

BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

MR. BRYAN'S TWENTY-FIFTH LETTER

"What is truth?" asked Pilate, and when he had asked the question he went out without waiting for an answer. The question has been asked many times and answered in many different ways. I was reminded of a similar question when I read over the door of a court house in Aligarh, India, the motto: "Justice is the strength of the British Empire." No empire, no government, no society can have any other source of permanent strength. Lord Salisbury, is quoted by Indian leaders as saying: "Injustice will bring down the mightiest to ruin," and we all believe it. Wendell Phillips expressed it as strongly and even more beautifully when he said, (I quote from memory): "You may build your capitals until they reach the skies, but if they rest upon injustice, the pulse of a woman will beat them down."

But what is justice? How varied are the answers given! The subject, in the name of justice, presents his appeal to his king, and the sovereign, if he be a despot, may send him to exile or the prison or the block and do it in the name of justice. What is justice? This question has been ringing in my ears during our journey through India.

When I was a law student, I read the speech of Sheridan at the trial of Warren Hastings, and that masterpiece of invective was recalled sixteen years later, when a colonial policy began to be suggested in the United States after the taking of Manila, and I tried to inform myself in regard to British rule in India. The more I read about it, the more unjust it seemed. So many Americans have, however, during the last few years spoken admiringly of England's colonial system that I have looked forward to the visit to India with increasing interest because of the opportunity it would give me to study at close range a question of vital importance to our own country. I have met some of the leading English officials as well as a number in subordinate positions; have talked with educated Indians—Hindus, Mohammedans and Parsees; have seen the people, rich and poor, in the cities and in the country, and have examined statistics and read speeches, reports, petitions and other literature that does not find its way to the United States; and British rule in India is far worse, far more burdensome to the people, and far more unjust—if I understand the meaning of the word—than I had supposed.

When I say this I do not mean to bring an indictment against the English people or to assert that they are guilty of intentional wrongdoing. Neither do I mean to question the motives of those who are in authority. It has been my good fortune to become personally acquainted with Lord Minto, the present viceroy; with Lieutenant Governor Frazier, the chief executive of the province of Bengal; with Lieutenant Governor La Touche, chief executive of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and with Governor Lamington, chief executive of the Bombay presidency, three of the largest Indian states. These men, I am sure, represent the highest type of their countrymen. Lord Minto is fresh from Canada, where he was governor general; Governor Lamington was the head of the Australian government before coming to India, and both Governors Frazier and La Touche have long official experience to their credit. That they will be just, as they understand justice, and do right as they see the right, I am satisfied. But what is justice?

The trouble is that England acquired India for England's advantage, not for India's, and that she holds India for England's benefit, not for India's. She administers India with an eye single to England's interests, not India's, and she passes upon every question as a judge would were he permitted to decide his own case. The officials in India owe their appointment directly or indirectly to the home government, and the home government holds authority at the sufferance of the people of England, not of the people of India. The officials who go out from England to serve a certain time and then return, whose interests are in England rather than in India and whose sympathies are naturally with the British rather than with the natives, can not be expected to view questions from the same standpoint as the Indians. Neither can these officials be expected to know the needs of the people as well as those who share their daily life and aspirations.

It is not necessary to review the earlier rule under the East India company; that is sufficient-

ly condemned by public record. That company was chartered for commercial purposes, and its rule had no other than a pecuniary aim. It secured control of state after state by helping one native prince against another where it did not actually instigate war between princes. The English government finally took the colony over, confessedly because of the outrageous conduct of the company's officials. No one now defends the rule of the East India company, although Warren Hastings was finally acquitted by the house of lords in spite of his crimes, out of consideration for his public service in extending English authority.

Is English rule in India just, as we find it today? Fortunately England permits free speech in England, although she has sometimes restricted it in her colonies, and there has not been a public question under consideration in England for a century which has not brought out independent opinion. It is the glory of England that she was an early champion of freedom of speech, and it is the glory of Englishmen that they criticize their own government when they think it wrong. During the American revolution Burke thundered his defense of the rights of the colonists, and Walpole warned his countrymen that they could not destroy American liberty without asserting principles which, if carried out, would destroy English liberty as well. During the recent war in South Africa the British had no more severe critics than were to be found among her own people and in her own parliament. And so today British rule in India is as forcibly arraigned by Englishmen as by the Indians themselves. While Mr. Naoroji, an Indian, goes to England and secures from a meeting of a radical club the adoption of a resolution reciting that as "Britain has appropriated thousands of millions of India's wealth for building up and maintaining her British Indian empire and for drawing directly vast wealth to herself," that as "she is continuing to drain about thirty million pounds sterling of India's wealth every year unceasingly in a variety of ways" and that as "she has thereby reduced the bulk of the Indian population to extreme poverty, destitution and degradation, it is therefore her bounden duty, in common justice and humanity, to pay from her own exchequer the costs of all famines and diseases caused by such impoverishment." And further, "that it is most humiliating and discreditable to the British name that other countries should be appealed to or should have to come to Britain's help for relief of Britain's own subjects, and after and by her un-British rule of about one hundred and fifty years."

