

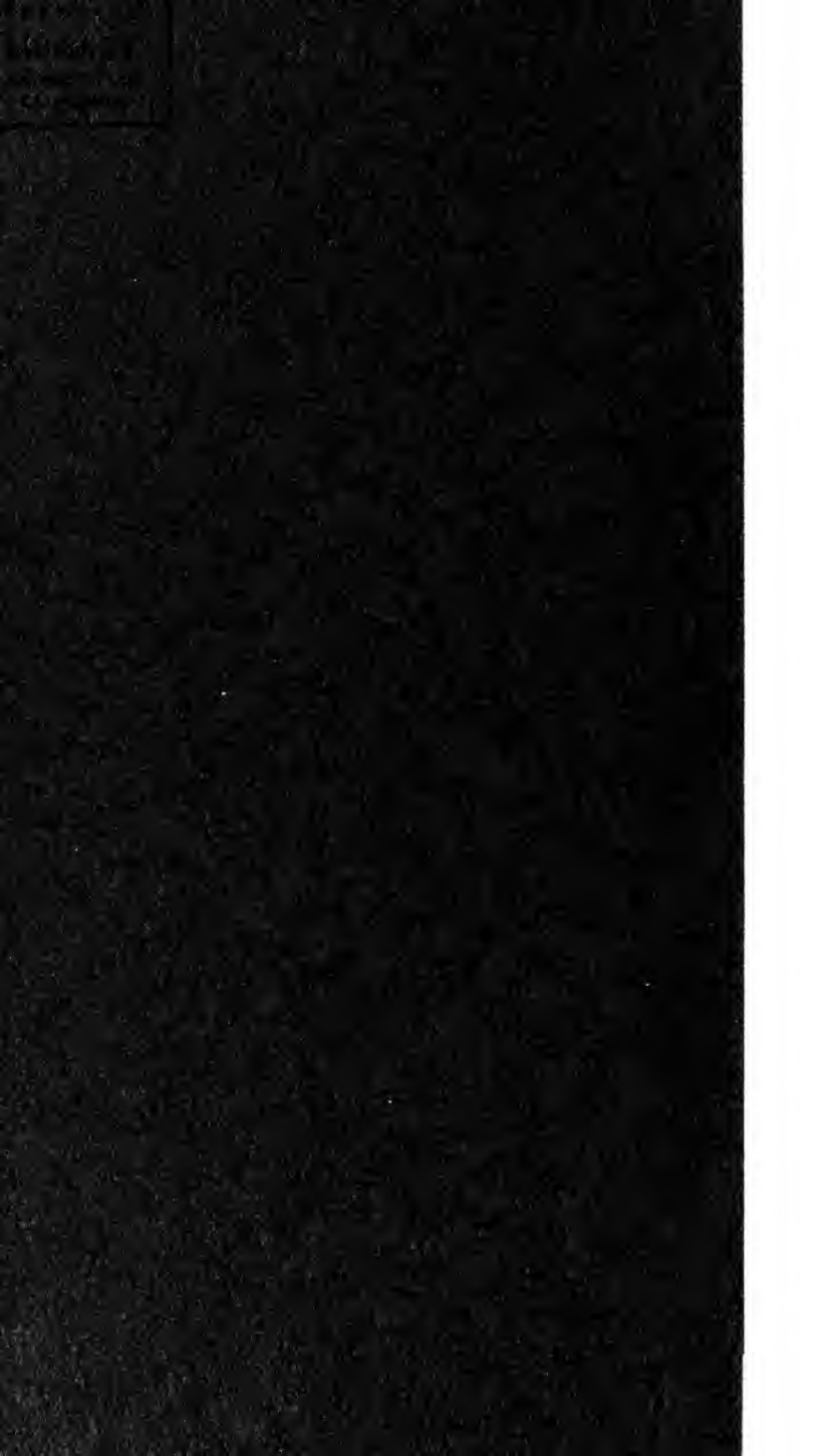
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22/1 Shamapukurane, Calcutta.
The 21st. September 1892.

To C. J. Lyall, Esq. M.A., LL.D., C.S.E.

Sir, In offering this small pamphlet on
"The Extension of Local Self-Government
in Bengal" which accompanies this
letter, the writer most humbly prays
that it will receive your kind attention
from the time of Lord Ripon, the Government of
India has always been anxious to see instituted
like Village Union Committees, as contain-
plated by the Local Self-Government Act.
I am sure a wise and generous officer
like yourself will naturally be in favor
of establishing such bodies.

I have the honor to be
Sir

Your most obedient servant
Kandakalshakar

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*Nandalala Sarban*THE EXTENSION OF
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
IN BENGAL.

INTRODUCTION.

Now that Sir Charles Elliott thinks it desirable to reduce the powers of the Self-Governing institutions in the country, it will, I am afraid, be crying in the wilderness, to speak of the extension of Local Self-Government in Bengal. However, it may be hoped, His Honor is not so much opposed to the extension of Local Self Government, as he is anxious to see that the powers entrusted to such bodies be not abused. It was about three years ago, early in 1890, I wrote a pamphlet on the formation of Village Union Committees, when the government of Sir Steuart Bailey contemplated the establishment of these bodies. It seemed to have borne some fruit; because from the resolution of that very year, on the working of the Local Self Government Act, we learned that a scheme for the gradual establishment of the Union Committees had been submitted to the Government of India. Sir Charles Elliott is opposed to this scheme, and desires their postponement for an indefinite period. As I believe Sir Charles Elliott to be a sincere well wisher of the country, and as the question is of vital importance, I venture to republish the pamphlet with some additions, rendered necessary on account of Sir Charles' attitude towards the scheme; and it is to be hoped His Honor will see the way to follow up the scheme of his predecessor and give effect to the wishes of the government of India, and thus earn the undying gratitude of the poor villagers of this country.

When I first wrote the pamphlet, there was no need, of proving the necessity and urgency of establishing these bodies. The government of Sir Steuart Bailey fully recognised their necessity. There

were some practical difficulties to be overcome. The principle was accepted, the difficulty was as to how to carry it into practice. What I then wrote regarding the formation of these bodies and the best means of their successful working, and about the improvement of the status of Local Boards is perfectly applicable now. The growing insanitary state of our villages, requires all the more urgently the formation of these bodies. I therefore repeat substantially what I wrote about three years ago. I shall deal with Sir Charles Elliott's objection in these preliminary pages. I am however glad to observe, the boards are growing more and more independent of official element, and what is to be more congratulated, the officials themselves leave matters more to the independent judgment of the Board than to their own inclination.

