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THE INDIA BOARD (1784-1858)

By WILLIAM FOSTER, C.I.E.

Read November 16, 1916

THE Right Honourable Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India—generally known as the India Board, or the Board of Control—had an existence of practically three-quarters of a century, namely, from the last year of the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings to the assumption in 1858 by the Crown of the direct administration of India. That this long period was filled with important events in the history of both England and India no one will need to be reminded; and a study of the part played by the Board would be of great interest. Obviously, however, the subject is far too big to be dealt with in the time available this afternoon; so I have thought it best to limit myself to what may be termed the domestic side of the Board's history—its constitution, its methods of working, its personnel, the various buildings it occupied, and so forth; using for this purpose chiefly the Board's own records, now preserved among the archives of its successor, the present India Office.

As a preliminary, a few words may be said regarding the inception of the Board. From the time when the victory of Plassey and its immediate developments laid Bengal at the feet of the English, it was recognised as inevitable that the King's Government should in some form or other assume the ultimate responsibility for the administration of the East India Company's territorial possessions; but only by slow degrees and with much hesitation was action taken. As early as 1759 Clive wrote from Calcutta to the elder Pitt, urging that the Crown should intervene; and as years went on, marked by scandals in India and blunders in Leadenhall Street, the demand, both in and out

of Parliament, for the institution of some form of control became more and more insistent. In 1773 the Ministry attempted to meet the situation by passing the Regulating Act; but this, while making important changes in India, left matters at home much as they were, except that the Company was required to send to one of the Secretaries of State a copy of every despatch received from India on other than commercial topics. Eight years later a further step was taken; by the Act of 1781, granting the Company an extension of its monopoly for a further period, it was enacted that copies of all dispatches sent to India on administrative matters should be communicated to the Government, and that the Company should obey any directions received from the latter relating to peace and war or to transactions with other Powers. It was soon felt, however, that this arrangement was ineffective, and that something more must be done. Accordingly in 1783 Fox introduced two Bills—subsequently merged into one—which included provisions for taking the entire territorial government of its Indian possessions out of the hands of the Company and vesting it in seven Commissioners or Directors, to be appointed in the first instance by Parliament, and afterwards by the King; while the management of commercial affairs was to be entrusted to nine Assistant Directors, chosen by the Legislature from among the holders of not less than £2000 of India Stock, and performing their duties under the supervision of the seven Commissioners. No provision was made for the responsibility of the new directorate to Parliament, except that its members were to be removable on address from either House; and herein lay the most striking weakness of the plan, which met at once with a storm of criticism. The opposition of the Company was natural enough, and it was reinforced by a large body of outside opinion, which dreaded lest the effect of the measure would be to place the patronage of India in the hands of party nominees, who would use it for party purposes. In spite of the outcry, the Government succeeded

in carrying the Bill through the Commons by a large majority; but the King saw in its unpopularity a means of getting rid of a Ministry repugnant to himself, and an unsparing use of the royal influence led to the Bill being thrown out on the second reading in the House of Lords.

The dismissal of the Ministers was followed by the appointment of the youthful William Pitt as First Lord of the Treasury, and five months later a general election gave him a triumphant majority over his opponents. A fresh measure for the management of Indian affairs was promptly introduced and passed through all its stages, becoming law on August 13, 1784. In this Pitt skilfully avoided the defects which had proved fatal to his rival's scheme. The constitution of the Court of Directors was not interfered with, except by the requirement that three of its number should be appointed a Secret Committee with special functions. A new Board of Commissioners was to be appointed by the Crown, consisting of not more than six Privy Councillors (including the Chancellor of the Exchequer and one of the Secretaries of State) and holding office only during the King's pleasure—an arrangement which secured the responsibility of the Ministry of the day for the actions of the Board. The latter was to have access to all the Company's papers, and no dispatch was to issue (on other than commercial business) without its previous approval. Further, the Commissioners might require the Company to prepare drafts on prescribed subjects, and might, in cases of default or urgency, transmit their own drafts to the Secret Committee, to be signed and sent out to India in the name of the Company. In the event of a dispute between the two bodies as to the powers of the Board, the question was to be submitted to the decision of the King in Council. The appointment and dismissal of their servants was left entirely to the Court of Directors, whose hands were strengthened by a proviso that any resolution of theirs approved by the Board was not to be rescinded or altered by the General Court of Proprietors.

