

'DESTINY OF BEHAR'

OR

'A STUDY IN PERILS'

—A REJOINDER.

BY

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On 27th September, 1916, the Patna University Bill was introduced into the Imperial Legislative Council with the following features, which have been rightly called "unprecedented in the annals of Indian University Legislation.—"

(1) Curtailment of expansion of higher education in the entire Province by restricting the growth of colleges to four towns, and within the radius of one mile from the Senate House.

(2) The Senate is to be a glorified debating society! It can come to any resolution on any question relating to the administration of the University, but such resolution shall not be binding on the Syndicate.

(3) The Syndicate is to be the central executive organ of the University and is to consist mainly of Government nominees. It is to be entirely free of all control by the Senate.

(4) The absentee and ornamental Chancellor will be the supreme authority and his decisions will be final.

Thus, under the proposed constitution of the University, "A secretary, sitting behind a barricade of despatch boxes and working without advisers, and without any public responsibility, will be able to defeat a council of educational experts."

The provisions of this Bill have been condemned not only by public associations and political meetings, but also by the most eminent educationists, such as Sir Gooroodas Banerjee, Sir Ashutosh Mukerjee, Sir Narayan Ganesh Chandravarkar, the Hon'ble Principal R. P. Paranjapye, Dr. Brojendra Nath Seal and Principal Heramba Chandra Maitra. But, strangely enough, a pamphleteer, under the cover of anonymity, has lent his gratuitous support to the measure. To know whether the writer, like an honest 'watchman,' has watched over the true interests of the rising generation, or has only sought to further extend the existing European monopoly of the superior Educational Service, it is necessary to examine his arguments in detail.

Referring to the proceedings of the extra-ordinary session of the Behar Provincial Conference he says:—

"If the numerous resolutions passed at the Conference are carefully studied and analysed, the unani-

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mity with which they were accepted appears nothing less than astounding."

'Watchman' makes a very poor exhibition of his knowledge of the procedure followed in Conferences of the type under consideration. He evidently does not know that there is a subjects committee, in which the resolutions to be adopted are thoroughly discussed, before they are placed before the Conference. Moreover the subject, in the present case, had already been discussed at preliminary meetings held at different centres of the Province. "The complete and absolute unanimity of all the delegates" indicates, if anything, their capacity to sink minor differences and to concentrate their whole attention on the most objectionable features of the Bill. According to the writer, if the people are not unanimous, their resolutions are worthless: if they are, the proceedings are machine-made. This logic is worthy only of the Pharisees of the Indian Educational Service!

If any machinery was employed to manufacture "this astounding unanimity" among the delegates, it must have been the most powerful mechanical device ever invented by man, as it created unanimity not only among the delegates of the Behar Provincial Association, but also amongst the members of the Behar Landholders' Association, the Bengalee Settlers' Asso-

ciation, the Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, the All-India Kshatriya Upkarini Sabha, the Orissa Association, and last though not least, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League, as well as learned bodies, like the Senates of the Bombay and Calcutta Universities.

We admit that some of the gentlemen present in the conference were men who usually take part in politics. That certainly does not diminish the significance of the Conference or make this extraordinary session a meeting of political agitators. But what harm if it were? Surely one could not expect a Government servant, such as the Principal of the B. B. College or of the Patna College, to displease his masters by condemning a bureaucratic measure in public.

He next deals with what he characterises as "the educational conservatism of the speakers in the Conference as contrasted with their burning enthusiasm for progress." He goes on to say that the desire for a better type of education does not seem to have occurred to any one of them, and when they want a better type of University they only mean a University "with a larger measure of popular control."

A careful perusal of the complete report of the speeches will distinctly show that this is far from the truth. The provisions of the Patna University Bill

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are mainly directed against the popular element;† therefore, in criticising the Bill it was only natural that the danger arising therefrom should be pointedly brought out by the speakers. If the people of Behar have expressed their willingness to continue under the regime of the Calcutta University, it is not because they consider it to be an ideal University, but because our existing connection with Calcutta is a lesser evil than the dreadful spectre of a University which will smother all higher education in the Province and petrify existing conditions.