Sir Charles Elliott has recorded in the resolution on the working of Local Self Government Act for 1890-91 that "it would be premature to initiate a new administrative departure by establishing union committees, before the relation of District and Local Boards have been finally settled and have stood the test of several years' experience." It is very likely, before recording this resolution Sir Charles Elliott has assured himself that the government of India holds his view, otherwise he would not venture to abandon a scheme which his predecessor had so wisely laid before the Government of India, and as it would amount to want of consideration to the supreme government, particularly as the Government of India itself was anxious to see them established.

The reason assigned for thus almost abandoning the scheme which is of the utmost importance to the country, is so vague, unmeaning and indefinite that nothing could be made out of it. It is merely a polite way of expressing that His Honor is unwilling to extend Local Self Government in Bengal. His Honor speaks of the adjustment of relations between the District and Local Boards. The Local Boards have no independent source of income ; and they work on the lines laid down for them by the District Boards. Little discretion is allowed them. During the last six years' working of these institutions, no where any difficulty has arisen as to their relationship to one

another. The Local Boards are generally allowed so little power and placed in such subordinate and insignificant position that its exercise is scarcely felt. From their very constitution as marked by the legislature, they can never prove intractable ; and so there can be no possibility of any difficulty arising out of their mutual relations. Six years, trial is enough, if anything is required to be known or adjusted in this direction. So the true reasons for this backward and false step must be sought for elsewhere.

From the tenor of Sir Charles Elliott's policy, and his distrust of Local Self-Government, as is evidenced by the introduction of the Chowkidari Amendment Act and the Municipal Amendment Act, it can easily be guessed that he does not approve of the principle of extending Local Self-Government in Bengal. Our Lieutenant Governor is however a very cautious and prudent man. In almost all public expressions of his opinions, Sir Charles has always taken up the cause of Local Self Government and has testified to the usefulness of these bodies. But unfortunately, in his actions he generally attempts to curb, to limit and to restrict the powers, already given by law to the people. We earnestly hope this tendency of Sir Charles Elliott's actions proceeds not from his dislike to Local Self-Government, but from his sincere desire to put a stop to the abuse of the powers given by the law. I would humbly beg to suggest that the best way of checking the abuse of a power is not to restrict or deprive a body of that power, but to create such safe-guards as will prevent its abuse.

It is much to be regretted that Sir Charles Elliott has not thought it desirable to assign any sensible cause for thus indefinitely postponing the establishment of Union Committees. So the true reasons which have led him to adopt this step can only be inferred from the general tenor of his policy, which is unfortunately not in favor of the principle of the Local Self-Government or its expansion. He is wise enough not to take his stand on the minor, legal and practical objections which can easily be avoided. When this pamphlet was first written, no question of principle was raised. It was assumed that the principle of Local Self-Government ought to

be extended to our villages and that the people are capable of turning it to their advantage. Sir Charles Elliott's opposition to the principle of the extension of Local Self-Government to our villages has rendered it necessary to say a few words on the subject.

We do not know the precise nature of Sir Charles Elliott's objections ; so we are under the necessity of assuming them. I hope the following arguments will probably exhaust all the objections which may be entertained against the formation of Village Union Committees.

1. The people are too ignorant, apathetic and conservative to deserve such institutions or to make any good use of them. In a word, the people are not fit for them.

2. The working of the institutions of this nature has not been such as to make it desirable to further extend it.

3. The people being ignorant, apathetic and conservative will either abuse their power, or will fail to carry out the sanitary and other measures, which require greater knowledge and self-sacrifice, than what they can be credited to possess.

4. It is unsafe and impolitic to train up a conquered people on principles of political independence, self help and combination.

Let us see how far the first objection is tenable. Sir Rivers Thompson introduced Local Self-Government in Bengal, and he made provisions for the establishment of Union Committees. So it can safely be presumed, that he thought the people fit to be entrusted with the management of their own villages. Sir Steuart Bailey laid before the Government of India a scheme for establishing Union Committees. Both of them were Bengal Civilians and knew Bengal perfectly well. Sir Charles Elliott's experience of Bengal does barely extend to two years. It is really to be wondered, that on the strength of this his short and limited experience of Bengal, he would venture to deprive the people of the real boon of Local Self-Government which two of his predecessors, each with about thirty years' experience of Bengal, were maturing for them. The Government of India has been for the last four years urging on the Government of Bengal to establish such institutions for the sanitary improvement

of our villages. It would not do so, if it were ever convinced, that the people are unfit for them. Then again, high officers who have personal experience of these matters, and who have personal experience of Bengal villages are confident that such self-governing institutions will be very useful. I quote here the opinion of Mr. Westmacot, Commissioner of Presidency Division, who is one of the most able and independent of the Bengal Civilians, and who has certainly no bias either for Local Self-Government or for the people, thus writes on the subject, in his report on the working of Local Self-Government Act for 1890-91. "I believe that Village Union Committees would prove a more efficient agency for carrying out any measures of real Local Self-Government, than Sub-Divisional Local Boards."..... "I do not however think it too late even now to organise village Union Committees, and entrust them with local administration under the existing Boards, and if this is done, I feel confident, Local Self-Government will show a vitality which it has not shown yet." "If Village Union Committees were organised.....we should have bodies directly interested in supply of good drinking water." Mr. Risley in his excellent speech in the Bengal Council on Chowkidari Bill thus testifies to the capabilities of our villagers in this respect. "The Indian peasant is no fool. He has his limitations like his class all over the world, but within the range of his knowledge, within the compass of his own village and its immediate surroundings, he is just as shrewd a person as one could wish to meet. Comparing him with the English rustic of the counties he was much inclined to think that the Indian was the sharper of the two." Mr. Cotton, however greatly we may regret his attitude towards the self-governing institutions in the country, has still left in him much of his liberal views to come forward and say, that the Village Union Committees can safely be formed, and will be very useful bodies. It may humbly be suggested that the opinion of Sir Charles Elliott, based on his two years, experience of Bengal, is of no value against the views held by his two predecessors and other high officials of the country. In Madras and Central Provinces these institutions are working very satisfactorily, particularly in reference to village sanitation. In

Bengal where the people are more enlightened, they will certainly work better. Moreover such institutions are not new in India, Local Self-Government on a wider basis has certainly not been tried in India, but on a smaller scale, it has been an immemorial practice in India. Our village communities were far more important bodies than the Village Unions can be ever expected to be.