It may seem a strange idea to entrust duties of this nature to half a dozen Privy Councillors, selected mainly for political reasons; but, after all, it was in accordance with British constitutional practice, which does not ask for expert knowledge from those entrusted with the nation's naval, military, or financial business, or even from those sent out to the colonies and dependencies as Viceroys or Governors. Moreover, the business of detail—in which such knowledge was of special importance—remained in the hands of the East India Company and its trained advisers; while before long the Board's own officials acquired a very fair acquaintance with Indian problems. Again, the first person chosen for the important post of Chief Secretary to the Board was Mr. Charles William Boughton Rouse, M.P. for Evesham (1780–90), who had had considerable Indian experience.¹ It is also to be remembered that later on the Board included members with first-hand knowledge of Indian administration. Lord Teignmouth, who (as Sir John Shore) had been Governor-General from 1793 to 1798, was a Commissioner from 1807 to 1828; the Earl of Buckinghamshire, who was President from 1812 to 1816, had previously (as Lord Hobart) been Governor of Madras; Lord Ellenborough was four times President, and between the third and fourth periods filled the post of Governor-General; while Sir James Mackintosh,

¹ He was appointed to the Bengal Civil Service in 1765, and served until about 1779. Details of his career are not available; but we know that he presided at Calcutta over the celebrated suit which formed the basis of the charge of forgery on which Nandkumar was afterwards hanged, and that from about 1775 he was Chief at Dacca. Rouse was also a Persian scholar, and translated parts of the *Ain-i-Akbari* for his friend Major Rennell, who in return dedicated to him one of the maps in the *Bengal Atlas*. He gave assistance of a similar character to Robert Orme, the historian. In the year of his retirement from the India Board, Rouse published a *Dissertation concerning the Landed Property of Bengal*, dedicated to Henry Dundas. As a reward for his services, he was created a baronet in July 1791; and in February 1794, on the death of his brother, he succeeded to the family baronetcy of Boughton of Lawford, whereupon he changed his surname to Boughton. He sat in the House of Commons as member for Bramber, 1796–99, and died in February 1821.

some years after his return from Bombay, became a member of the Board and held office till his death.¹ On the other hand, the Board served at times as a training ground for Indian administrators. Lord Mornington was a Commissioner from 1793 to 1797, before going to Bengal as Governor-General. In 1806 Lord Minto resigned the office of President in order to take up the Governor-Generalship, and Lord Ellenborough did the same thirty-five years later. George Canning, another President, had the offer of the same post in 1822, but declined. Macaulay was first a member of the Board and then its Secretary, before proceeding to Calcutta as Legal Member of Council ; and James Wilson, the first Indian Finance Minister, had previously served for nearly four years as one of the Board's secretaries.

From the point of view of the Company, the arrangement made by Pitt was one which was at least acceptable. The Directors possessed still the power of appointing and dismissing their own officials, the undisturbed control of commercial matters, and a very large share in other business, while the responsibility of justifying to Parliament the management of Indian affairs was shifted from their shoulders to those of the Ministry of the day. Pitt's proposals received, therefore, the ready assent of Leadenhall Street ; and, when once the measure had passed into law, the Directors did their best to co-operate with the new Board. It must have been irksome to them at times not

¹ In the report of the Select Committee of 1832 reference is made to a suggestion (by Sir John Malcolm) that one or two of the Commissioners should always be persons who had been employed in the Company's civil or military service abroad. Questioned on this point, the Board's Assistant Secretary pointed out that it was already open to the Government to appoint members with those qualifications ; while to go further, and lay down such a requirement by law, might imply that special attention was to be given to the views of such a member. He added that soon after the establishment of the Board there was a secretary who had had Indian experience (Rouse is evidently meant), and that ' the President found himself frequently annoyed by the obtrusion of opinions to which perhaps the party offering them was inclined to attach more weight and importance than properly belonged to them, from the mere circumstance of his having been in India.'

only to be overruled, but also to have to sign dispatches with which they were not in agreement ; yet in most cases they were content to remonstrate and require reconsideration (a right formally conceded to them in the Act of 1793). The position in this respect was rather a strange one, for while the Board could, if it desired, make the Company praise an official whose conduct was in reality disapproved, it could not save him from dismissal by his irate masters. A witness before the Parliamentary Committee of 1832 gave a rather highly coloured account of a case in which the Company submitted to the Board a dispatch denouncing the conduct of a certain official and ending with his recall from his post ; this dispatch, it was stated, was altered at Westminster into one of commendation, but with the sentence of dismissal unreversed, this being beyond the powers of the Board. The story, which related to the removal of Lord William Bentinck from the Governorship of Madras, was, however, put into its true proportions by a later witness ; and it then appeared that all that the Board had done was to tone down in some degree the terms of the Company's censure.

It would be tedious to examine all the cases in which the Court and the Board disagreed over the question of their respective powers ; but we may note in passing that Mr. Jones, the Assistant Secretary of the Board, declared before the Committee of 1832 that such cases were ' very few indeed,' and that, on the whole, ' a very extraordinary degree of harmony has prevailed.' Naturally these collisions occurred principally in the early years of the Board's existence ; and perhaps the most important of all was the dispute in 1788 over the charging to Indian revenues of the cost of the royal regiments sent to India by Dundas without the concurrence of the Company—a dispute which was settled by an Act in the same year. So far as I am aware, only on two occasions was the resistance of the Directors pushed to its extreme limits. The first was over the case of a certain Major Hart, whose claims, on account

of rice supplied to the army before Seringapatam, the Board wished to settle on terms which the Court considered exorbitant. The controversy, which involved the question of the right of the Board to interfere in such matters, dragged on from 1808 to 1816, when, the Privy Council having decided against them and a mandamus having been obtained from the Court of the King's Bench, the Directors gave in and signed the dispatch as altered by the Commissioners. The second instance was a dispute that occurred in 1832 over a dispatch regarding the claims of the house of Palmer & Co. against the Nizam of Hyderabad. The Board altered the draft in a manner which the Directors disapproved; whereupon the latter, as an afterthought, declared the matter to be one outside the Board's scope, and claimed the right to withdraw the draft. The case was carried to the Court of King's Bench, where the judges decided that the Directors, by submitting the draft in the first place, had virtually admitted the competency of the Board to deal with it, and were not entitled to annul it at a later stage. A writ of mandamus was issued accordingly, and the dispatch was then signed and sent in the amended form.

