

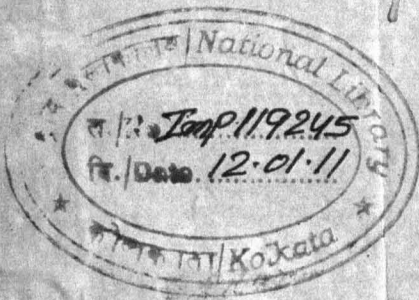
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IF THERE WERE ANOTHER MUTINY

BY MR. A. J. FRASER BLAIR,

EDITOR OF THE "EMPIRE."

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IF THERE WERE ANOTHER MUTINY.

By MR. A. J. FRASER BLAIR, EDITOR OF THE *Empire*.

I must apologize in the first place for the triteness of the remark that the British Empire in India is the strangest thing in the world. There has never, we believe, been anything quite like it before and, we imagine, there will never be anything like it again. How it ever came into existence is astonishing. How it has managed to exist so long is still more so. There are, as all the text-books inform us, 300 millions of people in India, who are governed by a few thousand foreigners, whose own homes are at the other end of creation. These foreigners come to this country in the flower of their youth; if they survive the first five years they spend in it the best years of their manhood; and in nine cases out of ten they are out of it and away long before old age has set in. While they are here they take practically no interest in the people of the country, unless they happen to be magistrates or policemen, and even then their interest is apt to be of a cold, official kind. They shut themselves up in a ring fence of social exclusiveness, and think it bad form even to speak the language of the country too well. No Indian guest ever crosses their threshold, and they avoid Indian hospitality like the plague. They spend their lives in the endeavour to forget that they have ever left their native country. India, with its history, its aspirations, its griefs, its possibilities, does not exist for them.

Naturally this picture has its reverse. The children of the soil gaze at these intruders with ever-increasing wonder, and ask themselves why they are there. Differences of race, religion, customs and ideals stretch between them and us like so many hostile entrenchments. India has been subject to a foreign yoke before now, but never to so rigid and cast-iron a system as the British—never to one so utterly aloof from the daily life of the people over whom it impends. We take credit to ourselves for the justice which we mete out to all Indians alike, and it is true, that we are so coldly impartial on every question of race and creed that we are eminently fitted to hold the scales evenly as between Hindus and Mahomedans, between Punjabis and Assamese. But I should not be surprised if the Indians would

not like to see us display a little human interest in one side or the other now and then, even at the expense of abstract fairness. Under the conditions which will prevail in the near future the warm clasp of a friendly hand will count for more than the frigid integrity of the most upright judge.

To sum up the situation as briefly as possible. We have ruled India all these years in the spirit of justice, and with some regard for that great future towards which India in common with other eastern polities is hastening; but we have done so with an utter lack of the spirit of sympathy. We do not understand the Indians and what is more we do not want to understand them. Nor do they thoroughly understand us, although I certainly think that they know more about us, simply because they have gone to the trouble of studying us, than we know about them. We thus have two communities, whom we shall divide for the purposes of our argument into the rulers and the ruled; and between the two communities thrown into so intimate a relation there is a great gulf fixed. Not merely is there a gulf but it is growing and has been growing for years. Mutual misunderstandings and an increasing impatience at the idea of any kind of racial predominance have led to a feeling of mutual resentment which has become chronic. That feeling has lately been very much aggravated by controversies arising out of the partition of Bengal, and many Indians, not in Bengal alone, have been moved, by their disgust at the manner in which that measure was carried, to take up a vehemently anti-British attitude, leading, in many cases, to the boycott of British goods, and in a few instances to the banning of the British Government and every individual Britisher. The anti-British feeling has, I believe, been absurdly exaggerated by a few alarmists; but it has a profound significance for all that, and it has made itself so manifest that it has caused many minds to hark back to the troublous times of half a century ago, and to raise the question "What if there should be another mutiny?"

A MILITARY RISING UNTHINKABLE.

