

Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

British and Indian Attitudes to the Indian Problem at the End of the Nineteenth Century

P. Harnetty

Volume 38, numéro 1, 1959

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300414ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300414ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Harnetty, P. (1959). British and Indian Attitudes to the Indian Problem at the End of the Nineteenth Century. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 38(1), 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300414ar>

All rights reserved © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 1959

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

BRITISH AND INDIAN ATTITUDES TO THE INDIAN PROBLEM AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

P. HARNETTY

University of British Columbia

The rise of national self-consciousness in India during the nineteenth century was a gradual process whose origins can be traced back to Raja Ram Mohun Roy and the Brahmo Samaj which he founded in Calcutta in 1828. Not for well over half a century, however, did this feeling find distinct institutional expression in the Indian National Congress, established in Poona in 1885. Both western influences derived from English education and indigenous influences derived from Hindu religious and social reform movements were responsible for the new feeling of national awareness which was behind the formation of the Congress. The liberalism which Indians learned from their familiarity with Western, and particularly English, political thought, provided the intellectual basis for their demand for gradual emancipation. At the same time, this claim was reinforced by a newly-awakened pride and sentiment which sprang from religious and social reform movements which developed after the middle of the nineteenth century, and which were at the same time a reaction against the values of the West and a reassertion of ancient values. Many of the leaders of thought in this period stressed the importance of social and spiritual freedom as the essential preliminary to political freedom, and they did so because they desired a restoration of ancient values native to the soil. Some were prepared to use English education as an agency to this end; others wished to eschew it entirely since they felt it would impede that restoration. But all schools of thought were wedded to the idea of the development of national feeling and, if their means to achieve this object were not the same, they all had the same end in view.

In the light of subsequent events, it is curious to reflect that the Indian National Congress was founded with official approbation. The preliminary work was done by A. O. Hume, a retired civil servant and a nephew of Joseph Hume, the British philosophic radical. The task to which he dedicated himself on his retirement in 1882 was the uplift of the masses from their condition of poverty and misery, and it was for this reason that he originally projected the Congress as an instrument of social reform. However, the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, whom he had consulted beforehand, had advised him to take up the work of political organization instead, both in order to provide the government with a means of keeping in touch with public opinion, and because social reform

propaganda raised issues which could best be dealt with on a local rather than on a national basis.¹

The resolutions passed by the first session of the Congress were of a moderate nature, and mostly concerned with enlargement of the scope, functions, and size of the Supreme and Provincial Legislative Councils which had been set up under legislation passed in 1861. Indeed, the Viceroy himself was beginning to think along these lines and early in 1886, soon after the first session of Congress was over, Lord Dufferin wrote a Minute expressing his view of what policy towards the new organization should be. "My own inclination would be to examine carefully and seriously the demands which are the outcome of these various movements", he wrote, "to give quickly and with a good grace whatever it may be possible or desirable to accord, to announce that these concessions must be accepted as a final settlement of the Indian system for the next ten or fifteen years."^{1a}

This attitude of affable toleration of Congress continued until 1887, after which a change set in. Hume was impatient for results and came to the conclusion that the best method by which Congress could secure its political and economic ends was to set on foot an agitation similar to that conducted by the Anti-Corn Law League in England forty years before. Elaborate preparations were made for the third session of Congress in 1887 which was to be held in Madras. In the Punjab, for example, public meetings were held to stir up enthusiasm for the Congress, and according to an official report, the leading part in calling these meetings was taken in most places by subordinate Indian officials.² In Madras Presidency, every town of over 10,000 inhabitants was asked to form a Congress sub-committee, and arrangements were made for the distribution of half a million pamphlets, one of which bore the title *A Congress Catechism*.³

The resolutions passed at the Madras session resembled those previously passed at the Bombay and Calcutta sessions in 1885 and 1886, but the honeymoon period in Government-Congress relations quickly came to an end. Allahabad had been chosen as the meeting-place of the 1888 session of Congress, and Hume made a speech in that city on April 30, 1888 in which he advocated mass propaganda by the Congress on the lines of the Anti-Corn Law League.⁴ This drew forth a reply from

¹ Sir William Wedderburn, *Allan Octavian Hume* (London, 1913), p. 59.

^{1a} Sir Alfred Lyall, *The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava* (2 vols., London, 1905), II, 56.

² Government of Punjab to Government of India, September 2, 1887. India, Home Proceedings (Public), April 1888, nos. 363-394.

³ For Congress activities in Madras, see the introduction to the *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Indian National Congress* (Madras, 1887), pp. 10-15.

