The decision of newly independent India and Pakistan in 1947 to remain within the Commonwealth came as a surprise to many well-informed observers. In the light of nationalist statements made during the years of war, it had been expected that India, if not Pakistan, would quit the Commonwealth; and in the final headlong rush to independence little discussion was directed to clarifying this particular issue. A full explanation of what happened and why it happened must be sought in the history of the subject.

Despite its great importance, the subject of India’s place in the Commonwealth in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has received little attention from scholars, and particularly from Indian scholars. Dr Mehrotra’s crystal-clear, incisive, well-balanced and thorough study is therefore to be warmly welcomed. It reveals the main phases through which Indian consideration of the subject passed, and also gives a new dimension to our understanding of the part which India played in defining and re-defining the Commonwealth idea. His book therefore forms a contribution both to Commonwealth and modern Indian history.

Dr Mehrotra first analyses the acceptance of the view in the nineteenth century both in India and Britain that India was to follow the model of colonial government leading to dominion status. This leads to a discussion of the nature of the transition in thought which took place in the first quarter of the twentieth century culminating in the view that complete independence, which it is important to note did not mean secession, must be India’s aim. Naturally this inquiry is conducted with major reference to the Indian National Congress, but Dr Mehrotra also examines the attitudes of the Muslim League, and in a particularly valuable chapter draws fresh attention to the contribution of the Liberals and the Liberal Federation, whose activities have tended to be obscured by the failure of the system of dyarchy which they tried to work after 1919.

Dr Mehrotra succeeds in showing that it was the simultaneous growth and enlargement of the idea of Commonwealth in India and of the concept of dominion status in the Commonwealth at large which made it feasible in 1947 for India and Pakistan to become Commonwealth members in the fullest sense.

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the British Empire into the modern Commonwealth has been one of the most remarkable events of our age and provides a perennial source of interest to the students of history. The subject has a special significance for students from those parts of the Empire which have grown or are growing into the sphere of the Commonwealth. It is a record of life which is their own. And even where it is not directly and immediately so, it affords a wider perspective which is essential to the proper understanding of the histories of their own individual countries. It would, for example, be a mistake to examine the history of India under British rule merely as the outcome of her relationship with Great Britain without taking into account the developments, both past and contemporaneous, in other parts of the Empire, for it would mean ignoring some of the deepest, most essential and most fruitful factors that have gone into its making. Neither logic nor accident but historical experience has been the mainspring of British Imperial policy. Nor can it be denied that the history of the British Empire has a certain unity and rhythm of its own.

The study of the growth of the idea of Commonwealth in India is full of interest not only with reference to Indian history, but to Commonwealth history as a whole. The modern Commonwealth is a living monument to the constructive genius of the British people, but it has been made as much by nationalism in the distant parts of the Empire as by British statesmanship. Enthusiasts and heretics, imperialists and nationalists—all have contributed to its shaping. It has been truly a work of challenge and response. If Canadians are proud of the fact that their country has played a major part in the long, peaceful evolution through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which has transformed the British Empire into the British Commonwealth, Indians may take pride in the fact that in the evolution of the modern multi-racial Commonwealth their country has played a significant and often a decisive role.

The contribution which the older Dominions made to the evolution of the Commonwealth and their individual conceptions of the latter have been examined by many eminent scholars. The story has not been told from the Indian point of view. The present study is a modest attempt to fill this gap. It concerns itself with a neglected aspect of both Commonwealth and Indian history.

This book is a study of the attitudes of the three major political parties in India—the Indian National Congress, the National Liberal
Federation of India, and the All-India Muslim League—towards the Empire-Commonwealth during the years 1885–1929. The reasons why the present inquiry has been confined to these three political parties may be stated at once: they alone were all-India organizations worth the name; they alone did any conscious thinking on the subject; and between them they could well claim to represent the main currents of organized public opinion in the country. Our starting point is the year 1885, when the Indian National Congress—the party which was to lead the Indian freedom movement—was organized. We bring our inquiry to a close in 1929, the year in which the British Government clearly affirmed their intention of granting India Dominion Status in the fullness of time and in which also the Congress rejected that goal in favour of 'Complete Independence'. The period covered in this book is momentous in Indian history and far more so in Commonwealth history as anyone who tries to recall the developments from, say, Gladstone's unsuccessful attempt in 1886 to give 'Home Rule' to Ireland to the passing of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, will realize.

The main theme of this study is the growth of the Commonwealth idea in India. It is not a political or constitutional history of the period. As internal politics dominated the scene and exercised a direct and immediate influence on the attitudes of the various parties towards the Empire-Commonwealth, they have been closely examined. An attempt has, however, been made to confine the study of domestic issues to what is strictly relevant to an analysis of the principal theme.