As I have already remarked, it is no part of my present plan to deal at any length with the history of the Board. The first Commissioners were appointed by a warrant under the Great Seal dated August 31, 1784, and they held their inaugural meeting on the third of the following month, with Lord Sydney (the Foreign Secretary) in the chair. Under the terms of the Act, the Secretary of State was always to preside, if present; while in his absence, and that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the chair was to be taken by the senior of the Commissioners attending. As a matter of fact, from the beginning of the Board the duty of presiding fell generally to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, the Treasurer of the Navy (afterwards Lord Melville). For instance, out of thirty-four meetings held during the first half of 1785, he took the chair at all but one—an

occasion when Lord Sydney happened to be present. Thus Dundas was virtually President from the commencement, not merely from 1793, when he was formally appointed to the post. Pitt himself, however, took an active interest in the work of the Board, and he actually presided at the meetings held during the first seven months of 1787, and also from April 1788 to March 1789. This he did, of course, in virtue of his position as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and doubtless he still left to Dundas the superintendence of the regular work of the Board.

Almost the first step taken by the Commissioners was to settle their staff of assistants. As already mentioned, the post of Secretary was given to Mr. Boughton Rouse. That of Under Secretary (an appointment abolished in 1797) went to the Hon. William Brodrick, M.P. Three clerks, a solicitor, an assistant solicitor, two messengers, an office-keeper, and a 'necessary woman' completed the establishment, quarters for which were found in the range of buildings then occupied by the Treasury in Whitehall. As it is mentioned later that the Board's office was adjacent to No. 3 Downing Street, it must have been at the southern end of the Treasury block. These premises were provided and kept up at the public cost, while all the other expenses of the Board, including the salaries of the staff (none of the Commissioners was as yet paid) were at this time defrayed from the same source.

Rouse's tenure of office as Chief Secretary lasted until May 1791, when he was succeeded by another Member of Parliament, Henry Beaufoy.¹ On the death of the latter four years later, the vacancy was filled by the promotion of the Under Secretary, the Hon. William Brodrick, M.P. He held it till November 1803, when he was made one of

¹ In his *Administration of the East India Company* (p. 129), Sir John Kaye prints a letter written by Beaufoy, in which he says that in the hands of his predecessors (*sic*) the office of Chief Secretary had been practically a sinecure, as papers were usually signed in circulation and the Board seldom met. The latter statement is certainly erroneous.

the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury. His successor at the India Board was Mr. (afterwards Sir) Benjamin Hobhouse, M.P., father of John Cam Hobhouse (Lord Broughton), the future President. It may be noted that the post of Chief Secretary was always held by a member of the Legislature, and that after a time it became the practice for him to go out of office with his party.

On the establishment of the Board, Dundas was sanguine enough to imagine that the King would desire to keep himself acquainted with all the proceedings of the Commissioners. He proposed, therefore, to send regularly to His Majesty copies of all drafts submitted by the Company, of the alterations made by the Board, of any correspondence resulting therefrom, and of all minutes of the Court of Directors. According to an endorsement on the document, this plan was actually carried out for about two years, after which it was discontinued, 'the papers being found too voluminous.'

As soon as the Board got seriously to work a practical difficulty arose. By the terms of the Act, any draft submitted by the Company had to be returned within fourteen days of its receipt. Doubtless, when the Bill was drafted, it was thought that such a period would allow sufficient time for discussion of the dispatch, while the limitation would prevent any delay in its issue. It was quickly found, however, that when a number of long and important drafts had to be considered about the same time by a body of men with other pressing duties, the period allowed was altogether insufficient; while the further requirement that any alteration made by the Board must be explained by a formal letter, signed by at least three of its members, added to the difficulty. The former obstacle was surmounted in the following ingenious fashion. When the Company's officials had framed their draft, and had secured its approval by the Chairman of the Directors, it was sent unofficially to the Board, accompanied by the necessary 'collection' of documents in support. There it was examined at

