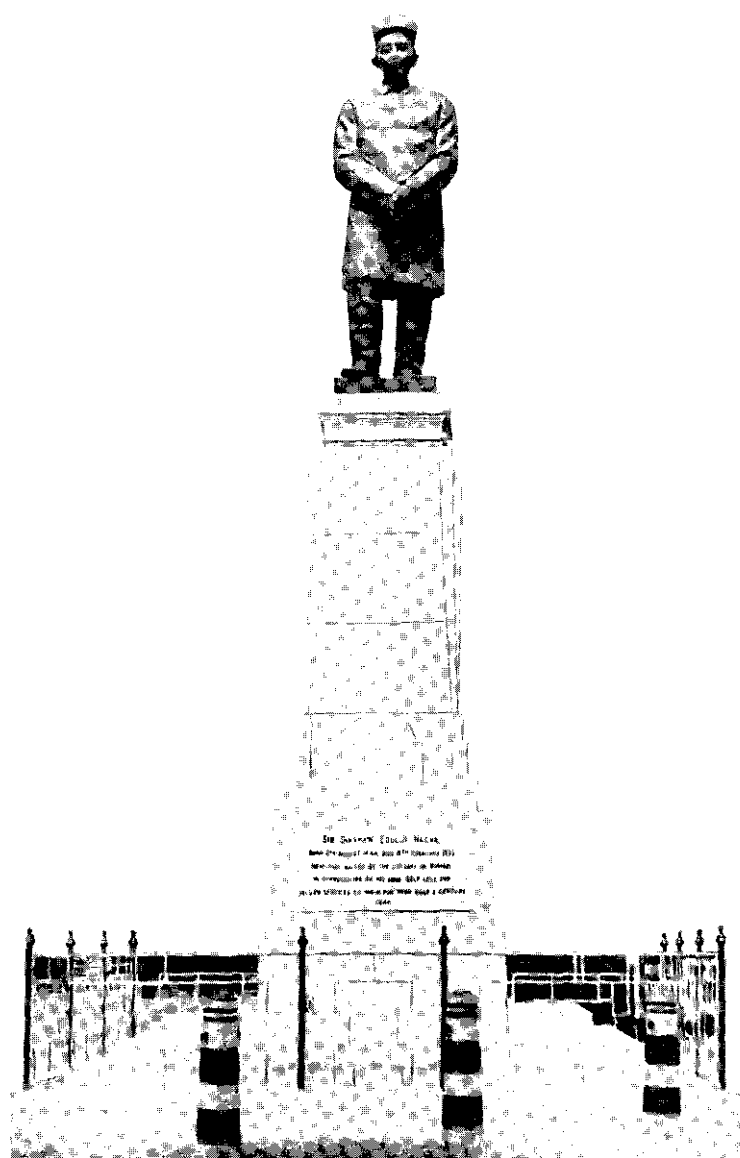


Sir Dinshaw Wacha Memorial.

Speech of
The Rt. Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri,
P. C., C. H., LL.D.

at the
Unveiling Ceremony
of the
Statue of the late
Sir Dinshaw Wacha in Bombay,
On Tuesday, the 9th April 1940.

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Sir Dinshaw Wacha Memorial.

In unveiling the statue of the late Sir Dinshaw Wacha, the Rt. Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri said :

SIR CHIMANLAL SETALVAD AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

You have done me conspicuous honour in assigning to me the principal part in today's ceremony. I do not deserve it either by intimacy of association with the illustrious man whose statue I am about to unveil or by a high position in the public life of the country. The meaning of your invitation, as I understand it, is that Sir Dinshaw Edulji Wacha did not belong to Bombay alone, but that distant Madras, as indeed every part of India, can claim his memory as a cherished possession. During the last ten years or so of his life Sir Dinshaw was unable to take prominent part in the public affairs of India. And let it be admitted that the liberal party, of which he was one of the leading lights, has for some years lost the influence which should properly belong to it by reason of its past record and by reason also of the personal merits of its members. Nevertheless a review of the main features of the long and honourable career of one of its luminaries will not be without profit, even to the present generation, which repudiates the political doctrines that are the immediate parents of its own school of thought.