The realm of intellect offers great opportunities for more systematic and intensive cultivation but rarely a virgin field. Intellectual discoverers and explorers seem to have been everywhere. There is no dearth of books dealing with the history of the Indian national movement or with the constitutional and political issues of the period. Stray references in such general works to the attitude of Indians towards the Empire-Commonwealth are not hard to find. Intra-Commonwealth affairs have found able historians, but there have been only a few scholars such as Professors W. K. Hancock, A. B. Keith and P. N. S. Mansergh, who have really attempted to bring the light of Commonwealth history to bear on the study of Indian problems. Writers on Indian history, even when they have been British, have generally lacked the necessary Commonwealth perspective. The two notable exceptions have been Professor John Coatman and Sir Reginald Coupland. No attempt has, however, been made so far to examine closely how politically-minded Indians thought about the
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Empire-Commonwealth. What did the British Empire mean to the early Indian nationalists? What was their idea of India's place therein? How did the ideal of self-government for India on the Dominion model grow? How did the concept of Dominion Status come to be applied to India? What did it signify to Indian nationalists? What part did India play in the evolution of the modern Commonwealth? Why was India's continued association with the Commonwealth valued by people in India and in England? These are some of the questions to which answers have been attempted in the following pages.

This book has grown out of a thesis I submitted on the same subject for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London in 1960. I am grateful to the British Council for the award of a scholarship for two years (1958–60) and to the University of Saugor for granting me study leave for the period, which enabled me to pursue my studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. I should like to thank the staff of the Public Record Office, London, the India Office Library, the British Museum, the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, and the University of Birmingham Library for their courtesy and helpfulness. I am indebted to Mr Dermot Morrah for permission to use the Curtis Papers and to the Librarian of the University of Birmingham for allowing me leave to use the Austen Chamberlain Papers. Professor Nicholas Mansergh of St John's College, Cambridge, Professor Kenneth Robinson, Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, Professor Gerald S. Graham of King's College and Dr Mary Cumpston of Birkbeck College, London, have read this book in typescript and I am grateful to them for their many criticisms and suggestions. My greatest debt is to Professor C. H. Philips, Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, who, amidst his numerous preoccupations, found time to guide me in my research and has very kindly written a Foreword to this book. I must record my grateful thanks to the Publications Committee of the School of Oriental and African Studies, particularly to its Secretary, Mr J. R. Bracken, for including this book for publication in their series of Studies on Modern Asia and Africa. My thanks are due also to Mrs Margaret Morris, Mr R. A. Hasson and my wife for assisting me in preparing the work for press.
THE GROWTH OF INDIAN NATIONALISM AND BRITISH POLICY IN INDIA, 1885–1910

In 1884 a distinguished ex-Indian civil servant, Sir John Strachey, delivered a series of lectures on India at the University of Cambridge. He began by telling his audience: ‘This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India—that there is not, and never was an India....’ Nor need it be feared, Strachey added, that the bonds of union fashioned by British rule could ever ‘in any way lead towards the growth of a single Indian nationality’. ‘However long may be the duration of our dominion,’ he remarked, ‘however powerful may be the centralizing attraction of our government, or the influence of the common interests which grow up, no such issue can follow.’ To Strachey it seemed ‘impossible’ ‘that men of Bombay, the Punjab, Bengal and Madras should ever feel that they belong to one great Indian nation’.

Next year, in 1885, another Indian civil servant, Henry Cotton, published a book entitled New India or India in Transition, in which he pointed out that significant changes were taking place in India and a new nation was rising before their eyes. Mainly as a result of British rule, wrote Cotton, and especially because of the growth of English education, a feeling of nationality was fast developing in the country which needed only an organization to crystallize.

In the event, it was not Strachey’s but Cotton’s judgement which proved to be correct. Before the year 1885 ran out, the spirit of nationality in India had found a body in the Indian National Congress.

1. B. 1823; entered Bengal Civil Service 1842; Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces 1874–6; member of Viceroy’s council 1876–80; returned to England 1880; member of Secretary of State’s council 1885–95; d. 1907.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. Ibid.
5. Henry John Stedman Cotton, b. 1845; entered Indian Civil Service 1867; Chief Commissioner of Assam 1896–1902; KCSI 1902; retired 1902; President of the Indian National Congress 1904; MP 1906–10; d. 1915.
6. Cotton, New India or India in Transition (1885), pp. 3 ff. Charles Dilke had noted these developments as early as 1867 on a visit to India. See Greater Britain (1868), vol. ii, p. 388.
The factors which contributed towards the growth of a national movement in India may be noted briefly. The British *Raj*, which united and held together the vast sub-continent and ensured its peace and security, made a pan-Indian political consciousness possible. The increasing influence of a free press and the progress of railways, posts and telegraphs broke down barriers which separated different sections of the communities in India and facilitated their union for a common purpose. The spread of English education and of Western ideas of liberty, equality and nationality provided the motive force. It was encouraged by the growth of self-government in the Colonies\(^1\) and the national movements in Europe—the unification of Italy and Germany, and, more especially, the Home Rule agitation in Ireland. Economic and social discontent, racial bitterness, and cultural revivalism, all played an important part.

