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Modern History Sourcebook: Edmund Burke: Speech in Commons on India, 1783

Despite the act of 1773, there were still concerns about the administration of India.

... Our conquest there, after twenty years, is as crude as it was the first day. The natives scarcely know what it is to see the grey head of an Englishman. Young men (boys almost) govern there, without society, and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people, than if they still resided in England; nor, indeed, any species of intercourse but that which is necessary to making a sudden fortune, with a view to a remote settlement. Animated with all the avarice of age, and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another; wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting. Every rupee of profit made by an Englishman is lost for ever to India. With us are no retributory superstitions, by which a foundation of charity compensates, through ages, to the poor, for the rapine and injustice of a day. With us no pride erects stately monuments which repair the mischiefs which pride had produced, and which adorn a country out of its own spoils. England has erected no churches, no hospitals, no palaces, no schools; England has built no bridges, made no high roads, cut no navigations, dug out no reservoirs. Every other conqueror of every other description has left some monument, either of state or beneficence, behind him. Were we to be driven out of India this day, nothing would remain, to tell that it had been possessed, during the inglorious period of our dominion, by any thing better than the ourang-ourang or the tiger.

There is nothing in the boys we send to India worse, than in the boys whom we are whipping at school, or that we see trailing a pike, or bending over a desk at home. But as English youth in India drink the intoxicating draught of authority and dominion before their heads are able to bear it, and as they are full grown in fortune long before they are ripe in principle, neither nature nor reason have any opportunity to exert themselves for remedy of the excesses of their premature power. The consequences of their conduct, which in good minds, (and many of theirs are probably such,) might produce penitence or amendment, are unable to pursue the rapidity of their flight. Their prey is lodged in England; and the cries of India are given to seas and winds, to be blown about, in every breaking up of the monsoon, over a remote and unhearing ocean. In India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired; in England are often displayed by the same persons, the virtues which dispense hereditary wealth. Arrived in England, the destroyers of the nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation, at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppressions and his oppressor. They marry into your families; they enter into your senate; they ease your estates by loans; they raise their value by demand; they cherish and protect your relations which lie heavy on your patronage; and there is scarcely a house in the

kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest, that makes all reform of our eastern government appear officious and disgusting; and, on the whole, a most discouraging attempt. In such an attempt you hurt those who are able to return kindness, or to resent injury. If you succeed, you save those who cannot so much as give you thanks. All these things show the difficulty of the work we have on hand; but they show its necessity too. Our Indian government is in its best state a grievance. It is necessary that the corrective should be uncommonly

19C Latin America

Socialism

Imperialism

Industrial Revolution
II

Darwin, Freud

19C Religion

World War I

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21st Century

vigorous; and the work of men, sanguine, warm, and even impassioned in the cause. But it is an arduous thing to plead against abuses of a power which originates from your own country, and affects those whom we are used to consider as strangers....

Source:

Taken from D. B. Horn and Mary Ransome, eds., *English Historical Documents, 1714-1783* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957), pp. 821-822

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should fall upon the son, that every stroke that escaped the son should strike upon the parent; so that, where they did not lacerate and tear the sense, they should wound the sensibilities and sympathies of nature. This was the common and every-day practice in this country for a long time. But, my Lords, there was more. Virgins, whose fathers kept them from the sight of the sun, were dragged into the public court, that court which was the natural refuge against all wrong, against all oppression, and all iniquity. There, in the presence of day, in the public court, vainly invoking its justice, while their shrieks were mingled with the cries and groans of an indignant people, those virgins were cruelly violated by the basest and wickedest of mankind. It did not end there. The wives of the people of the country only differed in this, that they lost their honour in the bottom of the most cruel dungeons, where all their torments were a little buried from the view of mankind. They were not always left there, though there they suffered those cruel and outrageous wrongs—wrongs to the people, to their manners, to the bodies and feelings of mankind: but they were dragged out, naked and exposed to the public view, and scourged before all the people. Here in my hand is my authority; for otherwise one would think it almost incredible. But it did not end there. In order that nature might be violated in all those circumstances where the sympathies of nature are awakened, where the remembrances of our infancy and all our tender remembrances are combined, they put the nipples of the women into the sharp edges of split bamboos and tore them from their bodies. Grown from ferocity to ferocity, from cruelty to cruelty, they applied burning torches and cruel slow fires—my Lords, I am ashamed to go further—those infernal fiends, in defiance of everything divine and human, planted death in the source of life; and where that modesty, which more distinguishes man even than his rational nature from the base creation, turns from the view and dare not meet the expression, dared those infernal fiends execute their cruel and nefarious tortures—where the modesty of nature and the sanctity of justice dare not follow them or even describe their practices.

These, my Lords, were the horrors that arose from bribery—the cruelties that arose from giving power into the hands of such persons as Deby Sing and such infernal villains as Gunga Govind Sing . . .

