

REFLECTIONS

ON

172A79

THE PRESENT STATE

OF

BRITISH INDIA.

"Ad illa nihil pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quæ vitæ, qui mores fuerunt—
per quos viros, quibusque artibus, domi militiæque, et partem et auctorem imperium
sit."

LIV. PRÆF.

"Primo pecuniæ, dein imperii cupido crevit, et quasi materies omnium malorum
fuerit. Namque avaritia fidem, probitatem, ceterasque artes bonas subvertit; pro his
corruptum, crudelitatem, Deos negligere, omnia venalia habere, edocuit; ambitio
multos mortales falsos fieri subegit; aliud clausum in pectore, aliud promptum in
lingua habere; amicitias inimicitiasque non ex re, sed ex commodo, sectantur; ma-
gisque vultum quam ingenium, bonum habere."

SALL.

"Cum per se res mutantur in deterius si consilio in melius non mutantur, quis finis
erit malis?"

LORD BACON.

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1829.



TO

W. WHITMORE, Esq. M.P.

IN TOKEN OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF HIS ABLE AND DISINTERESTED EFFORTS
IN FAVOUR OF
THE FREE TRADE OF INDIA,
AND IN THE HOPE OF FURTHER ANIMATING
AND EXPANDING HIS EXERTIONS
IN A CAUSE
WHICH IS NO LESS WORTHY OF THE STATESMAN,
THAN OF THE PHILANTHROPIST,
THESE PAGES ARE
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

INTRODUCTION

THE object of the following pages is not to enter upon the difficult, and almost unbounded, field of discussion, relatively to the affairs of India, but rather to attract public attention to the perilous situation of our empire in that quarter, with a view to the adoption of such measures as may appear calculated to consolidate its strength, and to prepare it for the eventful crisis which, at no distant period, it must have to encounter. Several of the topics here touched upon, are so ably discussed in the work on "Colonial Policy as applicable to the Government of India," that the Author feels himself called upon to account for his having introduced them at all. He can only say, that as he considered them incidental to his subject, he did

not think himself at liberty to avoid them altogether; and that, differing as he does only in a very slight degree from the writer alluded to, he shall feel himself amply rewarded if any of his readers, who happen not to have perused the above-named work, shall be induced to study it, in order to make themselves fully acquainted with the whole system of Indian Policy; for a work which has stronger claims to general attention, or which is better calculated to become the text-book of all who take a special interest in the affairs of India, is nowhere to be found.

On the subject of the Freedom of the Press, too, the Author has deemed it unnecessary, in the present concurrence of all the liberal and reflecting in the propriety and necessity of establishing such a principle, to add his feeble voice to the almost general acclaim. "No man who hath tasted learning," saith Milton, "but will confess the many ways of profiting by those who, not contented with stale receipts, are able to manage and set forth new positions to the world; and were they but as the dust and cin-

ders of our feet, so long as in that motion they may yet serve to polish and brighten the armoury of truth, even for that respect they were not utterly to be cast away. But if they be of those whom God hath fitted for the special use of these times with eminent and ample gifts, and those perhaps neither among the priests nor among the Pharisees, and we, in the haste of a precipitant zeal, shall make no distinction, but resolve to stop their mouths, because we fear they come with new and dangerous opinions, as we commonly fore-judge them ere we understand them; no less than so to us, while, thinking thus to defend the Gospel, we are found the persecutors! This I know, that errors in a good government and in a bad are equally almost incident; for what magistrate may not be misinformed, and much the sooner, if liberty of printing be reduced into the power of a few? But to redress willingly and speedily what hath been erred, and in highest authority to esteem a plain advertisement more than others have done a sumptuous bribe, is a virtue (honoured Lords and Commons)

INTRODUCTION.

answerable to your highest actions, and whereof none can participate but greatest and wisest men.* To the truth of such sentiments neither the lapse of time nor the ingenuity of man has been able to oppose any rational objections.

On the only remaining subject concerning India, the expiration of the Company's Charter, it would perhaps be premature to hazard any observations at the present moment. That momentous question must shortly be discussed; but as yet, facts, and not reasoning, are principally required. The periodical renewal of this question is considered by some as answering the effect which is aimed at by Machiavel, when, speaking of the instability of human institutions, he observes, that "those systems of government are best constituted, and continue longest, which either have establishments or institutions of their own, by the application of which they may be reduced to their first principles; or easily fail by accident, as it were, into some course that tends to such a renovation."†

* Areopagitica.

† Political Discourses, chap. i. book 3.

But Sydney, in reasoning upon this passage, very justly observes, that they who proposed doing this, "ought to have examined whether that principle be good or evil; or so good, that nothing can be added to it, which none ever was"*. And certain it is, that in the instance of the Company's charter, what is termed the previous question, is of much more importance than a discussion of the conditions on which their lease should be renewed. Such a mass of vested rights, as well as of rights by prescription, have now grown up and blended themselves with the existence of the charter, that the voice of reason stands but an indifferent chance, when opposed to the clamours of interest, backed by the weight of political influence. Unhappily, too, those who are chiefly concerned, the natives of India, have no share in the debate, excepting by means of the few disinterested individuals who spontaneously advocate their cause; and of the latter, a very small portion is in the possession of wealth or influence: for as the wealth of an Indian has generally been accumu-

* Discourses on Government p. 406.

lated by the operation of Indian abuses, it is but too frequently employed in continuing them.

