

The Christian Missions and the origins of the Indian Education Commission 1882-83

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It was the Indian political leader G.K. Gokhale who described *The Report of the Indian Education Commission 1882-83*¹ as 'one of the weightiest and most interesting documents ever published in India'.² Long recognised as one of the most informative documents about the history of nineteenth century education in British India it has also been one of the most neglected. Perhaps its sheer bulk has intimidated many researchers. Overall, the eleven volumes run to some 4,200 printed pages. The origins of the Commission have likewise escaped close historical scrutiny. Limitations of space preclude any comment on the Commission's report in this paper but its origins are examined in detail because they were closely related to ongoing friction which surfaced after the Mutiny between the Christian missions and British government officials over the nature and implementation of British education policy as laid down originally in Sir Charles Wood's Educational Despatch of 1854,³ and later reiterated in Lord Stanley's Despatch of 1859.⁴ The conflict arose when British evangelicals, most prominently those associated with the Anglican Church Missionary Society, were thwarted in their efforts to Christianize India by government officials in both London and Calcutta, who were apprehensive of offending Indian sensibilities and, therefore, determined to establish both a decentralized and secular Indian education system.⁵

The Education Commission had its origins in the proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference held at Bangalore in June 1879, as a result of which a memorial was forwarded to the Madras Government protesting at the way in which the Government's policy of grant-in-aid to schools was being administered.⁶ The spark which ignited what appeared to be a long simmering dispute between the Christian missions and the civil authorities was a reduction in the annual grant paid to the Madras Christian College, the leading mission institution in the Madras Presidency. It was claimed that the grant, which had contributed some 30 to 40 per

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cent of the College's total outlays in the early 1870s had since been reduced to about 19 per cent despite repeated requests for a larger grant to meet increasing recurrent costs. The dispute over the grant paid to the College was used as a pretext for a major confrontation with the Madras, and subsequently the Indian Government over their interpretation of the grant-in-aid policy as outlined in the Education Despatch of 1854. The Despatch, which set out the chief principles to be followed in the development of education in India, understandably drew much of its substance from contemporary English practice. In the mid nineteenth century English education was still run by voluntary agencies—most notably the Anglican Church—but the government was increasingly subsidising their efforts through grants-in-aid for school buildings, routine maintenance and equipment, and teachers' salaries. However, provision for specific government funded schools was not introduced until Forster's Education Act of 1870. Wood's despatch was ahead of its time because it provided for a dual system of voluntary and government schools existing side by side. The latter, whose numbers would be limited, were to provide models for voluntary agencies to emulate. Wood never envisaged a government funded national system of schools—the concept was financially impracticable—but both central and provincial Indian governments were expected to promote the spread of schooling, especially at the elementary level, throughout the population. Paragraph 52 of Wood's despatch, which the missions constantly referred to in stating their case read as follows:

We have, therefore, resolved to adopt in India the system of grants-in-aid which has been carried out in this country with very great success; and we confidently anticipate, by thus drawing support from local resources in addition to contributions from the State, a far more rapid progress of education than would follow a mere increase of expenditure by the Government

The Bangalore Conference memorial to the Madras Government also highlighted paragraph 96 of Wood's despatch which specifically cited Madras as a region where government efforts to establish schools had been minimal and where the adoption of grants-in-aid, especially to the Christian missions, should be pursued. The missions' memorial to the Madras Government also traced what the missions claimed was a general reduction of 9.4 per cent in government grants to voluntary agencies between 1869–70 and 1876–77. In the same period it was claimed that gross expenditure on government colleges and schools had risen by 45 per cent! Figures such as these, the missions claimed, were hardly supportive of a policy of fostering voluntary effort as outlined in the 1854 Despatch. The missions also claimed that the Director of Public Instruction, Colonel R.M. Macdonald, had amended the grant-in-aid rules without consulting

them. They also objected to the strengthening of Presidency College, the main government institution, by opening lower grade classes which had also cost more than initially envisaged. It was claimed that there was no need for new classes which had the effect of drawing the best pupils away from existing grant-aided schools. The missions likewise criticized the government for upgrading government schools at Cuddalore and Salem when aided schools were already established in the same districts. The memorial, signed by no less than 117 missionaries from varying Protestant denominations, was referred to Colonel Macdonald by the Madras Government for comment.

