

THE
 GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME GOVERNMENT.

It may be presumed that the public now sufficiently understands that the question as to that part of the administration of her Majesty's Indian territories which is conducted at home is in no wise involved in the rights or claims of what once was, and still in name is, the East India Company. Those rights have long since been determined: the part still played by the proprietors of East India stock in the election of an administrative board is merely intrusted to them for the public advantage; and we are now simply to discuss the form and mode in which India may be best and most conveniently governed, reference being had to English politics and facts as they exist, rather than as they might be under the most perfect theory.

Nature of the question.

From the peculiar circumstances attending our acquisition of India has arisen a system of government, the main principle of which seems to be so well approved by all parties, as, under present circumstances, better and more practicable than any other, that there can be little doubt of its retention; and it were useless here to argue the matter. That principle consists in the exercise of the right of initiation and the

Assumed main principle.

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management of details by a permanent board free from direct party influences and mutations, and the possession by her Majesty's Government of an absolute power of control over the proceedings of this administrative body, hitherto called the Court of Directors. Measures of ordinary administration do not necessarily or generally originate with the ministry of the day; and by the aid of the independent non-political and experienced Court our Indian policy is more uniform, better considered, and less exposed to the vicissitudes of party warfare, than that of other departments of the state. Indeed the more one learns of the mode in which matters are conducted by parliamentary ministers, and of the influences to which they are subjected, the more one is convinced of the excessive good fortune of India, in being comparatively free from such evils. It is agreed, then, that on the one hand some such body as the Court of Directors must be preserved, and on the other, that as, under our constitution, Parliament, and the ministry which commands a majority in Parliament, must of necessity be all-powerful, the cabinet of the day must retain an absolute power of control.

Whether this conjoint government is carried on in the Name of Crown or Company. name of the Crown or under the traditional appellation of the Company—whether the Directors render fealty to the Crown or the Crown exercises authority over the Directors—is of little importance as concerns the Home Government; but I shall afterwards have occasion to notice the advantages to be derived from the use of the name of the Crown in India.

Premising, then, that no radical change can be made with advantage; that on the whole the Indian administration has not been ill-conducted; and that comparatively, at least, it is infinitely to be preferred to (for instance) the Colonial Office, we must consider what

improvements can be made while we preserve the main principle. I think it will be found that there are considerable imperfections and weaknesses which in no way involve this principle. Although the present machine, complicated as it is, may seem in this country to work tolerably well, it is in India that its defects are felt; it is there that the results of its cumbrousness and slowness are every day practically experienced, acting as a clog and drag on onward progress. We should therefore, even whilst satisfied with the present solution of an English political difficulty, consider the claim of the government and people of India to an improvement of our machinery and acceleration of our pace. In truth, I believe that with all its faults the Home Government deliberates wisely and well, and that the greater part of all that emanates from it is worthy of much commendation. But it is in matters referred home from India for *previous* sanction that the difficulty of obtaining a prompt and decisive answer is found to be an evil of the most serious description, and one which is the subject of much local complaint. Whatever may be the rule in future, it is certain that hitherto it has been considered necessary to refer almost all important measures of internal administration for the previous orders of the Home Government, and that such a reference is apt to be looked upon as a sort of postponement *sine die*. The matter may or may not be revived by answer from England in from one to ten years, but for the present there is an end of it. Many important measures are discussed and changes suggested—all parties seem to approve—but at last comes the too often fatal and conclusive announcement—“the matter has been referred for the orders of the Court of Directors.” Now, I by no means impute it to the fault of the Directors that this

Nature of present defects.

reference should frequently be, in fact, an indefinite postponement. That it should be so follows, and must follow, from the nature of the Home Government, from the complicity of the arrangements, the unbusiness-like construction of a large, nearly unpaid, and heterogeneous body, the great division of authority, and the intermeddling of a separate establishment in Cannon Row. However well inclined each individual may be, it is not to be expected that, regarding a great Indian question which gives scope for much difference of opinion among professional men, and to English minds is infinitely complex, it is not to be expected, I say, that the Chairman and Secretaries at the India House, the Clerks at the Board of Control, the President and Secretaries of the Board, and four-and-twenty easy-going elected Directors* in a constant state of rotation, and without any permanent division of business, or any fixed and professional leaders, that they should all, in any moderate time, come to a business-like decision on such a question. There is great security for their doing nothing rashly, but a very great temptation to let things remain as they are; while in fact there is immense scope and necessity for progress. This is the evil which, if we cannot altogether remedy, I believe that we may at least greatly mitigate. As it now stands, it does, beyond all question, very much retard the advance and improvement of the Indian administration; and it is on this account that I fear the too great disposition now prevailing in this country—“*quieta non movere*”—to suppose that, because nothing goes excessively wrong at home, we may let well alone. I am far from wishing to see too active a Home Government, but I think that we