⁴ *A Speech on the Indian National Congress, its Origins, Aims and Objects* (Calcutta, 1888).

the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, Sir Auckland Colvin, in which he stated, in an open letter to Hume, that his early sympathy for the Congress had received a severe check when its campaign became aggressive on the model of the Anti-Corn Law League. Colvin argued that such tactics were premature in India, for they excited hatred against the Government and would serve to arouse a counter-agitation (on the part of the Muslims) which would divide the country into hostile camps.⁵ Hume denied these charges and claimed that in fact Congress was binding into harmonious co-operation men who had scarcely met previously except to quarrel. Hindu-Muslim discord did not arise from Congress agitation but from a few ill-advised officials who clung to the doctrine of "divide and rule". Congress, said Hume, represented the culture and intelligence of the country who saw danger ahead in the misery of the masses and in the bitter resentment of the educated class. He admitted that there was a certain risk in the agitation and that circumstances were not wholly favourable, but time was short.

Opposition to Hume's tactics came from middle-class Indians as well. An example of this is Bipin Chandra Pal, an English-educated Bengali who, like many young Bengalis of his generation, was a social idealist who desired a reconstruction of Hindu society on lines suitable to the conditions of the nineteenth century. Politically, he was a liberal who believed in the continuance of British rule in order to ensure the political and social advancement of the Indian people. Pal supported Colvin's stand, both in a letter to the press and in a public lecture delivered in Allahabad on the eve of the Congress session in December.⁶ His attitude to the Hume-Colvin controversy is interesting because less than fifteen years later he was to emerge as one of the foremost spokesmen of the "extremist" party in Indian politics which demanded the immediate termination of British rule. His complete change of front from a sincere supporter to an ardent opponent of British rule is a measure of the discontent which developed amongst educated Indians as a result of British indifference to the claims of the nationalist movement in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

Official displeasure with the Congress was pronounced by the Viceroy in a speech delivered at a St. Andrew's Day dinner in Calcutta on the eve of his retirement in 1888. He referred to the Congress as a "microscopic minority" and added: "surely the sensible man of the country cannot imagine that even the most moderate constitutional changes can be effected in such a system as ours by a stroke of the pen, or without

⁵ *Audi Alteram Partem : Two Letters on Certain Aspects of the Indian National Congress Movement* (Simla and London, 1888), p. 24.

⁶ B.C. Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times* (2 vols., Calcutta, 1932 and 1951), II, 32.

the most anxious deliberations, as well as careful discussions in Parliament.”⁷

The British attitude towards the Congress in these early years was to a considerable extent conditioned by the view that India was a “sacred trust” committed to Great Britain as part of her civilizing mission in the world. This attitude was a reflection of the general revival in imperial interest which had been gathering momentum since the late ‘sixties and which saw the British Empire not as a conglomeration of territories existing solely for the benefit of Great Britain, but as a positive force for good in the world which it was the white man’s burden to rule.

Indians, in fact, were not insensible to the benefits conferred on them by British rule; what they wanted was a greater share in ruling. All Congressmen in the early years were prepared for a policy of gradualness. Nor were they unaware of their own weaknesses. In 1889, for instance, a penetrating analysis of the strength and weakness of the Congress movement was published in Benares by an Indian writer, Bireswar Mitter.⁸ Mitter, who was no anti-nationalist, drew attention to the division of Indian society into a numerous orthodox party, and a small section of “Young India”. This marked the line of distinction between the majority, not affected by Western science and civilization, and the minority who had benefitted by their influence. He argued that there were such multitudinous grounds of discord among the various races of India that peace and amity between them could only be secured through the instrumentality of a powerful unifying force which could rise superior to all elements of disunion, and, though itself unaffected by them, would be persistent and irresistible in its operation. Congress did not provide such a unifying force, for the fundamental principle of union among its members owed its existence solely to the conditions of things brought about by the changes effected by British rule in India. It was composed of some of the leading men of every race in India, but its members did not acquire their capacity for representation by virtue of their being Mahrattas, Bengalis, Rajputs, and so on, but because they held opinions on political matters in consonance with the expressed views of the Congress. “The nationality is lost in the intellectual character of the man, and that character, it cannot be denied, is due to the civilizing influence of British rule.”⁹

Mitter also appealed for a greater spirit of understanding on the part of the authorities towards the Congress movement, for the opinions of the representatives of a class which had received all the advantages of West-

⁷ *Speeches Delivered in India, 1884-8, by the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava* (London, 1890), p. 245.