How long, then, the present system is destined to continue—how long our fellow-subjects in India will have to defray the expenses of four distinct governments, or to pay an enormous surplus revenue, as a contribution towards the profit and loss of their chartered rulers, it is in vain to conjecture; but whatever be the determination on these points, that something may be done to ameliorate the condition of the inhabitants of our Eastern territories generally, is most earnestly to be desired, for the honour of human nature, as well as for the real interest of the British empire.

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REFLECTIONS,

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TERRITORIAL ACQUISITIONS OF THE ENGLISH
IN HINDOSTAN, AND THEIR POSITION AMONGST
THE SOVEREIGN POWERS OF ASIA.

“Memorare possem quibus in locis maxumas hostium copias populus Romanus parvâ manu fuderit; quas urbes, naturâ munitas, pugnando ceperit; ni ea res longius nos ab incepto traheret.”

THE history of the rise and progress of British influence in Hindostan has been so frequently written, that in offering any observation on the present situation of the East India Company, it is only necessary to advert to a few of the most prominent points of that eventful record. Most English writers on the affairs of India, contemplating with a very natural complacency the vast fabric which has been raised in so distant a part

the globe, by the enterprise and ability of their countrymen, have been led to overlook, if not to undervalue, the exploits of other European nations in the same field of exertion, and have easily persuaded themselves to believe that none but Englishmen could have acquired so extensive, and, apparently, so firmly-rooted a dominion. The general impression which they thus endeavour to convey, is not only inconsistent with that character for impartiality which history ought to uphold, but, at the present moment, is pregnant with the most mischievous effects, as tending to bias our speculations concerning the future government of so interesting a portion of the British Empire. It is easy to proceed from generals to particulars, and to satisfy those who are already sufficiently hostile to any change, that as Britain has shown itself the most able, because the most successful, candidate for supreme power in Hindostan, so her empire having been acquired under the ostensible agency of the India Company, that Company, under a renewal of their privileges, will be best able to preserve it. On this account, it would not be without its use, at the commencement of the ensuing discussions, to lay before the public a succinct but impartial statement of the exploits of the Portuguese, Dutch, and French, in the course of their several attempts to establish

themselves in the continent of India. But as the investigation would involve nothing short of a general history of all the European settlements in that part of the world, it is sufficient, perhaps, on the present occasion, to refer to the pages of Di Barros and Raynal, as excellent correctives of our national historians; and to intimate that the exploits and noble conduct of Duarts Pacicco, with his small but intrepid band of heroes, in defence of Coction, against the King of Calicut; or of Francisco D'Almeida, and his gallant son Don Sorengo; or, above all, of the great Alphonso Albuquerque at Ormus, Goa, and Malacca, achievements which were even less honourable to his memory than the title of Just, which his great and eminent qualities extorted even from his enemies—will not readily meet a parallel, and certainly will not be surpassed, in the highest page of the Chronicle of the East India Company.

It is an error more frequently committed by those who merely record military events, than by the writers of general history, to allow their attention to be so entirely absorbed, by a desire to augment the fame of their favourite heroes, as to lead them to deny that the enemy had any qualities to entitle him to respect; forgetting that the merit of success rises in proportion to the obstacles opposed to it by his skill and courage. The

contrary to this, however, appears to be the case with the narrators of the actions of Europeans in India, and a disposition is everywhere apparent to magnify the triumphs of a disciplined force over an ill-armed and tumultuous rabble, into matter of national renown and congratulation. This observation does not apply to the Portuguese, because their numbers were so exceedingly small, as to render even their escape from such overwhelming masses as they were opposed to, a subject of the greatest surprise and admiration; but, brilliant as their exploits undoubtedly were, and making every allowance for the national degeneracy which had then begun, to display itself, they must cede the palm of intrepidity to the Dutch, who conquered the conquerors, and, under the command of Jacob Hemscherke, Gibrand Warwick, Stephen Vanhagen, and others, deprived them, after a short but severe struggle, of almost all the conquests and influence which they had acquired in India. But, if not to the Portuguese, it must be admitted that the observation applies to a great part of the military history of the English in Hindostan; and certainly, if they had not been opposed to the French, in the early part of their career, the renown of their conquest would have been less brilliant in proportion to the indifferent character

for military prowess of the only enemy with whom they would then have had to contend. ✓

The real cause of our success,* and the gene-

Sir John Malcolm, in the introduction to his Political History of India, observes, that the means by which India was rendered subject to England, were, of all others, the best calculated to effect that great object. "Force and power," he says, "would not have approached the shores of India without meeting with resistance; but to the unpretending merchant every encouragement was afforded," &c. This observation, however, is peculiarly unfortunate, for no Europeans (even not excepting the Portuguese) ever approached India more by the operation of force and power than the English. Their first regular voyage, in 1601, after the Portuguese had been in possession of their extensive influence in India for more than a century, was signalised by the capture of one of that nation's largest vessels. Ten years after they forced an entrance into Surat, after worsting the Portuguese fleet, and obtained permission to erect factories. The fact is, that the length and danger of the voyage to India placed all adventurers under the necessity of embarking in the trade with ships both well armed and well manned; but the English, above all others, were attentive to fortify themselves on shore, and erect factories wherever they were able to establish themselves; and a very few years after their first settlement at Surat, we find them entering into a treaty with the Dutch to pay half the expenses of the garrison of Pullicat, besides maintaining ten ships of war in the Indian seas. The expenses of their factories and fortifications were, indeed, objected to as early as 1668, and contracts with the Native merchants recommended. See Mill, vol. i p. 62, 3.

