

Fifteen years were to pass before Wedderburn next saw the Congress in session, but absence from India did not and could not lessen his devotion to the cause. For more than thirty years the Indian National Congress was the master concern of his public life. Its activities and aims were never out of his thoughts. He was personally acquainted with its leading members in every part of India, and with many of them he maintained continuous relations. He made himself responsible, not only for the discharge of its business in London, but also to a large extent for its financial credit. In the fullest possible sense he was its representative before the British people.

CHAPTER IV

SEVEN YEARS IN PARLIAMENT

THE strongest wish of Wedderburn's heart was to be in Parliament with his brother, when he retired from the service. But this hoped-for companionship was denied him. Sir David Wedderburn died in September, 1882. He was a remarkable product of his race and age.¹ Fortunate in his independence, he filled a strenuous life with travel and the study of public affairs. For twenty years after being called to the Scottish Bar he journeyed almost incessantly: in every European country, in North and South Africa and the Near East, through Australasia, the Pacific, and North America. He shared to the full the family interest in India, knew the country well, and was one of the best informed men of his time on all subjects relating to the Indian States. In

¹ See the *Life of Sir David Wedderburn*, by his sister, Mrs. E. H. Percival (Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884).

1868 he entered Parliament for South Ayrshire, and from 1879 to his death he sat for the Haddington Burghs, valuing his seat in the House mainly because it gave him opportunities of "doing an occasional turn for the good of India." His personal standing was exceptionally high. Indeed it would be true to say that no member of the two great Gladstonian parliaments was more generally and cordially esteemed than David Wedderburn. His elaborate journals (he was a far more systematic diarist than his brother) furnished him with a mass of material on the countries of his travels which he turned to account in a large number of speeches and lectures, and in articles for the monthly reviews. He died in his forty-eighth year and unmarried. Hence the baronetcy passed to his brother William, the third brother in succession to inherit during the nineteenth century.

For Sir William Wedderburn the strong personal attraction to Westminster was now removed, but his purpose was unaltered. Five years later, when freedom from official ties had been gained, there was no difficulty in his finding a constituency. In November, 1887, he was adopted as Liberal candidate for North Ayrshire, and it was characteristic of him that he should at once set out to acquaint himself at first hand with the dominant

political question of the hour. It was the year after the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill, and Wedderburn resolved upon a journey of personal investigation. In December he crossed to Ireland, with Sir Wilfrid Lawson and Theodore Fry, the party being later joined by several other members of Parliament. Wedderburn adopted his invariable plan. He went everywhere in pursuit of typical incidents of the land war and the political conflict, questioned people of all sorts, with the patience and courtesy that never failed him; witnessed evictions, and addressed meetings. The diary of this tour, kept with extreme care, contains material for an exact picture of Ireland under the Parnell plan of campaign. And to the reader of our day it suggests an unmistakable parallel. The names are different, but the forces are the same as those of yesterday. Allowing for the changes of circumstance, the record might have been written at any time between the Dublin rising of 1916 and the treaty with the Sinn Fein leaders in 1921.

Immediately on the close of the Irish trip, Wedderburn began political work in North Ayrshire. There was an interval of four years before the general election, and as a rule he conducted two speaking campaigns a year. On the eve of the contest he told the electors that for their suffrages

he had served almost as long as Jacob served for Rachel, and he hoped they would take care that Leah was not his portion after all. He stood upon a downright radical programme, which included Home Rule for Ireland, the Eight-Hours Day for miners, and Local Option. On a poll of something over 10,000 the Conservative candidate, the Hon. Thomas Cochrane, had a majority of 448. The defeat was a surprise to everybody. It was attributed mainly to Liquor and the Church question. Wedderburn had no complaint to make against any political opponent, and there were no personalities to regret. The fight, as he said, did a great deal for his political education, and in view of his support of the Temperance party he now became a total abstainer. The North Ayrshire Liberals took leave of him in December, 1892, with a dinner at Kilmarnock and the presentation of an address in a silver casket.

Three months later Wedderburn accepted an invitation from the Liberals of Banffshire. There followed a brisk election, enlivened by church-defence meetings, a liquor fight, and energetic canvassing of the fishermen, whose rights were the permanent and always lively question of the division. The Conservative candidate was a local resident, James A. Grant, son of the African

explorer. The result, on a poll of 5,561, was a Liberal majority of 771.

It was the second year of the troubled short parliament from which Gladstone retired on the defeat by the Lords of his second Home Rule Bill. The Government was almost impotent, and the House distracted. Wedderburn's maiden speech was delivered on May 8. He was wise enough to make it, not on an Indian question, but on the Scotch Sea Fisheries Bill, dwelling particularly on the improvement of the harbours as a matter of life and death to the people of the northern coasts. Throughout the whole of his time in Parliament he was a most assiduous Scottish member. No constituent could ever complain that his preoccupation with India prevented him from giving full attention to local affairs. On the contrary, since he could never do anything carelessly, he devoted much time to all matters affecting the welfare of the Banffshire people, notably to the fisheries and harbours, and the right and wrong of admitting trawlers into the Moray Firth—all questions of vital moment to Banff. Nor did he confine his interest to the merely local aspects of such questions. On his journeys abroad he made it his business to learn what was being done for people similarly placed, and he made a trip to Scandinavia for the

purpose of following up some questions in which the Banff fishermen were particularly concerned.

His first Indian speech was made on Mr. Herbert Paul's motion in favour of the holding of simultaneous examinations, in India and England, for the Indian Civil Service. And towards the end of his first session a motion on an Indian grievance gave him the opening for the first of a long series of speeches on the condition of the Indian people and the disheartening experiences of those who, whether within or without the bounds of the Civil Service, had made attempts to break through the defences of the all-powerful official clique.

During this first summer also Wedderburn fired his first shot at an abuse which he was never tired of assailing. He joined in the sending of a memorial to the Prime Minister urging that the Indian Budget might be brought on not later than the middle of July and be allotted not less than two parliamentary days, instead of being scrambled through in the last hours of the session. Mr. Gladstone was sympathetic, but said that, on account of the paramount claims of the Home Rule Bill, it was impossible to make any change. Wedderburn's assiduity in the House may be inferred from the record of his attendances during the session of 1894. Out of a possible total of 226 divisions he voted in 221.

The general election of 1895, which inaugurated the decade of Conservative rule, fell upon Wedderburn in the midst of private grief, his dearly-loved sister, Mrs. Percival, having died in April. In this contest he defeated his former opponent by 510 votes, Mr. Grant putting on record his sense of the member's courtesy and perfect fairness.

The last Gladstonian parliament was remarkable for the activity of the Indian group and the success of their efforts at bringing Indian questions before the House. This was to be accounted for chiefly by the close alliance existing between Sir William Wedderburn and Dadabhai Naoroji, who in the election of 1892 had been returned for Central Finsbury. Both men were dominated by a passion for the Indian cause; both were prodigiously informed; both were endowed with a power of work and a persistency which nothing could daunt. They had been associated in the councils of the National Congress from the beginning, and they worked in full accord. They were supported by several Liberal Anglo-Indians, and by a number of members belonging to the advance wing of Liberalism. Many of these valued allies went down in the Liberal disaster of 1895; Dadabhai Naoroji being among the fallen. But so long as Wedderburn was in the House his

knowledge, skill, and persistence insured the keeping of India in the forefront.

