

## INTRODUCTION.

Having now completed the inquiry which we were directed to undertake in the decision announced in the House of Commons eight months ago, we beg to lay before His Majesty's Government this report of the conclusions to which we have come, touching the constitutional changes which are desirable in India, and to ask their assent to its publication.

2. We have a preliminary point to make. It has been asked why the Secretary of State and the Government of India are devoting time and energies to the task of domestic reconstruction, when the whole activities of the authorities and the country ought to be bent to the supreme purpose of the war. Our report will, we hope, show how strong in themselves are the reasons for not postponing the consideration of reforms. We can add that the calm atmosphere in which we hoped that our inquiry might be conducted has been attained; and this has in itself been of no small assistance to the Government. It would be easy to rebut the criticism by a specific recital of the part that India has played in the war. But we wish to avoid any appearance of either apology or glorification; and therefore we prefer to meet it simply by the formal and definite assurance, made with a full sense of responsibility, that the energies of the Government have at no time been diverted from the war by other considerations however important.

3. We have also briefly to explain the means which we took to comply with the direction that there should be a free and informal exchange of opinion between those in authority at Home and in India. As soon as the announcement was made in the House of Commons, the Government of India in Simla and a Committee of the India Office in London devoted themselves to the preliminary consideration of the problems involved. The Secretary of State and those who accompanied him from England reached India in November. We began work at Delhi and then visited in turn Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, receiving deputations at each of these places and giving interviews to representative men. Efforts have been made to ascertain all shades of opinion. We have been throughout the inquiry in constant consultation with the members of the Government of India. We met the heads of certain provinces in Delhi in November, and the presidency Governors and Governments in their own capitals later on. On our return to Delhi a continuous series of conferences began; there were meetings of the Secretary of State and those associated with him and the Government of India; meetings with all the Heads of provinces; meetings with a Committee of the Ruling Princes; meetings of Committees to consider details; and frequent private interviews and informal discussions. We place our report

therefore before His Majesty's Ministers as the record of opinions formed after a very full and free discussion conducted in many varying ways with those whom we were instructed to consult. We are only too conscious of the defects which must attend a report produced under the limitations of time which we thought it right to impose on ourselves; but we have tried to make it a self-contained document, so as to obviate any need for the presentation of papers. Indeed this short description of the methods by which the inquiry has been pursued will show how difficult it would have been to present papers which would give a consistent and consecutive view of its progress.

4. In the course of our interviews with representatives of all classes of opinion we were made aware of their wishes upon many important questions which lie outside the scope of our present inquiry. For that reason we make no mention of such matters in our report. Nevertheless they are receiving and will receive our careful consideration. We have tried to trace the growth of the existing structure and to indicate its defects. We have tried to explain the conditions of the problem and to suggest the contributions which all concerned must bring to its solution. But we have not felt it our duty nor necessary to our purpose to pronounce judgment on the past, or to condemn individuals or classes or communities. Our concern was with the organization; and as far as possible we have confined our comments to it. In several cases we have been content to indicate our proposals without going into details which it would have taken us too long to explore; or without explaining the exact means by which we intend that our suggestions should be carried out. On many such points there must necessarily be further consultation between the Government of India and the India Office. Again we have often made use of compendious or convenient terms without attempting to qualify or define them on each occasion with extreme precision. The language of our report should not be taken as embodying the exact terms in which the proposals should be expressed in the legal instruments which will be needed to give effect to them. If we speak of India as self-governing, the phrase is a convenient means of referring to the objective set out in the announcement of August 20, namely, responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. When we speak of "provincial autonomy" the words are to be understood as conveniently summing up the position of the provincial Governments which we have defined more precisely elsewhere in the report. When we speak of the action of a local Government or of the Government of India, the terms should be understood in reference to the general powers of control exercised by the Government of India and the Secretary of State in Council respectively. If we speak of "Indian opinion" we should be understood as generally referring to the majority of those who have held or are capable of holding an opinion on the matter with which we are dealing. We have not forgotten that public opinion can rarely be unanimous,

nor have we overlooked the fact that a public opinion which is the opinion of the population as a whole can be developed in India only as education spreads and as people learn to use the vote. We trust that this explanation will be borne in mind by those who read our report.

5. We do not suppose that any words of ours are needed to express our sense of the gravity of the task which we have attempted. The welfare and happiness of hundreds of millions of people are in issue. We have been called upon to revise a system of government, which has been constructed by builders who like ourselves had no models before them, during a century and a half of steadfast purpose and honourable aim; a system which has won the admiration of critical observers from many lands; and to which other nations that found themselves called upon to undertake a similar task of restoring order and good government in disturbed countries have always turned for inspiration and guidance. England may be proud of her record in India. She should have even greater reason for pride in it in future. Because the work already done has called forth in India a new life, we must found her Government on the co-operation of her people, and make such changes in the existing order as will meet the needs of the more spacious days to come; not ignoring the difficulties, nor underestimating the risks, but going forward with good courage in the faith that because our purpose is right it will be furthered by all that is best in the people of all races in India. But the fact that we are looking to the future does not mean that we are unmindful of the past. The existing edifice of government in India is a monument to the courage, patience, and high purpose of those who have devised and worked it, to which before we set about explaining our own proposals it is fitting that we pay our imperfect tribute.