A paper such as this is not the place to examine in detail either his long initial reply, which ran to almost fifty pages of small single-spaced typescript, or his two further replies, but it is important to highlight certain points. Contrary to what the missions claimed, the Director argued that government education policy in Madras had been very favourable to the missions and he listed sixteen towns as examples of where the government had 'deliberately' not established government schools because of existing voluntary schools: 'Anything resembling a general system of education entirely provided by government has never been attempted'. Moreover, Macdonald cited the most recent annual report on education in Madras (1877-78) to show that of 10,121 institutions under government inspection, only 131 were under the direct management of the Madras Education Department. The missions had argued that the government should be closing government schools in pursuance of the 1854 policy but Macdonald claimed that such a policy presented serious problems. Government schools had often been established at the expressed wish of the local people who may have subscribed to the cost of buildings and equipment. If the school was closed parents would face three choices: (a) to send their children to a mission school to which they might take religious exception (b) to establish their own school which they might be unable to afford or (c) to leave their children uneducated. Macdonald had no hesitation in taking the initiative and openly challenged the missions' interpretation of the 1854 despatch. Did they really think that Hindus and Moslems should be forced to support mission schools? Given the British Government's overriding concern to maintain a policy of strict neutrality over religious matters in India,⁷ Macdonald claimed that it was surely not the intent of the 1854 despatch to force Indians to attend Christian schools against their will? He likewise emphasised that the 1854 despatch had also supported the establishment of institutions like Elphinstone College, a secular college under the control of a Board of Education, and other colleges like it. He also made reference to Lord Stanley's 1859 Despatch which, while endorsing most of Wood's Despatch, also questioned whether

Christian mission schools had been a factor in the Mutiny as had been alleged in some quarters.⁸

The main issue at stake was clearly the role of Christian mission schools in a country in which the population was overwhelmingly Hindu or Moslem, and in which the Government was genuinely committed to a policy of complete neutrality in religious matters. To emphasise this point, Macdonald referred to a large public meeting attended by some six or seven thousand Hindus and Moslems in Madras in April 1859 to protect their religions. The outcome was a memorial presented to Lord Stanley requesting an end to grants-in-aid—most of which were then paid to mission schools—and the establishment of more government schools. Clearly, Hindus and Moslems alike, objected to government support of mission schools. They also sought a stricter observance of the government's declared policy of neutrality in educational matters. Macdonald quoted the *Indian Statesman* of 13 August 1859 and its reference to the agitation of the missions to 'coerce the State into an open patronage of proselytising operations'. The paper went on to speak of the powerful and notorious influence exercised by the so-called evangelical party over the parliament of England and of the operations of its missionaries in India which were regarded with the deepest anxiety by the native community. Macdonald traced in great detail past education policy in Madras to emphasise the fact that there had been ongoing tension between the missions and Indian provincial governments for a quarter of a century over the true meaning of the 1854 Despatch. In Madras, as in Bengal, limited grant aid had been reduced to some schools that were thriving in favour of struggling schools. Macdonald also disputed mission statistics as quoted in their memorial and the assertion that the missions had not been consulted over new grant aid regulations. Finally, he highlighted the deep-seated conflict between the Roman Catholic and Protestant missions over grant aid with the Catholics claiming that the Protestants got more than their fair share. Macdonald's remarks clearly showed that the implementation of any grant aid policy was beset by numerous practical difficulties. In England and Wales the grant-in-aid policy had only one principal religion to contend with although denominational rivalry invariably complicated matters. In India the scenario was far more complex. Not only were there various major religious faiths to consider, but there were also further complications arising from caste, the forces of tradition, and endemic poverty.

In forwarding the memorial to London, the Governor of Madras, Sir Charles Trevelyan, expressed support for native fears.⁹ The fact that the missions received the lion's share of grant aid clearly suggested to Indians that the British Government was subsidising the Christian religion.

Trevelyan was not opposed to grant aid—quite the contrary—but he had grave misgivings about how the policy had been implemented in India. In response to the memorial, the British Government pointed out that grant aid was available to all voluntary agencies, and not just to Christian missions.

The Christian missions had a long history of setting up schools in the Western tradition, but the same could not be said of Hindu and Moslem communities. Moreover, it took many years for the predominantly rural population of India to see any value in basic primary schooling based on European concepts of the 3Rs. More often than not it was viewed as an external imposition and best left to the government to provide. Overriding all, however, was the widespread Indian fear of proselytising in mission schools. It was the potentially disruptive social consequences of such activities which generated much of the antagonism evident in the relations between missionaries and many government officials in India throughout the nineteenth century.

