MACAULAY'S INDIAN CAREER

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MACAULAY was in India for three years and a half from the middle of 1834; but his interest in Indian affairs, and indeed his official connection with the East India Company had begun two years earlier. Entering the House of Commons in 1830, he had taken a prominent part in the debates on the Reform Bill, and had been rewarded with a seat on the Board of Control for India. Taking more than an official interest in Indian matters, he laboured with characteristic energy at informing himself of the affairs of India. An opportunity for the display of his knowledge and enthusiasm presented itself when the Government of India Act of 1833 was introduced in the reformed Parliament.

The Charter Act of 1813 had deprived the Company of its monopoly of commerce with India, without, however, touching either its political powers or its monopoly of the China trade. The home government, then in the throes of the Napoleonic conflict, had not been prepared to face the responsibility either of assuming the government of the Eastern dominions or of introducing the grave temptations of the Indian patronage into the party politics of Great Britain. The Act of 1833 went deeper into the whole question. Not only did the Company lose the monopoly of the China trade, but it was also ordered to close its commercial business entirely and dispose of its assets. The merchant organization which had won an empire for Britain was now divested of its mercantile function, though forty-five years were yet to run before it was finally relieved of the government of the empire. A fourth member was added to the Governor-General's Council, for Law. This appointment of the Law Member "was important in two ways. It constituted the first step taken in India towards the establishment of a legislature separate from the executive; and it provided the Council with a legal expert to criticise, amend or draft legislative proposals."¹ Provision was also made for recruitment to the Civil Service and the employment of Indians.

Macaulay's great speech was made during the second reading of the Bill, in a House which, though it included men of the eminence of Russell, Peel and O'Connell, was yet extremely thin. "On a Wednesday, and

¹ Dodwell, The Cambridge History of India, VI, 7.
with an Indian question on the paper, Cicero replying to Hortensius would hardly draw a quorum,” says Macaulay’s biographer. 

This Act of 1833 furnished the starting-point of the movements with which Macaulay’s name is intimately connected in the history of this country. He had actively assisted in the drafting of the bill, and his powerful speech ensured its easy passage through Parliament. If Macaulay thus, at least partly, made the India Act of 1833, the Act in its turn brought him political and financial advancement. The offer of the newly created place of Law Member at Calcutta, for five years, on a salary of £10,000, that was now made to him, was prompted by the recognition rather of his Parliamentary ability and eloquence and his keen interest in Indian affairs than of his legal talents; for he had never taken kindly to law, and had built up neither practice nor reputation. His prospects in England were then none too bright, and he accepted without hesitation this chance of earning an honourable competence.

Macaulay’s Indian appointment occurred at a memorable juncture in the history of England and of India. The reformed Parliament had begun to perpetuate in the nation’s life the liberal and humanitarian principles of Wilberforce, Howard, Bentham and Ashley. The abolition of slavery, the inauguration of factory legislation, and the new Poor Law came in rapid succession after the purification of the representative system of the country. Many of these liberal ideas relating to government, to suppression of crime, to social amelioration, and to religion had spread beyond the ocean; and, they were filtering into British India through missionaries and through such remarkable men among the Company’s servants as Munro, Elphinstone and Metcalfe. And it was specially fortunate that the reforming zeal of Bentinck and Macaulay was able to find a decade of unwonted respite from wars and conquests. Time, opportunity and men combined to produce a series of social and administrative reforms.

Clause 40 of the Act of 1833 had laid down that the newly added Legal Member of Council “shall not be entitled to sit or vote in the said council except at meetings thereof for making laws and regulations”. This exclusion, however, was not enforced in practice as the Directors felt that the Law Member could not adequately perform his duties unless he attended all

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2 Trevelyan, Life and Letters of Macaulay, I, 329.

