

Address delivered by the Hon'ble Sir Dinu
Eduji Wacha, chairman of the All India
Conference of the moderates at Bombay,
on the 1st and 2nd November, 1918.

**Address delivered by the Hon'ble Sir Dinsha Edulji
Wacha, Chairman of the All India Conference of the
Moderates at Bombay, on the 1st and 2nd November
1918.**

GENTLEMEN,

On behalf of the Reception Committee of this Conference allow me please to offer you their most cordial welcome for your attendance on this historic occasion. I need not say how greatly the Committee appreciate that spirit of patriotism which, at the call of Duty, has inspired you to respond to their invitation and how pleased they are to see gathered around them from all the important centres those who have long been recognised as representing the maturer and better mind of the country.

2. Fresh as is the genesis of this Conference in your mind, I advisedly refrain from referring to it. It is sufficient to say that when the din and strife of faction has been hushed, when the mist of misrepresentation has completely disappeared, leaving the horizon of politics as clear as the azure sky, when the many regrettable events which followed in the wake of the declaration of the new Charter of popular liberty are forgotten and buried, and when, above all, sanity and serenity of thought have regained their previous supremacy, the wisdom which dictated the course that has culminated in this Conference, will, I firmly believe, be amply justified.

3. It seems to me, Gentlemen, that amid the din of conflict little or no heed was paid to the fundamental aims and objects of

our national movement, of which the Congress represents the political side. To me it is a matter of the deepest regret that some of those with whom these aims and objects were not infrequently the theme of public exhortation and instruction, should have, consciously or unconsciously, given them the go-bye. However, those aims and objects, as explained by the late Mr. Hume, whom they revere and adore as "the Father of the Congress," are writ so large that he who runs may read.

4. Mr. Hume had explained, as those of you who were closely associated with him from the outset in his work of Indian regeneration are fully aware, what were the fundamental aims and objects of that movement. They were to voice the volume of considered Indian public opinion with sobriety and to co-operate in the work of the Government with a view to bringing about by perseverance and patience, fortified by knowledge and experience, the general advance of the country, politically, socially and intellectually, with full reliance on the sense of justice and fair play of the great British nation whom an inscrutable Providence in his wisdom has called upon to govern India, as the late Mr. Dadabhoy Naoroji had frequently impressed on the minds of his countrymen.

5. It will be in your recollection how in his memorable speech at Allahabad, on 30th April 1883, Mr. Hume expounded the origin, aims and objects of the Congress. An extract from that speech at this juncture will prove neither unuseful nor uninstructive. Mr. Hume said :

"The Congress was intended to foster a wider enthusiasm and a more genuine public spirit by concentrating the most strenuous

efforts on great national problems and by diminishing the absorption in local and purely selfish interests—to educate all who took part in it, not merely in the arts of public speaking and debate, developing the faculty of thinking out clearly opinions, and expressing them lucidly to others, not merely in habits of accuracy and research, but also in the practice of self-control, moderation and willingness to give and take—to educate them in fact into what has been described as a genuine parliamentary frame of mind, to familiarize the country with the methods and working of representative institutions on a large scale, and thus, as this familiarity grew, to demonstrate to the Government and the people of England that India was already ripe for some measure of those institutions to which the entire intelligence of the country so earnestly aspires.”

I leave it to you to say in how many respects the aims and objects so tersely and clearly pointed out by Mr. Hume have been unheeded or ignored during the last few years. Aye, how few of the present generation of Congress men have firmly borne in mind those objects. Are we not entitled to enquire how far they have practised the faculty of thinking clearly, accurately and independently on the representative institutions which the genius of the freedom-loving Anglo-Saxon race has so conscientiously endeavoured to grant them in response to the legitimate aspirations of the *Intelligentia* of the country? May we not also inquire where may be perceived that practice of self-control, moderation and willingness to give and take? Do we not rather hear all around us the cry of unreasoning negation! Where, again, may we inquire is that “parliamentary frame of mind” which Mr. Hume so earnestly wished that men of the Congress should cultivate? Lastly, may we not inquire whether

the method now so thoughtlessly pursued is one wherewith to win the support of the democracy of Great Britain in the present constitutional struggle? Rather, is there not the fear among you, who better understand the situation from your long experience and intimate knowledge of public affairs, that recourse to hasty or thoughtless action must eventually prejudice in no little degree the very cause we have at heart, and alienate the generous sympathy and liberal instincts of the British people?