* I give the different authorities in the order in which business comes before them, commencing with the Chairman of the Directors and ending with the Directors collectively.

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should render it competent to keep pace with and abet Indian progress, and should secure this much, that it shall not act as a drag and over-check on an efficient Indian Government.

The Supreme Government has at present, according to the letter of the Act of Parliament, full power to act in everything, subject only to the subsequent orders of the Home Government: for instance, it may make any law, but is bound to repeal it if ordered to do so. In practice, however, the communication being now so speedy, and the inconvenience of reversal of accomplished acts so great, it has happened, as I have already stated, that most measures of importance (wars excepted) are referred home for previous sanction; and especially if an expenditure exceeding a very moderate sum is to be incurred, such a reference must be made even in matters of comparative little importance. Now, if it is necessary to wait for the decision of the Home Government, and that decision is not very promptly given, this practice is in fact a deprivation of the power of acting, and it is useless to give the Supreme Government a general authority over the several presidencies if it have not itself sufficient power.

The prodigiously detailed form in which everything is sent home, both by the Supreme and by every local Government, is one great cause of the slowness of the Home Government. Such masses of papers are received that the essential information is almost lost, or can only be gathered by intense labour. This practice, no doubt, originated in the detailed information of commercial matters necessary to a commercial company, but should now be materially altered.

An important question then arises at the outset, of which we must first dispose. Is the General Government of India to be really in India or in England? Are the

minor presidencies to be supervised by the Supreme Government or by the Home Government direct; and what is the degree of control which should be exercised by the Home Government over the Supreme Government in India? I think that this subject has not been sufficiently considered. It seems to me that there is not so much question of the relative power of the Board of Control and Court of Directors as of the Home Government generally and the Indian Supreme Government.

It is of the very utmost importance in every way that we should have one efficient central moving power for the whole of India, an active initiative centre, and we must decide whether this power is to be vested in the Governor-General and Council or in the Home Government. We may either intrust the Government of India to the former, and leave to the latter only the task of checking, controlling, and supervising its proceedings; or we may vest in the Home Government the imperial power—the direction of the several different presidencies—and merely give to one local government a political power of control in emergency, when time does not admit of a reference home.

When the presidencies in India were detached and separate settlements in different parts of a great continent, they were supposed to have no internal connection with one another; each was governed separately, and the Governor-General of Bengal had merely an exceptional power of control. But when India became one great country, subject to our universal rule, it was apparent that a central government was proper and necessary. It seems to have been the intention of the last Act of Parliament to vest this power in the Supreme Government; but then the Home Government still retained a simultaneous and parallel authority.

While our empire has been consolidated in India, the means of communication with England have been so much expedited that it is now possible to refer things home in a comparatively short time. The subordinate presidencies correspond both with the Government of India and with the Home Government direct at the same time ; and it has happened that, while the Government of India has by law an absolute control over the legislation and finance of the inferior presidencies (the very subjects which might, with least injury, be referred home), it does not, in fact, interfere much in executive matters. The latter are, for the most part, carried on by the local governments in correspondence with the home authorities, whose position, however calculated to digest laws or regulate finance, does not fit them for active executive functions. Now this division of authority is very injurious. What is several people's duty is no one's duty, and there seems to be a great want of executive generalization in the management of India. We must now determine either to make the Government of India thoroughly efficient for the management of *all* India, to relieve it from the clashing of a parallel authority, to subject the local governments to it completely, exclusively, and in everything, and to leave it to manage the empire, rendering an account to the Government at home ; or we must relieve the local governments from a system of double checks and controls which hinder and embarrass them in some things, without prompting them or pushing them forward in others, and place them directly under the Home Government. We have altogether in the whole Indian system too many checks and too little to urge forward and ensure combined and uniform action. Everything is done disjointedly by individual efforts. A Sir Thomas Monro starts up as a great prophet in one age and place,