3 “Macaulay's practice at the bar had been less than little, according to an account which he gave of it at a public dinner: 'My own forensic experience, gentlemen, has been extremely small: for my only recollection of an achievement that way is that at quarter sessions I once convicted a boy of stealing a parcel of cocks and hens.'” —Trevelyan, op. cit., I, 466.
meetings of the Council and was in constant communication with his colleagues. This relaxation enabled Macaulay to play a prominent part in three matters of the first importance besides that of Indian law reform, viz., freedom of the press, recruitment to the civil service by competitive examinations, and Indian education.

English newspapers were being published in Calcutta since the days of Warren Hastings. Their tone had been generally unsavoury, a common feature being scurrilous personal abuse, which spared neither the Governor-General nor even his wife. "Checks were supplied by duels, assaults on editors, or vigorous executive action." Wellesley established, during the Napoleonic war, a vigorous censorship, which was continued by Minto but somewhat relaxed by Lord Hastings. In 1823 John Adam, the acting Governor-General, a good, but somewhat bureaucratic man, deported Buckingham, the English editor of the Calcutta Journal, and introduced a press regulation by which printers and publishers of newspapers were required to take out a license. This restriction, however, does not seem to have had much effect, and the Calcutta press continued to enjoy a considerable amount of freedom. Bentinck and Macaulay were staunch advocates of the freedom of the press, though it was an irony of fate that both of them should be subjected to the most savage attacks in the press by their countrymen, Bentinck on the question of the reduction of the batta, and Macaulay in connection with the "Black Act" of 1836, by which appeals from British residents were transferred from the Supreme Court to the Sadr court. Bentinck declared that "he knew of no subject which the Press might not fairly discuss". Macaulay argued even more strongly for the repeal of the licensing law, which was odious without being effective. He made short work of the argument that it was necessary for Government to keep in its hands such powers to deal with a refractory press. He declared: "No government in the world is better provided with the means of meeting extraordinary dangers by extraordinary precautions. Five persons, who may be brought together in half an hour, whose deliberations are secret, who are not shackled by any of those forms which elsewhere delay legislative measures, can, in a single sitting, make a law for stopping every press in India. Possessing as we do the unquestionable power to interfere whenever the safety of the State may require it, with overwhelming rapidity and energy, we surely ought not, in quiet times, to be constantly keeping the offensive form and ceremonial of despotism before the eyes of those whom,

4 Thompson and Garratt, Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India, 291.
5 Boulger, Bentinck (Rulers of India), 162.
nevertheless, we permit to enjoy the substance of freedom." In 1835, when Macaulay was still a member of the Supreme Council, Sir Charles Metcalfe, the acting Governor-General, one of the ablest men by whom the Company was ever served, removed all these restrictions on the press, thereby, incidentally, incurring the wrath of the Court of Directors and losing all chance of being confirmed in his office.

Another question on which Macaulay felt and expressed himself strongly was that of recruitment to the Company's civil service in India. Though this matter did not arise directly during his membership of the council, there were two occasions on which he expressed himself with eloquence and force in the House of Commons. The first occasion was in the course of his speech on the second reading of the Bill of 1833. We are told by his biographer that "he had himself imported into the Act of 1833 clauses which rearranged the system of appointment to the Civil Service on a basis of Competition." In the course of his speech Macaulay said, "India is entitled to the services of the best talents which England can spare... It is proposed that for every vacancy in the civil service four candidates shall be named, and the best candidate elected by examination... It is said, I know, that examinations in Latin, in Greek and in mathematics are not tests of what men will prove to be in life. I am perfectly aware that they are not infallible tests; but that they are tests I confidently maintain... Education would be mere useless torture, if at two or three and twenty, a man who has neglected his studies were exactly on a par with a man who has applied himself to them." Unfortunately, however, the Directors managed to circumvent this wholesome proposal next year by an amending bill. If this system had been brought into force "it would have excluded the bad bargains who have always been the misfortune of every system of patronage; it would also have excluded the very clever men, with no interest in India but as a field for their talents, who have been the bane of the system of open competition." Twenty years later, long after he had returned from India, Macaulay returned to the charge with another speech in favour of absolutely open competition made in the House of Commons in 1855 during the discussion on the Government of India Act of that year. A