Now although I have chosen this query as the starting point for the enquiry upon which I propose to enter, I should like to dismiss it with a direct negative as soon as it is brought upon the carpet. It seems to me quite inconceivable that, under present conditions, there can ever be a military movement in

India resulting in the subversion of the British power. The railway system alone has armed us with an almost irresistible weapon, offensive and defensive, against any possible purely Indian combination. Of course the case would be very different if our attention were distracted by a foreign demonstration; while if we were beaten in any other part of the world we might as well clear out of India at once. But leaving this possibility out of account—as we must do, since it hinges on political combinations over which we in India have not the slightest control—we may fairly claim to hold a position of overpowering strategical strength, being able (practically at a day's notice) to concentrate a hundred thousand Britishers at any given point within the perimeter of the Indian Empire. Those Britishers, too, would be armed with the latest weapons of precision, while we have hitherto only armed the Indian army with a semi-obsolete rifle, and have to all intents and purposes disarmed the general population completely. Any attempt at mutiny under present conditions, therefore, or any armed rising among the peoples of India would be, to use Macaulay's tremendous image, "a war of sheep against wolves, of men against demons."

No, if the anti-British feeling ever does become so strong throughout India as to generate a national movement for our overthrow, I am very much mistaken if guns and swords will be the weapons employed. There is a far more effective measure lying ready to the hand of the people of India, and one much in keeping with the oriental character and with the peculiar situation, in which the British find themselves, as a handful of aliens surrounded by teeming millions on every side. It is a weapon which I have often wondered to see lying idle so long. An Indian once said to a friend of mine:—

It is very extraordinary that the British should maintain their hold of India; for there are so few of you and so many of us that if you could all be collected together in one spot, and each of us were to take a pinch of dust between his thumb and forefinger and sprinkle it upon you, you would all be buried under a mountain a mile high.

This remark is a forcible presentation of the idea which is the first to impress itself upon the mind as the picture of the British Empire in India is thrown upon the mental screen—the overwhelming disparity in numbers between the races of this country and the representatives of the paramount power. We

are like the party of navigators in the Norse legend who camped on the back of a sleeping kraaken, one of the mythical monsters of the deep. They thought it was an island, and lit a fire and were just settling down comfortably, when the island took a header into the depths, and those of them who survived had to look out for some other haven.

India is so immense, and we are so few that the moment that immensity comes into play our own comparative helplessness is at once brought home to us. The mutiny of a half a century ago simply amounted to the slightest and most superficial tremor, yet it shook our power to its foundations. Practically only one nationality—only one class even—was affected in 1857. What would happen to us if all nationalities and all classes were arrayed in opposition to us? Is it not obvious that in such an event all our military organisation would be as useless to us as the earthly artillery was in Mr. Wells' story when pitted against the death-dealing rays of the invaders from the planet Mars?

I have all along been so conscious of the enormous risks of our position in India that it has been a source of astonishment to me to find how implicitly so many of us assume that we are all right, provided we can keep the British army in India up to its present strength. I do not quarrel with the idea of the British garrison. I believe that it is necessary, in the real interests of India as well as of Great Britain, although I think it is open to question whether it need be as large as it is. But it seems to me the height of folly to imagine that all we have to do is to sit tight and keep our powder dry. Gunpowder is an excellent thing in its way, but it is apt to be more of a nuisance than a help supposing we find ourselves on the slopes of an active volcano.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOYCOTT.

It is always unpleasant to refer to recent controversies, even although they have passed through their acutest phases, but my argument leads me in a bee line to the *swadeshi* movement and the attempted boycott of foreign, and particularly of British, commerce. The boycott has failed in the meantime—that is to say it has not succeeded in driving British goods out of the Indian markets. Indeed I am not at all sure that its immediate effect may not be to tighten the grip of British commerce upon

India; for a reaction has already set in, and before it has exhausted itself it will undoubtedly operate to stimulate the sale of British products in this country. The boycott has brought home to many people how absolutely they depend upon *bideshi* cloths, etc., for the comforts and even the decencies of life. The attempt to forego these has proved too much for them, and in their chagrin at the failure of the experiment they will fall foul of *swadeshi* and all its works. I, therefore, look for a very decided reaction in favour of British goods, at all events, in the near future.

