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OF THE

PRESIDENT

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# OPENING ADDRESS

OF THE

## PRESIDENT

OF THE

### Thirteenth Indian National Congress.

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1897.

*Brother delegates, ladies,*

GENTLEMEN,

I thank you heartily for electing me to preside over this great national assembly. We meet at the close of a year that will be memorable in the history of the British Empire. We have witnessed and we have taken part in the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the reign of our Empress. We rejoice with our fellow-subjects of this vast Empire in the prosperity of that reign. We exult in our acquisition of political rights during this period. We bless Her Majesty for her message in 1858 of peace and freedom when the occasion invested it with a peculiar significance. While Englishmen in India inflamed by race animosity and the recollections of the Sepoy Mutiny, which Ignorance still calls the Indian Mutiny, were calling for terrible reprisals, she unmasked, forgetting and forgiving, issued her gracious proclamation. It was a stern reproof to those who then clamoured for indiscriminate vengeance; it continues to-day a standing rebuke to those of her European subjects who would deny us the rights of equal citizenship. She is to us the living embodiment of what is good in British supremacy, and we may feel assured that her anxiety in our behalf which she manifested in 1858, her kindly regard shown on every subsequent occasion, both in times of joy and of affliction, will continue unabated for the rest of her life. Throughout our land her name is venerated; in almost every language the story of her life has been written and sung, and in years to come her name will rightly find a place in the memory of our descendants along with those great persons whose virtues have placed them in the ranks of Avatârs born into this world for the benefit of this, our holy land.

## INDIA LOYAL.

Forty years of peace and progress seemed to have amply justified the wise and generous statesmanship of the great Empress, when suddenly this year, we have been startled with the cry of sedition directed not against any specific individual nor even against a number of persons but against a whole class, the product of the liberal policy inaugurated nearly half a century ago. The charge of sedition, faintly heard years ago, against the Congress, a charge the absurdity of which has been often exposed, has now been revived against the educated Indians by a section of the Anglo-Indian Press. We are tauntingly asked to study our past history for proof of our degraded condition from which the English Government has raised us, and to contrast it with the blessings we now enjoy. We do not need the invitation. We are acquainted with our immediate past; we feel grateful for the present. But, our opponents forget we are more concerned with the progress of our country in the future than with the benefits we have already derived under British rule.

We are well aware of the disordered state of this country when it passed, with its insecurity of person and property, under British rule, of the enormous difficulties our rulers had to overcome in introducing orderly administration without any help from the then existing agencies. We recognize that the association of the people in the Government of the country except to a very limited extent was then impossible. We also know that British rule cleared the way to progress and furnished us with the one element, English education, which was necessary to rouse us from the torpor of ages and bring about the religious, social and political regeneration which the country stands so much in need of. We are also aware that with the decline of British supremacy we shall have anarchy, war and rapine. The Mahomedans will try to recover their lost supremacy. The Hindu races and

chiefs will fight amongst themselves. The lower castes who have come under the vivifying influence of Western civilization are scarcely likely to yield without a struggle to the dominion of the higher castes. And we have Russia and France waiting for their opportunities. The ignorant masses may possibly not recognize the gravity of the danger attendant on any decline of England's power in the East. But it is ridiculous to suggest that those who have received the benefit of English education are so shortsighted enough not to see and weigh that danger. While, however, full of gratitude for what Great Britain has done to India,—for its Government which secures us from foreign aggression and ensures security of person and property,—it should not be forgotten for a moment that the real link that binds us indissolubly to England is the hope, the well-founded hope and belief, that with England's help we shall, and, under her guidance alone, we can attain national unity and national freedom. The educational policy of the Government, a policy which combines beneficence with statesmanship, justified such hopes in us. Those hopes were confirmed by various pledges. Those pledges were followed by the creation of institutions by which we were admitted to a share in our ordinary Government which must surely, though slowly, lead to the full fruition of our ~~ambitions~~ *aspirations*.

