INTERVIEW WITH THE NETHAJI

By WILHELM SCHULZE

A new name has appeared like a meteor in the headlines of the newspapers of East Asia, that of Subhas Chandra Bose. Since his arrival in East Asia after a mysterious trip from Germany, his fiery speeches and confident enthusiasm have made him a celebrated personality. As there are not many people, however, who have met him face to face, we are now publishing a living portrait of him drawn by Wilhelm Schulze, the East Asia correspondent of the "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" in Berlin.—K.M.

IN my life as a journalist I have interviewed all kinds of prominent people. Yet to this day I have a feeling of tension and uncertainty when I am about to meet some particularly outstanding personality. The question of what to say to such a man always disconcerts me.

In the case of Subhas Chandra Bose, the man who for so many years has been fighting the British Empire with singular daring, this feeling of uncertainty did not survive very long when I called on him a few days ago. And as for the question of what to say to him, this did not arise at all. I had been in his presence for less than two minutes, and tea had hardly been served, when his ease of manner and personal charm drove away the last vestiges of my shyness. After an hour of animated conversation between the two of us, my feeling of unfamiliarity had given way to complete agreement with his ideas and sympathy with his problems, more so than is usually possible with other people even after months of acquaintance. I admit quite openly that Subhas Chandra Bose has won me over to his cause—lock, stock, and barrel.

Subhas Chandra Bose is the Head of the Provisional Government of Free India and Generalissimo of the Indian National Army of Liberation. To capture him must be the dream of every British Secret Service agent. Subhas Chandra Bose has offered the members of this organization plenty of opportunity since his flight from India to Germany and his adventurous journey to Japan; but the British always missed the bus. In Tokyo, where he was staying as an observer of the Congress of the Independent Nations of Greater East Asia and was, no doubt, the most sensational personality present, a single Japanese policeman stationed at the gate of the beautiful villa housing him and his small staff was enough to guarantee his security.

But, even without the policeman at the gate, it would probably be no easy matter to capture him; for, sitting in the comfortable armchair before me, Subhas Chandra Bose was the personification of physical strength and mental vitality. His broad figure, stocky rather than tall, radiates health. He was wearing a well-cut uniform of the Indian Army of Liberation, distinguished from that of a private only by two small disks on the right breast. His movements are vigorous but controlled, and one can tell that they are only indications of what they can be if necessity arises. His clean-shaven, almost light-skinned face and spectacled eyes radiate an energy and intensity of life which make it seem inadvisable to start a quarrel with him. In contrast to his enemies and opponents in India, the impression he gives is one of untouched reserves of latent power. When his chief aide-de-camp Hassan comes in to ask him something and addresses him as "Nethaji," which means leader, I must admit that Bose merits this title if only for his tremendous vitality. He is the exact opposite of all we imagine an Indian to be in the way of passivity, tolerance, and uncomplain-

ing acceptance of the sufferings dealt out by a hostile fate.

In the last few months he has proved that he may lay justified claim to the title of Nethaji by having created a disciplined, powerful organization out of the chaos in which he found the Indian movement in East Asia on his arrival. He has demonstrated his talent for leadership in dozens of negotiations with the statesmen out here, from Prime Minister Tojo to Dr. Ba Maw, the Burmese chief of state. It stands to reason that these men would not have chosen him as an ally and co-fighter on a decisive front if they were not convinced of his ability and carried away by his enthusiasm. And finally he proved himself a leader at the Congress of Nations as well as in the many interviews which he granted to the press and which made great demands upon his presence of mind.

He was still somewhat inclined to be the leader when, after the first few exchanges of courtesies and compliments, we turned to the sober facts of his struggle. It was he who put the questions at first, for he wished to quench his thirst for knowledge of the situation in Europe, of political developments in Germany, his first place of exile; and this thirst for knowledge reveals his desire not to overlook events in the outer world in his preoccupation over his own affairs. Then only could we approach his own theme: India. His inquisitive eyes grew soft when finally he began to speak about India and her troubles, about his own plans and intentions, about the difficulties facing him and their undeniably approaching solution, and about the coming victory of free, independent India.

Bose has one firm, unshakeable conception of the events of the future which he repeats in all his interviews and all his speeches: India's independence can only be a real independence if it is gained by her own sacrifices. Only an independence that has been paid for by the Indians with their own blood can be defended in time of need, and Bose rejects any other independence for India. He has sometimes been reproached for this firm attitude, and it has been said that he was bloodthirsty, or at least spoke bloodthirstily. Indeed, many of his utterances seem to justify this reproach, and it is true that he never forgets to mention the necessity of sacrifice in lives.

In this conversation he surprised me by not speaking of his determination to make such sacrifices but, on the contrary, by emphasizing the more unwarlike sides of his struggle for his country. Knowing his subject, India, by heart as he does, and never having recourse to notes in his public speeches, he preferred on this occasion to discuss the political aspects of his campaign, and with them the idea of India from the cultural point of view. Perhaps I was partly responsible for this by remarking that he was to be envied for the satisfaction of knowing that he had done all that was possible for the conquest of India, but that I did not envy him the probably much more difficult task of one day having to unite the 380 million Indians with their different languages, religions, castes, and classes and to weld them into one nation.

"That will not be nearly as hard as you may perhaps think at the moment." Bose replied softly. He always speaks softly in a deep voice, and his English is sometimes slightly guttural. "But I see that you have been reading English literature on India, and that your ideas correspond to what the English like to spread everywhere. Let me tell you that neither religions nor castes, neither the maharajahs nor the 'depressed classes' invented during the last few years by the English, the 'untouchables,' offer serious problems in the way of Indian unity. Neither will the parties, once we have driven out the British. And even less the differences in language."

