*(November 13th, 1911.)*

# My Life in India

By Sir Andrew Fraser.*

At a meeting of the Canadian Club held on November 13th, 1911, Sir Andrew Fraser said:—

I want to talk to you about life in India, and I have agreed that the address may be entitled "My Life in India," because in the first place one knows his own life better than he knows the lives of other people, and it is just as well to talk about things that you know as about things that you don't know, and in the second place because the life of an official in India brings one into very close touch with the people of the country, and my desire is not to give you statistics about India, or information that you might get in the Government Blue Books, but rather to communicate to you some impressions which India has left on my own mind after thirty-seven years' work under the Crown in that country.

I suppose one of the things that most impressed me when I went to India, or at all events very soon after, when I began to know something of the life of the people, was that this was no homogeneous people, not one nation, but a number of people gathered together in that country, and even amongst these people there was something that separates them off into sections and groups in a way we don't understand in our own home country. In our own Old Country we feel very much alongside of each other, but in India they are just beginning to get to feel alongside each other at all.

I don't require to talk about caste: you know it has divided the people into sections so that it is difficult to draw them all together. Caste is a great reality. I remember being gazetted to the trial of one civil case: being a barrister, and having passed the necessary examinations, it was supposed that I was quite fit to take up any case. A small case court judge took up a case in which his sweeper was concerned. A sweeper is a man of the lowest caste—some people don't know that he has any caste, but he has. This sweeper had been outcasted, but his people had become more friendly, and had decided to accept a dinner from him, the dinner being a proof before the public and at the same time a solemn approval of the settlement of caste: when the question was raised, it was considered that all was settled and they were amicable if they met together and had dinner,—the whole of the public knew the caste question was settled. Well, when in this case they met together for dinner unfortunately they quarreled again, the whole question came up again, the dinner therefore was not eaten, and the sweeper sued them for the cost of it. A very interesting question arose, and we had to deal with it,—the same as in the home land we are sometimes discussing a clearly ecclesiastical question in the civil courts. I decided that any man is entitled to ask any other man to dinner, and that any other man is entitled to abstain from eating it. I feel safe on that decision. But the point I wish to draw your attention to is this: I had a sweeper there as plaintiff, and about twenty sweepers as witnesses, every witness was a sweeper, my court was full of the people of the lowest caste. The clerk of the court was a Brahman, the constable who stood as orderly and kept the peace behind my back was one too. They thought it would be very instructive to see these people wither before me. But this man kept himself as close to me as possible, though I am not a Brahman, as if to escape from the pollution of contact with these low caste people. One of them had some documents he wanted to hand me, but the officer would not touch them with a pair of tongs, so I had to stretch out my own exalted hand and take them. The constable behind me was crushing himself into the wall, as though he would like it to open and let him out from that awful place. My conduct read him a very clear lesson. It was talked of all over the district. A score of surprised outcast people gathered in the court room, and while the Judge did not seem to be in the least affected but took things so naturally, the people believed in the Judge that was able to do that thing, believed he was something more than the highest of their own caste, because of the inability of these people to do it. There is no doubt about it, the Christian is independent of caste, and these people begin to think of him as representative of the Father of us all, who binds us together in one bundle. I mention this to show you that caste is a reality. Even with all that the railways and trains have done —for when you get a Brahman and a sweeper making for a third-class carriage, they don't stop to question who is touching whose elbow,—caste is strong. The people of different

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castes cannot eat together. The people of different castes cannot intermarry. And when you have people that cannot eat together or intermarry, you understand how distinct and permanent the spirit of caste is. Therefore it is perfectly absurd to talk of an Indian nation till we get rid of caste. No dream is more foolish.

For the discussion of a question which had been considered and sent to me by the Government of India I called together as representative a court as I could: it was composed of landowners, commercial men, both native and European, all representing the different interests of which I was able to obtain any intelligent representatives. Just opposite me sat a member of the National Congress, who claimed the sole right to speak on behalf of the people of India, while next to me was a feudatory chief. These two men were at the opposite poles. The chief had been educated in England, was a loyal, strong supporter of the Government, and a firm, enlightened ruler. When we were talking, the man opposite spoke of a certain view as the "national" view. My friend next me, asked him: "What do you mean by the national view? for we differ in our views." The other replied, that he meant it was the view of the National Congress. "Then call it that," answered the chief, "so we may understand what we mean." Presently the man on the other side of the table again alluded to some view as the "national" one, and the chief leaned across the table, shook his fist in the member's face, and warned him that there was a difference in the views of those present upon that point, adding, "Do you suppose that if the British nation were to withdraw its hand we would not be flying at one another's throats?" I quietly said to my friend, "This is not likely to conduce to the settlement of the question. The chief immediately apologized for his impetuosity. But he was right, although he was not correct in the way he stated the question. But if the British power were removed, the peoples of India would be at one another's throats, and there would be the restoration of that old chaos and disorder. The conclusion is that the British army is necessary there. If we are to discharge our duty to humanity we will have to hold India for a long time to come.