leisure by the appropriate officials and submitted to the President, or some other Commissioner designated by him, and was then returned to the East India House with amendments or suggestions. Up to this point the 'Previous Communication' (as it was termed) was entirely unofficial. It now entered upon its official stage. After submission again to the Chairman, who decided whether the alterations suggested at Westminster should be adopted or not, it was moulded into a 'draft,' which, when approved by the appropriate Committee and by the Court, was formally submitted to the Board. The latter, having already examined the document in its earlier form, could now deal rapidly with it. Of course, in cases where their previous recommendations had not been adopted, the Commissioners had to decide whether or not to insist upon these, and in the former alternative their reasons had to be stated in writing; but all this could be managed within the period allowed by law. As a matter of fact, according to the evidence given by the Company's Secretary before the Select Committee of 1852, more than half the 'Previous Communications' came back unaltered, while a large proportion of the changes in the rest were little more than verbal; of 'Drafts' officially submitted, not more than 5 per cent. were altered.¹ So convenient did this system of 'Previous Communications' prove that it was continued even when the limit of time was extended to two months by the Act of 1813; and it lasted, indeed, until the dissolution of the Board. As early as 1793 the labours of the Commissioners were relieved by a proviso in the Act of that year, permitting the Board's orders and explanations to be notified under the hand of the Secretary. Twenty years later the Assistant Secretary was likewise authorised to sign such notifications.

¹ We may note in passing that the alterations made by the Board in the Company's drafts were always written in red ink. This was doubtless the origin of the present India Office convention by which the Secretary of State uses red ink in making comments or corrections on the documents placed before him.

It is to be regretted that most of the 'Previous Communications,' which had an interest of their own as showing the parts played by the Company and the Board respectively in shaping the official drafts, have been destroyed, apparently in 1867, when the India Office moved to its present quarters.

Allusion has been made to the India Act of 1793 (33 Geo. III, c. 52). This measure, while extending for twenty years the term of the Company's monopoly, made certain changes in the constitution of the India Board. The limitation in number was abolished. The Commissioners were in future to be such members of the Privy Council (always including the two principal Secretaries of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer) as the King might please to appoint, together with two others not of that body. The person named first in the royal warrant was to be President, his place being taken, in his absence, by the senior of the members present. A sum of £5000 a year was assigned for salaries to the Commissioners, to be apportioned by royal warrant, together with a further sum of £11,000 for the salaries of the staff and other expenses; and in future both these amounts were to be paid out of Indian revenues. Further, the controlling powers of the Board were increased in various directions which need not be specified.

In the first royal commission issued in consequence of this Act, the name of the Right Hon. Henry Dundas (then Home Secretary) stood at the head of the list, and he thereupon became formally what he had really been from the beginning—the chief member of the Board. By another royal warrant the £5000 provided for salaries was divided in the proportion of £2000 to the President and £1500 each to the two junior members of the Board, the others remaining unpaid and presumably doing little or nothing. With each change in personnel, a new warrant had to be procured; but the salaries remained at the same figures until 1811, when by Act 51 Geo. III, c. 75, the amount to be provided

yearly by the Company for the expenses of the Board was raised to £22,000, no restriction being placed upon the allotment of this sum. Thereupon the Prince Regent issued a warrant fixing the salary of the President at £5000, while two other Commissioners were to be paid £1500 each, as before. In 1813 (53 Geo. III, c. 155) the sum allotted to the Board was increased to £26,000, and provision was made for superannuating its officials; while in 1825 (6 Geo. IV, c. 90) the King was authorised to grant pensions to the President and the Secretary. Six years later the salary of the President was reduced by a Treasury minute to £3500, and those of the other two paid Commissioners to £1200. The Act of 1833 (3 & 4 William IV, c. 85) made further changes. The Lord President of the Council, the Lord Privy Seal, the First Lord of the Treasury, the principal Secretaries of State, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were henceforth to be *ex officio* members of the Board, in addition to those named in each royal commission. No Commissioner was to be paid except the President, and the number required for a quorum was reduced to two; while in future there were to be two Secretaries, each with the same powers as the existing Secretary. The salary of the President remained at £3500 until 1853, when the India Act of that year (16 & 17 Vict., c. 95) provided that his remuneration should not be less than that of a Secretary of State, viz. £5000 a year. This alteration, it may be mentioned, was not in the original Bill, but was accepted by the Government on the motion of Mr. Vernon Smith.

Dundas remained President until 1801, when he quitted office on the resignation of Pitt. He had thus held the post formally for nearly eight years, and really for nearly seventeen—a period which was to prove by far the longest tenure in the history of the department. The East India Company evinced their gratitude for the help he had afforded in continuing their monopoly by giving him a pension of £2000 per annum; and further, after his death, they voted his executors a sum of £20,000 towards the liquidation of

his debts. At the time of his retirement a special mark of their regard was in preparation. In August 1800, Dundas had written to the Chairman to say that the quarters of the India Board had always been inadequate, and were now, owing to the increase of business, intolerably cramped. 'The room where the Board meet is small, noisy, and uncomfortable, and in fact I have not a room to myself in the whole office.' He suggested, therefore, that the Company should buy two commodious houses which then closed in the western end of Downing Street; one of these would make excellent premises for the Board, while the other might be allotted as an official residence for the President. This was rather a cool proposal, seeing that the Company had never been expected to find quarters for the Board, much less to provide a house for its chief; but the Directors made no objection. To further the scheme, Pitt himself wrote to the Chairman, assuring him that the Crown would prolong the lease on the existing terms, providing that the houses were still appropriated to public purposes. Thereupon (November 26) the Directors authorised the purchase of the two houses, at a cost of £6650 for the one on the northern side, belonging to Mr. James Martin, and £6300 for its neighbour, which was the property of Mr. Eliot. By the end of March 1801 Martin's house had been bought and was being fitted up for Dundas's use; but the situation was suddenly changed by his retirement from the post of President, and he announced that he did not wish the proposal pressed. The matter was debated at a General Court held early in April. Some suggested that the house and furniture should be placed at Dundas's disposal for the rest of his life; others thought that it should be made available for the new President; in the end the consideration of the matter was postponed *sine die*. About £4700 had already been spent, including the cost of adding part of Eliot's premises to the other house. The purchase of the former building had not been completed, and it was now left upon Eliot's hands, with compensation for the