My Lords, the people of India are patience itself; their patience is too criminal. But here they burst at once into a wild, universal, uproar and unarned rebellion. The whole province of Rungpore and a great part of Dinagepore broke out into one general rebellion and revolt.

SOURCE: In *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings: Papers from a Bicentenary Commemoration*, ed. Geoffrey Carnall and Colin Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989).

From the Address of Warren Hastings in

His Defence, 2 June 1791

WARREN HASTINGS

My Lords, in the course of this trial, my accusers, to excite a popular odium against me, have called me the abettor or usurper of arbitrary power. I certainly did not use the words arbitrary power in the sense which has been imputed to me. The language, it is true, was not my own, for I was indebted for that part of my Defence to the assistance of a friend; but this I can aver, that nothing more was meant by arbitrary power than discretionary power. I considered myself and Council as invested with that discretionary power which commanders-in-chief have over their armies, which the Legislature has lately conferred, in a greater extent, on Lord Cornwallis, singly, and which all Governments have in their legislative capacity over the property of their subjects. I never considered that my will or caprice was to be the guide of my conduct; but that I was responsible for the use of the authority with which I was invested to those who had conferred it on me.

My Lords, let me be tried by this rule:—did I act prudently and consistently with the interest of my superiors and of the people whom I governed? What- ever may be your Lordships' opinion upon this question, I can with a safe conscience declare to all the world that my intentions were perfectly upright, and biassed by no selfish considerations whatever . . .

I must entreat your Lordships to remember that, at the time I formed an intention to levy a fine upon Cheyt Sing, and when I consented to the resumption of the Begum's treasure, our government was in the utmost distress for money. I need not, in this place, enter into a minute detail of the several armies we then had in the field, or of the various demands upon me for immediate supplies of treasure; it is sufficient to say, that the distress was as great as it was possible to be without an actual state of bankruptcy and insolvency. It was very natural, under such circumstances, for me to avail myself of every just means of supply which fortune might throw in my way. It might and, I may say, it actually did incline me to act with greater promptitude and decision than I should otherwise have done.

My Lords, it will depend upon your Lordships to give me what degree of credit you please. Whether I intended, for a moment, to apply any one of the sums received by me to my own use, is a point which can be known only to God and my own conscience. I can solemnly and with a pure conscience affirm that I never did harbour such a thought for an instant. And permit me

to add, my Lords, that I was too intent upon the means to be employed for preserving India to Great Britain, from the hour in which I was informed that France meant to strain every nerve to dispute that empire with us, to bestow a thought upon myself or my own private fortune....

My Lords, I will not detain your Lordships by adverting for any length to the story, told by the Manager who opened the general charge, relative to the horrid cruelties practised on the natives of Dhee Jumla by Deby Sing. It will be sufficient to say that the Manager never ventured to introduce this story in the form of a charge, though pressed and urged to do so in the strongest possible terms, both in and out of Parliament.

Mr. Paterson, on whose authority he relied for the truth of his assertions, and with whom he said he wished to go down to posterity, has had the generosity to write to my attorney in Calcutta, for my information, that he felt the sincerest concern to find his reports turned to my disadvantage, as I had acted as might be expected from a man of humanity, throughout all the transactions in which Deby Sing was concerned. Had the cruelties which the Manager stated really been inflicted, it was not possible, as he very well knew at the time, to impute them even by any kind of forced construction to me. My Lords, it is a fact that I was the first person to give Mr. Paterson an ill opinion of Deby Sing, whose conduct upon former occasions had left an unfavourable and, perhaps, an unjust impression upon my mind. In employing Deby Sing, I certainly yielded up my opinion to that of Mr. Anderson and Mr. Shore, who had better opportunities of knowing him than I could have. In the course of the inquiry into his conduct, he received neither favour nor countenance from me, nor from any member of the Board. That inquiry was carried on principally when I was at Lucknow, and was not completed during my government, though it was commenced and continued with every possible solemnity, and with the sincerest desire, on my part and on the part of my colleagues, to do strict and impartial justice. The result I have read in England; and it certainly appears, that, though the man was not entirely innocent, the extent of his guilt bore no sort of proportion to the magnitude of the charges against him. In particular, it proved that the most horrible of those horrible acts, so artfully detailed and with such effect in this place, never were committed at all. Here I leave the subject, convinced that every one of your Lordships must feel for the unparalleled injustice that was done to me by the introduction and propagation of that atrocious calumny.

My Lords, I will not now detain your Lordships by offering many remarks upon the gross injustice that I also sustained, in having been compelled to appear at your Lordships' bar to justify acts which have received the repeated approbation of the King's Ministers and, virtually, of the late House of Com-

mons. My Lords, it is perfectly true that the Articles to which I allude are not insisted upon, or, in other words, that they are abandoned. But I feel the injury most sensibly, and the expense of defending myself against them has been intolerable....

