

APPENDIX.

Selections from Sir William Wedderburn's Speeches and Writings.

I. Parliamentary Inquiry into Indian Affairs.*

The first occasion on which Parliament interfered actively in the affairs of the East India Company was in 1773, when, under Lord North's administration, the Regulating Act was passed, and an attempt was made to place a control on the Government in Calcutta. The experiment was not a success; and in 1782 and 1783, two Committees of the House of Commons were appointed, one presided over by Mr. Edmund Burke, and the other by Mr. Dundas; and these two Committees made not less than 17 Reports, all condemnatory of the Company's Government. Upon these reports the House of Commons passed resolutions for the immediate dismissal of the Governor-General and the Chief Justice of Bengal; the situation being thus described by the Rt. Hon. W. Massey in his *History of England under George III*:—

The Company lay under accusation of having cruelly and scandalously abused the privileges of rulers. Their principal servants had been inculpated of gross malversation by a unanimous resolution of the House of Commons; and the Company had nevertheless upheld their officers in spite of the opinion of Parliament and of the Minister of the Crown. . . . Nor had the Company purchased material prosperity by the open violation of

* Reprint from *India*.

the principles on which civil government; nay, society itself, is based. Plunder and extortion had only relieved their immediate and temporary exigencies. The ordinary resources of India were unequal to satisfy the greedy adventurers who were spread over the land, and to maintain the military force which was necessary to support an arbitrary and iniquitous Government. The Company, therefore, came before Parliament as delinquents who had grossly abused their trust, and as bankrupts who were unable to perform their engagements.

Such being the condition of affairs, India formed the most prominent topic in the King's Speech on opening the autumnal Session of 1783; and a few days later Mr. Fox introduced his famous India Bill, to suspend the powers of the Company, and to bring the affairs of India under constitutional control. In 1784, this Bill "for the better government of India" was passed through the House of Commons by a majority of more than two to one in every division. And if it had become law, a strong and independent Parliamentary control would have been established over the Executive in India. Unhappily, the progress of the reformers was stopped by the fall of the Coalition Ministry; and the task of putting a bit and a bridle in the mouth of the great Indian bureaucracy remains unfulfilled to the present day.

Mr. Pitt, who next came into power, passed his India Bill, which established the Board of Control, the President of the Board being a Minister of the Crown. He thus provided for systematic interference in the affairs of the Company; and in 1783, Mr. Dundas, then President of the Board of Control, took advantage of the renewal of the Company's Charter, for a period of 20 years, to consolidate all the existing enactments, thus completing the fabric of the dual government by the Board of Control and the Court of Directors, which lasted some 60 years from this date.

A similar Parliamentary enquiry was held before the renewal of the Charter in 1813, the result of which was that the commercial monopoly which the East India Company enjoyed with regard to India and China, was abolished.

Again, in 1833, when the Charter was renewed, the memorable Act was passed by which it was declared that Natives of India, without regard to colour, descent or religion, should be eligible to every office under the Government which their education and acquirements might qualify them to fill.

Finally, there was the enquiry which preceded the renewal of the Charter in 1853; an enquiry which led to many beneficial reforms, including the abolition of patronage in the Indian Civil Service, the appointments being thrown open to public competition.

From the above meagre summary we can see the immense benefit that India derived from such periodical Parliamentary enquiries; the object of these enquiries being, first, to ascertain the facts as to the condition, the wants, and the aspirations of the people; and, secondly, to decide how those wants and aspirations can best be met, with benefit to all concerned. Experience shows that in each period of 20 years fresh conditions had arisen, and material alterations became necessary both in the framework of the government machine and in modes of administration, in order to meet the social and political developments of the people. But this development and progress has been much more rapid during the half-century which has elapsed since the enquiry of 1853. What has been done since then to realise the situation; to provide redress of grievances; to control the official autocracy; and to satisfy the natural aspirations of the people for self-government, stimulated as it has been by the education and the contact of Western nations? Much was hoped for in 1858, when the old East India Company was disestablished, and the direct administration was assumed by the Crown. But what has been the practical result? The theory, of course, is that the Secretary of State for India is responsible to, and subordinate to, Parliament, and that in dealing with Indian complaints he occupies a position of judicial impartiality. But this is altogether a delusion. The Secretary of State for India, being backed by the Ministerial majority, is in Indian matters, practically the master, not the servant, of the House of Commons; and so far from being an impar-

