-long political associates (members of the Indian National Congress and of other such organizations), Gandhi has never, even in moments of the most violent excitement, lost control of himself. When light-hearted criticisms have been showered on his program by younger and more inexperienced colleagues, when the bitterest sarcasms have been aimed at him by older associates, he has never revealed by so much as a tone of his voice the slightest touch of anger or the slightest show of contempt. *His limit of tolerance has not yet been reached.*

During the last ten years of his political life in India when he guided the destinies of his countrymen as leader of a great movement, Gandhi again gave unmistakable proofs of the vastness of his love for mankind. That his love is not reserved for his compatriots

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alone, but extends even to his bitterest enemies, he revealed clearly throughout the most critical period of his life. His enemies, the British bureaucrats, tried to nip his movement in the very bud by using all the power at their command to discredit him in the eyes of his countrymen and of the world outside. Calumnies were heaped upon him from all sides. He was called a "hypocrite," an "unscrupulous agitator," a "disguised autocrat." The vast number of his followers were branded as "dumb-cattle," and hundreds of thousands of them were flogged, imprisoned, and in some cases even shot for no other offense than that of wearing the coarse hand-spun "Gandhi cap" and singing the Indian national hymn. Even in such trying moments he remained firm in his faith, and loyal to his professions. Evidence as to the undisturbed, peaceful condition of his mind and spirit is amply furnished by the following statements which he gave to the Indian press in those turbulent days:

"Our non-violence teaches us to love our enemies. By non-violent non-coöperation we seek to conquer the wrath of English administrators and their supporters. We must love them and pray to God that they might have wisdom to see what appears to us to be their error. It must be the prayer of the strong and not of the weak. In our strength must we humble ourselves before our maker.

"In the moment of our trial and our triumph let me declare my faith. I believe in loving my enemies. . . . I believe in the power of suffering to melt the stoniest heart. . . . We must by our conduct demonstrate to every Englishman



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that he is as safe in the remotest corner of India as he professes to feel behind the machine gun."

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"There is only one God for us all, whether we find him through the Bible, the Koran, the Gita, the Zindvesta or the Talmud, and He is the God of love and truth. I do not hate an Englishman. I have spoken much against his institutions, especially the one he has set up in India. But you must not mistake my condemnation of the system for that of the man. My religion requires me to love him as I love myself. I have no interest in living except to prove the faith in me. I would deny God if I do not attempt to prove it at this critical moment."

It must be remembered that all this was at a time when Mr. Gandhi held undisputed sway over the hearts of his three hundred million countrymen. Setting aside all precedence his countrymen unanimously elected Gandhi dictator of the Indian National Congress with full power to lead the country in emergencies. A word from him was sufficient to induce the millions of India to sacrifice their lives without regret or reproach. No man ever commanded the allegiance of so great a number of men, and felt at the same time so meek.

Through the successive stages of "self-denial" and "self-purification" he is gradually preparing his countrymen for the final step in his program, the civil disobedience. Once the country has reached that state, if his program is carried through, the revolution will have been accomplished without shedding a drop of blood. Henry David Thoreau once wrote: "When the officer has resigned office, and the subject has refused

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allegiance, the revolution is accomplished." That will be the dawn of day, hopeful and bright. The forces of darkness and of evil will have made room for those of light and of love. But this will not come to pass unless Gandhi's policy is literally adopted, and ultimately triumphs. He explains:

"The political non-violence of the Non-coöperators does not stand the test in the vast majority of cases. Hence the prolongation of the struggle. Let no one blame the unbending English nature. The hardest fiber must melt before the fire of Love. When the British or other nature does not respond, the fire is not strong enough.

"If non-violence is to remain the policy of the nation, we are bound to carry it out to the letter and in the spirit. We must then quickly make up with the English and the Coöperators. We must get their certificate that they feel absolutely safe in our midst, that they regard us as friends, although we belong to a radically different school of thought and politics. We must welcome them to our political platform as honored guests; we must receive them on neutral platforms as comrades. Our non-violence must not breed violence, hatred, or ill-will.

"If we approach our program with the mental reservation that, after all, we shall wrest power from the British by force of arms, then we are untrue to our profession of non-violence. . . . If we believe in our program, we are bound to believe that the British people are not unamenable to the force of affection, as they undoubtedly are amenable to the force of arms.

"Swaraj is a condition of mind, and the mental condition of India has been challenged. . . .

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India will win independence and Swaraj only when the people have acquired strength to die of their own free will. Then there will be Swaraj."

Gandhi has been bitterly assailed by both friends and foes for having consented to render assistance to the cause of the World War in contradiction to his own teachings of non-resistance. Gandhi has been accused of inconsistency and even his most ardent admirers often fail to reconcile his doings during the war with the doctrine of "Ahimsa" (non-violence to any form of life). In his autobiography he has tried to answer these objections, which we shall now examine. He writes:

"I make no distinction, from the point of view of *ahimsa*, between combatants and non-combatants. He who volunteers to serve a band of dacoits, by working as their carrier, or their watchman while they are about their business, or their nurse when they are wounded, is as much guilty of dacoity as the dacoits themselves. In the same way those who confine themselves to attending to the wounded in battle cannot be absolved from the guilt of war."

