

THE REBELLION IN INDIA: HOW TO PREVENT ANOTHER

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The rebellion in India: how to prevent another by John Bruce Norton

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JOHN BRUCE NORTON

**THE REBELLION IN
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THE REBELLION

IN

INDIA:

HOW TO PREVENT ANOTHER.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA
BY

JOHN BRUCE NORTON.

“Certe id firmissimum longè imperium est quo obedientes gaudent.”—
Livy, l. viii. c. 13.

“Nihil est quod adhuc de republicâ patem dictum, et quo possim longius
progredi, nisi sit confirmatum, non modo falsum esse illud, sine injuriâ non
posse, sed hoc verissimum, sine summâ justitiâ rempublicam regi non posse.”—
Cicero, *Fragm. de Rep.* l. ii.

LONDON:

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1857.

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AMANTILLAO

RICHARDSON BROTHERS, PRINTERS, 23, CORNHILL, E.C.

HENRY MORRIS STEPHENS

P R E F A C E .

FORBID to make any comment in India on the startling events now passing before my eyes, forbid even to make any enquiry into the causes of the rebellion, I turn—in common, no doubt, with many others—to England, where the liberty of the Press is not yet shackled.

I state a fact. It is not my intention here to discuss the merits of the Gagging Act. From many quarters abundant strictures will pour in on that subject.* The only point of view in which I wish

* The Calcutta journals expect to enlist the indignation of the English Press in their cause, as though it were a common cause. To me, such an event seems problematical. It seems to me almost impossible to predict what view will be taken of this measure by the Press in England. The danger is so imminent and overwhelming, and there is so prevalent a general idea that the English Press of India is licentious and scurrilous; it has been so assiduously branded as "lying," "rascally," and the like, that perhaps the Press and public at home may not regard the attack in its true light. They may regard it in some measure as necessary and merited, and there will be poured in from a hundred quarters, statements which may seem to justify Lord Canning's Act. Be it remembered, however, that these representations proceed from the very parties who have everything to gain by the suppression of the liberty of the Press.

to present it, is to warn the people of England against being misled by this most iniquitous device for blinding them. I utterly deny that Lord Canning has shown any sufficient reason for his indiscriminate application of one and the same measure to the loyal English, and the treasonous Native Press. As well might we confound the power of Printing-house-square with the filth of Holywell-street. Lord Canning expressly says, that "poison" "has been poured into the minds of the people by a" "portion of the *Native Press*, within the last few" "weeks." "*It is to this quarter* then," he continues, "that I direct the attention of the members" "of the Legislative Council." He expressly exonerates the European Press. He says, "*the remarks*" "*I have made against the Native Press, I do not*" "*direct against the European Press;*" he gives credit to the "many able and intelligent men who" "conduct the newspaper Press in this country, for" "the feeling they have shown at this period;" and forthwith, with an inconceivable logic, proceeds to say that he can draw no line of demarcation between the European and the Native Press, and at once confounds liberty and license, loyalty and treason, in one common catastrophe!

Now I warn my fellow-countrymen in England against being deluded by this feeble sophistry. Let them depend upon it, that this attack upon the

Press is in reality intended to screen the cowardice and incapacity of the real authors of the revolution. Lord Canning's arm may have dealt the blow, but there is a power behind which directed the arm. It is not that the crisis necessitated the measure; but that the crisis has been seized as the fittest moment for striking a long meditated blow at the Press, and gratifying a grudge of ancient standing. Political capital has been made out of the bloodshed in the North-West. The arm of the law was amply strong enough before the Gagging Act to meet the alleged evil: and the best proof is, that Mr. Beadon, *since the passing of the Act*, has prosecuted certain Native papers for treasonable writings published before. A public prosecution would at any time have been sufficient to curb the unbridled license of the Native Press. On Lord Canning's own shewing, it would have sufficed to legislate for the Native Press. If the intention had been merely to provide against the chance of injudicious statements, or erroneous information, finding their way to the public ear during a season of great excitement, the institution of a censorship would have met the object. *Prevention is better than cure.* But if it was sought to stifle all inquiry and all comment, then the measures of the supreme Government were admirably adapted towards accomplishing such a consummation. The Act itself is sweeping and indefinite enough: but the

real sting of the transaction lies in the conditions, since notified, on which licenses to printing presses will be granted. The first is as follows;—

1. "That no book, newspaper, pamphlet, or
"other work printed at such press, or with such
"materials or articles, shall contain any observa-
"tions or statements, impugning the motives or
"designs of the British Government, either in
"England or India, or in any way tending to
"bring the said Government into hatred or con-
"tempt, to excite disaffection or unlawful resistance
"to its orders, or to weaken its lawful authority,
"or the lawful authority of its civil or military
"servants."

Under this the Government, and the very lowest of its civil and military servants, enjoy perfect immunity and impunity. Such acts as those of Mr. Thomas can no more be commented on: and Mr. Thomas's conduct is venial in comparison with many other illegalities, which are at this moment running their career. Any attempt to trace the causes of the rebellion to the wicked, foolish policy of the past few years; to show how the hesitation of military men, the incapacity of civilians, has precipitated an unavoidable event; how the Commissariat reforms of Lord Dalhousie have paralyzed our arm at the moment we would put it forth to suppress insurrection; every sug-

gestion for the future guidance of our rule, may be construed without warning or notice into an offence punishable by a fine of 5,000 rupees, imprisonment for two years, the seizure of a tradesman's entire stock in trade,—in short, total ruin; this at the discretion of the magistrate—such magistrates as obtain in India! The other conditions are these:—

2. “ That no such book, pamphlet, newspaper, or other work shall contain observations or statements, having a tendency to create alarm or suspicion among the Native population of any intended interference by Government with their religious opinions and observances.

3. “ That no such book, pamphlet, newspaper, or other work, shall contain observations having a tendency to weaken the friendship towards the British Government of Native Princes, Chiefs, or States in dependence upon, or alliance with it.

“ The above conditions apply equally to original matter, and to matter copied from other publications.”

The third is of course expressly intended to prevent any allusion whatsoever to our shameless usurpation of our neighbour's property—a cause which I, for one, believe lies at the very root of the rebellion.

Further, as these conditions extend to extracts