

Habim Ajmal Khan

by C. F. Andrews.

Hakim Ajmal Khan.

(By C. F. ANDREWS.)

FOR more than eighteen years a friendship, which has grown stronger year by year, has bound me to Hakim Ajmal Khan Sahib, in Delhi. The history and tradition of his family is one of great interest in modern India, and the Hakim Sahib holds to-day, for the time being a place at the head of the popular movement in India, which is a sure token of the respect of Hindus and Mussalmans alike.

The chief ancestors of the family, to which Hakim Ajmal Khan belongs, and from whom he derives his origin, were residents of Kashgar, the famous city of Turkistan in Central Asia. The ancestor, who came to India held a leading place in the service of

* We are indebted to Mr. C. F. Andrews for permission to include this sketch in the "Biographies of Eminent Indians" Series.

the Emperor Babar. When the King invaded India, this ancestor was given the command of one thousand horsemen, and was a close companion in all the Emperor's adventures.

Among the descendants of this cavalry leader under Babar, were the two famous brothers, Khawajah Hashim and Khawajah Qasim, who lived their saintly lives at Hyderabad, Sindh, and also died there. Both of these brothers were honoured as great saints, and they had many disciples among the people of Sindh. The reverence for their saintliness extended among the Hindu population, and was not confined to Mussalmans only. This has always been a feature of the religious life of Sindh, where the Hindu and Mussalman religious ideals have approximated more nearly than in any other part of India.

The art of medicine began to be practised as a profession in this family, to which Hakim Ajmal Khan belongs, in the time of Hakim Fezal Khan, who was the grandson of Mulla Ali Quari.

After him, followed a long line of physicians in this house, who were not only skilled physicians, advancing the art of Unani medicine in India and keeping in close touch with Central Asia, but also men of great learning in their own days, keeping up the traditions of nobility, and culture which they had inherited from the Emperor Babar's Court.

The reputation of the family for medicine reached its highest point under Hakim Shariff Khan, who was the honoured grandfather of Hakim Ajmal Khan himself. Hakim Sharif Khan had written before his death a large number of treatises on medicine. He was greatly trusted by the physicians of his day, and his advice was frequently sought. His times coincided with the reign of Mahammad Shah.

In return for services rendered to the Mughal Emperors in Delhi, the family received, three times over, jagirs. The last of these was confiscated by the British Government, at the time of the Mutiny, in 1857.

Hakim Mahmud Khan was the father of Hakim Ajmal Khan. He lived to a great age and died in his 74th year. As in the case of Hakim Sharif Khan, he had a very large medical practice in Delhi itself and in the whole of the North of India. People came to consult him from all parts. His house in Delhi was famous for its open-hearted hospitality. During his days, the School of Unani Medicine at Delhi became celebrated, not merely in Delhi itself, but in all the Middle East and Near East,—as far as Constantinople and Cairo in one direction and as far as Bokhara in another.

The reputation of Hakim Mahmud Khan was well sustained by his successor, Hakim Abdul Majid Khan, who tendered great and valued service to his countrymen by his profound knowledge of medicine and by his training and education of a school of physicians, practising indigenous methods. He received the title of Haziq-ul-Mulk, which was well merited on account of the great width of his experience and practice. He

left a living monument after in the shape of the Tibbiya School which was developed into a famous institution in his time. Physicians who have been educated in the Tibbiya, are now to be found in every part of India and in many parts of Asia.

Hakim Abdul Majid Khan died in his fifty-third year. He was followed by Hakim Wasal Khan, his younger brother, who carried on his elder brother's work at the Tibbiya after his death with the same diligence and care as before. His devoted service was very deeply appreciated in the Punjab and United Provinces and the whole city of Delhi was thrown into mourning by the news of his early death, at the age of forty-three. On the death of Hakim Wasal Khan, the succession to the Tibbiya and the medical position in Delhi came to Hakim Ajmal Khan himself. He was born on the 17th Shawwal, 1284 Hijra, and was thus in the prime of his life, when he took up the work as leading Unani physician in Delhi.