⁸ Bireswar Mitter, *A View of the Indian National Congress* (Benares, 1889).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

ern learning and culture were entitled to respect. Lansdowne, during his viceroyalty (1889-1894), was inclined to take a cautiously tolerant view of the movement and its activities. In 1891, for example, he expressed the strong opinion that it would not be in the Government's interest to show any animus against the Congress, and so long as it acted within constitutional limits to accept it good humouredly as representing the view of the advanced party in Indian politics. With a free press and the right of public meeting there would always be some organization of this kind to deal with, and nothing would so well serve to keep the movement alive as exhibitions of hostility on the part of the Government of India.¹⁰ Two months later, Hume wrote to the Viceroy complaining that Government officials sowed distrust of the Congress in the minds of the masses. That there was validity in this charge can be gathered from the fact that Lansdowne himself had earlier written to Sir Steuart Bayley, a member of the Council of India in London and a former Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, deploring the fact that many officials made no effort to conceal their thoughts from the Congress. "It is this bitterness and intolerance which, I believe, give the Congress its strength, and render it a possible source of danger and an undoubted source of mischief and irritation."¹¹

It almost seemed as if the authorities believed that the policy of ignoring Congress was enough to ensure its decline. Thus in 1896 Lord George Hamilton, who held office as Secretary of State for India from 1895 to 1903, wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Elgin (1894-1898), expressing his gratification that the Congress, as a political power, had steadily gone down in the last few years. This was largely due, he thought, to the indifference and unconcern with which the Government of India had tolerated its proceedings.¹² Not long afterwards, Hamilton told the Viceroy that the more he saw and heard of the National Congress Party the more he was impressed with the seditious and double-sided character of that organization.¹³ Elgin, however, was not disposed to pass a hasty judgment on the Congress. He defended his policy of having Congressmen in the Legislative Councils,¹⁴ and considered that the leading men of the Congress party, when brought face to face with problems of practical administration, were inclined to deal with them reasonably.¹⁵

¹⁰ Lansdowne to Cross, January 28, 1891. Lansdowne Papers, Series I (Correspondence with the Secretary of State, 5 vols.), iib, No. 5B.

¹¹ Lansdowne to Bayley, February 14, 1891, *ibid.*, Series II (Correspondence with Persons in England, 5 vols.), iib, No. 18.

¹² Hamilton to Elgin, December 11, 1896. Hamilton Papers, Series Ia (Letters to Lord Elgin, 3 vols., numbered i-iii), i, No. 75. (These MSS are catalogued in the India Office Library under the title Private Correspondence, India. In order to avoid confusion with the private correspondence of Lord Elgin and Lord Lansdowne, they are referred to throughout as the Hamilton Papers).

¹³ Hamilton to Elgin, June 24, 1897, *ibid.*, Ia, ii, No. 115.

¹⁴ Elgin to Hamilton, April 21, 1897, *ibid.*, Series Ib (Letters from Lord Elgin, 12 vols., numbered i-xii), iv, No. 100.

¹⁵ Elgin to Hamilton, December 30, 1897, *ibid.*, Ib, viii, No. 173.

In June 1899 Curzon, who had recently succeeded Elgin as Viceroy, forwarded to the Secretary of State a report which had been drawn up at Hamilton's request on the influence which the newspaper *India*, published in England by the British Committee of the Congress, exercised over the Indian press. According to this report there was evidence to show that Congress received financial support from a number of princes and other prominent Indians. These included the Gaekwar of Baroda, one of the three premier chiefs; J. N. Tata, the industrialist; and the late Maharajah of Darbhanga, a wealthy Bengal *zemindar*. The Gaekwar frankly admitted, during a personal interview with Curzon, that he had subscribed 1,000 rupees annually towards the Congress funds. Amongst the reasons he gave was the fact that the bulk of educated opinion in India was in favour of the Congress, and he claimed that other chiefs also contributed to it.¹⁶

It would seem, therefore, that the Congress was more powerful than Hamilton professed to believe, and was supported by prominent Indians in all walks of life. The *Lucknow Advocate*, for instance, drew the attention of its readers on June 3, 1899 to the fact that six well-known Congressmen were, or had been, judges of different High Courts. Curzon quickly pointed out to the Secretary of State that these appointments were made exclusively upon the professional merits of the persons concerned, but it must have been disconcerting for the Government of India to realize that these admittedly capable persons were members of an organization whose leaders were regarded by both the Secretary of State and the Viceroy as seditious. As Curzon put it in September 1899: "But surely the whole of our case against that party is this, that it is in no sense a representative national body, as it claims to be, — that, if not actively disloyal to the British government in this country, it is, at any rate, far from friendly to it."¹⁷

The question of "loyalty" was, of course, fundamental to the whole issue between Congress and the Government. The Congress had commenced its career amidst solemn professions of its loyalty, and it did not consider that the reforms for which it asked — a greater elective element in the Councils, whose powers would be enlarged; and a greater number of Indians in the higher ranks of the Indian Civil Service — were inconsistent with these declarations. Yet it was not long before its