Sir Dinshaw was 92 years old when he passed away in 1936. He was born into a period of our history very different from today, so different indeed that it would take a great effort of the historical imagination for a young man to form a just picture of it in his mind. Let us remember that Wacha was well in his teens when the Great Indian Mutiny occurred and led to the famous Proclamation of the Queen of 1858. Political agitation and indeed political aspiration had hardly assumed definite shape. Our hero had entered on his forties when he was called upon to take his share in the proceedings of the gathering of Indian leaders which subsequently took

the great name of the Indian National Congress. The social reform and the educational movements were then in a rudimentary state. The city of Bombay had already started on its career of commercial prosperity, but no one could have predicted that its destiny was to become within a generation or so the second city of the British Empire. Nor was the Bombay Corporation anything like the pattern of municipal efficiency and civic enlightenment that it is today. Wacha had the rare distinction of seeing things grow from the humblest beginnings all through the stages of trial and error, of hope and hesitation, of careful planning and haphazard growth, of rising tides of prosperity and struggle against adverse circumstances. In this drama of exciting change and spirited endeavour, Wacha was no mute and unconscious sharer, no mere passive observer, but an active and brilliantly active participant. Of his early education we have a few glimpses from his own vivid pen. In a volume of reminiscences written over the humorous name of "Sandy Seventy," a few chapters describe the early efforts of Christian missionaries and a few private bodies to give the elements of education to their children before the duty of public instruction was recognised as part of the functions of government. This volume is a rich mine of information regarding Bombay of a hundred years ago, which may be recommended to a student of original records. Wacha went, like many promising students before him, to the famous Elphinstone institution, but was not destined to complete the course that was available. This circumstance he seems to have regretted. To one who marks the vividness and vigour of his style, the copiousness and power of his diction, and the range and depth of his observations, it does not appear that he suffered any real loss by the premature end of his scholastic education. At twelve he recited an English piece so well before Lord and Lady Canning that Her Excellency patted him on the back. He heard the great proclamation of Queen Victoria assuming the direct sovereignty of India read aloud to the assembled citizens by Lord Elphinstone, who stood on the spacious verandah of the Town Hall surrounded by the dignitaries of the day arrayed in robes of state.

Who would not envy his good fortune when he saw and heard that prince of African explorers, Dr. Livingstone, led into the Town Hall by Sir Bartle Frere of happy memory? He does not fail to mark the changes that time has wrought in our dress and manners, changes not always observed as they take place with exceeding slowness in society. We learn from the luminous pages of the book called by the picturesque name of "*Shells from the Sands of Bombay*" that in his boyhood Indian gentlemen of all classes, Hindus, Mahomedans, Christians, and Parsis appeared on formal occasions in snow-white and flowing *Jama* and *Pichoree* or *Kumerband*. We learn also to our astonishment that there was a time when even Parsi ladies were content to remain within doors and in ignorance. The year 1858 and the occasion of the Queen's Proclamation deserve to be remembered not only for their own intrinsic importance, but as the time of emancipation for Parsi womanhood. For they came out for the first time in open carriages, venetians down, mark you! to view the illuminations, which were on a grand scale. Our chronicler writes boastfully that they were attired in rich silk saris and bejewelled and that the *Purdah* was literally lifted. Amongst his early inspirations was a study of Sir Joseph Arnauld's classic judgments in the Maharaja Libel case and in the Aga Khan case—judgments which no student either of Indian law or of Indian social history should omit to read. Sir Dinshaw tells us that he acquired his passion for the study of economics and finance from a certain Professor Hughlings, who had fitted up a reading room at his own cost, where he would often sit with Sir Dinshaw and explain learned articles in the '*Economist*' of James Wilson, who afterwards became the first Finance Minister of India. Of this original inspiration we have the mature fruits in the writings and speeches which he poured forth in abundance during a long life of conscientious and devoted study. What a lad of fine sensibility and high enthusiasm he must have been to write as he does of the emotion that warmed his breast when first he visited the hallowed precincts of that great house of thought, that great temple of learning, a valhalla where lay buried the great

thoughts of great men of all the centuries—which is his own description of the Literary Society founded by Sir James Mackintosh ! Only on two other occasions did our hero feel a similar exaltation of spirit, once when he visited the library of the British Museum and again when he was within the precincts of Westminster Abbey.

