

INDIA AND THE EMPIRE

A LECTURE AND VARIOUS PAPERS
ON INDIAN GRIEVANCES

BY

ANNIE BESANT

LONDON
ECOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING SOCIETY
13 NEW BOND STREET, W.

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PREFACE

THE ignorance of the English public as to things relating to India, and the indifference of the House of Commons—as shown by the empty benches when Indian questions are before it—are grave dangers to the Empire. India is asking for self-government, such as is enjoyed by the Colonies, and she earnestly desires to have her place within the circle of the Empire, under the ægis of the Crown. Western education has inspired Western ideals of representation and self-government, and responsible Englishmen have declared that England desired to give to India the liberties enjoyed by her own people, so soon as India was ready to possess and utilise them. India has grown to love these ideals and to aspire after self-control; she does not seek to break her link with England, but she desires so to transform it that it may be

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a tie honourable to both and prized by both. She cannot remain the only nation in the Empire which is held in dependence, while she sees younger and less civilised peoples enjoying national autonomy.

I feel convinced that if the British public understood the reasonableness and the urgency of India's plea for justice, her demand would be heard and granted. Britain is indifferent because ignorant. The following papers have appeared during the last few weeks, and some interest, at least, has been aroused. They are now published separately, in the hope of reaching fresh readers, and of arousing further interest.

A brief explanation as to *The Times* correspondence is needed. My original letter appeared on May 29, 1914, and was followed on May 30 by the leader, reprinted here by the courteous permission of the Editor. There was no need to reply to this, as it evaded the main points, and its suggestion of my ignorance of well-known Indian conditions was merely foolish. But on June 3, Miss Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi by birth and a Christian by belief, rushed

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into the field, and made various misstatements as to ancient Indian ideals, calculated to mislead the public. *The Times* farther printed a contradiction from the Institution of Civil Engineers of one of my statements. I waited to see if any other comments would be made, and, as none appeared, I sent a reply on June 14. I received a note that the Editor hoped to print it; I waited a week, and then wrote asking that my letter might be returned, as I had kept no copy, not thinking it possible that a paper of the standing of *The Times* would not print a reply to misstatements it had inserted. Again I had note of the Editor's continuing hope, and a proof of the letter. Another week is drawing to its close, and I am leaving to-night for India, so I print here my reply to Miss Sorabji: it may have appeared before this booklet sees the light. Lālā Lajpat Rai, a Hindu, wrote exposing Miss Sorabji's ignorance of Hinduism, but his letter was refused insertion. Miss Sorabji writes as though Indian traditions and ideals were dear to her, but she does not share them, having been born a Parsi and

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having embraced Christianity; her arguments should only be taken at their face value, not as having the weight belonging to a member of the faith she misrepresents. Her ignorance of Hinduism is quite excusable under the circumstances, and is indeed natural. But the public would imagine from her letter that she was a Hindu.

The papers are printed in the order of their publication, except that *The Times* correspondence is all printed consecutively.

I am very grateful to the Editors of *The Christian Commonwealth*, *The Nation*, *The Daily Chronicle*, and *The Daily News* for their friendly help in laying facts before the public. My gratitude is also due to the Editor of *The Times* for the insertion of my first letter. I wish he had been fair enough to print my reply before all public interest had died out; and "pressure on space" is hardly a satisfactory reason for a fortnight's delay, where so much that appears is of no immediate importance, and is of limited interest. The exigencies of party politics now outweigh the old journalistic fairness, and facts which do not suit the favourite

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party are too often suppressed. Our daily newspapers neither lead nor express public opinion, nor care much for public interest. They rather try to suppress all that is against the party which they represent, and to exaggerate all that they think will help it. It seems a pity.

LONDON,
June 26th, 1914.

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