But to look upon this movement as a purely economic one—as a question of where the people of India can buy the cheapest and best of the articles which they use—is to be wilfully blind. It is infinitely more significant and far-reaching than that. It is a political portent such as has never appeared in India before. It displays a fierce resentment at the conditions which surround every individual Indian life under the British regime. It asserts for the first time the capacity of the Indians to life and progress without any reference whatever to the British Government. And the spirit in which the movement is being developed is for the most part intensely, even where tacitly, anti-British. This tendency, as I have said, is without precedent in the history of the British connection with India. Not even at the time of the mutiny was the anti-British feeling so strong or so widespread. It is of course more intense in Bengal than in other parts, but I have reason to believe that educated opinion in every community and every province is suspicious and inflamed. Such are the conditions under which the *swadeshi* movement has attained to its present proportions. It has also been stimulated by the Russo-Japanese war and the awakening of China; indeed the boycott in Bengal was suggested by the success of the Chinese boycott in bringing the Americans to their knees. The whole tendency of things in Asia is to make the Indians feel that they are in line with a gigantic continental movement, of which the ultimate issue must be the removal of western predominance from eastern politics, and the freeing of India and China to work out their own ideals in their own way. This has long been the cherished object of a few ardent patriots. Now it is openly avowed by the great majority of Indian thinkers. It is a highly natural ambition, and ten years ago we could afford to

admit that and even contemplate its realization in the dim and distant future with a certain amount of philosophic phlegm. But the relative positions of Asiatics and Europeans have profoundly altered within the last decade, and when we consider the new spirit in India in the light of the emergence of Japan, we can not help feeling that our tenure in this country has been rendered a good deal less secure. ••

HOW FAR IS THE BRITISH POSITION AFFECTED?

As to how far our position has been undermined there is diversity of opinion among the Indians themselves. It is important to note, however, that only a small and uninfluential clique believe, or wish to believe, that the time is ripe to drive us out. The enormous majority are fully aware that they stand to lose more than they would gain by an immediate change of Government. Whether the limit is 50 years, 100 years, or even more, they recognise that the process of emancipation must be a slow one, and that it must take place under British auspices, if it is going to take place at all. But, on the other hand, the thinkers of India have almost unanimously agreed to aim at the goal, not of an India governed by Britishers even in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants. They are working for an India which will be run entirely by Indians, and which will be absolutely free to achieve its own salvation in its own way, whether political, economic, or religious. This ideal does not exclude a sentimental profession of loyalty to the British Empire in the abstract—assuming that the British Empire is in existence by the time India attains to complete self-government. But on one point extremists and moderates agree—the ultimate outcome of the new movement is to be an India which will be as self-contained and independent for all practical purposes as the Australian Commonwealth or the Republic of the United States of America.

Now I say deliberately that from our point of view it is much better to have this clearing of the air and to look hard facts in the face than to go on in the vague hope that somehow or other our own predominance can be reconciled with the national aspirations which we ourselves have kindled. We have arrived at a crisis in the history of India and the Empire, and we shall be wise to try to reason things out a bit and plan our attitude accordingly rather than go on in our happy-go-lucky

fashion, shutting our eyes to disagreeable truths and then exclaiming when we run our heads against a wall.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

I shall take the liberty of assuming that the reader concedes the points I have been endeavouring to make—first that the forces with which we have had to deal in India could only be kept in hand as we have kept them so long as those forces were ignorant of their own strength; second, that, largely owing to our own teaching, those forces have become self-conscious, and that as a result our task has grown enormously more difficult and complicated. What is the policy which these circumstances appear to dictate?

It is undoubtedly a compliment to us, as well as a satisfactory guarantee of some measure of permanence in our connection, that nobody who is anybody would like to see us leave the country during the next few years, at all events. The enlightened Indian view on this point is probably as well-expressed in a recent number of the *Indian Mirror* as anywhere —

It has been often said that Englishmen are in India to fulfil a God-given mission, which is to lead the people, step by step, to that high standard of national existence which distinguished India in the past. The Portuguese and the Spaniards, the Dutch and the French, were all attracted to India by the dreams of a gorgeous empire; England came last, and she has outlived all her rivals. The divine dispensation is clearly manifest in this.