The missionaries went to India ostensibly to save souls and to reform Indian society whereas British government officials, especially after the Mutiny, sought to maintain peace and stability at all costs.¹⁰ In the second half of the nineteenth century missionaries also had to contend with a fundamental challenge to Christian beliefs as a consequence of the growth of scientific knowledge and especially Charles Darwin's theory of human evolution. While the subject calls for more detailed research, there appears to be a close link between the widespread growth of secularism in the second half of the nineteenth century and the often hostile attitudes of many government education officials in India towards the missions. Metcalf commented on the fact that many school inspectors were either agnostics or Broad Churchman, like W.D. Arnold, the son of Dr Arnold of Rugby, who served for a while in the Punjab.¹¹ As such they were little inclined to go out of their way to aid missionaries and much preferred to encourage efficient schools run by the Government. Perhaps also, a prolonged stay in India gave many government education officials a greater appreciation of Indian culture and less sympathy for what the missions were trying to accomplish.

The Madras Government upheld Macdonald's views and dismissed the missions' memorial but the matter did not stop there. The missions continued to press their case and Macdonald responded at length on two more occasions before the missions finally decided to appeal to the Secretary of State in London. That move prompted the Madras Government to send all the relevant material to London with a statement to the effect that it was of the opinion that the memorialists had no grounds for complaint. Not to be outdone, the missions sent a 'concluding

memorandum' to the Madras Government which was aimed more at Macdonald personally than at the issues in dispute. The India Office in London endorsed the conclusion of the Madras Government but that was far from the end of the dispute.

The missions based their case on a literal interpretation of the wording of the 1854 Despatch whereas Macdonald claimed that over time many government officials had seen fit to modify government policy in the light of local conditions. The dispute clearly brought into question the status of the 1854 Despatch (and that of 1859) and the influence, if any, of subsequent experience. Was the Despatch to be understood primarily as a statement of general guiding principles to be modified if necessary in the light of local circumstances or as a declaration of mandatory policy binding on all parties?

It is unclear whether the transmission to London of the Madras missionary memorial was the reason for the creation of the so-called General Council on Education in India or not, but the memorial certainly added to what was obviously a growing wave of concern in mission circles in the United Kingdom over the Indian Government's implementation of the 1854 Despatch. The General Council, consisting of members of fourteen religious societies 'labouring for the intellectual, moral and religious well-being of India', was formed either towards the end of 1879 or early in 1880, to promote a general inquiry into the working of the 1854 Education Despatch, to disseminate information thereon, and to encourage government both at home and in India to execute the principles and regulations of the 1854 Despatch as originally stated.¹² It was only ever intended that the Council should have a limited life—to call attention to abuses which had crept into the working of the Education System in India—and it was disbanded in 1883 after the report of the Indian Education Commission was published.¹³

A major emphasis was placed on the primary duty of government, as stated in the 1854 Despatch, to promote the elementary education of the people. It was claimed that a quarter of government education expenditure in India went on higher education which was mainly the preserve of the rich classes, and only one twelfth on elementary education for the great mass of poor people, of whom only nine in a thousand went to school. The missions claimed that the Indian Government had not followed the directive in the 1854 Despatch to hand over government colleges of higher education progressively to voluntary bodies. In the previous twenty-five years no evidence could be found of any such transference. Meanwhile, a further fifteen new colleges had been added to the government list. It was also alleged that the grants-in-aid scheme had never been carried out to the extent contemplated in the 1854 Despatch. Instead, most government

money had been spent on government schools and colleges. The Council members claimed that they sought no special favours or support for Christian institutions, but it was abundantly clear that they wanted the Indian Government to implement Wood's Despatch *as they interpreted it*. Critics of the General Council saw its arguments and activities as a blatant grab for power by the missions.

The General Council was presided over by none other than Lord Halifax, the former Sir Charles Wood, whose name was so closely linked to the 1854 Despatch, although he later claimed that while he was responsible for laying down the main lines of policy to be followed, it was Lord Northcote, his private secretary and later Viceroy of India, who compiled the despatch.¹⁴ The Secretary, chief spokesman and driving force behind the Council, was the Rev. James Johnston, who wrote several pamphlets on the subject of Indian education policy including *Our Educational Policy in India* (1879) and subsequently an *Abstract and Analysis of the Report of the 'Indian Education Commission' with Notes* (1884).¹⁵ The membership of the General Council, which included many highly influential people, provides a clear indication of the strength of mission influence in London's governing circles, a factor which no Indian government could afford to ignore.