The Congress, however, did not begin as an organization in opposition to British rule. It owed its origin largely to the initiative of a retired British civil servant, Allan Octavian Hume;\(^2\) it was blessed by the Viceroy of the day, Lord Dufferin.\(^3\) Hume had the sympathy and wisdom to understand that 'the broadcast dissemination of Western education and Western ideas of liberty, the rights of subjects, public spirit and patriotism' had let loose forces in India which needed control and direction into channels through which they might 'flow, not to ravage and destroy but to fertilize and regenerate'.\(^4\) The Congress was to serve the purpose of 'a safety-valve', an 'overt and constitutional channel' for the discharge of the Indian ferment.\(^5\) Its fundamental objectives were laid down to be the promotion of Indian nationality, the social, moral and political advancement of the Indian people, and 'the consolidation of the union between England and India, by securing the modification of such of its conditions as may be unjust or injurious'.\(^6\)

\(^1\) The term 'Colonies' is used here and in the following pages in the sense of the self-governing Colonies, which later came to be called the Dominions.

\(^2\) B. 1829; son of the Radical politician Joseph Hume (1777–1855); entered Bengal Civil Service 1849; awarded CB for services in Mutiny 1860; Secretary in the Revenue and Agricultural Department, Government of India 1870–9; retired 1882; General Secretary of the Indian National Congress 1885–1906; left India 1892; d. 1912.

\(^3\) Frederick Temple Hamilton-Temple Blackwood, first Marquis of Dufferin and Ava (1826–1902). Under-Secretary for India 1864–6; Governor-General of Canada 1872–8; Ambassador at St Petersburg 1879–81 and at Constantinople 1881–2; Special Commissioner to Egypt 1882–3; Viceroy of India 1884–8; Ambassador at Rome 1889–91 and at Paris 1891–6.


\(^5\) Ibid., p. 77.

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 47.
'Unswerving loyalty to the British Crown' was to be 'the keynote of the institution'. The continued affiliation of India to Great Britain, at any rate for a period, far exceeding the range of any practical forecast, was considered 'to be absolutely essential to the interests of our own National Development'. The Congress was to work not to supplant the British Government in India, but to supplement it. It was to acknowledge frankly and gratefully the many blessings of British rule and to seek their extension. Real grievances were to be voiced and reasonable concessions demanded in a loyal and temperate manner. The people of India were to be educated into 'a genuine parliamentary frame of mind' and the virtues of united, patient, constitutional agitation. The authorities in India and England were to be acquainted with the needs and aspirations of their Indian fellow-subjects. Official acts and omissions were to be subjected to fair criticism. Suggestions and modifications were to be offered in order to make the British administration in India more beneficent. The Congress was to insist that British policy in India be guided by the noble spirit which inspired the Act of 1833 and the Queen's proclamation of 1858. It was to demand that the rights and privileges of British citizenship be gradually extended to Indians.

For at least twenty years the Indian National Congress retained the spirit and temper of its founders. No less than four Britons presided over its annual sessions during these years; its strategy and tactics continued to be determined by men like Hume and William Wedderburn. This close association of Britons imparted to the Congress a liberal and moderate character. By precept and example these devoted

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1 Allan Octavian Hume, p. 53. 8 Ibid. 8 Ibid., p. 65.
4 The Charter Act of 1833 (3 & 4 Will. 4, c. 85) laid down that no native of India 'shall by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour, or any of them, be disabled from holding any place, or employment' under the East India Company. For the full text see A. B. Keith, Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy (1922), vol. i, pp. 266-74.
5 The Queen's proclamation of November 1, 1858, said, among other things, that, 'so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to office in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability, and integrity duly to discharge'. For the full text see ibid., pp. 382-6.
7 B. 1838; entered Indian Civil Service 1860; Judge of the Bombay High Court 1885; Officiating Chief Secretary to Bombay Government 1886-7; retired 1887; MP 1893-1900; Chairman of the Indian Parliamentary Committee; President of the Indian National Congress 1889 and 1910; d. 1918.
British friends impressed upon the Congress strict constitutionalism in its methods, firm loyalty to the British Government, and faith in the sense of freedom and justice of the British people.

The early Congress was a dignified debating society. Every year at Christmas time a few hundred educated and intelligent Indians from all parts of the country met in some big town for three or four days, reviewed the events of the year, passed a number of academic resolutions and dispersed to meet again. They gave voice to the public opinion of the country taking shape, presented their demands, criticized the shortcomings of the administration and offered their suggestions. Their tone was loyal and moderate; their criticism lacked bitterness. They were no professional politicians or agitators. Nor were they rainbow-chasers or whistlers for the moon. They urged redress of acknowledged grievances and demanded practical reforms. They never desired to subvert British rule or substitute another in its place.

