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THE INFLUENCE OF  
BRITISH RULE IN INDIA  
ON  
HOME POLITICS

THE CHANCELLOR'S ESSAY  
1909

BY  
HERBERT A. SMITH  
LATE SCHOLAR OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

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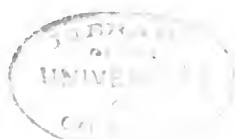
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TO MY SISTER.

## PREFACE.

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FOR the issue of this little volume, which cannot in any way pretend to "supply a want" (either of the public or the author), it would be difficult to make the ordinary apologies with any show of sincerity; but the traditional requirement that Oxford prize compositions shall be printed, though it can neither cure nor extenuate the shortcomings of this essay, may, I hope, excuse its publication.

It is hardly necessary to add that an essay such as this must be deeply indebted to many sources. I have expressly acknowledged those from which I have consciously borrowed; but my use of authorities has been, in the circumstances, somewhat hasty, and I hope no reader will connect their names with any errors, whether of fact or of reasoning, which he may discover in these pages.

H. A. S.

*May 30, 1909.*

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## THE INFLUENCE OF BRITISH RULE IN INDIA ON HOME POLITICS.

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### I.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

"Of all the unparalleled features which the English Empire in India presents, not one is so unique as the slightness of the machinery by which it is united to England and the slightness of its reaction upon England."—*Seeley*.

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ANY historical or political study which, without claiming to be a work of original research, attempts to be something more than a bare chronicle or précis of notable events must be directed by the purpose of establishing some proposition of fact or some doctrine of opinion. In other words, the events narrated must be in some way connected, and if the connection is not to be merely chronological it must be logical. Now, generally speaking, a positive is more attractive than a negative conclusion, and consequently, in an attempt to investigate such a subject as the influence of India upon English politics, the natural tendency is to look for such facts as will justify the conclusion that "the influence of India upon English politics has been very great."

There is therefore a certain sense of disappointment in finding that the history of English politics during the three centuries of the Indian connection fails almost entirely to disclose any trace of the existence of such an influence; only one brief period stands out as a notable exception. We feel as if the case had broken down for want of evidence, and the desire to avoid the purely negative verdict of "not proven" prompts us to discover some positive reasons why India should not exercise any appreciable influence upon politics in England. Such an investigation will lead us to a conclusion of fact—that any such continued influence was virtually impossible; and to a conclusion of opinion—that in view of what India is and what England is, the result is one for which we have every reason to be grateful.

Of course in estimating influences upon current politics the necessary personal bias makes it difficult to obtain a just view. There is a logical doctrine (not uncontroverted, it is true) to the effect that there are as many definitions of a thing as there are reasons for wishing it to be defined. That is to say, each man will select as the distinguishing features of anything those features in which he is personally at the time most interested. The geologist and the sculptor will have different definitions for the same piece of stone. In the same way we find it difficult to avoid exaggerating the importance of our own opinions in political controversies. Many factors, for example, usually go to produce the result of a parliamentary election; but each elector is apt to think that his own special interest (if he is on the winning side) has been the "dominating issue." The philosophical author of the "Breakfast-Table" series has given a classical example:—

"One ought to know something about his immediate neighbours at the table. This is what I said to myself, before opening a conversation with him. Everybody in our ward of the city was in a great stir about a certain election, and I thought I might as well begin with that as anything.

'How do you think the vote is likely to go to-morrow?' I said.

'It isn't to-morrow,' he said, 'it's next month.'

'Next month!' said I, 'why, what election do you mean?'

'I mean the election to the Presidency of the Entomological Society, sir,' he creaked, with an air of surprise, as if nobody could by any possibility have been thinking of any other.\*

Only so far as we can claim to be considered "men in the street" can our estimate of such a thing as political influence be free from the bias of fad. Here, as elsewhere, it is well to remember the late Lord Young's judicial classification of liars†; the "expert witness"—the specialist in politics—is apt to be the final and most perfect type.

\* Holmes, *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, Ch. II.

† "Liars, damned liars, and expert witnesses."

## II.

### ACTUAL EXTENT OF THE INFLUENCE.

"I was going to the House of Commons yesterday to commence my tenth year's warfare against the most dangerous enemy to the justice, honour, morals and constitution of this country by which they have ever been attacked. I mean the corruption which has come upon us from the East, and in which I act with everything respectable in every party in the House."—*Burke*.

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IN fixing precisely what is to be the scope of our inquiry the first thing to bear in mind is that policy and politics do not always go together. To say that an event has had no influence upon politics does not imply that it is without political importance. Political influences act in the first place upon men's minds, and it is therefore into men's minds that we must inquire.\* Many important things are continually being done by governments and parliaments which nevertheless do not in any way affect the state of men's minds upon political questions. Grave questions of foreign or colonial policy may be decided, important administrative action taken, far-reaching changes effected in public or in private law, without stirring one ripple of feeling in the minds of those with whom rest the decision of political controversies and the distribution of political power. An alliance with Japan may have consequences infinitely more weighty than any which can possibly be expected from the passing or rejection of an Eight Hours Bill; yet no one can mistake the comparative amount of political attention devoted to the two. The federation of the Australian Colonies was a highly important and by no means uncontroversial measure; but there is no reason to believe that it has influenced a single vote at any election in Great Britain. Or

\*Mediaeval opinion would have discouraged such inquiries. "The thought of man is not triable by us," said Chief Justice Brian (*Year Books*, 17 Edward IV., p. 1); "for the Devil himself knoweth not the thought of man." Modern opinion, whether rightly or wrongly, is less diffident; "the state of a man's mind," said Lord Justice Bowen, "is as much a fact as the state of his digestion" (*Law Reports*, 29, Chancery Division, p. 483).

if we take the field of private law we find Mr. Birrell saying of the Trustee Act of 1888:—

“This Act is an interesting example of how in this country those laws are made, which affect (far more than hotly-contested constitutional changes) the habits and liabilities of Her Majesty’s liege subjects. It is, I believe, quite true to say, that democratically governed as we are alleged to be, the laws which most nearly affect us are never subjected to our review, nor is our opinion (speaking of the people generally) ever sought upon the subject.”\*

The question in short is not—what are the most important things that have been done? but, what are the things, be they important or unimportant, which have actually influenced men’s minds so far as to affect the course of politics in England? Into what controversies have Indian affairs entered? Whom have they put into power? Whom have they kept out?