At 4.00 pm on Friday 7 May 1880, a deputation from the General Council met with the Marquis of Ripon, the newly appointed Viceroy, at the India Office, on the eve of his departure for India.¹⁶ The Rev. James Johnston presented him with a memorial signed by no less than twenty five chairmen and/or secretaries of fourteen religious societies, all calling on him to administer the 1854 Despatch as was originally intended. The deputation, led by Lord Halifax, claimed that the original despatch of 1854 was based on English precedent, namely, elementary education for the masses maintained by the State (Forster's Education Act of 1870 had provided for the establishment of local boards of education and board schools financed from local property rates), purely secular teaching, and grants-in-aid to voluntary societies whether they be Christian, Moslem or Hindu. The education of the richer classes was to be maintained principally by themselves. In conclusion, Halifax made reference to the great services rendered to education in both England and in India by the missions.

In presenting the memorial, Johnston drew attention to the lack of resources devoted to the education of the poor in India in comparison to those provided for higher education, and also to the preponderance of government schools and colleges despite the aim of encouraging voluntary schools as advocated in the 1854 Despatch. He concluded by saying that the General Council sought a gradual government withdrawal from the direct running of schools in India and a greater emphasis on the schooling

of the masses. He also claimed that the memorial had strong support from 'all shades of mission opinion'. The Bishop of Rangoon lent his support arguing strongly for the gradual withdrawal of government from the running of schools, while Dr Underhill went so far as to claim that government officials actively obstructed mission efforts to advance education in India: 'We have had to regret, not only the absence of sympathy, and the refusal of aid, but positive opposition—and that, strange to say, under a professedly Christian Government'. All the speakers asked for impartiality in interpreting the principles of the 1854 Despatch. Ripon expressed great satisfaction at meeting the deputation and was clearly sympathetic to their cause, but he was careful to say nothing that might incriminate him.

Ripon¹⁷ had started on a distinguished political career back in 1852 when he became Member of Parliament for Hull. In 1859 he was called to the House of Lords as the second Earl of Ripon on the death of his father. In 1871 he was made Marquess of Ripon. His family had strong links with India. His maternal grandfather, the fourth Earl of Buckinghamshire, had been a governor of Madras and later sat on the Board of Control in London, while his maternal uncle and a cousin had also served in India. In 1861 Ripon became Parliamentary Under Secretary to Sir Charles Wood in the India Office and they became close friends. In 1866 he became Secretary of State for India when Wood retired to the House of Lords, but he lasted in office only five months before the Government was defeated. Gladstone won the ensuing election and Ripon became President of the Council with a brief to deal with educational reform. Thereafter, he worked closely with W.E. Forster in framing the Education Act of 1870, which provided for the first time in England and Wales, for a dual system of voluntary and government or board schools existing alongside each other. Ripon strongly supported the voluntary principle and sought in the 1870 legislation to provide for efficient elementary education with the smallest possible interference with existing (voluntary) schools. He was no stranger to educational matters. When only twenty three years of age he had joined the National Public Schools' Association, founded in Manchester, to promote the establishment by law in England and Wales, of a system of free schools. These were to impart secular instruction only and be supported by local rates and managed by local committees, specially selected for that purpose by the ratepayers. Later his ardour for secularism waned, but the 1870 Education Act included many of the ideas he had supported in his youth. The Act of 1870 is traditionally associated with Forster's name but Ripon was responsible for steering it through both the Cabinet and the House of Lords, and also for averting a last minute crisis when the National

(Anglican) Society threatened to withdraw its support because of a dispute over the conscience clause.

In 1874 Ripon stunned his political colleagues by becoming a Roman Catholic. At the time he was also the Grand Master of English Freemasonry. Clearly he could not continue in office and Gladstone could not be reconciled to his conversion. He was also bitterly attacked by *The Times* which argued that to be a Roman Catholic was not compatible with being a patriotic Englishman. For the next six years he dropped out of the political limelight and devoted his time to Roman Catholic matters and visited Rome. Then, in 1880, Gladstone returned once more to office and surprisingly offered Ripon the post of Viceroy. At first he was reluctant to accept because of his wife's poor health but eventually he accepted.

While Ripon was busy acquainting himself with life in India, Johnston remained active in promoting the cause of the General Council. He spoke at public meetings, published several pamphlets in support of the voluntary principle in Indian education policy, and solicited support from various quarters. For example, in early April 1880, he sent a copy of *Our Educational Policy in India* for comment to Alfred, later Sir Alfred, Croft, the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal, India's most populous province.