¹⁶ Curzon to Hamilton, July 17, 1899, *ibid.*, Series IIb (Letters from Lord Curzon, 14 vols., numbered xiii-xxvi), xiv, No. 31 (encl.). As early as May 1889 Lansdowne had written regarding the Congress that "there was every reason to believe that many of the Chiefs and leading men do not regard its proceedings with disfavour, but are giving it secret assistance and encouragement. Even some of those who are ostensibly hostile or neutral are, for reasons not difficult to fathom, maintaining amicable relations with the leaders of the 'progressive party'." "Note on Reform of Provincial Legislative Councils", dated May 4, 1889. Lansdowne Papers, Series IV (Notes and Minutes), 46.

¹⁷ Curzon to Hamilton, September 27, 1899. Hamilton Papers, IIb, xv, No. 40.

program was being equated with disloyalty and even sedition. Most educated Indians were loyal not only by nature and in accordance with the genius of their civilization but, in the words of a contemporary Indian writer, Malur Rangacharya, "under the imperious pressure of their immediate interests."¹⁸ The British suspicion that Indians were disloyal was due to their lack of understanding: the rulers of India rarely knew well the Indian nature, and their very position as rulers made it difficult for them to fraternize with Indians, learn their inner feelings, aspirations, and habits of thought, and in consequence be able to sympathize with them. The complexities of Indian life appeared mystic and uncouth to the Englishman, who, failing to understand his environment, withdrew from all contact with it and lived a self-satisfied insular life in which prejudice was perpetuated and strengthened.

According to Rangacharya, the large question of the Indian people's loyalty to British rule was chiefly determined by the attitude adopted by the Indian Civil Service. In earlier years these civil servants set the example for all other British people in India to follow in their direct and indirect dealings with Indians, but in recent years they had given way to others of British birth who, though living in India, had no serious political responsibility of any kind to bear. This non-official Anglo-Indian society was now larger than ever before and wielded, through its consolidated public opinion, an enormous amount of power to influence the tendency of Anglo-Indian official thought and life, and thus determine the attitude of the rulers to the ruled. The increasing demands of educated Indians to be allowed a greater share in the governing of their own country had injected feelings of jealous rivalry against them in the minds of officialdom. Hence the Indian reputation for loyalty was discoloured not merely by the insular habits of the British in India, but also by the struggle between the haves and the have-nots for the patronage at the disposal of the state.

This Indian view can be supported from other sources. For example, Hugh Childers, a Conservative member of Parliament who toured India during Lansdowne's time, praised the evident efficiency of the Indian Civil Service, but criticized the way in which Indians as a class were regarded by younger officers, especially army officers, and the way many of these officers showed their dislike, and sometimes contempt for them.¹⁹ Lansdowne himself was often struck, upon the occasion of such social gatherings as were attended by both Europeans and Indians, by the extraordinary indifference shown by the former to the latter. As a rule, there was little attempt at fusion between the two, and if a civil word was addressed to an Indian, it was done in a patronizing and perfunctory

¹⁸ M. Rangacharya, *The Indian Loyalty* (Madras, 1898), p. 37.

¹⁹ Childers to Lansdowne, February 15, 1890. Lansdowne Papers, Series III (Correspondence with Persons in India, 10 vols.), iiiia, No. 152.

manner.²⁰ Sir Charles Crosthwaite, who ended a long and distinguished career as Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces (1892-1895) and who then served on the Council of India (1895-1905), when asked by Hamilton to sum up his experiences in India replied: "I came away knowing nothing whatever of the inner feelings and thoughts of the people amongst whom I had lived for many years."²¹

Both Elgin and Curzon shared Rangacharya's view that the growth of non-official Anglo-Indian society was largely responsible for the steady deterioration of relations between the rulers and the ruled. Elgin, for example, drew Hamilton's attention to the attitude taken by the Anglo-Indian newspaper *The Englishman* to a riot which occurred in Calcutta in July 1897. Instead of trying to allay fears, it had opened its columns to the wildest exaggerations and had rivalled the worst of them in its leading articles.²² Curzon, in a characteristic satirical sally, wrote that in ordinary times the Anglo-Indian was a good fellow, addicted, in the intervals of his business hours, to playing polo or golf, to imbibing strong drinks, and to mild denunciation of the Government. "As soon as any question arises, affecting, as he thinks, his prestige as a member of the superior race, he becomes an excitable fanatic, destitute of reason, fairness, or even common sense."²³