Severe though these restrictions on our inquiry may appear to be, they must be rigidly observed if a conclusion of any value is to be reached. If we admit any more facts into the discussion, they can only go to prove the obvious. No one need be at any pains to show that British statesmen have often carried out political schemes of immense importance for India; and, consequently, that Indian affairs have often been and are a source of great anxiety for British statesmen. The omission of such events means, it is true, the omission of much that is interesting or sensational, and nearly all that is creditable in Anglo-Indian history; it means the omission of most things that have attracted the notice of Anglo-Indian historians. But this is because the influence of India upon home politics has been slight and very largely discreditable; and our inquiry, after all, is concerned not with Indian history but with a particular feature of home politics.

The history of British India begins with the year 1599, when an association of London merchants was formed to fit out three ships for the purpose of the East Indian trade. On the last day of 1600 the association was granted a charter by Queen Elizabeth and became “The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies.” The period from 1600 to 1757 may be called the period of the factories. The battle of Plassey may conveniently be taken for the end of this period—though such lines, of course, can never be drawn with absolute accuracy—since it is the first occasion on which the English took the field, not as mere auxiliaries, but as one among the many independent powers warring

\* *The Duties and Liabilities of Trustees*, p. 160.

for supremacy in India. During this period Indian affairs had not, and, as we shall see later, could not be expected to have any appreciable influence upon politics in England. The period is of course important in many ways, since it saw the foundation of the British dominion in the East. It also saw the decision of the conflict between the English and the Dutch for the great prize of the East Indian trade. The dangerous domestic competition which sprang up owing to the formation of a rival English Company in 1698 was averted by the amalgamation of the two Companies in 1702. It is of course true that the Dutch Wars during the latter half of the 17th century were largely prompted by the desire to secure commercial supremacy in the East; and Sir William D'Avenant, writing of the Indian trade, says that "whatever country can be in the full possession of it will give law to all the commercial world." But all these things, important though they may be, are matters of war, diplomacy, foreign policy, or commerce, and on the principle we have adopted must be noticed only to be passed over. If the politics of the 17th and early 18th centuries had turned upon the rivalry between the commercial and some other interest, Indian affairs would doubtless have been one of the determining elements. If the foreign policy of the country had been in controversy, as it was when Mr. Gladstone in 1880 convinced the people that Lord Beaconsfield's foreign policy was unworthy of the nation, then again India might have been an important factor in the problem. But, as we know, the controversies of this period were not mainly concerned with commerce or diplomacy, and therefore India did not affect them. If Indian affairs ever did come before Parliament, as in the great case of *Skinner v. The East India Company* (1666), the real question at issue never concerned India, but arose entirely out of some domestic controversy.\*

\*Thus the quarrel in *Skinner's* case was about the claim of the Lords to an original jurisdiction in civil causes. The following resolutions (which I take from Mr. Grant Robertson's *Select Statutes, Cases, and Documents*) summarize the position:—

*Resolution of the House of Lords*:—"That the House of Peers taking cognizance of the cause of Thomas Skinner merchant, a person highly oppressed and injured in East India by the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading thither, and over-ruling the plea of the said Company, and adjudging £5,000 damages thereupon against the said Governor and Company, is agreeable to the laws of the land and well warranted by the law and custom of Parliament, and justified by many parliamentary precedents, ancient and modern."

*Resolution of the House of Commons*:—"That whosoever shall be aiding or assisting in putting the order or sentence of the House of Lords, in the case of Thomas Skinner against the East India Company, in execution, shall be deemed a betrayer of the rights and liberties of the Commons of England, and an infringer of the privileges of this House."

We are concerned only with what men thought about, and it will only confuse the issue if we suffer either the intrinsic importance of the events or their romantic attraction to detain us over the factory period of Anglo-Indian history. For the purposes of our inquiry we may adopt the conclusion of Sir Alfred Lyall that "distance favoured the plantation of our dominion by keeping Indian affairs at the beginning outside the sphere of European politics."\*

The Peace of Paris in 1763, following the defeat of the French at Wandiwash in 1760 and the surrender of Pondicherry in the next year, marked the final withdrawal of the French from the contest for imperial extension in India†; and henceforth there is only one European power competing with the various native princes for supremacy in the peninsula. Once freed from all rivalry with Dutch or French, the English were in a position to pursue the path of rapid political aggrandisement, which, as we shall see, brought Indian affairs for a short period into the world of English politics. As compared with the other powers in India the position of the Company was peculiarly favourable. The anarchy and chaos that came with the decline of the Mughal Empire gave the opportunity to any one who was strong enough to set up and maintain an actual government of whatever kind. The power of the Marāthās, who had been the Company's greatest rivals, was shattered by Ahmad Shah Durrānī at Pānīpat in 1761; on the other hand the victor of Pānīpat made no use of his success, but retired to his own country with the plunder, and made no attempt to set up a Muhammadan dynasty in Hindustan. The consequence was that the field was cleared for the East India Company by the issue of a battle to which they were not a party. The details of the events by which the Company gained its political position do not concern us; we may take it to have been definitely established when in 1765 they received from the titular Mughal Emperor the formal grant of the *Diwānī*, or power to collect and administer the revenues in Bengal, Bihār, and Orissa.

The important thing for us to notice is that it was this transformation of the Company from a trading association protected by native princes into an Indian State which drew down upon Indian affairs the attention of the British Parliament. The whole thing is an excellent illustration of the enormous importance which has in English politics always attached to matters of finance. The alteration in the Com-

\* *Rise of the British Dominion in India*, p. 47.

† Suffren's descent in 1781 was merely an incident in a much larger struggle.

pany's position prompted them to seek a re-adjustment of the financial relations by which they were bound to the home government; and it was this proposal which aroused such wide spread interest and deep suspicion among English politicians, stimulating them to overhaul the whole question of British administration in India, with a view to securing that these great sources of wealth should be adequately accounted for and made of some direct benefit to the State as a whole.

The dividend of the East India Company in 1766 was six per cent. On the acquisition of the *Diwānī* golden visions of new wealth were conjured up, and after some opposition the dividend was raised to ten per cent. This was followed by proposals to ask Parliament for an extension of the Company's charter in consideration of the State being admitted to a share in the advantages of the recent acquisition.