While, I repeat, Mr. Naoroji was securing the unanimous adoption of the above resolution in England, Sir Henry Cotton, now a member of parliament, but for thirty-five years a member of the Indian civil service, was preparing his book, *New India*, in which he courageously points out the injustice from which India now suffers. Neither he nor Mr. Naoroji suggests Indian independence. Both believe that English sovereignty should continue, but Mr. Cotton shows the wrongs now inflicted upon India and the necessity for reform. Not only does he charge that the promises of the queen have been ignored and Indians excluded from service for which they were fitted, but he charges that the antagonism between the officials and the people is growing and that there is among civilian magistrates "an undoubted tendency to inflict severe sentences when natives of India are concerned, and to impose light and sometimes inadequate punishment upon offenders of their own race," and that in trials "in which Englishmen are tried by English juries" the result is sometimes "a failure of justice not falling short of judicial scandal." If justice can not be found in the court, where shall she be sought?

After the Indian mutiny the queen, in a proclamation, promised that natives should be freely and impartially admitted to offices, "the duties of which they might be qualified by their education, ability and integrity to discharge." Lord Lytton, a viceroy of India, in a confidential document which got into print, speaking of the pledges of the sovereign and the parliament of England, said: "We all know that these claims and expectations never can or will be fulfilled. We have had to choose between prohibiting them (the natives of India) and cheating them, and we have chosen the least straightforward course," and again: "Since I am writing confidentially, I do not hesitate to say that both the governments of England and of India appear to me, up to the present moment, unable to answer satisfactorily the charge of having taken every means in their

promise they had uttered to the ear."

power of breaking to the heart the words of the government of India is as arbitrary and despotic as the government of Russia ever was, and in two respects it is worse. First, it is administered by an alien people, whereas the officials of Russia are Russians. Second, it drains a large part of the taxes out of the country, whereas the Russian government spends at home the money which it collects from the people. A third disadvantage might be named since the czar has already created a legislative body, whereas England continues to deny to the Indians any form of representative or constitutional government.

The people of India are taxed, but they have no voice in the amount to be collected or in the use to be made of the revenue. They pay into the government nearly two hundred and twenty-five millions of dollars a year and of this nearly one hundred millions is expended upon an army in which Indians can not be officers. It is not necessary to keep such an army merely to hold the people in subjection if the Indians are really satisfied with English rule, and if the army is intended to keep Russia from taking India, as is sometimes claimed, why should not the British government bear a part of the burden? Would it not be wiser to so attach the Indian people to the British government that they would themselves resist annexation to Russia?

The home charges, as they are called, absorb practically one-third of the entire revenues. About one hundred million dollars go out of India to England every year, and over fifteen millions are paid to European officials in the civil employ. What nation could stand such a drain without impoverishment?

Taxation is nearly twice as heavy in India as in England in proportion to the income of the people. Compared with the people of other countries, the Indian's income is, on an average, one-twentieth of the average English income, one-seventh of the average Spaniard's income, one-fifth of the average Italian's income and one-half of the (European) Russian's income and one-half of the income of the Turk. Sir Henry Cotton shows that the average per capita deposit in banks in England is one hundred dollars while the average per capita deposit in India is fifty cents; but how can the Indian be expected to have a large bank account when the average yearly income is only ten dollars? I have, in another article, referred to the jewelry worn by Indian women. The bracelets and anklets are silver except among the poorest, and this was formerly a form of hoarding, but the suspension of the coinage of silver deprived the people of the privilege of converting this hoarded silver into rupees. It will be remembered that the late Senator Wolcott, a member of the monetary commission appointed by President McKinley in 1897, on his return from Europe declared that the suspension of the coinage of silver in India had reduced the value of the saving of the people to the amount of five hundred millions of dollars. The suspension was carried out for the benefit of European interests regardless of the welfare of the masses.

So great has been the drain, the injustice to the people and the tax upon the resources of the country, that famines have increased in frequency and severity. Mr. Gokhale, one of the ablest of India's public men, presided over the meeting of the last Indian national congress (held in December) and declared in his opening speech that the death rate had steadily risen from twenty-four to the thousand in 1882-4 to thirty in 1892-4 and to thirty-four at the present time. I have more than once within the last month heard the plague referred to as a providential remedy for over-population! Think of it, British rule justified because "it keeps the people from killing each other" and the plague praised because it removes those whom the government has saved from slaughter!

The railroads with all their advantages have been charged with adding to the weight of famine by carrying away the surplus grain in good years, leaving no residue for the years of drouth. While grain can now be carried back more easily in times of scarcity, the people are too poor to buy it with two freights added. The storage of grain by the government at central points until the new crop is safe would bring some relief, but it has not been attempted.

If it is argued that the railroads have raised the price of grain in the interior by furnishing a cheaper outlet to the sea, it must be remembered that the benefit has accrued not to the people,