Then I was given a little lecture on Indian history, which rapidly led from the earliest origins via the mutiny of 1857, the first organized Indian revolt against England, to the recent past and the present. The maharajahs? It stands to reason that, as the beneficiaries of the British rule, they are without exception opposed to the Indian struggle for free-

dom. But the unarmed population will drive them out with sticks and scythes as soon as the British have been beaten; for England's friendship has not extended so far as to permit the maharajahs to have their own troops. The conflict between Hindus and Moslems? It has only existed for a few decades, having been invented by the British Viceroy Lord Minto and taken up and furthered by Mohammedan dignitaries for selfish reasons. But the Congress Party has more Moslem members than the Moslem League. And finally, the depressed classes? They were not discovered by the English until the latter found that even religious disputes were no longer enough to sustain their policy of "divide and rule." They are by no means a political problem but a purely social one which, however, must be dealt with far more thoroughly than the British have ever pretended to do.

"The English have seen to it," Bose then continued, "that the world forgot that India has actually always formed a cultural unit in her history, although not always a political one. In spite of all differences in language, an Indian from the North will find all he needs for his private and religious life everywhere in the South. In our prayers for our country we include by name all the holy places from one end of India to the other. In former days the numerous founders of philosophical schools in India, who benefited by the proverbial Indian tolerance and provided the outer world with a constant stream of new thought, had, if they wished to obtain recognition for their new doctrines, to travel from one holy place to another to debate with the representatives of the existing schools before they could say that they had won India over. This feeling of all India's unity is something the English have never been able to take from us, no matter how many allies they bought and used from Indian ranks. The very fact that at present the innermost British circles are planning and preparing to split up India after the war into four or five completely separate countries shows more clearly than anything else that all their other measures for the destruction of Indian unity have failed. No, indeed, not for a moment am I anxious about Indian unity after the war has been won against the English."

Bose waxed so enthusiastic over his theme that he even let his cigarette go out. Lost in thought, he took another out of the box beside him, pulled out his lighter, lit it and, without having lit the new cigarette, went on speaking. He hardly noticed that I finally gave him a light and blew out his own lighter. It was not until a few seconds later, in the midst of a sentence, that he thanked me. But soon that cigarette went out too, and neither of us bothered about lighting a third.

"It is a really fine gesture but at the same time it is an auspicious deed," he continued, "that at the Congress of the Independent Nations of Greater East Asia Premier Tojo promised to hand over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Provisional Government of Free India. A fine gesture because everyone in India knows the Andaman Islands to be the compulsory home of political exiles, as the Indian counterpart to Siberia, and as the penal settlement for the Indian fighters for independence. That these very islands should become the first bit of Free India, that on them the Indian flag should for the first time fly over free Indian soil, is almost symbolic. The association of ideas from the prison to the home of Indian liberty is inevitable. It will have incalculable effect within India.

"And the handing over of the islands to the Provisional Government is an auspicious deed because the British have already given out in their propaganda that India would never get back these islands unless Japan were beaten and defeated. The islands are ancient Indian possessions, and this propaganda may have had some effect, especially since it was coupled with the claim that the Japanese would establish bases there from which they could dominate the Indian Ocean. Tojo's promise has knocked the bottom out of this propaganda. The entire trend of the future

Japanese policy toward Free India is already contained in this promise; and no one should be surprised if we have more confidence than ever in the Japanese policy, if an increase in confidence were possible."

After this climax, our conversation turned to other affairs. In a few strokes the Nethaji outlined the personality of Gandhi who, he said, would in the last few years of his life probably not abandon his principle of rejecting force but would more likely retire into the background. He spoke about Nehru, who by no means subscribed to the principle of passive resistance but only regarded it as a temporary means to an end, until a better means had been found. Peoples and names passed in review, and in every case one could feel that they were registered in Bose's brain as if in a well-kept card index, with all their qualities and weaknesses. Finally, Bose professed himself and his followers to be supporters of the Congress Party, although they had meanwhile formed the Forward Bloc within the Congress Party and were in part opposed by the official leaders before the outbreak of the war.

"But all this is past history," he concluded in a firm, conciliatory tone. "We can and will take up the threads, but the past must not hinder us in our progress, and it will not hinder us. You can rely on that."

His chief aide-de-camp Hassan—who with his pointed black beard looks deceptively like a maharajah in the movies but who can make good jokes in fluent German and keeps a close watch on the Nethaji's timetable—had meanwhile discreetly indicated for the third time that it was necessary to conclude our chat and had left the room for the third time without success. My host even offered me a whisky. When I lifted my glass to drink to his campaign, Bose thanked me and said :

"Please do not forget to send my regards to Germany. I think back with pleasure and gratitude to the time I was allowed to spend in Germany during the war and to the great sympathy and support given to me by the German Government and the German people in our struggle for independence. We are determined to fight to the end with the Axis powers and their allies, no matter what sacrifices it may cost, as long as final victory is won."

Broad-shouldered and self-confident he stood there before me as he said this, and he shook my hand firmly as I took leave. "Good luck," I said on going out, and "Au revoir in Free India," replied the Nethaji with a friendly smile.

Statues

In the days of Cato, it was customary in Rome to erect statues to all more or less deserving men, as long as they managed to acquire fame in one way or another. There was no statue of Cato. An inquisitive friend questioned him about this.

"Don't worry," Cato replied. "I would rather the world asked why no statue has been erected to me than for it to wonder why there was one."