part taken away. Dundas had some thoughts of buying the other house from the Company for his own use, but in the end it remained in their possession until April 1804, when it was bought by the Treasury for £9433, including fixtures. In August 1807 Dundas's son Robert, who was then President of the India Board, applied to the Treasury to make over the house (which was at that time in the occupation of Sir Charles Morgan) to him as his official residence. From a Treasury minute of May 1809, it appears that he was thereupon permitted to occupy the premises, though without any formal assignment of them; but in July 1809 mention is made of the impending transfer of the house to one of the public departments—probably the Colonial Office, which occupied both that and its southern neighbour for many years. The site of Dundas's house is now covered by the Whips' Office.

Meanwhile the Board's staff, which was steadily increasing with the growth of business, was finding its quarters at the Treasury far too small. In August 1804 John Meheux, the Chief Clerk, in a letter to the President, mentioned that two plans had been prepared for remedying this—one by adding a new storey, the other by rebuilding the office on the same site; both, however, had been set aside for want of funds. As the pressure was becoming intolerable, Meheux directed attention to two houses in the Privy (now Whitehall) Gardens. One of them, which had been occupied by a Miss Pelham, was in the market; the other, which adjoined it, belonged to the Comptrollers of Army Accounts, who, it was thought, might be willing to exchange it for the Board's existing quarters. Nothing came of the scheme, and matters remained as they were for another two years, when the question was raised afresh by a proposal to purchase a couple of newly built houses on the eastern side of Whitehall, opposite to the Pay Office. That plan also fell through; and then Meheux obtained permission from the President to buy No. 3 Downing Street, which adjoined the existing office of the Board. This house had

been for some time unoccupied, and its acquisition cost the Treasury (September 1806) only about £250.

Before long there was fresh trouble. In 1808, when the house next door to No. 3 was repaired, the party wall between the two was found to be in such a rotten state that its rebuilding was imperative. The front wall was in almost as bad condition, and the cost of the whole operation was estimated at about £550. As the expenditure was unavoidable, the Treasury agreed to the outlay; but after a while the work was stopped by a new development. Towards the close of 1808 it was learnt that the premises were intended to be given to the Home Department, whose office was wanted by the Treasury, and that the India Board was to be accommodated in Dorset House, Whitehall. The Secretary was thereupon directed to write to My Lords for particulars and to ask for a voice in the new arrangements. In May 1809 rooms were being fitted up for the Board in Dorset House, and the transfer appears to have taken place about a year later. No. 3 Downing Street was made over to the Privy Council. Its demolition was not long deferred, and its site was absorbed into the remodelled Treasury buildings.

Dorset House stood on the western side of Whitehall just to the south of Dover House; to-day its site is covered by the northern part of the Treasury buildings in that street. The premises, which belonged to the Dorset family, were purchased by the Crown under an agreement made in 1808, though the transfer was not concluded until two years later (Sheppard's 'Royal Palace at Whitehall,' p. 162). Evidently the India Board became the first public tenants. Practically the only subsequent reference to the premises in the Board's records occurs in May 1815, when the Board of Works was asked to make a vault under the paved yard for the storage of firewood, and also to substitute an open iron gate for a closed door at the backway to the Office from the Treasury Passage.

The records are equally silent about the next (and final)

move. We learn, however, from the second report of the Select Committee of 1830, that in 1817 the India Board removed to a separate office in Cannon Row. This was a building erected in the previous year for the Transport Office, on the site of the office of the Ordnance Board.¹ It stood on the eastern side of the street, and was designed by William Pilkington, in the Classical style, with a stone front graced by a large Ionic portico at the top of a sweep of steps. At the back the grounds ran down to the river, and the best rooms were on this side, the President occupying a large apartment in the centre, with offices for the secretaries on either side (see a plan in sessional volume No. 41 of 1857). It is to be noted that this building also was provided and maintained by the Government, not by the East India Company.

As a supplement to this account of the various buildings occupied by the Board, something may now be said concerning the staff that inhabited them. In September 1807 the President (Robert Dundas) introduced an important change in the organisation of the office. Ten years earlier his father had divided the clerks into three departments, to deal respectively with matters relating to Bengal, Madras, and Bombay. This geographical arrangement was now abandoned, and the work was distributed into four branches, viz. (1) Secret and Political, (2) Revenue and Judicial, (3) Military, (4) Public and Commercial.² These branches, each of which was under the charge of a senior clerk, were practically parts of one general

¹ There had evidently been some idea of moving the Foreign Office thither, for the *Times* of February 29, 1816, states that 'the new building now erecting in Cannon Row, Parliament Street, which was intended for the Transport Office, is, in consequence of the abolition of that department, to be used as the Secretary of State's office for Foreign Affairs, which will be removed from Downing Street, the lease of the premises at present occupied having nearly expired.'