6. Ample evidence of the aims and objects of the Congress may be discerned in the series of Resolutions which the Congress passed from year to year from the date of its institutions. They are indeed an education by themselves in Indian problems of pith and moment, which he who runs may read. A close study of these, as well as the addresses delivered by distinguished Presidents of the sagacity and statesmanship of Messrs. Banerji and Dadabhai Navroji, of Sir P. M. Mehta, B. Tyabji, Surendranath Banerji, Romesh C. Dutt, Ananda Bose, Lalmohun Ghose, Bhupendranath Basu, Sir S. Nair, Sir Rash Behari Ghose, G. K. Gokhale, Bishmarayan Dar and of Mr. George Yule, Sir William Wedderburn, Sir Henry Cotton and Sir S. P. Sinha, is certain to induce that sanity and sobriety of thought which, unfortunately, is all too scarce. The Public Services, military expenditure, separation of judicial and executive functions, simultaneous examinations, education in all its branches, sanitation, industrial advancement, amelioration of the impecunious peasantry, and a score of other topics, many of which still await a final solution, were brought forward on the Congress platform as time and occasion inspired, and discussed with an accuracy of

facts, a breadth of view and self-restraint which would have reflected credit on any advanced deliberative assembly in the world. These subjects, again, were argued with an earnestness and single-mindedness of purpose which would have rejoiced the heart of any sincere lover of his country. Beyond, however, the Resolutions on these subjects, there were those touching the reform of the obsolete Legislative Councils first instituted in 1861. It was mooted at the very first session of the Congress, and hammered in at each succeeding Session till the advent of the late Sir William Wedderburn in 1889, as President of the Fifth Session, accompanied by the late Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, that redoubtable parliamentarian and the true friend of India and Indian aspirations. That Congress formulated the broad outlines of the Reform Scheme which Mr. Bradlaugh, soon after his return to England, crystallised in the form of a Bill of his own drafting and introduced in the House of Commons. You, however, are fully aware of the practical counsel that great politician gave to our assembled countrymen at the historic Congress of 1889: "Not only do not expect too much, but do not expect all at once. Don't be disappointed if of a just claim only something is conceded." None of us here can aver that that advice has lost its force even after this long tract of years.

7. The rest is history. But it was the efforts of the early Congresses which eventually brought into operation the expanded Councils of 1892. That was the first substantial harvest which the original builders of the Congress were able to reap. But ten years of further well-reasoned and constitutional agitation, at the opening of the Twentieth Century, resulted once more in a further reform as embodied in the Morley-Minto Scheme. And here we are to-day the

recipients of a further reform of a substantial character which, when put into operation, will fulfil in due course that political destiny for which our countrymen have yearned these many years past.

8. But, Gentlemen, we are living in other times. The old order of things which fairly served the country for the last half a century is rapidly passing away. Its exit is being quickened not a little by the war which, we are rejoiced to see, has secured a glorious triumph to the gallant British and their brave Allies during the past few weeks, and which, it is to be hoped, will prove the glad harbinger of a lasting and enduring peace in the months to come. As in other matters, so in this the war has now quickened the pace of all forms of social and political growth. It is the part of practical statesmanship to take cognisance of the changing times. Shepherds of State as much as leaders of public opinion have to guide their respective charges on the straight path by the light of the past. The past can never be obliterated; it serves as a beacon to illuminate the path of statesmen and people alike. History is nothing but past politics. Under the circumstances it is only by the light of history that the future of the governance of this country can be shaped. It can only be wisely fashioned, moreover, when the method and manner of conducting constitutional struggles, which have carried us so far forward in our national development, are faithfully followed. Political pretentiousness can never yield that success. For it is needful to remember that immaturity of political thought, combined with the exuberance of indiscipline, has invariably wrought mischief in all constitutional movements. Thus it goes without saying that the same serenity and sanity of mind, the same spirit of

patience and perseverance, of toleration and sobriety which characterised the deliberations and utterances of our distinguished leaders in the past are imperative at the present hour. Opinions may differ, but opinions have to be founded on knowledge. Short views are views formed in darkness. They are parochial and, therefore, fatal to great reforms calculated to advance the further progress of a people. We have to see the harbour with a clear vision and carefully steer the bark of progress midst the surrounding shoals and quicksands in order to bring it to the haven of safety and rest.

9. New ideals are welcome, for we cannot do without the service of the idealists, and the enthusiasm, patriotism and energy of our young men. None is more welcome in our ranks than the ardent rising generation, who bring to political movement freshness and vigour. But I would ask them to remember that ideals are dangerous, rather than beneficial, if they are not based on broad views and an all-embracing patriotism. Moreover, however splendid our ideals, there is no short cut to constitutional development; in politics the short cut has always been found to be the longest way round. Enthusiasm is a great and vital force; faith moves mountains; but both enthusiasm and faith need the guidance of experience, without which they can accomplish nothing durable. While therefore holding fast to our ideals, let us never lose sight of the practical difficulties to the early attainment of those ideals. As an able writer recently observed in this connection:—

“Of the many combatants engaged in the warfare of ideals few have the courage to face the certainty that their dreams will be fulfilled to-morrow. Our confidence in legislating for the new

Jerusalem is immensely far off. The remoteness of the event permits a freedom to the wings of fancy which would be sadly curtailed if there were any prospect that we ourselves might have to live in the world we are recreating. Most Utopias have been constructed in the interests of generations so distant from the age in which the constructors lived that the question, 'How would you like it yourself?', has seldom occurred. The remoteness of the fulfilment, coupled with uncertainty, of which most dreamers are dimly aware, gives rise to an element of irresponsibility which is deeply characteristic of all our idealisms."