This course was not immediately adopted, but at the end of 1766 the House of Commons formed a Committee of the whole House for the purpose of considering the position of the East India Company, and on the 10th of December the Court of Directors was ordered to lay before the House of Commons all kinds of papers relating to the business of the Company, together with a statement of accounts. This was followed by prolonged negotiations between the Government and the Directors, which no imaginable gifts of narrative could render interesting at the present day.\* The chief results for us to notice are the passing of an Act to restrict the Company's dividends to ten per cent. during the existing session, and an Act of 1768 which imposed upon the Company a tribute to the Crown of £400,000 a year for two years. A subsequent agreement permitted a small increase of dividend, but continued the annual payments.

Events in India however proved too strong for these arrangements. By inexcusable bad policy the Madras Government found themselves involved in a long and ruinously expensive struggle with Haidar Ali. In 1770 a bad famine impoverished Bengal. Before long the Company not only found itself again unable to meet its obligations, but was compelled to ask the Government for a loan. Borrowers and defaulters at the best seldom find much favour with the public, and the unpopularity of the Company at this time was aggravated by a glaring anomaly which could not escape the most casual attention. The Company was pleading poverty and supplicating the State for more favourable terms; yet by every ship retiring officials of the Company returned from India possessed of enormous fortunes, which they paraded with all the ostenta-

\* They are given in great detail by Thornton.

tion of the parvenu. The sight of these fortunes confirmed the popular impressions, however exaggerated they might be, of the riches of India, and strengthened the general demand that these riches should be distributed through channels more profitable to the State.

Indian affairs had now come out into the street, and, even if the Ministry had been unwilling, popular indignation would no longer permit them to let the matter rest. The Company were not in a position to resist the demand. They had nothing to offer and everything to ask. Nor did they improve matters by attempting to rely upon a purely technical point. They tried to disclaim a position of political independence by pointing to the grant of the *Diwāni* which they held from the Mughal Emperor. But even at the distance of a six months' voyage, the real state of affairs in India was too notorious for this flimsy pretext to deceive; and reliance upon it did not serve to increase public confidence in the Company's good faith. The *prima facie* case for an inquiry was irresistible, and the immediate result of the general clamour was the appointment by the House of Commons of two Committees (one public and one secret) "to enquire into the state, nature, and condition of the Company, and of British affairs in the East Indies." The reports of these two Committees were in the highest degree unfavourable to the Company. Indeed they could hardly be otherwise, for the administration of British India during the past few years had been a public scandal of the gravest kind. The dualism which maintained two concurrent and independent executive and judicial systems in the same territory would have been difficult to work under the most favourable conditions; but when Clive left India in 1767 the Company's service became at once demoralised by the grossest corruption and lack of discipline. Nor could the constitutional arrangements be defended which kept Bengal, Madras, and Bombay politically distinct, and enabled the Madras government to involve all the three Presidencies in the ruinous war with Haidar Ali. In fact, everything which came to light went to confirm the general feeling that the Company's double position as a trading Corporation and a sovereign military State was indefensible. On the strength of these reports the House of Commons passed resolutions declaring that all acquisitions made by military force or by treaty with foreign powers of right belonged to the State. These resolutions may be taken as the beginning of the process which reached its logical conclusion in the Government of India Act of 1858.

At the same time a motion was brought forward directly



attacking as dishonourable the administration of Clive in Bengal. No vote however was taken on the direct issue, which was evaded, in a manner curiously characteristic of the House of Commons, by an amendment declaring that "Robert Lord Clive did render great and meritorious services to his country." We may welcome the result, not from any desire to defend the transactions impugned, but because a condemnatory resolution would have been such an intolerable hypocrisy coming from the House of Commons. For not only had the worst scandals in Indian administration appeared after—and in consequence of—Clive's departure, but it was notorious that the indignation of English politicians against Indian misgovernment was kindled not by the spectacle of misgovernment, but by the failure of the Company to meet their financial obligations to the home Treasury. The morality of Parliament came a little too late to be entirely decent.

The various reports and resolutions found a more effective expression in Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773, in pursuance of which Warren Hastings, who had been appointed by the Company Governor of Bengal in 1772, became in 1774 the Crown's first Governor-General of India. But the importance of the Act was more Indian than English, and it had the effect of temporarily removing Indian affairs outside the region of home politics. It satisfied for a time that feeling, which is often so powerful in politics—the feeling that something must be done. It dealt, or professed to deal, with all those matters in which Indian administration seemed most urgently to demand reform. It set up in India an executive deriving its title from Parliament, in which the discretionary appointment by the Directors was made subject to the approval of the Crown. Side by side with this was set up a judicature with a parliamentary title and appointed solely by the Crown. The three provinces were, to a certain extent, subordinated to the authority of the Governor-General in Council, and the "eminent dominion of Parliament" was declared to be the source of all British power in India. Perhaps the most important reform of all was that which prohibited the Company's servants from accepting presents from natives or engaging in private trade.

The Act is of course best known by the opening which some of its provisions gave for the celebrated conflicts of Hastings with his colleagues and of the Executive with the Supreme Court. But for our purposes it is chiefly valuable as giving some indication of what was in the mind of English politicians concerning India, and of the way in which Indian affairs influenced their thoughts. We see that there

were two things which the English political mind felt to be especially wrong. One was the constitutional anomaly of the East India Company's position. The other was the gross mismanagement of its wealth. The former grievance may be thought speculative; but it must be remembered that the eighteenth century was an age of luxuriant speculation; and further the constitutional theory was closely connected with the very practical question of patronage, to which we shall have to refer again later. As for the financial grievance, it was supplemented by a very strong social grievance of a kind which could not be specifically dealt with by statute, but was nevertheless very real. It is necessary to remember that in the eighteenth century politics in England were very largely the preserve of the wealthy country families and the voters dependent upon them. Against the parvenu official, grown rich by dubious means in India, all the resentment of this powerful and exclusive society was aroused. That it was a practical influence with politicians, we see from the speeches of Burke, who was far from being a slave to the traditions of the great families. Speaking on Fox's Bill he says:—

“In India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired; in England are often displayed by the same persons the virtues which dispense hereditary wealth.

“Arrived in England the destroyers of the nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppressions and his oppressor. They marry into your families; they enter into your senate; they ease your estates by loans; they raise their value by demand; they cherish and protect your relations which lie heavy on your patronage, and there is scarcely a house in the kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest, that makes all reform of our eastern government appear officious and disgusting; and, on the whole, a most discouraging attempt.”