Just look for a moment at the training we are receiving. From our earliest school-days the great English writers have been our classics. Englishmen have been our professors in Colleges. English history is taught us in our schools. The books we generally read are English books which describe in detail all the forms of English life, give us all the English types of character. Week after week, English newspapers, journals and magazines pour into India for Indian readers. We, in fact, now live the life of the English. Even the English we write shows not only their turns of thought but also their forms of

feeling and thinking. It is impossible under this training not to be penetrated with English ideas, not to acquire English conceptions of duty, of rights, of brotherhood. The study and practice of the law now pursued with such avidity by our people, by familiarising them with reverence for authority and with sentiments of resistance to what is not sanctioned by law, have also materially contributed to the growth of mental independence.

#### POLITICAL REFORM.

Imbued with these ideas and principles, we naturally desire to acquire the full rights and to share the responsibilities of British citizenship. We have learnt that in the acquisition of those rights and in the recognition of the principles on which they are based, lie the remedy for the evils afflicting our country, evils similar to those from which England herself once suffered. We know that in Great Britain race differences between Norman and Saxon, at one period more virulent than those which at any time existed between Hindu and Mahomedan, religious intolerance which has scarcely been surpassed in India, class divisions equalling any in our own country, a degradation, political and social, of the masses which may be equalled here but could never have been exceeded—all these have disappeared in the common struggle for freedom, and in the combined effort to retain it when acquired, in which each required the help of its antagonist and each was obliged to concede to others the right claimed for itself and which, therefore, resulted in the recognition and solemn affirmation of principles of Government which obliterated all distinctions of race or religion, caste or class. Those principles affirmed the equality of all before law and Government, the right of self-Government by the people themselves through their representatives, and complete freedom of speech and discussion as the very breath of national life.

It is the hope that one day we may be admitted as equal sharers in this great inheritance, that we shall have all the civil rights associated with the English Government, that we shall be admitted as freely as Englishmen themselves to worship in our temple of freedom—it is this hope, that keeps India and will keep her always attached to the British. This hope is sustained by pledges solemnly made; and the sentiment of loyalty to the British connection created by repeated declarations that we shall be gradually allowed the full rights of English citizenship is already in full force. Such a pledge was made in 1833 when Parliament solemnly declared that race or religion or colour shall not be a disqualification for holding any appointment. This declaration of policy in a time of peace has been solemnly affirmed after the mutiny. Already, the pledge has been in part redeemed. We have been admitted, as it were, into the outer precincts of the temple of freedom. The press has been enfranchised. Partially elected members sit in our local and legislative councils. We can enter the civil service through the open door of competition. These blessings are no doubt now coupled with conditions which unfortunately detract from their value. But these great and healthy principles have nurtured and consolidated a sentiment of affection. All that England has to do is to persist resolutely in the line of policy she has initiated and thereby deepen that feeling of loyalty which makes us proud of our connection with England. I myself feel that there is very little reason to fear that England will reverse the past. To deny us the freedom of the press, to deny us representative institutions, she will have to ignore those very principles for which the noblest names in her history have toiled and bled. She cannot close all her educational institutions in the country. She cannot persuade us not to read the fiery denunciations of every illiberal form of Government, of the petty acts of tyranny committed anywhere on the face of the earth, which

appear in her papers imported into India week after week. It is impossible to keep out of India eloquent orations on Patriotism by men like Mr. Chamberlain—a Cabinet minister holding up to admiration the memory of patriots like Wallace whose head was stuck up on the traitor's gate of the city of London, of Bruce guilty of foul murder in a church, of Emmet and other Irish leaders executed or hung for treason by the English Government. It is impossible to argue a man into slavery in the English language. Thus the only condition requisite for the fruition of our political aspirations is the continuance of the British Rule. The fond hope that India may one day take her place in the confederacy of the free English-speaking nations of the world can be realised only under England's guidance with England's help. Years must elapse, it is true, before our expectations can be realized, before we get representative institutions on the models of those of the English-speaking communities. Slavery we had under our old rulers, Hindu and Mahomedan; we may again get it under any despotic European or Asiatic Government. But we know that real freedom is possible only under the Government of the English nation, nurtured in liberty, hating every form of tyranny, and willing to extend the blessings of representative Government to those capable of using it wisely in the interests of freedom and progress.

#### SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REFORM.

Great as is the necessity of British rule for the political emancipation of our country, even greater is the necessity for social and religious reform. In the present circumstances of India, inhabited as it is by followers of various religions, various sects, classes, very often with antagonistic interests, any Government which is not strictly secular and absolutely impartial must be disastrous to the best interests of the country. The customs, institutions, beliefs, practices of our com-



munity are denounced by others as unreasonable and destructive of true faith. Some of our reformers, hopeless of any internal reform, are building up a new social system and accordingly have adopted an attitude so antagonistic to the popular religion that they are regarded as seceders from Hinduism. Others again have formed themselves into sects each claiming to be orthodox and denying to others the merit of adherence to the true Hindu religion. We have also preachers in our midst who while deprecating any revolt or open defiance urge the purification of the Hindu faith. The gulf between Hinduism and other religions has been considered impassable. But attempts are being made with some success to re-admit converts into Hinduism. Steps are being taken in some places to mitigate the rancour of religious hostility between Hindus and Mahomedans. Some of the lower castes resent the galling yoke of caste so bitterly that they seek refuge in Mahomedanism or Christianity. The original four castes had multiplied into a number that must appear to every man unreasonable and absurd. There seems to be a general desire to break down the barriers between these numerous castes. Knowledge is accessible to all. The Vedas and other holy books are now common property; equality in knowledge must eventually lead to the practical removal, if not the entire destruction of the great barriers that now divide the various classes. Again, you are aware of the attempts that are being made to restore our women to the position which competent authorities maintain they occupied in ancient India. We want in brief to eliminate, if necessary from our system all that stands in the way of progress. We desire to absorb and assimilate into our own what appears good to us in western civilization. This is impossible under a Government which would uphold a particular social system or a particular form of religion to the exclusion of others as some of the ancient Governments of India did. To

break down the isolation of the Hindu religion, to remove the barriers which now prevent free social intercourse and unity of action, to extend the blessings of education to the lower classes, to improve the position of women to one of equality to men, we require the continuance of a strictly secular Government in thorough sympathy with liberal thought and progress.

Gentlemen, I do not propose to refer to the various subjects that we have been continually pressing on the attention of our Government and of the public. This year, Mr. Dadabai Naoroji and our four Indian witnesses have stated our grievances before the Welby commission with a fulness and clearness which leave nothing to be desired. They have stood the test of cross-examination by those who have constituted themselves the advocates of Indian Government and their evidence will remain on record as a protest against some of the shortcomings of British administration. Our thanks are due to them.

#### FAMINE.

I shall accordingly content myself with referring to certain notable events of this year. Naturally, the terrible Famine that has devastated our country first claims our attention. We render our hearty thanks for the magnificent aid received by us from the people of Great Britain and other countries. We recognize the great sympathy and ability with which the Famine administration was carried on in India. But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the same energy, if directed to discover and remove the causes of famine would be of far greater benefit to the country. At the root of these famines is the great poverty of India. The Madras Board of Revenue recently estimated on the returns furnished by local officials with reference to ryotwary tracts, that, in a season described as generally favourable for agricultural operations, there was no grain in the presidency for five out of a population of 28 millions. If this is true, the miserable