Curzon, in particular, was troubled by this problem of the relations between the British and the people they ruled. In his letters to Hamilton, he often talked about the position of the British Government in India, of its relations with Indians, and of the way in which they were affected by the changes passing over British habits and life. Towards the end of his first term of office (1899-1904), he sent the Secretary of State a statement of the case from the Indian point of view which, he said, showed greater knowledge and insight than anything on the subject he had yet seen in an Indian journal.²⁴

The article in question was written by Bipin Chandra Pal, and it appeared in the *Hindustan Review* in June 1903.²⁵ Pal began by emphasizing the gravity of the situation created in India by repeated failures of justice in cases concerning European criminals. The chief strength of the British Government in India had always consisted in the impression it had been able to create in the popular mind regarding its justice and benevolence. England, said Pal, had really won the trust of the people of India, but the question now was whether she had been able

²⁰ Lansdowne to Childers, February 21, 1890, *ibid.*, III, iiib, No. 111.

²¹ Hamilton to Curzon, February 20, 1902. Hamilton Papers, Series IIa (Letters to Lord Curzon, 5 vols., numbered i-v), iv, No. 8.

²² Elgin to Hamilton, July 14, 1897, *ibid.*, Ib, vi, No. 125.

²³ Curzon to Hamilton, September 9, 1903, *ibid.*, IIb, xxvi, No. 37.

²⁴ Curzon to Hamilton, August 12, 1903, *ibid.*, IIb, xxvi, No. 33.

²⁵ B.C. Pal, "Criminal Justice between Europeans and Indians". *Hindustan Review*, VII (No. 6, June, 1903), 515-521.

fully to retain it. The old spell was fast breaking, for the generation that had witnessed the change from anarchy and misrule to settled order and government had passed away. With them had gone the old memories in family or village traditions which nourished these sentiments of trust. The Government, however, had failed to forge new bonds of sympathy between the rulers and the ruled. Furthermore, the old foundations of British rule — the education of Indians in the arts of self-government, as propounded in the Royal Proclamation of 1858 — had been consciously, though gradually shifted; and all aspects of the British administration, even when benevolent, were viewed in an entirely new light not flattering to British character or policy. This deterioration of British character, whether real or imaginary, constituted a political danger of the utmost gravity.

Pal continued that the patient forbearing and silent fortitude of the Indian masses in face of poverty and starvation were really due to the hypnotic spell that the British had cast over them from almost the very commencement of their rule. It was this spell which was being broken by the maladministration of criminal justice in regard to offences committed by Europeans against Indians, because such maladministration destroyed the reputation established by the British government for justice and benevolence, on which the strength of British rule had always depended. England's power in India rested more on the prestige of character than of arms. As this prestige diminished in Indian eyes, and as the people lost their confidence in the justice and benevolence of their alien rulers, the threat of lawlessness became more real and, with it, an almost complete deadlock in the administration.

Once again, these Indian views find confirmation from the official records. Three years before Pal wrote this article, Curzon wrote to Hamilton: "I have discussed with you, in many letters, the difficulties that have to be encountered in this country to secure even justice between Europeans and Natives in the Courts."²⁶ In the very month that Pal's article appeared, Curzon wrote to the Secretary of State about a series of four assaults in one week by British soldiers on Indians, in two of which death had resulted, and he expressed his opinion that there would be no change in this state of affairs until a British soldier was hanged for murdering an Indian.²⁷ Hamilton, too, was impressed by Pal's article, which he commended for its ability and moderation. He seized upon it to develop a favourite theme of his — the declining quality of the civil service and the serious problem this posed for the future of British rule in India:

²⁶ Curzon to Hamilton, October 17, 1900. Hamilton Papers, IIb, xviii, No. 47. Curzon related in this letter how the High Court of Calcutta itself had just failed in a case involving the murder of a tea-plantation coolie by a European.

²⁷ Curzon to Hamilton, June 17, 1903, *ibid.*, IIb, xxvi, No. 25.

The perusal of an article like this aggravates my pessimism as regards the future of India. We established our rule and extended our authority throughout India by being fortunate enough to secure, as our agents, men of exceptionable attainments and exceptionable character, and these attributes were not confined to the highest of our agents, but were shared by many in humbler spheres of employment; and now there is a far larger proportion of what might be termed "mean whites" — men taken from quite the lower stratum of middle-class life, who simply go out to try and make, as rapidly as possible, a livelihood in India, from which they wish to return as quickly as possible.²⁸

The lack of understanding which Hamilton attributed to the contemporary civil service was due, he thought, to the undisputed control exercised by the British over the whole country, backed by a strong army. This was in contrast to the older and less perfect system which civil servants in former days had to administer when, in consequence of the isolation in which they found themselves, they were compelled to consider, and if possible to utilize, the peculiarities of constitution and temperament of the leading Indians in their vicinity.²⁹ Another reason for the changing character of the civil service was the quickening of the communications between England and India consequent upon the opening of the Suez canal. England became more and more the home of the Indian officer, and the wonderful knowledge of the characteristics of Indians once possessed by so many of the old school of political officers was becoming a thing of the past.³⁰