Of course with regard to Burke we must always observe the caution suggested at the beginning of this essay. He had made a speciality of Indian affairs, and took the point of view of the Indian native to an extent that was unapproached by any contemporary politician, except possibly his fellow-countryman Sheridan. In any case Burke was not an Englishman; he was never representative of Englishmen, as his Bristol constituents and parliamentary colleagues made quite clear, and no Englishman of his own day—few indeed of any other—ever understood him. He derived his political genius from a nation in which politics have always been a reality and

never a mere game—a matter of life and death to the people, not a luxury for the rich. But even allowing for all this, the fact remains that Indian wealth was at this time becoming an important factor in English politics for the reasons given by Burke; and it must always be remembered that we are dealing with a time when a large number of seats in the House of Commons were merely so much property to be openly bought and sold.

The years from 1773 to 1783 witnessed events of the greatest importance in India, but in England public feeling had been more or less satisfied with the passing of Lord North's Regulating Act. The Company's officers being now forbidden to engage in private trade, there was a reasonable prospect of stopping the stream of wealthy "Nabobs" who came home to outshine the old families and purchase parliamentary seats. It might well be hoped that the revenues which had before gone in this manner might be diverted into better channels. Nevertheless rumours of irregularities in the Indian Government reached home, and two members of Hastings' Council were busily engaged in fomenting English feeling against the Governor-General. Meanwhile Parliament condemned these irregularities and at the same time renewed the Company's charter in consideration of a sum which could not possibly be raised by any reputable methods. This is worth noting in view of the impending impeachment of Warren Hastings. As in the case of Clive, however much Hastings may have deserved condemnation for his doings, the accusation came ill from the House of Commons which impeached him.

The Coalition Ministry was now in office, and in 1781 a "Committee of Secrecy" was appointed for the investigation of Indian affairs. The Company proved unable to raise the £400,000 required by the Act renewing their charter, and the House of Commons voted the recall of Hastings; but the Company's Court of Proprietors, backed as it was by the King, was strong enough to prevent the Directors from acting on the vote. Once more the question of money had come to the front and Indian affairs became again a matter of acute political controversy.

In the autumn of 1783 Fox introduced his Bill, the main objects of which may be quite shortly stated. It proposed to effect a clear severance between the political and the commercial undertakings of the Company. The former were to be practically placed beyond the Company's control, being entrusted to seven Commissioners, nominated by the Bill in the first instance for four years and subsequently by the Crown. In the hands of this body were to be placed all

dealings with native princes, all charges of corruption against the Company's officials, and, most important of all, the whole patronage of the Company. The commercial part of the Company's business was to be controlled by a Board of Assistant Commissioners; these were to be nine in number, the original members being nominated in the Bill, while vacancies were to be filled up by the Court of Proprietors. Commissioners were not to be disqualified by the Place Act from sitting in the House of Commons.

Against this Bill petitions were presented by the East India Company itself and the Corporation of London, while in the House of Commons it was resisted by the official Opposition. The arguments of the Opposition, which owing to the King's interference ultimately prevailed, show once more the way in which Indian affairs presented themselves in the minds of politicians. The Bill was opposed as an attack upon a charter and a vested interest. It was prophesied that it would increase the amount of patronage in the hands of the Crown or of the Ministry. It was denounced as imperilling the financial credit of the nation. In short, though the debate nominally dealt with India, the Indian point of view only appeared in the speeches of such entirely unrepresentative politicians as Burke. The House as a whole was not interested in Indian affairs, as Indian affairs. It was deeply interested in the rights of property, and a very large number of its members were personally interested in the East India Company. It was interested in the great question of patronage, and it was interested in the raising and spending of public money. All these questions happened to be raised in a Bill for reforming the Indian administration; but had the Bill been confined to its ostensible objects it could never have held the attention of the House. India served merely as a peg on which to hang a number of old and popular controversies; it did not give English politicians any fresh ideas as to how these old controversies should be decided. This is best understood by taking an instance from the other side. The French Revolution exercised an enormous influence on English politics. It inspired in some an entirely new conception of government and filled them with an entirely new enthusiasm for "freedom, brotherhood, and an equal law." In a far greater number, unfortunately, it aroused an intense terror and distrust of all democracy. In practical effect it delayed political reform in England for about thirty years. Meanwhile, events were happening in India fully equalling in horror and in magnitude many of the most sensational features of the great Revolution. Many of these events were perfectly well

known in England, at any rate among active politicians. Yet what happened in India made no man in England more of a Republican or more of a Monarchist, more Whig or more Tory, than he was before. If he was interested, as he generally was, in the rights of property, or the disposal of patronage, or the public finance, he was none the less concerned because the property happened to be that of the Company, because the patronage was exercised over its servants, or because it was the Company's difficulties which drained the public purse. But nothing could interest the average politician in anything more genuinely Indian than this, and the consequence was, that though Indian affairs were for a time plunged into the very middle of the whirlpool of party politics, their influence upon those politics was practically nothing, and India was a mere cork upon the surface of waters that were stirred by entirely different forces.

The Coalition carried the Bill without much difficulty through the House of Commons, and would doubtless have passed it through the Lords, but for interference from another quarter. The exact details of the transaction are concealed in a disgraceful intrigue, which has never been fully exposed to the light, and we can only guess what was actually in the King's mind. Temple and Lord Chancellor Thurlow were the agents of the Opposition; and if they succeeded in persuading the King, who detested the Ministry, that the Bill would throw a great body of valuable patronage into the hands of Fox and North, His Majesty's precipitate action is easily explained. But whatever may have happened in the course of private intrigue, the result was one of the most sensational incidents of English political history. Temple was given a letter to show privately to the peers, in which it was announced that "whoever voted for the India Bill were not only not his (the King's) friends, but he should consider them as his enemies." The Bill was thrown out on the second reading by a majority of nineteen, and in order that he might leave nothing unconstitutional unattempted, George sent an urgent message to the Ministers demanding the immediate surrender of their seals of office.

This incidental mention may seem inadequate for a constitutional crisis of such magnitude, but the matter is not strictly within the scope of our inquiry. The King was after all a very average Englishman, and his attitude was that of the average English politician whom we have just been considering. His action in this matter was decided not by any ideas which he received from India, but by his

hatred of the Coalition and his determination to resist anything which might increase their power.

The rejected Ministers were replaced by Pitt, not yet twenty-four years of age, and backed only by a weak minority of the House of Commons. After a few months of struggling with an impossible parliamentary situation the new Premier dissolved the House, and his appeal to the constituencies was rewarded by the return of a substantial majority, which maintained him in practically uninterrupted power until his death in 1806. In this period there are only two things that concern us at all, the passing of Pitt's India Act in 1784, and the impeachment of Warren Hastings in 1788. Of these the former really marks the end of such influence as India had obtained over English politics.