ral ascendancy we have acquired in India, does not reside in our national character as Englishmen, but in the moral and physical energy which the arts of civilization confer on mankind, and in which it is the peculiar distinction of Europe to exhibit a marked contrast to the degenerate effeminacy of the greater part of the Asiatic continent. Long previous to the appearance of the English on the Peninsula of India, the inhabitants of that extensive region had felt, and acknowledged, the effect of European valour and discipline. Our countrymen had only to repeat the lesson which had but lately been impressed upon the minds of the Natives by the hardy achievements already alluded to. The question as to the

From the first the English had shown themselves more than a match for the Portuguese,—and from the Dutch they were fortunately relieved, in a great measure, by the superior importance which their formidable rivals attached to the spice trade of the Indian Archipelago; whilst the French, who appeared upon the stage when our countrymen had already become firmly settled, and, besides obtaining the cession of Bombay, had distinguished themselves against the Mahrattas—set the first example of aspiring to political influence, grounded upon cessions of territory from the Mogul Emperor. In short, the very reverse of Sir John Malcolm's observation appears to hold good, and the English may be said to owe their success to their *not* having approached India as unpretending merchants, but as warlike adventurers, aided by force and power.

competency of an Indian army to cope with even a vastly inferior force of disciplined Europeans, was already settled. After the first encounter this could never, indeed, have been for a moment doubtful; and, at the present day, it may be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that notwithstanding the long intercourse which the people of the Eastern world, whether under British influence or not, have had with the English, and with other Europeans—and notwithstanding the numerous opportunities which they have had of profiting by the examples placed before them, there is not a nation from Persia to China, that could oppose greater obstacles to the progress of an European army, than were experienced in the early period of our reign, when General Goddard marched across the Peninsula.

The struggle for supremacy, then, was not in reality a struggle between Europeans and Natives, but between European rivals amongst themselves; and from the instant the command of the ocean was obtained by the British, that struggle was at an end. Dupleix, Bussy, and Suffrein, did much to retard the event; but as the main contest between England and France was decided in Europe, those eminent men did but vainly strive against events which were totally beyond their control. Their efforts, indeed, rather tended to

the advantage of the English Company, for it was the policy adopted by Duplex, that first suggested that wide departure from the mercantile character, which eventually placed us in the position we now occupy amongst the powers of India. The appointment of that able man to the Soubahdarry of the Carnatic, by Salabut Jung, in 1755, and the cession which his equally distinguished colleague, Bussy, obtained from the same Prince, of a part of the Northern Circars, for the French Company, were the prelude and pretence for the English India Company's soliciting the title of Dewan of Bengal. Indeed, if the course of European politics had not taught the French commanders rather to indulge their feelings of national rivalry, than to attend to the prudent line of conduct which their relative position in India ought to have suggested, they would probably have avoided coming into direct collision with their powerful competitors; in which case, they would have preserved an influence in India, which even our great maritime resources might not have enabled us easily to destroy. Under this supposition, what the result might have been if the French had retained Surat, and directed all their efforts to advance in the line of the Nerbudda, or even the Indus, would be a curious, though now a fruitless speculation.

But, whatever might have been the event, if the decisive struggle had been deferred until the rival Companies had been more nearly on an equality as to their available resources, no man can doubt that the conqueror was destined to be Lord of the Indian World. By the discovery of a passage round the Cape of Good Hope, the weakest, and most effeminate portion of the globe, was, in a manner, laid open to the attacks of the strongest and most enterprising. The exploits of the Greek mercenaries, the Macedonian conquest, and even the comparatively feeble inroads of the Romans in the decline of the Empire, had never failed to evince the effect of military discipline, when fairly brought to bear on the countless array of an Asiatic force; and if this is undeniable as an historical fact, relatively to that portion of the Eastern World, which, being in immediate contact with the Western, was likely to have imbibed some share of its warlike character and principles of organization, how much more certain is it, that the same effect could not but follow in a quarter, the remoteness of which from any such source of improvement conspired, with an enervating climate, to render its inhabitants both morally and physically an easy prey to the first invader. Accordingly, we find that the conflict between civilization and semi-barbarism; between the de-

generacy attendant upon vicious institutions, and the spirit of enterprise, resulting from freedom and intellectual energy, was never for an instant doubtful. The same tide of success by which the progress of the Spaniards was characterised in America, carried forward the British in their conquest of Hindostan; and if, in either case, that tide seemed for a moment to be interrupted, it was only when the confidence or arrogance of the victor induced him to rely too much on his courage or good fortune; in short, to despise every indication of a warlike spirit on the part of his opponents.

With such a prey, then, within their grasp—so rich in attraction—so powerless to defend itself—it is evident that there was no conceivable limit to the career of our countrymen, but in the restraints which the great council of the nation might see fit to impose upon them. The want of the necessary funds, which, at first sight, promised to become a barrier to their advance, became, in fact, the principal inducement to their aggressions, and, occasionally, furnished them with the means of extending them. So many petty usurpations had started up, when the Mogul Empire was dismembered, that the British, who made their appearance at that crisis of intrigue and rivalry, not only found every facility in compassing

their own more legitimate ends, but were tempted by many an Indian Divitiacus to push forward their invincible legions, and to interfere in the politics of the country, by those splendid offers of remuneration which the traitors were enabled to hold out, by intercepting the provincial treasures on their passage to the capital. It cannot be denied that it required an arduous exertion of self-denial to decline opportunities at once so tempting in point of immediate profit, and attended, in reality, with so little risk: in this sense it is no doubt true, that the first advance of the English, from their several factories, was decisive of their future conduct, and the position in which they found themselves was, certainly, little calculated to encourage the adoption of any system of policy, founded upon a just and equitable estimate of the claims of the various powers with whom they were thus suddenly brought in contact.