The manner in which we hold it, however, is mainly through the executive service, but every one knows that behind that service is the army. What a splendid machine that army is, I suppose is admitted by all. No part of the British army is so immediately equipped for effective action as the Indian army. But what really holds the people, that which we trust



more than anything else, is simply the body of officers scattered throughout the country, with the British power behind them no doubt, but keeping that in the background, and manifesting to the people only the sympathy and justice of British rule. I have had the pleasure of meeting the Ameer of Afghanistan, a most interesting guest in India, who was present at a review held by Lord Kitchener at Lahore. Lord Kitchener ordered a great charge of cavalry. The whole brigade massed together charged down right at the very place where the Ameer was standing with Lord Kitchener. At the word of command, within a few yards of them, the whole brigade came to a dead stop. The Ameer looked on with great astonishment for a time, and then is reported to have turned around and said in Persian to his military secretary: "What do you mean by telling me that I have the finest army in the world? That man has the finest army in the world. I will have a talk with you about that afterwards."

When down in Calcutta a visiting high native official was walking with me one day, he said, "What a splendid army you have!" I said, "Yes." "One thing strikes me," he said, "more than anything else: you never, hardly, see a soldier anywhere throughout the country. You don't keep the peace by your soldiers walking about in uniform." "No," I replied, "the peace keeps itself." That strikes the observer with wonder: throughout the whole of India what one sees is a peaceful life, as peaceful and law-abiding as the life of any country in the world. Now, what is it that does that? Who is it that achieves that? I think I may no doubt safely say, the collector of the district, the magistrate. It is many, many years since I ceased to be a collector. I was a collector once; since then I was a Commissioner, with seven collectors under me; since then I went into the Government of India; and since that I have been the Governor of two different provinces. But having been a collector myself, and a commissioner with collectors under me, I understood something of the collector's work. But when I went out first, a man taught me the duties I would have to perform, and from him I learned first of all this, that the great duty of the officer is to know the people. Opportunities are given him for this: the government provides for the officers touring the country, tents are given you, you go without any great pomp or circumstance, doing all you can to prevent being a burden to the people, paying your way, pitching your tent here to-day, and ten miles farther on to-morrow. You see the people in their own fields, talking to them in their houses, learning their desires, bringing

the Government into contact with them in respect of everything that concerns them. You learn to talk with them in the vernacular around your own camp fire, making them know about that little island you never forget, its traditions, the hopes it has, its great ideals. You have to go about in this way, to prepare yourself to discharge your duties as collector. Who is the collector of the district? I have spoken of him as a collector and magistrate. You know also that the magistrate of a district is far more than a magistrate, for he is the pivot of the administration. The reason is, he is the head of the district, which has an area of anything from four to fifteen thousand square miles, a very considerable area: he is the head of the district for every department of Government work. He is not a Forest Officer; the Forest Officer is an expert, who is his assisting adviser. He is not one of the police; they have their own department; but he is the head of the police, and they take their orders from him. He is not a surgeon or a doctor; but he is the head sanitary officer. He is the head of education in the district; the inspectors have to consult him, and the masters are always looking out for a visit from him, so that their influence may be increased, and the people may be induced to send their children to their schools. In all these things the collector is the head of the district.

But he is something more than that,—the most important of all: he is the agent of the great land owner. The State is the land owner, except in those certain few districts of Bengal where Lord Cornwallis instituted a permanent settlement, and gave proprietary rights to those who had been only collectors of the revenue. Except in those districts the collector is the land agent, and ever since the Government inherited that great inheritance and became the land owner, there has been before the company and the governors in Queen Victoria's time, the aim and purpose to devise a system of land administration which is equitable, reasonable, sympathetic,—in short, to be to all the people of India what a good landlord is in the Old Country to his tenants. It may be worth while mentioning that in every case where the Government of Great Britain has had to deal with a land question affecting India, an Indian officer has always been sent over, that the responsible people at home might consult with him. And when land questions affecting Ireland were up for consideration, several Indian officers were called to help in the details of settlement even in old Ireland. India has shown the world a government that is sane, righteous, sympathetic, in its land revenue administration, which, after all, the people of India most



require. For they are an agricultural people, not living to any great extent in cities; there are only twenty-eight large cities. Out of three hundred million inhabitants only seven million live in cities, a ratio of one in fifty, instead of one in three, as it is in some countries.

