

# INDIA UNDER EXPERIMENT

G. M. CHESNEY

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## INTRODUCTION

THE public has learned during the past autumn that further changes of the kind usually gilded by the name of reforms are to be introduced in the system of government which has hitherto prevailed in India. Wherever the momentum behind this experiment may lie, it is at any rate not to be accounted for by any stir of public opinion in the ruling country. The measures foreshadowed have not been discussed in Parliament, and, except for the transient gleam of interest imparted to them by Mr. Montagu's personal proceedings, have scarcely been noticed by the Press. By the general public, absorbed in so many other more pressing concerns, they have been totally unheeded. That alone should surely have been sufficient ground for postponing their introduction to a time more favourable for deliberation. But as things are done in these days, there is every reason to anticipate that the world will only hear of the matter after the decision has been arrived at, and when,

as we shall be told, it is beyond the possibility of recall. As the Delhi Durbar was utilised to announce the change of capitals and redistribution of Provinces, in a way that closed the door to discussion or protest, so there is too much likelihood that the Montagu visit will be turned to account to spring upon India, and upon the owner, England, fundamental changes, upon which, it will be protested, once announced, there can be no going back. The combination of Secretary of State and Viceroy is evidently designed to invest their pronouncements with an appearance of authority that will put them beyond question. Who is to demur to the conclusions arrived at by the two chief personages, and only arrived at after a most patient hearing on the spot of the views of all classes? To refuse assent to conclusions proclaimed under such sanction, we must be prepared to hear, is mere impracticability, for the reason that the disappointment of the expectations raised would increase the discontent the changes are intended to remove, and would even sanctify it. The contention may be difficult to answer then, but it does not remove the objections to the manœuvring by which the situation will have been created. The preliminary consultation

of the affected interests which has been going on in India during the winter can only be a matter of form, for the main issue was pre-determined from the day that Mr. Montagu, in August, announced his intention of going to India to prepare the way for the change of policy for which he took the name of the Cabinet. If his ideas were to change under contact with local opinion, could he avow it in face of the undertaking he had given? The reader will be able to form his own opinion of the probability of such a conversion. Taking it for granted, then, that the cause has been prejudged, the object of this work is to set forth as intelligibly as may be to the British public, which, after all, is an interested party to the case, the probable character of these changes, their probable effects and ultimate bearings. The difficulty of the task lies in the obscurity in which the plans of the promoters are shrouded. After the fashion in which "popular" government works, the secret will be carefully kept until the moment when the lid comes off and the public is bidden to swallow the stew with the best face it can, for nothing else will it get. To keep the world carefully in the dark while the selected project is maturing, to plead high

reasons of State for refusing all information during the preparatory stages, to dismiss all criticism as ill-informed and premature, and finally, when the result is produced, to tell dissentients "it is too late now; you should have objected sooner"—this is the simple mode of procedure by which the democratic Behemoth is nose-ringed and brought to follow wheresoever his leaders may be willed to draw him, while with a few adroit pats on the flanks they persuade him to believe that he is taking his own way.



## NOTE

*“ Il me semble que le bonheur de cette nation n'est point fait comme celui des autres. . . . Voilà qui s'est fait un gouvernement unique dans lequel on a conservé tout ce que la monarchie a d'utile et tout ce que une république a de nécessaire. . . . Je la vois seulement embarrassée de l'Amérique septentrionale qu'elle a conquise à un bout de l'univers, et des plus belles provinces de l'Inde subjuguées à l'autre bout. Comment portera-t-elle ces deux fardeaux de sa félicité ?”*

VOLTAIRE: *Éloge de la Raison.*

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