It was at this period, when his fame was

beginning to show signs of still wider recognition than that of his predecessors that I first became acquainted with the Hakim Sahib. At the Tibbiya I found present, as students, not merely Indians, but those who had come from countries as far distant as Turkistan and Macedonia. One specially I remember who had the features of a European. When I asked his nationality I was told he was an Albanian.

The first visit I paid to the Hakim Sahib, was to me a memorable occasion. It threw entirely new light upon India and Indian affairs. I had been brought up in the old school of Anglo-Indian thought, and imagined that there was an almost impassable gulf between Hindu and Mussalmans due to caste on the one hand, and religious prejudice on the other. I had been told, that it was no more possible for Hindus and Mussalmans to mix than oil and water. This opinion, which I had carried with me direct from England, had already received a good many shocks on my arrival at Delhi. But the sight which

shattered it and made me revise it altogether, was the evidence before my eyes of the Hakim Sabib's hospital waiting-room where the sick people had gathered together. It was pointed out to me by the missionary, who introduced me, that every type and religion were represented, and when Hakimji came in, he made no difference whatever between rich and poor, Hindu and Mussalman; all were treated alike, and I noted especially the number of the Hindu poor who received free treatment. After that first visit, my acquaintance with the Hakim Sahib ripened into a close friendship.

But to return to Hakim Ajmal Khan's own life story, he was educated in his youth in all the Islamic branches of learning. His literary education was completed under different teachers. It consisted of Persian and Arabic Grammar, the study of the Quran, Logic, Physics, Literature, Astronomy, Mathematics, Islamic traditions. He was not taught English. He still speaks English with some hesitation, though he has picked up a

good working knowledge of the language from his journeyings abroad. His knowledge

Urdu literature is extensive, and it is always a pleasure to hear him speak in the Urdu language.

His knowledge of medicine began from a very early age under his father. But the chief store of his medical knowledge he received from his elder-brothers, especially his elder brother Hakim Abdul Majid Khan. It is probably true to say, that his own medical reputation has exceeded that of any of his predecessors. The fame of the Tibbiya never stood so high in the estimation of countries abroad as in the days of Hakim Ajmal Khan.

When I arrived in Delhi from England in March, 1904, the Hakim Sahib was absent in Mesopotamia. This was the first of his travels abroad, and his tour was an extensive one. He visited Basra, Osair, Kat-ul-Amara, Baghdad, Zulkifi, Kufa Najaf-i-Ashraf and Karbala-i Mulia. In addition to many visits to pilgrim shrines, he consulted libraries

in those cities and met and conversed with experts of every science, especially that of medicine. His whole journey lasted three months. He was greatly interested in the indigenous schools where education was given to the children. The new type of school which was introduced by the late Sultan, Abdul Hamid Khan, gave him many suggestions, some of which he utilized later.

When he returned to Delhi in May, 1904, I was in the Hills, on language study as a missionary. My first visit to the Hakim Sahib, which I have already mentioned, took place later in that year. From that time forward until his visit to Europe in May, 1911, I constantly went to see him at his house and dined with him frequently and met him at public functions where we would often get apart from the crowd and talk together about different public affairs. It is strange now to think of those days when it was regarded as the special duty of every gentleman in Delhi to attend each tea-party or entertainment given by the Deputy Com-

missioner, and when the absence of anyone would be looked upon as a slight. What long weary hours were wasted! What empty formalities! It was easy to find the Hakim Sahib on such occasions, for he would sit apart and would do nothing to court favour or to gain recognition. I could well imagine how irksome they were to him, and how he must have looked back to the old Mughal days when his ancestors were truly honoured guests at the great Mughal Court. There was a humiliation under the new regime, which was never far distant and sometimes came acutely near. I greatly admired the dignity and courtesy of the Hakim Sahib, which was always united with a gesture of independence. No one could mistake that gesture. It was inherited from generations of ancestors. It was a birth-right, not something acquired.