Wedderburn's first task in Parliament was the organisation of the Indian Parliamentary Committee. The responsibility of Parliament for India was for him the essential fact of the imperial relation. He was convinced that India had suffered greatly by the cessation of the parliamentary reviews which, before the transfer of authority to the Crown, had preceded the periodic renewal of the Company's charter. But since 1858 nothing had taken the place of those invaluable inquiries. The private member, seeking to call attention to conditions in India—unless he were endowed with the personality of a Bright, a Fawcett, or a Bradlaugh—was easily extinguished by the Secretary of State or some other minister, and he could expect very little backing from the Press. Combination in the House was therefore a necessity. In the eighties John Bright had brought together an informal group of members pledged to general sympathy with India; but it was not until Wedderburn entered the House that the work of forming a regular committee was undertaken. During the summer of 1893 W. S. Caine joined him in inviting a small number of independent members to dinner for a talk over the project. A resolution was carried affirming

the need of a committee "for the purpose of promoting combined and well-directed action among those interested in Indian affairs." The original members included most of those known as coming under this description: Jacob Bright, W. S. B. McLaren, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, John E. Ellis (later Under-Secretary for India), J. G. Swift MacNeill, Herbert Paul, R. T. Reid (Lord Loreburn), and Dadabhai Naoroji; with Wedderburn as chairman and Herbert Roberts (now Lord Clwyd) as secretary.

Active during the brief Liberal term, the committee was necessarily of comparatively little account during the ten years of Conservative power when the tide of aggressive Imperialism was running high. After the great Liberal triumph of 1906 it was reconstructed under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Cotton and again became active, particularly during the Morley régime. By that time Wedderburn was no longer in Parliament; but he remained in close touch with the new group of Anglo-Indian members and their Liberal and Labour allies.

The scope of the Indian Parliamentary Committee was wider than that of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress. No attempt was made to form in the House a definite group committed to the Congress programme. Wedderburn

was of opinion that the wisest course lay in enlisting as large a number of members as possible under a general promise of attention and sympathy nothing more. * India to him was in a pre-eminent sense a House of Commons concern. He counted it disgraceful, humiliating, that this unbounded responsibility, this extraordinary example of imperial duty and administration, should be outside the range of the elected representatives of the British people; capable only of arousing languid notice on one official day of the year or of provoking angry interest on the occasion of a frontier expedition, a scandal in an Indian State, or a religious riot in one of the cities of the plain. It may of course be questioned whether a parliamentary committee framed on this plan could ever have fulfilled the hopes of its founder, especially when he was no longer on the spot to apply the goad. And certainly it is true that in the years when the nominal membership included a large section of the House there was never any great muster on Indian budget day, or on those other occasions associated with the welfare of the Indian millions when, as was said long ago, Cicero replying to Hortensius would hardly draw a quorum. But none the less the committee was a valuable aid to the keeping alive of Indian questions in the House.

Wedderburn's parliamentary efforts on behalf of India during the busy years of his membership fall roughly under three heads; (1) Protests against the forward policy on the North-West Frontier, with the consequent expansion of military expenditure; (2) criticism of the Indian budget system, and pressure, continually renewed, for the purpose of securing an independent scientific inquiry into the condition of the rayat and the causes of famine; (3) the advocacy of the reform programme of the Indian National Congress.

When in 1895 the Liberals had given place to a Conservative Government backed by an immense majority, Wedderburn attacked the first of these questions. In February, 1896, he moved an amendment to the Address regretting that the Government had decided not to withdraw from Chitral, "thereby violating the pledge given by the Viceroy's proclamation, dangerously adding to government responsibilities beyond the north-west frontier, and leading to an increase in the already overgrown military expenditure." In July he is found protesting against the vote for the Indian troops at Suakin: this charging to India of the ordinary costs of an Indian contingent serving in another part of the Empire had been already denounced by Fawcett as "a masterpiece of melancholy meanness."

He then returned to the charge on Chitral, repeating several times before the end of the year his accusation as to the breaking of pledges to the tribesmen, and pressing the case in favour of returning to "the good, old, and humane policy," which, as he insisted, had, under Lawrence and Ripon, "given India a full treasury, friendly neighbours on the frontiers, and a contented people at home."

Such appeals made no sort of impression upon Government. But before the Liberals went out of office the Indian group obtained one important concession from Sir Henry Fowler. He agreed to the appointment of a commission on Indian expenditure. Wedderburn and Dadabhai Naoroji had concentrated upon the demand for a complete stocktaking. On August 14, 1894, they moved for "a full and independent parliamentary inquiry into the condition of the people of India, their ability to bear their present burdens, the possibilities of reduction of expenditure, and the financial relations between England and the United Kingdom generally." The Secretary of State promised that at the beginning of the next session he would propose a select committee to inquire into "the financial expenditure of the Indian revenues both in England and in India." This, though much less than

had been asked for, was accepted as the best that could be expected. On second thoughts, however, and doubtless under pressure from Simla, Fowler changed the plan. He proposed a Royal Commission, and in May, 1895, it was appointed. The terms of reference covered "the military and civil expenditure incurred under the Secretary of State for India in Council, and the apportionment in charge between the Governments of the United Kingdom and of India for purposes in which both are interested."

Lord Welby, the experienced Treasury official, was chairman, and the official element predominated. G. N. Curzon, Leonard Courtney, and T. R. Buchanan (afterwards Under-Secretary for India) were nominated as independent parliamentary members, while Wedderburn, Dada-bhai Naoroji, and W. S. Caine represented the interests of India. The principal Indian witnesses called by the Commission were Naoroji, D. E. Wacha, Surendranath Banerjea, Subramania Iyer, and G. K. Gokhale, all except the first-named coming from India after being chosen by special resolution of the Indian National Congress. The final reports of the Commission did not appear till 1900. The Majority Report, signed by all except the three pro-Indian members, caused deep disappointment in India as falling grievously

short of reasonable expectations. The minority produced a report which was largely the work of Sir William Wedderburn himself. He always contended that, between matters of high policy on the one hand and matters of mere book-keeping on the other, there was a large middle ground which parliamentary inquiry might safely and usefully traverse; and it was largely to this ground that his attention was directed. The main recommendations of the minority were as follows :

“An inquiry by a select committee of the House of Commons on a full array of material compiled under improved conditions;

Non-official members of the Viceroy's Legislative Council to be made more directly responsible to the Indian people; to have the right to move amendments to the budget and to divide the Council;

Indians to be nominated to the Secretary of State's Council, and at least one Indian to the Viceroy's Executive Council;

The salary of the Secretary of State to be placed upon the British estimates, and parliamentary inquiries into the Indian administration, every twenty years, to be revived by statute;

A return to the Lawrence-Ripon military and frontier policy; the frontier to be defined, and not altered without the assent of Parliament;

Trans-frontier wars to be paid for primarily out of the British exchequer, India contributing her

due share on the basis of protection and benefit to the frontier; for distant wars, India to pay nothing, except in the event of attack upon the Suez Canal;

Payment by Great Britain, for all Indian work performed in the United Kingdom; India to pay for all Indians employed in India, and for all others in equal shares."

It will be remarked that several of these recommendations were afterwards embodied in the Morley and Montagu reforms, while others have never been acted upon. The Minority Report was issued in a separate volume by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, and was used for many years as a means of public instruction in Indian finance and general administration. Wedderburn, who gave an immense amount of time to the sittings of the Commission and the preparation of the Report, regarded its educational value as high, and on the whole well repaying the labour and cost entailed upon the British Committee.

The long fight over budget procedure and the question of an independent survey of economic conditions began in Wedderburn's first session. It was from the outset a discouraging experience, and Wedderburn had not long been engaged in it before he was found confessing that he was "hopeless of any benefit arising from the budget

debate" in the circumstances feebly tolerated by the House of Commons. In August, 1894, he made his first speech in favour of the inquiry. Before the next year's budget the Conservative Government was in power, and Wedderburn was pitted against Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State whom for the remainder of his parliamentary term he laboured to convince or in some degree to impress.

No Secretary of State had any cause to complain of the substance or tone of Wedderburn's attacks. He recognised the special difficulty of this minister, surrounded, as he was, "by an India Council which is chiefly composed of those very officials who in Simla have carried out the policy" under attack. And, of course, a Liberal Secretary of State was in a position of the greatest difficulty. He suffered from the bad political atmosphere in which his work had to be done. But even so, as Wedderburn warned Sir Henry Fowler, he should realise that something was wrong when he found himself cheered regularly by the party in opposition.