If the hope of gain, however, tempted the agents of the Company to embroil themselves with the Native Powers, their profusion and imprudence did not fail to involve them, shortly after, in the greatest financial difficulties. An inordinate thirst for commercial profit characterised them as merchants, and an eager desire to silence the scruples and reproaches of the home authorities, by exhibiting a show of revenue as an

excuse for, their political enterprises, was the line of policy subsequently pursued. At first they merely stipulated with their Indian allies for an exemption from duty on their merchandize; but afterwards, when they began to mix more intimately in the intrigues of the petty chiefs around them, they became willing accomplices whenever the prospect of adequate advantage was held forth; and *point d'argent, point de Suisse*, would then have been a much more appropriate motto than the imposing one since adopted, without, it is to be hoped, the sanction of the British Senate. It had been well, indeed, if the possession of wealth had been their only ambition; but when the immense hoards of treasure, accumulated and plundered throughout the Empire, were entirely exhausted in the payment of their heavy demands, the animosity and ambition of the Native Chiefs still remaining unappeased, a convenient substitute was found in land, and a district, yielding a certain revenue, became, in most cases, the stipulation agreed upon. But as it is a much easier task to cede territory than to give quiet possession of it,—to estimate the amount of revenue, than to point out how that revenue is to be collected, the territorial acquisitions of the Company almost invariably brought with them the necessity for expelling some occupant, whose title was, not

unfrequently, more valid than that of the power assuming to be paramount, and of burthening the unhappy population with taxes. In addition to those which had already reduced them to the greatest poverty.

Nor were these the only embarrassments in which the foreign transactions of the Company involved them. The several Presidencies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, acting upon views of local expediency, or of apparent commercial advantage, were sometimes in direct opposition to each other, and always exhibited, to the nations of Hindostan, the spectacle of a people actuated by every impulse of pecuniary or political covetousness. Thus at Bombay, a league with the Mahrattas, the enemies of the Mogul, for the protection of our trade against Angria the pirate,—and with the Mogul authorities themselves against the Mahrattas,—signalized the commencement of our career in that part of India; and the violation of the treaty of Poorundur, and the disavowal of the convention of Wargaum, soon followed. Thus the Company offered its assistance alternately to those who rebelled against their lawful sovereign, and to that sovereign himself, just as its interest at the moment happened to prompt:—witness the deposition of Surajah-ul-Dowlah and of Meer Jaffier,—the alliance with the Mogul against Cos-

sim Ali,—the deposition of the latter, and the restoration of Meer Jaffier, after the latter had been stigmatized by them as an avaricious ruler, whose chief officers sought only to enrich themselves by the plunder of the people, who had occasioned a scarcity and dearness of provisions in his country by the heavy and exorbitant taxes which he had levied, and whose conduct, in short, made him the dread and detestation of all good men, and called aloud for a change of system :—witness their subsequent opposition to the Mogul himself, till bought off by a promise of the cession of Oude, then ruled by Surajah-ul-Dowlah, who himself, however, shortly after purchased their alliance for fifty lacs of rupees, and availed himself of their aid to crush the Rohillas, without the shadow of a reason beyond the ‘fixed hate and loathing’ which he bore the posterity of Ali Mohammed, the principal founder of their clan, and the personal enemy of his father :—witness, also, their disgusting arrogance and injustice towards Mahomed Ali, Nabob of the Carnatic, who had evinced his gratitude for their support, in fixing him in his dignity, by contributing the treasures left him by his father, his own large resources, and all that he could raise upon credit, as a fund to meet the expenses of the war with the French,

as well as for the re-establishment of their ruined factories in Bengal,—conduct which left an indelible stain, not only on the reputation of the Company, but on that of the British nation, by whom the rights of the Nabob had been unequivocally and solemnly acknowledged in the treaty of Paris in 1763. Thus, too, on the Coromandel coast, national rivalry was the occasion and excuse for the agents of the Company endeavouring to ruin the French interest at the Native Courts, by their intrigues; and the cession of the Northern Circars, in 1765, was the fruit of this policy; whilst at Calcutta, a thirst for dominion and pecuniary profit obtained Bengal, Behar, and Orissa, about the same time, under a promise of the payment of twenty-six lacs of rupees annually to the Mogul, which tribute, though exceedingly small when compared with the revenues of those provinces, was withheld, in less than eight years, under the pretext that the unfortunate Monarch, who it was notorious was not master of his own actions, had broken his agreement with the Company, by consenting to reside in the capital of his Empire, under the protection of the Mahrattas. And to conclude, when Sir John Lindsay, and afterwards Sir Robert Harland, were sent out from Europe as commissioners and plenipotentiaries, to ensure

the execution of the treaty of Paris, to which our ally, Mahomed Ali, as well as Salabut Jung, Soubahdar of the Deccan, were in some measure considered as parties, their presence was found so inconvenient by the Council of Madras, that every possible obstruction was thrown in their way, and their recall earnestly, and, to the disgrace of the nation, successfully recommended. The selection of those individuals does not indeed appear to have been a happy one; but much allowance should be made for them, in consequence of the various and even impracticable engagements with the Native Powers, with which the Company's Government had embarrassed itself:—they determined to cut the knot which it was so difficult to untie; but in so doing, they ran the risk of committing even a greater injustice than that which they desired to correct. Placed in a novel situation, with extensive but imperfectly defined powers, the Commissioners were probably inclined, like the Supreme Court of Judicature on its first establishment in Bengal, to interfere too much in the ordinary administration of the Provinces; but their presence, under more precise regulations, if they had been men of greater ability and experience, would still have been eminently useful, as a check upon those proceedings of the Company's Government, which so frequently entailed the

deepest disgrace upon the national character. The experiment might still be made with every prospect of advantage.