An event of great importance happened in his own life, when Hakim Ajmal Khan visited Europe in the year 1911. The journey in Europe lasted three months, and he returned

to India in the autumn of the same year. He reached London on June 7th, and through the intervention of Sir Theodore Morison, who had been Principal of the M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in earlier days, he was able to visit all the leading hospitals and medical colleges of London. He also spent many hours in the Libraries of the Indian Office and the British Museum. From London he went to Oxford and Cambridge. At the latter University, he met Professor E. G. Browne. Then he returned to London and took part in the Coronation ceremony of H. M. the King on July 7.

On his way back to India, Hakim Ajmal Khan made a tour of the continent. In Paris, owing to the good offices of certain friends he was able to see thoroughly the famous State Hospital and also to visit historical places. He felt greatly drawn towards the French people. From Paris he went on to Berlin, where he again made every enquiry into hospital arrangements with a view to his own proposed College in.

Delhi. The Oriental Library was also open to him for consultation. At Vienna he followed the same course of enquiry.

It was naturally at Constantinople that he made his longest stay. There he was entertained and given permission to see all that would help him in his great object of founding a Medical College at Delhi. The visit to Constantinople made a lasting impression upon him and I can well remember his speaking to me about it with eagerness and enthusiasm. It was probably from this visit to Constantinople that his deeper interest in Turkish questions began. At Cairo also he stayed many days and visited El Azhar. He found many of his old pupils both in Turkey and in Egypt. They gave him the warmest welcome.

After Delhi had been made the capital of India, Lady Hardinge took great pains to study the condition of the poor and to seek in every way to increase the medical arrangements for their help and comfort in times of sickness. She came into touch with Hakim

Ajmal Khan in this work of charity and human kindness. At the critical time when Lord Hardinge was lying almost fatally wounded by the bomb, which had been thrown, and when Lady Hardinge herself so narrowly escaped, his warm heart went out to them both in a manner which went far beyond the bounds of formal sympathy. He was very deeply moved by the dignity and magnanimity with which Lord Hardinge and Lady Hardinge acted, and a personal friendship sprang up which had important results. For when the Hakim Sahib at last had finished the plans of his new hospital, it was named after Lord and Lady Hardinge. A very beautiful act was performed in the midst of the political controversy, a little more than a year ago. Mahatma Gandhi was asked by Hakim Ajmal Khan to unveil a portrait of Lord and Lady Hardinge in the Hospital buildings. In doing so, Mahatma Gandhi expressed the greatest pleasure. He indicated by the act that his political movement was not directed against Englishmen as

a people. He admired them greatly, he said, as a people, and Lord and Lady Hardinge in a special manner for their noble character and their love for the Indian poor, which was genuine and sincere. But he was opposed to the system of administration and was fighting against the system.

Hakim Ajmal Khan is not merely famous for his medical skill, but also for his writings on medicine. He has written many treatises which have become popular among which the best known are an 'Introduction to Medical Terms,' and 'A Taun' or 'The Plague.'

For very many years Hakim Ajmal Khan, following the tradition of his family had been taking interest in public affairs. But, up to the time of his visit to Europe his interests were almost entirely confined to his own community though all the while he had been on friendly terms with others, as I have shown. On his return from Europe a new idea came into prominence. He saw that the question of Hindu-Muslim unity was of supreme importance

and he became its ardent upholder. Up to the year 1918, however, he had taken but little part in the active political life of the country. He had worked patiently and quietly for the M. A. O. College, Aligarh, and for the formation of a Muslim University. He had also been a member of the Muslim League and had been elected a Vice-President. He had warmly welcomed what might be called the Hindu-Muslim Entente and had done his utmost to bring it about. But it was not till the year 1918 that he became actually prominent in politics. In December of that year a memorable Congress was held at Delhi, and Hakim Ajmal Khan accepted the responsible post of Chairman of the Reception Committee. The Congress at Delhi, was exceptionally large in its numbers, and the work of the Chairman of the Reception Committee was extremely arduous.