In pretending horror at the alleged low standard of the Calcutta University, Watchman has only repeated the familiar shibboleth of a class of men, whose insidious activities against it are not unknown to the public. It is not our business to defend that institution. But is it actually so rotten as some of these people are pleased to represent it? In spite of the factious opposition of a powerful section of the Indian Educational Service, neglect on the part of the Government, lack of adequate space, buildings and equipment, it has a fine record of work behind it. It does

* N.B. "The...framers of the Bill had one paramount object in view, namely, to secure for the Local Government the maximum of control in all academic matters in the so-called University." (Vide the Report of the Calcutta University Committee on the Patna University Bill.)

not produce a smaller number of first-rate men every year than the much-talked of Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, notwithstanding the fact that men of indifferent qualifications from these Universities, not to speak of men from cheap Universities, like St. Andrews and Aberdeen, are dumped down from time to time as professors in its colleges, who make up by roughness what they lack in intellectual attainments. According to 'Watchman' in the department of higher education "popular control is a factor uniformly adverse to improvement." But we would like to remind him of the following recommendation, contained in the report of the Haldane Commission on the University of London, which, in the words of His Excellency the Viceroy "is a document omnium consensu of the highest educational value."

"We agree * * * in thinking that above the Senate there should be a *widely representative and Supreme Governing Body* to be called the Court. In the main, this form of Government, though not without its dangers, has proved eminently *successful*. One of the principal advantages of a *large body of this kind* is that it should bring an *intelligent lay judgment to bear upon the solution of problems*, which divide expert opinion." (P. 151).

A reference to the proposed constitution of the London University would show how laymen have

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been given the final control over the statutes governing the University, the affiliation of colleges and all other matters in which a minority of the Senate may appeal against the judgment of the majority. The Court is a body of 200 men of whom only 30 to 35 are to be teachers by profession, and the remaining seats are to be filled up by popular representatives.

At one place Watchman writes as follows:—

“One would have anticipated that in any informed discussion on the topic before the Conference, considerable attention would have been given to authoritative pronouncements on University Education.”

After this remark one would have thought that the writer himself would throw some additional light on the discussion of the question under consideration by a reference to those authoritative pronouncements on University Education, which are not easily available to the general public. But in this we are sadly disappointed. We knew Lord Sydenham as an amiable Governor of an Indian Province, who would willingly keep India in her swaddling-clothes as long as he could. We know Sir James Meston as a capable Civilian, who made himself the local agent of the Round Table. But we have yet to learn that they are high authorities on matters educational, whose utterances no serious student of University literature can afford to ignore. Is it Watchman's ideal to

make our new University an appanage to the State Department of Public Instruction ?

He airily dismisses the recommendations of the Royal Commission in favour of popular control by saying that "they are patently inapplicable to conditions in Behar and Orissa !"

'Watchman' is an apostle of 'efficiency' and would secure it at the cost of the expansion of higher education in the country. Indians are not very fond of this expression, for the enemies of India have often tried to check the progress of education amongst them in the name of efficiency. In fact, without universal diffusion of knowledge, organisation of higher brain work must be an impossibility. The quality of education in a country is largely determined by the moral and intellectual atmosphere of the community, from which the students are mainly drawn. A superb educational structure requires a correspondingly broad base.

In Great Britain, one has not to depend for his very subsistence on University qualifications. One can rise even to the highest positions in the land without having crossed the threshold of a University. In India, however, it is the only key to employment, and even a poor clerk is required to show some University qualification to his credit. This is an additional reason why a provincial University should have among its aims the wide diffusion of knowledge.

After discussing the question of efficiency, Watchman flies off at a tangent and gives his readers a dissertation on the evils of democracy, relying on a passage from Plato. It would seem that according to him, the form of Government best suited to the requirements of our Province is Oligarchy, and he would secure this end by altogether eliminating the popular element from it. His political studies do not seem to have gone very far, for he obviously does not know what Aristotle has said about the comparative merits of oligarchy and democracy :—

“The fourth sort of oligarchy is where the power is in the same hands, and they are supreme instead of the laws, and this sort of oligarchy exactly corresponds to a tyranny among monarchies.”