Lord George Hamilton ascribed the rut into which the administration had settled to the influence of the utilitarians and the Manchester School. He felt that there was a great deal that was good in the financial and commercial policy of the utilitarians; but, when they went outside finance and endeavoured to lay down principles both for the internal and external administration of the Empire, in his judgment they then broke down, since they made no allowance for sentiment, for tradition, or for the inherent instincts of governing and fighting races.³¹ The centralized system of administration which had developed in India since the Crown assumed direct responsibility for the government of India had turned the Indian official into something resembling a French bureaucrat, and the civil service was rapidly coming to resemble the bureaucratic system which prevailed in France. The old-fashioned civilians had been constantly in touch with the people, whereas the modern official, kept perpetually at his desk by an enormous mass of correspondence, with less chance to go outside, tended to deal in a stereotyped, systematic, logical manner with all appeals and questions which came before him.³²

²⁸ Hamilton to Curzon, September 2, 1903, *ibid.*, IIa, v, No. 35.

²⁹ Hamilton to Elgin, September 17, 1896, *ibid.*, Ia, i, No. 63.

³⁰ Hamilton to Elgin, July 8, 1897, *ibid.*, Ia, ii, No. 119.

³¹ Hamilton to Amphill, September 17, 1902. Amphill Papers, V.

³² Hamilton to Amphill, April 10, 1902, *ibid.*, V.

There was another aspect of the civil service question which caused the policy-makers concern both in India and Great Britain: the number of Indians in the civil service. One of the major aims of the Congress party was to secure the admission of a higher proportion of Indians into the upper echelons of the service, and to secure the simultaneous holding of the entrance examinations in India as well as in England. The Congress agitation to this end met with no success; nevertheless, a small number of Indians did manage to enter the civil service after going to England and taking the examinations there. By the mid-'nineties, this intake was causing concern to the Government of India, which warned the Secretary of State in November 1893 and again in 1894 that it was necessary to keep a close watch on the proportion of Indians who entered the civil service by competition in London. At the same time, the Government of India expressed the view that it might become necessary to restrict the proportion of Indians in the service to 18 per cent or some similar figure.³³ Both of these despatches were signed by Lansdowne. Elgin, after he had been in the country eighteen months, recorded his impression that the British could only govern India by maintaining the fact that they were the dominant race. "Therefore it is that in civil administration, however much we may desire to introduce natives of India into the Government of their country, there is a point at which we must reserve control to ourselves, if we are to remain at all."³⁴

Five years later Curzon wrote to the Secretary of State about the extreme danger of the system under which every year an increasing number of the 900 and odd higher posts that were meant, and ought to have been exclusively and specifically reserved for Europeans, were being "filched away" by the superior wits of the Indian in the English examinations. This was the greatest peril with which the British administration was confronted in India.³⁵ Hamilton replied that he too was filled with apprehension by the increasing numbers of Indians in the service, a number that would continue to grow in the future. One of the greatest mistakes that had ever been made was the statement in the Royal Proclamation annexing India of the principle that perfect equality was to exist, so far as all appointments were concerned, between Europeans and Indians.³⁶

This concern over the personnel of the civil service grew from the necessity for ensuring the permanence of British control of India by retaining the key posts in the administration firmly in British hands. This was basic to the conflict which existed between the promises made

³³ Government of India to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 62 (Public), November 1, 1893. Letters from India (Public), vol. 18, (1893).

³⁴ Elgin to Rosebery, July 7, 1895. Elgin Papers, Series II (Correspondence with Persons in England, 5 vols.), iib, No. 51.

³⁵ Curzon to Hamilton, April 23, 1900. Hamilton Papers, Iib, xvi, No. 17.

³⁶ Hamilton to Curzon, May 17, 1900, *ibid.*, Iia, ii, No. 21.

in the past on the British side (notably in the Royal Proclamation of 1858), and accepted at their face value by the majority of educated Indians, and the pressing demands of the contemporary world situation. As Hamilton had pointed out, much of the difficulty arose from the influence exercised on the Indian political scene by the ideas, policy, and precepts of the utilitarians. This influence was not, however, confined to the practical expression of utilitarian theories, such as competitive examinations, but extended over the whole range of liberal idealism which had motivated the rulers of India in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. At that time, men such as Sir Thomas Munro, Sir John Malcolm, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Lord William Bentinck, had viewed the "sacred trust" in terms of emancipation and the preparation for liberty rather than as justification for maintaining the *status quo*.