When Great Britain was involved in a complicated war, and her governments in India had, besides European enemies, a confederacy of all the principal powers of India armed against them, I gave the then Minister of this kingdom constant information of all the measures which I had taken, in conjunction with my colleagues in the government, to repel the dangers which pressed us, the motive and objects of those measures, the consequences expected from them, and the measures which I had further in contemplation. And it has since afforded me more than common pleasure to reflect, that every successive letter verified the expectations and the promises of the preceding.

If I had given evidence in my defence, I should have called upon the noble Lord to have produced all my letters in his possession—those, and my letters to the court of Directors. But my letters to Lord North, in a most striking manner, would have shown how careful I was to expose all my actions to their knowledge; and, consequently, how little apprehension I could have felt that there was anything in them that could be deemed reprehensible. In all instances which might have been deemed of a doubtful nature, these communications were virtual references for their sanction or for their future prohibition. If I received neither, their silence was a confirmation, and had more than the effect of an order; since, with their tacit approbation of them, I had imposed upon myself the prior obligation of my own conception of their propriety. Were I therefore for a moment to suppose that the acts with which I am charged and which I so communicated—for I communicated all—to the court of Directors, were intrinsically wrong, yet from such proofs it is evident that I thought them right; and therefore the worst that could be said of them, as they could affect me, is, that they were errors of judgment....

Two great sources of revenue, opium and salt, were of my creation. The first, which I am accused for not having made more productive, amounts at this time yearly to the net income of 120,000*l*. The last—and all my colleagues in the Council refused to share with me in the responsibility attendant upon a new system—to the yearly net income of above 800,000*l*.

To sum up all—I maintained the provinces of my immediate administration in a state of peace, plenty and security, when every other member of the British empire was involved in external wars or civil tumult.

In a dreadful season of famine, which visited all the neighbouring states of India during three successive years, I repressed it in its first approach to the

countries of the British dominion, and by timely and continued regulations prevented its return . . .

And, lastly, I raised the collective annual income of the Company's possessions under my administration from three to five millions sterling—not of temporary and forced exaction, but of an easy, continued, and still existing production—the surest evidence of a good government, improving agriculture and increased population.

To the Commons of England, in whose name I am arraigned for desolating the provinces of their dominion in India, I dare to reply, that they are—and their representatives annually persist in telling them so—the most flourishing of all the states in India. It was I who made them so. The valour of others acquired—I enlarged and gave shape and consistency to—the dominion which you hold there. I preserved it. I sent forth its armies with an effectual but an economical hand, through unknown and hostile regions, to the support of your other possessions—to the retrieval of one from degradation and dishonour, and of the other from utter loss and subjection.

I maintained the wars which were of your formation, or of that of others—not of mine . . . I gave you all; and you have rewarded me with confiscation, disgrace, and a life of impeachment.

SOURCE: In *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings: Papers from a Bicentenary Commemoration*, ed. Geoffrey Carnall and Colin Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989).

Warren Hastings

LORD THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

Whatever we may think of the morality of Hastings, it cannot be denied that the financial results of his policy did honour to his talents. In less than two years after he assumed the government, he had, without imposing any additional burdens on the people subject to his authority, added about four hundred and fifty thousand pounds to the annual income of the Company, besides procuring about a million in ready money. He had also relieved the finances of Bengal from military expenditure, amounting to near a quarter of a million a year, and had thrown that charge on the Nabob of Oude. There can be no doubt that this was a result which, if it had been obtained by honest means, would have entitled him to the warmest gratitude of his country, and which, by whatever means obtained, proved that he possessed great talents for administration.

With all his faults,—and they were neither few nor small,—only one censure was worthy to contain his remains. In that temple of silence and reconciliation where the enmities of twenty generations lie buried, in the Great Abbey which has during many ages afforded a quiet resting-place to those whose minds and bodies have been shattered by the contentions of the Great Hall, the dust of the illustrious accused should have mingled with the dust of the illustrious accusers. This was not to be. Yet the place of interment was not ill chosen. Behind the chancel of the parish church of Daylesford, in earth which already held the bones of many chiefs of the house of Hastings, was laid the coffin of the greatest man who has ever borne that ancient and widely extended name. On that very spot probably, fourscore years before, the little Warren, meanly clad and scantily fed, had played with the children of ploughmen. Even then his young mind had revolved plans which might be called romantic. Yet, however romantic, it is not likely that they had been so strange as the truth. Not only had the poor orphan retrieved the fallen fortunes of his line. Not only had he repurchased the old lands, and rebuilt the old dwelling. He had preserved and extended an empire. He had founded a polity. He had administered government and war with more than the capacity of Richelieu. He had patronised learning with the judicious liberality of Cosmo. He had been attacked by the most formidable combination of enemies that ever sought the destruction of a single victim; and over that combination, after a struggle of ten years, he had triumphed. He had at length gone down to his grave in the fulness of age, in peace, after so many troubles, in honour, after so much obloquy.