Pitt appreciated the need for Indian reform no less keenly than his opponents, and he felt under an obligation to replace the scheme of the Coalition by one of his own. Accordingly an India Bill was made the first charge upon the labours of the new Parliament. The main feature of this measure was that it created a new department of State in harmony with the Government. Fox's Commissioners were to have held their places on a fixed tenure, which opened up endless possibilities of conflict with the regular Ministry. The new department was to be a committee of the Privy Council, called the "Board of Commissioners,"\* which has since, under the Act of 1858, become the India Office. Its power was rendered effective by making it impossible for the Court of Proprietors to override a decision of the Directors that had been sanctioned by the Board. The nomination of the Presidency Governors was vested absolutely in the Crown, and the Governor-General was given a more effectual authority. Stringent precautions were taken against official corruption, and in general the Crown was given a real control over the political as distinguished from the commercial enterprises of the Company.†

Warren Hastings retired in 1785, and Lord Cornwallis went out in the next year to administer India under the new scheme. The substantial merits of this system, enforced as

\* Generally known as the "Board of Control."

† In 1839 the position was thus summed up by Chief Justice Tindal in the case of *Gibson v. The East India Company*:—"It is manifest that the East India Company have been invested with powers and privileges of a twofold nature, perfectly distinct from each other; namely, powers to carry on trade as merchants, and powers (subject only to the prerogative of the Crown to be exercised by the Board of Commissioners for the affairs of India) to acquire and govern territory, to raise and maintain armed forces by sea and land, and to make peace or war with the native powers of India." (Bingham, *New Cases*, v. 273).

they were by the honesty and ability with which Cornwallis conducted the government, entirely put a stop to the baneful influence which India had threatened to exercise upon politics at home. The speech from the throne at the opening of the session in 1784 warned Parliament "not to lose sight of the effect any measure may have on the constitution of our country." What the constitutional danger was, as it presented itself to Burke, we have already seen; and William Pitt's speech on a motion for parliamentary reform in 1782 points the same way:—

"Our laws have with a jealous care provided that no foreigner shall give a single vote for a representative in Parliament; and yet we now see foreign princes not giving votes, but purchasing seats in this House, and sending their agents to sit with us as representatives of the nation. No man can doubt what I allude to. We have sitting among us the members of the Rajah of Tanjore and the Nawab of Arcot, the representatives of petty Eastern despots; and this is notorious, publicly talked of, and heard with indifference; our shame stalks abroad in the open face of day, it is become too common even to excite surprise. We treat it as a matter of small importance that some of the electors of Great Britain have added treason to their corruption and have traitorously sold their votes to foreign Powers; that some of the members of our Senate are at the command of a distant tyrant; that our Senators are no longer the representatives of British virtue, but of the vices and pollutions of the East."\*

With the passing of Pitt's Act, firmly and honestly administered as it was by Lord Cornwallis, these dangers disappeared, and with them the only kind of influence that India could exercise upon home politics. That influence in fact had nothing to do with political ideas, and was not really Indian in character, but a moneyed influence, for which India supplied the necessary funds. India was not an essential, but an accidental element in the situation.

As for the impeachment of Warren Hastings, though a failure to notice it might seem a strange omission, yet its dramatic and personal interest is far greater than its historical importance. As Professor Jenks has pointed out, "it forms no part of the permanent history of politics."† After the excitement of the opening days was over and the public curiosity in the strange spectacle was abated, even the sensational interest disappeared. The proceedings settled down into one of the weariest recitals of evidence that have ever been heard in a court of law, while the cumbrousness of the tribunal and the procedure protracted the trial to an intolerable length. The result became obvious long before

\* Quoted by Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p. 289.

† *Parliamentary England*, p. 289.

the verdict was given, nearly eight years after Hastings had first pleaded at the bar.

When we say that the influence of India upon home politics ceases with the year 1784, the objection may be raised that we are overlooking the important part which India has played in the foreign relations of Great Britain. It is of course undeniable that the possession of India has confronted British statesmen with numerous problems of foreign policy that could not otherwise have arisen. It has thrown upon them all the anxieties that must arise from the possession of a long continental frontier with a powerful European State on the other side. Furthermore the presence of a large Muhammadan population in India has undoubtedly influenced British relations with the central authority of Islam at Constantinople, while the problems of naval and military strategy to which India has given rise are of course both numerous and important.

The answer to the objection lies, not in denying the existence or practical importance of these problems, but in remembering that questions of foreign policy have for the most part been kept almost entirely outside the sphere of English politics. This may or may not be a matter for regret; it may reasonably be said that the average elector is far too ready to trust the Government of the day in dealings with foreign powers and that there ought to be some provision, as there is in the United States, for the parliamentary control of treaties. These however are matters of opinion; the main fact can hardly be disputed, and is indeed generally admitted on both sides; it is a frequent boast of active politicians. There have of course been exceptions. The country became for a time keenly interested in the foreign policy of Palmerston, and later in the new imperialism of Disraeli. Again, it was largely on Gladstone's denunciation of Disraeli's foreign policy, that the "Midlothian" general election of 1880 was fought and won. But even where India is concerned in such controversies it is merely by way of illustration or of incident. It is never a determining factor. It was merely one count in the indictment of 1880.

In the same way, wherever India has appeared in the controversies of the nineteenth century, though it may have been deeply affected by the currents of home politics it has never influenced them in return. The question of the Indian cotton duties—a very important one for India—was decided by the interests of Lancashire and by the economic theories prevailing in England; what Indians may have thought about



the question was never allowed to affect what English voters thought, and the opinion of the India Office Council was over-ruled by the Secretary of State. India again was drawn into controversy by Disraeli's Royal Titles Bill, which made Queen Victoria "Empress of India"; but here again the question was merely whether an imperialistic policy should or should not be permitted to express itself in this particular way.

