

DECEMBER 21, 1908

NATIVE PRESS OF INDIA RESPONSIBLE FOR SEDITION

Eighty Years Ago Director of East India Company
Prophesied Trouble.

SITUATION NOT SERIOUS

Position Only Requires Very Careful Watching
and Firm Handling.

Even after this lapse of time authorities differ as to the predisposing conditions which brought about our troubles in 1857; therefore where the mischief is still smouldering, and so much is obscure, it behoves any one professing to unravel the tangled skeins of present-day unrest in India to step warily, lest, he lead his readers astray, says a writer in the London Daily Mail.

There have, however, been two main factors operating in, and to the prejudice of, our administration for many years which are sufficiently obvious to any one viewing the question by the light of Indian experience. These are an unduly liberal system of higher education and a culpable indifference to the excesses of the vernacular press. One of the first duties of every government is to provide elementary education for the lower classes of society, but the bountiful and almost free scheme of advanced education which we have given to India has, in attracting imperfectly trained minds towards disaffection, done much to ruin many whom it should have assisted to become useful citizens.

In this sense India has its unemployed, who are devoting the talents they acquired so cheaply to rendering the government of their country impossible. Regular means have been adopted for the study and propagation of active sedition—the requisite energy and ardour being derived from

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religious motives, the fostering of racial hatred, and the reports of anarchy in other countries. Thus we find that the actors on the state in the drama of sedition are often immature youths, prompted, not doubt, by cowardly wretches who pull the strings in the background.

Liberty of the Press.

Secondly, there is the ever-ready handmaid of discontent, a section of the vernacular press, which flourishes on mendacious and malicious representations, and(?) systematically vilifies European officials, and openly preaches sedition, with an occasional incitement to murder.

The poison thus carefully distilled is scattered far and wide by selected emissaries, and so by degrees penetrates into the simple mind of the agriculturalist, "the man who matters," who has hitherto had nothing but veneration and respect for the government which has treated him so well.

Eighty-six years ago, in a minute for the court of directors of the old East India company, Sir Thomas Munro, dealing with the then vexed question of the Indian Press, at that time entirely in European hands, wrote: "A free press and the dominion of strangers are things which are quite incompatible, and cannot exist long together, for what is the first duty of a free press? It is to deliver the country from a foreign yoke and to sacrifice to this one great object every measure and consideration, and if we make the press really free to the natives as well as to Europeans it must inevitably lead to this result."

The minute contains much more that is wonderfully prophetic, recorded by a man who knew India and was beloved by all classes.

No one would propose at this stage entirely to muzzle the vernacular press, but liberty and license are different things, and it is to be hoped that the measures foreshadowed by the viceroy in a speech at Simla will not long be delayed. The publication of honest public opinion, even if antagonistic, may often do good by opportunely informing the official mind, but constant streams of misrepresentation and abuse can only do harm in a country where the population is so largely illiterate.

The Unsettled East.

There are doubtless other contributing causes to unrest besides the two discussed. The victories of Japan over Russia, showing what it is possible for an eastern nation to accomplish, probably have had some unsettling influence.

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Similarly the revolutions in other countries—Russia, Persia, and Turkey—have all been used to foment disaffection, without, of course, any consideration for the fact that in those countries, unlike India, maladministration has been chronic and grievously burdensome.

Finally, it must regretfully be admitted, and impression prevails, rightly or wrongly, that the controlling force of our government in India exhibits an incapacity for recognising the potential gravity of the situation. It would perhaps be unfair at present to criticise too closely the jail management at Calcutta, which allowed an informer, whose evidence was most valuable, to be assassinated; or the apparent ineptitude of the Calcutta police in some recent incidents culminating in the folly of allowing Gossain's body to be publicly paraded and worshipped. The time would seem to have arrived when it might be a...(illegible word) that city would be to involve in the cost and burden or punitive proceedings the ordinary citizen, dwelling in the disturbed quarters, who is frankly unsympathetic and unconcerned would government plans be thwarted or its officers murdered.

Need for Government.

In considering the remedies applicable the first thing to remember is that in an eastern country you can only maintain peace and prosperity provided you are strong—the Oriental respects firm authority and sees in leniency towards misbehaviour merely humorous(?). The well known phrase in India, "the Sirkar has a tough arm," is thoroughly appreciated; if the strength of this member be dissipated on the altar of doctrinaire principles the worst results must ensue.

Some concessions are inevitable, and when made we must earnestly hope that a clear distinction will be drawn between the aspirations of the legitimate opposition and the crazy ideas of the implacable bomb-throwers and sedition-mongers, none of whom are fit to undertake any responsibility. The manner in which His Majesty's gracious proclamation has been received by the latter faction is significant. Nothing will satisfy them short of complete surrender to the cry of "India for the Indians," and good-bye to the regime under which the country has emerged from chaos to order and prosperity—for, judged by any text that world-wide experience may apply. India is undeniably prosperous.

To pacify the extremists, who have no redressible grievance, nothing can be done or should be attempted. The cure for their ailment is extra

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vigilance by the police, a firm and more rapid administration of justice, the exclusion of newspaper reporters from the courts when sedition cases are under trial, and the rigid abstention when enforcing the law, from anything calculated to advertise sedition or to promote the hero-worship of anarchists.

The Echo from England.

In England something is urgently required both to restrain and to assist Indian students. When they indulge, as they did at a meeting held recently in the Caxton hall, in open manifestations of disloyalty, the thought naturally arises that there is something radically defective in their training.

Official chaperonage is undesirable and would be resented, but at the same time nothing really useful can be done without pecuniary assistance from the government.

Though the position of India requires careful watching and firm handling, there is nothing as yet to cause alarms. It is, for instance, quite untrue to say that there is anything approaching general dissatisfaction with our rule; some mischief has undoubtedly been done, but the evil has not permeated too deeply to be eradicated, and we may well hope that the hearts of the masses of the population are as yet untouched. In a letter to the Times a week or two ago, the Maharajah of Benares, alluding to the "unmeaning and hollow cries" for Swaraj, wrote: "We...would scarcely have troubled our head about them had it not been for their echo which is now and then ominously reflected from the white cliffs across the English channel." If all speakers in this country would measure their language and not seek to add to our difficulties in Hindustan it would be both prudent and patriotic.

It is comforting to know that we have among the Maharaja of Benares' brother princes and chiefs of India an asset of the greatest possible value—their loyalty and devotion to the British crown. The gallant behaviour of one of the Bengal chiefs, when Sir A. Fraser was attacked is fresh in our memory.