Those who look on his character without favour or malevolence will pronounce that, in the two great elements of all social virtue, in respect for the rights of others, and in sympathy for the sufferings of others, he was deficient. His principles were somewhat lax. His heart was somewhat hard. But while we cannot with truth describe him either as a righteous or as a merciful ruler, we cannot regard without admiration the amplitude and fertility of his intellect, his rare talents for command, for administration, and for controversy, his dauntless courage, his honourable poverty, his fervent zeal for the interests of the state, his noble equanimity, tried by both extremes of fortune, and never disturbed by either.

SOURCE: In the *Edinburgh Review* 74, no. 149 (October 1841): 160–255.

only the *Sanscrit*, the treasures of which we may now hope to see unlocked, but even the *Chinese*, *Tartarian*, *Japanese*, and the various insular dialects, an immense mine would then be open, in which we might labour with equal delight and advantage.

Having submitted to you these imperfect thoughts on the *limits* and *objects* of our future society, I request your permission to add a few hints on the *conduct* of it in its present immature state.

Lucian begins one of his satirical pieces against historians, with declaring that the only true proposition in his work was, that it should contain nothing true; and perhaps it may be advisable at first, in order to prevent any difference of sentiment on particular points not immediately before us, to establish but one rule, namely, to have no rules at all. This only I mean, that, in the infancy of any society, there ought to be no confinement, no trouble, no expense, no unnecessary formality. Let us, if you please, for the present, have weekly evening meetings in this hall, for the purpose of hearing original papers read on such subjects, as fall within the circle of our inquiries. Let all curious and learned men be invited to send their tracts to our secretary, for which they ought immediately to receive our thanks; and if, towards the end of each year, we should be supplied with a sufficiency of valuable materials to fill a volume, let us present our *Asiatisk* miscellany to the literary world, who have derived so much pleasure and information from the agreeable work of *Kempfer*, than which we can scarce propose a better model, that they will accept with eagerness any fresh entertainment of the same kind. You will not perhaps be disposed to admit mere translations of considerable length, except of such unpublished essays or treatises as may be transmitted to us by native authors; but, whether you will enrol as members any number of learned natives, you will hereafter decide, with many other questions as they happen to arise; and you will think, I presume, that all questions should be decided on a ballot, by a majority of two thirds, and that nine members should be requisite to constitute a board for such decisions. These points, however, and all others I submit entirely, gentlemen, to your determination, having neither wish nor pretension to claim any more than my single right of suffrage. One thing only, as essential to your dignity, I recommend with earnestness, on no account to admit a new member, who has not expressed a voluntary desire to become so; and in that case, you will not require, I suppose, any other qualification than a love of knowledge, and a zeal for the promotion of it.

Your institution, I am persuaded, will ripen of itself, and your meetings will be amply supplied with interesting and amusing papers, as soon as the object of your inquiries shall be generally known. There are, it may not be delicate to

name them, but there are many, from whose important studies I cannot but conceive high expectations; and, as far as mere labour will avail, I sincerely promise, that, if in my allotted sphere of jurisprudence, or in any intellectual excursion, that I may have leisure to make, I should be so fortunate as to collect, by accident, either fruits or flowers, which may seem valuable or pleasing, I shall offer my humble *Nectar* to your society with as much respectful zeal as to the greatest potentate on earth.

SOURCE: "A Discourse on the Institution of a Society" was a pamphlet published in 1784.

Minute on Indian Education

LORD THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

[Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) was a dominant critic—and advocate as well as historian—of imperial ambitions, both scholastic and political. He wrote voluminously on the topic and its multiple ramifications. His "minute" on Indian education was—and remains—a critical and much-cited contribution to the debate on the respective roles of Indian and English traditions in the issues of governments and instruction. Should the English, for example (and as William Jones argued), learn from and about their Indian subjects? Or vice versa? And what consequences would such considerations bring to the existing relations between colonizer and colonized? Macaulay served in India from 1824 to 1838; he later served as a member of Parliament.]

Shortly after he reached India in 1824, Macaulay found himself embroiled in the struggle over the future of Indian education which had been raging within the General Committee on Public Instruction for some time. The committee was divided into two factions—the "Orientalists" who felt that the British government should continue to foster instruction in Sanskrit and Arabic as well as in English for students in institutions of higher learning sponsored by the committee; and the "Anglicists" who were convinced that the available funds should be employed more or less exclusively for the teaching of English. Both sides believed in varying degrees in the necessity for "Westernization" and in the importance of the Indian vernaculars for carrying out this purpose. But the Anglicist party, unlike the Orientalist, believed strongly that the principal effort on the part of the government had to be put into the teaching of English. Macaulay's minute, written in his capacity of Legal Member of Council, strongly favored the Anglicist side. In the event, the governor-general, Lord William Bentinck, adopted in principle (though not

in every detail) the policies recommended by Macaulay. The correctness of these policies is still being argued about today, but there is no doubt that their consequences for India were immense.

As it seems to be the opinion of some of the gentlemen who compose the Committee of Public Instruction, that the course which they have hitherto pursued was strictly prescribed by the British Parliament in 1813, and as, if that opinion be correct, a legislative Act will be necessary to warrant a change, I have thought it right to refrain from taking any part in the preparation of the adverse statements which are now before us, and to reserve what I had to say on the subject till it should come before me as a member of the Council of India.