tial judge, ready to hear complaints, and eager to afford redress, he is in reality the mouthpiece and champion of the official hierarchy, against whom the complaints are made. Deriving his views and information solely from the India Office, he becomes naturally the apologist of all official acts, and resents every complaint as a reflection on the administration of which he is himself the head. So far from things being better now than they were before 1858, they are distinctly worse; and especially in two particulars: In those days India was administered in the name of the East India Company, and there existed a wholesome jealousy, both in the House of Commons and in the country, of a chartered monopoly. That wholesome jealousy has been lulled to sleep since the Crown has openly assumed the administration. The other great benefit that India then enjoyed, and has now lost, was the full and impartial enquiry before each renewal of the Company's Charter. Out of those enquiries arose, as we have seen, all the most useful and progressive reforms by which England has benefited India. Also, the Company used to put its house in order, and redressed grievances, when these enquiries were in sight. Now, all these benefits are lost. Since 1858, there has been no such enquiry; no day of reckoning for the Indian administration; and the Indian people are quite powerless to obtain that thorough and independent investigation into facts which used to come to them automatically, and without effort, once every 20 years. So far from being controlled, the Indian Bureaucracy is always becoming stronger, more reactionary and more aggressive; fortifying itself in the great centralised departments, and grasping the legislative machinery, which it employs to undermine local self-government, to suppress free speech, and to paralyse higher education. Instead of emphasising the difference between British and Russian rule, and developing those free institutions which form the main ground of Indian attachment to England, these blind guides are setting up in India a feeble and foolish imitation of Russian despotism, and are rapidly alienating the affections of a loyal, intelligent and law-abiding people.

Anyone who peruses the earlier debates in Parliament

with regard to the constitutional changes in the Indian Government, will notice the anxious desire of the speakers that due weight should be given to Indian opinion and Indian knowledge. But the difficulty in those early days was to get hold of any authorised and organised Indian public opinion. Now, however, that difficulty no longer exists. Since 1866, several generations of educated men have come forward, trained in our colleges and universities; men who have attained the highest distinction in administration, on the Bench, at the Bar, in science, and all the liberal professions. With such spokesmen India is no longer inarticulate. Nor is Indian public opinion any longer without effective organisation. For the Indian National Congress, freely elected in all the Provinces of India, has now met year after year, for the last 20 years, to voice the needs, the wishes, and the aspirations of the Indian people; and the resolutions, moderate and reasonable, are year by year respectfully submitted for the consideration of the Indian Government. Rightly understood, the interests of India and England are identical, and the cordial co-operation of the educated classes is the most hopeful sign for our successful administration in the future. As a preliminary step towards utilising this source of knowledge and influence, an experienced Indian administrator should be added to the Executive Council of the Viceroy, and several independent representative Indians should be invited to sit on the Council of the Secretary of State for India.*

At present the Indian Government refuses enquiry into the condition of the Indian rural population, which suffers from famine and plague; and a deaf ear is turned to the memorials of the National Congress, asking for reasonable measures which will improve the condition of the masses. Special Indian knowledge, such as Parliament does not possess, is needed to deal satisfactorily with these vexed questions.

* This article was written long before the latest Indian Councils Act.

II. Agricultural Indebtedness.*

In this Address you have referred to the impoverished condition of the masses of this country, and you have referred to the interest that I have taken in the ryot, in the great rural population of India. It is quite true, I may say, that for nearly half a century my anxious thought has been for the great mass of the rural population. (*Cheers.*) The great problem is this, the terrible indebtedness of the agriculturist, an indebtedness so great that it paralyzes his energies, it enslaves him, it deprives him of his hereditary acres. That is the greatest misfortune that can happen to the country. This great indebtedness has led, I regret to say, to the destruction of his credit. When a man owes more than he can ever hope to pay, how can he get loans when he is in great difficulties? The consequence is that this excessive indebtedness is, I believe, the main cause of the great mortality during famines. When crops failed in former times a man had some little ornaments remaining to him and he had credit with the money-lender, with the grain dealer; but now owing to his excessive indebtedness, if the harvest fails, he has no money to buy food, no credit to borrow money, and unless he is fed by the State at the expense of the taxpayer, he must die in starvation. That is a terrible state of things. I may say that famine has not been a famine of food, but has been a famine of poverty. In the worst times of the famine and in the worst localities there was always food to be got if the people had only the money to buy it with or had the credit to borrow the money. Therefore, I say this terrible indebtedness is the great cause of the famine mortality.