state of the people with regard to food supply in seasons less favourable may be easily conceived. For ourselves, it is unnecessary to rely upon Government estimates and returns. The poverty of the country reveals itself to us in every direction, in every shape and form. It shows itself in the poor condition of the labouring population and of the great majority of ryots who are under-fed, and who are without, not only the comforts, but even the absolute necessities of life and who lead a life of penury and toil unredeemed by any hope of provision against the frequent vicissitudes of the seasons, sickness or old age when they must be dependent on relatives or strangers. The once well—to-do ryots are becoming reduced to the position of poor tenants, their poverty preventing them from carrying on any cultivation that requires capital. Parents find it difficult to give their children the education which their profession or station in life demands or indeed any education necessary wherewith to earn their livelihood; the extreme poverty of the class to which the majority of students belong could easily be ascertained. Even a partial failure of crops in one year leads to terrible scarcity or famine. Famine at certain intervals of time is becoming a normal condition of things in India. In 1877 and again this year, the loss of life has been terrible. Each succeeding famine finds the staying power of the masses particularly in the ryot-wary Districts reduced. Is this state of things to continue for ever? Are we not entitled, are not those who so generously come to our help entitled to ask the responsible Government, whether any steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence of the famine. In a fertile country, with every variety of clime capable of producing every variety of product, with a population thrifty and hard working, if the produce is not sufficient for the population, it must be due to some defect in the system of administration which does not protect the fruits of industry

but scares away capital from the land. If the produce of the country is sufficient for the population and yet as a fact the food stock remaining in the country does not suffice for consumption, the state of things must be due to some enormous drain on the resources of the country. The feeling is gaining ground, that the Government is morally responsible for the extreme poverty of the masses, for the scarcity that prevails almost every year in some part of the country or other, for the famine that so frequently desolates the land and claims more victims and creates more distress than under any civilized Government anywhere else in the world. The flippancy that would dismiss the entire problem from consideration with the remark that all this is due to over-population and is irremediable, is as dangerous as is the deep-rooted belief that distress is a visitation of Providence for the sins of our rulers. One great Viceroy has had the question under consideration, and to him the remedy in so far as the increase in wealth from the land is concerned was clear. It is permanent settlement of Government Revenue from the land. The settlement officer will not then increase the Revenue and deprive the cultivator of the increased produce due to his labour, or his capital. Labour and capital will then be attracted to the cultivation of the land. There will be a large increase in the agricultural produce in India. There will always be a large reserve of food stocks in the country available in times of scarcity. The fixity of taxation will create a class of landholders interested in the maintenance of law and order. The policy of Government was once settled in favor of permanency, but in recent years under pressure of, mainly, military expenditure the policy has been changed and the revenue enormously raised. Our Government ought to concede the permanent settlement immediately to all parts of India and in those parts of India where from local circumstances a permanent limitation of land revenue is not feasible, it would

be a step in the right direction if any increased demand for revenue by Executive action is permitted only with the permission of the Legislative Council. This would not be an adequate remedy, but it is a measure that will help to produce great and satisfactory results.

The next remedy that obviously suggests itself has reference to expenditure. Government agencies are notoriously extravagant, at least in the opinion of those who have to find the money, and the foreign policy of the Indian Government imposes a burden on the tax-payer which is already becoming too heavy to bear. The checks that exist are not sufficiently effective. The Budgets at present are only offered for criticism. They ought to be submitted to the Legislative Councils for approval and the members ought to have the power of moving resolutions in connection with them. As the officials always form the majority, Government could never be embarrassed by an adverse vote, whereas in its differences of opinion with the Home Government, a resolution of the Legislative Council could naturally be a great support to it. The biggest item of expenditure is the Military expenditure. Our true policy is a peaceful policy. We have little if anything, to expect from conquests. With such capacity for internal development as our country possesses, with such crying need to carry out the reforms absolutely necessary for our well being, we want a period of prolonged peace. We have no complaint against our neighbours, either on our north-west or our north-east frontier. If ever our country is involved in war, it will be due to the policy of aggrandizement of the English Government at London or Calcutta. An army is maintained at our cost far in excess of what is required for us. The military element is supreme in the Viceroy's Council. For interests other than Indian, countries are invaded, all the horrors of war let loose at the expense of the Indian tax-payer. As England directs our foreign policy and as wars are undertaken to maintain English rule, the English

treasury ought to pay the entire cost, claiming contribution from India to the extent of India's interest in the struggle. This would secure a thorough discussion of any foreign policy in the British Parliament. It would also enable Indian members in the Viceroy's Council to protest against any unfair distribution of the war expenditure when the Budget has to be passed.