It does not appear to me that the Act of Parliament can, by any art of construction, be made to bear the meaning which has been assigned to it. It contains nothing about the particular languages or sciences which are to be studied. A sum is set apart "for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories." It is argued, or rather taken for granted, that by literature the Parliament can have only meant Arabic and Sanscrit literature, that they never would have given the honourable appellation of a "learned native" to a native who was familiar with the poetry of Milton, the metaphysics of Locke, and the physics of Newton; but that they meant to designate by that name only such persons as might have studied in the sacred books of the Hindoos all the usages of cusa-grass, and all the mysteries of absorption into the Deity. This does not appear to be a very satisfactory interpretation. To take a parallel case; suppose that the Pacha of Egypt, a country once superior in knowledge to the nations of Europe, but now sunk far below them, were to appropriate a sum for the purpose of "reviving and promoting literature, and encouraging learned natives of Egypt," would anybody infer that he meant the youth of his pachalic to give years to the study of hieroglyphics, to search into all the doctrines disguised under the fable of Osiris, and to ascertain with all possible accuracy the ritual with which cats and onions were anciently adored? Would he be justly charged with inconsistency, if, instead of employing his young subjects in deciphering obelisks, he were to order them to be instructed in the English and French languages, and in all the sciences to which those languages are the chief keys?

The words on which the supporters of the old system rely do not bear them out, and other words follow which seem to be quite decisive on the other side. This lac of rupees is set apart, not only for "reviving literature in India," the

phrase on which their whole interpretation is founded, but also for "the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories,"—words which are alone sufficient to authorize all the changes for which I contend.

If the Council agree in my construction, no legislative Act will be necessary. If they differ from me, I will prepare a short Act rescinding that clause of the Charter of 1813, from which the difficulty arises.

The argument which I have been considering affects only the form of proceeding. But the admirers of the Oriental system of education have used another argument, which, if we admit it to be valid, is decisive against all change. They conceive that the public faith is pledged to the present system, and that to alter the appropriation of any of the funds which have hitherto been spent in encouraging the study of Arabic and Sanscrit would be downright spoliation. It is not easy to understand by what process of reasoning they can have arrived at this conclusion. The grants which are made from the public purse for the encouragement of literature differed in no respect from the grants which are made from the same purse for other objects of real or supposed utility. We found a sanatorium on a spot which we suppose to be healthy. Do we thereby pledge ourselves to keep a sanatorium there, if the result should not answer our expectation? We commence the erection of a pier. Is it a violation of the public faith to stop the works, if we afterwards see reason to believe that the building will be useless? The rights of property are undoubtedly sacred. But nothing endangers those rights so much as the practice, now unhappily too common, of attributing them to things to which they do not belong. Those who would impart to abuses the sanctity of property are in truth imparting to the institution of property the unpopularity and fragility of abuses. If the Government has given to any person a formal assurance; nay, if the Government has excited in any person's mind a reasonable expectation that he shall receive a certain income as a teacher or a learner of Sanscrit or Arabic, I would respect that person's pecuniary interests—I would rather err on the side of liberality to individuals than suffer the public faith to be called in question. But to talk of a Government pledging itself to teach certain languages and certain sciences, though those languages may become useless, though those sciences may be exploded, seems to me quite unmeaning. There is not a single word in any public instructions from which it can be inferred that the Indian Government ever intended to give any pledge on this subject, or ever considered the destination of these funds as unalterably fixed. But, had it been otherwise, I should have denied the competence of our predecessors to bind us by any pledge on such a subject. Suppose that a Government had in the last century enacted in the most

solemn manner that all its subjects should, to the end of time, be inoculated for the small-pox: would that Government be bound to persist in the practice after Jenner's discovery? These promises, of which nobody claims the performance, and from which nobody can grant a release; these vested rights, which vest in nobody; this property without proprietors; this robbery, which makes nobody poorer, may be comprehended by persons of higher faculties than mine—I consider this plea merely as a set form of words, regularly used both in England and India, in defence of every abuse for which no other plea can be set up.

I hold this lac of rupees to be quite at the disposal of the Governor-General in Council, for the purpose of promoting learning in India, in any way which may be thought most advisable. I hold his Lordship to be quite as free to direct that it shall no longer be employed in encouraging Arabic and Sanscrit, as he is to direct that the reward for killing tigers in Mysore shall be diminished, or that no more public money shall be expended on the chanting at the cathedral.

We now come to the gist of the matter. We have a fund to be employed as Government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of this country. The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it?

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither Literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

What, then, shall that language be? One half of the Committee maintain that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommend the Arabic and Sanscrit. The whole question seems to me to be, which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic.—But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is,

indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.

