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COUNCIL OF STATE.

Thursday, 2nd February, 1928.

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE VICEROY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE AND THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

H. E. THE VICEROY: Gentlemen, with the exception of one topic to which I will return later in my speech, I do not propose to-day to deal with all the various important subjects which are likely to come before you for consideration this session. But there are one or two matters to which I think it is proper that I should make brief reference.

Our relations with Foreign States along our great land frontier, from Persia in the west to Siam in the east, continue, I rejoice to say, very cordial in character. India has been honoured by a public visit from His Majesty the King of Afghanistan on his way to Europe, and the warmth of his welcome by Government and people alike was evidence of the links of friendship and common interest that bind the two countries together. It was a matter of much disappointment to me that indisposition debarred me from active participation in the welcome to His Majesty. My disappointment was no less great that indisposition should have robbed me of the pleasure of making the personal acquaintance of that sagacious statesman His Highness the Prime Minister of Nepal, now in Calcutta on a visit which only the state of his health precluded from being a public visit and which I trust will soon lead to a complete restoration of his normal vigour.

I pass from the subject of India's external relations with her territorial neighbours to mention recent events affecting the position of Indians overseas. Honourable Members will have observed with great satisfaction the cordial spirit in which the appointment of the Right Honourable Srinivasa Sastri, as our Agent in South Africa, has been from the first received both by the Union Government and by the various sections of the public, both European and Indian, in that country. Since his arrival our Agent has performed invaluable work in consolidating the friendly relations between the two countries, in stimulating among the Indian settlers the desire for self-help, and in promoting between Europeans and Indians in South Africa a clearer perception of mutual obligations. He has realised the highest expectations of those who, appreciating his capacity and gifts, expected most from him, and there is therefore every reason to hope that questions which are still outstanding or may arise in the future will be harmoniously adjusted.

Indians in East Africa have also recently claimed the special attention of my Government and of Honourable Members. Acting on a suggestion of a representative deputation of the Legislature which waited on me in Simla last September, my Government have recently sent Kunwar Maharaj Singh and Mr. Ewbank to assist the Indian communities concerned in connection with the Commission, which has been deputed by His Majesty's Government to examine locally certain aspects of future policy. Our

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representatives have already made a rapid tour of the territories in which Indian interests are important, and are now working there in close relations with the accredited leaders of Indian opinion. Honourable Members may feel confident that any case which the Indian settlers may desire to advance will be effectively presented, and can count upon careful consideration at the hands of the Commission.

I now turn to the major political question which it is necessary that I should ask you to examine in greater detail. Since I last addressed the Legislature, His Majesty's Government have, as Honourable Members are aware, taken certain decisions in connection with the Statutory Commission, which are of vital concern to India. Circumstances made it impossible for me to announce these decisions to the Legislature, as I should naturally have wished to do, and I therefore avail myself of this, the earliest convenient occasion, to make some observations in regard to them.

I need not recapitulate what I said in my statement of November 8th. That statement gave at length the reasons which had prompted His Majesty's Government to accelerate the date of the enquiry and to appoint a Parliamentary Commission. It outlined the proposed procedure at the various stages, and indicated broadly the lines on which His Majesty's Government hope to unite the best efforts of the chosen representatives of India and Great Britain in the wise ordering of India's future. Within the general framework as there described the Prime Minister made it plain in the course of the Parliamentary Debates that it was the considered intention of His Majesty's Government to leave to the Commission itself full discretion as to the methods by which they should approach their task. The Commission arrives in India to-morrow, not as yet on its more formal mission, but with the hardly less important object of enabling its members to acquaint themselves with the general working of the legislative and administrative machines, and hold informal consultations for the purpose of determining the most appropriate means of discharging the responsibility which Parliament has laid upon them. Considerable difference of opinion has become apparent as to the way in which India should receive these decisions of His Majesty's Government and of Parliament. On the one hand, those who speak for important sections of Indian political thought have been loud in their criticism and condemnation of the scheme approved by Parliament. On the other hand, many thoughtful and distinguished Indians, as well as large and powerful communities, have declared themselves in favour both of the Commission's constitution and of the general procedure that has been devised, and have expressed their readiness to give it all the assistance that they can.

I do not propose to enter far into the lists of controversy, but there are two points to which I think it right to refer. It has been freely said that His Majesty's Government have done Indians a real injustice, in denying to them adequate means by which Indian opinion may influence and affect these proceedings. Such charges as these arise in part from the genuine failure of some critics to appreciate features of the scheme which I thought had been sufficiently plainly stated. It has, for instance, been assumed that representatives of India would not confer with the Joint Parliamentary Committee in London, until after Parliament had reached main decisions of principle upon the second reading of a Bill. That this

is not the case is clear from my statement of 8th November, in which I said that it was not the intention of His Majesty's Government to ask Parliament to adopt any proposals which, as a result of the Commission's report, might be put forward, without first giving an opportunity for Indian opinion by personal contact to exert its full weight in shaping the view of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in regard to them. I was careful to point out that at this stage Parliament will not have been asked to express any opinion on particular proposals, and that therefore, so far as Parliament is concerned, the whole field will still be open.

