

**THE TRUE POLICY OF
ORGANISING A SYSTEM
OF RAILWAYS FOR INDIA**

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The True Policy of Organising a System of Railways for India by James Ward

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JAMES WARD

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TRUE POLICY OF ORGANISING
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OF
RAILWAYS FOR INDIA.

A Letter to the Right Hon. the President of the Board of Control.

BY JAMES WARD, Esq.,
AUTHOR OF "RAILWAYS FOR THE MANY AND NOT FOR THE FEW;" AND "HOW TO
RE-CONSTRUCT THE INDUSTRIAL CONDITION OF IRELAND."

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1847.

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TO THE RIGHT HON. THE
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF CONTROL.

SIR,

It is by no means from an apprehension that the Directors of the East India Company may be disposed to neglect the important affairs confided to their administrative care, that I am induced to address to you the following suggestions for developing the vast resources of our Indian Empire. Whatever accusations may from time to time be brought against that honorable body by factious jealousy, and the disappointed ambition of which it is generally the offspring, this will meet with no echo in the following pages. However anomalous may be the constitution of their rule over India, it is not only well adapted to our peculiar relations towards it from its self-denial of all the offensive insignia of foreign conquest and imperial despotism, but in practice it has worked beneficially for the subjects of it. Even Mr. Mill, who evinced any thing but an unscrupulous

pulous and parasitical regard for the Company and their policy, felt constrained to do justice to the virtue of their intentions and the efficacy of their labors, before he closed his great work on the history of our connection with that country. "The Company," he declares, in summing up the character of their administration, "during their sovereignty have done more in behalf of their subjects; have shewn more goodwill towards them; have shewn less of a selfish attachment to mischievous powers lodged in their hands; have bestowed a more generous welcome to schemes of improvement, and are now more willing to adopt improvement, not only than any other sovereign existing in the same period, but than all other sovereigns taken together upon the surface of the globe."* So just an encomium from so impartial an authority needs no addition or enforcement from me; and I only repeat it that my cordial confirmation of it may dissipate any suspicion of my desiring to cast any imputation upon the deserving objects of it.

But, Sir, although I believe that the Company have ever honestly and disinterestedly studied the welfare of India, there may be some points in which they have overlooked or mistaken it. Few sins of actual aggression can be laid to their charge, but they have perpetuated many errors of finance which amount to unintentional—perhaps they would call it unavoidable—oppression. The continuance of the

* Mills's History of British India. Vol 3, p. 49.

salt tax, for instance, by which so large a portion of the fruits of the Ryot's labor is sacrificed to procure the necessary condiment for rendering his insipid food palatable and wholesome; and of the voracious land-tax, which swallows such a lion's share of the whole produce of the country, may be quoted as examples of their fiscal mismanagement. And again, the Company are not always in the same favorable position for attempting reforms and improvements on a large and comprehensive scale. Their charter requires a periodical renewal, and towards the expiration of any given term, they are slow to initiate any great changes of system themselves. They do not know the conditions upon which parliament may consent to re-invest them with power, and are loth to commit themselves to engagements, or involve themselves in a policy which the future tenure of their delegated authority may possibly render injurious or inconvenient. I can hardly impute this to them as a fault. It is natural that, under such circumstances, they should be cautious; and still more so when we remember that so long as they realize the full amount of the dividend to which they are restricted, they have everything to lose and nothing to gain by any venturous innovation upon their established *regime*.

This, however, does not forbid or absolve us from urging them onward in the course of improvement; and it is the more necessary that they should be constantly acted upon by public opinion here, because they are at all times liable to be influenced by the

prejudices of their legislative officers in India. The Direction in England, and even the transitory supreme Head of the government in India, are always more liberally disposed than the Legislative Council at Calcutta, whose long residence in the East, however it may otherwise qualify them for their functions on the score of practical experience, incapacitates them from keeping pace with the more rapid march of intellect at home. I need not go beyond the subject of these pages—the Introduction of Railways into India—for an illustration of this tendency in the Legislative Council to take a narrower and more selfish view of any grand Anglo-Indian scheme for developing the resources of our Asiatic dominions, than we could in justice give any Governor General or Secret Committee the credit of originating.

Let us, Sir, with as much conciseness as the subject will permit, consider, first, what are the *objects* to which the Legislative Council confine themselves in their qualified approval of introducing the railway system into India; and secondly, what are the *terms* upon which they would permit—we cannot say encourage—English Capitalists to avail themselves of the privilege.

The primary and almost exclusive object which they have in view is to render the military defence of the north-western frontier more effectual and economical. They are unable to see a railway in any other light than as a new system of fortification. Strip it of its advantages except as a rapid line of military and other official communication, and they would

vouchsafe it but a very indifferent reception. They do not *deny* that it would be productive of great commercial advantages, but they make little account of them in comparison with their utility as "instruments of Government;" and to this special utility, they make every other consideration secondary and subservient. Mr. Cameron, who seems to be the least frigid of the triumvirate on this topic, "ventures to say, in general terms, that the advantages which a civilised Government will derive from railways in improving the condition of its semi-barbarous subjects, and in resisting the aggressions of its semi-barbarous enemies, are so great, that the Government of India might be very well justified in making railroads for the attainment of them." "*Civilising* semi-barbarous subjects," as an isolated expression, would hold out to us some hope that Mr. Cameron really entertained an enlightened view of the question; but when we arrive at what are his notions of *civilising* a people, we find that he uses the word too much in a literal sense for it to be a liberal one. By *civilising* people he only means *making them civil*. By *civilising* semi-barbarous subjects he means nothing more than keeping them in orderly as well as nominal subjection; a very desirable object most certainly, but which falls very short of what, in our conception, the introduction of a system of railways is adapted to accomplish, if planned for such purposes as it ought to be. We expected to hear from him some sound reflection upon, and some fervent aspiration for, the *civilising* influence of commerce; for of commerce, as of the