Official testimony on this score is overwhelming. Dufferin wrote to the Secretary of State in 1886: 'Amongst the natives I have met there are a considerable number who are both able and sensible, and upon whose loyal co-operation one could undoubtedly rely.' He admitted that ‘the objects even of the more advanced party are neither very dangerous nor very extravagant’. Lord Lansdowne wrote in 1891 that the Congress was ‘reasonable and moderate in its tone’ and that ‘most of its proposals have reference to questions which have at one time or another been treated by the Government of India as subjects open to discussion’. ‘With a free Press and the right of public meeting’, he added, ‘we shall always have some organization of this kind to deal

1 The main demands of the Congress during this period were: the holding of simultaneous examinations for the Indian Civil Service in India and in England; the reform of the legislative councils; the increased employment of Indians in the public services; the separation of the executive and the judicial functions; the fixity and permanence in land revenue; increased grants for education; the reduction in military expenditure; commissions for Indians in the army; the reform of the Secretary of State's council; periodical inquiry into the administration of India; and the appointment of Indians to the executive councils of the Governors and the Viceroy.

2 Dufferin to Kimberley, April 26, 1886, Dufferin Papers, vol. 19, No 17.

3 Ibid.

4 Henry Charles Keith Petry-Fitzmaurice, fifth Marquis of Lansdowne (1845–1927). Under-Secretary for War 1872–4; Under-Secretary for India 1880; Governor-General of Canada 1883–8; Viceroy of India 1888–94; Secretary of State for War 1895–1900; Foreign Secretary 1900–5.

with. I doubt whether it could, upon the whole, assume a more in-
ocuous shape than that which it now takes.  

1 Lord Elgin, whose vice-
royalty (1894–8) is said to mark the beginning of Indian unrest, did 
not agree with the opinion of the Secretary of State that Congressmen 
were disloyal. ‘Remember, I do not myself admit’, he wrote, ‘that these 
men are disloyal. Some of them are discontented men, and discontent 
may of course verge on disloyalty; but I do not believe that a man like 
Mr [Pherozeshah] Mehta  

2 wishes to overthrow the British Govern-
ment.’ Elgin believed that they were ‘men of intelligence’ whose 
proper place was in the legislative councils.  

6 His own experience was 
‘that the leading men . . . of the Congress party, when brought face to 
face with practical administration, whether in the form of legislation or 
otherwise, are more disposed to deal with it reasonably than dema-
gogues further west’.  

6 Even the Conservative Secretary of State, Lord 
George Hamilton, who often complained of the lack of active loyalty 
in India and despaired of the future of the British Raj, remarked in 
1899: ‘I look upon the Congress movement as an uprising of Indian 
Native opinion against, not British rule, but Anglo-Indian bureau-
cracy.’  

The truth of Hamilton’s remark was vindicated almost immediately 
afterwards. When the South African War broke out in October 1899, 
Indian nationalists displayed what Lord Curzon described as ‘a most 
exemplary and gratifying loyalty’.  

9 ‘There is considerable annoyance’, the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State, ‘that no Native troops are sent [to South Africa], on the ground that it implies a distrust of their 

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1 Lansdowne Papers, MSS. Eur. D.558/IX/III, No. 5. 
3 B. 1845; barrister of the Bombay High Court; President of the Indian National Congress 1890; d. 1915. 
4 Elgin to Hamilton, August 25, 1896, Elgin Papers, MSS. Eur. F.84/14, No. 34. 
5 Elgin to Hamilton, April 21, 1897, ibid., MSS. Eur. F.84/15, No. 16. 
6 Elgin to Hamilton, December 23, 1897, ibid., MSS. Eur. F.84/15, No XLVI. 
7 Lord George Francis Hamilton (1845–1927), Under-Secretary for India 1874–80; First Lord of the Admiralty 1885–6 and 1886–92; Secretary of State for India 1874–80; First Lord of the Admiralty 1885–6 and 1886–92; Secretary of State for India 1895–1903. 
8 Hamilton to Curzon, October 20, 1899, Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F.111/ 158, No. 54. 
9 George Nathaniel, first Marquis Curzon of Kedleston (1859–1925). Under-
Secretary for India 1891–2; Viceroy of India 1898–1905; Lord President of the Council and member of the War Cabinet 1916–18; Foreign Secretary 1919–24. 
10 Curzon to Hamilton, December 28, 1899, Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F.111/ 158, No. 64. A similar phenomenon had been witnessed in 1885 when a war with Russia seemed imminent.
loyalty and a derogation of the great position that India holds in the Empire.\textsuperscript{1}