Gentlemen, with your permission, I would very briefly refer to the efforts which at different periods I have made

* Reply to an Address of Welcome presented by the Citizens of Madras on the 6th January, 1905.

in order to deal with this terrible evil of rural indebtedness. From both of these things I had considerable hopes ; but I am sorry to say in both cases those hopes were not realised. (The Chairman ; for the present.) For the present, I am glad to see, the Chairman tells us. The first was in the year 1882 when our beloved Marquis of Ripon (*cheers*) was the Viceroy of India. At that time we made a scheme to deal with the indebtedness of the Taluq of Purandar in the Poona Collectorate. Both the ryots and money-lenders agreed to the arrangements proposed. The scheme was to make a settlement of the old debts upon an equitable basis with the consent of all parties : the State was to advance the amount of these debts. Having thus cleared the way, we were to establish an experimental Agricultural Bank in that taluq in order that the ryots might receive abundant advances at a moderate rate of interest. To this scheme the ryots had agreed, the money-lenders had agreed—they were to become shareholders in the Bank—the bankers had agreed, the landholders had agreed and we had many experienced Government Pensioners who were willing freely and without payment to administer the affairs of the Bank. Not only that, but the Government of Bombay agreed to this scheme and the scheme went up to the Government of India : and I am glad to say that the scheme was not only approved by the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, but also by his Finance Minister, Major Baring, who is now Lord Cromer. Lord Cromer, when he was satisfied that the people desired the scheme, that it was on good business lines, and that it was likely to be a pioneer that might spread to other parts of the country, was willing to provide the hard cash to make the settlement between the ryots and the money-lenders. He was willing to advance no less than Rs. 6½ lakhs in order to make a complete settlement of the old debts.

This having been agreed upon, a despatch was sent in the year 1882, to the Secretary of State for India in London, asking for his sanction for this great and useful experiment ; and the Government of India said : “ We cannot see that any harm can possibly come from this, and very great benefit might accrue to the whole country.” I am sorry to say—I am not going to call any hard

names, I do not think that any hard names ever break one's opponent's bones nor do any good to one's cause—I shall only say that I regret to say that the Secretary of State for India, after a wearisome correspondence making difficulties and asking questions that could not be answered—we wanted to make an experiment and see how it worked; a man cannot learn to swim until he goes into water, and in the same way we wanted to make an experiment to see how a Bank could be worked—I am sorry to say that after considerable correspondence, the Secretary of State for India ended by giving a negative to the whole scheme without giving any proper reasons for his refusal. (*Shame.*) That was in 1882. Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed and now at last, after 22 years the Government of India have discovered that Agricultural Banks would be a good thing for the ryots of the country. If they had found out that 22 years ago, we should have found that Lord Cromer, instead of employing his genius and ability in rescuing the ryots of Egypt from their indebtedness, would have employed his genius and capacity to have done that for the ryots of the Empire of India. I have seen the proposals of the Government of India for Agricultural Banks, but it appears to me that they are not satisfactory. They are too much centralised. They depend upon centralisation instead of being adapted to the special needs of the people in the locality. They are too doctrinaire; they are not practical enough and I very much fear that they have not very much hope. But I am glad at any rate that they have taken that one step in 22 years, that they discovered that Agricultural Banks would be a good thing for the people. (*Laughter.*)

The second matter to which I would draw your attention is the Memorial, the very largely and influentially signed Memorial, of the Indian Famine Union, asking for a detailed economic inquiry into the condition of typical villages that have been suffering from famines. The reason that we desired that enquiry was because of the irreconcilable differences of opinion between the officials and the non-officials with regard to the real condition of the Indian ryots; in the Annual Reports we are always being told of the increasing prosperity of the ryot.

If he has been increasing in prosperity every year since I remember official Reports, he ought to be a very fat man by this time. (*Laughter.*) But the non-official opinion is that he is a very poor man, a mere starveling and a victim of famine and plague. Until we decide what the condition of a patient is, how can we possibly apply any remedy? If you have a sick man, we first make a diagnosis of his case and then we know how to apply the remedy. We, therefore, begged the Government of India to make this enquiry. I think I may say that never was a petition more influentially signed, beginning with the Archbishop of Canterbury and going down through every grade of society. I am sorry to say that the Secretary of State and the Government of India both refused to make that enquiry; and I see that in the last day or two, Sir Edward Law has spoken of the general wave of prosperity that has been passing over the country during the last three years. I say this is a statement which ought not to be made unless there is a full enquiry before independent authorities to ascertain what is the real condition of the people. Now, this enquiry was refused for various reasons. One was that it would take up too much time of the Government officials. But I have been able to point out to them that Mr. Thorburn, the Financial Commissioner in the Punjab, made such an enquiry in no less than 742 Punjab villages. He completed the enquiry, I think in six weeks and the whole cost of it was only £300. If that is the case, why should the Government shrink from making the enquiry we ask for? Another ground was that it would raise unfounded hopes in the agriculturists' minds. But in Sir Antony Macdonnell's great Famine Report, he said that one of the greatest evils which the country suffered from was the despairing dependancy of the agriculturists. The first thing he asked to take was the motto "put heart into the people"; that is what is wanted. Therefore to raise hopes in the minds of the people is not a bad thing, but on the other hand a very good thing.