“The power is not in the man who is member of the Assembly or Council, but in the Assembly itself, and in the Council and the people, of which each individual of the whole community forms a part, as Senator, Adviser, or Judge. And for this reason it is *very right* that the *many* should have the *greatest powers* in their own hands.” (Aristotle).

And yet the Patna University Bill seeks to vest the decisive power of shaping the education of our children in a close, narrow and irresponsible oligarchy of officials!

In conclusion, the writer prescribes his own solution of the problem. He says:—

“Here is a third possible type of University a truly independent University which is managed and controlled “under proper safeguards” by the men who are actually carrying on the work for which it is established, and in which educational interests will at last preponderate.”

His ideal is monkish, but the best modern Universities have outgrown this mediaeval stage. Curiously enough in advocating this ideal, he has not sought the guidance of the report of the Royal Commission, which embodies the latest plan of University reform in England, but has relied on extracts from the speeches of Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar in the Imperial Council, and an occasional contribution to an Anglo-Indian paper by an obscure Professor of an Indian College and some ribald verses. For his edification we quote the following observations of the Royal Commissioners in extenso:—

“The history of the University of London and of other Universities proves that from time to time questions of great importance to the subsequent development of the University have failed to find an answer... because the opinions of the experts have been divided.”

Again “the presence of representatives of these Colleges...might encourage the continuance of historic

jealousies and detract from the judicial temper, which should animate the chief executive organ of the University."

They have recommended the creation of an Academic Council, consisting of University teachers, whose functions will be merely advisory.

The representation of the teaching element could not have been larger than that in the existing constitution of the Calcutta University. Out of its 103 ordinary fellows no less than 75 are men actually engaged in the profession of teaching. The composition of the Syndicate is equally instructive. Out of its 16 members including the Vice-Chancellor no less than 14 are professors of Colleges or members of the Education Department. And yet 'Watchman' is not satisfied with the constitution of the Calcutta University!

The strike of September last in the Patna College is dragged into Watchman's pamphlet with the following sapient remarks:—

"Taken in connection with certain sinister tendencies which are undoubtedly at work, it assumes a different character. I do not for a moment accuse any of the strikers' friends of sympathy with revolutionary propagandists. But when they give open encouragement to a spirit of insubordination, and specially when they invoke the sacred name of religion

in support of the defiance of lawful authority, they are in effect if not intention allying themselves with these enemies of society. There have been too many examples in a neighbouring province of the effect of such teaching upon unbalanced minds and the process which begins with the cultivation of a disaffected spirit may end here as elsewhere in organised campaigns of treason and murder."

It is a serious charge and needs investigation. But such an investigation is impossible without giving a detailed history of the strike.

The Minto Hindu Hostel, attached to the Patna College, was built mainly with subscriptions from Hindu Zamindars for the benefit of Hindu students. A Brahman professor has always been in charge of it, and such Hindu boarders as liked had always celebrated Pujas in their own quarters, without having had to take special permission for it, unless they wanted to have music or remain out of doors during their study hours, for there are two distinct rules against making any noise and being absent from one's room during the periods of study (about 1½ hours each morning and evening), and another rule against holding public meetings.

In August last, on the Janamastmi day, only 42 boarders were in residence, the other 66 Hindu boys of the Hostel having gone, some to their homes and

most on an archaeological trip to Benares. These 42 applied to the Principal for permission to celebrate the Janamastami in the Hostel lawn with music and up to 9 P.M. The Principal wrote on the petition that the petition was granted "on the understanding that it should not be regarded as a precedent for future occasions of a *similar nature*." This reply was shown to the signatories for a few minutes and then shelved away in the Superintendent's office. It was never circulated to the other students, never put up on the notice board, and never entered in the College order book. The 66 absent Hindu boarders, therefore, had no means of knowing that such an order had been issued—for it was no general order, but a definite reply to a particular request from a particular group of students. The language of the Principal's reply can not be squeezed to mean a prohibition of all Pujas without permission, because it never says so distinctly and the petition which it professes to grant definitely solicits permission for music and breach of study hours. The sanction of such a petition cannot by any human ingenuity be forced to mean the subjecting of Pujas in general, apart from music and breach of study hours, to official permission in future.