After the Congress was over, Hakim Ajmal Khan had settled down to his regular work of healing the sick and looking after the hospital patients and the medical students,

and encouraging the growth of medical knowledge among Indian women by his Tibbiya Medical School. Suddenly, into the midst of these quiet activities came the outbreak in the Punjab, in April, 1919. It was then that I saw the Hakim Sahib in all the true greatness of his character. Night and day he laboured for peace among the common people; and it was only through his intervention, along with Swami Shraddhananda, that peace was maintained, and the city of Delhi, which he loved so well, was saved from Martial Law. Then came later the disclosure of the terrible things that had actually been done in Amritsar and Lahore and other places under the stress of Martial Law. The Hakim Sahib had written to me quite simply: "My political ideas were wholly changed by the iniquitous deeds of the present bureaucracy in India during the Martial Law days in the Punjab, in the year 1919." This sentence is literally true. . . . Later, in the year 1920, came the further knowledge of broken pledges, when the Treaty

of Sevres was signed on behalf of the Indian Government and with the Indian Government's consent. From that time forward the Hakim Sahib became a staunch supporter of Mahatma Gandhi; and when Mr. C. R. Das was arrested on the eve of the Ahmedabad Congress in 1921, he accepted the post of President, which was unanimously offered to him and thus crowned the whole work of his own life in the cause of Hindu-Muslim Unity. Since the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and his imprisonment, the leadership of the whole movement, for the time being has practically devolved upon him, and in—spite of failing health and a weakened physical constitution he has done his very utmost to fulfil the work. In all this arduous undertaking, he has had the devoted sympathy and support of Dr. A. M. Ansari who has been all through his translator into English as well as active helper in organisation. The friendship between Dr. Ansari and the Hakim Sahib has been very close indeed, and it has become closer than ever during the past year. The

spirit of Hakim Ajmal Khan is seen most simply expressed in his letter to Mahatma Gandhi when the Mahatmaji was arrested and placed in Sabarmati jail in March, 1922. "I can feel happy," he writes, "at your arrest only when I find that as a mark of the profound respect, which it has for you, the country takes still greater interest in the national movement than it did when you were free. It gives me infinite pleasure to see that the country observed perfect peace. This is a clear sign of the spread of the spirit of non-violence in the country, which is as essential for our success as pure air is necessary for life. I have no doubt that the secret of the progress of our country lies in the unity of the Hindus, the Mussulmans and other races of India. Such a unity should not be based on policy, for that in my opinion would be only a kind of an armistice. But I clearly see that the two great communities are coming closer together every day, and although the number of men, whose hearts are absolutely free from any sectarian

prejudices, may not be very great; I feel' convinced that the country has found the road to real unity and will advance on it with steady steps towards its goal. So highly do I prize this unity, that if the country gave up all other activities and achieved that alone, I would consider the Khilafat and Swaraj questions automatically solved to our satisfaction. For the achievement of our objects is so intimately connected with this unity, that to me the two appear identical. The question, then, naturally arises, how are we to achieve this living and lasting unity? We can achieve it only by the sincerity and purity of our hearts. Not until everyone of us has driven selfishness out of his mind, will our country succeed in achieving its objects."

The ending of this letter shows, along with this passage which I have quoted, the true spirit of the Hakim Sahib:—

'In the end,' he writes, "I join you in your prayers and wish to assure you that though my failing health will not enable me to be of very great service to my country, it will be

my earnest endeavour to discharge my duties until Mr. C. R. Das is once more among us. May God help us in the sacred work, which you and the country have undertaken for truth and justice."