a Mr. Thomason in another; but the results of their experience are nowhere united. They differ in many and important points: opposite systems are followed at the present day, and the right hand of the empire does not even know what the left hand doeth. There is intense centralization of checks, but no centralization whatever of execution beyond the limits of each separate Governor or Lieutenant-Governor. It was clearly the intention of Parliament to remedy this evil, but the object was not sufficiently effected, and another effort to the same end must be made. Meantime steam has raised the question (which has rendered it necessary for me to discuss the matter in this chapter), Shall the central executive be in India or in London? If we lived under an efficient despot, who could at once select, appoint, and maintain a Board of the best working-men in the empire to sit in Leadenhall-Street, there would be, if not a preponderance, at least a very strong array, of arguments in favour of London. We ought to be, and I hope may be, pretty free from wars in future; and for matters of internal administration, the time now consumed in the actual transit of despatches between the presidency Governors and Leadenhall-Street would be (supposing a centralized and untrammelled Home Government, which would answer as promptly and decidedly as the Governor-General) no overwhelming objection. It would seem a good and natural arrangement, that the best of tried Indian talent—now most lamentably thrown away after retirement to England—should be made available; that first-rate Indian ex-officials, whose health has failed in India, or who claim in a cessation of exile the reward of their labours, should be employed in that portion of the government which can now be conducted at home. We should thus obtain a permanence and a concentration of the ability of successive periods, such as

we have not had in the constantly changing Governors-General and Councils. Recent practice would from time to time be added to matured experience; the assistance of jurists, too, would be more accessible than in India; and a very efficient Government might be formed. It is true that men might hardly be the same exclusively-devoted and energetic public servants in this country as in India, where, isolated as they are, their whole souls are in their official duties; it is true that in lapse of time personal Indian knowledge and Indian associations might wane; it is true that, while in India a man's physical energies generally decay before his mind, and he retires before he ceases to be efficient, in England a great and good man might decline into senility, and it might be difficult to get rid of him; but still, all things considered, I believe that London might be the seat of government if, as I have said, we lived under a despotic constitution, and could in any way secure the appointment of the best men. This, however, is the difficulty; England is not a despotic country, and it would be difficult to maintain a good despotic government in England. The Court of Directors, as at present constituted, is not at all of the nature of an executive body. Executive efficiency is always in the inverse ratio to numbers; it would be necessary very much to reduce the numbers and to form a permanent Board of paid men of business. Is it possible, under our political constitution, to secure the impartial appointment of such a Board? It is generally supposed that it is not. The number being limited, we must have not only some, but *all*, good men—and not only good men, but the very best men. It may be doubted whether we could depend on so much public virtue; still more may it be doubted whether, if such a Board were formed, they could, in this country, be preserved free from various personal influences. Yet, with all the disad-

vantages, I confess that I should much prefer to intrust the central administration to a Board at home, constituted as I am about to propose, rather than to the present Council of India, located in Calcutta, in a bad climate, always separated from the Commander-in-Chief, and generally from the Governor-General, and constituted in a manner inconsistent with executive efficiency. But if, on the other hand, the Council of India be posted permanently and advantageously in a healthy climate, where the presence of the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief, and the heads of departments may be secured, and if it be rendered strong and efficient enough in its constitution, then it will be infinitely preferable to intrust to the Governor-General and Council the initiative and general executive direction of all things; and to make the Home Board merely a deliberative and controlling body, to whom the Indian Government should be responsible for its acts.

Still it is impossible and undesirable altogether to free the Indian Government from a practical obligation in some degree previously to ascertain and consult the wishes of the Home Government. The latter must have entire power over the government in India, and, if efficient, its policy in large and lasting questions is likely to be more uniform and better considered than that of successive governors of varied views and experience. It would be, therefore, highly inconvenient that, in very important matters which admit of a reference home, the Indian government should act without the knowledge of the Home Government, or without giving it an opportunity of expressing its views. I would not attempt to abrogate the reasonable and discreet use of a wholesome practice. But I would remedy the evils which have hitherto accrued from it by confining these references to really im-

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