Apart from such misapprehensions, I am free to admit that the question of whether or not better means could have been devised for associating Indian opinion with the enquiry which Parliament is bound to undertake is one on which every man is entitled to hold his own view. But though Indian leaders have the right, if they wish, to say that His Majesty's Government have chosen the wrong method of such association, they are not at liberty, if they desire to retain the character of true counsellors of the people or of honest controversialists, to say that His Majesty's Government have not sought means—and I would add very full and very unprecedented means—of placing Indians in a position to take an ample share with them in the evolution of their country's future. I cannot help thinking, if we may attempt to look beyond the present dust and turmoil of argument, assertion and debate, that there is real danger in some quarters of mistaking shadows for reality. I doubt whether those who criticise the broad framework of the plan approved by all parties in Parliament have reflected upon what is implicit in the idea of the Select Committees of the Central and Provincial Legislatures. In the earlier stages there is the association of these Committees with the Commission, through whatever procedure the Chairman and Members of the Commission, after placing themselves fully in touch with Indian opinion, may deem best calculated to enable them to discharge the duty entrusted to them. In due time the Commission will have completed its task and the matter will pass into other hands. At this moment as the Commission moves from the stage, the Central Legislature has, if it so desires, through chosen representatives of its own perhaps the greatest and most powerful means of influencing the further current of events. It is at this juncture invited, through some of its number, to sit with Parliament itself, acting in its turn through its own Joint Select Committee. Let us picture to ourselves the Joint Select Committee of Parliament and the Select Committee of this Legislature, sitting together in one of the Committee rooms of Westminster to consider the proposals of His Majesty's Government. These proposals will deal with a vast problem on which Parliament indeed has to decide, but where it is no more to the interest of Great Britain than it is to that of India that the issues should be clouded by avoidable difference or disagreement, and in regard to which therefore Parliament will naturally seek to reach decisions that command as great a measure as may be of reasoned Indian political support. Is it not fair to conclude that both the Joint Parliamentary Committee charged with the function of making final recommendations to Parliament, and earlier the Commission—each being masters within very wide limits of their own procedure—will desire to go to the furthest point that they deem possible, in order to carry along with them the convinced assent of the representatives of India, with whom they will under the plan proposed be

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working in close and intimate relations? To suggest that in these circumstances the effect of Indian opinion, if it avails itself freely of its opportunities, will be no greater than that which might be associated with the rôle of witnesses, and will not indeed be such as to influence the course of events throughout every stage, is to advance a proposition that no political experience can support, and that I should have thought no one who was versed in the process and management of public affairs would seriously maintain. Any such impression is as strangely at variance with the intentions of Parliament recorded in recent debates as it is with any such picture as I have sought to draw of the process in operation. It is surely obvious that what will be of supreme importance to India at both stages will be the quality of the men she has chosen to represent her, and it is difficult to conceive of any way in which Parliament could have given more clear indication of its desire both to give full weight to Indian opinion, and to recognise the dignity and position of the Indian Legislature. In such matters it is well to remember that constitutional forms are nothing but instruments in the hands of men, responding to the skill of the craftsman as the plain chisel in the hand of the expert sculptor. And as men are greater than the instruments they use, we gravely err if we suppose that complaint however loud of the tools, which circumstance has placed in our hands, will suffice to induce posterity to hold us guiltless, if in the result our workmanship whether through lack of will or of capacity, is found wanting. Whatever men may be tempted to think at the present moment, I dare predict that the searching inquest of history will not fail to return judgment against those who sought to use their power to hinder when it was in their power to help.

The other main point to which I invite attention is the statement, which has been widely and repeatedly made, that His Majesty's Government have deliberately offered an affront to India by the exclusion of Indians from the *personnel* of the Commission. I have said enough to make it plain why I do not think it reasonable for any Indian to feel that he or his country has been slighted by the decision of His Majesty's Government. The relative merits of the various methods of associating India with this business are, as I have said, matters on which opinion may legitimately be divided. But to go further and say that His Majesty's Government deliberately intended to affront Indian feeling is a very much more serious charge to make, and the first duty of those who make it is to satisfy themselves that it is well founded. Let me make it very plain that I expect Indians, as I would myself, to be sensitive of their honour. None, whether individuals or nations, can afford to be otherwise, for honour and self-respect lie at the foundation of all social life. But honour and self-respect are not enhanced by creating affronts in our imagination, where none in fact exist. For the essence of any such offence, as of rudeness in private life, lies in the intention behind the act, and no reasonable person would dream of blaming the conduct of another where the intention of discourtesy was lacking.