It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But, when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

How, then, stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands preeminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence; with historical compositions, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equalled; with just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and trade; with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to expand the intellect of man. Whoever knows that language, has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important, and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of

all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronise sound Philosophy and true History, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English Farrier—Astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school—History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long—and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

We are not without experience to guide us. History furnishes several analogous cases, and they all teach the same lesson. There are in modern times, to go no further, two memorable instances of a great impulse given to the mind of a whole society—of prejudices overthrown—of knowledge diffused—of taste purified—of arts and sciences planted in countries which had recently been ignorant and barbarous.

The first instance to which I refer is the great revival of letters among the Western nations at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time almost everything that was worth reading was contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Had our ancestors acted as the Committee of Public Instruction has hitherto acted; had they neglected the language of Cicero and Tacitus; had they confined their attention to the old dialects of our own island; had they printed nothing and taught nothing at the universities but Chronicles in Anglo-Saxon and Romances in Norman-French, would England have been what she now is? What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity. I doubt whether the Sanscrit literature be as valuable as that of our Saxon and Norman progenitors. In some departments—in History, for example—I am certain that it is much less so.

Another instance may be said to be still before our eyes. Within the last hundred and twenty years, a nation which had previously been in a state as barbarous as that in which our ancestors were before the Crusades, has gradually emerged from the ignorance in which it was sunk, and has taken its place among civilised communities—I speak of Russia. There is now in that country a large educated class, abounding with persons fit to serve the state in the highest functions, and in nowise inferior to the most accomplished men who

adorn the best circles of Paris and London. There is reason to hope that this vast empire, which in the time of our grandfathers was probably behind the Punjab, may, in the time of our grandchildren, be pressing close on France and Britain in the career of improvement. And how was this change effected? Not by flattering national prejudices; not by feeding the mind of the young Muscovite with the old woman's stories which his rude fathers had believed: not by filling his head with lying legends about St. Nicholas: not by encouraging him to study the great question, whether the world was or was not created on the 13th of September: not by calling him "a learned native," when he has mastered all these points of knowledge: but by teaching him those foreign languages in which the greatest mass of information had been laid up, and thus putting all that information within his reach. The languages of Western Europe civilized Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for the Hindoo what they have done for the Tartar.

And what are the arguments against that course which seems to be alike recommended by theory and by experience? It is said that we ought to secure the co-operation of the native public, and that we can do this only by teaching Sanscrit and Arabic.

I can by no means admit that, when a nation of high intellectual attainments undertakes to superintend the education of a nation comparatively ignorant, the learners are absolutely to prescribe the course which is to be taken by the teachers. It is not necessary, however, to say anything on this subject. For it is proved by unanswerable evidence that we are not at present securing the co-operation of the natives. It would be bad enough to consult their intellectual taste at the expense of their intellectual health. But we are consulting neither—we are withholding from them the learning for which they are craving; we are forcing on them the mock-learning which they nauseate.

This is proved by the fact that we are forced to pay our Arabic and Sanscrit students, while those who learn English are willing to pay us. All the declamations in the world about the love and reverence of the natives for their sacred dialects will never, in the mind of any impartial person, outweigh the undisputed fact, that we cannot find, in all our vast empire, a single student who will let us teach him those dialects unless we will pay him.

I have now before me the accounts of the Madrasa for one month—the month of December, 1833. The Arabic students appear to have been seventy-seven in number. All receive stipends from the public. The whole amount paid to them is above 500 rupees a month. On the other side of the account stands the following item: Deduct amount realised from the out-students of English for the months of May, June, and July last, 103 rupees.

I have been told that it is merely from want of local experience that I am surprised at these phenomena, and that it is not the fashion for students in India to study at their own charges. This only confirms me in my opinion. Nothing is more certain than that it never can in any part of the world be necessary to pay men for doing what they think pleasant and profitable. India is no exception to this rule. The people of India do not require to be paid for eating rice when they are hungry, or for wearing woollen cloth in the cold season. To come nearer to the case before us, the children who learn their letters and a little elementary Arithmetic from the village schoolmaster are not paid by him. He is paid for teaching them. Why, then, is it necessary to pay people to learn Sanscrit and Arabic? Evidently because it is universally felt that the Sanscrit and Arabic are languages the knowledge of which does not compensate for the trouble of acquiring them. On all such subjects the state of the market is the decisive test.

Other evidence is not wanting, if other evidence were required. A petition was presented last year to the Committee by several ex-students of the Sanscrit College. The petitioners stated they had studied in the college ten or twelve years; that they had made themselves acquainted with Hindoo literatures and science; that they had received certificates of proficiency; and what is the fruit of all this? "Notwithstanding such testimonials," they say, "we have but little prospect of bettering our condition without the kind assistance of your Honourable Committee, the indifference with which we are generally looked upon by our countrymen leaving no hope of encouragement and assistance from them." They therefore beg that they may be recommended to the Governor-General for places under the Government, not places of high dignity or emolument, but such as may just enable them to exist. "We want means," they say, "for a decent living, and for our progressive improvement, which, however, we cannot obtain without the assistance of Government, by whom we have been educated and maintained from childhood." They conclude by representing, very pathetically, that they are sure that it was never the intention of Government, after behaving so liberally to them during their education, to abandon them to destitution and neglect.