#### INEQUALITY OF LAWS.

It is also to be borne in mind that a large portion of this unnecessary expenditure is due to the recognition, not perhaps openly in words, but in acts and policy by Government of the idea that the English are a foreign and superior race holding India by the sword and that the Indians are, as a rule, not worthy of trust and confidence. To us this idea is hateful and therefore we insist upon equality before law and Government. We maintain that no distinction ought to be made between classes or races, that the Queen's proclamation should be adhered to, and therefore we protest against the principle underlying the Arms Act whereby no native of India may possess or carry arms without special license while Europeans and Eurasians may bear arms unquestioned. We appeal to our Government to authorize a system of volunteering for Indians and not confine it practically to Europeans and Eurasians thereby creating and fostering class prejudices. For the same reason we demand that the military service in its higher grades should not be restricted to Europeans alone but should be practically opened to the natives of this country and that colleges be established for training them for the military career. On the same ground we press for admission into the Public service on an equal footing with Europeans. Apart from economic necessity, the stability and permanence of British connection require that not only no positive disqualification should exist but that the rules intended to make the declarations of 1833 and the

Queen's promise of 1858 a dead letter must be removed. For, the Civil Service, the Police, the Forest Service, the Salt Service, and even the Educational Service rules are framed apparently on the assumption that a European is by mere reason of his nationality fit and an Indian for the same reason is unfit for the higher appointments in those services.

The concession of these demands means an enormous increase in India's defensive strength against any foe ; it means a reduction in taxation which at the rate it is now growing, must involve the ruin of the country. These distinctions on the other hand cast a slur on our loyalty, accentuate race prejudices in a most invidious form and relegate Indians to the position of an inferior race and silently ensure the emasculation of our manhood. The disastrous consequences of this race question are already apparent. Englishmen and other European Colonists in South Africa and Australia refuse to treat us on terms of equality and justify their refusal on account of our degraded position in our own country. On the other hand, a section, I hope a very small section, of our fellow-subjects regards a foreign power of its own religion following a course of policy apparently abhorrent to the conscience of the English public, with feelings which, though unconsciously, took their origin in the refusal of Englishmen to treat them as fellow-citizens in reality and not merely in name. To this feeling of race superiority is also due the frequent contemptuous treatment of respectable people by soldiers, a treatment which renders them a terror to peaceful inhabitants and which according to the confessions apparently believed by Government has led to the Poona tragedy. The racial feeling I refer to, is confirmed by the belief generally entertained in India that it is almost impossible to secure the conviction of a European accused of any heinous offence. If that feeling is justified by the action of our authorities, then the position is deplorable. If the impression is unwar-

raunted, then its origin must be due to the idea of inequality before law generally entertained. On this race question, no concession is possible. No compromise can be accepted so far as it lies in us. We must insist on perfect equality. Inequality means race inferiority, national abasement. Acquisition, therefore, of all civil rights conferred on Englishmen, removal of all disabilities on Indians as such—these must be our aim.

#### THE POONA INCIDENTS.

I shall now briefly refer to the Poona plague operations and their unfortunate developments. This country was passing through a terrible ordeal. Poverty which may be said to be the normal condition of our masses deepened into famine. In the Bombay Presidency, it was followed by Plague, a terrible disease ~~to~~ which no remedy has yet been discovered. The measures which the Government had to take for its suppression in Poona which was badly affected were said to have interfered with the domestic habits of the Hindus and Mahomedans; soldiers who were employed to enforce these Government measures were rightly or wrongly, generally believed to have insulted women and defiled places of worship. The result was prostration of the people. A feeling of helplessness came over them. In Western countries, the result would have been lawlessness. In Poona, many contented themselves with abandoning their homes. Some resigned themselves to sullen apathy and despair. There were a few who protested against Government measures, pointing out their unnecessary harshness. Amongst those who protested was Mr. Natu, a leading Poona Sirdar. His formal written complaints recently published in England disclose, if any reliance can be placed on them, a state of affairs which certainly demanded attention. Let me give you a brief summary of his complaints.