² The Revenue branch was separated from the Judicial in 1826, and by 1838 there was a fresh branch for financial business, under the Accountant. Legislative business was transacted by the Judicial branch, Marine and Ecclesiastical by the Public.

correspondence department, at the head of which stood the Assistant Secretary. Elaborate rules were laid down at the same time for the making of abstracts, the compilation of arrears lists, and the due preservation of the Board's records. Next the President turned his attention to another matter vitally affecting the staff. For years the clerks had been complaining that the fixed salaries allotted to them by royal warrant had become inadequate, owing to the increased cost of living ; at the same time they urged that their work was growing both in bulk and in importance, and that their remuneration contrasted unfavourably with that given in other public departments. An attempt had been made to remedy the grievances by giving allowances, drawn from the contingent fund of the office ; but here again a difficulty had arisen, inasmuch as the establishment was a growing one, while the total sum available was strictly limited by law. The question of applying to Parliament to increase the allowance had been considered by successive Presidents, but always postponed. Now, however, Dundas found it possible, by effecting certain economies, to institute a fresh scale of salaries ; and this staved off Parliamentary action until the Act of 1811, already mentioned, placed another £6000 a year at the disposal of the Board. A new scale was then introduced, under which the junior clerks received from £150 to £400 per annum, the seniors £400 to £600, the Chief Clerk £600 to £800, the Assistant Secretary £900 to £1200, and the Secretary £1500. A Librarian was also appointed, at £200 a year, to act in addition as Keeper of the Records. However, the expenditure continued to grow, and, in spite of the extra sum provided by the Act of 1813, the financial situation in 1822 was so bad that not only were all increments suspended, but temporary abatements had to be made. The paid members of the Board agreed to a reduction of their salaries by one-tenth, and a similar decrease was ordered in the pay of the Secretary. The alterations made nine years later in the salaries of the Board enabled matters to be adjusted ;

and thereupon the suspensions were removed and the arrears were paid. Henceforward we hear of no further complaints on this score.

Interesting allusions to office matters occur from time to time in the records of the Board. Apparently the bonds of discipline were slack in the early days. Mention is made in June 1800 of the fact that one of the clerks, who had enjoyed 'almost constant leave of absence for some years' (presumably without pay), desired to rejoin; he was permitted to do so, but evidently his holiday-making propensities again asserted themselves, for in the following February he was dismissed on the ground that he had absented himself without leave for many months past. Soon after we learn that a clerk who had been 'deprived of his eyesight by the visitation of God' was allowed by the Board to draw his full salary as a sort of pension, there being as yet no retiring allowances. In July 1821 attention was drawn by the Secretary to certain irregularities in the attendance of the staff, particularly as regards the summer holiday; and thereupon the Board laid down its views on the matter. The three months August, September, and October were to be looked upon as the recess period. During this time the heads of the various departments were to 'give themselves such relaxation as they may find necessary,' taking care to maintain sufficient staff to carry on routine duties; the clerks in general were to be allowed six weeks each; and the juniors were warned to be more punctual in their attendance for the future. In August 1839 the President noted that he had received complaints of bad writing in documents sent out; wherefore he directed that in future these should be written 'carefully, in a large and plain hand.' It was not until 1855 that any educational test was applied to candidates for employment. In that year it was decided that for the future any such candidate should furnish particulars of his education, and should be examined by the Assistant Secretary in the 'elementary rules of arithmetic and ordinary composition of letters.'

All appointments were to be probationary for the first year.

It is rather surprising to find a native of India acting as a clerk in the office of the Board. This happened in 1835-38, and is part of an interesting story. Many years before, an Englishman in the Company's service, while attending a religious festival at Hardwar, found a little Indian boy wandering about forlorn and destitute, his parents having either died or lost him in the crowd. Taking pity on the child, he carried him down to Calcutta, and, being himself on his way to England, asked Ram Mohun Roy, the celebrated Bengali religious reformer, to take charge of him temporarily. However, the good Samaritan died at sea, and the boy grew up under the care of Ram Mohun Roy, who treated him as a son, though he did not formally adopt him. When in 1830 Ram Mohun Roy, now dignified with the title of Raja, embarked for England to claim certain lands from the Company on behalf of the Great Mogul, he took with him Rajaram Roy, as the youth was named. Ram Mohun Roy, though his mission proved unsuccessful, was much lionised in England and France, largely on account of his enlightened views on religious matters; and much regret was expressed when he died at Bristol in the autumn of 1833. Rajaram Roy, thus left alone in a strange land, was doubtless befriended for a while by the admirers of the deceased Raja; but in time he found himself obliged to look around for means of support. In August 1835 he was appointed by Sir John Hobhouse¹ (then President) an 'extra clerk' in the office of the India Board for one year at a salary of £100, on the plea that he desired to obtain some insight into the system of transacting public