I feel that any estimate of the character of Hakim Ajmal Khan, given in my own words, is unnecessary after quoting such self-revealing passages as these from his own writings. Quiet, humble, modest, with all the dignity of a man of character, learning and religious sincerity, he stands out to-day in the city of Delhi as the one recognised head, whom all alike acknowledge to be their moral leader, for his character and his character alone. In times of trouble and in times of rejoicing alike, the poor people of Delhi flock to his house to share their sorrows and their joys with the Hakim Sahib. When at the beginning of the year the rumour was spread abroad that he was to be arrested, the crowds of the city of Delhi became excited almost beyond the limits of endurance, but the Hakim Sahib went about his daily work of healing the

sick and ministering to the poor, quiet, silent, calm and fearless ; sustained in his inner spirit by his trust upon God and his belief in the victory of righteousness.

It has been difficult to write calmly and dispassionately concerning one whom I have learnt during all these years to love as an intimate friend ; but I have tried to do so knowing what would be his own wishes in such a matter. It is no slight thing, that the country should have found a character, so pure and sincere for its leader, during the months that immediately followed the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi. No one could have better represented, at the time, Mahatma Gandhi's spirit.

APPENDIX.

HINDU MUSLIM UNITY.

Hakim Ajmal Khan has championed the cause of Hindu Muslim Unity and has consistently striven to promote it. It is the one dominant note in all his speeches in the Congress, the Muslim League and in all his public addresses. Presiding over the Muslim League at Amritsar in December 1919. Hakimji said in the course of his address:—

The secret of the success, not merely of the Reform Scheme, but of all the work which is being done by Indians in India and abroad, lies in Hindu-Muslim unity. There is no need to look back as both these communities have fully realised it now that unity alone can be the firm foundation of India's real improvement and future progress. Although war is rightly regarded as a calamity, the share the world-war (now happily ended) has had in forging the links of unity between these two great communities, entitles us to say

that the war has bequeathed to India a legacy which is likely to prove the key to the success of the national self-realisation of India. I must, however, confess that there are certain matters which at times come in the way of the full realisation of this blessing. Those who are inspired by a genuine desire to serve their country cannot be affected by any differences of race or creed, which are the same to-day as they were before. Hindu-Muslim relations, however, appear to be infinitely more satisfactory than they have been in past years. The question of Government appointments is no longer capable of engaging our attention to any appreciable degree, and although political rights were the subject of much controversy between them before, the Congress-League compact of 1916 went a very long way to settle that matter. Such other matters as the League and the Congress may still require to have an understanding about, will, I am sure, be easily settled between them, on some appropriate occasion.

I shall, therefore, address myself to the one question, which has an importance quite its own, and which is none other than the problem of the preservation of cows. We have, for some time past, been indulging in indirect allusions and vague hints and to my mind it is high time that this question was dealt with in clear and specific terms with a view to reaching a satisfactory conclusion. Some of the methods, some of our Hindu brethren have at times permitted themselves to adopt for the attainment of their object have, in certain instances, undoubtedly proved highly objectionable, and naturally tending to defeat the very purpose aimed at. But to-day, when both Hindus and Muslims are marching together through a new era, when various differences are gradually, but surely, being transformed into varied phases of unity, the possibility of the resumption of such fruitless efforts is becoming remote. In fact, we are now inspired by that spirit of patriotism which is sure to prove the key to the solution, not merely o the

question of the preservation of cows, but also to the final settlement of all other differences. When two sections begin to co-operate in a spirit of loving comradeship, sharing one another's burdens, the inevitable result follows and their differences passing through various phases of mutual toleration, finally merge in community of interest with timely endeavours. In fact, given the circumstances referred to, the very differences are transformed into the surest basis of united endeavours.