Here I think we get the real feeling that lies behind all the declamation and hostility which have recently been so marked in Bengal. Our Bengalee friends have been, and are, intensely mortified—and in my opinion justly so—by the manner in which their country has been partitioned in defiance of their most vehement protests, and that mortification has led a few of them to indulge in fierce denunciation of the whole British race. But in their heart of hearts they all know that we are doing a better work than we ourselves are aware of. The *Indian Mirror* says that we have a God-given mission. I wonder if we ourselves are convinced of it. I wonder whether, if foreigners were established in the supreme control of our country, we could bring ourselves to admit that they had been sent there by Almighty Providence to do certain work for us which we were incapable of doing for ourselves. I am afraid it would take us a very long time to see it. And I claim that when enlightened Indians can look at the situation with such calm and

penetrating eyes, they constitute at once the best defence and the only guarantee for whatever permanence British ideas of Government in this country may attain. The presence of such thinkers explains why the country has kept its head during the upheavals which are modifying the whole trend of eastern politics—among which I include the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal, the awakening of China and the humiliation of Russia at the hands of Japan. We all know that language of a very different kind has been flung about during the last couple of years. The people who have used it have been for the most part irresponsible nobodies, who are incapable of taking long views of things, and that is why their shriekings have fallen flat. If the real leaders had sung to the same tune the situation would have become extremely serious, not merely on account of the effect which the anti-British propaganda would have had on the people at large, but also because there would then have been reason to fear that the British Raj had lost hold upon the consent of the governed without which no Government can possibly exist. The extremists, who are at this moment preaching a *jehad* against the British Government, represent the natural impulse of men upon whose minds the consciousness of national unity has just begun to dawn. All history shows that the moment a nation begins to feel that it is a nation, it resents any foreign domination whatsoever. The extremists in proclaiming that British rule in this country must come to an end are only the unconscious instruments of a tendency which is as old as mankind. If they had the ear of the people we should be driven out of the country, just as Austria was driven out of Italy, after a prolonged and bloody struggle. But they have not the ear of the people, most of whom are too poor and ignorant to care about politics; and as for the class which is able to take an interest in affairs, the counsel of the extremists is more than counter-weighted by the opinions of enlightened patriots such as the gentlemen who prevented the tail from wagging the dog at the last session of Congress. These men are just as ardent patriots as the extremists. They are certainly not less alive to the immediate disadvantages of British rule; but they take long views, and are willing to put up with disadvantages, because they see that in the long run they will be well repaid. It may not be in their life-time. Perhaps the finest

character that this movement has produced told me that he was prepared to work for emancipation all his life, and then find at the end of it that the goal was still far off. But a lifetime in history is a mere breathing space, and Mr. Gokhale and those who think with him are wise enough not to want to force things on to some premature climax. While they do not pretend to be satisfied with the present system, their efforts to get it altered in accordance with their own ideas are strictly conditioned by the knowledge that if British rule were overthrown before Indian solidarity was an accomplished fact, the last state of India would be a good deal worse than the present one.

So far then as the present time and the immediate future are concerned, the tacit assent of the inarticulate millions and the intelligent appreciation which the majority of Indian thinkers accord to our virtues as well as our weaknesses seem to assure us of an unchallenged continuance of our overlordship in this country. But history teaches us in the most emphatic manner that we cannot expect a freehold tenure. Many other people, besides the writer in the *Indian Mirror*, believe that we have been sent here by Divine Providence to train the Indians to fend for themselves; and if there is anything in this theory it is certain that the same Divine Providence will not suffer us to remain in the country a day longer than it takes us to complete our task. And if we are to complete the task at all, and make a good job of it there are certain conditions which we must endeavour to fulfil.

WHAT TO AVOID.

(1.) First of all we must not try to put back the hand of the clock. The forces which we have set in motion by our educational system and by the steps we have already taken in the direction of according self-government to the people are enormous, and can only be arrested, if then, by measures which we cannot and dare not take. This may or may not be regrettable from our point of view, but it is a grim fact, which certain of our rulers have quite recently been compelled to recognize as the result of a more or less painful experience. Having once discarded the old idea that India exists for the benefit of England there can be no halt until the logical consequences of that concession are followed out to the bitter end. The Queen's Proclamation of half a century

ago, if I may use a vulgar expression, gave the whole show away. That Proclamation laid down certain principles and made certain promises which have never been carried out. And they have not been carried out for the simple reason that we feared, rightly or wrongly, that by adhering to them we should jeopardize our own position and privileges. The result has been that for half a century our performance has lagged miles behind our promises. No matter what we have done for India—and I have no doubt the verdict of history will be that we have done a great deal—we have never been able to satisfy the people. For they have judged us, not by what we have done but by what we said we were going to do. Judged by that test there is not a single concession we have made that should not have been larger and fuller. Doubtless, from our point of view, it is very irritating of the Indians to insist on having their pound of flesh; but if we were in their place can anyone suppose that we should be content with less? In order to get things into proper perspective, then, I suggest that we should take the late Queen's Proclamation of nearly half a century ago as our starting point, and carry out unswervingly the obligations it imposes, whether those obligations are agreeable to us or whether they are not.

