

**SPEECH, IN THE COURT OF
PROPRIETORS, ON THE
PRELIMINARY PAPERS
RESPECTING THE EAST INDIA
COMPANY'S CHARTER**

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Speech, in the Court of proprietors, on the preliminary papers respecting the East India company's charter by Sir John Malcolm

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SIR JOHN MALCOLM

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Before I proceed to the question immediately before the court, I hope I shall be excused if, for a few minutes, I advert to other points, which are however not unconnected with the main subject. In the first place, we never ought to forget that, up to the year 1765, no five years have passed during which the commercial capital of the Company was not placed in hazard and jeopardy. Our system then took a settled form, under the auspices of that great man Lord Clive, who may be justly called the founder of our Indian empire. We then became possessed of some of the richest portions of our territory, which we have retained ever since. I will not here go into a dissertation as to what we have lost by commerce and gained by territory, or what we have lost by territory and gained by commerce. I will not compress the concerns of an empire into a ledger, or calculate its destinies like an account current; but I will call on the proprietors to look to the advantages which have been derived from India since the period to which I have referred—to look to the stream of wealth which has been poured from that country into England. (*Hear, hear!*) As Englishmen, we must feel gratification and pride in the possession of that immense territory; and I believe it is well known that every nation on the continent of Europe envies the great reputation which England has gained by her achievements in India. There can indeed be no doubt that England is in a considerable degree enabled to maintain her present exalted situation amongst the nations of the earth by possessing that great, that extraordinary empire. (*Hear, hear!*) England, I will maintain, has been benefited, assisted, and defended by that empire.

I desire to excite no alarm, to create no feelings which will lead men who are not acquainted with the subject to tremble for the fate of our eastern possessions; but I cannot, in justice to the country, in justice to those who are to decide on this important subject, in justice to the Company, and in justice to myself, forbear on this, perhaps the last time I shall ever be engaged in such a discussion—I cannot, on such an occasion, forbear from giving my opinions, and stating the apprehensions which I feel with respect to the future. We have subdued nations—we have overcome difficulties apparently insurmountable—we have braved many dangers successfully; but I will say that we have at this moment to encounter greater danger than we have ever before encountered—the danger arising from ourselves. (*Hear, hear!*) I speak not now of the measures proposed by ministers—to that I will apply myself by and by; but, considering the means by which we have gained a wonderful extent of empire, the government of which requires all the energies and all the calm wisdom of experienced men, I will say that the chief danger that is now to be apprehended is from proceedings which we adopt or sanction.

From the whole tenour of my life, I never can be accused of wanting a proper feeling towards the promotion of those blessings that are obtained by religious instruction; but I see no small difficulty as to the mode by which it is to be imparted in India. I think, indeed, that, in order to repress danger, the Company ought to keep down and confine within proper bounds that religious zeal (the motives of which we all must admire, for I am sure that they are pure and sincere)

which will prematurely force forward instruction of the nature of that to which I have alluded. Such a course of proceeding might lead, not only to the subversion of our Indian empire, but to the utter disappointment of all the hopes of those who are most anxious on the subject. I speak thus, with the knowledge of an unpleasant event which has recently occurred in India, but which fortunately was not attended with loss of life. In this case, the feelings of our own soldiers, or at least of a small part of them, were greatly irritated *. To meet every danger and difficulty, from this and other causes, we ought to have an efficient government abroad, and an efficient government at home: the latter ought to be enabled to arm the authorities abroad with that degree of strength and of confidence which will lead them, in the execution of their duty, to brave every calumny that may be directed against them. The great object is, without reference to minor considerations, to give the best possible government to that great empire, and to secure, as far as we can, the happiness and comfort of the people. Our conquests, our rapid conquests, have placed us in possession of a dominion of which no other country offers an example. The empire of British India stands alone in the history of the globe; we have no precedent to guide us in govern-