Our Hindu compatriots have for some time past, been making genuine efforts to meet us more than half way, and deserve our sincerest gratitude for their good-will. It is indeed, a testimony to their keen realisation of the needs of nation-building. It, therefore, behoves us, as inheritors of a noble creed, to reciprocate their amiable regard with greater warmth and good-will to demonstrate that our faith teaches us that every good act deserves a better return. Our Hindu brethren enthusiastically and spont-

aneously observed the Khilafat day with us, and in closing their business to share our sorrow they evinced remarkably large sympathies. They cheerfully bore great commercial loss, only to prove their sincere regard for our sentiments in regard to a matter which was exclusively religious, and could claim their interest in no other way. Can these sincere demonstrations of friendly regard and good-will go for nothing. Most certainly not, nor can they possibly fail to evoke the deserving responses from a people not dead to all noble feelings. Again, what but the promotion of commendable reciprocity and co-operation in exclusive religious matters can be a surer guarantee of India's future welfare and progress? Indeed this is the only point on which we are without the least hesitancy unanimously agreed. The matter which is entirely for Muslims to decide, is what practical step they are going to take to demonstrate their appreciation of this principle, to reassure our Hindu brethren. Not a soul among Mussalmans would hesitate to

vouchsafe the necessary assurance. In fact, they should enthusiastically respond to such a call, and do whatever they legitimately can to consummate such an object. They should in so far as it lies in their power refrain from acts calculated to wound the susceptibilities of their compatriots.

We are, and should be, fully cognisant of the fact that cow-killing seriously annoys our fellow-countrymen. But before holding out any assurance to them, we must first see in what light our religion views this question. We must also determine the extent to which "Qurbani" is enjoined upon us—irrespective, of course, of the slaughter of cows. According to Islam, Qurbani or sacrificial offering, is only a Sunnat-i-Muwakkidah (a practice observed by the Prophet and emphatically enjoined on his followers) which Mussalmans, as long as they can afford it, must observe. Now it is a matter of choice to fulfil this observance by sacrificing camels, sheep, goat or cow, which simply means that any of these animals can be fit offerings. Crpres

of Indian Muslims must be strangers to the slaughter of camels, for the fulfilment of this observance, but none of them can possibly be accused of the slightest religious omission. On the contrary, Mussalmans of Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Tripoli and Asiatic Turkey have been faithful to this observance without ever having slaughtered a cow, and I am confident no erudite theologian or mufti can maintain that these Mussalmans have failed to observe the Sunnat (practice of the Prophet) or have been guilty of any religious shortcoming. If any Mussalman dares to call a religiously legitimate act illegitimate, he certainly commits a sin. I consider it appropriate at this stage, to recount some of the "ahadees" (religious traditions), according to which the sacrifice of animals other than the cow is entitled to preference. For instance, "Ummi Saimah" (the Holy Prophet's venerable wife) says that the Prophet once observed, "if any of you sees the Crescent heralding the month of Zil Hijjah and desires to sacrifice a goat . . . etc;" which obviously indicates

that the Arabs were in the habit of sacrificing goats. According to another tradition our Prophet said that of all sacrificial animals sheep was preferable; if we reserve sheep alone for the offering we will be complying with this tradition. However I would refrain from expatiating upon the religious aspect of this subject as, properly speaking, it relates to the domain of the doctors of theology. If having regard to all these circumstances, Mussalmans devoted their attention to this subject, of their own accord, and elected to sacrifice animals other than the cow they would have the proud privilege of being regarded the first to take the initial step towards ensuring the internal peace of the country, and they would also, in this way, be repaying the debt of gratitude, under which they have recently been laid by their Hindu compatriots. I earnestly appeal to my Muslim brothers, to consider calmly, what I have said about this question, and if they arrive at the conclusion at which I have arrived, it will be up to them to show what

value they attach to the great principle of unity and what practical response they are ready to make (with particular reference to religious susceptibilities) to the forward step already taken by the Hindus in the direction of that goal. If I am asked to specify the practical step to be taken in this direction, I would recommend that the residents of Kashi, Ajudhia, Muttra and Brindaban (the sacred places of the Hindus) should begin the operation of the principle enunciated above, and efforts should be simultaneously directed to the propagation of the same idea in other places. I must confess that it is a question which belongs to the vast and heterogenous population of seven crore Mussalmans, scattered all over India, and our efforts will take time to bear fruit; but this consideration should not discourage us from making an immediate beginning. I am also of opinion, that unless some organized institution is entrusted with the propaganda, we must despair of any practical achievement in this respect. The Muslim League of all the insti-