But whatever may have been the injury done to our national character, it cannot be denied that it is to a steady adherence to the system of political barter just described, that the Company owes its extensive territories. Nothing was done without an equivalent, either in money, or in land, rated at an annual revenue greatly exceeding the interest of the outlay attending its acquisition; and it is susceptible of proof, that, if commercial had not been blended with political transactions,

Hyder Ali is said to have declared that peace with the English was indifferent to him, since they had shown themselves totally unworthy of confidence. The splendid passage in Burke's Speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts, 28th Feb. 1785, is well known:—"When at length Hyder Ali found that he had to do with men who either would sign no convention, or whom no treaty and no signature could bind, and who were the determined enemies of human intercourse itself, he decreed to make the country, possessed by these incorrigible and predestinated criminals, a memorable example to mankind. He resolved, in the gloomy recesses of a mind capacious of such things, to leave the whole Carnatic an everlasting monument of vengeance, and to put perpetual desolation as a barrier between him and those against whom the faith which holds the moral elements of the world together was no protection."

the British power in India would now exhibit the singular spectacle, of a government continually at war, and yet totally free from public debt. The statements published by Mr. Rickards have clearly shown, that whilst the utmost prosperity attended the Company, even in its most unjustifiable aggressions upon the neighbouring States, its trade was so improvidently conducted as to threaten absolute bankruptcy—a crisis which seems only to have been averted by the appropriation of territorial revenue to the amount of a million sterling per annum, or, in other words, the imposition of a tax to that amount upon their Indian subjects. The whole of the dividends paid to proprietors of India stock for a period of seventeen years, prior to the last renewal of the Company's charter, may, indeed, be said to have been furnished by money extorted from the people of Hindostan, by a system of the most oppressive taxation probably ever inflicted upon any country in the world—a taxation so heavy, and so directly tending to the impoverishment of the wretched inhabitants, as to cause a doubt in the minds of reflecting men whether we are not called upon, in justice and in mercy, to relinquish altogether the possession of a country, the Government of which is so much more expensive than its actual resources are able to support.

But independent of political consideration, the difficulties attending the abandonment of territory, particularly after it has been for any considerable period under our sway, are more than sufficient to outweigh the humane motives upon which such a measure might be suggested. To whom, in fact, are we to restore such conquests? If the authorities from whom we wrested them, we should merely relieve the inhabitants from one set of usurpers, to deliver them into the hands of a worse; with the aggravation, too, of the latter being both exasperated and impoverished in consequence of those changes which they believe the English to have been principally instrumental in bringing about. There is not, perhaps, a square mile of territory, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayah mountains, that had not for very considerable periods been subject, under some form or other, directly or indirectly, to foreign dynasties or usurpers; and it was but in comparatively few instances, that the dismemberment of the Mogul empire gave the actual possessors a more valid claim, than that acquired by the Company in the course of their negotiations or conquests. The reproach of the Company is not in its having appropriated as large a share of the spoil as it could secure, by treaty, or by force of arms, after it had declared itself a political compe-

example to enjoy their blessings, by placing yourselves under my protection; it is a duty you owe to your aged and infirm parents, to your female relatives, your wives and children."—On being assured that this proclamation really emanated from authority, for they deputed one of their chiefs expressly to make the inquiry, the major part of them came over to the British Army, many of them bringing their arms with them; and during the remainder of the war co-operated with our forces. Yet, after having thus, upon the faith of our promises, incurred the deepest resentment of their unforgiving foes, the Burmese, they were again delivered over to the tender mercies of the Lord of the White Elephant, with merely the hollow provision in their favour, contained in the sixth article of the treaty of peace, that "no person whatever, whether native or foreigner, is hereafter to be molested by either party, on account of the part which he may have taken, or have been compelled to take, in the present war." The sequel is known to every body who has found leisure to devote a few moments' attention to what passes in so remote a part of the globe. Those who escaped the sword fell by the hands of the executioner, unless they averted their fate by the payment of such heavy fines as reduced them to a mass of abject and powerless slaves—

themselves and all they hold dear kept, as the fatal proclamation described them, "in constant terror of their lives, and, like wild beasts, frequenting jungles." And such, doubtless, would be the lot of the inhabitants of India, generally, whenever any considerable portion of the territory should be abandoned by the British authorities.* The Mahometan, assisted by crowds of Arab mercenaries—the Seik—the Nepaulese—the Mahratta, and even the Burmese, would carve, each for himself, an empire over the less energetic inhabitants of the peninsula. The greater, as well as most fruitful portion of India, bounded as it is by nations which are robust and warlike, in comparison with the inhabitants of the plains, is unfit for

The abandonment of the Rajpoot states in 1805, in consequence of the line of policy imposed upon Lord Cornwallis, and his successor Sir George Barlow, it is well known, consigned that unfortunate race to the avarice and extortion of the Mahrattas, and their ally Amir Khan; and it is worthy of remark, that when those states were again taken under the protection of the British Government, it was only on condition of the greater part of them paying to the Company the same tributes, in fact, that had been exacted by the Mahrattas. This, indeed, was stated to be in return for political protection, and military defence, but the whole of the Mahratta powers having been completely prostrated by the masterly operations of Lord Hastings in 1818, that protection and defence were no longer necessary to their security.

the establishment of a government composed entirely of natives :—like the horse in the fable, they are incapable of putting forth their best speed, in the race of civilization, without the assistance of a rider to animate their exertions, and direct their course. When successfully defended, it has always been by foreigners—witness the numerous Patan dynasties by whom Bengal and Behar were so long maintained in independence, and who not only repulsed all attempts to subdue them, but even carried their arms beyond the Indus, and conquered Cabul and Candahar.

