

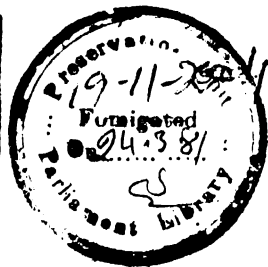
Monday, 29th August, 1927

THE
COUNCIL OF STATE DEBATES

VOLUME II, 1927

(29th August 1927 to 21st September 1927)

THIRD SESSION
OF THE
SECOND COUNCIL OF STATE, 1927



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COUNCIL OF STATE DEBATES

(OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE SECOND
COUNCIL OF STATE.)

VOLUME II—1927.

COUNCIL OF STATE.

Monday, the 29th August, 1927.

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

H. E. THE VICEROY : Gentlemen, little more than a year ago, I invited India to pause and consider seriously the communal situation, and I then appealed to leaders and rank and file to pursue peace and cultivate a spirit of toleration towards one another. For several months past I have had it in mind again to speak to the conscience and heart of India upon that question which still dwarfs all others in her life, but I have felt some doubt as to the most convenient means of doing it. I finally came to the conclusion that there was no more appropriate way of reaching the ear of the multitudes of India than by addressing them through the representatives of India in the Central Legislature. Accordingly I decided, in exercise of the statutory privilege conferred upon me by the Government of India Act, to ask the Members of the Legislature to meet me here to-day, and I am gratified that so large a number of Honourable Members of both Houses should have been able to attend.

Let me recall the salient incidents of India's recent history.

I am not exaggerating when I say that during the 17 months that I have been in India, the whole landscape has been overshadowed by the lowering clouds of communal tension, which have repeatedly discharged their thunderbolts, spreading far throughout the land their devastating havoc.

From April to July last year, Calcutta seemed to be under the mastery of some evil spirit, which so gripped the minds of men that in their insanity they held themselves absolved from the most sacred restraints of human conduct. Honest citizens went abroad in peril of their lives from fanatical attack, and the paralysis that overtook the commercial life of a great metropolis was only less serious than the civic loss that flowed from a naked and unashamed violation of the law, which perforce had to be reasserted by methods drastic and severe. Since then we have seen the

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same sinister influences at work in Pabna, Rawalpindi, Lahore and many other places, and have been forced to look upon that abyss of unchained human passions that lies too often beneath the surface of habit and of law.

In less than 18 months, so far as numbers are available, the toll taken by this bloody strife has been between 250 and 300 killed, and over 2,500 injured. While angry temper reigns we are not always sensible of the tragedy that lies behind figures such as these. The appreciation of it is dulled in the poisoned atmosphere, which for the time prevails, suggesting that such things are inseparable from the defence of principles jealously revered, and tempting men to forget how frequently in history the attempt has been made to cloak such crimes against society in honourable guise. But let us translate these things into terms of human sorrow and bereavement, and let our minds dwell in pity and in shame upon the broken human lives that they represent, mothers robbed of sons whose welfare they counted more precious than their own, the partnership of lives severed, the promise of young life denied. The sorrows of war are often mercifully redeemed, as many of us have known, by an element of self-sacrifice that transfigures and consecrates them to the achievement of some high purpose. But here, over these domestic battlefields, sorrow holds sway unredeemed by any such transforming power, and speaks only of the senseless and futile passions that have caused it.

Nor are the many houses of mourning the only measure of the damage which is being done to India. Is there not much in Indian social life that still cries out for remedy and reform and which enlightened India of to-day would fain mould otherwise? Nowhere perhaps is the task before the reformers more laborious; for in India civilisation is age-long, immemorial; and all things are deep-rooted in the past. United must be the effort if it is to gain success; and on the successful issue of such work depends the building of the Indian nation. Yet the would-be builders must approach their task sorely handicapped and with heavy heart, so long as the forces to which they would appeal are distracted and torn by present animosities. For nothing wholesome can flourish in unwholesome soil, and no one may hope to build a house to stand against the wind and the rain and the storm of life upon foundations that are rotten and unsound.

And what shall we say of the effect of these troubles upon India's progress in the field of constitutional evolution? There are many who hold that the very reforms that were designed to lead India along the peaceful road of political development have by reason of the political power that they conferred been directly responsible for the aggravation of these anxieties. True it most certainly is that national self-government must be founded upon the self-government and self-control of individuals. Where private citizens do not possess these qualities, political self-government of a nation is an empty name, and merely serves to disguise under an honourable title the continuance of something perilously akin to civil war.

And thus this problem, of which the reactions upon the future of India must be so intimate, is a problem with which Great Britain, not less than India, is vitally concerned. For India desires to win self-government, and it is Great Britain's self-appointed task to guide her to this end. Surely it is evident that those who desire to win, and those who desire to lend assistance in the winning, are mutually and vitally confronted with

the necessity of laying the spectre that besets the path of their common hopes. By the logic of our purpose or desires, we are partners in the task, and no one of us can here shirk or decline responsibility. Of the burden which India's unhappy disunion imposes on Government, the figures I gave earlier in my speech are eloquent. It is our inalienable duty to preserve order and to vindicate the law. We may make mistakes in doing it; there are few human beings who can avoid them; but if we make them, they are, believe me, mistakes made in the cause of a genuine attempt to discharge the difficult and painful duty that is ours.