The Royal Proclamation of 1858 bore the stamp of mid-Victorian liberalism, but liberalism was on the wane by the end of the century, and in the changed political context of the new imperialism, the "Magna Carta of Indian Liberties" came to be viewed in an entirely different light. In 1897, for example, the Bishop of Madras suggested that the Royal Proclamation should be republished on the occasion of Queen Victoria's jubilee, since it would be of advantage to recall to the minds of the people of India the noble sentiments and gracious pledges it contained.³⁷ Elgin replied that the Bishop's idea was not a wise one. Circumstances had changed, and the India of 1897 was assuredly not the India of 1858. Furthermore, the Proclamation had been given a significance that had not been intended, and which directly impeded, or at any rate would impede if attended to, the Government of Her Majesty.³⁸

The India of 1897 was not the India of 1858, but then England had changed too. The decline of liberalism in imperial affairs must be viewed against the background of the changing scene in international politics and the relative decline in Great Britain's position in world affairs. Hamilton expressed his awareness of this change in a letter to Curzon in April 1902:

I may be pessimistic, but I do see most serious dangers ahead, not in the immediate future; but the immense development of the material prosperity of the world and the increase of production are enabling foreign nations in all parts of the world to more effectively compete with us. Our supremacy in many branches of life and work, which in the past has been uncontested, is now going, and it will require men of exceptionable capacity, resolution, and tenacity, to bridge over the time in which we shall pass, from the old position which we occupied in the nineteenth century to that which, if we are properly led and administered, I think the British Empire ought to occupy in the twentieth and succeeding centuries.³⁹

³⁷ Havelock to Elgin, April 5, 1897. Elgin Papers, Series III (Correspondence with Persons in India, 10 vols.), viia, No. 287.

³⁸ Elgin to Havelock, April 12, 1897, *ibid.*, III, viib, No. 254.

³⁹ Hamilton to Curzon, April 2, 1902. Hamilton Papers, IIa, iv, No. 14.

From Hamilton's point of view, the maintenance of British dominion in India was essential if the British Empire was to occupy its rightful position in the century just opening. Yet on more than one occasion he took the line that it was India which gained most from the imperial connection. Curzon, however, was quick to take issue with the Secretary of State, reminding him that India rendered conspicuous services to Great Britain without which for many imperial purposes the latter would be absolutely crippled.⁴⁰

The economic value of the Indian Empire also governed the British attitude to India, and to the claims of the Indian National Congress. In March 1894 the Government of India, in urgent financial straits, imposed a general 5 per cent duty on imports, but exempted cotton goods from this duty under extreme pressure from the British government.⁴¹ The position of an important British economic interest — the Lancashire cotton industry — was at stake and had to be protected; as the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, Sir Arthur Godley, commented at the time: "It is quite true that at this moment India is being sacrificed to Lancashire. I very much regret it, but I can see no help for it at this moment."⁴² When agitation in India made it necessary, in December 1894, to extend the import duty to cotton goods, the Government of India was obliged by the British Government to impose a countervailing excise duty on Indian-produced goods.⁴³ Even this did not satisfy Lancashire, and in February 1896 the Government of India was compelled to make further modifications, exempting cotton yarns from all taxes, and reducing the import and excise duties on woven goods from 5 to 3½ per cent.

The cotton duties controversy illustrated only one aspect of the economic ramifications of British rule in India. Several years earlier, in 1888, Dufferin had laid it down that the general conditions which governed British policy in India did not stop at the obligation placed upon the British government of providing for the safety and welfare of all the different groups and interests found within the boundaries of India. There was also the duty of watching over the enormous commercial interests of the "mother country", represented by a guaranteed capital of over 220 million pounds sterling, which, to the great benefit of India, had either been lent to the state, or sunk in Indian railways; and he went on:

...for, however freely we admit that India should be primarily governed in the interests of the Indian people, it would be criminal to ignore the

⁴⁰ Curzon to Hamilton, September 2, 1903. Hamilton Papers, IIb, xxvi, No. 36.

⁴¹ Secretary of State to Viceroy, private telegram, February 27, 1894. Elgin Papers, Series IV (Telegrams from and to Secretary of State, 5 vols.), ia, No. 52.

⁴² Godley to Babington Smith, April 6, 1894, *ibid.*, II, ia, No. 24. Babington Smith was private secretary to the Viceroy.

