

Nothing surely is more likely to conduce to these ends than the liberty of the press.

Those who object to it are further bound to show that it is not salutary for the Government and its functionaries to have the check of a free press on their conduct ; and that the exercise of arbitrary power over a restricted press is preferable to the control of the laws over a free one ; assumptions which cannot be maintained.

The time was when the freedom of the press was considered as intolerable for any class in India. That has passed away, and many now admit that there is not much harm, and that there may be some good, in granting it to Europeans, but still entertain apprehensions as to its injurious effects if enjoyed by natives. I do not participate in those apprehensions ; but of this I am sure, that to legislate in distrust of our native fellow-subjects, or to legislate differently for them and for Europeans, in matters of right and liberty, would be extremely unwise and unjustifiable policy. The press will always be under the safeguard of laws, and laws can be made where laws are wanting. The existence of a local legislature, which can at any time provide for the safety of the State, should it be endangered, has removed the only formidable bar which before opposed the complete liberty of the press.

In addition to the motives which must have existed, on general principles, for giving the fullest freedom, there were circumstances in the state of the press in India which rendered the measure now proposed almost unavoidable. The press had been practically free for many years, including the whole period of the administration of the late Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck ; and although laws of restriction existed in Bengal which gave awful power to the Government, they had ceased to operate for any practical purpose. They were extremely odious. They gave to the Government arbitrary power, which British subjects in any part of the world detest. No Government could now have carried them into effect without setting universal opinion at defiance. After the liberty given by Lord William Bentinck's forbearance, no Government could have ventured to enforce those laws unless it had been gifted with a most hardy insensibility to ridicule and obloquy. Even supposing them to be good, they were