tutions, is by far the most suited for this purpose, and I hope it will offer itself for the sacred work, and perform it with the wisdom and zeal which it deserves. I also hope, the Muslim League will receive adequate and willing co-operation from the zealous members of the Khilafat Committees. In the first place, I trust that my views on this subject will evoke no adverse criticism from any quarter, but in view of the fact that the Muslim community, like all other communities of the world, is composed of men of varied ways of thinking, I shall not mind any onslaught, for I am conscious that my humble suggestions spring from the depth of honesty and sincerity and are not from any motive to please or annoy anyone.

Again at the Punjab Provincial Conference in September 1922 Hakim Ajmal Khan with the memory of the Multan riots during the last Moharrum, exhorted the people to realise the need of Hindu Muslim Unity.

Every one of you say that you are prepared for Swarajya when you are actually fighting amongst yourselves. I can clearly tell all the Muslims here that they cannot solve the Khilafat problem if they give up the question of Swarajya and Swarajya cannot be obtained without Hindu-Muslim unity. With those great aims before you, how can you afford to fight each other? This disunion and strife is a sure poison which if you do not try to eradicate will affect the whole country. That will mean that you are the bonds of your slavery. If the epidemic of disunion spreads through the country, Punjab shall be responsible for it. If you fight each other it means that you do not realize the worth either of Swarajya or of Khilafat.

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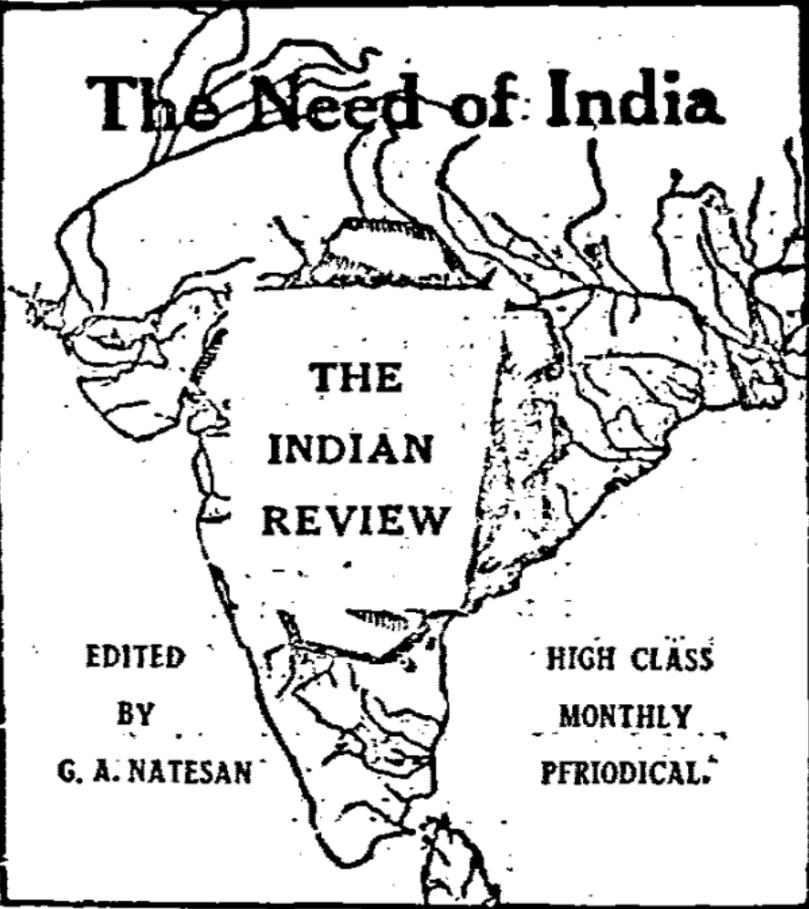
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