The inspection of houses by soldiers seems to have been carried out without notice by forcing open, very



often unnecessarily when there were other means of entrance, the locks of the shops and the houses when the owners were absent and absolutely no attempt was made to protect the properties or the houses. No notice was taken of complaints concerning them. A Hindu lady was assaulted by a soldier and Mr. Natu reported the matter to the authorities producing the witnesses. No notice was vouchsafed. The soldiers were refractory and any complaint against them was obstruction. When a man fell ill many neighbouring families were taken to the segregation camp and left there without any covering to protect their body or any furniture, their property at home including horses, cows and sheep being left unprotected. A man was unnecessarily taken to the hospital and sent back as not being affected by plague to find his furniture destroyed and his poor wife and relatives forcibly removed and detained in the segregation camp. Temples were defiled by soldiers and his own temple was entered by them on account, Natu believes, of his impertinence in making a complaint. An old man who succeeded in satisfying the search party that he was not suffering from plague was detained in Jail some hours for having obstructed the search party, the obstruction apparently consisting in the delay caused by him. Insult was the reward for the services of volunteers and their suggestions were treated with contumely. You all know how sensitive our Mahomedan fellow-subjects are about the privacy of their women. And when Mr. Natu suggested that the services of Mahomedan volunteers should be availed of, to search the Mahomedan quarter, he was told that his conduct was improper and his services voluntarily rendered were dispensed with. Mr. Natu brought all this to the notice of the officials, pointed out that the operations were carried on against the spirit of the rules and complained that there was a great amount of unrest. The Indian newspapers gave prominence to these and similar complaints. They

compared the English Government to other Governments very much to the disadvantage of the former. *The Mahratta* complained, "Plague is more merciful to us than its human prototypes now reigning in the city.".....The tyranny of the Plague Committee and its chosen instruments is yet too brutal to allow respectable people to breathe at ease." And it was added that "every one of these grievances may be proved to the hilt if His Excellency is pleased to enquire into the details." These representations were certainly entitled to attentive consideration however much the authorities might have disagreed with them. Their objects were honest, their methods were proper. Their language was not respectful, it was perhaps violent, but men dominated by feelings of distress are often carried beyond what strict prudence would dictate. The violence seems to have been proportionate to the contempt with which the complaints were treated. But to the Indian mind the idea of creating a feeling of disaffection with a view to overthrow the English Government is simply ludicrous. Language which to a lawyer savoured perhaps of sedition was only intended by its violence to attract attention, and such language was only caused by the bitter feeling that milder representations by a race not so law-abiding as the Indians would have received immediate and careful attention. However, while these plague operations were being carried out, the President of the Plague Committee, to the horror and alarm of the native community, was murdered on what happened to be the Jubilee celebration day. To the Indian mind it was clear that this was nothing more than an unfortunate coincidence.

But its effect was very different in certain quarters. An Englishman in India is in a strange world; with his energy, practical will and ideas of freedom, he fails to understand and perhaps despises a nation given up to metaphysical dreams which does not regard material prosperity as the great object of life. In other parts of the world un-

der European sway, in Africa and America an alliance with a European is eagerly sought while in India where also he is master, he is regarded by the castes as impure whose touch is pollution. With such differences in thought and feeling, no wonder that ordinary Englishmen ignore the people entirely and do not try to understand them. Hence their limited comprehension. Not knowing the native mind they exaggerate the importance of trifles which only ruffle the surface of native feeling, and attribute to certain events a significance which however justifiable in England do not even deserve a passing notice in India. The difficulties of English administration based on this misunderstanding are increased by misrepresentations. Labouring under this incapacity to discover the mental condition of the Indian masses, the Anglo-Indian papers are not generally safe guides. In times of excitement in particular, some of them prove positively mischievous.