In August, 1896, Lord George's budget statement contained a reference to "infinite benefits" and "infinitesimal drawbacks." Wedderburn, submitting his recital of grim facts in opposition to the official optimism, moved for the appointment

of a select committee to examine the East Indian accounts. He urged that a special report, based upon the debates in the Viceroy's Council, should be supplied to the Committee every year. In resisting the amendment Lord George Hamilton had the support of a vigorous speech from his predecessor, Fowler, whose control of the India Office during the Liberal administration had been in full harmony with the mind of the India Office. Shortly afterwards, in an article headed "The Indian Budget Farce" (*India*, June, 1896), Wedderburn restated his case :

"If an independent member seeks to make an opportunity on the Queen's Speech, or on a motion of adjournment, he is angrily told by both front benches that the time for discussing all such grievances is the Indian budget night."

But when that night came round, the minister responsible took refuge in the habitual means of escape. On this occasion, Wedderburn insisted, neither Lord George nor Fowler had any suggestion to make in reply to "the moderate and simple scheme" of the Indian National Congress.

When Parliament reassembled in February, 1897, India was moving fast into the stage of famine, plague, and unrest. Wedderburn moved an amendment to the Address for "a full and

independent inquiry into the condition of the masses of the Indian people." In a speech composed with great care he argued that the Government Famine Relief Fund could only come from fresh taxation: "that is, "the dying would be fed at the expense of the hungry survivors." He then brought forward the specific proposal with which during the cycle of great famines at the turn of the century, his name was to be identified: namely, an intensive inquiry, practical and definite, into the condition of the villages within a selected and defined area. His contention was that no imperial commission was necessary; the cost would be negligible; the information invaluable.

It was the year of the Diamond Jubilee. Wedderburn hoped against hope that the great celebration would appeal to the Government as an occasion above all others for giving the suffering millions of India a substantial reason for rejoicing. This was the text of all his appeals to the British people at this time: appeals by speech and writing which he was compelled to base upon the gathering evidence that India was entering upon a time of exceptional trial.

The budget statement covered the events of a terrible year. During 1896 the country had suffered from an almost universal shortage of

rain; and in 1897 the famine had spread to an appalling extent. The numbers on relief at one time reached a total of 4,200,000. In Assam there had occurred the most destructive earthquake known in India for a generation. Plague had appeared in Western India, and in Bombay serious riots had been provoked by the government's protective policy. At Poona two British officers, Rand and Ayerst, had been murdered. The Mahratta leader, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, had been tried and sentenced, and an additional sensation had been caused by the deportation, without trial, of the two Natu brothers, suspected of complicity in the assassinations. Not since the Mutiny had the evidences of popular disturbance been so disquieting.

In making his budget statement Lord George Hamilton strove hard to maintain the customary tone of optimism. But it was impossible, especially in view of the plague, a menace with which British administrators had not hitherto been called upon to cope. The minister was impelled to say that the sanative measures adopted by the Government of Bombay were "repugnant to the instincts, customs, and usages of the great mass of the native population," and that they "interfered with the privacy of home life." It was, he admitted, impossible to exaggerate the alarm; but he held

that there was no serious difficulty except at Poona, where the Tilak party had been guilty of gross distortion of facts. The debate following Lord George's speech was of exceptional moment, notwithstanding that even this overwhelming statement of disaster had not materially increased the attendance of members.

Wedderburn expressed his conviction that the inquiries favoured by the Secretary of State were purely official and of a routine character. They did not and could not touch the causes of the suffering. Gradually and very reluctantly, he said, he himself had been forced to the conclusion that a great portion of the land-revenue system, though good in theory and well-intentioned, was not suited to the conditions of the Indian peasantry. He renewed his appeal for an independent and intensive inquiry, and once more urged the necessity of agricultural banks as the one practicable means of attacking the problem of rural indebtedness.

Meanwhile there had occurred a very unfortunate incident, which not only embarrassed Wedderburn and imperilled the career of the most promising member of the Indian reform party, but put a dangerous weapon into the hands of the enemy and for a time did much to nullify the work of the Congress Committee and its friends in Parliament.

In May, 1897, at the height of the plague agitation, a memorial, signed by some 2,000 Hindu and Moslem citizens of Poona, had been submitted to Government. In a letter to *The Times* Wedderburn had called attention to its gravity, particularly as regards the alleged conduct of certain troops engaged in enforcing the plague regulations. He pressed upon Lord George Hamilton the significance of the memorial, and particularly the appendix, which contained testimony as to ill-treatment and oppression given over the signatures of the parties aggrieved. Inquiry, Wedderburn contended, was imperative. If the complaints were substantiated, redress should have been afforded; if they proved to be false, those making the charges should have been punished. In no other way could the good name of British administration be upheld. Unfortunately, no such inquiry was instituted, nor did the Secretary of State make any reply to the memorial. Accordingly Wedderburn decided to bring the matter before the Indian Parliamentary Committee, which was addressed by G. K. Gokhale, who described to the meeting the miserable and distracted condition of the people of Poona, enduring the combined calamities of famine, plague, house-searching, and punitive police. He stated that the wildest rumours were abroad,

and that two of his correspondents, in whom he had entire confidence, had informed him of a report current in Poona that two Indian women had been outraged by British soldiers, and that one of them had committed suicide. This information was subsequently proved to be inaccurate. Wedderburn wrote to Lord George Hamilton expressing profound regret that the statement had ever been made; and to the *Banff Journal* he sent a long explanatory letter setting forth the course of events leading up to the meeting in the House of Commons. After reiterating his regret, he said :

“I am bound to express my belief that Mr. Gokhale, who was much moved by the sufferings of his friends in Poona, mentioned the existence of the rumour, not with evil intent, but in order to show the extreme necessity of that full inquiry to obtain which was the sole object of the meeting.”

Gokhale, who until then had been enjoying the triumph of his appearance before the Welby Commission, was for the time crushed. Returning soon afterwards to India, he published, immediately on landing at Bombay, a complete apology and retraction, to which his extreme conscientiousness led him to give a form that was for many years bitterly resented by large numbers of his compatriots.

To Sir William Wedderburn the affair was a cause of the deepest grief. He had been led by his profound pity for the Indian people, then suffering from a multiple visitation, to make the accusations known in England, and if he placed too much reliance upon the advices from Bombay, it was because he had already formed the highest opinion of the sound judgment of the young Indian colleague who was to become his intimate friend. Better than anyone else he knew the difficulty of getting Parliament to display even a momentary interest in Indian affairs. And at a time of widespread calamity, when discussion unavoidably takes the form of attack upon the administration, the difficulty becomes almost insuperable. At this particular crisis, with the plague adding an unknown terror to the problem, the misfortune of the Gokhale episode was incalculable. It added greatly to the burden of Wedderburn's task in the budget debate of 1897, and for some time ahead to that of his efforts outside the House.

In view of the almost complete disappearance of India from the regular proceedings of Parliament in later times, it is astonishing to find that in several successive years the Indian group was able to make an opening for Indian questions during the debate on the Address. Whether moved by Wedderburn, or by one of his colleagues,

his hand was always discernible in the wording of the amendments ; and on no occasion more than in the years of the great famines after 1897. Thus, in February, 1898, his amendment to the Address on behalf of the Indian people called for

“special forbearance towards them and careful inquiry, in order to restore confidence among the suffering masses and thus prepare the way for measures tending to bring back peace and prosperity.”

