

Speeches of

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Zemindar of Singampatti

AT THE

First Electoral Group Conference of the
Citizens of the Districts of
Madura, Ramnad and Tinnevely
held at Madura on the 18th and
19th October 1913



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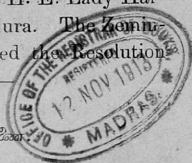
1913.



I

The Second Resolution passed by the Conference was the Resolution welcoming H. E. The Viceroy and H. E. Lady Hardinge to the city of Madura. The Zemindar of Singampatti moved the Resolution in the following terms :—

முருகன் றுணை.



Mr. President and Gentlemen!

I am very thankful to the Conference for the opportunity given to me for voicing the welcome of the three Districts of Madura, Ramnad and Tinnevely to the Excellencies Lord and Lady Hardinge.

Gentlemen! Their Excellencies know, are to visit only

and not any other town in the three Districts. But as in times of yore when the Pandian Raja held sway, so now under the auspices of this Group Conference, I look upon the three Districts as one, and on the visit of Their Excellencies to Madura as honour intended for the whole Pandian Country. Except on one rare occasion, when the energetic Lord Curzon was ruling India, Viceregal visits in the South have been confined to the City of Madura, and this practice is, I am afraid, likely to continue. If, as a representative of the Government, I join the people of Madura in welcoming over the visit of Their Excellencies to this City now, I beg to express the hope that the people and Government of Madura will so order their proceedings as to befit the welcoming Viceroy in

future as to recognise the sentiment I have just expressed, *viz.*, that the Viceregal visit is to the Capital of the whole Pandian Country and for the benefit of all the inhabitants of that area.

Gentlemen, it is highly fitting that this and the previous Resolution should occupy the first place in our programme, for it is my firm and unalterable conviction that no political thought, utterance or work is possible in this land except on the axiomatic basis of our loyal devotion to His Majesty the King-Emperor and our earnest desire that his rule, now happily personified in H. E. Lord Hardinge, should continue for ever and ever. I am aware, Gentlemen, that there are people, among political theorists, European

and Indian, who speculate that when India has been trained for absolutely independent Self-Government, England ought to take friendly leave of India as having fulfilled her great mission in India. But Gentlemen, not being embarrassed by any abstract political philosophy, and looking pretty long into our future with the eye of a practical but none the less patriotic citizen, I can say with all the sincerity and depth of conviction I can command that India ought fervently to pray for the continuance of British connection for ever and ever, not alone till Britain like a parent qualifies us fully for taking care of ourselves, but also during our national manhood when we aspire to live as a sturdy and useful member of the political joint-family of the British Empire. Gentlemen,

when that day comes, I have the strongest hope—a hope founded on our national religion, ideals and traditions—that India will be found the most faithful, grateful and affectionate member of that family, loyal as ever to the King and the Constitution, and never rebellious like Ulster, and never selfish or faithless like South Africa and other Colonies which seek to draw a sinister colour-bar across the bright horizon of the future of the British Empire. I will only add here that if our best and highest hopes lie in British rule, the highest honour and ambition of England can only lie in so protecting India in its political infancy as to find in it in its adult stage, a strong, sturdy, self-respecting partner in the joint concern.

Gentlemen, if such are my sentiments regarding British rule in general, it is also my sincere judgment regarding His Excellency Lord Hardinge that he has greatly contributed by his wise and sympathetic statesmanship in the administration of our country to strengthen our faith in Britain and British Rule. India will always gratefully remember that it has been in His Excellency Lord Hardinge's Viceroyalty and on his advice and encouragement that Their Imperial Majesties King George V and Queen Mary condescended to visit India as Emperor and Empress and spoke to us face to face from Their Thrones erected in Imperial Delhi of hallowed traditions, words of love, sympathy, and hope. India will also always remember that His Excellency Lord Hardinge has

sympathetically worked and fostered the political constitution vouchsafed to us by Lord Morley, and bravely fought some preliminary battles for us in the ill-matched warfare now going on between India and South Africa. But alas! what a shame it is to recall how he was requited for his chivalrous services on the occasion of his State-Entry into Imperial Delhi. Gentlemen, all India has deeply mourned over the diabolical incident and I will not mar the atmosphere at the eve of the Viceregal visit by reviving painful recollections. I will rather dwell on the courage with which Their Excellencies bore the unkindest cut that fell on them and the generous and magnanimous resolve with which they have chosen to stay amongst us and continue their services to our country

to the full measure of their possibility. Very naturally, Gentlemen, the Princes and Peoples of India have sent their fervent prayer to the Almighty on the recovery of their great Viceroy, and those who can afford it have laid highly valuable thanks-offerings at the hands of Lady Hardinge for bestowal on such objects as she should choose. In her wisdom she has chosen so to celebrate her husband's auspicious recovery as to call forth from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin the loudest and most enthusiastic expressions of the real feeling of India towards His Majesty The King-Emperor and his rule and the great statesman who embodies all that is best in the principles and aims of that rule.