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6 Trevelyan, op. cit., 436.
7 Ibid., II, 336.
8 Keith, Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy, I, 251, ff.
9 "They were not going to resign without a struggle the most valuable patronage which had existed in the world since the days when the Roman Senate sent proconsuls and propraetors to Syria, Sicily and Egypt."—Trevelyan, op. cit., 337.
10 Dodwell, The Cambridge History of India, VI, 7.
was not unusual with him he looked at only one side of the question. The system of open competition was adopted, and confirmed in 1858; and "the very clever men" came to have their day. "Lord Stanley, in committee, drew pointed attention to one weak side of the plan. Unlimited competition which, in fact, would exclude all Indians from participating he regarded as a step back, not as a step forward."11 Macaulay now, as in his famous education Minute, simply forgot or ignored the fact that conditions in England and in India were not identical. And for him the other side simply never existed.

The Act of 1833, recognizing the desirability of standardising the judicial and police systems and institutions in the Company’s territories, directed the Governor-General in Council, in clause 53, to appoint Indian Law Commissioners, not exceeding five in number, to enquire fully into all these matters and to suggest alterations that might be desirable. Of this Indian Law Commission Macaulay, as Law Member, was the first President. In addition to holding the inquiry, and advising on new proposals of legislation emanating from the supreme or the subordinate governments, this Commission, at Macaulay’s instance, undertook the project of codifying the criminal law. "This code," declared Macaulay, "should not be a mere digest of existing usages and regulations, but should comprise all the reforms which the Commissioners may think desirable. It should be framed on two great principles—the principle of suppressing crime with the smallest possible amount of suffering, and the principle of ascertaining truth at the smallest possible cost of time and money." Macaulay underrated the difficulties of the task; and the majority of his colleagues were prevented by illness from taking their full share in it. He, however, produced the first draft of the Indian Penal Code in 1837. After careful revision by many experienced lawyers during a period of more than twenty years, especially by Sir Barnes Peacock, it became law in 1861. The credit of having laid its secure foundation belongs to Macaulay. "His Draft," says Sir Fitzjames Stephen, "gives the substance of the Criminal law of England, down to its minute working details, in a compass which, by comparison with the original, may be regarded as almost absurdly small. The Indian Penal Code is to the English Criminal law what a manufactured article ready for use is to the materials out of which it is made."

Of all the subjects connected with the Indian career of Macaulay that which is best remembered is the new education policy inaugurated in 1834.

11 Ibid., 19.
After the establishment of British power in India Western education first came through private agencies, chiefly Christian missions. The lead was taken by non-British missionaries: Jesuits, Danes and the German missionary Schwartz, who visited India in the year of Wandewash and started schools in Tanjore and other places in the Madras Presidency. In 1793 the Baptists established a mission in Bengal. “But all these missions were small affairs and Dr. Thomas doubts whether in 1800 more than 1,000 children were receiving instruction in Indian mission schools.”

The East India Company at first looked on this missionary effort with suspicion if not hostility. In an age when there was no state responsibility for education even in England it was too much to expect the Company to assume such responsibility in India.

In 1781 Warren Hastings established the Calcutta Madrassa or Muhummadan College, the first important educational institution in India started by the British power, paying for it at first from his own pocket, though he was reimbursed later; and in 1792 Cornwallis sanctioned the opening of the Sanskrit College at Benares. As a result of the agitation of reformers in England like Charles Grant, Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay, the East India Company Act of 1813 included a clause, the 43rd, “which is justly famous as containing the first legislative admission of the right of education to participate in the public revenues.” A lakh of rupees was to be set apart annually for being applied to education. The Court of Directors in their Despatch of June 3, 1814, interpreted the provision as follows: “The Clause presents two distinct propositions for consideration: first, the encouragement of learned natives of India, and the revival and improvement of literature; secondly, the promotion of a knowledge of the sciences amongst the inhabitants of that country.” But no active steps seem to have been taken for ten years to carry out any part of this provision.