In commending this motion to the House he pointed out that, as in previous years, the affairs of the frontier had been discussed at length ; but what were those affairs in comparison with the vital condition of the people ? What, in truth, was that “key of India” to which such constant references were made ? It was to be found, not on the frontier, but in the contentment and well-being of the Indian people. And yet, he remarked, there were those who, in the face of famine, pestilence, and earthquake, could bring themselves to believe in the efficacy of the policy of repression upon which in its panic the Government had embarked.

No governor-general of modern times had gone out under happier personal auspices than those which attended Lord Curzon at the end of the year 1898. But the country was already in the

grasp of famine, and a few months later it had become clear that India was being called upon to pass through the most terrible experience of the century. The years 1899 and 1900 were indescribably dark. Wedderburn was untiring in his appeals, both inside and outside Parliament; but England was being carried into the South African War, and as a consequence the public temper was not favourable to a generous response, even when Lord Curzon sent from Simla a despairing cry for help. In the budget debate of 1899 Wedderburn reiterated for the last time on this annual occasion his lesson. Driving home the moral of the great famine, he said:

“The India Office theory is that the rayat is a fat and comfortable person, increasing every year in prosperity, pleasantly conscious of the blessings of British rule. On the other hand, all Indian opinion knows and asserts that he is a miserable starveling, hopelessly in debt to the money-lender; without store of food, money, or credit; living from hand to mouth, so that he readily dies from famine if there is a failure of one harvest. Here is a clear issue of fact; and again and again I have asked for a detailed village inquiry which would settle the point.”

He made yet one more plea (April, 1900) for the intensive inquiry, and in July he moved in the House for an imperial grant in relief of famine.

The Indian debates of 1899 were all held in the shadow of war. The summer was taken up with the contest between Chamberlain and Kruger, and Parliament rose with the issue practically settled.

Wedderburn, needless to say, was utterly opposed to the war policy. By temperament, conviction, and training he was an Old Liberal. No movement in Parliament and no sweep of popular emotion could affect his position. He believed the war to be avoidable. He voted against the war credits. He was, indeed, one of the little band of Liberals and Radicals who refused on every occasion to modify the stand they had taken. His constituents disagreed. The majority of them were angry, and showed their feelings like the good Highlanders they were. Indignation meetings were held in all the Banffshire towns, and Wedderburn grew accustomed to votes of censure being passed in the division with something like unanimity. Entirely unmoved, he went on his way. The electors of Banff knew him; they could not have looked for any different behaviour; and it needed a short time only to bring them round, not to agreement with him but to entire respect. Nor did they, even at the worst time of war feeling, imagine that their member would make any move towards resignation on the South African issue.

None the less, Wedderburn's years in Parliament were now drawing to an end. During the preceding twelve months he had become increasingly convinced that his days of 'usefulness at Westminster were over. He was finding himself unequal to the double burden of, as he wrote, "direct work for India, together with the wear and tear of contested elections, care for the special interests of his constituents, and the multifarious duties of parliamentary life." And there was one determining circumstance connected with the spirit of England at the opening of the century. He deeply distrusted the temper of the country, and realised that for some time to come reformers of every kind would have to endure severe trial and discouragement. He saw, moreover, that the Balfour-Chamberlain Government intended to seize the tactical advantage and make an appeal to the electorate before the war fever subsided. Accordingly he reached a conclusion, and on June 20, 1900, he addressed a letter of resignation to Mr. A. R. Stuart, president of the Banffshire Liberal Association.

This was a thoroughly characteristic utterance. Wedderburn began by saying that his decision not to stand again had not arisen out of anything in his relations with his constituents. Had he wished to remain in Parliament he would not

for a moment have contemplated severance from a constituency where sound Liberal principles were so firmly rooted and where he personally had received so much kindness. But in the then temper of the British people he saw no chance within the next few years of forwarding the purposes for which he had desired a seat in the House of Commons. First, his hope had been to do some work, however humble, in support of peace, economy, and reform, which he regarded as the only solid basis of national welfare. Secondly, as regards the wide interests of Britain outside these islands, he had desired to support a policy of national righteousness. And, he continued :

“Especially I felt it a duty to the unhappy and unrepresented people of India to place at the disposal of my fellow countrymen the experience acquired during many years of official life in that country. Further, since I have had the honour to represent Banffshire, I have been anxiously desirous to remove the more prominent grievances of those engaged in the local industries of fishery and agriculture.”

But the wave of militarism which had swept over the country seemed to ensure a fresh lease of power to the Government which engaged in mischievous and costly wars abroad, and at home

misapplied public funds in the shape of doles to political supporters. Under such circumstances it seemed useless for him to continue those personal sacrifices without which it was not possible for parliamentary duties to be performed.

As for the reiterated accusation that his attitude to the South African War displayed a lack of patriotism, Wedderburn continued, it affected him little. He knew it to be undeserved, and he believed that even his strongest opponents did not seriously doubt that he was acting from conscientious motives. Since he was convinced that the war was hurtful to the country's best interests, he would have been wanting in patriotism if he had not done his best to prevent it. "According to my view," he concluded, "we best show love of our country by striving after a high national ideal. It will not profit a nation, any more than it will profit a man, to gain the whole world and lose its own soul."

Throughout the county his resignation was received with the deepest regret. In the midst of the general lamentation it was difficult to believe that barely a half-year earlier Wedderburn's constituents had been passing resolutions of censure which challenged alike his liberalism, his patriotism, and his political character. But no retiring member ever had less cause to doubt the

admiration and goodwill of the community he had served in Parliament.

The newspapers of the time contain many descriptions of Sir William Wedderburn as parliamentarian. One example of these may suffice. The sketch-writer of the *Daily Mail* thus pictures him in the course of an Indian debate :

“A Scotch laird of some wealth; a man who could take the world easily—he brings to the consideration of the people of India a zeal that nothing can abate, a great industry, perfect singleness of purpose. . . . He is a crusader, but a crusader of the Scotch type—gentle, a little sad, suggesting melancholy over the sadness and sombreness of the human lot rather than power to relieve it.”

That is not a bad picture. But those who knew Wedderburn knew that the melancholy was not in his nature. It was in the body of fact by which he was weighed down when describing the sadness of the human lot in India to those who, as he believed, possessed the power but not the will to relieve it.

It is regrettable that the story of these years, so heavily scared by calamity in India, should have to be told in a manner largely controversial. But that is unavoidable in view of the persistent attitude of the India Office. We should, however, naturally assume that a minister so experienced

and conscientious as Lord George Hamilton would be able to make an effective defence of his department against the Wedderburn indictment. But when he came, many years afterwards, to review his long tenure of the India Office,¹ Lord George wrote as one who deemed the authority of the Imperial Parliament to be an evil, and also as one who did not doubt the practical perfection of the governing system in India. Touching upon the subject-matter of the economic debates during the nineties, he says simply that Indian finance has been admirably managed, and that during the eight years of his term of office, "despite plague and famine, the progress of India in wealth and prosperity and trade was steady and continuous." To the repeated and well-documented appeals for a more fundamental treatment of famine than that comprised in the relief policy, Lord George Hamilton makes no reference. His single comment upon the activities of the Indian group in the House is the following:

"I was unfortunate enough to have a succession of famines to deal with, and although I am tolerably pachydermatous, the unjust criticism and abuse to which Lord Elgin and I were subjected in connection with famine administration arouses within me even

¹ See *Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections*, by Lord George Hamilton, vol. ii.

to this day a vibrant indignation. There was the less justification for this misrepresentation as, when the relief operations were concluded and reviewed, it was generally admitted that they had been exceptionally effective and successful."

It is, however, important to note that Lord George Hamilton concedes the greater part of Sir William Wedderburn's case in two incidental sentences of this very brief account of his stewardship. Famine, he says, is preventable, "in one sense"—which sense, strangely enough, he does not specify. And he adds this unqualified statement: "The so-called famines in India are not so much a food as a wage scarcity." That is precisely what Wedderburn maintained from beginning to end of his long contest with the bureaucracy. In other words, the root evil of India is the extreme poverty of the rayat under the system of revenue administration which, in the official reports, makes so great a display of efficiency and prosperity.