Another test by which we may confirm these conclusions is to go to those writers who have dealt specially with the history of politics, and see how far India has entered into their pages. Professor Jenks' *Parliamentary England* covers the period from the Restoration to the Reform Act; Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* may be said to cover the period from the Reform Act to the present day. Between them they deal with almost the whole period of Anglo-Indian history. Both are pre-eminently concerned with politics. Yet India only enters into Professor Jenks' book for that period in the eighteenth century with which we have been dealing. The passages dealing with India in Lord Morley's work are incidental and disconnected; and perhaps the most significant reference in the index is "India, parliamentary indifference to affairs of." Or to take another point of view, we find writers on Indian history complaining of this indifference as one of the chief difficulties with which they have to contend. Everyone knows the contrast which Macaulay has drawn between the apathy of the British public towards India, and the interest which he imagines that they feel in Atahualpa and Montezuma. Thornton also in the preface to his *History of the British Empire in India* complains:—

"Our magnificent Oriental Empire has never yet attracted that degree of attention which it merits, not less from its intrinsic importance than from the extraordinary circumstances under which it has been acquired. . . . This state of the public mind with regard to India has often afforded a theme of regret, or of remonstrance to the friends of both countries."

Similarly the learned author of a long-forgotten political pamphlet finds this indifference a bar to the reforms he wishes to effect:—

"That sound public opinion, which it is so essential to carry along with every branch of our free government has been very partially exercised with regard to the administration of Indian affairs. The problem of the best mode of governing that country is so difficult to be solved, the interests affected by it so remote and complicated, that few have given it any deep attention."\*

Even the current politics of the day give no indication of

\* Malcolm, *Government of India* (1833).

any appreciable charge. It may be said with truth that an unusual number of members in the House of Commons are now for good or evil interested in India, and that the question of Indian reform has assumed a considerable importance. It is again beyond all doubt that English ideas, English educational systems, and the example of English institutions are exercising a great influence in India. But this is all. There is no sign whatever of reciprocal action. The whole question, so far as the public is concerned—and the public generally is very little concerned—is whether or not certain English ideas of government may safely be applied in India, and, if so, how far. But speaking generally we notice at the present moment a similar tendency to that which prevails in matters of foreign policy, that is to say, a general disposition to trust the present Secretary of State and his expert advisers. This last feature is especially worthy of notice. The actual government of India is carried on by an expert bureaucracy, and the controlling Minister at home relies very largely on his Council, which consists chiefly of retired Indian officials. This alone is enough to shew how entirely India fails to interest, still less to influence the minds of English politicians; for if men are keenly interested in a political matter they will not be content to leave the conduct of it entirely in expert and official hands.\*

\*" La société a le droit de demander compte à tout agent public de son administration." (*Declaration of the Rights of Man*, 1789).

### III.

#### WHY THIS INFLUENCE HAS BEEN SO SLIGHT.

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“Unless we greatly err, this subject is, to most readers, not only insipid but positively distasteful.”—*Macaulay*.

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The reasons why India has exercised so little influence upon political thought at home must have appeared more or less clearly in the course of our inquiries into the facts; yet it may perhaps be convenient to summarize them separately.

Of all these reasons the most obvious is the great physical or geographical separation between India and England. Even at the present day, with all the modern improvements in methods of communication, this separation is keenly felt by all who have any interests in India. But in the eighteenth century no traveller and no message could cover the distance in less than six months; with unfavourable conditions the voyage might even take two or three months more. Now live politics cannot be conducted through batches of official despatches and private letters delivering news that is always at least six months old. The great mass of the people, even among the restricted electorate of that day, was not reached at all by these communications. Those who were reached by them must undoubtedly have often found them very wearisome. In any event such communications could not have been expected to sway the mind of the electorate upon the political questions of the day. If men are to be influenced in politics, it must be by something more living and present to their eyes than strange events in a strange country known only through bundles of stale papers. The gross and perceptible things that did come home from India were Indian wealth and the retired Indian officials of the day. Both of these exercised the influence which we have already noticed, but as we have seen it was the influence of wealth and wealthy people, not of India. It was an influence exercised upon the pockets, not upon the convictions; in other words it was corruption. The dangers arising from this

were averted by the passing of Pitt's India Act, supported as it was by the upright and capable administration of Cornwallis; and when India could no longer corrupt England its influence ceased altogether.

The separation between the two countries has always been, though it may seem uncharitable to say so, not only geographical, but moral and spiritual as well. Even within India itself the divergence in this respect is sufficient to keep European and native society, except for formal and official purposes, almost entirely apart. The distinction is not only or even chiefly a distinction of classes, nor a distinction between governors and governed. The Hindu aristocracy is probably equal in wealth, lineage, and social exclusiveness to any order in Europe; while it is far more aristocratic than the Europeans actually serving in India, who are almost all drawn from the children of the professional classes or of earlier officials, and have gone to India to earn a livelihood. Indians also compete keenly for posts in the various services and rise to practically every position short of a Lieutenant-Governorship. But in spite of the fact that nearly all formal barriers are broken down, the natural barrier remains. It is felt on both sides that there is not enough in common between natives and Europeans for them to form one society; the points of view and the ideals of the two are so divergent as to render it impossible. The Europeans are never settlers in the land, and almost invariably return to England on the completion of their term of service. The ideals of the Indian on the other hand are naturally enough centred in India. There is therefore no common ideal or common goal to create any feeling of unity between the races; and when this is the case between the Europeans and the natives in India itself, it can scarcely be wondered that the chasm is widened by the geographical separation between east and west. Obviously this is a potent reason why India cannot deeply influence English politics. When men differ and wish to persuade each other they must agree on something; all argument is wasted unless there is some common ground; and it is this common ground which is lacking as between English and Indian thought.

Further it must be remembered that the constitutional relations between India and England are such as to keep the politics of the two countries as far as possible apart. The Roman empire destroyed the republican constitution of Rome. But that was because Rome tried to include her empire within the limits of her original constitution. The vast additions to her citizen body were all made within the limits of the ancient number of tribes, and political power was nomin-

ally exercised by the whole electorate meeting together in the Comitia. In these circumstances the incongruity between the old civic forms and the actual political organism which they professed to embody became too glaring to be tolerable; and of course it was the civic institutions which gave way. England has been more fortunate in keeping the constitution through which she has governed India entirely distinct from her own. Originally the governing English power in India was a trading Company, which admitted no responsibility to any one except its own shareholders. The power of the Company was by successive stages transferred to the Secretary of State for India in Council, who is now the link between the Government of India and the House of Commons. But in practice the Viceroy, who is an official independent of political changes at home, necessarily exercises a very large independent power, since the actual government of India is far too large and complicated a thing to be systematically controlled by a Minister in England, and such control as the political Minister does exercise is largely directed by a permanent and non-political Council of expert advisers. Below the Viceroy the Governors and Lieutenant-Governors with their Councils have also a wide initiative, and in a lesser degree a very wide discretion is permitted to high officials of subordinate rank. The consequence is that only a very small percentage of political events in India actually come under the eye of the Secretary of State; and of these again only a small fraction reach the House of Commons and the outside public.