This statement shows that his reasons for going into the war were different from those of the Quakers, who think it is an act of Christian love to succor the wounded in war. Gandhi, on the contrary, believes that the person who made bandages for the Red Cross was as much guilty of the murder in war as were the fighting combatants. So long as you have consented to become a part of the machinery of war, whose object is destruction, you are yourself an instrument of destruction. And however you may argue the issue



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you cannot be absolved from the moral guilt involved. The man who has offered his services as an ambulance carrier on the battlefield is helping the war-lords just as much as his brother who carries arms. One is assisting the cause of the war-lord by killing the enemy, the other by helping war to do its work of murder more efficiently.

I am reminded of the argument I once had with a very conscientious friend of mine, who is a stubborn enemy of war and yet who recalls the following incident in his life with a sorrowful look in his face. One day while he was living in London, a young friend of his came to say his farewell before leaving for the front. Poison gas had been just introduced into the war as a weapon. The combatants were instructed to procure gas masks before departing, but the supply was limited, and his young soldier friend had to go without a gas mask. He left his permit, however, with the request that my friend should get the mask when the next supply came in and send it to his regimental address. Two days later the gas mask was mailed to this boy soldier at the battle front. Before it reached there, however, the soldier was already dead. On the first day after the arrival of the regiment, it was heavily gassed by the enemy, and all of those who had gone without the protective masks were killed. The parcel was returned to my friend at his London address with the sad news that his friend was here no more. He was bitterly disappointed that the mask had not reached the beloved young man in time to save his life. I interpret the whole affair in this way: In sending a gas mask to this English soldier, my pacifist

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friend was conspiring, however unconsciously, to kill the Germans. He wanted to save his friend from death, but did he realize that at the same time he was wishing more deaths on the enemy? He was, in fact, helping to save one young man in order that this young man might kill more young men on the other side. How does Gandhi justify his action in joining the war, then? We shall let him speak once again. He writes:

“When two nations are fighting, the duty of a votary of *ahimsa* is to stop the war. He who is not equal to that duty, he who has no power of resisting war, he who is not qualified to resist war, may take part in war, and yet whole-heartedly try to free himself, his nation, and the world from war.

“I had hoped to improve my status and that of my people through the British Empire. Whilst in England, I was enjoying the protection of the British fleet, and taking as I did shelter under its armed might, I was directly participating in its potential violence. Therefore if I desired to retain my connection with the Empire and to live under its banner, one of three courses was open to me: I could declare open resistance against the war, and in accordance with the law of Satyagraha, boycott the Empire until it changed its military policy, or I could seek imprisonment by civil disobedience of such of its laws as were fit to be disobeyed, or I could participate in the war on the side of the Empire and thereby acquire the capacity and fitness for resisting the violence of war. I lacked this capacity and fitness, so I thought there was nothing for it but for me to serve in the war.”

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How far Mr. Gandhi's explanation can answer the objections of his critics we shall leave our readers to judge for themselves. The question is debatable, and admits of differences of opinion. If his argument does not carry conviction with other believers in the doctrine of non-resistance, Gandhi will not be surprised or offended. What an eminent pacifist friend of mine wrote me after she had read the answer of Gandhi may be summed up thus:

Gandhi's argument is entirely wrong. When she was asked to help the Red Cross, she was also told that she had the protection of the army and the navy. To this she replied that she did not wish the protection of the army and the navy. As a conscientious objector to war, she felt it her duty to resist war to the best of her ability and power. When she stood against war with her full might, instead of being a mere cog in the wheel of war, she was like a loose bolt in the machinery. Thus in her resistance "she was a positive force against war."

Such in brief is the man Gandhi. As a specimen of the praise and affection that have been heaped upon him from all quarters, we shall in conclusion give the sketch of Gandhi from the artistic pen of his honest admirer, Mr. Romain Rolland:

"Soft dark eyes, a small frail man, with a thin face and rather large protruding eyes, his head covered with a little white cap, his body clothed in coarse white cloth, barefooted. He lives on rice and fruit and drinks only water. He sleeps on the floor—sleeps very little, and works incessantly. His body does not seem to count at all. His ex-



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pression proclaims 'infinite patience and infinite love'. W. W. Pearson, who met him in South Africa, instinctively thought of St. Francis of Assisi. There is an almost childlike simplicity about him. His manner is gentle and courteous even when dealing with adversaries, and he is of immaculate sincerity. He is modest and unassuming, to the point of sometimes seeming almost timid, hesitant, in making an assertion. Yet you feel his indomitable spirit. Nor is he afraid to admit having been in the wrong. Diplomacy is unknown to him, he shuns oratorical effect or, rather, never thinks about it, and he shrinks unconsciously from the great popular demonstrations organized in his honor. Literally 'ill with the multitude that adores him' he distrusts majorities and fears 'mobocracy' and the unbridled passions of the populace. He feels at ease only in a minority, and is happiest when, in meditative solitude, he listens to the 'still small voice within'."