CHAPTER V

THE NATIONAL CONGRESS IN ENGLAND

So large a measure of the driving force in the Congress movement being English, it was natural that the founders should look upon the work in England as hardly second in importance to that in India. Hume indeed, after some years of exacting and often dispiriting labour in every part of India, was driven to believe that the ensuing stage would have to be accomplished through agitation in England, together with organised pressure upon Parliament and the India Office. Concessions could not be expected from the Government of India. It was idle to suppose that the great bureaucracy could ever reform itself. The officials, he wrote in 1889, denied altogether the justice of the Congress contentions :

“We cannot blame them for this: it is only natural—for the tendency of all the reforms we advocate is to curtail the virtually autocratic powers

now exercised by these officials, and unless they were more than human they must necessarily be antagonistic to our programme."

And yet the reforms demanded by the Congress were necessary, not only to the welfare of the Indian people, but "to the auspicious continuance of British rule." Wedderburn agreed entirely with Hume's view that the only hope lay in "awakening the British people to a consciousness of the unwisdom and injustice of the present administration." There was one means, and one only, to that end: the provision of funds for public meetings in England, for pamphlets, leaflets, and articles in the Press; "in a word, to carry on an agitation there on the lines and the scale of that in virtue of which the Anti-Corn-Law League triumphed." In the eighties of last century the memory of Cobden's methods and success was still recent. The repeal of the Corn Laws was regarded as the outstanding example of a cause being carried to victory by pacific agitation and untiring persuasion, and the leaders of the National Congress continually cited the League as their exemplar.

Many contemporary historians have observed that it was in 1887, the year of the Victorian jubilee, that the mass of home-keeping British people were brought for the first time to a partial

realisation of the Empire as a momentous fact—it would be too much to say, a great responsibility. In this year, appropriately, the first steps were taken towards the forming of an Indian reform organisation in England. Dadaßhai Naoroji, then and for long afterwards resident in London, had offered to act as agent for the National Congress. He was, however, not supplied with funds, and it was not until the following year that any definite progress was made. Charles Bradlaugh—who, having fought through the extraordinary conflict over the parliamentary oath, now had an honourable place among the small company of great private members—was enlisted as an active supporter. As a natural consequence he became the parliamentary champion of the Congress. At the same time a paid agency was established, with an office in Craven Street, Strand, under the charge of that tireless advocate and controversialist, William Digby, afterwards to be known as the author of '*Prosperous British India*'. An energetic campaign of meetings and publications was opened. Bradlaugh entered upon the work which he continued till his death, of speaking on Indian affairs; and a wide distribution of the annual reports of the National Congress made some thousands of politically-minded people in England aware of the existence and aims of the new Indian organisation.

The experience of the first few months showed the need of adding to the London office an advisory body of public men, belonging to both the English and Indian sides of the movement. The British Committee of the Indian National Congress was the result. It was formed in July, 1889, with Sir William Wedderburn as Chairman. This position he retained to the end of his life. The original members of the British Committee were : Dadabhai Naoroji, W. S. Caine, and Walter S. B. McLaren, with William Digby as secretary. Shortly afterwards it was joined by John E. Ellis (later Under-Secretary for India in the Campbell-Bannerman Ministry), George Yule, head of a great firm of Calcutta merchants and President of the fourth Congress ; W. C. Bonnerjee, Sir Charles Swann, Herbert Roberts (Lord Clwyd), and as time went on various men who in one way and another were active in Indian affairs. The constitution of the Committee was confirmed by a resolution of the 1889 Congress, and an annual sum was voted for its support. Three years later William Digby resigned the secretaryship. The office was removed to Palace Chambers, Westminster, a good strategic situation for the House of Commons, and these rooms remained the headquarters of the movement until they were annexed in war-time by the Ministry of Food.

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During its thirty years of active work the personnel of the British Committee altered considerably, the unchanging features being the chairman and the devoted secretary and manager, W. Douglas Hall. The custom was to elect as temporary members any leading representatives of the Congress who might happen to be in England. Among such from time to time were Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Sir Surendranath Banerjā, Sir Dinshaw E. Wacha, Subramania Iyer, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Bhupendranath Basu, and G. K. Gokhale.

To Sir William Wedderburn and his colleagues in the earlier years of the movement the Indian member of highest value was W. C. Bonnerjee, a wise counsellor and most assiduous worker. They esteemed him as the perfect Congressman. His influence among the educated classes in India was hardly surpassed by that of any contemporary, and his death in 1906 was a loss from which the London Committee never completely recovered.

Other sympathisers of the Congress in Parliament, notably Sir Charles Dilke and Samuel Smith, were not enrolled as members of the Committee, being of opinion that they could do more effective work in Parliament for the Indian cause if they remained unconnected with any outside organisation. Sir Henry Cotton, who retired in 1903 as Chief Commissioner of Assam,

joined the Committee immediately after his return to England, and thereafter was a most valuable member. He was one of a group of Anglo-Indian Liberals who had secured seats in Parliament at the general election of 1906, and who, along with Frederic Mackarness, Sir C. Dilke, Philip Morrell, and V. H. Rutherford, with Keir Hardie, James O'Grady, and Ramsay MacDonald on the Labour benches, kept Indian questions alive in the House during the first four years of the long-lived Liberal Administration. ~

So long as his health held out Sir William Wedderburn was frequently in London for the meetings of the Committee, or for consultations in the House of Commons, and invariably he occupied the chair. During his lifetime there was no thought of any other chairman, since it was manifest that no one else had his unique qualifications, or possessed in a comparable degree the confidence of the Congress forces in India and of their sympathisers in England. In later years the journey from Gloucester necessarily grew to be a more serious undertaking, and as a consequence the meetings were less frequent and required special arrangement. But year after year, and without any slackening, Wedderburn remained the leader and counsellor, devoted without intermission to the Committee and the wide-

spreading influences of which it was the centre. One may well doubt whether, during a century of unparalleled public service, there has been any more remarkable example than this of a volunteer public servant carrying through with such complete devotion the severe and thankless labour of a reform committee. Whoever flagged, whoever made excuses, it was never the chairman. He thought no labour too arduous or prolonged in the preparation of memoranda, or of pamphlets, the writing of public letters, the supply of information to the Press or to public men, on all the subjects coming within the range of the Committee.

What has so far been said of the British Committee, its activities and burdens, might seem to imply that, for Sir William Wedderburn, these things meant nothing but continuous labour, an undue measure of anxiety, and pecuniary sacrifice spread over a long term of years. But there were relaxations and compensations not a few, which Wedderburn appreciated keenly. He had in India an immense circle of acquaintances and admirers, many of whom kept in touch with him. And if during these busy years the load of correspondence was at times difficult to carry, the sense of contact with many people of varied character and interests was a constant pleasure. He had formed close personal ties with a number

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of the Indian leaders—notably, Sir Pheroza Shah Mehta, Sir Dinshaw Wacha, Bhupendranath Basu, and above all G. K. Gokhale; and their visits to England, whether connected with public meetings or not, brought additional interest into his life.

The fulfilment of the Hume-Wedderburn plan of education in England could obviously not have been attempted without the aid of a newspaper organ. When Indian affairs were prominent, the Press in general could be relied upon to give a measure of attention to the reform case, however prejudiced their general position; but it was plainly necessary for a paper to be maintained for the purpose of giving a continuous summary of political events, and especially for the furnishing of an authoritative version of the facts in relation to the manifold Indian grievances, economic, administrative, and personal. There could be no serious appeal to the British electorate without such an organ. In its early stage, therefore (1890), the British Committee established the journal *India*, at first issued irregularly, with William Digby as editor. In 1892 it became a monthly, and in 1898 it was changed to a weekly, with Mr. Gordon Hewart¹ as editor, and passed in 1906 into the charge of Mr. H. E. A. Cotton.²

¹ Now Lord Hewart, Lord Chief Justice of England.