Is it any wonder that with such subtle and powerful stimuli Wacha acquired a voracious appetite for knowledge, which made him to the end of his days a great buyer and reader of books? Nor was he a mere acquirer of all kinds of knowledge. He gave freely to the public out of his vast store of information. There is hardly a man within my recollection who has written and spoken so abundantly as Sir Dinshaw Wacha. His output, if we could assemble it all, would easily equal that of any two of his compeers in public life. Anonymously, pseudonymously and over his own proper name, he was an untiring contributor to magazines and newspapers of every degree of influence. And the marvel is that he never took a pie of remuneration for it all. I have it on good authority that he never employed a stenographer, but wrote always in his own hand. His private correspondence was of colossal proportions. He wrote regularly to friends in England and innumerable people in India. As often as a thought occurred to him, I fancy he took pen and paper and wrote it down for somebody's benefit. I fancy also he wrote nearly as fast as he thought. He did not pause for the most appropriate word or the most inoffensive phrase. I have had occasion to read a good deal of his manuscript, for he wrote often and with complete freedom to Mr. Gokhale. I do not remember a scratch or an erasure. It was the same even, parallel-lined, fine-looking, fluent calligraphy. The attraction, however, was only on the surface. The trouble started as soon as you put on your glasses and began to read. You came up against an illegible scrawl and could make progress only with many a stumble and many a break, to which you said to yourself you would come back when your organ of vision had regained its tone.

In his public work Wacha was associated with several colleagues of similar calibre. And it used to be said that for many years Bombay had the singular good fortune of having a galaxy of brilliant men who placed their talents at the disposal of the community. In civic matters the ascendancy of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, extending over nearly two generations, was an advantage which other cities of metropolitan rank might have envied. His great example of devotion to municipal duties drew to the service of Bombay a wealth of talent and experience, which might else have been dispersed among diverse small interests and yielded little public benefit. Of about the same age, Wacha seconded his friend with his own uncommon ability. It is a just claim made on their behalf that their unsurpassed influence in the Corporation was never perverted to any jobbery or patronage, but exerted to keep policy and principle free from all taint of unworthy ends. In many quarters Pherozeshah Mehta's domination excited jealousy and resentment. But be it said to the honour of Sir Dinshaw and many others that they were not only content but glad to rally round him like soldiers round a brave and gifted general. Wacha in particular regarded his eclipse as a dedication. I was anxious soon after Gokhale's death to call on the notables of Bombay. I was ushered into a room where Pherozeshah Mehta sat beaming among his accustomed companions. Naturally backward in speech, I felt hushed in the great presence, but soon a number of kindly queries broke my reserve ; and as the talk flowed easily over a wide range, I remarked how every now and then Mehta would turn round and appeal to Wacha for confirmation of what he had said, and Wacha would assent without using too many words. His book on the Municipality of Bombay, especially the chapter dealing with the inauguration in 1888 of the present constitution, gives due meed of praise to Lord Reay, Mr. Telang, Mr. Forbes Adam and other stalwarts of the time, but accords first place ungrudgingly and convincingly to Pherozeshah Mehta, whose vigilance, intrepid advocacy and far-seeing vision transmuted the halting and timid proposals of the authorities into a golden measure of local government, which has nobly stood the

test of time and furnished a model of municipal government throughout India. Wacha outlived his great friend by more than 20 years, during which period he was called upon to occupy the vacant place of primacy as far as he could. This was the case not only in the Corporation, but in the Legislature first of Bombay and then of All-India, in the Bombay Presidency Association and in the Indian National Congress. It might be said of this brilliant pair, in greater measure than of any others in the country, that their eminence in municipal affairs led as a natural and almost inevitable consequence to equal eminence on the broader stage of national affairs. Be it also recorded for the benefit of other patriots that they never allowed their zeal for the civic welfare of Bombay to be dimmed or diminished in any way by larger and maybe more exalted pre-occupations. Wacha was one of the seventy odd leaders of India who laid in 1885 truly and well the foundations of the Indian National Congress. His interest in this organisation grew with its growth. He was its Secretary for many years and President at the 1901 session in Calcutta. He took a prominent part in its debates, and Congressmen of all ranks soon learned to appreciate and love the sterling qualities of the small lively figure who seemed to frisk and jump on the platform as he denounced, in a squeaking voice and apparently through very thick spectacles, the military policy and expenditure of India in vehement accents and with torrential eloquence. His utterance could not be commended for distinctness or melody of tone, but his earnestness and mastery of facts and figures ensured for him patient and respectful attention. Before the Welby Commission on Indian Finance he made a gallant stand for equitable apportionment of charges between England and India, and along with Mr. Gokhale gave invaluable support to Dadabhai Naoroji, who was a member of the Commission as well as the most learned and formidable witness on the Indian side. As an economist Wacha belonged to the school of Cobden and John Stuart Mill ; and though in later years he countenanced the policy of discriminating protection for the industries and manufactures of India, his original homage to the pure water of