At noon on 10th September, some 12 Hindu boarders (all but one of whom had been absent from the Hostel on the Janamastami day, when permission

had been solicited and obtained) performed the Anantkatha in a vacant room of a bungalow in the College Compound, the farthest from the Mohammedan Hostel. Incense was burnt, a bell was rung and finally a Brahman student read a chapter out of a Hindu sacred book.

For this act the Principal suspended from the College four of the participants in the Puja at 9 P.M., and ordered them to leave the town for their village homes before 6 o'clock next morning. It should be borne in mind that all those who had done Puja were fasting that night and were asked to board train and steamer without being given any time to break their fast.

The Senior Prefect, who had been absent from the Hostel during the Puja and the rest of the day, was also suspended, because the Principal imagined that the Anant Puja was a deliberate and organised defiance of his authority, that the Senior Prefect knew that the dozen boarders were going to perform the Puja and had failed in his duty by not reporting the matter to the Superintendent.

We, laymen, who live in the work-a-day world and do not wear pedagogic magnifying spectacles, find it difficult to follow Mr. Jackson's process of reasoning, but that is probably because we lack his training in the exact sciences, and his habit of making

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big drafts on his imagination instead of relying on concrete facts!

The other Hindu boarders were astounded to hear of the sentence and next morning begged Mr. Jackson to permit the five suspended boys to remain in the town pending the decision of the charge against them, as they would needlessly miss a large number of lectures if they were sent home and then recalled to stand their trial before the College authorities. Mr. Jackson refused to grant the request and reprimanded the spokesmen of the boarders for their audacity in representing their grievances before him. The disappointed boys left the Hostel on a strike. This very simple matter was seemingly complicated by a strike in the Mohammedan Hostel, which was due to a long-standing grievance, altogether unconnected with the Hindu boys, except that the two strikes happened on the same day. The cause of the latter was that Mr. Jackson forbade the chanting of the Moslem call to prayer in the Mohammedan Hostel—a thing allowed in every other Mohammedan Hostel in India, and then demanded that the man chanting the call should coo softly like a dove, while the Mohammedan students declared it impracticable to modulate the voice to any official pitch.

On the third day the strikers were induced to return to college. They were all fined for absence.

All scholarships and free studentships, enjoyed by the deserving poor, have been suspended in the case of those out on strike and three students have been rusticated on the suspicion of their having been ring-leaders in the strike.

We have shown how Mr. Jackson, a brilliant scientist, disdains the drudgery of going on proved facts and draws upon his imagination in forming his theories. The strike is now represented as a political movement engineered from Bengal to create unrest and give trouble to the Government of Behar.

“Every Bavius has his Bufo still.”

And here comes his friend ‘Watchman’ accusing the Bankipore public leaders of encouraging unrest among the boys and fomenting sedition in Behar by opposing College authorities. With a logic bearing a family likeness to that by which Mr. Jackson arrived at his theory of the guilt of the boys he has punished, ‘Watchman’ asserts that the strike was the result of the wickedness of the boys, which Mr. Jackson as a lover of discipline was bound to punish. Here it should be pointed out that the only two strikes in the long history of the Patna College took place during Mr. Jackson’s Principalship. If the boys are the cause of this unhappy result, why did they not strike under any other Principal? The legitimate inference from Watchman’s theory is that Principals

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like Messrs. Ewbank, James—the beau ideal of the I. E. S. and the darling of the *Times*,—Russell and Little were sleepy, inefficient administrators who indulged the students in their lawless humours and durst not punish them, while Mr. Jackson as the only conscientious officer in the service has caused an out-break by trying to punish offenders against discipline!

