

SPEECHES AND WRITINGS
OF
SIR WILLIAM WEDDERBURN

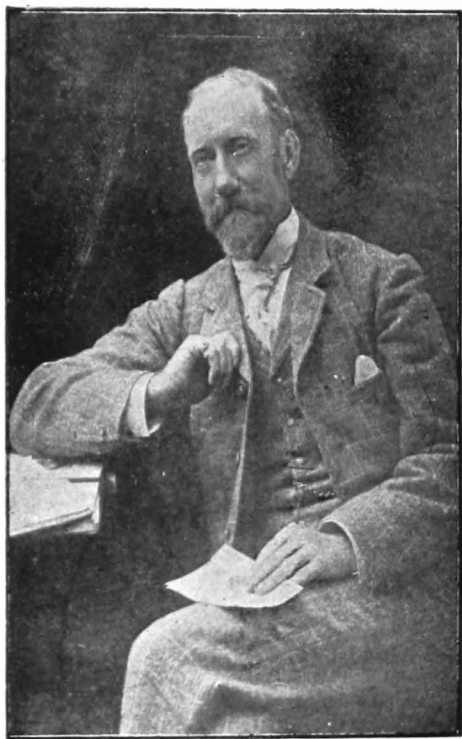
"I have passed a quarter of a century among you, and during that period of time I have not known what it was to suffer an unkindness from a native of India. During that period I have been in the service of the people of India, and have eaten their salt. And I hope to devote to their service what still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

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NOTE

The Publishers have made every endeavour to make this collection comprehensive and up-to-date. The matter was selected by Sir William Wedderburn himself. The first part contains the full text of his two Congress Presidential Addresses; the second, all his speeches in the House of Commons; the third, Miscellaneous Speeches on a variety of topics relating to India; the fourth, "Contributions to the Press" comprising his writings to the daily and the periodical press on Indian Questions; the fifth, "Personalia" being his speeches and writings in appreciation of his Indian and European friends; and the sixth, Replies to Addresses and Entertainments given in his honour on various occasions in India and England. In part seven, entitled "Appreciations" we have a selection of tributes paid to Sir William's services to India by his numerous English and Indian friends and admirers.

THE PUBLISHERS.

Allan Octavian Hume

Father of the Indian National Congress

A MEMOIR BY

SIR WILLIAM WEDDERBURN, BART.

WITH PORTRAIT

'The purpose of this memoir' is, to use the words of Sir William Wedderburn, "to set forth the work of teaching of a man experienced in Indian affairs who combined political insight with dauntless courage and untiring industry." "But specially it has seemed to me a duty to place before the youth of India the example of Mr. Hume's strenuous and unselfish life, and so bring into fresh remembrance the stirring words he uttered of encouragement and reproof, both alike prompted by his love of India and his anxious care for her future. "Excelsior!" was his motto. His ideal was indeed a high one—the regeneration, spiritual, moral, social and political, of the Indian people. But he taught that such a consummation could not be attained without the solid work-a-day qualities of courage, and industry, and self-denial."

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A TRIBUTE.

It is with feelings of inexpressible sorrow that I attempt to pen this little note. About the middle of November 1916, I wrote to Sir William Wedderburn requesting him to accord permission to me to bring out a volume of his Speeches and Writings. He was good enough to comply with my request and also to help me in the selection of the matter. But for the exigencies of business this volume should have been out by the end of last year, as originally announced, and it is to me nothing short of a misfortune that I have been denied the privilege of presenting him with a copy of this book.

In my letter to Sir William regarding the selection of matter for his speeches and writings, I suggested among other things, the need for giving prominence to his many contributions on the condition of the Indian raiyat, as I knew from personal conversations and correspondence, which it was my inestimable privilege to have with him, how deeply interested he was in the improvement of the economic condition of the Indian raiyats. It is sad to recall the following extract from his letter dated the 7th January, 1917 :—

I am very glad that you will give special prominence to the Famine Union and proposed Enquiry into the economic condition of the villages, as the woes of the Indian raiyat have been from the very beginning the stimulus which has kept me tied to the labouring oar of Indian Reform. In the "Skeleton at the (Jubilee) Feast," Congress Green-book No. 1, you will find the summing up of my case, comprising (1) my demand for enquiry sent to every member of the House of Commons, (2) the details of efforts to relieve the raiyats, frustrated by official opposition, and (3) the challenge to contradict any one of my

incriminating statements. The indictment was met by the usual method in such cases, "the conspiracy of silence."