Above all India is financially independent. Her administration makes no demand upon an English Chancellor of the Exchequer, and proposals, whether legislative or administrative, that involve a demand upon the Exchequer are perhaps the chief food for political thought in England. It is true that the Indian Budget requires the sanction of the House of Commons; but that only involves an annual debate of a rather discursive nature upon various matters connected with the government of India. Nor is the House of Commons anxious to pry much further into Indian politics. Only last year a proposal was made that the Secretary of State's salary should be transferred from the Indian to the home estimates, in order to give an opportunity for a second debate upon Indian affairs; but the proposal was rejected even in the present democratic House of Commons. The general feeling on the subject seems to be precisely the same as that which prevails in respect of foreign affairs. That is to say, the House of Commons is disposed to assume that the officials actually administering Indian affairs know their own business

best and therefore lets them alone. The result is to leave Indian affairs for the most part in the dark limbo of official despatches and official consultations. The results of these official doings may be of the greatest consequence to millions of people: but so long as they are conducted in this way it is a sure sign that the public takes no interest in them, and they are not influencing the public mind. Once the public is really interested, it will begin to poke about and inquire; it will not be put off with official assurances, that all is for the best and entirely in accordance with all ascertainable precedent. Whether such an active interest would be for good or evil is of course a matter entirely foreign to this discussion. But till we see some evidences of such a spirit afoot, we may be assured that whatever may be the influences that are swaying English politics they are not concerned with India.

#### IV.

##### ADVANTAGES OF THIS SEPARATION.

"We may reckon among the disadvantages arising from the possession of a dependency, that it tends to generate or extend a system of official patronage in the dominant country, and thus to lower the standard of its political morality."—*Cornwall Lewis*.

"Ship me somewhere east of Suez,  
Where the best is like the worst;  
Where there ain't no ten commandments,  
And a man can raise a thirst."

*Kipling.*

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It is perhaps not entirely outside the scope of this inquiry to consider whether home politics are the better or the worse for their practical freedom from all influences from India.

To a certain extent the answer will depend upon individual political convictions; but perhaps it is not too much to assume that there is in England at the present day something like a general preference for existing institutions over forms of government that are more autocratic, bureaucratic, or official. In this connection we may remember the maxim which Thucydides puts into the mouth of Kleon, to the effect that a democracy cannot govern an empire;\* which is true in the sense that a democracy cannot well exercise a great official despotism and at the same time remain a democracy. Comparisons are often drawn between the Roman Empire, with its elaborate provincial system, and the English Empire in India. But these comparisons generally tend to overlook the striking distinction which we have already noticed—that the Roman Empire destroyed the Roman Republic, while the English Empire in India has not succeeded in destroying republican institutions at home. The chief reason for the difference is to be found in the different methods by which the two dominions were acquired. The provinces of the Roman Empire were directly conquered by Rome. The rise of the English dominion in India was really the attainment of supremacy in India by one of many conflicting Indian powers. Of the troops employed at the most critical period only about

\* Book III., ch. xxxvii.

one-seventh was European. The conquest in fact was not made by England as a State at all, but by the East India Company; and the East India Company was at the time only one among many Indian powers. England as England could never have gained India, and could not hold it now without turning herself into a vast military State, in which all other political considerations would be postponed to the claims of military efficiency. What has saved England from this necessity is the fact that India was won in the first instance by a power that relied almost entirely on its own resources in India, and that the government of India is now carried on in such a way as to maintain as far as possible a complete political separation between India and England.

Still, those who value democratic institutions must always be on the watch against any possibility of encroachment, for as Burke says:—

“No complaisance to our Court or to our age can make me believe nature to be so changed, but that public liberty will be among us, as among our ancestors, obnoxious to some person or other; and that opportunities will be furnished for attempting, at least, some alteration to the prejudice of our constitution. These attempts will naturally vary in their mode, according to time and circumstances. For ambition, though it has ever the same general views, has not at all times the same means, nor the same particular objects. A great deal of the furniture of ancient tyranny is worn to rags; the rest is entirely out of fashion. . . . Every age has its own manners, and its politics dependent upon them; and the same attempts will not be made against a Constitution fully formed and matured, that were used to destroy it in the cradle, or to resist its growth during its infancy.”\*

At present a distinctly sympathetic attitude in certain quarters toward bureaucratic systems of government may well give lovers of democracy cause for genuine alarm; the more so because this love of incessant regulation and an elaborate official hierarchy is shared by Socialist politicians who profess an enthusiasm for democracy. This admiration so far has chiefly centred itself upon Germany, but occasionally we hear suggestions that the government of India is the perfect type of the “benevolent despotism” which these politicians frankly admire; and sometimes there is a slightly dictatorial note in the speeches of eminent officials from India

\* *Thoughts on the Present Discontents.* Compare Lord Acton on the leaders of the American Revolution:—“Their example . . . teaches us that men ought to be in arms against even a remote and constructive danger to their freedom; that even if the cloud is no bigger than a man's hand, it is their right and duty to stake the national existence, to sacrifice lives and fortunes, to cover the country with a lake of blood, to shatter crowns and sceptres and fling parliaments into the sea.” *History of Freedom*, p. 586.



and other dependencies which jars rather unpleasantly upon the ordinary tone of argumentative political discussion. For example, during the recent\* House of Lords debate on Lord Morley's proposed scheme of Indian reforms, one of the peers present claimed to speak "with all the authority arising from my long experience in India." Now, although we freely acknowledge the services rendered by these distinguished men, we do not admit the possibility of the existence of the expert in politics, or that politics can ever be reduced to the technicalities of a science. Even the greatest official can only stand at one of many points of view, and this is why we feel a certain resentment at a speech of which the dominant note is, "I have been there, and so I ought to know."

The danger is perhaps exaggerated, but it cannot be said to be altogether fanciful, and if real at all it is a reason for viewing with suspicion any closer relations between Indian and home politics. If we may go back to old authors the point is crisply stated in the *Leviathan*.†

"And as False Doctrine, so also oftentimes the Example of different Government in a neighbouring Nation, disposeth men to alteration of the forme already settled. So the people of the Jewes were stirred up to reject God, and to call upon the Prophet *Samuel*, for a King after the manner of the Nations."