The natives, of the plains, indeed, appear to be so insensible to that regard for the dignity of human nature, by which combinations for self-defence, and public institutions of all kinds, are encouraged,—they are as a body so deficient in that feeling of mutual confidence, upon which the power of self-government must depend, that it is quite impossible to believe them capable of defending themselves against the encroachments of their neighbours, in the event of the administration of the country being committed to their control. If such a step were taken, they would very shortly invoke the assistance of their late masters, and the groans of the Hindoos would place us under the necessity either of entangling ourselves once again in the politics of the country, or of

witnessing the oppression of our former subjects, under the consciousness that our own government had done its utmost to incapacitate them from making any resistance.

On these principles, the resignation of any part of the Indian territory would be inconsistent with justice or even with sound policy, for in the event of a portion only being given up, its quick subjugation, by the most powerful of its neighbours, would only protract for a little the period when we should have to struggle for our own safety, and enter once more upon the arena of political contention. The expediency of such a step, though at all times furnishing an alluring topic of declamation, is applicable, if at all, only to such recent acquisitions, as, having been wrested from organised governments, and not always upon principles of self-defence, or under an expressed or implied obligation to protect them against former usurpers, do not involve either a national breach of faith, or such a sudden change in the settled state of society, as would occasion inconvenience, if not ruin, to the majority of the community.

The fact indeed seems to be, that in a country so unsettled as India was at the time of the English appearing in it,—in a country, too, so remarkably deficient in that public spirit and character to be

acquired by civilization alone, it was very difficult for the East India Company to maintain a stationary position. A certain degree of influence, and a small extent of independent territory, were absolutely necessary for its safety; and had these been secured upon a moderate scale, it might, always have commanded advantages sufficient to preclude any apprehension of its being overawed by a native force; and the benefits of commerce being reciprocal, the surplus produce of the country would not have failed, in that case, to find its way into the English factories. To have constantly declined advancing, however, when allurements to ambition were everywhere held out, was more than could have been expected from a government administered by so many individuals of various talents and character, and by men whose distance from the Mother Country almost entirely relieved them from responsibility. When fairly committed in the great struggle for independence and power, no matter whether by the incapacity or the rashness of colleagues, the difficulty of preserving a strict neutrality, without a compromise of the national dignity, (a quality, alas! at once so palpable and so evanescent as to invite and yet to elude, the attempts of every "brief authority" to define it) was enhanced, in proportion to the numbers of all ranks of natives

who voluntarily resided under their protection. For it must not be concealed, that although the subjects of the Company have great reason to complain of the avaricious and oppressive nature of its government, yet it is still, in most of its features, very superior to any other which they could hope to enjoy by a change of masters. If it were otherwise, it would indeed be disgraceful to human nature; but, nevertheless, it should not be forgotten, that our duty is not restricted to giving the country a better government than it could expect under native rulers—we should give it the best, which, under all circumstances, it is capable of enjoying.

In despite, then, of the feeling of indignation which every honest mind must experience, on perusing a detail of the unworthy, and often criminal, means by which the East India Company have attained possession of their vast domains, it is impossible, without doing a still greater wrong, to counsel any other atonement* for the wrong already committed, than that which a just and liberal system of government will afford. If we can give peace, happiness, and security to

* The expediency of relinquishing our conquests in India, will, to most people, appear in the highest degree extravagant, even if it were possible to draw a line between what could be called the old, and the new acquisitions of the

those realms,—if we can rescue them from the state of degradation into which they have been plunged, no less by natural than by moral causes—by their effeminacy, as well as by their vices,—and if we can raise them to the rank of a free and an industrious people, then, and then only, will our dominion have been a blessing; in every other point of view it must be looked upon only as the means of perpetuating the misery of a wretched population of nearly a hundred millions, and of entailing a heavy and indelible disgrace upon the British name.

Company. In the wide field of Indian speculation, however, there are not wanting those who do counsel such a measure.—*In eodem pruto, bos herbam quærit, canis leporem, ciconia lacertum.*—A few words therefore, on the point in question, it was thought, would not be deemed irrelevant.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE DANGER TO WHICH BRITISH INDIA
IS EXPOSED FROM INVASION.

*“ La vostra nominanza è color d'erba
Che viene, e va, e quei la discolora
Per cui ell' esce della terra acerba.”*

THE view just taken of the nature of our Indian empire, suggests these two important inquiries.—What are the dangers to which Hindostan is exposed in the event of its being invaded by a powerful enemy capable of meeting a British army in the field? and, What degree of attachment can the Natives be supposed to bear to our name and government? Upon the first of these points, a few observations will form the subject of the present chapter.

The most careless reader of Indian history cannot have failed to observe, that every Asiatic people, with whom the British forces have come into contact, have shown themselves unable to resist the European system of war and discipline.