But I cannot reconcile it with my conception of a real and effective partnership in this matter between Great Britain and India to confine the responsibility, either of myself or my Government, to a mere repression of disorder. Necessary as that is, the situation, as I see it to-day, demands a more constructive effort.

A year ago an appeal was made to me by many men of influence and distinction that I should take the initiative in convening a conference to examine any means that might hold out promise of amelioration. For reasons which seemed to me convincing, I thought it inadvisable to take that step; and I have not wavered in my conviction that my decision was well-founded. But the passage of events between that time and this has compelled me perpetually to review the grounds on which I then formed my judgment. I had hoped that, in answer to my appeal to the communities, it might not have been impossible that they themselves, freely taking counsel together, might have reached an agreement genuine, convinced and thus effective, that would have brought much-desired and long-sought relief from these distractions. In this respect my hopes have been disappointed. Partial agreements, it is true, have been reached in regard to this or that aspect of the problem, reflecting much honour upon those who exposed themselves, I do not doubt, to considerable risk with many of their own friends in making them. But, so far as I can judge, those agreements have failed to offer that fundamental solution of the problem, and to gain that measure of acceptance, which are necessary if we are to win through the present distress. And one condition remains constant, which is, as I said last year, that no conference can offer any hope of success unless those participating in it are truly inspired with a will to peace.

It was with real pleasure that I observed statements recently in the press which indicated that fresh efforts might be made to bring together Hindus and Muslims for the discussion of these matters. Any such attempt deserves the active good-will and support of all who care for India's welfare and good name. I myself have long been considering anxiously whether any action by Government could help to stimulate that general desire of reconciliation without which nothing can be done. It is not easy, or perhaps possible, for me to give a positive or assured answer to these reflections. In matters of this kind, each man must search his own heart and answer for himself whether he does in truth and without reserve desire to play his part as an apostle of peace, and whether those associated with him are like-minded. But this I can say. If it were represented to me by the responsible leaders of the great communities that they thought a useful purpose might be served by my convening a conference myself with the object of frankly facing the causes of these miserable differences, and then in a spirit of determined good-will considering whether any practical solution or mitigation of

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them could be found, I should welcome it as evidence of a firm resolve to leave no way unsearched that might disclose means of rescuing India from her present unhappy state. And, if these representations were made by those who occupy such a position in their communities as to permit me to assume that the communities would accept and abide by any decisions at which they might arrive on their behalf, then, allying myself with them and such other leaders of public thought as might be willing to assist, I should gladly and cordially throw my whole energies into this honourable quest.

I have been told that any such efforts are foredoomed to failure, and that all we might accomplish would be to contribute a few more barren pages to the story of unprofitable discussions. I do not underestimate the difficulties; I do not minimise the risk of failure. But difficulties are meant to be surmounted, and outward success or failure is not the sole or the final test of conduct in this sphere. After all, many of the greatest ventures in human history have sprung from what the world deemed failures. At any given time the evil forces of life may be so strong that the efforts we can make against them appear unavailing. Yet to allow this thought to drive us into a posture of feeble acquiescence in something against which our whole moral sense rebels, and into losing our will for better things, this surely would be deliberately to turn our back upon everything that makes life worth living.

There is an epitaph in a small country churchyard of England upon an English country gentleman, whose lot had been cast in those unhappy days of English history, when England too was torn by religious strife. It runs as follows :—

“ In the year 1643, when all things sacred were either demolished or profaned, this Church was built by Sir Francis Shirley, Baronet, whose singular praise it is to have done the best things in the worst times, and to have hoped them in the most calamitous.”

I doubt whether higher testimony could be paid to any man, or more concise expression given to the forces by which this world is moved.

There must surely have been times during these latter months when Indian patriots, gazing upon their motherland, bruised by this interne-cine and senseless struggle, must have been hard put to it to maintain their faith in India's destiny untarnished, and when many must have been even tempted to hate the very name of religion, which ought to be man's greatest solace and reward. Yet may it not be that the purpose of these trials has been to test the calibre of our faith, and that some day when the testing time is past, those who with trust in their hearts, and hope in their eyes, have striven unceasingly to spread kindly feeling among their fellowmen, will reap for India a reward that will repay tenfold the bitter cost at which it has been purchased?

You will forgive me, Gentlemen, for speaking in a strain that may seem to some to accord ill with the hard facts of life and the common atmosphere of politics. But I believe—and I think India believes—in the power of spiritual forces to assert themselves over their material expression by which they may often be betrayed. And it is because of this belief that is hers and mine that I have ventured once more to trace out the only path along which India can lead her peoples to take their appropriate part in the fulfilment of the ordered purpose for humanity.