² Now (1922) President of the Bengal Legislative Council.

The expenses of production were of course considerable, and in later years the burden became increasingly heavy for Sir William Wedderburn. From beginning to end the work of the British Committee was carried on with inadequate funds and, worse still, under a strain caused by the knowledge that the younger men in India were becoming more and more sceptical of results obtainable in England. Wedderburn, although his means were always limited, carried a very large part of the burden, in money and responsibility, with faultless patience and forbearance and for many more years than he should have been allowed to carry it. But at intervals even he found it necessary to use words of grave protest against the slackness of the Congress authorities in India in the matter of money. In Bombay he received a certain measure of support from Sir P. M. Mehta and his friends, and over a period lasting several years Mr. Gokhale not only spent time in raising contributions and enrolling subscribers for the weekly journal, but also pressed into the service some members of his society, the Servants of India. The struggle, however, grew not less but more severe, and it brought to Sir William Wedderburn an amount of labour and anxiety that was extremely trying to a man of his years and high sense of responsibility. He

hated urging his own comfort or interests, and always put off the inevitable protest to the last moment. It is distressing to record that the closing weeks of his life were troubled by the thought of a charge that had become too heavy. During his last illness he addressed to his faithful old friend Wacha a long and earnest letter, in which he reviewed the financial history of the British Committee, and its organ and stated the facts of the case as they affected his own position and pocket after more than three years of the war. The London organisation, which had been his special care, did not long survive him. Causes other than financial had for years been at work, and in the early days of 1921 the office was shut down and *India* discontinued.

Indian Liberals, sometime leaders of the Congress and representing the Hume-Wedderburn tradition, had already established the Indian Reforms Committee at 21, Westminster Palace Gardens with Lord Clwyd as chairman and H. E. A. Cotton and Douglas Hall as secretaries.

There was a social side, by no means unimportant, to the Indian reform work in London. During his time in Parliament and for long afterwards Wedderburn was a notable political host. On behalf of the British Committee, or in his private capacity, he made a practice year by year of

entertaining eminent Indian visitors, generally at the Westminster Palace Hotel; or, whenever important Indian legislation was afoot, of bringing together a company of politicians, journalists, and other active workers—at breakfast, luncheon, or dinner. He was almost the last of our public men to favour the political breakfast. Wedderburn had a large circle of political friends, and he was able to call together at these gatherings many men who, while not going all the way with him in opinion, held steadily to him in general sympathy. Some of these were specially valued by him because, belonging roughly to his own generation, they were links for him with the older Liberal movement and the early days of Indian reform. Among such especially he would have counted Lord Courtney, Sir Charles Dilke, Sir William Markby, Sir George Birdwood, Frederic Harrison, G. W. E. Russell, and C. P. Scott.

CHAPTER VI

THE INDIAN FAMINE UNION

THE period of Sir William Wedderburn's public work was marked by two great famine cycles—that of 1877-8 in which, according to the official estimate, between five and six millions of people perished, and the still more terrible series of 1896-1900, when in Western and Northern India the mortality surpassed all records since the Bengal famine of 1770. Wedderburn was absent on leave during the greater part of the famine in the seventies; but he understood intimately the causes of recurring scarcity and never ceased to urge upon the Government of India, the House of Commons, and the British public the need of scientific inquiry into their phenomena. During his seven years in Parliament he periodically brought forward a motion to this effect:

“That, looking to the grievous sufferings endured by the people of India, this House is of opinion that a detailed and searching village inquiry should

be instituted, in order to ascertain the causes which blight the industries of the cultivators and render them helpless to resist even the first attacks of famine and pestilence."

The motion was, regularly and consistently, opposed by Lord George Hamilton, the Conservative Secretary of State for India in the Salisbury and Balfour Cabinets, so that the most he was ever able to draw from the spokesman of the India Office was a statement that the Government of India was making its own inquiries and was satisfied as to their sufficiency.

The most accessible and complete statement of Wedderburn's case in respect of famine policy is to be found in a series of articles written in 1897. They were published in *India*, and reprinted in a pamphlet (Congress Green Book) entitled, with a provocative emphasis unusual with him, "The Skeleton at the (Jubilee) Feast." The main suggestions of this monograph are familiar to all who have followed his activities while in the Service; nor can anyone, with knowledge of the obstruction he encountered in India, be surprised at the obduracy and obscurantism he had to fight when his labours were transferred to England.

By 1900 conditions in India had once again passed the point of human endurance. Gokhale,

speaking on the financial statement in the Bombay Legislative Council, (August 25) said :

“The last four years have been years of frightful sufferings for the greater portion of this presidency. Famine and plague, plague and famine, these have been our lot, almost without intermission. It is admitted, almost on all hands, that the last famine was absolutely unparalleled in its extent and intensity even in this famine-frequented land.”

Two months before this, in a speech delivered in East London, Wedderburn said :

“There are about six millions of people receiving daily bread from the Government, and this number is daily increasing. The stress must go on until September, for not until then can the harvest be reaped. . . . The famine camps are swept by cholera and smallpox. Those who had taken refuge in the camps are flying from them in fear and are spreading infection everywhere ; and, stricken in their flight, they are found dying in the fields, ditches, and along the roadside. The death-rate in the hospitals is 90 per cent.”

The *Manchester Guardian* had sent out Mr. Vaughan Nash, a trained student of economics, as special correspondent. He spent eleven weeks in India, and his letters, when published in book

form (*The Great Famine and Its Causes*: Longmans), were reviewed by Sir William Wedderburn in the *Speaker* (February 2, 1901). Mr. Nash's broad conclusions coincided with his own: namely, that the recurring famines were due to the excessive poverty of the people, caused mainly by well-intentioned but fatal errors in our general system of administration; and that in this latest famine the awful mortality was due to insufficient liberality in the distribution of relief. The astonishing fact was that in India, taken altogether, there was, even in these terrible years, food enough and to spare. In Gujerat, for example, where the people were dying in thousands, the official reports showed that there were abundant supplies in the hands of the traders, "sufficient grain to last for a couple of years." It seemed to be proved that in these districts at all events every death from hunger was a death from poverty. He held further that the plight of the people was made worse by means of an unfortunate circular (December, 1899), issued by the Government of India with a view to limiting the expenditure on relief, and commenting on the "extreme readiness (of the famine stricken) to throw themselves on the charity of the State, and to avail themselves of every form of relief."

In April, 1901, Wedderburn addressed to *The*

Times an impressive communication in which he said :

“In recent years these famines have recurred at ever-shortening intervals and with ever-increasing severity. The famine of 1897 was at the time pronounced to be the severest on record—although in 1876-9 there was a decrease of the population of Southern India, due to famine, amounting to five millions. But in 1900 things were still worse; and the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, declared that the famine of that year was greater in intensity than any previously recorded, visitation. . . . I point to one economic fact of the highest importance, which has not sufficiently occupied public attention. . . . Even in the worst months of the famine, and in the worst localities, there has never been a deficiency in the food supply. There has always been a sufficiency of grain on the spot, in the hands of the traders: the difficulty is that the cultivators have no means to purchase. They have no money, and being hopelessly in debt to the money-lender, have lost their credit.”

This letter was followed by others to all the leading dailies, including those of Manchester and Glasgow. In 1900 Sir William Wedderburn had given up his seat in the House, being convinced, among other things, that with his recovered freedom he could do more effectual service for India. Not many months later the epoch-making report of the Famine Commission presided over by Sir

Antony (now Lord) MacDonnell was made public. It was a document of the highest moment, and was cordially welcomed by Wedderburn and his allies, especially for the recommendation of the commissioners that at all stages in famine-relief work greater use should be made of non-official agency.