INDIA FOR THE INDIANS.

(2) But that, I need hardly insist, is the very minimum of what honour and duty require of us. It is only the beginning and not the end of the sacrifices which the policy of "India for the Indians" may entail. I do not propose to forecast those sacrifices. It is not necessary, and it would probably be misleading to do so, because the course of events would make fun of any prophecy as likely as not. For instance, it is generally assumed that in a self-governed India there would be no room for British commercial enterprise. I do not see why there shouldn't be. The assumption by Japan of full jurisdiction over foreigners has made no difference to the fortunes of the foreign houses that carry on business in Kobe and Yokohama. India is so immense that so long as she is under any civilized Government at all the tendency must continually be towards an increase in her trade with other countries, and, therefore, an increase in the foreign agencies in her chief ports and marts. But supposing that were not so; supposing that the ultimate

effect of the extension of self-government to India were to be the disappearance of every British firm in Calcutta and Bombay, is that, when it is looked at dispassionately, a sufficient reason for swerving from the path which we deliberately marked out for ourselves long ago? If it is wrong to compromise the future of British commerce in India then we ourselves are to blame. For it lay in our power to a very large extent to prevent Indian thought and ambition from taking the direction in which they are now moving so fast. We could have refused to provide any Indians with a modern education, or we could have forcibly prevented the pioneer missionaries from laying the foundations of the Indian educational system. We declined to avail ourselves of that opportunity, and it is much too late now to rectify that mistake, if it was one.

The moving finger writes, and having writ
 Moves on ; nor all your piety nor wit
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a line ;
 Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

OUR PRIVILEGE.

(3) The moment we grasp the fact that the movement of "India for the Indians" is not a hateful and diabolical conspiracy against the British, but that it is the logical outcome of a universal instinct which has been nourished by our own traditions, it will dawn upon us what a noble task may yet lie before us in India. It has been a great privilege to begin it. It will be a greater privilege if we are permitted to conduct it to its final stage. Never mind whether we Britishers win or lose in a monetary sense. If the worst comes to the worst, there is plenty of room elsewhere for our brains and muscles. Let us make up our minds that we will do the right thing by this great country whatever happens to us. The mere fact of our taking up that attitude would bind the Indians to us with ties that nothing could break. But even if it left them cold that ought not to matter to us. Of course I have nothing to say to the Britisher who honestly believes that liberty is not good for the Indian, although he himself would promptly rebel if any attempt were made to introduce autocratic methods into Britain. But most of us are not honest Tories of this stamp. If we made a clean breast of it we should be constrained to admit the unfairness of employing one set of political scales for the Indians and

another for ourselves. And the secret consciousness of that unfairness is and must be a source of great unhappiness to right-thinking men. That honesty is the best policy is a truth which most of us discover to be more true every day we live. If we apply it to the situation in India it will do wonders in the way of clearing the air.

SYMPATHY. (13/80)

(4) So far I have appealed to the sterner virtues of my countrymen in India. But if they can only be induced to regard this mighty problem in the generous spirit in which our fathers abolished slavery in the West Indies and put an end to class restrictions and disabilities in Britain, they will not halt there. They will feel themselves drawn to the noble men and women who are re-moulding the conditions of Indian life and thought and laying the foundations of the Indian nation of the future. They will begin to understand and revere their pure and lofty patriotism, and be fired with a generous impulse to share their mighty task. And as each one of us breaks through the barriers of racial prejudice and self-interest and comes out into the sunlight of this great national awakening he is doubly blessed. There is that about a great movement which tones us up to something of its own greatness if we are in sympathy with it. That is the first of the benefits that accrue to us. But the second is even more important, for it is impossible to be caught by the spirit of this movement without endeavouring to assist others to obtain a glimpse of the vision that has flashed on us. In national as in spiritual progress there are three cardinal virtues, and the greatest of these is love. We all love India in a vague way, whether we admit it or not. All I want is to see that love transmuted into practical sympathy for its just and righteous aspirations after nationhood. I feel convinced that India has a grand future in store for her, and we may have a share in that future if, but only if, we deal justly and wisely with the problems which are being thrust upon us at this most critical time.

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