Thus, it is not a matter for surprise that a section of the Anglo-Indian Press discovered a deep design in the Poona murder. They found a pretext for the murder in the plague measures taken by Government. That the Native Press denounced such measures confirmed their suspicion. That the murder took place on the day of a great world-wide rejoicing proved to their satisfaction a deep-laid conspiracy which could have been planned only by educated cunning. Almost every incident that took place in Poona was pressed into the service to support this theory of conspiracy, and an attack was commenced on the Vernacular Press and the educated Indians, perhaps unexampled in its virulence since the mutiny; a gagging act was loudly demanded, the policy of imparting education to the Indians was questioned, the press in England was worked, and the Europeans were thrown into a panic. The attack on the educated Indians and the Vernacular Press was brutal and cowardly. It was suggested as a matter for regret that the native mind had forgotten the lessons of the last

mutiny, that a fresh mutiny would clear the air, particularly as the Mahrattas were not in the show of 1857. It was insisted that the Native Press was seditious and was responsible for the murder, and a section of the Anglo-Indian Press demanded the punishment by name, of Mr. Tilak, the man who had strongly attacked and denounced the measures of Government. The unreasoning panic into which the Anglo-Indian community was driven by this malignant attack and its unfortunate success in inflaming the English public, forced, according to the English papers, the hands of the Secretary of State, and Lord Sandhurst had to take measures which, it is believed, he would never have sanctioned if he had remained a free agent. Ostensibly to discover the murderer, but acting on the theory that the murders were the result of a conspiracy for which the Vernacular Press was responsible, the Government arrested the Nattu brothers under the provisions of an old law intended for lawless times to secure the peace of the country. Mr. Tilak and the Editors of two Vernacular papers were prosecuted; and a punitive force was imposed on the Poona Municipality. The arrest of the Nattu brothers was and must remain a great blunder. It recalls the worst days of irresponsible despotism. Liberty of person and property is a farce if you are liable to be arrested, imprisoned, and your property sequestered at the will and pleasure of Government without being brought to trial. We shall before we part, I have no doubt, express our emphatic protest against this proceeding.

The Editor of one of the papers was tried by a Judge without a Jury and was convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment which can be explained only by the panic which seized the entire European community. Mr. Tilak was tried by a Judge and Jury. A European,—he need not even be a subject of the Empress,—may claim to be tried by a jury of whom at least one half shall be Europeans. This is practically an efficient protection not only against the

executive but against popular excitement. In the case of an Indian, the entire Anglo-Indian community may be most unreasonably and passionately prejudiced against him; he may be an object of violent antipathy to the other races; yet he cannot claim fair trial at the hands of his countrymen. He must submit to be quietly convicted after, it may be, the farce of a trial; for a trial seldom restrains men who are passionately excited, and the trial by jury, an institution intended for the protection of the prisoner in such circumstances proves a delusion and a snare by depriving the prisoner of the right of appeal. Mr. Tilak, there can be scarcely any doubt, would have claimed a trial by a jury of whom one half were Indians, if to the Indian the law allowed the same protection that it affords to the European. If there is any offence in India which ought to be tried by a native Jury, it is the offence of sedition. It was possible that a native Jury who knew the language and who were in a more favorable position to form a correct judgment of the probable and intended effect of the articles on native mind would not have convicted; it was certain that a European Jury in that state of public excitement would convict. By exercising its right of challenge the prosecution was able to secure a Jury of six Europeans—the number necessary to secure a conviction—and three Indians, and the verdict was naturally 6 to 3. In a far stronger case tried by an experienced Chief Justice who had been trained in English courts, and retained the instincts of an Englishman, the Judge refused to accept the verdict of 7 to 2, when there was only one native on the Jury. In prison, these men, after conviction, have been treated as ordinary criminals. You are perhaps aware that, in England, a man convicted of sedition is not treated as an ordinary criminal, sedition being regarded a political offence, but in India apparently one is subject to the ordinary hardships of prison life.