Croft expressed sympathy with much of what Johnston said but he also claimed that many of Johnston's strictures seemed to be much more applicable to the state of education in Bengal as it was ten years previously than it was in 1880; 'for within that time we have witnessed the great development of primary education among the masses, which was set on foot by Sir George Campbell in 1872 amid a storm of detraction'.¹⁸ Campbell had promoted village schools in which indigenous traditions and languages were preserved while at the same time providing some useful modern knowledge but Croft hastened to add that most primary schools were 'still of the humblest and cheapest kind, and very little money suffices for their management'. He also referred to the suggested closing of Presidency College, the only major government college in Bengal. He agreed that it could be done but probably at the expense of physical science which voluntary bodies would not provide because of its high cost. He also thought that it would be met with a fierce outcry throughout the length of Bengal on the grounds that the Government was handing over higher education to a proselytising agency before the people were themselves in a position to undertake the change. He also wrote at length in favour of the much-despised theory of 'downward filtration'. In his long experience as a former school inspector Croft claimed that where high and middle (secondary) schools existed, the extension of primary education was an easy task because the people accepted it. Moreover, those who were

educated desired to extend the benefits of education to their poorer neighbours, and the middle schools were able to provide a ready supply of teachers. Croft refuted Johnston's claim that the government discouraged mission activity in Bengal by asserting that grant aid was willingly given to all voluntary agencies and that the missions had been major recipients of financial aid from government sources. In conclusion, he claimed that the Bengal Government was trying to implement the 1854 despatch but added that if progress was slow it was due mainly to the poverty of the people rather than to any deliberate government policy.

A week after Johnston wrote to Croft, the General Council organised yet another deputation, this time to wait on the newly appointed Secretary of State for India, the Marquis of Hartington, subsequently the eighth Duke of Devonshire.¹⁹ Hartington, a member of the Cavendish family, had a long and illustrious political career—three times he declined the offer to be Prime Minister—but up to this point education was not a subject that had engaged his attention.²⁰ Lord Halifax, supported by Johnston, again led what *The Times* described as a large deputation which included no less than seven MPs. Halifax, Johnston and six others all spoke about the Indian Government's alleged neglect of elementary schooling and its obligations to voluntary agencies under the terms of the 1854 Despatch. Hartington claimed to know little about the issue but assured the deputation that the Indian Government would be advised of their views. He added that he was glad to hear that the deputation was not seeking to advance the cause of religious proselytism as it was common knowledge that the British government had long pledged itself to neutrality in religious matters in India. The new Secretary of State was true to his word and Ripon soon received a lengthy despatch on educational matters raised by the deputation.

Most of Hartington's despatch was based on a memorandum submitted to him in late June by Arthur Howell who had worked for many years as an Under Secretary in the Home Department in Calcutta and who had an extensive knowledge of Indian education.²¹ Howell, a graduate of St John's College, Oxford, had joined the Bengal Civil Service in 1858. After serving in the North West Provinces and Oudh, he was appointed, in 1864, to the Home Department of the Secretariat of the Indian Government in Calcutta. Thereafter he was the author of two major *Notes on education in India* (1866–67 and 1870–71) which are still considered important sources for historians of Indian education.²² Howell was a strong supporter of the missions and their interpretation of the 1854 despatch and expressed sympathy for the aims of the General Council in his memorandum to Hartington. He was especially critical of the alleged neglect of elementary education by successive British governments in India on grounds of

inadequate finance. He produced various tables of statistics to demonstrate the wide variations in student costs from one province to another, and concluded by saying that the real truth behind mission concerns expressed by the General Council was that local provincial governments in India preferred to spend their educational funds in ways that did not accord with the principles outlined in the Despatch of 1854.

Hartington's despatch to Ripon reiterated most of the claims made by Johnston and the Council and endorsed the view that the main objective of the Despatch of 1854 had been 'overlooked or frustrated'. Hartington was convinced of the soundness of the 1854 policy and was anxious 'that it should be reverted to and earnestly carried out'. He was also critical of the way in which higher education seemingly fitted graduates solely for government employment:

What is wanted all over India is better producers, better artisans, and better farmers; instruction that gives accuracy to the eye and skill to the hand, such as has of late years been successfully imparted, by a sound system of primary education in other countries. We do not want to train up classes who look down on the labour of their hands.

Hartington sought an assurance that in future the promotion of elementary education would be a principal object of government policy and that the Government would steadily withdraw from direct involvement in running schools and colleges. He had no wish to see government withdraw wholly from the management of higher educational institutions—some should be retained as models—nor did he think that government should withdraw from the overall direction, supervision and inspection of higher education. He also noted the absence of any central control and direction of education policy in India which meant that local governments seemingly drifted in different directions at their own will. To offset this trend he called for annual reviews to check capricious or autocratic action and to highlight progress and the cost to government. Annual reviews would also be a means to educate and inform the public about educational matters. Finally, Hartington noted Ripon's recent proposal to establish a small commission to examine primary education and asked to be kept informed of developments.