The antipathy of early Indian nationalists to the bureaucracy did not imply any want of loyalty to the Throne or the Empire. They always spoke of the Sovereign in most respectful terms and were effusive in their professions of loyalty, which at times even irritated some of their ultra-radical friends in England. Queen Victoria was almost venerated in India and usually referred to as the 'Mother'. Sidney Low,\textsuperscript{2} who accompanied the Prince of Wales during the latter's visit to India in the winter of 1905-6, noted that there was not much disloyalty even among the agitators of the platform and the press, still less among those who listened to their exhortations. "The journey of the Prince of Wales showed", he wrote, "that there is a deep and widespread attachment to the Imperial House among the Indian people, and that even where there is discontent with the mode of government there is no feeling against the Throne. Nor, I imagine, is there any hostility to the Empire and the Flag, so far as the meaning of these terms is understood."

Low cited the instance of Calcutta in support of his conclusion. The city was, he wrote, in the trough of a furious agitation against the partition of Bengal, but when the Prince visited it, he was received by its 'angry population' 'not only with cordiality and good humour but even with demonstrative enthusiasm'.\textsuperscript{4} The death of King Edward in May 1910 was universally mourned in India. The Viceroy, Lord Minto,\textsuperscript{5} informed the Secretary of State of a condolence meeting held on the Calcutta Maidan at which prominent Congress leaders like Surendranath Banerjea,\textsuperscript{6} Motilal Ghose\textsuperscript{7} and Bhupendranath Basu\textsuperscript{8} joined a crowd of 'at least 100,000 people' in paying obeisance to a huge portrait of the deceased Emperor.\textsuperscript{9} King George V and Queen Mary received a warm and enthusiastic reception on their visit to India in 1911 and the Coronation Durbar in Delhi was on all accounts a

\textsuperscript{1} Curzon Papers, MSS. Eur. F.111/158, No. 64.
\textsuperscript{2} Sir Sidney James Mark Low (1857–1932), author and journalist.
\textsuperscript{3} Sidney Low, \textit{A Vision of India} (1906), p. 362. \textsuperscript{4} Ibid., pp. 362–3.
\textsuperscript{5} B. 1848; entered Indian Civil Service 1871; dismissed from Indian Civil Service 1874; teacher and journalist at Calcutta; President of the Indian National Congress 1895 and 1902; Minister in the Bengal Government 1921–3; d. 1925.
\textsuperscript{6} B. 1847; editor of the Calcutta \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika} and a prominent radical nationalist; d. 1922.
\textsuperscript{7} B. 1859; attorney of the Calcutta High Court; President of the Indian National Congress 1914; member of Secretary of State's council 1917–24; d. 1924.
\textsuperscript{8} Mary, Countess of Minto, \textit{India: Minto and Morley} (1934), p. 402.
THE GROWTH OF INDIAN NATIONALISM AND BRITISH POLICY IN INDIA

great success. It was the great popularity of British Royalty in India which encouraged some people to advocate the appointment of a 'Royal Viceroy' to counteract the growing unpopularity of the British administration in that country.

Early Indian nationalists took pride in their membership of an Empire on which the sun never set. They were fond of recalling that India was the brightest jewel in the British Crown and that she alone made the British Empire truly 'Imperial'. When in 1902 Curzon asked Indians to feel for the Empire with Englishmen a 'composite patriotism' and to accept the union of England and India, which was 'so mysterious as to have in it something of the divine',¹ his words struck a responsive chord in the hearts of his listeners. 'Now that is an aspiration', commented Gopal Krishna Gokhale,² the leader of the moderate Indian nationalists, 'which is dear to the heart of many of us also. But the fusion of interest between the two races will have to be much greater and the people of India allowed a more definite and a more intelligible place in the Empire before that inspiration is realized.'³ Even Bal Gangadhar Tilak,⁴ the leader of the radical Indian nationalists, expressed his approval of Curzon's views, only adding that Indians should be 'living' and 'worthy' partners in the Empire.⁵ And though, taking a cue from British radicals, Indian nationalists began to denounce 'insane imperialism' and 'Birmingham imperialism' at the turn of the century, it was as yet not 'imperialism' as such but a particular, depraved variant of it which came in for denunciation. Similarly, the racial policies pursued by Australia and South Africa were condemned as lapses from the high ideals and noble traditions of the Empire.

Educated Indians in the later half of the nineteenth century were full of admiration—almost adulation—for British history and culture. They gratefully acknowledged the manifold advantages derived by their country from the British connection. They frankly and loyally accepted British rule because they were convinced that 'that rule alone could secure to the country the peace and order which were necessary for slowly evolving a nation out of the heterogeneous elements of which it

² B. 1866; teacher and journalist at Poona; member of the Bombay Legislative Council 1899–1901 and of the Imperial Legislative Council 1901–15; President of the Indian National Congress 1905; d. 1915.
⁴ B. 1856; teacher and journalist at Poona; jailed for sedition 1897–8 and 1908–14; d. 1920.
⁵ Speeches of Srj B. G. Tilak delivered at Bellary (1905), pp. 12–13, 17.
was composed, and ensuring to it a steady advance in different directions'.