free trade was a lifelong obsession. He was instrumental, along with Mr. Manmohandas Ramji and others, in founding the Indian Chamber of Commerce on this side of the country, and when other Chambers had sprung up elsewhere, he induced them all to join together and act as a Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Nothing could be more eloquent testimony to his lofty principles and his unselfish and unworldly character than that throughout his life, though money lay all about him, he never possessed more than a competence and for some time before his death he was without even that competence. It would be a mistake to suppose that, while he specialised in finance and economics, he neglected other aspects of study. His pronouncements on education are entitled to respectful consideration, and he was no mean authority on history in general and international affairs. Writing over the pseudonym of "Rajduari," he surveyed for many years in the "Indian Review" the course of events as they shaped themselves in the world, with a wealth of detail and a sureness of grasp which were the admiration of readers.

Wacha's was a simple nature. There was never any difficulty in understanding him. He was subject to strong emotions and expressed his likes and dislikes with disconcerting candour. As Secretary of the Indian National Congress he had to collect monies, call for reports and require conformity to ordinary canons of public business. In the discharge of these duties he had to reprove, to dun, to scold, to threaten. People complained bitterly of the severe terms in which he castigated slackness or evasion of duty. To the end he never learned how to suffer fools gladly or temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Especially in recent years few of his colleagues or correspondents altogether escaped his verbal chastisement. I had my share. But we all remembered how like a child he was and how utterly innocent of the arts of polite circumlocution and of pretended friendship. If he was quick to scold, he was equally quick to forgive and to befriend. As he himself said in one place, if he was a lion in the chase,

he was a lamb at home. For my part, while I seldom remember the sharpness of phrase with which he expressed his disapproval of my doings, I recall with mingled pride and pleasure his appreciation of the unrelenting vigilance with which, as captain of volunteers at the Congress session of 1908 in Madras, I guarded the proceedings, which were in special danger in consequence of the animosities and bickerings of Surat.

Experience will have taught many of you here, as it has taught me, that, ever since the two schools of moderation and of extremism emerged with more or less defined frontiers, nearly every moderate has been suspected at one time or another by his orthodox compatriots of leanings towards the wrong side. In the Servants of India Society that has been the fate of almost all. I sometimes think that the suspicion under which I lay at the beginning still clouds my name, and Gokhale was never wholly sure of me in his inmost mind. Gokhale himself, if the truth be told, would not have been raised to the Cardinalate in the Vatican of Bombay. Going higher still, was not Pherozeshah Mehta accused by the archangels who surrounded the Viceregal throne of introducing a new spirit of question and cavil in those serene regions where seemliness and perpetual obeisance were the attributes of the chosen denizens? It was the esoteric belief of the moderates of Bombay, Madras and U.P. that most of our compatriots in Bengal were tarred with the extremist brush and could not be admitted into the *sanctum sanctorum*. Pride must not blind us to the danger lurking in the nature of us all, a tendency, whenever we have unchecked power, to erect the stake and light the fire of inquisition. Wacha was particularly subject to this frailty. Markedly when he was young, and less markedly when he had attained middle age, he was playfully and not untruthfully called the firebrand of western India. His views were strong, and the words he chose to express them were stronger. No one could listen to his early speeches or read his early writings without being struck by the uncommon range and sweep of his vocabulary of disapprobation and denunciation. His finger

could in those bounding days read the pulse of popular feeling unerringly. If his private letters could be recovered and arranged in the order of date, they would furnish a faithful chronicle of the various phases of feeling through which the general mind passed on the questions engaging it. One instance I may be pardoned for mentioning today. His letters to Gokhale during the years 1906, 1907 and 1908 are a mirror in which could be seen vividly reflected the initial hope, the scepticism, the bewilderment, the indignation, the despair and finally the reviving hope and satisfaction with which the eager Indian politician watched the changing moods and fancies and slowly evolving reform proposals of Lord Morley. Mr. Gokhale was by no means unaffected by the vagaries of the political barometer ; but because of his proximity to the central orb of the firmament, his faith never wholly disappeared, but shone like a star, now bright, now dim, but always there. He gently reprimanded us for failure to make full allowance for Morley's difficulties and misgivings, and it is pleasing to recall now the happy ending of the episode when he expounded the main features of the coming constitution to the Congress of 1908 and successfully communicated to the audience his own expectations of a happy and prosperous future.