⁴³ "I need not emphasize what I am saying at length in the telegram; but I should like to emphasize that it is absolutely *essential* that the Excise Duty should be so fixed as to eliminate any possibility of protection." Fowler to Elgin, November 30, 1894, *ibid.*, I, ia, No. 34.

responsibility of the Government towards those who have sunk large sums of money in the development of Indian resources on the faith of official guarantees, or who have invested their capital in the Indians funds at the invitation of the Imperial Indian authorities.⁴⁴

The same consideration applied with almost equal force, added Dufferin, to that further vast amount of capital which was employed by private British enterprise in manufactures, in tea planting, and in the indigo, jute, and similar industries, on the assumption that English rule and English justice would remain dominant in India.

To a majority of Englishmen, faced with the compelling demands of national self-interest, the liberal ideal became irreconcilable with the maintenance of British rule in India. At the end of the nineteenth century, those responsible for the governance of India lacked the necessary vision to produce a workable solution to the Indian problem. Hamilton summed up his attitude in a letter to Lord Elgin late in 1896 when he declared that "beyond grumbling I have no remedy for the present state of things; but a generation hence the position will be worse, and how it is to end I cannot see, though during our lifetime the evil will be one of inconvenience rather than one of danger."⁴⁵ In the light of such a statement, it is scarcely surprising that Hamilton's approach was absolutely negative in dealing with the problem of Indian nationalism. He told Elgin that as regards legislation, either for purposes of consolidation or otherwise, the Viceroy could rely on him doing as little as he could, for he had a "holy horror" of Indian legislation which simply raised a "heap of anomalous questions."⁴⁶

The technique of "divide and rule" was behind much of Hamilton's approach to Indian affairs, as can be seen from his correspondence with Elgin and Curzon. For example, referring to the question of commissions for Indians in the Indian army, he held that in this respect Russia's example should be followed, for Russia opened almost endless advancement to her Central Asian subjects if they were of good birth and ability. Considerable advantages would accrue from the adoption of such a policy, for if the Government could keep the affection of the fighting races and higher orders of society in India, it could ignore the dislike and disaffection of the intellectual non-fighting classes — the *babus*, students, and pleaders.⁴⁷ Hamilton expressed the same view in a letter to Curzon two years later when he was discussing a scheme of modern Hindu

⁴⁴ "Minute by H.E. the Viceroy". Government of India to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 67 (Public), November 6, 1888 (encl. 3, p. 3). Letters from India (Public), vol. 9 (1888).

⁴⁵ Hamilton to Elgin, October 30, 1896. *Hamilton Papers*, Ia, i, No. 69.

⁴⁶ Hamilton to Elgin, September 6, 1895, *ibid.*, Ia, i, No. 10.

⁴⁷ Hamilton to Elgin, September 6, 1897, *ibid.*, Ia, ii, No. 139. Hamilton also praised Russia's example in another field: her denial of a free press. Hamilton to Curzon, August 3, 1899, *ibid.*, IIa, i, No. 30.

education, associated with definite religious and moral training, which Annie Besant had initiated in the North-Western Provinces:

I think the real danger to our rule in India, not now but say 50 years hence, is the gradual adoption and extension of Western ideas of agitation and organization; and if we could break the educated Indian party into two sections holding widely different views, we should, by such a division, strengthen our position against the subtle and continuous attack which the spread of education must make upon our present system of Government.⁴⁸

Hamilton was alarmed at the changes taking place in British politics; new ideas and forces were coming into operation whose consequences he could not foresee. As for himself, he confided to Curzon that he was beginning to feel the weight of years, in the sense of not caring to tackle and overcome difficult administrative questions as he used to do. Hence he found it a great delight to find Curzon keen and confident to deal with any question that might arise in India. "I am left to discharge the functions of an old foggy", he said, "namely, to encourage and occasionally to put the drag on."⁴⁹

Hamilton was shrewd enough to be aware of the changes which the passage of time must bring in India. Yet he followed a policy of negation during a period when, more than ever before, the problems raised by the development of national feeling in India required a positive and statesmanlike approach based on a sympathetic understanding of the various factors involved. Hamilton was baffled by his task and, when the Government of India was taken over by a man of Curzon's strength, he was quite content to let matters drift out of his control. This combination of Curzon and Hamilton was disastrous to British dominion in India. With a convinced imperialist at the helm in India and a tired and disillusioned Secretary of State in charge at the India Office, a crisis developed which ushered in a new era in Indian politics, both as regards the British attitude to the growing nationalist movement and within the movement itself over its own aims and objectives. To the disillusionment engendered in the educated Indian mind by British political and economic policy, and the ferment caused by the social and cultural forces at work, was added the bitterness of a head-on clash between the avowed and unrestrained imperialism of Lord Curzon and the advancing forces of developing Indian nationalism.

⁴⁸ Hamilton to Curzon, September 20, 1899, *ibid.*, IIa, i, No. 37.

⁴⁹ Hamilton to Curzon, January 5, 1900, *ibid.*, Ia, ii, No. 1.