In the meantime David Hare, a rationalist reformer of Calcutta, joined with Ram Mohan Roy in establishing a society of Indians and Europeans to promote Western education in this country. They established the Calcutta Vidyalaya, also known as the Hindu College or the Maha-

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12 Hartog, Some Aspects of Indian Education, 5, referring to F. W. Thomas, The History and Prospects of British Education in India.
13 “Education in India under the British Government was first ignored, then violently and successfully opposed, then conducted on a system now universally admitted to be erroneous, and finally placed on its present footing.”—Howell, Education in British India, 1872, quoted in Sharp, Selections from Educational Records, Part I, 2.
14 Sharp, op. cit., 18.
15 Ibid., 22.
Patasala, which later developed into the Presidency College and the David Hare School. Various other schools were started. “The desire for learning English,” says Sir Philip Hartog, “was perhaps partly due to the desire for entering the Company’s service, but until 1836 it received little encouragement or stimulus from Government. In its first stages the development of ‘English Education’ was due to no deep-seated desire of Great Britain to Westernize Indian education. It was spontaneous and voluntary.”

In 1823, during the time when John Adam acted as Governor-General, a Committee of Public Instruction was appointed in Bengal for the purpose of administering the annual grant of a lakh of rupees. Much of the money was at first spent in printing Oriental classics and in supporting institutions of Arabic and Sanskrit learning. A strong difference of opinion developed between the supporters of Oriental and of Western learning, and in 1823, eleven years before Macaulay set foot on Indian soil, Ram Mohan Roy, in a celebrated petition to Lord Amherst, roundly declared that “the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British Legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences.”

Differences developed on the question of the content as well as the linguistic medium of higher education. The Orientalists, whose stalwarts were H. T. Prinsep and H. H. Wilson, were in favour of the indigenous system of education and of Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian as the medium of instruction. The Anglicists, composed generally of the younger men like Trevelyan, Russell Colvin and Metcalfe, and reinforced by Ram Mohan Roy and the redoubtable Alexander Duff, the Scotch missionary, were in favour of English and “English Education”. Bentinck, even before he was carried away by the torrent of Macaulay’s eloquence, was inclined towards the Anglicists. He believed in the superiority of Western education and in its fitness as a means of founding “British Greatness upon Indian Happiness”. He was also interested in raising up a class of educated Indians to occupy administrative posts in the Company’s service, in consonance with clause 87 of the Act of 1833 and the opinion of the Directors, who had declared that “in every view it is important that the indigenous people of India, or those among them who by their habits,

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16 Hartog, *op. cit.*, 11.
character or position may be induced to aspire to office, should as far as possible be qualified to meet their European competitors.”

Educational policy was bound up with the task of government and the constant supply of its instruments.

The differences among the rival schools of thought in the Committee of Public Instruction had come to a head by 1834, the year in which Macaulay came to Bengal as Law Member and was appointed President of the Committee. He insisted on the matter being decided forthwith. “When the question was brought up before the Council by the rival parties, who addressed their arguments in the form of letters, he expressed his views on the matter in dispute in a masterly minute, dated 2nd February 1835.”

Macaulay had no doubt in his mind about the superiority of the English language and of Western education. “I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic,” he admitted, but went on to declare that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” “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 pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. 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 with our own.” He concluded by saying that neither Sanskrit nor Arabic had any special claim to encouragement, and “that it was possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English Scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.”

Macaulay brought the mind of an advocate to the task of a judge. All his limitations as a thinker were in evidence in this celebrated Minute. “He has a constant tendency,” says Mark Pattison, “to glaring colours, to strong effects, and will always be striking violent blows.... There is an overweening confidence about his tone.... His propositions have no qualifications.”