In the present case British statesmen of all parties have stated in terms admitting of no misconception that the appointment of a Parliamentary Commission was in no way intended as any affront to India. Time and again this assertion has been repeated, and I would ask in all sincerity by what right do leaders of Indian opinion, who are as jealous as I am

of their own good faith, and would resent as sharply as I any refusal to believe their word, impugn the good faith and disbelieve the plain word of others? I would deny to no man the right to state freely and frankly his honest opinion, to condemn—if he wishes—the action of His Majesty's Government in this regard, or to say that they acted unwisely or in misapprehension of the true feeling that exists in India. That again is a matter of opinion. But what no man is entitled to say—for it is quite simply not true—is that His Majesty's Government sought to offer a deliberate affront to Indian honour and Indian pride.

I have thought it right to speak plainly on these misunderstandings because they have been widely represented as the justification of some at any rate of the counsels, which urge Indians to abstain from all part or lot in the enquiry now to be set on foot. I feel at the same time a profound and growing conviction that those who would argue that such abstention will do no harm to the cause of India are dangerously deluding themselves and others. There are of course some who would wholly deny the moral right of Parliament to be the tribunal in this cause, but as I have said more than once, however much I may respect many of those who take this view, I do not pretend to be able to reconcile it with the actual situation which we to-day have to consider. I have during the time that I have been in India been careful to avoid saying anything that might magnify differences that must inevitably exist, and have never invited any man to forego principles to which he felt in conscience bound to subscribe. But let nobody suppose that he is assisting the realisation of his ideals by reluctance to look on facts as they are. It is in no spirit of argument or lack of sympathy with Indian aspirations that I repeat that India, if she desires to secure Parliamentary approval to political change, must persuade Parliament that such change is wisely conceived, and likely to benefit those affected by it. She has now the opportunity of making her persuasion felt, through the means of the Commission statutorily established. The Commission has been established with the assent and co-operation of all British parties. They will carry through their enquiry with, it is hoped, the generous assistance of all shades of Indian opinion. But whether such assistance is offered or withheld, the enquiry will proceed, and a report will be presented to Parliament on which Parliament will take whatever action it deems appropriate. Anyone who has been able to read the full report of the debates in Parliament on the motions to appoint the Commission must have been impressed by the evidence of spontaneous good-will towards India, with which the speeches of responsible spokesmen of all parties were instinct. This good-will would naturally be a factor of immense importance in determining the attitude of Parliament towards these questions, and I would very earnestly hope that it might not be lightly cast aside. And yet it is certain that an agitation, fostered and promoted by methods which have led to grave occurrences in the past, is bound to breed serious misgivings in the mind of the British Parliament, with whom at present lies the final decision in Indian political affairs.

What then in India or Great Britain is to be gained by a policy of boycott? Neither I nor anyone else can predict the effect upon the Commission's report, or later upon the mind of Parliament, if many of those who claim to speak for India decide at every stage to stand wholly aloof

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from a task in which Parliament has solicited their assistance and collaboration. It is clearly possible for people to stand aside, and withhold their contribution, just as it will be possible for the Commission to prosecute its enquiry, and with the assistance at its disposal reach conclusions in spite of such abstention. But at the least it would seem certain that such an attitude must interpose yet further obstacles to the discovery of that more excellent way of mutual understanding, which the best friends of India, of every race, well know to be requisite for her orderly evolution to nationhood. And meanwhile, in order to mobilise national resentment at an alleged deliberate affront, that has never been more than the fiction of men's imaginations, appeal will have been made, under guise of vindicating national self-respect which there has been no attempt to impair, to all the lowest and worst elements of suspicion, bitterness and hostility. Those were wise words of one of India's most distinguished sons a few weeks ago, which repeated the lesson—taught more than once of recent years—that it is easier to arouse than to allay such forces, which too readily pass beyond the control of those who invoke their aid.

I do not know whether I am sanguine in hoping that even at this hour it may be that words of mine might induce some of those, who aspire to guide their fellow-countrymen in India, to desist from a line of action, which at the best can only lead to negative results and disappointment, and may at the worst bring consequences of which India is unhappily not without experience. But in any case I feel it to be not less incumbent upon me now to state what I believe to be the truth in this matter than I lately judged it to be my duty to direct the attention of India to the communal antagonisms, that threatened the destruction of any attempts to build an Indian nation. The counsel I then gave was, I am glad to think, regarded as that of a well-wisher, sincerely desirous of assisting India. But the counsel of a friend must be independent of what at any particular moment some of those whom he addresses may desire to hear, and if that which I now give is less universally certain of acceptance, it is not less dictated by my desire to dissuade India, as I verily believe, from mistaking the path at one of the cross roads of her destiny.