Wedderburn realised that, with this report as ammunition, the time was peculiarly favourable for a new method of approaching the Government through the public. On June 7, 1901, a preliminary conference of men having special experience of Indian affairs met at the Westminster Palace Hotel, with Leonard Courtney (afterwards Lord Courtney of Penwith) in the chair. At this conference the Indian Famine Union was launched; as an association to promote inquiry into the causes of famine and possible remedies. The provisional committee included a remarkable number of prominent names: Leonard Courtney, Lord Hobhouse, Sir Raymond West, Sir George Birdwood, Sir John Jardine, Sir M. M. Bhowaggee, W. S. Caine, S. S. Thorburn, Ramesh Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji, G. Parameswaram Pillai, etc. It was agreed that a memorial be prepared for presentation to the Secretary of State. Wedderburn at once reported proceedings to *The Times*, his letter and his report being incorporated in No. 3

of the Indian Famine Leaflets. No 4 followed quickly, an able critical summary of the Mac-Donnell Famine Report. It was noted in this leaflet that three reforms long advocated by Wedderburn were at last being treated as practical politics: namely, increased elasticity of revenue collection, agricultural banks, and *takavi* loans. Wedderburn took the opportunity of urging afresh, not a "roving imperial commission," but a detailed inquiry into the economic condition of a few selected villages. As always, he comes back to the village community as "the unit and microcosm of all India"; or, as Lord Morley put it some years later, "the indestructible unit of Indian administration."

No. 5 of the Indian Famine Leaflets, "Drought-resisting Fodder Plants," was a further illustration of the special Wedderburn method which we have noticed in connection with the spice gardens of Sircy. He took the case of Gujerat, where nearly two million cattle had succumbed:

"In their efforts to save the cattle the Gujerat agriculturists expended all their savings, themselves enduring great privations; they sold their jewels, and even the doors and rafters of their houses . . . in order to purchase fodder. Their efforts failed, their cattle died, and with all their cattle their accumulated wealth disappeared, so that Gujerat became a stricken field."

He had investigated the conditions of the drought regions of Australia, of South Africa, and Russia, and, as always, his recommendations had a solid basis of fact and experience. The Agricultural Department of the Government of India is still, as we learn from the annual reports, engaged in demonstrating the advantages of new fodder crops.

The memorial, again, contained an unequalled body of signatures, and was indeed, in that respect, a unique document.

The Union urged investigation and preventive measures, and emphasised the value of previous commissions; it enumerated various suggested remedies, but considered that there was a pressing case for an economic and social survey of certain selected and typical villages—such as had been done by the Deccan Riots Commission, and by Thorburn's inquiry in the Western Punjab. The latter, although including the large number of 742 villages, was completed in six months, at an expense of only £300. The memorial differentiated between this suggested inquiry and those that had been undertaken in 1881 and 1887, and was careful to add that the memorialists were making their representation with an entire detachment from party politics.

The signatories numbered over 200. They

represented all parties and shades of opinion, including church and civic dignitaries, Anglo-Indian officials, politicians, educationists, publicists—men and women eminent in every department of English public and intellectual life.

It is with regret one records that Lord George Hamilton's attitude was in harmony with all of his previous conduct in relation to famine policy. He at first agreed to receive the deputation, which was to be headed by the Liberal ex-Viceroy, the Marquis of Ripon. Later, however, he withdrew, offering as a reason that, as W. S. Caine had given notice of an amendment to the Address on Indian affairs, he would be required to speak in the debate and would therefore reserve his statement on famine policy till that occasion. Lord George's final pronouncement was as follows: "I have read the memorial. . . . There is nothing new in their proposal, which has on more than one occasion been condemned by the House of Commons. . . . The signatories . . . have with few exceptions neither personal nor official knowledge of the matter they refer to." "This was an extraordinary declaration, since the list contained the names of a number of the most eminent and experienced Indian administrators of the century. A meeting of protest against Lord George Hamilton's broken promise was held, again presided over by Courtney,

and the Indian Famine Union issued an effective leaflet in reply. In the meantime, a dispatch from Simla, although acknowledging no case for the inquiry, was much less hostile in tone, and the present chapter may fittingly close with a paragraph from this last word of the Government of India :

“Even were the suspicions of the Indian cultivator not excited in the manner we apprehend, or if they were successfully allayed, we think that a worse consequence might ensue in the expectations of change than would almost certainly be aroused in the minds of the people. . . . Did the result of the investigation in the selected villages indicate a low level of material prosperity, it would be impossible to raise that level by any novel act of government, either in the so-called famine areas or over the whole of India.”

CHAPTER VII

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE; EDUCATION; TEMPERANCE

THE Indian reform policy had no more fervent supporter in England than Florence Nightingale. Her concern for the health of the British Army in India had led her on to the problems of village sanitation, and thence to those of land revenue, which she mastered with the imperious thoroughness that had made her the terror of public departments ever since the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. The year of enforced leave which Wedderburn spent in the advocacy of land banks found her in active co-operation with him. Her paper on "The Rayat, the Zemindar, and the Government" was read to the East India Association a month before his on "The Poonja Rayat's Bank"; and an article contributed by her to the *Nineteenth Century* (August, 1883) was actually more his than hers. When sending him the rough drafts she writes:

"The more you are so kind as to correct and alter, the better pleased I shall be. Please do not let me be impertinent to the India Office, nor to the departments. It is so very unbecoming of me to be governing the Government. I feel inclined to sign myself 'Cat's Paw.'"

During the months before the article's appearance she bombards him with letters and telegrams asking for the return of the notes and the corrected manuscript, and then after publication she writes : "The article is an excellent one, if only it had been signed by you and not by me." In the January following, when he returns, alone, to duty she writes :

"May success attend your arrival in India. May Land Banks and all other goods for our native friends follow your footsteps, and may you above all continue enlightening us in England and show us the real meaning of Lord Ripon's policy. . . . Long may you live to show the working of liberal principles on that most stupendous stage of the world."

And when, the next year, he is appointed to the Bombay High Court, she writes : "May you proceed from strength to strength."

In the autumn of 1885 Miss Nightingale took a no less eager interest in the founding of the Indian National Congress and in the mission of the Indian speakers who had come for the purpose

of putting the case for Indian reform before English audiences during the general election. She discusses the political situation in long and vivacious letters to Sir William Wedderburn. The losses suffered by the Liberals in the boroughs distressed her, and all the more because they involved the defeat of nearly all the parliamentary friends of India—"excepting dear old Mr. Bright, who *is* India. But he will not work alone."

Readers of the *Life of Florence Nightingale* by Sir Edward Cook do not need to be reminded of the characteristics of her letters, with their vivid and unrestrained criticism of public men. In one very characteristic specimen of her manner, written at this time in the highest spirits, Wedderburn was given an account of her talks with Lalmohun Ghose, the Bengali orator, who had stood unsuccessfully as Liberal candidate for Deptford. She confides to Sir William her suspicion that he was not quite sound in his attitude to the zemindars; compares him with his brother, Manomohan, and speaks with pleasure of having met Mrs. Manomohan Ghose, who "might vie with a well-educated English lady." She enjoys a long talk with Mr. (afterwards Sir Narayan) Chandavarkar, the Bombay member of the group.¹ The meetings addressed by the

¹ Now (1922) President of the Bombay Legislative Council.

Indian delegates, she believes, had been successful in attracting attention throughout the country, although she is inclined to suspect that the organisation had sometimes fallen into hands not wholly disinterested. Then she turns to the preparations for the first meeting of the Indian National Congress, which arouse her highest enthusiasm. She writes :

“This National Liberal Union (one of the names suggested), if it keeps straight, seems altogether the matter of greatest interest that has happened in India, if it makes progress, for a hundred years. We are watching the birth of a new nationality in the oldest civilisation in the world. How critical will be its first meeting at Poona! I bid it God-speed with all my heart.”