When you think of the collector of the district as being the administrator and head of the district in every department, and representing the great land owner, you understand what power he has. We were trained by years of experience in understanding the people in the languages of the districts, learning their history, their social ife, through their municipal boards, associated with the district councils, through years of work at great sacrifice, before we were allowed to occupy the position, so we came to have a sense of responsibility, and learned the great principles we had to apply, and to apply these principles in an intelligent and sympathetic appreciation of the difficulties and circumstances of the people. And this, I believe, is the essence of the success of British rule in India.

The collector of the district is not often interfered with. The commissioner over seven collectors, while outside of their rank, is not appointed to keep a strict watch over them, but for his supposed capacity for getting men to do the work without friction or great show of his hand. The details of their work he is expected to show them, and to do that by travelling about with them, keeping in touch with them, not by public interference with them or censuring them, and to preserve their interests, not the interest of the magistrate, but the interests of the people, against all difficulties and dangers with which they in their simple agricultural life have to fight. He is the friend of the people: any collector who should forget that must have had a curious experience, or forget the very best part of his own life.

Just in the same way we expect the head of the Government to act toward the commissioner, as we look to the commissioner to act towards his seven collectors. So the Secretary of State is supposed to stand in the same relation to the Government of India. It is not a good thing to interfere: it is likely to make mischief and friction in an Oriental Government. If any particular man is not fit to be trusted, he should be removed; but if a man is fit to put in, the first essential is that he be thoroughly trustworthy; such men are to be obtained.

We go about among the people, and we find them very lovable. They are simple, truthful, kindly, hospitable, patient. You say "truthful? We thought that if there was one thing

that was established, it was that the Oriental is distinctly a liar." I will let you into a secret. I have not the slightest doubt that if you get a native of India into the court you get a man who nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand will tell you at least one lie in the course of his admissions. But I would not like the reputation of a Scotchman or an Irishman (I specially mention the Scotchman first, because I am most interested in his reputation) to depend upon the reputation those who attend the courts have for strict accuracy, thoroughly sound memory, or distinct desire to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But though I should not like the reputation of a Scotchman, for instance, to depend upon the reputation some of that race may have in the courts, it is far more important not to depend upon the reputation of an Indian in the courts in judging of his character in general. The Indian believes in that proverb, "All things are fair in love and war," and he probably thinks—I hope we don't—that the very worst form of war is litigation. Therefore, he thinks that if you expect a man to tell the truth when it does not advantage his case, you are a very silly person to expect it. But if you come down into the village, and investigate a question in the presence of the villagers, the villagers won't tolerate a liar, any more than you would tolerate a lying brother in your house. For the life of the village is a family life, so they won't tolerate the liar. You see, the two things are as the poles asunder. In the court the Indian is an absolutely accomplished liar, but when he gets out of the way of law, in ordinary life he is absolutely truthful. Therefore you find people come from a collector, who see the Indians only in the courts, saying they are not to be trusted. But a man like me, who has lived among them for thirty out of thirty-seven years I have spent in the service of the Crown in India, will trust them anywhere. They are as honest as any man that we meet.

And they are kindly,—in one thing perhaps too kindly. They want to have you pass through life without the slightest friction, without turning a hair on your body. Let me tell you a story. I went on a visit to a college on the Hoogli river, at Nawa Dwip, or "New Island,"—they called it that three thousand years ago!—a college in which they taught Sanskrit, in which all the priests of Bengal are educated for their work. The priests came down to us clothed in white, the scholars also, and met me, and escorted me up to the college. They treated me very much as they would treat one of their own Rajahs, addressing me in Sanskrit, and receiving me with



praises of my power that made it essential for me to keep sponging it all out if I were to remain at all modest. The college is a beautiful old place, just such as one reads about in holy books. There was the sacred tree, with a little idol under it, and in the corridor the sacred tulsi plant. The students had their palmleaf books, and with no paper or printing, they would write on the palm leaves with a stylus, rubbing over it some hard substance that left the letters black,—the same old books, the same kind of philosophy as they studied three thousand years ago. They told me they heard strange sounds from the outer world, news of anarchy and sedition; they could scarcely believe it. They asked me if I would accept a degree from the college, and they gave it to me with the same kind of reverence that they would to one of their Rajahs with their civilization of three thousand years ago. The decree was written on a palmleaf, and it signifies "The Ocean of Logic and Truth." I carried it away, and now, in these days of my abasement, while laid here as it were upon a solitary shelf all by myself, I sometimes take it out, and think of what I once was! So these people have been able to send me away from my work with pleasant memories of my work with them.

