

COMPETITION

AND THE

INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE.

(A PREFACE.)

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE EAST INDIA ASSOCIATION;
TUESDAY, MAY 21, 1872,

BY

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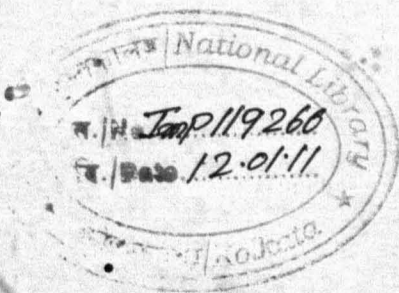
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"For now the sons of Æneus were no more!
The glories of the mighty race were fled!
Æneus himself and Meleager dead!"

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1872.



DEDICATED .
TO THE
MANES OF THE PUBLIC SERVANTS
OF THE
ENGLISH NATION,
WHO,
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE OLD EAST INDIA COMPANY,
CREATED AND ORGANIZED
THE
BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA.

as well as Haileybury, revived at Cooper's Hill. But the State, after founding Cooper's Hill College, for the special training of civil engineers for the Indian Government, sacrificed its special regard once to the summons of the untrained engineering profession in England by dispensing with one or two years' residence at the college in the case of students who already, before presenting themselves at the college, possess a competent knowledge of the subjects taught in the college education—i.e., sacrificed training to examination. I will venture to say in the dark that the Principal and Professors of Cooper's Hill have already found that the competitive entrance examinations periodically held by them too often admit men into the college who give infinitely more trouble than they are worth, and again and again have excluded men who would have done honour to the college and to the great scientific service of India. England will keep the best young engineers, and India get the poorest—the men who would have been plucked in the manly competition of the free life of England. I speak in the dark, and I trust in utter error, and that the college may yet vindicate the lines of Pope on Denham's poem—

"On Cooper's Hill eternal wreaths shall grow
Whilst lasts the mountain, or while Thames shall flow"—

for old Indians look out through tender leaves of hope to its future. At least the British Government in India rests absolutely on the personal character of the men of the Indian Services, and, above all, of the civilians; and the contentment of India with our rule—as apart from, and secondary to the security of our rule—depends mainly on the discipline, the sense of duty, obedience, order, responsibility—on the conscientiousness of the members of public services. The predisposing causes of the Mutiny were, of course, the unalterable disloyalty, enmity, and disaffection of the sovereign houses, priests, and dominant sects dispossessed by us of their states, power, and supremacy in India. But its exciting cause, separate from the exciting causes of the Rebellion of 1857, was the suspension of our career of conquest; and consequent discontent of the Army. For three generations it had been marched from victory to victory, and gorged with the spoil of the vanquished. And at last, when all India was subjugated, and while there were still endless marches to be made from Calcutta to Peshawur, there was an end of the loot, and the undisciplined mercenaries mutinied. I think that this must of necessity be the common sense of the mutiny of a mercenary army; and the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 is an apt illustration of the dangers of an undisciplined service. Now, the spirit of indiscipline which, before 1857 characterized the Bengal Army, now pervades the junior grades

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and ranks of all the Indian Services. The stability is everywhere wanting, and discontent and insubordination universal; while the old feeling of peace is gone, with the system which nurtured it, for ever. The millions of India are, indeed, well enough affected towards our rule, but it is with the passive subserviency characteristic of village communities everywhere. A ryot's interests are restricted to his own holding and village, the interests of a village to itself, and the lands which the villagers hold; and so conqueror after conqueror sweeps past, and the country stands by, a passive spectator. Thus the fate of India has always been decided by armies in the field, without the people taking, or caring to take, any part in the conflict. It would be perfectly indifferent to the ryots around Poona and Sattara whether they were ruled by Mahrattas, or Mahomedans, the English or the Russians, and this simply because they have no interest—no efficient political interest—in who rule over them. And thus it must be until the growth over the country of a landlord-class, without which an independent spirit, and a spirit of intelligent loyalty to our rule, and, above all, to law and order, can never animate the people of India; and without which, if from no other cause, self-government must always be impossible in India. The ryot is neither loyal nor disloyal—nor can be. He is simply a ryot, to whom a general action between the armies of Russia and England would be no more than a military spectacle. Nothing, indeed, could be happier than the condition of the Indian ryot—as we have made it for him—as a mere animal. To see the fields for leagues and leagues round about cities like Poona, and Sattara, and Sholapore under cotton, jowarie, linseed, hemp, flax, safflower, and pulse, the rich gardens surrounding every water-spring, the fruitful orchards by every village, and to hear the reapers shouting in the golden harvests, impresses the imagination vividly at first in favour of the Bombay system. But all is false and hollow, if we look beneath the fair, persuasive seeming, and are not misled by such arguments as make the worse appear the better reason. Administered generally in a narrow spirit, it is practically found admirably adapted for fattening the ryot up, like a calf, for the knife of “the able revenue officer,” and preserving a subject race in a state of brutal ignorance, selfishness, and sloth. But this at the sacrifice of all the qualities which should distinguish men, and which make the true greatness and safety of States. We have already tasted the bitter fruits of ignorance and barbarity, and seen with what ease the designing may act upon an ignorant people, and to what lengths of unutterable cruelty it can go when they have cast off the only fetters that restrain them; and we have, I trust, at last learned the lesson, that the stability of