Even if we take the question from an abstract point of view, without the support it has received of high authorities, and the precedent that exists for such institutions in the country, I believe it ought to receive the favourable consideration of all right-minded and liberal statesmen. The utility of self-governing institutions is admitted on all hands, unfortunately there is no fixed and ascertained limit to the degree of ignorance, apathy and conservatism that may justify the non-bestowal of these institutions to a people. It does not require much knowledge or activity or liberality of views, to understand one's own interest, either as an individual or as a member of society. A body of men, who have learned to live in society, and have trained themselves to forego those inclinations which prompt men to break the bonds of society, can be entrusted to select men to govern themselves, especially in matters which particularly and immediately concern them. Almost everywhere in the very first stage of society, people selected one or more amongst themselves as their governing body. The principle of governing ourselves by representatives of our own choice is a natural one, and is possible in any stage of social development.

The second objection that may be raised, is that the work and attendance of the existing bodies under the Local Self-Government Act, have not been satisfactory. Sir Charles thus observes on their working. "He (the Lieutenant Governor) finds every where a praiseworthy disposition on the parts of the Boards, to attend regularly to their duties, and to pay due regard to the wishes of Government and the advice of their Chairman and professional advisers." So he can not urge this as an argument against the establishment of these bodies, although the attendance in a very few Boards has not been such as is desirable. Considering the difficulties

of attending a meeting of the Local Board, it is to be wondered that the attendance has been generally so good. In many cases a member has to walk over a distance of twenty to forty miles to attend a meeting of the Board. Out of 106 Boards, the average attendance in 49 was half the number of the members of the Board or more. It was only in four cases, the average attendance fell below the quorum number. In the case of Union Committees, the attendance will naturally be expected to be most numerous of all, because the Union Office will in rare cases be more than two miles distant from the members' houses, and the members generally will have more time to spare, there being few officers and professional men in our villages. There is another important matter which more largely contributes to the thinness of attendance at the meetings of Local Boards. The powers given to the Local Boards are so limited, restricted and circumscribed that little interest attaches to their work. They have been reduced to farces. They have no independent income, no real power, but a good deal of worry and botheration. Under these circumstances, how a man can be expected to do his work heartily. The remedy lies in improving the position of the Boards, and in allowing travelling allowance to members coming from distant places.

Sir Charles Elliott observes, that the "Success or failure of Local Self-Government depends less upon constitution and legal status of the Boards than on the practical capacity and good sense of the individual members who serve upon them." It is a truism to say law can make men good, but men can not make law good. I have quoted elsewhere an observation of Lord Ripon, showing that success depends on their constitution and the help and encouragement they may receive from Government. On matters of Self-Government law ought to hold out an encouragement. If the members of the Local Boards be reduced to the position of mere road sarcars, much can not be expected of them.

Another objection that can likely be raised, is that the people will abuse their power or fail to make proper use of it. This like the first is a stock objection generally raised by the enemies of Local Self-Government. As Sir Charles Elliott always professes to be the

friend of Local Self-Government, this certainly is not his view of the case. Such difficulties, however, if they ever seriously arise can be met by imposing reasonable restrictions as safe-guards against the abuse of their powers, provided they do not frustrate the purpose for which they are created. Complaints are sometimes received against our municipalities. But this should not be made much of. They often show that our rate-payers are beginning to take interest in their own affairs. The rate-payers are now no longer thought of except at the time of election. They are gradually coming to the front. And whatever defects our municipalities may have, they will disappear as the institutions will grow more and more in popular estimation, and with the spread of education. A little party spirit also shows that the members are no longer mere passive instruments in the hands of a powerful clique. Party spirit is often a necessary element in such institutions. I quote here a very learned and apt illustration of the Hon'ble Dr. Mohendra Lal Sarkar in this connection. "It is the antagonism of opposite polarities which under creative superintendence has produced and is maintaining the marvellous cosmos of which we are part and parcel." It may be urged that sanitary improvements can not be left to poor and ignorant villagers. The nature of sanitary improvements that our villagers may be required to undertake will not require any scientific training. To dig a pond, to clear jungles, to open up a local drain, are certainly not works to be entrusted only to learned and scientific men. Moreover they will have the Board's engineers and sanitary inspectors to help them.

The fourth and last objection, that it is unsafe and impolitic to train up a conquered people on principles of political self help, combination and independence, is one that need not be much dwelt-upon. Though there are many Anglo-Indians accustomed to the obsequious salaams of their subordinates, and habituated to terrorize over the poor people of the country, who would very much like to follow this policy, yet England has never governed India in this spirit, even in the early days of the Company. How great a follower of the policy of restrictions, prohibitions and reductions, Sir Charles

Elliott may be, a statesman of his experience, can never make this the aim and end of his policy. Apart from the higher and nobler ground of the great duty of a Government to advance the general civilization of those under it, a training of this nature is necessary in the interest of England's wealth, power and progress. If we had been governed in such a way as to keep us in that stratum of social development, in which we were, when the English first came, we would see nothing of this great expansion of trade and commerce for which England conquered India; and for which alone she is unwilling to part with her. A civilized and progressive Government can not but civilize its subjects and promote their progress.

The necessity of establishing such bodies is growing day by day. Now that the Conference for water supply and drainage has determined to raise additional taxes for these purposes, and as the burden of these taxes will fall mostly on the poor and hard-pressed villagers, particularly in case of drainage, greatest care ought to be taken to make the burden as little oppressive as possible. Greatest economy must be practised in carrying out these works, and the co-operation of the villagers ought to be secured for raising the contributions. Union Committees will be just the bodies to do these economically and with less heart-burning. A self-imposed burden is not felt very strongly. When I first wrote this pamphlet, I suggested that the Panchayets may be brought under their control in matters of taxation, and sanitation. Now that the amended Chowkidari Act has reduced them to tax collecting sarkars, and has paved the way for levying the Chowkidari Cess, as causes and pleas will easily be found of their incapacity, ingorance and apathy, I would humbly beg to suggest that these bodies may safely be dispensed with, and their powers may be transferred to Union Committes. Sir Charles Elliott is the greatest master of political tactics. His severest blows are struck after such preparation that you scarcely perceive them, and if you feel them, you are obliged to conceal the pain. Axe has been laid at the root of high education in Bengal, but we are told that we are advanced enough to take care of it ourselves, though unfortunately this advancement of ours, does not extend to prevent our being

deprived of some powers under the Municipal and Local Self-Government Acts. The cause of Local Self-Government is gasping under a severe blow. Belvedere parties, softening speeches, and one or two mollifying acts are all that Sir Charles can give us by way of compensation. The most inveterate enemies of Indian progress will be satisfied, at the result of His Honor's policy. Death blows have been struck, to two of the most potent factors of human progress and civilization—Education and Self-Government. Sir Charles Elliott is such a great tactician that these measures have not raised one-hundredth of the opposition, they would have done, if he had not been our Lieutenant Governor. But fortunately Sir Charles Elliott has this redeeming feature in his administration that he generally gives something for what he takes away. We therefore most humbly and earnestly pray that His Honor will follow up the scheme of his predecessor for the establishment of Union Committees, and thus partly make up for what he has done to check the progress of Local Self Government in other directions. It is our firm conviction that Sir Charles Elliott does not entertain any dislike towards Local Self Government in this country, and so we have ventured to make this prayer.