In this connection it is perhaps worth remembering that when a very important office in Ireland fell vacant a few years ago, the new holder was appointed on the ground of his successful experience in Indian administration. It is perhaps not strictly within the province of this essay to balance the political good and evil that flowed from this appointment; suffice it to say that it was generally agreed that these results were influenced by ideas derived from the government of India. But whatever the results may have been, the principle upon which the appointment was made is deplorable and dangerous. There is no need to deny that the Indian administration, so far as one can judge from home, is conducted with great efficiency and above all with integrity; in any case it is probably better than any of its numerous predecessors in India. But however this may be, it is a system for India, and it would be a grave danger if we allowed its principles to affect the government of the United Kingdom or any part thereof.

The wide difference between the moral, religious, and

\* *i.e.*, in December. Another debate has just taken place (Feb. 23rd and 24th) on the second reading of the Indian Councils Bill. It is worth noting that none but past or present officials took any part in it.

† Book II., Ch. 29.

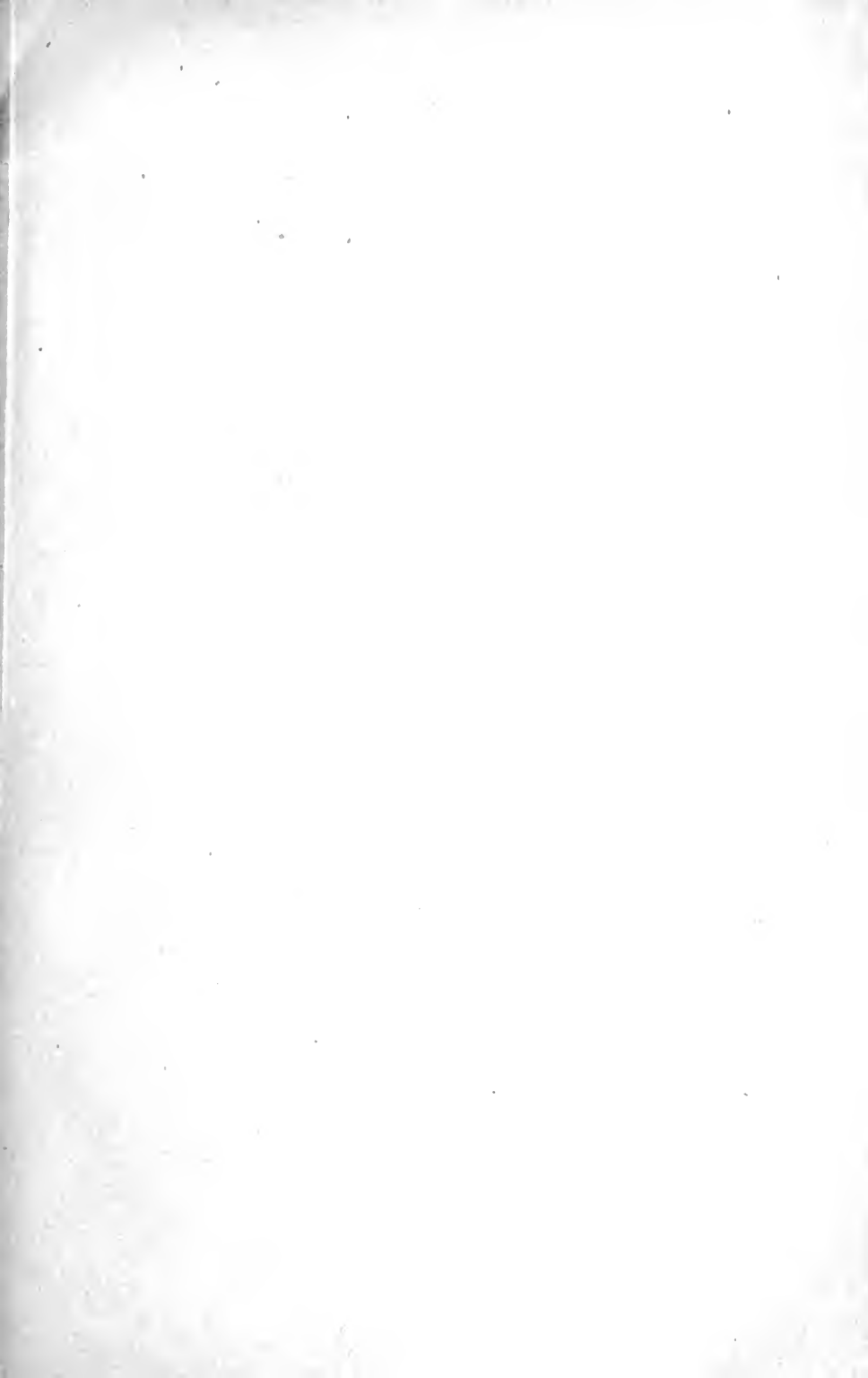
philosophical ideals of the East and the West has often been pointed out, and has not escaped the notice of Mr. Kipling. Experienced observers say that no amount of Western education ever substantially affects the deeper philosophical ideas in the mind of a native of India, and that these ideas can co-exist with a perfect readiness to use all the outward results, such as scientific inventions, of modern European thought. For the peoples of the West similarly to resist influences from the East is not mere insularity or intolerance; it is a very old tradition which has been inherited by all the healthiest civilizations of Europe, and explains the extraordinarily intense feeling that has always surrounded certain great battles in which East and West have met. "The day of Marathon," says Creasy, "secured for mankind the intellectual treasures of Athens, the growth of free constitutions, the liberal enlightenment of the Western world, and the gradual ascendancy for many ages of the great principles of European civilization."\* Merivale speaks in the same way of Actium:—"The laws and language, the manners and institutions of Europe, still bear witness to the catastrophe of Actium. The results it produced can never recur to our minds without compelling us to reflect upon the results we may suppose it to have averted."† If we are actuated by this feeling we shall find ourselves opposed by the "Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland" and a few other philosophical and artistic sects. But behind us is a mighty tradition, and to-day it is perhaps not too much to assume that this tradition is wholesome and right.

\* *Fifteen Decisive Battles*, Ch. I.

† *History of the Romans under the Empire*, Vol. III., Ch. xxviii. Compare Vergil's description of the combatants (*Aeneid*, viii. 678):—

"Hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar  
 Cum patribus populoque penatibus et magnis dis, . . .  
 Hinc ope barbarica variisque Antonius armis  
 Victor ab Aurorae populis et litore rubro  
 Aegyptum viresque Orientis et ultima secum  
 Bactra vehit, sequiturque—nefas!—Aegyptia coniux."









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