They had a strong belief that 'the great English people' would prove to be their deliverers, and that slowly but surely they would admit Indians as equal sharers in 'their noble inheritance of freedom'. It was this gratitude for the past and hope for the future which made men like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Pheroze Shah Mehta and Gopal Krishna Gokhale speak of the British connection as 'providential'. The Indian leaders of the early Congress were no 'failed BAs' or 'Macaulay's Frankenstein'. They were men who devoted the best part of their lives to the study of the mighty English literature, who found solace in English poetry, and whose minds were nurtured on English history, law and political thought. They valued English political institutions as the acme of human genius and were inspired by 'the large-hearted liberalism of the nineteenth century English politics'. It was not their fault that they desired to put into practice the principles they had learnt and to imitate the model held out to them. 'Just look for a moment', said Sankaran Nair in 1897, 'at the training we are receiving. From our earliest school-days the great English writers have been our classics. Englishmen have been our professors in colleges. English history is taught us in our schools. The books we generally read are English books. . . . It is impossible under this training not to be penetrated with English ideas, not to acquire English conceptions of duty, of rights, of brotherhood. . . . Imbued with these ideas and principles, we naturally desire to acquire the full rights and to share the responsibilities of British citizenship.'

The early leaders of the Congress knew by heart the Charter Act of 1833, the Queen's proclamation of 1858, and all that Burke or Bright, Macaulay or Munro, Elphinstone or Malcolm had said about the purpose of British rule in India. They shared the belief in England's mission in their country. A disillusioned and faithless generation may well dismiss them today as the greatest dupes of Whig history and oratory. But those who lived in that age of faith and hope and innocence were convinced that the British people were essentially just, righteous and

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2 B. 1842; Judge of the Bombay High Court 1893–1901; social reformer; d. 1901.
4 B. 1857; vakil of the Madras High Court; President of the Indian National Congress 1897; Judge of the Madras High Court 1908–15; member of Viceroy's council 1915–19 and of Secretary of State's council 1920–1; d. 1934.
5 *Report of the Thirteenth Indian National Congress*, 1897, p. 15.
freedom-loving. Dadabhai Naoroji, 1 the greatest figure in early Indian nationalism, was never tired of recalling how, at a time when Indians did not fully understand their rights and were too unenlightened even to ask for them, the statesmen of England had themselves declared that their policy in India was to be one of justice and equality, that the possession of India was a solemn trust with them, that the material and moral welfare of her people was the prime object of British rule, that Englishmen were not to form a governing caste in the country, and that Indians were to be helped to advance steadily to a position of equality, so that they might in due course acquire the capacity to govern themselves in accordance with the higher standards of the West. And his advice to his countrymen regarding their course of action was very simple: Remind the Government and the British people of their pledges and demand their fulfilment. Take your stand upon British charters and proclamations and insist that the rights of British citizenship be granted to you. If the bureaucracy in India refuse to listen, approach the British Demos. 'Nothing is more dear', he assured his people, 'to the heart of England—and I speak from actual knowledge—than India's welfare; and if we only speak out loud enough, and persistently enough, to reach that busy heart, we shall not speak in vain.' 2 To the people of Britain he said: Indians are either 'British citizens or British helots'. Tell us frankly how you mean to treat us. Speak out 'with your English manliness' whether 'you really mean to fulfil the pledges given before the world and in the name of God . . . or to get out of them'. 3

'This springtime of Indian nationalism', writes Guy Wint about the last two decades of the nineteenth century, 'was perhaps its fairest period. The public mind if ardent was yet generous; if naive it was also appealing; if unpractical it was responsive to reason. It was a tragedy that the government allowed so early a breach to come between itself and this Indian patriotism which did no more than repeat the commonplace of English political platforms and desired no more than to be accepted by the British as partners in the administration of their country.' 4

The story of this tragic breach has often been told. In part, it was a natural and inevitable process caused by the growth of education, of

