

**THE OPINIONS OF LORDS  
WELLESLEY AND GRENVILLE,  
ON THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA,  
COMPARED AND EXAMINED**

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The Opinions of Lords Wellesley and Grenville, on the Government of India, Compared and Examined by William Wyndham Grenville & Richard Colley Wellesley

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1881

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## THE OPINIONS, &c.

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THE minister for India having declared in his place, that the momentous question relative to the future administration and commerce of India would not be brought under the consideration of Parliament in the present session, the time that is thus afforded us cannot be misapplied in taking a retrospective view of the opinions that were delivered by two of the distinguished statesmen who took part in the debates when the question was discussed in the year 1813, namely, Lords Wellesley and Grenville. The opposite views which were taken of the subject by these eminent men was the more remarkable, as upon all other questions, whether of Asiatic or of European policy, their opinions had been in strict accordance,

while a close degree of personal friendship was known to have subsisted between them from early life.

Lord Wellesley, whose brilliant career in the government of India, had given to his opinions a just claim to the attentive consideration of the legislature, proposed to vest in the East India Company, by a fresh legislative grant, all its former monopolies, in order to preserve that Company as the organ for the government of India. "It was his decided opinion that there "never was an organ of government in the world "so administered, as to demand more of estimation, than that of the East India Company." —"If their Lordships looked at the general "state of our empire in India, if they examined "it on those heads on which the grandeur of "an empire rested, if they looked at the removal of all foreign influence and intrigue, "at the suppression of all great dangers in that "country, at the regular consolidation of institutions and authorities, by which all were "brought into a common mass for the benefit "of the empire at large; if they adverted to the "state of solid peace in which countries were "now placed, that had at previous times been "constantly exposed to war and devastation, "they would see that the success of the administration of the government of the East India



“Company had been productive of strength, tranquillity, and happiness.”—“No government,” he said, “had ever better fulfilled its duties towards the people whom it governed, than that of India.”—“The existing system operated most beneficially for the advantage not only of the Company, but for that of the empire at large.” Lord Wellesley, therefore, deprecated any changes in that system, which should in the most remote degree operate to deprive the Company of those powers which were requisite to enable it to perform its functions effectually, as the organ of the government of India. He declared most solemnly that it appeared to him, from all the knowledge and experience which he had been enabled to acquire on the subject, that the trade to India was vital to the Company in their political character; he therefore dissented from the proposition which was then before the House for throwing open that trade to the enterprize and capital of the private merchant.\*

These opinions were the more calculated to make a strong impression, because Lord Wellesley advocated the continuance of that system of government, under the mistaken direction of which, he had only a few years before been superseded in the government

\* Parliamentary Debates, Vol. xxv. p. 675.

general ; by which act all the advantages of his administration, and of the unexampled success which the energy of his character had given to his measures, were suddenly put to the hazard.

When a public man of such a character, of such high pretensions, and so wounded in his feelings, declared in Parliament that he considered the East India Company as the fittest instrument for conducting the government and commerce of India, it required the talents and authority of so distinguished a statesman as Lord Grenville to take up and sustain an opinion at variance with that of Lord Wellesley.

Lord Grenville prefaced his speech by informing the House that his attention had been called to the subject of India, upon his first entrance into public life. " Party violence then " raged with unusual fury, and the course of " events directed it particularly to this ques- " tion. It was on this very ground that the " government of the empire was disputed " between the greatest statemen of the age."\*

His first acquaintance with it was improved by a lengthened experience as a member of the first Board of Control, which was established in 1784. And in after life, his freedom for many years from official avocations had enabled him to qualify himself " for the

\* Parliamentary Debates, Vol. xxv. p. 722.

“ awful duty, which had devolved upon Par-  
 “ liament, by study and reflection ; so that  
 “ imperfect as my notions may be,” said his  
 lordship, “ they are not brought before the  
 “ House without long, diligent, and repeated  
 “ consideration.\*

“ Other questions more deeply interesting to  
 “ our own domestic concerns, affecting more  
 “ nearly the prosperity or the safety of these  
 “ Islands, may have occupied the deliberations  
 “ of Parliament—one of such large, and almost  
 “ boundless extent has certainly never yet  
 “ been brought before us.”—“ My noble friend,”  
 he observed, adverting to the opinions of Lord  
 Wellesley, “ is anxious to determine it by a  
 “ compendious and summary proceeding. It  
 “ is his opinion that we should re-establish the  
 “ now expiring system under which these  
 “ great interests have been administered. He  
 “ thinks, extraordinary as it may appear, that  
 “ the Company is the only instrument through  
 “ which the King and Parliament of Great  
 “ Britain can safely administer their Indian  
 “ empire. So strange, in his view of it, is the  
 “ necessity of this unprecedented case, that  
 “ we must carry on our commerce at a loss, in  
 “ order to govern our empire to advantage.

“ He compels me then to ask, what is in

\* Parliamentary Debates, vol. xxv. p. 752.