Wacha is a striking and forceful illustration of the sobering effect of time. We could see how he gradually shed his optimism, moderated his demand and saw things through authoritarian glasses and weighed events in the scales provided by Government. This swing-over is noticeable in the careers of other politicians as well. I can recall more than one occasion on which the late Sir B. N. Sarma and I were roundly censured by him in the Council of State for attacking the Government of the day. But we were amused and half consoled when in his own turn he would get up and belabour Government with the verve characteristic of the redoubtable oppositionist we had known and admired of old. At such times he reminded me of a fond but temperamental mother who might beat her child mercilessly when she was angry, but, if anybody

else threatened violence to it, would fly at his throat in a fit of fury.

The year 1918 marked a crucial turn in the fortunes of the Congress. When it became apparent that the extreme section of our politicians had made up their minds to denounce and declare unacceptable the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals of reform, the elder statesmen, if one may be pardoned for appropriating that term, decided to secede from the Congress and create an organisation for themselves. After much anxious consultation and frequent searchings of the heart, of which the memory is still poignant, the members of the Servants of India Society threw in their lot with the All-India Liberal Federation. The two mighty pillars of the movement were Wacha and Surendranath Banerjee. At the end of the inaugural session in Bombay I likened them to those unchanging hills in the landscape by which Sri Rama identified the various regions of the Indian continent when, during his return home after fourteen years of exile, he found no other distinguishing marks, for they had all, rivers and plains and forests and the habitations of men, shifted enormously and obliterated all boundaries. That similitude seems to me not inapt after the twenty-two years that have since passed. A few of us, alas, a continually diminishing few, still stand where we stood, pointing the finger of warning, like Wordsworth's "Peele Castle" amidst the wreckage of a fearful storm.

Rather a succession of fearful storms. For many years now our country has not known tranquillity except for brief periods. While we sit here, tens of thousands of people all over the country are preparing for mass civil disobedience, and the campaign may begin any day. However non-violent it may be, the authorities cannot afford to look on, but must meet it by violent measures. Not improbably communal discord may add itself to the disturbance and convert civil disobedience into something like civil war. The demand for partitioning India into two political entities with separate national interests staggers the imagination and makes it impossible even to guess the

next step in our movement. Has the teaching of Sir Dinshaw any guidance for us in this predicament? The answer is not for a moment doubtful. We have all heard of the claim made in Congress circles that, if Dadabhai Naoroji and Gokhale could be brought back to life among us, they would take their stand with the author of non-violent non-co-operation and mass civil disobedience. It is difficult to say how many that actually knew these departed worthies would allow the claim. I do not allow it. In Wacha's case nobody would dream of advancing such a claim. It is well known how Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and he did not countenance in the faintest degree the Home Rule League movement started by Mrs. Besant and how they endeavoured to induce our Grand Old Man to withdraw the consent that he had given to be its President. To Mrs. Besant as a political force in India they had an invincible antipathy. Of Gandhiji's aims and methods Wacha had an instinctive dread. His condemnation would have been clear, complete and caustic. He had no patience with the judicious frame of mind which weighs pros and cons with meticulous precision, and after making full allowance for purity of motive, pronounces a half-hearted verdict against the particular method at the particular time. I confess to a natural aversion from cocksure, uncompromising, final judgments in any sphere of human conduct. One can never know enough to judge aright. Still, when one is racked by doubt and appalled by the prospect of disaster, one is drawn by the sovereign instinct of safety to the voice of a leader of men who sees clearly into the future and points the way with confidence. In the interests of posterity we cannot afford to let Sir Dinshaw Wacha's fame become dim or his example cease to inspire coming generations. That is why Sir Chimanlal Setalvad and his Committee have in their wisdom erected Wacha's statue on this prominent spot, within hailing distance, in case the shades of great men should wish to commune with one another, of Tata, Mehta, Naoroji, Ranade, Gokhale, and Montagu.