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

THE EXTENSION OF

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

IN BENGAL.

1. It was about ten years ago, Lord Ripon, that great Governor-General of India, whose name will ever be worshipped with the utmost veneration in the inmost shrine of every Indian heart, first formulated the noble and wise scheme of Local Self Government for India. It was his fervent desire to see it carried into effect during his *regime*. But such is the apathy and jealousy with which the grant of such powers is looked upon by most of our officials, particularly in Bengal, that though ten years is about to elapse, the scheme has not been yet carried out to half the extent to which it was intended to be done, and with one hundredth of the spirit which actuated its most noble founder. Moreover the scheme, as much of it as has been worked out, is so much distorted that success can not be fairly expected of it. That the institutions under the scheme are working on the whole, satisfactorily, inspite of their constitutional defects and the jealousy of the official body, is a matter of congratulation.

2. The greatest defect of English rule in India has been the destruction and disorganisation of some of the most useful institutions of the country. The foremost among them being the destruction of the system of village communities, which in the words of Sir Charles Metcalfe were "little republics" "the indestructive atoms from which empires were formed." In

times of danger or internal commotion, or in all matters in which combined action is necessary, our villagers have now no one to look up to. If Village Union Committees be established they will partly, though to a very slight extent, restore our village communities, and gradually their powers may be extended as far as practicable. For the present, by the establishment of these bodies, our villages will be enabled to manage their own affairs in matters of village communication, education, and sanitation under such supervision as the government may deem proper. In times of danger, and difficulties, particularly when widespread combination is necessary to avert a calamity, or for carrying out a great undertaking these bodies will prove a bulwark of strength to the Government. To the villagers themselves they will prove of inestimable benefit not only in regard to the matters with which they will be directly concerned, but also in other respects. Our villagers will then have a recognised body to look up to in cases of danger and difficulty. An organisation like that of village unions, will be useful in various ways. The great and noble object of Local Self-Government will never be accomplished without the formation of Union Committees. The Unions should be the foundation on which the whole edifice of Local Self-Government should rest. I need scarcely observe that the District Boards and Local Boards should merely be the connecting links and controlling agencies. They are to be the main arteries that should infuse life-blood into them. But it is the Union Committees that should bear the burden of the work, as they are the fittest to do it. Let us first take the question of sanitation, on which so much stress is laid both by the Supreme Government and the Secretary of State for India.

3. In a peaceful country like ours where polygamy and child-marriage prevail ; and particularly where it is regarded a religious duty to give birth to a child, and where the people

are often so improvident, and where climate favors procreation, the birth-rate far exceeds death-rate ; and so there is no means of determining whether the percentage of death-rate has increased to what it was a generation ago. But this much is certain, that in Bengal places which were once regarded as sanitariums have become the den of malaria ; and are regularly visited, sometimes twice a year, by cholera. There are numberless villages in the Districts of Hughley, Nuddea and Burdwan, with deserted houses crumbling down to earth, with pale and sickly people, the chosen victims of death. Whatever other causes there may be of this misfortune to the country, it is now an undisputed fact that the silting up of many river-channels or water passages, and the partial stoppage of the drainage of the country by railway embankments, particularly when running parallel to the course of a river in a low and flat country, are the main causes of malaria. Where the drainage of the country is impeded by railway embankments, the railway authorities should take steps to remove the obstructions.

The Government will confer a great boon to the people if it will institute a thorough enquiry into the matter, and direct the railway authorities to take proper steps for keeping the drainage of the country free.

4. These difficulties are, however, confined to a limited area, and are not to be found everywhere. But unfortunately the sanitation of our villages are more or less defective everywhere ; first because the mass of the people do not understand the laws of sanitation, and secondly because they have little means of giving effect to them, even if they come to know and put any faith in these laws. When cholera rages in a village the good villagers instead of taking care to keep the tanks free from cholera poison, would raise a subscription, not to buy medicine, but to worship the goddess of cholera. Not the least objection will be raised to wash the clothes of a cholera patient

in the tank, or even to throw cholera stools into it, of which the water is used for drinking, but you will be made an out-caste if you object to take part in the feast of the night of worship, which has often been found to help the goddess in her work of destruction. I am sure if a sanitary code had been enforced it would far more effectively prevent the destruction of life and property than the Penal Code will ever do.

5. The sanitation of a village consists mainly in these three things : first that it should be kept neat and clean, secondly that it should have good drinking-water and thirdly that the village waterways should have no impediments. Malaria and cholera will lose much of their right over us, if we would but follow some of the ordinary sanitary laws, as to drink pure water, not to allow rank vegetation to grow around our houses, to see that the compounds of our houses be well drained, that the floor of our rooms be not very low, that there be at least some ventilation in our rooms, that the ordinary water passages of the village be not blocked up, and that no one be allowed to deposit any offensive matter as dead bodies, night-soil and the like, in such a place as may injure the health of other villagers. No amount of sanitary primers, resolutions of the Sanitary Commissioner, or even the bye-laws of the District Boards will do these as effectually as a Union Committee, properly guided, instructed, empowered and assisted to carry out the necessary sanitary reforms.

6. The most important question in connection with sanitation, is the supply of good drinking-water ; and it requires serious attention of the Government. Formerly our richmen would dig large tanks from motives of religion. We have grown wise enough to understand that digging tanks confers no religious benefit ; but unfortunately we have not grown correspondingly wise in matters of sanitation to understand that good tanks are essentially necessary to good health. Moreover

the price of labor has risen so high, that it is now very difficult for a single individual to dig a large tank. Even the tanks with pure water, are unfortunately unreliable in times of epidemic, as no care is taken to keep the water free from poisonous matters. So it has become a matter of absolute necessity that we should have at least one good tank in a village, of which the water should be used only for drinking. A Union alone can do it. In a village where there is no good tank, if each house-holder will subscribe a rupee or two and the District Board will make a fair contribution, then every village will have a respectable public tank which will not only conduce to its health but also to the profit of the Union, which will have it under its management. Now people do not undertake such works there being no corporate body with legal existence, in whom the property in the tank would vest; and there being none to keep it in a state of repair. The Local Governments have now been placed in a position to grant loans to Municipalities for works of public utility. This concession can easily be extended to District Boards, and thence to Unions. Three to four Hundred rupees will be enough to secure for the Union a tank of a moderate size, about a bigha in area, if instead of excavating a new tank, the sum is applied in purchasing and reclaiming an old one. Sinking wells would prove far cheaper, though our villagers in Lower Bengal are not accustomed to use the water of a well. As a rule, the Union tanks should be used only for drinking purposes. These tanks will be a source of income to the Unions.

