

IQBAL DAY AT DELHI

WE are reproducing an article on Iqbal written by Mr. B. P. L. Bedi specially written to commemorate Iqbal Day for the daily *Patriot*, Delhi (April 17, 1966).

Iqbal, Maker of New Man

The Nineteenth Century witnessed the netherpoint of human qualities among the multi-million inhabitants of Asia. It was the century of slavery — mental, physical and cultural—a century of homage to the superiority of the white man. European imperialists were holding in thralldom billions of human beings in Asia a beasts of burden. This is history.

Here and there the urgings of the human soul were spurring revolts. But sporadic in character, they were doomed to failure. The story of the grand struggle of 1857 in India is too well known to need repetition. But the isolation of one part of Asia from another was so complete and life so tightly compartmentalized within the rival and warring British, Dutch' and the French colonial empires that one nation hardly knew what was happening to another, so much so that we in India barely knew — except for a few experts — what magnificent struggles were fought by Indonesian patriots against their Dutch colonial masters. The ignorance was mainly due to the fact that the enslaved mind of India thought only of Europe. In the early twenties of this century, when we were just college youngsters, quite a stir was created, thanks to the researches of eminent Indian historians of the calibre of Dr. Kalidas Nag, Dr. Mazumdar and Prof. Ved Vyas who began to talk about the cultural affinities of South-East Asia with the ancient Indian heritage — naming particularly the area which was then called Melan-asia and the rest. Illustrative slides were shown as testimony to the grandeur of the Borabadur temple among other monuments of note. Their ruins spoke of past greatness.

With the Islamic world of the Middle East we were a little better connected, partly because P & O boats had Aden as one of their halting stations and also because our history books made us familiar with the "Sick man of Europe", i e., Turkey with its Caliphate, and the Balkans as the seething cauldron of conflicts. Arabia, of course, was more familiar because of Holy Mecca and the sight of the Hajis whom one saw off and on being given a hearty send-off or welcome.

As for the rest of Asia, imperial Japan's historic victory over Czarist Russia in 1905 left an impression, and China was only known as the land of opium eating men and sabre-rattling war-lords.

Against this background stands a giant figure who brought new content to Man's being. A message of dignity to the depressed, a message of revolt to the down-trodden:

Arise, ye poor, o creation of God on earth, and shake this world;
Pull down the walls and windows from the mansions of the mighty;
The field that does not yield a bellyful to the poor
Burn every ear to wheat in that farm.

Sloth-ridden and fatalists Asians could hardly hear these words with their benumbed ears — centuries of slavery had clogged their minds.

Iqbal went further. His soul was tortured and his inner self sickened at the sight of a glorious civilization lying vanquished at the victor's feet. The inheritors of that tradition were assigning every calamity to fate and were apathetically reduced to supine acceptance.

Iqbal sought to remake man. His first call was to pitch man against fate — and even against the maker of that fate — with the challenge of human dignity. His wrath burst out in flaming song asserting the might of man:

In the vast wilderness of my mad chase to me
Gabriel, the Archangel, is just a mean prey.
O, the might of dignity-conscious man, cast
Your noose around the neck of the Creator Himself.

Asserting the right of man as God's chosen creation he exhorted man to face his Maker standing erect:

Raise your dignity to the Height that before stamping your destiny for you,

The Almighty must ask, O man, what is thy will?

Iqbal aroused the consciousness of the enslaved with stabs which pierced through the thickest of skins and the hardest of skulls:

The grave asked with disgust. I was dark enough as it was.

How have I become darker and what is this stench of filth that has entered me ?

The voiceless voice of the Angel answered the Lament:

Inside you has been brought the corpse of an enslaved human being.

This was the soul-shaking dynamism of Iqbal which entitled him to be known as the Fiery Star on the Eastern Skies. The inspiration for the message was partly innate in Iqbal and partly had come from his sojourn in Europe where his thought got its democratic content from the teachings; of Rousseau, Paine, Locke, Bentham and Mill. The richness of Iqbal's philosophic background came from Schopenhauer and Hegel, and his ethical values from Kant. No less is the influence of Goethe, Milton and Dante visible in the flight of his soaring fancy. He had seen with his eyes the battling urges of enslaved European nations writhing under the iron heel of the imperial Hapsburgs, the Romanovs, and the Hohenzollerns. Imperial Russia itself was known as the Prison House of Nations.

Thus a new spark was ignited in the eastern soul which was destined to blaze a new trail on the firmament of enchained Asia.

Iqbal's technique was sweeping. His dynamism expressed itself with equal vehemence in all forms. The romantic and the revolutionary in Iqbal make the warp and woof of the multi-coloured texture of his thought.

If the revolutionary message of Iqbal has the blood of battle on the sword-blade, the romantic in him has the delicacy of rose petals. Both forms are spiritually integrated with emotion. The delicacy of tender emotion which he poured into the elegy on his mother remains unmatched in any known language in the world's literature. In expressing the power of love over heartlessness with such a subtle simile he proclaims:

A rose petal can cut in twain even the hardness of a diamond's heart.

Iqbal was an unsurpassed master of the dialogue in quatrains and the most sensitive and profound meaning he could convey in this form. All forms of poetry were hand-maids to the fundamentals of Iqbal's passionate guardianship of the stature of man as the highest in God's creation. To the

realization of it by fellow-men he dedicated himself and thus twenty-eight years ago entered the portals of the great Beyond where dwell the Immortal.