After arriving in India Ripon had followed up the charges voiced to him by the General Council in London by seeking information from the various provincial governments on two main questions: (a) had primary education been neglected since 1854 and (b) was a disproportionate amount of government money spent on higher education? The evidence collected appeared to support the claims of the London-based General Council. Accordingly, shortly before he received Hartington's despatch arising from

the deputation of the General Council, Ripon called for 'a complete and general inquiry' or what he also termed 'a small Commission' to examine the existing education system.²³ He noted that provision for primary education, whether English or vernacular, lagged far behind that of middle and higher education: 'I cannot think', he penned, 'that we can regard with satisfaction or contentment the advance made in the last twenty five years in the elementary instruction of our settled districts'. Clearly the extension of elementary education had to be a top priority for the future. Inadequate finance to support such a move was clearly a major obstacle but Ripon had no wish to stand still on the matter. He was also aware that the government needed more information before it acted. Reports of Directors of Public Instruction were often very interesting but they were strictly provincial: '... they give statistics and details of the working of the existing system, but they seldom take wide or general views of the subject or afford information of the kind which the Government ought to possess before it can deal satisfactorily with the question of education as a whole'. Accordingly, a circular was sent to all provincial governments in June 1881 calling for information on the progress of primary education since responsibility for it had been delegated to local governments in 1871.

F.C. Daukes, an Under Secretary in the Home Department, later prepared a summary of the information obtained.²⁴ It was clear that both the nature and extent of provision for elementary education varied widely from one part of the country to another as did the proportion of government expenditure spent on government institutions. The most significant growth in elementary schooling in the previous ten years (1871-1881) had occurred in Bengal and Assam but elsewhere progress was slow. The proportion of provincial government funds spent on elementary education also varied but this was complicated by the varying classifications from province to province of what constituted an elementary as opposed to a junior secondary school. There was no such problem, however, in determining the percentage of government finance spent on government and aided institutions. In 1880-81 Bengal and Assam devoted some 70 per cent of government funds to aided or voluntary institutions. By contrast, comparable figures for Bombay, the North West Provinces and Oudh, the Punjab, and the Central Provinces were 8, 16, 17 and 16 per cent respectively. In what can only be described as a classic understatement, Daukes commented, 'These figures seem to show that measures are required in some provinces for further developing the grant-in-aid system'.

In November 1881 Sir Thomas Erskine Perry sent Ripon a copy of a memorandum²⁵ that he had written to the Secretary of State in response to a draft of the despatch that Hartington subsequently sent to Ripon. Perry,²⁶ a product of Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge, had enjoyed a

distinguished legal career in Bombay as a judge and later Chief Justice in the 1840s. After retiring in 1852, he returned to England and entered politics as the MP for Devonport. In 1859 he was appointed to the Council of India. As an old India hand who had spent many years as President of the Bombay Board of Education in the 1840s, he was highly critical of Hartington's draft despatch. In what can best be described as forthright language he wrote: 'I doubt much the expediency of this despatch in its present form. It will certainly be very unpopular in India, and will be looked upon, I think justly, as a triumph of the Missionaries in the contest they have been waging for 40 years to get the superior education of India into their own hands'. He also claimed that the despatch ignored the great success of government efforts to expand education, and especially primary education. Perry readily acknowledged that Howell, who had supplied most of the content of Hartington's draft, was very well informed on the subject of education but, said Perry, 'he writes under such an evident bias as to make him a very unsafe guide'. Moreover, Perry claimed that Howell's view had never won acceptance in India and that all Indian governments were agreed on the need for secular education. The idea of placing a greater emphasis on primary education and government withdrawing from higher education sounded plausible and had been advocated for many years but Perry claimed that the difficulties encountered in attempting such moves were not patent to the framers of the 1854 despatch:

When Sir Charles Wood was preparing that despatch he took great pains to obtain the views of all who had any practical acquaintance with the workings of education in India and he sent a copy of his proposed draft to me, amongst others I remember well that both Sir Edward Ryan and myself warned him that he was incurring future danger by the encouragement he was giving, perhaps unconsciously to the missionaries, although we expressed our great satisfaction at the general terms of the draft.

Perry also wrote to Ripon at length on the many problems that he and others had encountered in establishing a modern type of primary education amongst the indigenous population, problems which he felt had been underestimated in Hartington's draft memo. Perry also provided strong support for the 'downward filtration' theory.