7. The second great question in connection with sanitation is drainage. It will be not very expensive to keep the ordinary water passages of a village open. These passages are generally narrow, and are often used for agricultural purposes, particularly where they lead to broader channels, connected with some river. These broader channels being silted up often causes obstruction to drainage. In some places the smaller rivers

themselves are silted up. It will not be in the power of a Union to open up these broader channels or smaller rivers. The District Boards must look to them. In many places the railway or other embankments cause obstruction to drainage. It is to be hoped the new Sanitary Board will devote its special attention to the subject of drainage, and the Government itself will move in the matter.

8. As in the case of village sanitation, so in the case of village communication, it is the villagers that can do it the best. Almost all our village roads under the Local Boards are unmetaled and their length generally varies from four furlongs to three miles. Village roads of greater length are generally under the District Board, but their number is very limited. The grant for repair varies from rupees ten to rupees fifty per road. It is obvious that no great engineering skill is necessary to repair these roads, but thorough supervision is absolutely necessary. The District Engineer and his subordinates have very little time to supervise these roads properly, as they have to attend to many other more important works. So these village roads prove the very harvest field to the contractor, if he happens to be in the good graces of the supervising officer. It is much to be regretted that the District Engineers do not generally take much interest in regard to these roads. It has often been found more advantageous to entrust some respectable villager with the repair or construction of the roads in his village than to leave them to the mercy of the pet contractors and the supervising officer. These village roads are now placed under the entire control of the Local Boards. The District Engineer can not naturally look with favor on a change which deprives him of the disposal of so much money, and he naturally raises the cry that the village roads under the Local Boards are not regularly supervised, although it is his duty as officer of the Board to supervise these roads. The com-

plaint of want of supervision will have no existence whatsoever if the Unions be entrusted with the repair and construction of village roads, under the guidance of the Engineer of the Board, as the works will be carried on under the very eyes of the members of the Union. So far as the execution of the works are concerned the members of the Board will be very glad to leave it entirely to what is called professional scrutiny. Though all the district works including these village roads should be under the surveillance of the District Engineers, yet the wisdom of employing a lower subordinate establishment in supervising and carrying out these petty works can not be questioned, as surveys and estimates of works of repair of petty village roads where the amount to be spent generally varies from rupees ten to fifty do not require the services of highly paid engineers.

In many cases the members of Local Boards have been able to induce the villagers to part with their land free of cost for widening or constructing new village roads. Union committees will do it more successfully and extensively.

9 The general tendency of the District Boards, particularly of their official element, appears to be to allot as small a sum as they could manage for village roads. The District Engineer is naturally reluctant to spend much money on roads over which he has little control. The District officers and the majority of the members of the District Board have no experience of the villagers, troubles and inconveniences, particularly in the rainy season. Few feel for poor men that can raise up no cry. It is only those members who are themselves villagers, who have actual experience of what it is to wade through knee-deep mud and breast-deep water, that can be expected to take up the cause of the villagers who however bear the burden of the tax out of which the high officials of the Board are paid. But unfortunately such members are rare. The true aim of local Self

Government is often frustrated by electing or nominating men only with stars, titles and riches without taking care to see whether they possess local knowledge or are ready to sacrifice their own interests for those they represent. When the roadcess was first imposed it was expressly declared that every tax-payer would reap the benefit of the tax which he should have to pay. It was expressly stated "That money will be distributed and spent by local men trusted by the inhabitants who will be selected or elected for that purpose. Every tax payer is encouraged and invited to claim that the tax shall be fairly applied to the village roads and local paths or water channels in which he is interested" This is a very plain statement and leaves no room for those who affirm that the road-cess should be spent only on the main roads of the district and that as village roads exist for the private convenience of the villagers they themselves should look to those roads. The private convenience of many men becomes public convenience. And it was partly for this private convenience of many men that the road-cess was imposed. Recognising the great importance of village roads our good Lieutenant-Governor urged last year that "it is desirable that the allotment (for village roads) should in all cases be as liberal as the circumstances will permit" The District Boards do not seem to pay much attention to these remarks. In Burdwan only Rs. 2000 out of the balance of the roadcess fund of Rs. 102426, in Nuddea Rs. 4494 out of Rs. 79043 in Dinagepur Rs. 1882 out of Rs. 75434 in 24 Pergunnas Rs. 13255 out of Rs. 111887, were allotted during the last year. These grants were certainly not at all liberal. At least one fourth of the roadcess fund after deducting the expenditure on collection, should be spent for village improvements. Care should be taken that no part of the grant be misapplied; and the District Engineer should be responsible for the thorough execution of the works sanctioned by the Boards.

No information is given as to the total length of the village roads in each District. But those who have experience of our villages know how meagrely they are provided with roads. The trade of the country often suffer for the want of good village roads fit for cart traffic, as otherwise it becomes very expensive to carry the local produce to the nearest road fit for cart traffic, which in many cases lies at a distance of ten miles or more; and thence to be taken to the market where it may find sale.

10. We have seen how useful a Union may prove for village sanitation and communication. It will prove no less useful in promoting primary education in a village. It is well known how large a share of the grant to primary education, particularly lower primary education, is misappropriated by mercenary Gurus, and by got-up season Patshalas. Even the system of payments by results, though objectionable in many cases, could not check designing Gurus from receiving greater rewards than they deserve by causing boys that do not belong to their patsalas, to appear in the examination for rewards. If frequent and regular inspection were practicable then all these would not happen; the mercenary gurus would not venture to present themselves, the season patsalas would disappear, and the same boy would not appear for two or three patsalas, and it would not be necessary to follow the system of payments by results in every case. The greatest defect of the system of payments by results is, that it gives no help and holds out no encouragement where they are most urgently needed and to those for whom the primary education is chiefly intended. It is well known that the children of our poorer cultivators particularly the grown-up ones, generally help their fathers or guardians during the sowing and the harvest season. These boys generally keep away from patshalas for about half the year. A gurn with such boys can not secure sufficient rewards to induce him to continue long in a patshala. In these villages the Guru should

be encouraged to continue in the same patshala by monthly or yearly stipends on condition of his maintaining the patshala throughout the year, and showing as good results of his boys as possible under the circumstances. Where there are more patshalas than one, or where the residents belong to the higher castes, or where the inhabitants are generally in a prosperous condition, the system of payments by results is the most suitable. Where the people can help themselves the Government should only encourage; but where they can not, the Government should render material assistance. If a Union be established, the patshalas will be under the direct supervision of the members of the Union who are expected to know who should be helped and who should be encouraged; and our Gurus would not dare to impose upon them.