¹ In his diary (under date of March 18, 1837) Hobhouse mentions giving a dinner party at which the youth was present. 'The Rajah,' he says, 'is really a very superior young fellow. He gave us a very entertaining account of a walking tour in Scotland. On one occasion he went up to an old woman who was working in a field and asked his way; the woman raised her head suddenly, and exclaiming "The de'il! the de'il!" ran away.' (*Recollections of a Long Life*, vol. v. p. 68.)

business before returning to his own country. His engagement was continued until the spring of 1838, when, as he was about to embark for India, the Board resolved to pay him up to the following August and to give him a gratuity of £100. His subsequent history has not been traced.

By this time the Commissioners had long ceased to be a Board in any practical sense. When, early in 1816, Lord Buckinghamshire died as the result of a riding accident, there was a prolonged vacancy in the post of President. The other Commissioners met as usual, down to June 24, 1816, on which occasion Lord Sidmouth (the Home Secretary) presided. Then suddenly, without a word of explanation, the minutes of meetings cease. The change was evidently due to the new President, the Right Hon. George Canning, but his reasons can only be surmised. Probably he thought it a waste of time to hold formal assemblies, when documents could be either signed in circulation or disposed of after discussion between himself and the two paid Commissioners; while, if either of the latter was unavailable, it was easy to obtain the signature of some other member.

As we have seen, the Act of 1833 abolished the two paid Commissioners and made only one signature necessary in addition to the President's. The royal warrant of July 1837 nominated, apart from the President and the *ex officio* members, only one Commissioner—the Right Hon. John Sullivan, who had been a member of the Board for twenty-five years; and when Sullivan died, at the age of ninety, on November 1, 1839, the President (Sir John Hobhouse) carried on the administration unaided. The next commission (September 1841) named only one person, the President (Lord Ellenborough), and henceforward this became the regular practice. Nevertheless, right down to the end, the signature of an *ex officio* member was still obtained, in addition to the President's, for every document of importance, thus making up the quorum required by the Act. The late Sir Henry Waterfield once told me that, as a junior clerk at the Board, it was a part of his

duties to obtain this second signature, and that he usually went for the purpose to the Lord Privy Seal.

Time will not permit of my dwelling upon the many eminent men who filled the office of President; and this is the less necessary, in that their careers are part of the political history of the time. Nor is it possible to go *seriatim* through the list of Secretaries.¹ In one case—that of Mr. Robert Vernon Smith (son of ‘Bobus’ Smith, and afterwards Lord Lyveden)—the tenure of the secretaryship was followed some years later by appointment to the post of President; and many other Secretaries were young politicians who in due course filled more important offices. Such were the Hon. Sidney Herbert (afterwards Lord Herbert of Lea), Lord Sandon (afterwards Earl of Harrowby), and Robert Lowe (who became Viscount Sherbrooke). Several, too, were men who made something of a mark in literature. Thomas Peregrine Courtenay, who held the post from 1812 to 1828, and was then an unpaid Commissioner for two years longer, published commentaries on Shakespeare and a biography of Sir William Temple. His predecessor had been John Bruce, author of the well-known ‘Annals of the East India Company.’ The poet Praed was the Secretary in 1834-35; while James Emerson Tennent, traveller and writer on Ceylon, held the post in 1841-45, and was succeeded by Viscount Mahon, the future Earl Stanhope, the historian. Sir George Cornewall Lewis, Secretary in 1847-48, is remembered both as a politician and as a man of letters.

Best known of all was Thomas Babington Macaulay, who, after being a Commissioner for about six months, accepted, in December 1832, the post of Secretary, left vacant by the death of his friend Thomas Hyde Villiers.

¹ The names of the various Presidents will be found in the *India Office List* and other works of reference. A full list of the Commissioners is given at p. 367 of the Thirty-first Report of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records (1870), but it starts only from 1790. Another list (omitting *ex officio* members) is contained in Haydn’s *Book of Dignities*, together with a chronological list of the Secretaries.

This appointment Macaulay held until after the passing (which he did so much to promote) of the India Act of 1833, when, as is well known, he proceeded to India as the first holder of the post of Legal Member of the Governor-General's Council. Several amusing letters to his sisters give us glimpses of his life at the Board. He at once plunged into an active study of Indian politics, and wrote that he was 'in fair training to be as great a bore' as if he had himself been in India. A few weeks later he says that he has 'the Rajah of Travancore to be kept in order, and the bad money, which the Emperor of the Burmese has had the impudence to send us by way of tribute, to be exchanged for better.' In June 1833 he sends some rhymes about the welcome approach of the quarterly pay-day; and in the following month he describes himself as sitting in his 'parlour' at the office in Cannon Row, 'looking out on the Thames,' with his attention divided between writing to his sisters and 'a bundle of papers about Hydrabad.' It is unnecessary to quote his allusions to the progress of the India Bill, and later to his appointment as Legal Member. Nearly twenty years after, he had the opportunity of becoming President of the Board. He writes in his diary, under date of January 31, 1852:

'I see that Lord Broughton retires, and that Maule goes to the India Board. I might have had that place, I believe: the pleasantest in the Government and the best suited to me; but I judged far better for my reputation and peace of mind.'