Lastly, they told us a most extraordinary thing; they said that if the enquiry were made it would be intensely resented by the people. Now, I think that it is ar

inquiry which the people have always been asking for ; that it will not be resented by the people is shown by the fact that the Indian National Congress, which represents the people, has twice made the request to Government that the enquiry should be made in accordance with the recommendations of the Indian Famine Union's Memorial. (*Cheers.*)

III. The Mission of the Congress.*

I have watched from its commencement the movement which has now culminated in the Indian National Congress. And in my humble judgment the movement is unmitigated good in its origin, objects and its methods. As regards its historical origin, we know that it is the direct result of the noblest efforts of British statesmanship : the natural and healthy fruit of higher education and free institutions freely granted to the people of India. Again what are the practical objects of the Congress movement ? They are to revive the National life, and to increase the material prosperity of the country ; and what better object could we have before us ? Lastly, as regards our methods, they are open and constitutional, and based solely on India's reliance upon British justice and love of fair play.

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The man who points out the rocks and shoals towards which the ship is moving, is the friend of the captain, not the enemy. And that is the light in which the Government should regard the criticisms of the Congress. The moderate reforms proposed by the Congress will all tend to make the people of India more prosperous and more contented, and will thereby strengthen the foundations of British rule. (*Cheers.*)

* *From the Presidential Address to the Fifth Congress, 1889.*

IV. The Congress and the Masses.*

If we carefully study the Congress resolutions, we shall find that they all point to one main consideration, the condition of the agricultural masses. Upon the welfare of the peasant cultivator depends the prosperity of all India. The one great question, therefore, is how can he be protected from famine and pestilence? How can he be made happy and prosperous? Everything depends upon the answer given to this question. And it is here that the irreconcilable difference of opinion arises between the official and non-official view of the situation; between the Government and the Congress. The Government view is that the cultivator is prosperous; the Congress view is that he is ruined: the Government view is that the official system of centralised departments is the cause of his prosperity; the Congress view is that this same system is the cause of his ruin. Here is a clear issue of fact; and the prayer of the Congress is that this issue should be tried and determined. Is the cultivator prosperous or is he ruined? What we now ask for, as a preliminary step, is a detailed economic inquiry, by an impartial authority, into the condition of a few typical villages; an inquiry after the fashion of that conducted in London by Mr. Charles Booth, and in York by Mr. Rowntree. But this inquiry the Indian Government is unwilling to face. Lord Curzon will not allow it to be made, although it has been demanded by the *Indian Famine Union*, backed by a Memorial signed by leading representatives of every influential class in the United Kingdom.

The situation is, indeed, a strange one. On the one hand, we have Indian public opinion, represented by the Congress, quite solid, but destitute of political power; on the other hand, we have Lord Curzon at the head of the all-compelling official autocracy. The Congress says

* From an article on "India Re-Visited" to the "Indian Review" for March, 1905.

that India is suffering; Lord Curzon says: "No, she is happy and prosperous;" and here the matter must stand until inquiry is made, and the facts determined. It is the old dispute between the wearer of the shoe and the maker. The wearer says: "the shoe does not fit; it galls me; I am crippled, and cannot walk; please examine my foot, and you will see that this is the case." The official shoe-maker is indignant that such complaints should be made. He knows what a superior person he is, how skilled a workman, how kindly intentioned. He, therefore, refuses all inquiry; and explains to the British public that these complaints must be unfounded, as his workshop and his work people are the most meritorious that the world has ever seen.

Such is the present situation. But it cannot last. Inquiry cannot be indefinitely postponed; and truth will be out in the end.

V. A Scheme of Village Inquiry.*

My scheme is that, after the inquiry suggested is made, each of these typical villages should be put under the charge of an experienced and sympathetic officer with instruction that he should by his own methods of keeping accounts of the cost, etc., bring that village into prosperity. I regard the village community as the unit in India. The result of this experiment would give us a clue to the method for rendering prosperous all the half a million villages of which India is made up. The inquiry suggested is not merely to diagnose the disease but to discover the remedies by experiment.

Each experiment that is found successful would be applied to the neighbouring villages and the remedies would gradually expand from each centre to places which economically are similarly conditioned.

* * From an interview given to the Representative of the *Madras Mail* in January, 1905.

"I have passed a quarter of a century among you, and during that period of time I have not known what it was to suffer an unkindness from a native of India. During that period I have been in the service of the people of India, and have eaten their salt. And I hope to devote to their service what still remains to me of active life."—From the Presidential Address to the Fifth Indian National Congress, 1889.

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