By the start of February 1882 Ripon had abandoned plans for a limited inquiry into primary education. Instead, he announced that an Education Commission was to be appointed to enquire into the manner in which effect had been given to the Despatch of 1854, and to suggest ways in which the policy outlined in the Despatch might be carried out more effectively.²⁷ In an earlier memorandum, dated 30 December 1881, Ripon had commented on the delicacy of the subject and suggested that the

proposed commission would need plenty of time to complete its task. His claimed that his Government fully endorsed the soundness of the policy contained in the 1854 Despatch and had no wish to depart from the principles upon which it was based but conceded that a review of progress was long overdue.²⁸ In short, the missionary lobby in the united Kingdom had finally got its way although the Indian Government in Calcutta was quick to stress to the Commission that it should not make recommendations in the belief that large additional sums of money would be forthcoming.²⁹

It is clear from Ripon's private correspondence that he was fully aware of the complex nature of the Commission's task. In a most revealing letter to Lord Northbrook, the former Viceroy and author of the 1854 despatch, he wrote:

We are about to appoint a Commission to inquire into the state of education with special reference to Primary Education. It is a difficult subject as it is beset with conflicting interests, the Missionaries pressing Hartington in their direction and the Natives, who are interested in Higher Education, watching with the utmost jealousy every step which has the semblance of being taken at the bidding of the missionary bodies. It is a difficult task to hold the balance evenly between the two parties. At first Hartington appeared to be very cautious about making changes in the system as it is now being worked; but of late, under the influence of Howell, he seems to have to some extent gone over to the other side. *If you have an opportunity please point out to him how necessary it is to proceed with great caution upon a question, which in India, as well as at home, is mixed up with religious feeling and religious prejudice.*³⁰

There is no room here for an any detailed analysis of the Commission's Report. Suffice to say that the missions gained little from its manifold recommendations many of which were ineffectual compromises. One member of the Commission argued for a single education act to cover all of British India but most agreed that the central government should continue to supply the broad principles to be followed and that these should be embodied in separate provincial acts as shaped and suitably modified by local circumstances. This view was readily endorsed in a despatch from Calcutta to London: 'We shall, under no circumstances, attempt to impose by law any uniform educational system upon the different provinces of British India ...'.³¹ It was a practical decision that was readily endorsed by the India Office. As a consequence the missions could no longer realistically continue to appeal to the Secretary of State in London to redress their grievances. Moreover, as if to rub salt into the wound, they still had no choice in the future but to work with provincial government education officials many of whom were unsympathetic to their cause and equally sympathetic to Indian hostility towards mission schools.

Nevertheless, the events in Madras which led to the establishment of the Education Commission were not the last time that the missions in Madras challenged the Indian and provincial governments' interpretation of the 1854 despatch.

In 1901 the Missionary Council on Aided Education in South India petitioned Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, on the eve of an education conference that he had convened in Simla, objecting to the way in which the Madras Government was allegedly favouring government schools and colleges at the expense of voluntary institutions. The Madras Government refuted the claims and the Government in Calcutta chose to await the results of the Simla conference before responding to the Missionary Council's appeal.³² A decade later, the same Madras Missionary Council protested strongly yet again to the Madras Government about a proposed scheme to establish model government secondary schools in a large number of local districts.³³ The same familiar argument was advanced about it being contrary to the policy as enshrined in the 1854 Despatch. On that occasion the protest eventually reached the desk of the Secretary of State, Lord Crewe, together with further support from 'influential missionary bodies' in the United Kingdom. Crewe expressed some sympathy for the mission cause but delayed making any decision until further proof was obtained of whether there was widespread popular support for the Madras Government's proposed policy. The First World War intervened before the matter was resolved.

For historians of education the conflict between missionaries and government officials adds a further dimension to an already complex array of factors which helped to shape British education policy in nineteenth century India. It was Lovat Fraser, the editor of *The Times of India*, who said of Indian education in general shortly before the First World War:

No topic ... has been written upon so interminably, or as a rule with so little profit. Whether it is approached by Englishmen or Indians it almost invariably seems to produce the same results, for it stimulates prolixity, tends to the development of the most dogmatic opinions, develops bitterness in the most unexpected quarters, and frequently ends by becoming enveloped in a curious vagueness of thought *Those who study the question of Indian education generally discover that they have entered upon a battlefield*³⁴

The often controversial role played by the missionary bodies in simultaneously spreading Western education and the Christian faith amongst the Indian population and their frequent recourse to a literal interpretation of the 1854 Education Despatch in their disputes with British officialdom bear ample testimony to the accuracy of Fraser's observation.