Yet past exploits, and the transactions under the administrations of Lords Wellesley and Minto, were not of themselves sufficiently decisive upon this head, to convince those who had taken a superficial view of the causes of our success; and the then impending conflict with Nepal, which may be said to have been bequeathed as a state legacy to Lord Hastings, was by many considered to be the *experimentum crucis* of the military character of the Indian government. So, indeed, it proved to be, as far as tactics and discipline were concerned; for it was by our superiority on those points alone that the struggle was decided in our favour. The Nepaulese were superior in physical strength, if not in personal courage, to the greater part of our troops; they had numbers at their command, and their country abounded in natural obstacles and defensive positions; yet by the effect of comprehensive military arrangement, assisted by good discipline, were all these advantages set at nought, and the war, so formidable in its first aspect, brought to a successful termination in two short campaigns. Still, although the splendid government of Lord Hastings achieved this great and important triumph, which, in addition to those masterly operations which his Lordship directed against the Mahrattas and Pindarries, appeared to place the Company's territories in a state of per-

manent security, there yet remained one enemy with whom the Indian army had not measured its strength; and as Lord Minto had left the war of Nepal to him, so Lord Hastings left that of Ava to his successor. In the event, however, the Burmese proved to be even less formidable than any antagonist whom the British had hitherto been tempted to meet in the field; and the dismemberment of their empire, together with the establishment of military stations in Cachar, Arracan, and on the borders of Pegue, effectually put it out of their power to molest the Bengal government in future, even if their contemptible character, in a military point of view, did not render the occurrence of such a contingency comparatively unimportant. Thus, while the interior of India is entirely under British influence or authority, the whole frontier of that vast tract is tenanted by states, which not only have felt the weight of our arms, but which have been compelled to admit resident officers at their courts, or in their immediate vicinity, to watch over and report upon their conduct. The Seiks, who witnessed the operations of the British army in 1805, and have since acknowledged our influence, form no material exception to this general arrangement.

Whether it be in consequence of the influence of climate, or of imperfect social institutions, or,

as is more probable, of both, it is observable that the Asiatic nations have shown themselves less susceptible of consistent and sustained exertions of warlike skill, in proportion as the country which they inhabit approaches towards the tropics. The sun, which imparts its fire and vivacity to them, seems to deny them the exercise of judgment and discretion. Even the natural advantages of a strong country appear to form no exception to the truth of this remark; and whilst the mountaineers of Nepaul excel the inhabitants of the hilly regions of Southern India, including Ceylon, the latter made a much firmer stand against the Moguls and the English, than the tribes established in the fastnesses of Java have shown themselves capable of in their resistance to the Dutch.*. Many of the nations now alluded to had acquired considerable knowledge in the arts of war and government; the Nepaulese and Burmese had subjugated several neighbouring states and provinces; but the latter, in particular,

By recent advices, however, it would appear that the extremely weak state of the European establishments of the Dutch in Java, has at length tempted the natives of that island to rise and make strenuous efforts to recover their independence. If the character here given of the Southern Asiatics does not operate to the disadvantage of the Javanese, we may shortly hear of the Dutch being totally expelled the island.

after pursuing the career of conquest with remarkable spirit for a series of years, had apparently become contented with what they had acquired, and, without evincing any genius for improvement, had deteriorated in the stupid tyranny of their domestic government, in proportion as they had relaxed from the energy of their foreign policy. It seems, indeed, to be a law of nature, that nothing in the history of mankind shall be stationary: to cease to advance in the career of improvement, is to retrograde; and thus we invariably find, that the half-civilized portions of the globe, when no longer acted upon by their first impulse, become alike the prey either of the civilized portion, on the one hand, or of the complete barbarian on the other. Thus the half-civilized states of China, Persia, and Hindostan, showed themselves as unable to resist the barbarian Tartar tribes, as the Asiatics of modern times have been to withstand the attacks of European invaders; whilst the Tartar conquerors, in their turn, when they came to partake of the half-civilized character of the conquered, evinced themselves utterly incompetent to withstand the discipline and organized institutions of Great Britain and Russia.

The same reasoning, which is applicable to the English in their present attitude as an Asiatic

power, is equally so to Russia; with this consideration, indeed, which gives additional force to it, that the latter is in a manner compelled, by her natural position, so that collision with the weaker states, which the former has traversed half the globe to provoke. It is evident, however, that the same train of consequences must in both cases attend upon the conflict between a people rapidly advancing in civilization, and one, if not in the act of retrograding, certainly almost stationary; and that, in proportion as the southern provinces of the Russian empire profit by the attention which is bestowed upon them by the government, the Autocrat of the North will be assailed by the same temptations to aggrandize himself at the expense of his semi-barbarous neighbours, which the East India Company's agents were unable to resist in their progress towards the conquest of Hindostan. Nor are the facilities which the Russians enjoy for the prosecution of such enterprises, at all inferior to those which their superior maritime strength conferred upon the English. The water-communication between the Baltic and the Caspian is complete and uninterrupted: from St. Petersburg to the Neva, a canal runs along the margin of Lake Ladoga to the Walkowa, from which the naviga-

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tion is continued by the Nests and the Sna, to another canal which joins the Tuertsä, of which the waters flow into the Wolga; so that military stores can be conveyed, with comparatively small risk or expense, not only to the southern and eastern shores of the Caspian, but probably to the centre of Khorasan, or to the confines of Cabul.