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1 B. 1825; journalist and businessman; first Indian Member of British Parliament 1892–5; President of the Indian National Congress 1886, 1893 and 1906; d. 1917.
2 Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji (1910), p. 18.
INDIA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

racial and national consciousness, and of a hypercritical attitude towards an alien administration which, however benevolent, could never be really popular. The British civil service in India is often blamed for widening the gulf between the governors and the governed. It became, it is said, a huge lifeless machine, an indoor-bureaucracy, an army of note-manufacturers, losing contact with both the old India and the new. Its mind was 'tempted to stand still'; its arteries hardened; and even its general intellectual calibre declined. Lansdowne was persuaded that half the troubles in India could be avoided if the officials manifested 'a little more gentleness and consideration' towards the people. Curzon complained bitterly of the 'mediocrity' of the civil servant of his day, his lack of 'interest in India as India and in the Indian people', and his tendency to 'regard himself as an unfortunate exile in a land of regrets'. Hamilton believed that 'the main cause of the unpopularity' which attached to British rule in India was 'the angularity and rigidity of officialdom'. There is a good deal of truth in these accusations, but it would only be just to recognize the difficulties facing the officialdom. An orderly, regularized, and symmetrical administration left no room for a spirit of adventure and enterprise. Not even the highest-placed official could dare to interfere with the stupendous and extremely artificial structure of the Raj. The natural temptation, therefore, was to govern and change nothing. The Indian Civil Service looked upon itself as the guardian of the people and hated the pretensions of educated Indians to pose as the representatives of the latter while, as it believed, in fact engaged in seeking jobs and distinctions for themselves. The most literary service in the world, it was prone to look down with contempt upon the educated and half-educated Babus. Severely practical by nature, it scorned the theories of arm-chair politicians. Trained to be dictatorial, it never cared to cultivate the confidence and co-operation of the governed. Conscientious, efficient, industrious, impartial and incorruptible, it judged educated Indians by its high standards and found them wanting. It was soured and embittered by what it considered to be the growing ingratitude and insolence displayed by the vocal sections in India. For the negative functions of administration it was well equipped, but it had no conception of the positive recon-

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1 Lansdowne to Cross, October 8, 1890, Lansdowne Papers, MSS. Eur. D.558/IX/II, No. 44.
struction of the political, social and economic life of the country. It was convinced that any attempt 'to hustle the East' was a folly and that political concessions were a sin against the Holy Ghost. To rob the administration of its autocracy, it felt, was to rob it of its benevolence. The conditions of its existence in India and those of Indian social life had always imposed an almost insuperable barrier to real intimacy and understanding between the rulers and the ruled. The suspicion and hostility engendered by politics enormously complicated the situation.

The non-official British community in India took little interest in the affairs of the country. Its manners were far from being desirable. The isolated but frequent cases of cuffing, kicking and even killing of Indians were a constant source of infinite mischief. Nothing so shook the confidence of Indians in English justice as the fact that no Englishman accused of killing an Indian ever got capital punishment. Nor was the Anglo-Indian press a model of sobriety and good manners. Its slighting and supercilious tone towards educated Indians wounded and alienated a sensitive people.

But when all is said of the shortcomings of Englishmen in India, the fact remains that the evil was caused mainly by the failure of the British Government and Parliament to give guidance. Fearing the possible evil effects of the democracy at home on the Indian Empire or those of an 'utterly un-English', autocratic, 'Oriental Empire' upon that democracy itself, India was 'held at an arm's length'. British Governments—Conservative and Liberal alike—dreaded lest India be lost on the floor of Parliament. They tried their best to keep India away from the House of Commons and resented even the occasional questions asked in that chamber by a few radicals. Parliament lost its grip of Indian affairs. Even the periodic inquiries held in the time of John Company were allowed to lapse. The rare debates at Westminster on Indian questions, with hardly a dozen members in attendance, made a mockery of Parliamentary control. Indian nationalists appealed to the busy heart of England in vain. In the matter of the 'home charges', the British army in India and the 'cotton duties', the British Government behaved in a

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1 The quotations are from John Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883), pp. 190, 304.
2 The payments made by India to the British Government towards the cost of the establishment of the Secretary of State, including his salary, and the British army in India, civil and military pensions, and the interest on loans, etc.
3 The total strength of the British army in India was about 60,000.
4 Acting on the free-trade principle, but not without pressure from the Lancashire interests, the British Government forced the Government of India to gradually remove all import duties on cotton goods between 1878 and 1882. When
manner which successive Viceroy’s denounced as unjust and unfair. Not only did they provide Indian nationalists with permanent grievances, they shook, as Curzon warned, the moral bases of British dominion in India. Indians were increasingly convinced that the primary aim of British rule in India was to serve British interests, that John Bull at home was no better than John Bull abroad, and that neither the Conservative nor the Liberal Party could be relied upon to do justice to India.

The gravamen of the charge against the British Government and Parliament, however, would be that they failed in their primary duty of determining—what they alone could determine—the policy of the Government of India. Certainly the Government of India was to be in India, but Parliament was to lay down the lines on which the former was to run. Parliament and the Home Government had no sense of direction, no definite conception of the goal towards which the Government of India was to travel. A double-headed machine like the Indian Government could only work satisfactorily if both its ends were inspired by a clear, consistent and definite purpose. Any such purpose was wholly lacking. An examination of the history of the passing of the Act of 1892 reveals that there was often more imagination on the hilltops of Simla than at Whitehall.

