

MYSORE REVERSION,

“AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE

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“Government is a practical thing, made for the happiness of mankind, and not to furnish out a spectacle of uniformity.”—BURKE.

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PREFACE.

I THINK that any one who candidly and carefully peruses the following pages, will find that they are not open to certain plausible and obvious objections—that they are not written to represent a mere isolated grievance—that no claim is set forth here of despotic power for an Indian Rajah, on “divine right” principles, and at the expense of an industrious population, contented and prosperous under British management. It will be seen that I do not ask for the toleration of old abuses in the face of accomplished facts and altered circumstances, or insist upon an over-scrupulous devotion to letter and precedent in favour of a Prince, without regard to the spirit of engagements, without protecting the interests of the people.

This book is not written merely to propose the reconsideration of this case of Mysore, but to suggest a reconsideration of all the relations of the Imperial Power to the minor States of India; to show how, in Mysore, we neglected our earliest duties of instruction and guidance—how, grasping at patronage, we have

hitherto thrown away the opportunity of establishing a limited monarchy as a model and exemplar—and how, by abolishing that Principality, we should, in all probability, throw away the opportunity for ever, and retard, or finally obstruct, the progress of Indian reform, and the relief of our scattered military strength.

I shall endeavour to prove, that although the expected Mysore Reversion is not by any means “an Exceptional Case,” in the sense of the official document which I quote, it is so far exceptional that the appropriation of this State would be exceptionally unjust, injurious, imprudent, and unprofitable.

And while I argue that statements disparaging a Prince’s personal conduct or mental qualifications—unless asserting crime or idiocy—are as irrelevant to a question of his sovereignty and his regal position in India, as they would be in Europe, I shall show that this Prince’s derelictions have been much exaggerated, and that their origin in British neglect has been completely overlooked; that his conduct was never so blameable, and that his abilities are not so deficient, as to warrant his permanent exclusion from power, or to offer the slightest excuse or pretext for extinguishing the tributary State.

But I have not written the following pages as an apologist or an advocate for the Rajah of Mysore. I do not plead for the Rajah’s personal advantage and dignity, I plead for the advantage and elevation of his people, and of the people of India, and for the general good of the British Empire.

For Lord Canning's public character I have the profoundest respect; no one can estimate more highly than I do the great services he rendered to the Empire by the matchless courage, the sagacity, self-control, and self-contained steadfastness of purpose which he so signally manifested throughout the perils and horrors of 1857 and 1858. In the pacification of Oude, and the maintenance, modified by law, of its ancient baronial institutions, the extension of similar privileges to the great landholders of other Provinces, and in the restorative operations on the Punjaub settlement, I recognise the statesman of large heart and broad intellect. But Lord Canning lived and died a public man; his acts are public property, and so long as they entail important consequences on the nation, they form a legitimate subject for comment and discussion, until, in the course of time, they become matters for history.

With great reluctance and regret, therefore, but without hesitation or reserve, I shall have to call attention to that part in the treatment of this exceptional case of Mysore, in which Lord Canning, misled by its superficial temptations, appears to me to have deviated from the direct path of justice and good faith, to have raised unfounded claims by the novel process of an eternal right of conquest, and a latent Supreme Sovereignty, and to have launched our Government upon an aggressive course, which cannot be justified or defended, but from which it is difficult to recede.

The truth is that Lord Canning, in his treatment of the Mysore case, was not pursuing a policy of

his own choosing, but dealing with the practical results of his predecessors' policy, results which were decidedly good, so far as they went, and the permanence of which seemed to him, and was declared by his professional advisers—erroneously as I maintain—to depend on a strict persistence in the administrative sequestration of the Mysore Principality. That his mind was not clear or composed on this subject is, I think, manifest, not only from his declaring it was “an exceptional case,” but from the slight aberrations of logic and of temper into which he was betrayed in his correspondence both with the Rajah and with the Secretary of State. But on these points my readers will be able to judge for themselves.

I will yield to no one in the admiration I feel for those eminent men in the Indian Services, whose achievements in days of war and convulsion, and whose earnest labours in the time of peaceful organisation, have conferred so many blessings upon India. Let the fullest meed of honour and gratitude be awarded to our great Indian administrators—but let them be confined to their own sphere. The field of Indian administration is the very worst training-ground for Indian government. I do not say that it is absolutely impossible for a Collector or a Resident to rise above the small successes of his official career to broad views of Imperial policy; but I certainly think it is highly improbable. The exceptions, though brilliant, have been very few. I think, moreover, that in the present day, the work and associations of an Indian administra-

tor are even less likely to inspire him with enlarged and tolerant principles, and more likely to fill his mind with narrow technicalities and contemptuous prejudices, than they were forty or fifty years ago. Native States were then substantive Powers in India; native Princes and Ministers were looked upon as worthy opponents or coadjutors.

I must confess to considerable distrust and dread of a purely professional Government,—composed of members of a close official guild,—untempered by a well-defined Imperial policy, unmitigated by the presence of a British statesman as Viceroy, unwatched by Parliament, unmindful of popular feelings. The professional ruler must magnify his office; to him it always appears an incontrovertible position, that “whate’er is best administered is best,”—an opinion which is probably entertained by a great many people in Great Britain, with reference to India, but which seems to me to be opposed to the first principles of modern politics, and to be fraught with infinite mischief. However strong, however well administered, the Government of India may be, it is not, and never will be so strong, and so well administered, as to be able to trust to physical force and organised establishments, and to dispense with moral superiority.

But, it may be said, there are certain facts that cannot be denied—they speak for themselves; the results of British administration are beneficial, the revenue and trade of India are increasing, the people are contented and prosperous. No one can assert more strongly than

I do that British rule has conferred and is conferring the greatest benefits upon India. I object to the progress of annexation and uniformity, because it neutralises and debases those benefits, and endangers the stability of our reforming operations. I admit that in most provinces of India the people are in a thriving and improving condition. But that the population in general, or the reflecting and influential classes in particular, are politically contented, indifferent or apathetic, I must distinctly deny.

It does not follow as a matter of course, that a period of material prosperity is always a period of political tranquillity. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.

Nor does it follow as a matter of course, that a period of material prosperity is to last for ever. Because we dare not predict disaster, do not you presumptuously prophesy smooth things. Twenty years, thirty years, fill up a small space in history, form but a brief term in the life of a nation. Can we not look forward so far? We may have goods laid up in store for many years; we may eat, drink, and be merry, but the day may come—a day of reckoning for our stewardship—when a soul shall be required of us; and it may then be found that there is no soul in our Indian Empire, but that it is possessed of a devil.

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