The Act of 1833, by destroying finally the commercial character of the East India Company, placed practically the whole of its transactions under the control of the Board. The importance of the latter body was, in fact, continually increasing. From the beginning the furnishing and presentation of all returns required by Parliament, as also all negotiations with the War Office, Admiralty, or other Government departments, had been in the hands of the Board; and with each fresh Act affecting India its functions

were strengthened and added to. When, therefore, the duty of revising the legislation of 1833 came up automatically in 1852, the question uppermost in many minds was whether there was any reason to continue the Company's share in the administration of India, or whether the time had not arrived to entrust the entire business to the Board, either as then constituted or with a Secretary of State at its head.¹ Lord Ellenborough, in his evidence before one of the Select Committees appointed to report upon the subject, strongly advised the direct government of India by the Crown, and suggested that the President of the Board should be assisted by an advisory council of twelve members with Indian experience. The witnesses on the Company's behalf were, of course, opposed to any drastic alteration of the existing situation: John Mill, in particular, declared that to place the administration in the hands of a Secretary of State for India would create 'the most complete despotism that could possibly exist in a country like this,' owing to the absence of any effective check on the part of Parliament or the country in general. However, the Government was too weak and too much absorbed in other questions to take a strong line on the subject of India; and a makeshift measure was passed in August 1853, which practically continued the existing system, though not for any specified period. One alteration was significant. The Court of Directors was reduced from twenty-four to eighteen members, six of whom were to be appointed by the Crown from among persons who had served in India for at least ten years, while of the remaining twelve (elected by the Company) half were to possess a like qualification. From this it was an easy transition, five years later, to the Council of India, which was composed in the first instance of eight

¹ It is interesting to note that Mr. B. S. Jones, Assistant Secretary to the Board, when giving evidence before the Select Committee of 1832, mentioned that at the time of the renewal of the Company's charter in 1813 he had suggested to the then President the expediency of creating the post of Secretary of State for India (to include the charge of the Cape, Ceylon, and Mauritius).

members appointed by the Crown and seven elected by the Directors.

As regards the India Board, practically the only changes made by the Act of 1853 were the increase (already mentioned) in the salary of the President, and the stipulation that for the future only one of the Secretaries should be a member of the Legislature. This meant that one Secretary was to be a permanent head of the department, while the other would change with the Ministry. As a matter of fact, the arrangement only perpetuated the state of things then existing; for since January 1853 one of the secretaryships had been held by Sir Thomas Redington, K.C.B., who, although he had been M.P. for Dundalk from 1837 to 1846, had then resigned his seat on his appointment as Under Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. As he had not sought re-election, and was willing to abstain from active connection with his party, he was now declared to be the Permanent Secretary contemplated by the Act, his colleague, Mr. Robert Lowe, being regarded as the Parliamentary Secretary. Redington resigned in March 1856, on his appointment to a post in Ireland; and he was succeeded by Sir George Russell Clerk, K.C.B., an old servant of the Company, who had held the offices of Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces and of Governor of Bombay (a post to which he returned in 1860).

The end was now rapidly approaching—an end inevitable in any case, but hastened by the sensation created in Great Britain by the mutinies of 1857. It is unnecessary to detail the history of the three India Bills produced in succession during 1858 by the Governments of Lord Palmerston and Lord Derby, or to explain at length the provisions of the last (Lord Stanley's), which received the royal assent on August 2 of that year. Every one knows that it put an end to the Company's share in the government of India, and placed the home administration in the hands of a Secretary of State for India, assisted by a Council. The

change was actually made on September 2, 1858, when Lord Stanley, the President of the Board, became the new Secretary of State; while the two Secretaries, Mr. H. J. Baillie, M.P., and Sir George Clerk, were appointed respectively the Parliamentary and the Permanent Under Secretaries of State. The post of Assistant Under Secretary of State and Financial Secretary was given to Mr. J. C. Melvill, the Deputy Secretary of the Company; and the establishments of the Board and the Company (relieved by a number of retirements from each office) were amalgamated to form the staff of the new India Office.

Another building was obviously necessary, since the premises of the India Board were far too small for the enlarged establishment, while those of the Company were unsuitable by reason of their distance from Westminster.¹ For the present, however, it was decided to utilise the East India House; and there the new department remained until, in 1860, pending the erection of the present India Office, it found temporary quarters in the newly completed Westminster Palace Hotel. The building in Cannon Row was used for a time to house the India Office library and part of the records; and when no longer needed for this purpose, was made over to the Civil Service Commissioners. Within the memory of most of us it was pulled down, and its site is now covered by the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police.

¹ When the Bill of 1853 was under consideration, Mr. Bright unsuccessfully moved a clause enacting that the business of both Board and Company should be transacted in one building, and empowering the Directors to sell the Leadenhall Street house to provide funds for a new office.