I have been used to see petitions to Government for compensation. All these petitions, even the most unreasonable of them, proceeded on the supposition that some loss had been sustained—that some wrong had been inflicted. These are surely the first petitioners who ever demanded compensation for having been educated gratis—for having been supported by the public during twelve years, and then sent forth into the world well-furnished with literature and science. They represent their education as an injury which gives them a claim on the Government for redress, as an injury for which the

stipends paid to them during the infiction were a very inadequate compensation. And I doubt not that they are in the right. They have wasted the best years of life in learning what procures for them neither bread nor respect. Surely we might, with advantage, have saved the cost of making these persons useless and miserable; surely, men may be brought up to be burdens to the public and objects of contempt to their neighbours at a somewhat smaller charge to the state. But such is our policy. We do not even stand neuter in the contest between truth and falsehood. We are not content to leave the natives to the influence of their own hereditary prejudices. To the natural difficulties which obstruct the progress of sound science in the East we add fresh difficulties of our own making. Bounties and premiums, such as ought not to be given even for the propagation of truth, we lavish on false taste and false philosophy.

By acting thus we create the very evil which we fear. We are making that opposition which we do not find. What we spend on the Arabic and Sanscrit colleges is not merely a dead loss to the cause of truth: it is the bounty-money paid to raise up champions of error. It goes to form a nest, not merely of helpless place-hunters, but of bigots prompted alike by passion and by interest to raise a cry against every useful scheme of education. If there should be any opposition among the natives to the change which I recommend, that opposition will be the effect of our own system. It will be headed by persons supported by our stipends and trained in our colleges. The longer we persevere in our present course, the more formidable will that opposition be. It will be every year re-inforced by recruits whom we are paying. From the native society left to itself we have no difficulties to apprehend; all the murmuring will come from that oriental interest which we have, by artificial means, called into being and nursed into strength.

There is yet another fact, which is alone sufficient to prove that the feeling of the native public, when left to itself, is not such as the supporters of the old system represent it to be. The Committee have thought fit to lay out above a lac of rupees in printing Arabic and Sanscrit books. Those books find no purchasers. It is very rarely that a single copy is disposed of. Twenty-three thousand volumes, most of them folios and quartos, fill the libraries, or rather the lumber-rooms, of this body. The Committee contrive to get rid of some portion of their vast stock of Oriental literature by giving books away. But they cannot give so fast as they print. About twenty thousand rupees a year are spent in adding fresh masses of water paper to a hoard which, I should think, is already sufficiently ample. During the last three years, about sixty thousand rupees have been expended in this manner. The sale of Arabic and Sanscrit books, during those three years, has not yielded quite one thousand rupees. In

the mean time the School-book Society is selling seven or eight thousand English volumes every year, and not only pays the expenses of printing, but realizes a profit of 20 per cent on its outlay.

The fact that the Hindoo law is to be learned chiefly from Sanscrit books, and the Mahomedan law from Arabic books, has been much insisted on, but seems not to bear at all on the question. We are commanded by Parliament to ascertain and digest the laws of India. The assistance of a law commission has been given to us for that purpose. As soon as the code is promulgated, the Shasters and the Hedeya will be useless to a Moonsiff or Sudder Ameen. I hope and trust that, before the boys who are now entering at the Madrasa and the Sanscrit college have completed their studies, this great work will be finished. It would be manifestly absurd to educate the rising generation with a view to a state of things which we mean to alter before they reach manhood.

But there is yet another argument which seems even more untenable. It is said that the Sanscrit and Arabic are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred millions of people are written, and that they are, on that account, entitled to peculiar encouragement. Assuredly it is the duty of the British Government in India to be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions. But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly reconcilable with reason, with morality, or even with that very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly preserved. It is confessed that a language is barren of useful knowledge. We are told to teach it because it is fruitful of monstrous superstitions. We are to teach false history, false astronomy, false medicine, because we find them in company with a false religion. We abstain, and I trust shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting natives to Christianity. And, while we act thus, can we reasonably and decently bribe men out of the revenues of the state to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?