11. There are two chief difficulties in the way of establishing Union Committees; the one legal, the other practical. The legal difficulty can be easily met by resorting to fresh legislation as His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor intimates in the resolution on the reports of the working of the Local-Self Government Act. And so long as Sir Steuart Bayley will be at the head of the Bengal Council, we are sure no half-hearted policy will guide the course of legislation. It was the distortion of Local Self-Government at the Bengal Legislative anvil by the hammer of suspicion and distrust that has greatly retarded its success in Bengal. In this connection it is to be suggested, that the Village Chowkidari Act should be a little amended so as to bring the panchayets and village chowkidars under the Union Committees, so far as village sanitation and the imposition and collection of taxes are concerned. It is a well known fact that no respectable man will be found willing to serve as member of a panchayet, on account of the harassment, they are often put to, by petty police officers. The result is that neither any system nor any principle is followed in imposing

and collecting the chowkidari tax, and abuses and oppression are frequent. Moreover the complaint is general that the chowkidar has too much time and too little to do, and what little he has to do he does imperfectly. The reason of all this is that there is no one to see what he does. Over and above his duties as the guardian of peace which he rarely discharges faithfully, he will be the superintendent of sanitation in the village. It will save the Union the cost of employing a peon, and will give some work to the Chowkidar.

12. The only serious practical difficulty that has delayed the establishment of Union Committees, is that the income of a Union which on an average is estimated to be rupees four hundred a year, is quite insufficient for any useful work after meeting the cost of establishment which will amount to about Rs. 300, as the Union will require, under the existing law, the services of a clerk able to keep accounts in English, in order to submit them to the Accountant-General. It is much to be wondered that no simple solution of the difficulty did suggest to any one; and it shows how greatly our great officials are unacquainted with the resources of our villages; and it also shows how matters of the greatest importance to the people of the country, are left in the background for want of adequate consideration and local knowledge. It is to be borne in mind that the accounts to be kept are of Rs. 400 to be spent in a year. A day's attendance in the week will be enough to keep such accounts, particularly as the works of the Union should be carried out as much as practicable by local contractors, having interest in the works. So a clerk can keep the accounts of at least four Unions. and in that case, if the clerk is paid at Rs. 20 a month, each Union will have to pay Rs. 5 a month. As the Union offices will not necessarily be at a great distance from each other, one clerk can carry out the works of four Unions without much inconvenience. This is one way of solving this difficulty. Two others may be suggested.

13. The duties of many village post offices are discharged either by some petty village school-master or by some other villager who has sufficient leisure to perform such works on the trifling remuneration of Rs. 4 or 5 a month, and sometimes even less. No one will deny that the post-office accounts are far heavier and difficult than the Union accounts are likely to be. It may be urged that the post office work is undertaken at so small a remuneration by way of conferring some benefit on one's village. If patriotism should sell so cheap in the case of post offices why should it not do so in the case of Unions ; which will confer far greater benefits on one's village. English education has spread sufficiently to enable us to find such men in many of our villages. Again a member of a Union might be induced to undertake the work either without any remuneration at all or on a trifling honorary allowance. But the best and the cheapest practice would be to keep the accounts in Bengali, according to whatever form the District Board or the Government may prescribe. The accounts and forms of our ordinary police stations and out-posts are kept in Bengali ; and there is no reason why the accounts and forms and office-books of the Union should not be kept in the same language. If the accounts be kept in Bengali the village Gurus of Patshalas may do it at a very trifling remuneration say of Rs. 2 or 3 a month. As the proceedings of the Union Committees will generally be conducted in Bengali, and as many of the members may not know English at all, it is absolutely necessary to keep the accounts and books in Bengali.

14. The success of the Union Committees will depend on the powers they will be entrusted with. If their actions are fettered on all sides by useless restrictions, they will prove a failure. If they are encumbered with duties without corresponding rights we can not expect much of them. What Mr. Smith the Commissioner of the Presidency Division, observes

regarding District Boards holds equally well regarding these Union Committees. He observes :—“ I have no doubt that the members of the various Sub-Committees will attend and take an intelligent interest in their work, if they feel that they are a real power in the disposal of the work.” The most important power that a Union can be entrusted with, is the power of raising taxes or levying contributions or making loans to carry out absolutely necessary sanitary improvements. The Government has now expressed its willingness to lend money to municipalities to carry out important works of public utility, it can empower the District Boards to lend money to Unions for sanitary improvements, as excavating tanks, cutting jungles and the like. This power should however rest entirely with the Union and it should be exercised with the greatest caution under certain restrictions and limitations that the Government might desire to impose, for guarding against any abuse or oppression that may be caused ; otherwise the blessings of Local Self Government will be mixed with curses and sighs, and the institution itself will become unpopular, and its progress will be hampered. In a poor country like India, imposition of taxes is regarded with the utmost dread. During the first years of its existence a Union should try its best to avoid taxation. Its efforts should better be directed to encourage people to contribute voluntarily to the Union fund for carrying out some particular work of improvement. If it be absolutely necessary to raise any tax the Chowkidari tax may be enhanced instead of raising any tax under a different name.

15. The Union should be empowered to enforce its orders by penalties. On the analogy of municipal benches we may have Union benches. But in the villages the number of educated men is very limited, and the members of the Union Committees will feel disinclined to inflict adequate punishment for fear of losing popularity, particularly as they may have to

depend on those very men whom they will now punish, at the next election. The whole committee however may sit in judgment, the power of determining the punishment resting with the chairman. As the committee will not in any case consist of more than nine members, this will not give rise to much inconvenience. It is an immemorial practice in India to punish the infringements against society by an assembly of the elderly members of the community.

16. As in the course of time Unions may be established all over the country I shall venture to make one suggestion for the consideration of the Government. It is to create Magistrates of the fourth class with power of inflicting fines only to the extent of Rs. 50, and investigating and committing ordinary criminal cases. As a rule they should be Honorary Magistrates. They may try all Municipal cases, and the cases referred to them by Union Committees or Local Boards. Police investigation often means ruin to our poor men. There would be no extortion and oppression, nor any garbling of facts, if respectable villagers of proved honesty and independence of character would investigate these cases. They may be permitted to exercise much of those powers that a justice of the peace exercises in an English village. This will also serve as a reward to those who would take great interest in public matters and who would undertake works of public utility at his own expense or make liberal contributions to such works. With the spread of education such men will be found in almost all our villages Lord Ripon desired that some courtsey titles should be given by way of encouragement to those who will take great interest in matters connected with Local Self-Government. This step will go in some way to fulfil the wishes of the great author of Local Self-Government in India.