There is unrest in India. I am glad of it! We have been trying to wake these people from their sleep of a thousand years. Education is beginning to do this work. All the people of India are beginning to press forward in civilization and enlightenment. There is nothing to regret. We earnestly trust that the people will press forward on the path of improvement and advance.

Associated with this there is a certain amount of sedition and anarchy, but it is very small and circumscribed. It is perfectly possible for a man to do mischief, and for a dozen of them, if they have made up their minds they will give their lives for the taking of a few lives. But it is strictly circumscribed: the vast majority of the people are loyal, all the people with stake in the country are entirely loyal; all the people in whom we can place our confidence, the Rajahs ruling over independent states, all the merchants, the land owners, those interested in the real prosperity of India, are loyal as far as their intelligence enables them to be. There are only a few who think they can make money by stirring up trouble. It is only a few hare-brained, half-educated young men, on whom the whole responsibility falls, and upon whom also unfortunately too often the punishment falls.

A story will illustrate this, which pertains to a section which was in a peculiar state of unrest and anarchy. On the 7th of October, 1908, I presided at a lecture by a Chicago professor on "Education in America." The professor had not arrived when I reached the hall, his carriage having, as we afterwards learned, broken down. I was speaking to the president of the association, when a young fellow stepped forward. The Maharajah of Bengal was with me, the highest Hindu nobleman. This young man, who had been seated near the door, came forward as if to speak to me. I asked him what he wished, and as I spoke I heard a click, and looking down saw a revolver thrust out from under his coat. The cartridge failed to explode—the Ordnance Department officials said it was one chance in ten thousand. Just as I was about to take measures—I hope for my own defence—the arm of the Maharajah, who stood between me and the assassin, was thrown around me, and he threw me out of the room, placing himself between me and my would-be assailant, while at the same time the American secretary of the association seized the hand of the assassin, and the hammer of the weapon, as the trigger was pulled again, came down on the web of flesh between his thumb and forefinger. He didn't let go of the weapon, till the young fellow was knocked down by the students, and handed over to the police.

(Sir Andrew did not tell the whole story here, in his modesty, but Mr. G. Sherwood Eddy, General Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. for India, told the rest of it at the Laymen's Missionary movement banquet in the evening at St. James' Square Presbyterian Church, as he had told it a few weeks ago at a small gathering in the home of Mr. E. R. Wood. A number of Sir Andrew's friends had sought to dissuade him from going into the room at the first, saying the students were seething with sedition, but Sir Andrew replied: "Why! I am a Britisher; I'd rather die than be a coward! I'm going in there to preside at this meeting.")

That is a true picture of the state of things in India. That young man was ready to take life to encourage Bengal by showing that even the Lieutenant-Governor was vulnerable and mortal. On my way home from the meeting, at every street lamp, where the people could see me, they gathered to look at me. That young man of twenty-eight, and the nobleman of Bengal, with great fortune, great ambitions, and his whole future before him, feeling he could give his life, offered it deliberately for me, because I was his governor and his friend. If it were for his father, it would be a splendid act of



filial devotion; but for me, of another race—I cannot find language to describe it! It proves indisputably that in their hearts they have love for the British Crown, as one could see if the British Government were turned out of India. When a man has a memory like that at the back of his mind, it is absolutely impossible to fasten the blame of such deeds as you hear of sometimes upon the whole people.

The King has gone to visit India. The visit of the King will give great gladness to his subjects there. The King has taken account, we believe, of the fact that there may be perils in his way—but I don't feel myself that there will be anywhere less than there—you don't know where some half-brained fanatic will vent his blood—even in the United States they have lost three presidents, but nothing of the kind has taken place in India. It is possible for a few to work great mischief, but the officers of the British Crown will not tolerate separation from the people, or anything which might hinder their getting into sympathy with them, while taking the severest measures against sedition and anarchy, not in the interests of the Government but of the people. I rejoice to know we serve a King who with full knowledge of all it means is going —as a splendid example to the officers who serve him, to bring gladness to the hearts of the vast millions in that country who are devoted to him and to his country.