* By a letter from the frontier cantonment of Jalnah, dated the 25th December, 1832, it appears the imprudent zeal of some missionaries, in circulating religious tracts, excited such violent feelings in the native part of the force, that the lives of the European part were considered, for a period, in danger. The men were calmed by the efforts of the officers, and by the burning of the offensive tracts, which are stated to have contained abuse of the religion of Braluna and of Mahomed.

ing it. Greek and Roman histories are consulted in vain; no other country has ever been similarly situated. It is not only held by opinion, but much of it has come into our possession through the division and quarrels of the native princes. The numbers whose prospects our progress of power has destroyed, as far as their worldly interests are concerned, and the numerous nations which have lost their independence, must regard us with feelings of jealousy and hostility. Can any person in this court doubt the fact? No: millions of individuals in India desire nothing but an opportunity of destroying that power which has destroyed their prospects, and disappointed all their views. Such persons abound in every kingdom and in every province. This proves the necessity of keeping up a firm, wise, and strong government. Am I, under these circumstances, to be accused of a want of love of liberty, because I will not impart the principles on which freedom such as we enjoy in England is founded, to our subjects in India? Their condition is altogether unsuited to its enjoyment. How can liberty be given to a conquered people? The first use that will be made of such a gift will be to turn their foreign masters out of the country; and if that is effected before they are prepared for the great change, we shall replace them in greater anarchy and confusion than that in which we found them.

I will not be debarred, by any personal or prudential considerations, from stating my opinion, that that mighty engine of good and evil, a free press, is not suited to the state of India. Some persons, I know, wish the freedom of the press to be extended as much

as possible. Such a course was, however, likely to disappoint the efforts of those who recommend its adoption. While I would give to the press every latitude that is proper, I would not allow it to enter into discussions on those topics that dangerously excite the feelings of natives, and tend to lower the character and reputation of the local government. I myself made an attempt to check a native editor from promulgating opinions in a newspaper that were degrading to the government. That person very fairly and honestly told me, that the course he pursued brought him money. He professed to entertain a good opinion of me; and observed, "that if I would pay him as much as he was in the habit of receiving from the increased sale of his paper since it contained the articles objected to, he would change his tone, and praise my government." (*A laugh.*)

Having made these observations, I will say, that that man must be very rash and very ignorant, who, looking at the important bearings of this question, will attempt to decide upon it without delay or pause. It is a question, the effects of which will be found to go far beyond what is now calculated on; and with these feelings I do entreat the court to give to every part of it the deepest attention. From my habits of life I am accustomed to judge for myself, by examining every part of a question. I do not decide, as many do, upon a mere abstract view. The present question requires to be examined in all its minute parts. It is no party question,—and, in discussing it, I disclaim being a party man. Many may be disposed to think that I am a party man, on account of the course which I adopted,

when a member of parliament, with respect to the Reform Bill. That bill is now the law of the land,—and it is my duty, and the duty of every man, to assist in rendering it as beneficial as possible. I did not, however, oppose it from party spirit, but because I thought that it involved a serious diminution of the strength of the government; and, on that very ground, I am disposed to give every aid in my power, as far as my judgment will permit, to the executive government of my country. Having stated so much with respect to the general view of the question, I will say very little more on this part of the subject. I observe that frequent allusion is made, in Mr. Tucker's minute, to political economy. I completely agree with the sentiments of the Honourable Director on that science as applicable to India. I admire the science of political economy when applied to its proper use—the development and fixing of general principles. I look upon it as I would upon a great trigonometrical survey, which points out large tracts of territory on the face of the earth, but does not embrace minor details. He that attempts to march an army from one point to another by such a map will be stopped by hundreds of obstacles, which a plain practical survey would have enabled him to avoid. Political economists treat a question of human rule like one of arithmetic; and I should no more expect success from the application of their general principles in the government of so extraordinary an empire as India, than I should from the application of the wonderful machine of the ingenious Mr. Babbage, were it applied to the settlement of the disputed balance of the commercial and territorial accounts of the East-India Company.