Illiteracy being a vital cause of the rajah's trouble, I would also ask your attention to my article supporting Mr. Gokhale's Bill of free and compulsory elementary education.

As regards the pressing question of Self-Government, you will find my most recent views in the Joint Note of Sir Krishna Gupta and myself, and also in the annual reports of the British Committees over my signature. As the key to the situation, you will find in articles in, and letters to, magazines in England, my insistence on "Public Servants" remaining servants of the public, and not usurping the position of masters. When a member of the permanent civil service steps into the Viceroy's Executive Council or "Cabinet," he ceases to be a servant and becomes one of the governing body. The whole force of India's public opinion should, therefore, be directed against the statutory provision which gives the Civil Service three out of five seats in the Viceroy's Cabinet. This is what creates the "Bureaucracy" which is literally the "rule of the officials."

I have no doubt that this volume will be most welcome and dear to every Indian. Besides serving as a history of the politics of India during a most eventful period in the growth of its National life, it will be an imperishable record of the noble and unselfish efforts of a great and saintly Englishman who for over half a century was unceasingly and unostentatiously labouring for the advancement of the people of India.

I can hazard the remark that the reader who attempts to form an estimate of his services to India by the number of his published speeches and writings or by a record of his work before the public gaze is bound to do serious injustice to his memory; for Sir William, the "hereditary friend of India," so quiet, so gentle, so unassuming, "lavishly spent his force, time, money and labour" for the benefit of India and its people and a great deal of his work was done by private interviews and corres-

pondence. His was a nature which scorned all publicity. Even among his intimate friends very few happen to know that every pie of his Indian pension—aye—a not inconsiderable portion of his private wealth, he spent in the service of India to which he had dedicated his life.

‘India held his whole heart to the exclusion of every other subject’; his abounding love for the people of this country stood all tests and his faith in us was indeed “a part of his great personality.”

Presiding over the fifth session of the Congress at Bombay Sir William thus spoke of his interest in the advancement of India :—

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.

He lived another quarter of a century and lived it all for the sake of India and he lived it indeed to translate his noble resolve into action. When at the end of the year 1910 it was represented to him that in the best interests of India and with a view to cement the bonds of unity between Hindus and Mahomedans it was necessary that he should accept the Presidentship of the Congress of that year, Sir William, at the advanced age of 72 and in an indifferent state of health, responded at the risk of his life to the call made upon him. Only the other day I was informed by a member of the Party that has accompanied Mr. Montagu to India on his great mission, that Sir William forgetting his age and health volunteered to be of the party and but for the warning of his Doctor—alas! only too well justified by after-events—that he would not guarantee him life even for a journey from Gloucester to

London, he would have started for India. One might well exclaim in the words of a veteran Indian Publicist : "How many of us, children of the soil, whose bones will rest here, whose interests, sympathies and reminiscences are centred in this ancient land, can claim to have exhibited in the record of their life-work, the selfless devotion, the unflinching self-sacrifice and the supreme love for India and her peoples, which have always been the dominating features in the public career of Sir William Wedderburn." It is pathetic to contemplate that Sir William who for years has been our trusted friend, philosopher and guide and in times of distress and despair, our beacon light, and who for years in cheerful co-operation, laboured with Hume, Dadabhai, Bonnerjee, Mehta and Gokhale for obtaining for India her proper place in the Empire, has passed away on the eve of great and momentous changes in the constitution of India.

In the words of Mr. Gokhale who ever regarded Sir William with filial affection, "he has believed in us in spite of the obloquy of his own countrymen. He has believed in us in spite of appearances. He has believed us in spite of ourselves. It is because he has so believed in us that he has been able to work through sunshine and storm and through good report and evil report. . . . The picture of this great venerable rishi of modern times, who has done this work for us is a picture that is too venerable, too beautiful, too inspiring for words : it is a picture to dwell upon lovingly and reverentially and it is a picture to contemplate in silence."

Can the people of this land ever sufficiently repay their deep debt of gratitude to Sir William for all that he has hoped for us, for all that he has done for us, for all that he has borne and braved for us ?

30th Jan. 1918.

G. A. NATESAN.

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