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Curzon

Lord Curzon in India

BEING A SELECTION FROM HIS SPEECHES
AS VICEROY & GOVERNOR-GENERAL
OF INDIA

1898—1905

WITH A PORTRAIT, EXPLANATORY NOTES
AND AN INDEX

AND

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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LEGAL MEMBER OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S COUNCIL, 1899-1904

'We are ordained to walk here in the same track together for many a long day to come. You cannot do without us. We should be impotent without you. Let the Englishman and the Indian accept the consecration of a union that is so mysterious as to have in it something of the divine, and let our common ideal be a united country and a happier people.'

Speech at Calcutta, Feb. 15, 1902.

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GAME PRESERVATION

BURMA GAME PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION, RANGOON

AMONG the various Addresses that were presented to the Viceroy on the occasion of his visit to Rangoon on December 10, 1901, was one from the Burma Game Preservation Association. In reply Lord Curzon indicated the views upon which he felt disposed to act. The subject was afterwards exhaustively examined by the Government of India, and the heads of a draft Bill were circulated to the various local Governments in 1903. In reply an immense number of opinions were received, and these were being digested with a view to legislation in the Imperial Legislative Council when Lord Curzon left India.

The question of Game Preservation in India is one that may appear, in my judgment, not merely to the sportsman, but also to the naturalist and the friend of animal life. It is certainly not through the spectacles of the sportsman only that I would regard it, though I yield to no one in my recognition of the manly attractions of shikar. Such considerations, however, might be suspected of a selfish tinge, and I think that in approaching the matter we should, as far as possible, put our own predilections in the background, and view it in the public interest at large.

There are some persons who doubt or dispute the progressive diminution of wild life in India. I think that they are wrong. The facts seem to me to point entirely in the opposite direction. Up to the time of the Mutiny lions were shot in Central India.¹ They are now confined to an

¹ Before leaving India Lord Curzon persuaded Maharaja Scindia of Gwalior to attempt the introduction of the lion into the wild outlying parts of his State, and procured for him animals both from the East Africa Protectorate and from the Soudan. It will be interesting to see whether the experiment succeeds.

ever-narrowing patch of forest in Kathiawar.¹ I was on the verge of contributing to their still further reduction a year ago myself ; but fortunately I found out my mistake in time, and was able to adopt a restraint which I hope that others will follow. Except in Native States, the Terai, and forest reserves, tigers are undoubtedly diminishing. This is perhaps not an unmixed evil. The rhinoceros is all but exterminated save in Assam. Bison are not so numerous or so easy to obtain as they once were. Elephants have already had to be protected in many parts. Above all, deer, to which you particularly allude in the case of Burma, are rapidly dwindling. Every man's hand appears to be against them, and each year thins the herds. Finally, many beautiful and innocent varieties of birds are pursued for the sake of their plumage, which is required to minister to the heedless vanity of European fashion.

The causes of this diminution in the wild fauna of India are in some cases natural and inevitable, in others they are capable of being arrested. In the former class I would name the steady increase of population, the widening area of cultivation, and the improvement in means of communication—all of them the sequel of what is popularly termed progress in civilisation. Among the artificial and preventable causes I would name the great increase in the number of persons who use firearms, the immense improvement in the mechanism and range of the weapons themselves, the unchecked depredations of native hunters and poachers, and in some cases, I regret to say, a lowering of the standard of sport, leading to the shooting of immature heads, or to the slaughter of females. The result of all these agencies, many of which are found in operation at the same time, and in the same place, cannot fail to be a continuous reduction in the wild game of India.

I cannot say that the Government of India have hitherto shown any great boldness in dealing with the matter. But there has been, and still is, in my opinion, very good reason for proceeding cautiously. There are some persons who say

¹ This is the Gir Forest in the State of Junagadh in Kathiawar. The preservation of the fast dwindling number of lions in consequence of the Viceroy's intervention led to a rapid multiplication of their numbers, and in 1905 there were said to be over sixty in existence.

that wild animals are as certainly destined to disappear in India as wolves, for instance, have done in England, and that it is of no use to try and put back the hands of the clock. I do not attach much value to this plea, which seems to me rather pusillanimous, as well as needlessly pessimistic. There are others who say that, in a continent so vast as India, or, to narrow the illustration, in a province with such extensive forest reserves as Burma, the wild animals may be left to look after themselves. This argument does not impress me either; for the distant jungles are available only to the favoured few, and it is the disappearance of game from the plains and from accessible tracts that it is for the most part in question. I do, however, attach great value to the consideration that wild animal life should not be unduly fostered at the expense of the occupations or the crops of the people. Where depredations are committed upon crops, or upon flocks and herds, the cultivator cannot be denied, within reasonable limits, the means of self-protection. Similarly, it is very important that any restrictions that are placed upon the destruction of game should not be worked in a manner that may be oppressive or harassing to his interests.

Hitherto the attempts made by Government to deal with the question by legislation, or by rules and notifications based on statute, have been somewhat fitful and lacking in method. In parts, as I have already mentioned, elephants have been very wisely and properly protected. A close season has been instituted for certain kinds of game. An Act has been passed for the preservation of wild birds. And I observe from one of the enclosures to your memorial that your ingenuity has not shrunk from the suggestion that a deer may reasonably be considered a wild bird. Under this Act the possession or sale during the breeding season of the flesh of certain wild birds in municipal or cantonment areas is forbidden. Then again rules have been issued under the Forest Act protecting certain classes of animals in certain tracts.

The general effect of these restrictions has been in the right direction. But I doubt if they have been sufficiently co-ordinated, or if they have gone far enough; and one of

my last acts at Simla, before I had received or read your memorial, was to invite a re-examination of the subject with the view of deciding whether we might proceed somewhat further than we have already done. We must be very careful not to devise any too stereotyped or Procrustean form of procedure ; since there is probably no matter in which a greater variety of conditions and necessities prevails ; and the rules or precautions which would be useful in one place might be positively harmful in another. Among the suggestions which will occur to all of us as deserving of consideration are some greater restriction, by the charge of fees or otherwise, upon the issue of gun licences, the more strict enforcement of a close season for certain animals, the prohibition of the possession or sale of flesh during the breeding season, penalties upon netting and snaring during the same period, restrictions of the facilities given to strangers to shoot unlimited amounts of game, and upon the sale and export of trophies and skins. I dare say that many other ideas will occur to us in the discussion of the matter, or may be put forward in the press and elsewhere by those who are qualified to advise. My own idea would be, if possible, to frame some kind of legislation of a permissive and elastic nature, the provisions of which should be applied to the various provinces of India in so far only as they were adapted to the local conditions. The question of Native States somewhat complicates the matter. But I doubt not that the Government would, where required, meet with the willing co-operation of the Chiefs, many of whom are keen and enthusiastic patrons both of animal life and of sport. The subject is not one that can be hastily taken up or quickly decided, but I have probably said enough to show you that I personally am in close sympathy with your aims ; and I need hardly add that, if the Government of India finds itself able, after further study, to proceed with the matter, an opportunity will be given to those who are interested in each province to record their opinions.