NOTES

1. Gov't Printer, Calcutta, 1883
2. D.K.Karve and D.V.Ambekar (eds.), *Speeches and Writings of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Vol.III—Educational, London, Asia Pub. House 1967, p.163
3. Richey, J.A., *Selections from Educational Records*, Part II (1840–1959), 1920, Calcutta.
4. *Ibid.*
5. The subject is examined in Thomas B.Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857–1870*, Princeton University Press, 1964, chap. III, and more recently and in greater detail in David W.Savage, *Evangelical Educational Policy in Britain and India, 1857–60*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 22 (3) 1994, pp.432–461
6. The memorial and ensuing correspondence is contained in the *Report by the Madras Provincial Committee* (pp.303–365), which was prepared for the Indian Education Commission 1882–3, and which forms a volume of the Commission's final report.
7. See para. 33 of Wood's Despatch
8. See para. 1 of Stanley's Despatch
9. *Educational Papers*. A Supplement to the South India Missionary Conference Report, Addison and Co., Madras, 1880, p.49
10. M.E.Chamberlain, *Britain and India The Interaction of Two Peoples*, 1974, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, esp. chap. 6
11. Metcalf, p.130
12. Precise details relating to the origins of the Council remain obscure. The Council's second annual report (1882) was printed and there is a copy in the British Library. Viscount Halifax was listed as the President together with a long list of Vice Presidents consisting mainly of peers and M.P.s. The Council claimed to have two branches—one in London and the other in Edinburgh. The Chairman of the London branch was General Sir William Hill, assisted by Lockhart Gordon (treasurer) and the Rev. J.Johnston (secretary). Colonel A.G.Young (Indian Army) was the convenor of the Scottish branch assisted by Col. P.Dods, a former Director of Public Instruction in the Central Provinces of India, who acted as secretary.
13. The principal source on the Council's aims and its reactions to the Report of the Indian Education Commission is J.Johnston, *Abstract and Analysis of the Report of the 'Indian Education Commission' 1882–83*, 1884, London, Hamilton, Adams and Co,
14. For more detail on the origins of the 1854 Despatch see R.J.Moore, The Composition of 'Wood's Education Despatch', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 80 Jan. 1965, pp.70–80; The Charter for Education, chap. 6 in R.J.Moore, *Sir Charles Wood's Indian Policy 1853–66*, 1966. Manchester University Press; Suresh Charndra Ghosh, Dalhousie, Charles Wood and the Education Despatch of 1854, *History of Education*, Vol. 4, No.2, (1975) pp.37–47
15. Johnson, *op. cit.*
16. *The Times*, 8 May 1880
17. For biographical details of the Marquess of Ripon see Lucien Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon*, 2 Vols., 1921, London, John Murray
18. Ripon Papers [RP] (43582) Coft to Johnston, 26 June 1881

19. *The Times*, 7 April 1881
20. *Dictionary of National Biography* COMPLETE
21. RP (43617) Sec of State to Viceroy, n.d. A copy of Howell's memorandum to Hartington of 25 June 1881 was enclosed.
22. For details of Howell's career see *India Office List 1989-90*, p.271
23. RP (43582) Memorandum by Ripon 9 May 1881
24. *Ibid*, folios 93-154
25. RP (43617) Memorandum by Sir Irskine Perry dated 15 Nov. 1881
26. For a full account of Perry's life see Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (eds.), *The Dictionary of National Biography From the Earliest Times to 1900*, Vol. XV, London, O.U.P. Reprint 1937-38, pp.924-6
27. Resolution of the Gov't of India 3 Feb. 1882. India Office Records L/P and J/3/151
28. Ripon to the Sec of State, 30 Dec. 1881, RP (43582)
29. *Report of the Education Commission*, p. 2
30. Ripon to Lord Northbrook, 9 Jan. 1882, Northbrook Collection, MSS EUR C144/1, India Office Collection, British National Library. Author's emphasis.
31. Despatch 12 May 1884, Home Dep't. to Secretary of State, para.19
32. Proceedings, Home Department, Nov. 1901, Appeal of the Missionary Council on Aided Education in South India, Nos.10-12
33. Proceedings, Dept. of Education, August 1912, Improvement of Secondary Education in the Madras Presidency, Nos. 8-21
34. Fraser, L, *India Under Curzon and After*, 1911, London, Heinemann, p.182
Author's emphasis