As we, the admirers of the former Principals, are called upon by the vigilant *chowkidar* to adore Mr. Jackson, a little enquiry into this new super-efficient Principal's record will not be considered irrelevant on our part.

Mr. Victor H. Jackson, M.A. (Cantab) first joined the Presidency College in 1897. While still a junior professor, he sent to the Government a scheme for the better working of the Presidency College, in which he charged Dr. J. C. Bose and Dr. P. C. Roy, the senior professors in science, who had gained a European reputation, of not honestly earning their salaries, but cheating the Government by doing research work of their own, instead of teaching classes all the day. Here it should be pointed out that ever since he became Principal in July, 1914, Mr. Jackson has not taken a class for a single hour, though neither his worst enemies nor his fondest admirers would ever accuse him of making any original researches. Happily, the then Lieutenant-

Governor of Bengal nipped the scandal in the bud by withdrawing Mr. Jackson's report and packing him off to the Patna College. Here in the paucity of senior officers, he rose to officiate as Principal in 1908 and signalised his first lustrum by provoking a strike by suspending from the College for several weeks, with a view to debar them from the University examinations, four B.A. candidates, whose only fault was that they had held a meeting to bid farewell to an invalid fellow-student! However, Mr. Jackson afterwards admitted his own mistake by commuting the punishment on these four boys in to a fine.

He next came to officiate as Principal in July, 1914, and distinguished this period by the following astonishing incident. Babu Keshodayal, a brilliant Behari Honoursman and M. Sc. in Physics, was lecturing to his students, when Mr. Jackson walked into his class room unasked, and in a voice loud enough to be heard by the students rebuked him for not making enough experiments and insinuated (what was absolutely untrue) that Babu Keshodayal could not arrange experiments because he did not come to College early enough. Then, when the lecturer had finished his discourse and come to a natural stop in the subject, Mr. Jackson roared out to him to continue lecturing for his benefit! On the dumfounded gentleman (Indian Professors may con-

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ceivably be gentlemen, even when they happen to be Mr. Jackson's subordinates) professing his inability to lecture to order on a scientific subject, Mr. Jackson shouted out, "Go on lecturing, or I shall suspend you." And he did suspend B. Keshodayal and turned him out of the Laboratory saying "Leave the College grounds at once." The end of the affair was the return of common sense to Mr. Jackson and his restoration of Babu Keshodayal to his class with the remark, "I never intended to lower your teacher in your eyes."

And the man who behaves thus to his colleagues,—as highly educated as himself, though occupying a lower position by reason of their colour, is Watchman's ideal of a disciplinarian and immaculate College Head! And any criticism of his conduct by the guardians of Bankipore is a stimulus to sedition! How many tons of such lies must be forged by the croaking Watchman at his smithy before he can beat down the truth and persuade his readers that the Vakils of the Patna High Court by advocating reforms in the Patna College are only preaching the cult of the bomb!

What shall we say of the capacity of a man, whose administration requires to be defended by such weapons? What shall we say of the morals and logical power of such an advocate?

It is bad enough that our Government Colleges are domineered over by third-rate men, who have largely monopolised the Indian Educational service and whose relations with their Indian colleagues, who have grown grey in the profession of teaching, are not always satisfactory. But the prospect will be infinitely worse when the forth-coming Patna University will be lorded over by men, with the academic manners of Mr. Jackson or the polemic morals of Watchman.

It is not our intention to enter upon a defence of those whose character Watchman has defamed from behind the safe mask of anonymity. But what would an impartial observer think of a Bill, that requires to be defended by such absurd arguments and dishonest insinuations as disfigure the pamphlet of Watchman! And what would be the character of a University where men, capable of employing such controversial methods and possessed of such queer capacity of reasoning will be the dominant authority! An honest 'Watchman' ought to guard the interests of the community. But if he thinks only of the emoluments and power of himself and his brethren, he proves himself the hireling of the Parable. Even 'pleader rule' in our University is better than the rule of such academic "Mercenary Swiss."