It is taken for granted by the advocates of Oriental learning that no native of this country can possibly attain more than a mere smattering of English. They do not attempt to prove this; but they perpetually insinuate it. They designate the education which their opponents recommend as a mere spelling-book education. They assume it as undeniable, that the question is between a profound knowledge of Hindoo and Arabian literature and science on the one side, and a superficial knowledge of the rudiments of English on the other. This is not merely an assumption, but an assumption contrary to all

reason and experience. We know that foreigners of all nations do learn our language sufficiently to have access to all the most abstruse knowledge which it contains, sufficiently to relish even the more delicate graces of our most idiomatic writers. There are in this very town natives who are quite competent to discuss political or scientific questions with fluency and precision in the English language. I have heard the very question on which I am now writing discussed by native gentlemen with a liberality and an intelligence which would do credit to any member of the Committee of Public Instruction. Indeed, it is unusual to find, even in the literary circles of the continent, any foreigner who can express himself in English with so much facility and correctness as we find in many Hindoos. Nobody, I suppose, will contend that English is so difficult to a Hindoo as Greek to an Englishman. Yet an intelligent English youth, in a much smaller number of years than our unfortunate pupils pass at the Sanscrit college, becomes able to read, to enjoy, and even to imitate, not unhappily, the composition of the best Greek authors. Less than half the time which enables an English youth to read Herodotus and Sophocles ought to enable a Hindoo to read Hume and Milton.

To sum up what I have said: I think it clear that we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1833; that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied; that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law, nor as the languages of religion, have the Sanscrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement; that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.

In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel, with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

I would strictly respect all existing interests. I would deal even generously with all individuals who have had fair reason to expect a pecuniary provision. But I would strike at the root of the bad system which has hitherto been

fostered by us. I would at once stop the printing of Arabic and Sanscrit books; I would abolish the Madrasa and the Sanscrit college at Calcutta. Benares is the great seat of Brahmanical learning; Delhi, of Arabic learning. If we retain the Sanscrit college at Benares and the Mahomedan college at Delhi, we do enough, and much more than enough in my opinion, for the Eastern languages. If the Benares and Delhi colleges should be retained, I would at least recommend that no stipend shall be given to any students who may hereafter repair thither, but that the people shall be left to make their own choice between the rival systems of education without being bribed by us to learn what they have no desire to know. The funds which would thus be placed at our disposal would enable us to give larger encouragement to the Hindoo college at Calcutta, and to establish in the principal cities throughout the Presidencies of Fort William and Agra schools in which the English language might be well and thoroughly taught.

If the decision of his Lordship in Council should be such as I anticipate, I shall enter on the performance of my duties with the greatest zeal and alacrity. If, on the other hand, it be the opinion of the Government that the present system ought to remain unchanged, I beg that I may be permitted to retire from the chair of the Committee. I feel that I could not be of the smallest use there—I feel, also, that I should be lending my countenance to what I firmly believe to be a mere delusion. I believe that the present system tends, not to accelerate the progress of truth, but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. I conceive that we have at present no right to the respectable name of a Board of Public Instruction. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish, who live on the public while they are receiving their education, and whose education is so utterly useless to them that, when they have received it, they must either starve or live on the public all the rest of their lives. Entertaining these opinions, I am naturally desirous to decline all share in the responsibility of a body which, unless it alters its whole mode of proceeding, I must consider not merely as useless, but as positively noxious.

SOURCE: In *Miscellaneous Works of Lord Macaulay*, ed. Lady Trevelyan (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880). Dated 2 February 1835.

The Aryan Section

MAX MÜLLER

[Max Müller (1823–1900), a distinguished “orientalist” of German background but with residence in England, was important in representing the importance of the East in the elaborations of academic and institutional efforts of the empire. His work takes, for example, the early efforts of Jones as proponent of the “Asiatic” school through Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay’s arguments on behalf of “Anglicization” to the more procedural directions of latter-nineteenth-century scholars.]

The danger of all scientific work at present, not only among Oriental scholars, but, as far as I can see, everywhere, is the tendency to extreme specialisation. Our age shows in that respect a decided reaction against the spirit of a former age, which those with grey heads among us can still remember, an age represented in Germany by such names as Humboldt, Ritter, Böckh, Johannes Müller, Bopp, Bunsen, and others; men who look to us like giants, carrying a weight of knowledge far too heavy for the shoulders of such mortals as now be; aye, men who *were* giants, but whose chief strength consisted in this, that they were never entirely absorbed or bewildered by special researches, but kept their eye steadily on the highest objects of all human knowledge; who could trace the vast outlines of the kosmos of nature or the kosmos of the mind with an unwavering hand, and to whose maps and guide books we must still recur, whenever we are in danger of losing our way in the mazes of minute research. At the present moment such works as Humboldt’s *Kosmos*, or Bopp’s *Comparative Grammar*, or Bunsen’s *Christianity and Mankind*, would be impossible. No one would dare to write them, for fear of not knowing the exact depth at which the *Protophyses Haackelii* has lately been discovered or the lengthening of a vowel in the *Samhitapāṭha* of the *Rig-veda*. It is quite right that this should be so, at least, for a time; but all rivers, all brooks, all rills, are meant to flow into the ocean, and all special knowledge, to keep it from stagnation, must have an outlet into the general knowledge of the world. Knowledge for its own sake, as it is sometimes called, is the most dangerous idol that a student can worship. We despise the miser who amasses money for the sake of money, but still more contemptible is the intellectual miser who hoards up knowledge instead of spending it, though, with regard to most of our knowledge, we may be well assured and satisfied that, as we brought nothing into the world, so we may carry nothing out.