our Government in India depends on the improvement of the lower classes, and the training of them by the means proper for a Government to use, at once to know their duties, and to assert their rights as members of the commonwealth. But to trust to the popularity of our rule with the Indian ryots—such as they are at present—for the low material blessings it has brought to them, is to build on sand. In the half-Europeanized Presidency towns the loyalty of the mercantile and educated classes towards our rule is at once hearty, intelligent, and an active power on our side—at least so it is in Bombay. But the educated are few, and the loyalty of the Bazaar and “go-down” is but a form of cupboard-love, after all—(hay, straw, and stubble—fire shall reveal it)—for the foundation of Empire. Still if the problem of the government of India is full of perplexity, and, at this supreme hour, strangely overclouded, so is that of all government everywhere; and I, for my part, believe that the people of India are easier to govern than any other people up and down the bright latitudes and longitudes of the terraqueous globe, if governed in mercy and truth, in righteousness and peace. They are long-suffering and patient, hardy and enduring, frugal and industrious, law-abiding and peace-seeking. They hate change, indeed—especially in legislation and taxation. This is the Indian ryot universally. The educated and higher mercantile classes are honest and truthful, and loyal and trustful towards the British Government, in the most absolute sense that I can use, and you understand the words. The most perfect example of intellectual truthfulness I have ever known is “a lying Mahratta.” Moral truthfulness is as marked a characteristic of the Settia class of Bombay as of the Teutonic race itself. The people of India, in short, are in no intrinsic sense our inferiors, while in some things—measured by some of the false standards, false to ourselves, we pretend to believe in—they are our superiors. They would, for instance, give our boys no chance in competitive examinations under the present system, if they could only come to London. And their human ideals are Janak and Bali, Tukaram and Akalyaba, and Bunyan’s Pilgrim—all Christians of the Gospel. They are not our ideals, to whom the unmixed Christian character is radically repugnant, profess what we will. One of the most rueful sights in all India is to see a respectable English missionary—good, honest Gentile fellow—expounding Christianity to the natives. The Christ of the Gospels they know, and of the prints from the pictures by the old masters; but this muscular, worldly wise, and well-dressed self-called Ambassador of Him, utterly confounds the Divine Message in their ears. They are indeed by accident of geographical place and climate, physically a weaker race, and hence politically a loosened faggot of sticks, a nation

disintegrated into its villages, and they never, never will rise into self-organized, self-supported national life, desire it as we may. Municipal self-government is the utmost they can attain to. The vital question, then, of the government of India is—not what sort of a people are they; but what manner of men are we?—not are they loyal to us, but are we true to ourselves? Our rule in India rests wholly on ourselves—on the personal character of each and every Englishman in India; and while we understand this, and are true to ourselves—look to ourselves, take care of ourselves—our empire in India shall endure as that house about which the floods arose, and against which the stream beat vehemently and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. This it is which gives the question of appointing to the Indian Civil Service by competitive examination such importance. And the moment is critical. On all sides we find men's hearts failing them for fear about India, and for looking after those things that are coming. I do not pretend to make light of this fearful seeking for of judgment; but I believe that this undisciplined state of the national mind is the very greatest danger of all threatening our rule in India—that panic here means inevitably lawless tyranny and massacre there. But so long as we remain true to ourselves, we shall always govern India with credit to ourselves and perfect acceptability to the natives; and the brave, wise, and humane blood of the English race must have run to water before we fail in, or quail before, the task.

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