And I may also recall in the same connection the following lines of the popular American poet which contain the essence of all practical wisdom in the domain of human affairs :—

We have not wings, we cannot soar,
But we have feet to scale and climb,
By slow degrees, by more and more,
The cloudy summits of our time.

10. We are now on the eve of entering on a great period of reconstruction. We shall have to sweep away by slow degrees the forms and images, the superscriptions and the trappings which now encumber the ground. Our first business as reformers is to clear away the survivals that can no longer justify themselves. The process will be slow requiring no little patience. A positive policy will have then to be adopted which will make a complete breach, slowly but surely, with the obsolete past and prepare the foundations for a solid edifice. What did Sir Henry Cotton, that other valued friend, say in his great speech as President of the Bombay Congress of 1904?

“The process of reconstruction cannot be effected otherwise than by slow and gradual means. Many years must elapse before we can expect the consummation of a reconstructive policy * * * In the continuous and gradual development of representation, and the increase of your power and influence in India itself, involving the ultimate extension of autonomy, we shall find the appropriate and natural prize and legitimate goal of Indian aspirations.” It is for you, Gentlemen, to say, whether this advice is not as true to-day as it was when given a few short years ago.

11. The foundation of a new constitutional fabric now to be laid in this country is unlike that of any other constitutional edifice in the world. There is, however, no question that the foundations are being laid broad and deep by the combined statesmanship of the Right Hon'ble Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford, in a material degree, in harmony with the expressed sentiments and wishes of the people. The work of completing the edifice, brick by brick, and laying the crowning stone will entirely depend on our own energy, aptitude and capacity for governing ourselves. It is a most arduous and uphill task which for successful accomplishment will need the co-operation of all, Indian and British alike; we cannot afford to dissipate our energies in fruitless controversy. The transitional period, which will immediately commence on the passing of the Reform Bill in Parliament, will be the most critical one and watched with the keenest interest by our generous rulers. On the wisdom and ability with which we carry out the provisions of the Parliamentary Statute will depend our future constitutional progress towards responsible self-government. Whatever may be the imperfections of the measure before us, it should

be our duty to work it whole-heartedly, with singleness of purpose so as to achieve for it the success we desire. The imperfections, I need not say, are bound to be removed with the experience of revolving years. It will be, therefore, prudent for you, gentlemen of the Conference, who are not the advocates of "The All or the Nothing" creed, to accept the salient features of the scheme, so prolific of good; all minor details may well be left to find their true solutions. Experience is a great teacher and I will leave it to time and experience to deal with those details, as well as the imperfections which are to be detected. No constitution prepared by human foresight and human energy has ever been known to be perfect. Constitutions can never be made to order. At the best they grow with the growth of years and become stronger with their own inherent strength. The Reform Scheme has now been heartily accepted by an overwhelming majority of the better minds of the country as a first definite advance towards the steady realisation of full responsible self-government, as pronounced in that memorable declaration of 20th August 1917. Let us with one heart and mind make a supreme effort to secure for it that success which our rulers so sincerely wish and which the British Democracy, who have already assented to it by their representatives in Parliament, will rejoice to see.

12. It is not for me, standing before you as the Chairman of the Reception Committee of this Conference, to enter into the many merits of the scheme. Properly speaking, it is the province of our esteemed and eloquent Congress veteran whom you have by your unanimous suffrage so wisely elected your President, to expound it in his own lucid terms. All I wish to say here is

that my own views are those already expressed in the Memorandum which I and my esteemed co-signatories and co-workers submitted to the public in July. The Reform proposals have, by universal consent, been deemed to constitute a solid monument of the industry, ability and far-sighted statesmanship of their distinguished authors. They have been conceived from a lofty point of view and in a spirit which is even broader in some respects than that of the Congress itself. India should express with one voice its sense of gratitude for this memorable work which will add another and brighter page to the annals of British Indian rule.

13. And now, Gentlemen, before I resume my seat may I venture to make one suggestion which is calculated, I think, to advance those liberal views which you, who are all assembled in this Conference, entertain. My suggestion is that on the conclusion of your proceedings you will in your respective provinces follow the laudable example of Bengal and make every effort to inaugurate a liberal organisation to propagate and advance the views you hold. Let us all fearlessly and resolutely pursue the aim and object for which this Conference has been held. Let us steadily maintain a broad outlook with a unity of purpose, never relaxing those sound principles on which we have taken our firm stand. Let us hold aloft our own banner on which are inscribed Trust and Hope and slowly but steadily march straight to the goal of our aspirations for the attainment of which the elders of the Congress have borne the burden and heat of the day for thirty years and more.