And she ends by expressing the hope that the new body will refrain from personal attacks, that it will seek to “lay down principles, and not try to throw down men.”

This same letter contains a particular example of Florence Nightingale's practical sense of affairs. She refers to a subject that was at all times a matter of interest and concern to Sir William Wedderburn—namely, the chances of getting an independent service of press cablegrams from India. The long weekly message to *The Times* from Calcutta was in those years a powerful

influence in the shaping of British opinion, and to Miss Nightingale, as to her correspondent, it was anything but an influence to be commended. She points out that its effect had been greatly enhanced by the editorial rule of printing it in Monday's paper, where large numbers of people read it habitually because there was on that morning no parliamentary report to absorb the time. She urges Wedderburn to bear this fact in mind in his efforts to organise a new service. And, having thus made a point of unusual value, she remarks, as her way was, that on a matter of tactics such as this her opinion is worth nothing !

Again, there is India to be considered in regard to the new Liberal Ministry, destined to break up a few months later over Irish Home Rule. Unhappily, as she realises, there is no chance of getting Lord Ripon at the India Office :

"That would have been the best way to heal all our woes. But I trust in God and the Right—though I may not live to see it."

Meanwhile, in the dying Conservative Government "Lord Randolph, the 'Boy with the drum,' is doing untold harm—literally untold, because the India Office is a secret society"—by attacking Lord Ripon and Sir Evelyn Baring at the India Office Council.

From the early eighties onward to the last months of her life Wedderburn worked with Miss Nightingale in the cause of village sanitation. The year 1891, when the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography was sitting in London, furnished an opportunity of urging afresh the need of a systematic policy. Wedderburn's name was on her memorandum on the subject, which was circulated by the Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, to the provincial governments, and produced a formidable dossier. Acknowledging this, in July, 1893, he writes :

"It seems clear that you have most effectively drawn attention to the subject. The official replies are what we might naturally expect; but reading between the lines I think they admit the justice of our contention, and have been impressed by your action."

On her death in 1910, Wedderburn received a legacy of £250 "for some Indian object." With his habitual generosity he added to it. Later, her cousin, Mrs. Vaughan Nash, passed on Rs. 1,000, her own legacy under the will, while Mr. Ratan J. Tata gave Rs. 500 per annum for five years, to what became the Florence Nightingale (Village Sanitation) Fund. A letter from Wedderburn to *India* (June 28, 1914) summarised the progress of the movement. At a meeting of the subscribers in Bombay (April, 1912) two typical villages were

selected for experiment. Mr. R. U. Kelkar was appointed Health Officer for Wadala near Bombay, and Dr. Abhyankar for Karla in the Poona district. The fund at that time stood at nearly Rs. 14,000, and the Bombay Legislative Council agreed to add a sum equal to the annual income. Experimental work was to continue for a year, the Health Officer being aided by voluntary workers. A certain measure of success was reported from both villages. Tanks were cleaned, gutters dug round houses, separate sheds set up for cattle, etc.; but hardly had Wedderburn's letter been printed when the war broke out. The work at Karla was closed down, that at Wadala being extended over a score of the neighbouring villages. Wedderburn had suggested some modification of the original plan; and in 1915, after the death of G. K. Gokhale, he recommended that, the work of the health visitors under existing conditions having been found so difficult, the Florence Nightingale fund should be employed as endowment of a Gokhale Scholarship for an Indian girl student, who should have sanitary science included in her training. This suggestion was a natural corollary to the appointment (in 1914) of an Indian to the portfolio of Education and Public Health in the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Sir William Wedderburn's active connection

with education was practically continuous throughout his residence in India. He was chairman of the Deccan Education Society, which founded the first independent college in the country under Indian management—the famous Fergusson College at Poona, where Gokhale taught for eighteen years, and of which Mr. R. P. Paranjpye was principal till he took office¹ under the Reform Act. It is the women of India, however, who have special reason for being grateful to his memory. The story of the Wedderburn Hindu Girls' School, Karachi, is worth being told in some detail.

Mary Carpenter, of Bristol, well known in her day for her generous interest in Indian education and liberal religious thought, during her fourth and last visit to India, in the cold season of 1875-6, noted with distress the wretched accommodation provided in Karachi for the city's one school for Indian girls. It had been started some three years before, and the 60 or 70 pupils were taught in one room of a small house by a single poorly-paid master, with the aid, for the needlework, of a Hindu widow. Wedderburn, then Judicial Commissioner in Sind, had provided an entertainment at his own house for Indian children, and Miss Carpenter was invited to meet such of the fathers who accompanied their children.

¹ Minister of Education for Bombay.

Her warmth on the subject of the poverty-stricken school aroused her audience. The local committee of the National Indian Association, of which she was the founder, was stirred to action, and she herself made a contribution to the building fund. Wedderburn's departure from the province some months later provided the occasion. The love and admiration of the people of Sind found expression in the form of a considerable fund, raised in the first place for giving him a farewell entertainment. Eventually a large portion of this was allotted to the erection of a school: Wedderburn himself gave Rs. 500; Miss Carpenter added to her original Rs. 500; the municipality grant was obtained, and the Government doubled the total amount thus raised. The Public Works Department built the school, which was named after Wedderburn and opened in June, 1880, by the then Commissioner, H. N. B. Erskine. It started work with nearly 100 pupils, and with an Indian policy—the language to be taught being the vernacular of the province, Hindi-Sindhi.

A second institution of the kind with which he was identified is the Poona High School for Indian Girls. Wedderburn was one of many witnesses before the Ripon Education Commission, who attacked the existing system of instruction. While occupying the post of District and Sessions

Judge, he presided over a meeting in the Poona Town Hall, in 1884, and urged immediate action towards the starting of a high school in the city. In co-operation with the eminent jurist and reformer, M. G. Ranade, he carried the scheme to completion, himself contributing Rs. 1,000 for a scholarship in memory of his brother David, and obtaining liberal support from the Chiefs assembled at the annual birthday *darbar*.

Similarly he collaborated with the Parsee reformer Manockjee Cursetjee, who founded the Alexandra English Institution for Indian girls; and, further, in the Female Normal School at Poona the Lady Wedderburn Scholarship was established by his friends when he left Ahmednagar. It was natural, therefore, that in 1887 his last public visits should have been to the Pathshala (Sanskrit school), the Fergusson College, and the Girl's High School.

In his later years he devoted much time to the same cause, especially in connection with the Indian Women's Education Association. This body had its origin in a resolution on women's education proposed by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu at the Calcutta session of the All-India Social Conference in 1906. The work was taken up by Indians in London. A number of English women joined hands. The aim of the association was to form in India committees under whose auspices training

colleges might be established in the larger cities, and to train in England Indian women graduates for these colleges. The society languished ; but in 1915 Wedderburn became actively associated with it ; and shortly afterwards he and the other founders of the Gokhale Memorial Scholarship offered to the association the work of administering the scholarship fund with himself as treasurer. Later in the year he drafted a memorial to the Secretary of State on the Education of Girls and Women in India. The signatures made an influential list, and the memorial aroused considerable discussion and brought correspondence from women in England interested in India and in education. Early in 1916 appeared his letter-pamphlet, "Urgent Call to Indian Reformers." In September he aired in *Jus Suffragii* a new scheme for an Indian Women's University, for in the meantime the Everest bequest (1912) had been proved, and the Fergusson College was putting in its claim for a women's university in Poona. But no actual headway was being made.

In January, 1917, the first Gokhale scholar, and incidentally one of the last Indian guests at Meredith during its owner's lifetime, arrived in London and was entered at the London Day Training College. This was Mrs. Rajkumari Das, head of the Brahmo Girls' School in Calcutta.