Gentlemen, over the coming advent of such a Viceroy and such a Vicerene,

our rejoicing cannot but be cordial and great, and I have no doubt you will indicate it adequately by the way you carry this Resolution.

With very great pleasure therefore, I propose the Resolution that “This Conference rejoices at the approaching visit to Madura of His Excellency the Viceroy and Lady Hardinge, who have endeared themselves to the People of India by their various acts of sympathy and benevolence and beg to offer Their Excellencies a hearty welcome to this City.”

II

One of the Resolutions passed by the conference at its sitting of the 19th October related to the Religious Endowments of this Presidency, and the Resolution was moved by the Zemindar of Singampatti in the following terms.

முருகன் பிணை .

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

The Resolution entrusted to my care stands as follows:—

“This Conference is of opinion that India Act XX of 1863 (Religious Endowments Act) is quite inadequate in its provisions and has failed in its purpose, and places on record the universal feeling of

the people that our Sovereign's declaration of religious neutrality will not be infringed by undertaking improved legislation, and urges that the Government of India should afford the necessary facilities to enable the Local Government to replace the said Act by another measure necessary, adequate, and suitable for the needs of this Presidency ”.

Now, Gentlemen, this is a matter upon which Congresses and Conferences have declared their unanimous desire in clear and unmistakable terms, and there ought properly to be no speech necessary to commend the Resolution to your approval. But the obstinacy of Government in refusing to legislate for the better protection of our temples and trusts, is, to say the

least, most provoking. The usual objection raised by the Government of India that the legislation desired by us may infringe the declared neutrality of Government in religious matters is obviously untenable. If an adequate and suitable legislative provision will offend against the principle of neutrality, it is incomprehensible how the present enactment left on the Statute Book can be deemed consistent with that principle.

Gentlemen, I stand to-day before this Conference to declare from the top of my voice that the people of this Province are unanimous in their desire to see Act 20 of 1863 replaced by an adequate and effective measure which is not likely to stand in need of revision for a good long time.

In this connection I must say that we ought not to be too ready to give our support to any legislative effort, merely to tinker here and there with the existing Act. It is regrettable that, owing to the continued refusal of the Government of India to permit legislation, successive members of Council have curtailed and attenuated their Bills to the smallest size imaginable. I, for one, Gentlemen, am strongly against any such attempt being placed before Government. We have now waited for half a century in vain, and it is my emphatic conviction that we ought not to stand in need of seeking such leave once in 5 years. Our province has been aptly described as a land of temples, and the trust property at stake, including the allowances given by Government, is very

large. Such funds are administered and protected, in the case of Municipalities and Local Boards, by elaborate enactments containing detailed provisions and safe-guards, and one cannot understand how the administration of religious endowments can be effectively guided and controlled except by a similarly full enactment. Schemes were devised at one time by Robinson's Committee and others afterwards, but for reasons which do not appeal to those who are deeply interested in the endowments, one effort after another has been frustrated—thanks to the indifference of Government.

Gentlemen, I take this opportunity of putting in a strong appeal for the appointment of a strong committee of non-

official experts to draw up a regular Code for the administration of these trusts, with a view to the same being discussed and passed in the Legislative Council. Act 20 of 1863 must, I unhesitatingly declare, simply go, as it has been found an obvious failure. A proper enactment, with adequate provisions, must take its place,

Gentlemen, I must also say that the necessary legislation should be undertaken by the Provincial Legislative Council. Here is a matter, at any rate, wherein we have grievously suffered on account of our fellow-ship with Bengal. It would appear that in that province private endowments and hereditary trusts largely abound, and the opposition to legislation has always come from that quarter and frustrated the

chances and aspirations of Madras in this particular. I am sure, however, that if Bengal had desired legislation and we had objected to it, the result would have been quite different. For good or for evil, the loud voice of Bengal has always prevailed in the councils of the Empire, and our feeble utterances have never won. In the matter of Religious Endowments, which, thank God, cannot perturb the relationship between the Rulers and the Ruled—in this matter, at any rate, which is peculiarly our own—we are entitled to have our own way, and the fault will be all our own, if we do not clamour sufficiently aloud to rouse Government into legislative activity.

Gentlemen, I ask you to cry aloud from every platform that you have for the

purpose from now, and the Government, which is not so missionary-ridden in these days, as in times of yore, is bound to listen to us. Indeed, Gentlemen, even Christian Missionaries, whose enlightenment nowadays is more pronounced than their bigotry, will not oppose any objections to legislation in this matter. We want legislation to enable *ourselves* to administer our trust, and not to authorise Government or its officials to interfere in the same. We want legislation for the protection of our Gods and the properties vested in them, and to prevent our people who are charged with the administration of the same from malversation of public funds. In the best interests of the trusts, and in the highest interests of public morality—both of which are matters of serious concern, not only to

Hindu and Mohammedan worshippers, but also to all enlightened citizens of whatever creed or race in this country—this legislation must be promptly undertaken, and I hope and trust that Government will no longer delay the doing of their obvious duty by us in this matter.

With these words, Gentlemen, I commend this proposition to your unanimous acceptance.