“I wish I was as cocksure of any one thing,” said Lord Melbourne once, “as Macaulay is of everything.” Macaulay’s self-confident assertions practically decided the issue, as the Governor-General signified his ready and complete concurrence with the sentiments expressed in the Minute. Bentinck, as a reforming liberal, was anxious that Western ideas

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19 Boulger, op. cit., 151.
20 Encyclopædia Britannica, 11th edn.
should spread in India; and, besides, the arguments of the Orientalists carried the less weight with him for the reason that Wilson, one of their number, had doubted the wisdom and practicability of the abolition of Sati and been proved wrong by the event. The Resolution of March 7, 1835, ran as follows: "His Lordship in Council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed in English education alone."

Opposition did not disappear immediately. Prinsep, contending that the resolution was "based upon a minute advocating with all the warmth of controversy one particular side of a debated question without the opportunity having been given to those opposed to this view to offer any explanations or reply," continued to answer Macaulay’s points in official and unofficial writings; and as late as 1847 Col. Jervis roundly declared: "The project of importing English literature along with English cottons into India, and bringing it into universal use, must at once be felt by every reasonable mind as chimerical and ridiculous." But the English party had triumphed. A Minute by Auckland in 1839 endorsed this policy. The schools of Oriental learning were not abolished, but the system of English education had come to stay, and Macaulay had played a decisive part in bringing this about.

A century of actual working has revealed many serious defects in the enterprise thus inaugurated. In the first place, the start was made at what proved to be the wrong end. The hope of Macaulay, Auckland, and other believers in the "filtration theory" that education would filter to the masses through the educated classes was not realised. Speedy filtration on a large scale was scarcely possible through more or less watertight barriers. No spontaneous or beneficial contact was established between the masses, to whom the vernacular was the only possible vehicle of culture, and the new educated classes, who too often looked on English education as not a means but an end, and did nothing to develop a literature of modern learning in the mother-tongue. Indeed the effect has been the reverse of what was hoped. "The use of English as a means of instruction and the inability of Government to develop the vernaculars have widened the gulf that separates the intelligentsia of India from the masses."

22 Ibid., 138.
20 Richie, Selections from Educational Records, Part II, 11.
24 Mayhew, The Education of India, 91.
Secondly, the system took a wrong turning at the very start by reason of the harnessing of education to the needs of government service. "By making its own type of education the qualification for government service, it tended to concentrate the energies of the youth of India on the search for public offices rather than of learning for its own sake or of that general development of the intelligence which would serve the industrial growth of the country."\(^{25}\)

Thirdly, the models and materials of English education that were in fashion in this country in the early Victorian era were hardly adequate as a basis for the cultural advancement of a nation, and were indeed unsuited even to the task of building up a staff of administrative officials. "Absurdly enough our Eastern subjects were prepared for taking their part in the government of the country by the study of writers who taught that government itself was at best a necessary evil. We attempted to raise a race of administrators on the literature of Revolt."\(^{24}\)

Moreover, certain accidental circumstances further complicated the issue. Educational reform was undertaken at a time when the vernacular literature of the country was at a particularly low ebb and could give no creditable account of itself. The policy was largely decided by men who had no knowledge of the treasures of the indigenous learning and culture. The orientalists did not get a fair and full hearing, partly because of the heat generated by Macaulay's imperious vigour and partly by reason of the prejudice created against Wilson and others by the controversy over the abolition of Sati.

In spite of a century of organized effort Indian education largely remains as a problem to be solved by the new statesmanship of the post-war world. It is a happy augury that among the various schemes of social reconstruction contemplated for the new order in this country a noteworthy plan of educational reorganization should already occupy a prominent place, for it is one of the great lessons of modern history that a country's greatness, to be lasting, should be built on the rock of a national and nationwide education. His prejudices and the limitations of his outlook notwithstanding, Macaulay must be counted among the makers of modern education in India; and there is no doubt that his motives were honest, disinterested and democratic.


\(^{24}\) Roberts, *British India*, 304.