In December 1881 Lord Ripon had suggested the introduction of an elected element into the legislative councils—something that Indians had been demanding for thirty years. The reform would, the Viceroy had argued, be appreciated by the people of India and promote their ‘political education’; it would prevent the councils from becoming shams and subject Government bills to real discussion; it would be ‘a substantial assistance to the Government’, for it would enable them to ascertain the views of the public and give them an opportunity of explaining their real intentions and removing misunderstandings. The

in 1894, due to financial stringency, the Government of India found it necessary to restore the old 5 per cent tariff, the British Government compelled it to levy a countervailing excise of the same amount on cotton goods manufactured in Indian mills.

2 George Frederick Samuel Robinson, second Earl and first Marquis of Ripon (1827–1909). Secretary of State for India 1866; Viceroy of India 1880–4; Colonial Secretary 1892–5; Lord Privy Seal 1905–8.
3 Ripon to Harrington, December 31, 1881, Ripon Papers, I.S. 290/5, No. 70.
Secretary of State, Lord Hartington, had thought the suggestion premature and risky and ignored it. Ripon's successor to the viceroyalty, Dufferin, was impressed with the rapid growth of political aspirations in India and the need to satisfy them. He felt that it would be both prudent and profitable from the point of view of the administration to associate qualified Indians with itself and to provide them with regular, constitutional channels for the expression of their wants and feelings. The Liberal Secretary of State for India, Lord Kimberley, to whom Dufferin communicated his proposals for the reform of the legislative councils in March-April 1886, was not opposed to 'some very cautious step in this direction', but unfortunately before any step could be taken the Government of which he was a member had gone out of office in July 1886. Dufferin had to waste about two years more in persuading the new Tory Secretary of State, Lord Cross, to permit him to submit his recommendations for the reform of the provincial legislative councils. And when in November 1888 Dufferin submitted his recommendations for the introduction of the elective principle, the increase in the non-official element of the councils, and the grant to the latter of the right of interpellation and partial control of the finances, they did not commend themselves to the Secretary of State. It required yet another Viceroy—Lansdowne—and three more years of persistent pressure on his part to compel a rather reluctant ministry at home to go to Parliament with a half-hearted measure which did not even go as

1 Spencer Compton Cavendish, Marquis of Hartington and eighth Duke of Devonshire (1833–1908). Chief Secretary for Ireland 1870–4; Secretary of State for India 1880–2; Secretary of State for War 1882–5; Lord President of the Council 1895–1903.
2 Hartington to Ripon, December 26, 1882, Ripon Papers, I.S. 290/7, No. 156.
3 Dufferin to Kimberley, March 21, April 6, and April 26, 1886, Dufferin Papers, vol. 19, Nos. 12, 14 and 17.
4 John Wodehouse, first Earl of Kimberley (1826–1902). Lord Privy Seal 1868–70; Colonial Secretary 1870–4 and 1880–2; Secretary of State for India 1882–5, 1886 and 1892–4; Foreign Secretary 1894–5.
5 Kimberley to Dufferin, April 22, 1886, Dufferin Papers, vol. 19, No. 20.
9 The Indian Councils Act of 1892 (55 & 56 Vict. c. 14) increased the number of additional members in the Governor-General's council, that is to say, the number of members added to the executive council when it went into legislative
far as the Government of India desired and could hardly be expected to satisfy Indian public opinion.

The alienation of Indian nationalists from their rulers was made inevitable by a yet more fundamental fact. The two main demands of the Congress were: first, the more extensive employment of Indians in the higher administrative posts—and for achieving this it urged that the examination for the Indian Civil Service, then held only in England, should be held in India also; and second, the steady development of representative institutions in India. British statesmen—of both parties—were convinced that to concede any one of these demands would be to endanger the continuance of British supremacy in India. Kimberley, the Liberal Secretary of State, was as emphatic as Lansdowne, the Unionist Viceroy, that come what may the predominance of the European element in the civil service must be maintained, and as the holding of examinations in India would imperil that predominance, it could not be allowed.  

Curzon believed that there were already too many Indians in the civil service.  He warned the Secretary of State of 'the extreme danger of the system under which every year an increasing number of 900 and odd higher posts that were meant, and ought to have been exclusively and specifically reserved for Europeans, are being filched away by the superior wits of the Native in the English examinations'. 'I believe it to be', he added, 'the greatest peril with which our administration is confronted.' The Secretary of State, Hamilton, was equally filled with apprehension and remarked: 'One of the greatest mistakes that ever was made was the issue in the Proclamation annexing India of the principle that perfect equality was to exist, so far as all appointments were concerned, between European and Native.'


2 There were not more than 20 Indians in the Indian Civil Service in 1900.


4 Hamilton to Curzon, May 17, 1900, ibid., MSS. Eur. F.111/159, No. 33.

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