This Poona incident enforces the necessity of cease-

less vigilance in keeping the English public correctly informed of whatever passes in India and of thus counteracting the mischievous effects of the dissemination of incorrect news. It emphasises the necessity of extending the system of Trial by Jury to India on the same conditions as it is granted to Europeans. It also shows that the Executive Government can deprive us of our liberty of person and property, at its own will and pleasure. It has brought into disagreeable prominence the unsatisfactory nature of the law of sedition. The Government of India have announced their intention to alter such law in the light of recent events. We trust the Government will bear in mind that in the circumstances of this country, anything which checks freedom of public discussion is most deplorable. Such check may become a temporary, if dangerous bar to quiet and steady progress. The stream of our national progress will nevertheless move on. It will become dry only when our holy rivers of India become dry. Its progress at present under sympathetic guidance is smooth. Its unwise obstruction may compel underground passages or its overflow. It is a sad commentary on a century of British rule that a Vernacular paper has had to close its office with these words. "It is no more now-a-days safe to conduct newspapers, hence we, who have other means of livelihood to support, make our exit, and do not feel any more necessity of attending the Deputy Commissioner's Bungalow to offer explanations for certain writings."

Though the Press prosecutions are over, the Government has not answered the question that will be asked by Posterity, and that is being asked by India now. Was there any foundation for the complaints made by these various men, some of them honorably distinguished? Why have they been led to commit those acts which have now been declared to be offences? If they are not justified, if they cannot prove their allegations, they cannot be condemned too strongly; they will then have proved a curse to our

country for the mischief they have committed. If, on the other hand, it was a righteous indignation for the sufferings of their countrymen that led them to Jail, it will be difficult to blame those who extend their sympathy to them.

We deprecate most strongly any intemperate language in criticizing Government measures. We are bound to assume that any objectionable measure must have been due either to ignorance or to error of judgment. We have also to remember that after all our salvation lies in bringing home to the majority of the people of England our real wishes and feelings and that the persons whose actions are criticized are their own kith and kin, that the system of Government we attack was framed by men for whom they feel just respect and esteem. Any violence therefore will do us infinite harm, it may possibly prevent us from securing a hearing. A false, incorrect, or even doubtful allegation will discredit us in the eyes of Englishmen, and the cause of reform may be thereby put back for generations.

Let me say at once that in the remarks I make I deem it superfluous to proclaim our loyalty to the British throne or to the British constitution, or to add that we have not the slightest sympathy with any speech or writing which would regard a severance of our connexion as a desirable consummation. We naturally take a pride in the lives of the great men who have lived for India, and we would draw the attention of our rulers to that part of our ancient history which we think they might usefully study. But we are also aware that the Present has its roots in the past and the past is responsible for our lowly condition. We who claim equality at the hands of Englishmen would deplore and resist any attempt to revive the days when any caste or class as such was privileged before the law, when a Brahmin for instance, could claim immunity from punishment! We claim equality for all, Brahmins and Pariahs alike.

It is this same feeling that prompts our criticism of any act on the part of our Rulers which may seem to recognize any inequality. It is by the removal of these inequalities before law between European and Indian and by the degree of self-Government conceded to us that we measure our progress towards freedom.

Gentlemen, I have done. I am afraid I have wearied you with my lengthy remarks, but I hope I have succeeded in placing before you clearly some points relating to our present political condition. We have no need to despair of our political future so long as we depend upon Great Britain, but let us at the same time be alive to our duties and responsibilities. India expects great things from us; the whole civilized world is watching the changes coming over us. Shall we be content to leave India as it is, or shall we go on and do all in our power to lift it to a higher level. Years of subjection, nay, we may even say servitude, have sapped the strength of the Indian nation, dwarfed its growth, and stripped it of all that was grand and noble in it, and if India is ever to occupy a better position than she fills at the present moment and take her proper place in the scale of nations, it must be entirely due to the zealous efforts of her educated and enlightened sons. Let '*Nil desperandum*' be our motto; let not 'insidious smile or angry frown' deter us from following the straight path of duty; and with the welfare and progress of our land as our end and aim, let us endeavour under a solemn sense of responsibility as well as loyalty to our country, to bring about that glorious future which must inevitably crown our efforts.

C. SANKARAN NAIR.