17. The most of the bye-laws that are generally in force in our Municipalities, will prove useful to the Union-Com-

mittees. The sanitary reforms must be slow and conform as much as practicable to the existing practices of the particular locality. It is highly desirable that the tanks, of which the water is used for drinking should not be used for bathing and washing clothes. But this is so much against the usage of our villages that it would cause great hardships, if a Union would issue orders imposing penalty to this effect. So at first only the Union tanks and some other tanks, the water of which is largely used by the public for drinking and cooking purposes, should be declared to be used only for those purposes, provided that no private rights be thereby infringed. But in times of epidemic as during an out-break of cholera, private rights could be infringed to protect public health, as one should not be allowed to wash clothes smeared with cholera stools even in his own private tank though not used by the public for drinking purposes. No system of privies is practicable in a village. But no one should be allowed to clear stools on the side of a road or in such a place as may injure others' health.

18. One of the most important duties of a Union would be to see that no encroachment be made on any public pathways or public land in the village ; and that no waterways be blocked or obstructed ; and that nothing be done to help the obstruction or stoppage of water-ways. The commons or patitlands are often encroached upon by powerful neighbouring landholders. And as the decrees of our village panchayets have now no legal force, nobody cares what others may say about it ; the pathways particularly the trenches on both sides of it are also often altered or encroached upon. But what causes greater harm both to the agriculture and drainage of the village is the stoppage of waterways. This is sometimes done directly by helping the natural causes by artificial ones, for getting an accretion to one's land on one or both sides of the channel. Whatever is re-

garded as public property in a village should be vested in the Union. Open spaces often serve many useful purposes. No one should be allowed to do anything as may obstruct or tend to obstruct the waterways of the village.

18. The usefulness of a Union will depend on the fund at its disposal. As it will have to carry out works of different character it should be provided with separate funds for each kind of work. It should have grants for repairing village roads, for maintaining Pathshalas, for carrying out sanitary improvements, and for any other works it may be entrusted with. The Government probably makes no grants to District Boards for sanitary improvements from Provincial Revenues; unless this is done the District Boards will not be in a position to make grants for sanitation except at the detriment of other works. It is the duty of the state to see that its subjects do not perish on account of the insanitary condition of the country. But if financial difficulty does not enable the Government to make grants for sanitary purposes, it is desirable that the sanitary wants of the District should be supplied before the Boards would undertake any other work of public utility. If the Government will make a grant of about four lakhs rupees a year from the provincial revenues the District Boards will be much relieved of their burdens in this connection. As a part of this sum will be spent in remunerative works, there will be some return for the money spent on digging or reclaiming tanks and the like works.

So far as the constitution of the Union Committees is concerned the members should be selected partly by election and partly by nomination. But the greatest care should be taken to appoint only those who would take active interest in the works. In India our fore fathers were and we still are accustomed to the assembly of elders who decided and still decide many disputes among the villagers. The assembly is made up

of self-nominated members. Every one has voice. But the voice of the elder members carries greater weight. In a purely Hindu or Mahomedan village where the several sections of the community are equally balanced, election would be preferable to nomination.

19. One of the most important questions in connection with the formation of Union Committees is the supervision and control over these bodies. As in a district there will be no less than two hundred Unions, on an average, it will be very difficult for the District Board to manage them and to look after their requirements and grievances. The Local Boards under the direction of the District Boards may do this more effectually. The law has made the Local Boards agents of the District Boards; but the District Boards have made them little better than their petty road sarcars. Generally the members of the District Boards take greater interests in their works than the members of the Local Boards. The reason is not far to seek. The members of the Local Boards have no real power, in many cases they have been turned into mere shadows. The District Board or to speak more correctly the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the District Engineer who practically constitute the District Board, wishes to keep all the powers in their hands. The Local Boards in a district do not spend even the one-twentieth part of the income of the District Board. Unfortunately many of the members of the District Boards, both elected and nominated, particularly the latter ones, are more ornamental than useful. We can count among them Princes, Knights, Maharajas, Rajas, Nawabs, not to speak of the Bahadoors, and Zemindars. But only a very few of them take practical interest in the works before them, and possess or care to possess that amount of local and practical knowledge which would be useful to them in discharging their duties. Men with stars, titles and riches are certainly very able men. It is

our earnest prayer, they would add local knowledge and sympathy with the people, to the ability and influence they possess. If they take practical interest in the questions before them, their words will carry greater weight than those of the District Authorities. In their anxiety to get men with titles and riches, the District Authorities forget to recommend for nomination, such men as engineers and doctors whose professional knowledge would be invaluable to them for testing the accuracy of the estimates and statements of the officers of the Board; and for advising in all matters requiring professional knowledge.

It is a great misfortune to India that the true, high and noble principles that often actuate the Supreme Government, to confer new or greater powers, on the people of this country, are often not appreciated, or are regarded as inapplicable by the subordinate officers of the Government, on whom, however, depends the practical working-out of those principles. The result is that they never receive full play and are hindered at every step. In his famous resolution on Local Self-Government, Lord Ripon with the insight of a true statesman made this observation regarding the partial success of municipal institutions "It may be suspected, therefore, that the cause of comparative failure in the efforts hitherto made is to be found rather in the character of those efforts than in the nature of the object pursued." There are good reasons to fear that many District Officers will speak against the establishment of Union Committees, not simply because some of them are against the introduction of Local Self-Government in India, but because they themselves know little about the conditions, resources and requirements of our villages. Many of them will not care to receive information on the subject from independent, educated and respectable villagers who alone can give reliable opinions on the subject. It is a very bad practice of our officials to depend on their immediate subordinates for any information

or opinion they require on a subject. In India independent gentlemen of proved ability are rarely consulted on questions of public importance. The immediate subordinates often find it safe and advantageous to conform their own views to the known views of their immediate superiors; and moreover they themselves may not have any experience of actual village life and may not possess any adequate amount of knowledge of the resources and requirements of a village.

20. If Union Committees be established the Local Boards will comparatively rise into importance. They will distribute the amount at their disposal among the several Union Committees under them. They will issue instructions to Union Committees, look over their accounts, decide any dispute that may arise among the members themselves or among two Union Committees, and point out their mistakes. There may be villages where it may be found inexpedient to establish Unions. These places should be under the direct management of the Local Boards. When the people will see the advantages of having Unions in their villages, they themselves will come forward to request the Government to give them Unions, as they now pray to the Government for opening a post office or establishing a municipality. The Engineer of the Local Board will supervise the roads under the management of the Unions. The primary schools under a Union will be supervised by the Sub-Inspector of schools. It is to be hoped the new Sanitary Board will appoint sanitary inspectors to superintend the sanitation of our villages. The members of the Local Board will also have the power of supervision over these Unions. These officers the engineer, the sub-inspector of schools and the sanitary inspector will act as advisers to the Unions. Their recommendations should be followed as much as practicable. Let the Union Committees be at first experimental. But in order to make an experiment successful the antecedent conditions must

all be favorable to the experiment. So in order to make a Union successful, we must carefully and tenderly nourish it during the first years of its existence, correcting without rebuking, watching without suspecting and helping without grumbling.

In introducing Local Self-Government in India, it was the chief aim of its great author to make it an instrument of popular and political education. This object will remain absolutely unfulfilled if Union Committees be not formed. The members of the District and the Local Boards are generally well educated men and have some experience of political life, and many of them are generally residents of towns and live under municipalities. In villages there are few men who know any thing of political life. If Union Committees be not established, no opportunity for self-help and political training will be offered to our villagers. They will not know, what it is to unite in a systematic manner for common good. The Union Committees will revive our ancient village communities under the shining garb of western civilization. I have confined myself only in stating the facts as I have observed them and in making bare suggestions the adoption of which, I think would be useful. I do not wish to increase the bulk of this letter by appealing to those principles and sentiments on which they depend. I only touch the several points connected with this subject.

21. But whatever the Government may do to ensure the successful working of the Union Committees they shall fail if we take no interest in them. Whatever the Government may give us let us accept it thankfully. And let us first prove ourselves worthy of what the Government may give us. Local Self-Government is a privilege, given to us by our well-meaning though sometimes erring Government. It is a privilege rarely given to a subject nation. There is no denying the fact that it is the British Government that has made us what we are, and

that we shall not be what we are, if the British Government goes away. There is nothing extraordinary in the fact, that a foreign people with right of conquest would look to their own safety and profit before any thing else and make mistakes in governing a country which fortune has thrown into their arms. The best way of seeing, that they do not secure their safety by crushing out all independence from the people, that they do not make profit by causing our ruin, and that they make no such mistakes as may lead to injustice and oppression, is by repeatedly and persistently pointing out to them, in every instance, the errors they commit, in language that will carry conviction without producing bitterness. Strong language sometimes has its value. But in our case it does only harm. The world has not as yet reached that stage of development when all difference between man and man will be forgotten. To use the language of philosophy, let us, therefore, contribute our proper share to the harmonious adjustment of heterogeneous elements that now envelope the world on all sides of us ; and which will ultimately lead to that happy equilibrium which always floats on philosophers' dreams of universal felicity. A generation ago we were far behindhand to Englishmen in culture and civilization, and it is owing to the civilizing influence of British Government ; and its noble policy of education, that we are now fast approaching Englishmen in education and enlightenment. But as happens in all cases of rapid growth what we have gained in length we have lost in solidity. Our enlightenment and education do not rest on solid pillars of patient growth and on firm foundation of mature experience. And what is more unfortunate in our case, is that our enlightenment is confined to a very limited circle and has not reached the great mass of the people. The difference between our peasant in the field and our Bachelor of Arts in the lecture-hall is far greater than the difference between an English peasant and an English

graduate. No false growth will bear the test of time. It ought to be therefore our first endeavour to be careful in securing what we have got, otherwise we may lose it.

22. It is very desirable that the press and the public associations should take greater interest in these matters. The establishment of village Unions and their successful working will do great good to the country. Here will be the germ, the rudiments of political training. Here we shall learn our duties to public and how to discharge them. It is therefore our earnest prayer to our country men, that they should leave aside their lethargies of ages; and devote their heart and soul to make these institutions successful. Every one thinks better of himself, and we may not like the restrictions put upon us. But it lies in us to get these restrictions removed, when we can show that we were misjudged or that the causes which led to the imposition of the restrictions, do no longer exist. When we make good use of what is given to us, we can hope for more. There are enthusiastic men amongst us who carried away by the spur of the moment forget everything. Instead of spending all our efforts in a paroxysm of grief or abuse, as we sometimes do, let us show our worth by patient and silent work and by steady and persevering industry. We have, as a nation, not yet learned what it is to take interest in public matters. If we did, Mr. Hume would not have to complain of want of funds to carry out the agitation in England for Self-Government, in a higher sphere, in India. Mr. Hume is the living example of that self-sacrifice which sends forth its rays of love and benevolence to cheer and to give hopes to the drooping spirits all over the world. The Hindus were once famous for love, charity and self-sacrifice. But we are unworthy sons of worthy fathers. Our public spirit is more to be found in our speeches and writings than in our acts. There is no doubt that England from the very beginning has been trying

to rule India with justice and fairness, nay I may almost say, sometimes with indulgence. The spirit of Burke still pervades many English hearts. If we can but show ourselves worthy, we shall get everything we aspire to. The best way of getting our grievances remedied, is not to give them out to the world with all the bitterness of our spirit, but to show ourselves by our conduct, to be above all false pleas and insinuations of incapacity that our decriers may put forth against us. We have proved ourselves worthy in many things, but we have still to prove our capabilities for persistent and continued efforts, patient and silent work and a determination to do or die in whatever we undertake. Failure must not discourage us, dangers must not dishearten us, and above all abuse must not embitter our spirit. If you have true and sterling merits, they will consume, like the ill-suppressed fire, everything heaped upon them, and shine with redoubled brilliancy.

It is sometimes expedient to begin at the top, but it is always expedient to begin at the beginning. These Union Committees will be the beginning of our political independence. They will partially restore to us under the shining garb of Western Civilization, our well-tryed and time-honored system of Village Communities. It is now premature to hope that at one time they may even be empowered to try petty civil and criminal cases. And we hope we shall not be wanting in our efforts to make it a complete success. With a reformed Legislative Council in the centre, and a net-work of self-governing institutions spread all around, India will receive the sacrament of liberty; and emerging fresh, pure and holy out of her thralldom of ages, and imbibing whatever is good and great and noble in the Civilization of the West, she will march on her way to progress and prosperity; and will again set an example of love, truth and charity to the

world, as she did in her halcyon days of the old. She will again recover her supremacy, particularly, in intellectual culture and spiritual activity under the protecting arms of the British Lion.



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