In weighing the inducements which are thus held out to Russia to aggrandize herself, it cannot but be perceived that the great prize at which she aims must undoubtedly be Hindostan. Persia, and the countries immediately contiguous, offer comparatively but a feeble temptation; the barren soil of the former, and its deficiency in navigable streams, render it unfit for colonization, and worthless as a conquest; whilst the tracts lying between Orenberg and Balkh contain so great a proportion of desert and uninhabitable land, that, notwithstanding the advantages to be derived from the fine streams which flow into the Sea of Aral and the Caspian, any extensive settlement in that quarter would be a work of time and difficulty. It is probable, then, that Russia would covet no more of either than to afford her a safe and easy communication with the territories immediately adjacent to India. The whole line of her frontier, from the Seas of Kamtschatka and

Okhotsk to the Caspian, is so well guarded by the cautious policy of the Chinese, no less than by natural obstacles, that, taking into consideration the scanty population and bleak climate of Siberia, together with the difficulty of assembling a large force in those quarters, there can be little encouragement for her to attempt an advance in that direction. But when her frequent wars with Turkey and Persia are considered; the armies so long concentrated in Georgia and Armenia; the military colonies planted in her southern provinces, together with the now long-established habits of the people of those parts, which have reconciled them to the inconvenience of their situation, and taught them to meet the exigencies attendant upon so warlike a neighbourhood, we cannot but perceive that, whether from the elasticity of an increasing population,* or from the wish to employ large masses of troops, which it might be alike expensive and dangerous to re-mand to the northern provinces, the country

See the Chevalier Gamba's Account of Georgia, for the encouragement afforded to commerce and agriculture by the Russian Government, and the immense accession to the population from the neighbouring provinces of the Persian and Turkish empires. In 1820, seven thousand families are said to have gone over to the Russian dominions.

extending towards our Eastern possessions is the line of least resistance, and the direction in which the explosion must take place.

On the other hand, if to the operation of natural causes, as just described, we add the stimulus of political rivalry, we may be assured that every circumstance conspires to produce the collision of Great Britain and Russia on the confines of India, and that at no very distant period. Russia, at least, will leave nothing unattempted to accelerate the meeting, or rather to place the occurrence of that meeting entirely at her own option in point of time; for in what other quarter can she detect a vulnerable point in the armour of her mighty antagonist, or where could she desire a nobler field on which to measure her colossal strength with her undaunted rival, than on the plain of Hindostan?

In discussing the probability of such an attack being made upon India, the mind naturally recurs to the Macedonian conquest; and with reference to the loosely-recorded enterprise of Alexander, we form, perhaps, an exaggerated estimate of the length of the march, the difficulties of the road, and the hostile dispositions of the nations whose territory would have to be traversed. Making allowances for the improvement of modern warfare, this might, indeed, be the correct mode of

reasoning, in the event of such an expedition as that which is said to have been meditated by Napoleon, after the conquest of Egypt; but great is the difference between the obstacles to be overcome on such a route, and those which oppose themselves to a march from the shores of the Caspian. On consulting the map, we may observe that the Russian possessions already extend very nearly to the spot whence most of the later conquerors of Hindostan set out on their route. The geography of that part of Asia is still so imperfectly known, that it has not yet been clearly ascertained whether the river upon which stands the city of Herat, disembogues itself into the Caspian by the Gulf of Balkan, or joins the Oxus in its course to the Sea of Aral. If, however, as is most probable, the former be the fact, an establishment on the island of Naphtonia, or in the Gulf of Balkan, would place the Russians in communication with the Turcoman tribes, whose hostility to the Persians is deadly and hereditary, and secure the means of advancing by Herat to Cabul, without the necessity of taking the more circuitous route by the southern shores of the Caspian, or of following the more difficult track, already laid down, from Orenberg to the banks of the Oxus, and along the course of the Amu to Balkh. The Turcomans and Usbees, though for-

midable to a nation so weak in itself, and so defective in military organization as the Persians, would be unable to oppose a large well-appointed army of Russians, even if their hopes of plunder did not induce them eagerly to take part in the expedition. If, however, it be thought that an advance through Azerbaijan, and the north of Persia, into Khorasan, though the most tedious, would yet be the safest route, the progress which the Russian arms are now making in that direction,* afford every prospect of the way being very soon left open to them. Every conflict into which it is so easy for a powerful state to force its weaker neighbour, especially in a quarter so remote from general observation, and therefore so little liable to excite public animadversion, must of necessity end in defeat to the Persians, and, in consequence of their poverty, with reference to the probable demands of Russia, as well as to their misgovernment, in a cession of territory. Already has the feeble barrier of the Kur, and the Uras, been forced; and, in addition to their conquests, indemnification for the expenses of the war, may possibly place the Russians in possession of Ghilan

If we may believe the latest intelligence, the Russians have taken possession of Tabriz, and are in full march upon Teheran, a point at least four hundred and fifty miles within the boundary, and on the route to Herat.

and Mazenderan, provinces which Peter the Great considered necessary to the establishment of his complete ascendancy on the Caspian.

But it is not to war and conquest alone that we must look for the narrowing of that space which separates the two most powerful candidates, not only for the supremacy of Asia, but, through her, for preponderance in Europe also. For it is not to be doubted, that the possession of India would greatly increase the influence of Russia in the general councils of Europe—even its danger would probably have an unfavourable effect upon the politics of Great Britain. Nations, like individuals, to be honest must be independent: and, under the bare possibility of our Asiatic territories being wrested from us, it is not difficult to conjecture the unworthy compliances into which we may be driven. But by open war, however efficient in the end, this crisis might not, possibly, be produced for many years; notwithstanding the direct interest which Russia must have in silently acquiring that position, from which, eventually, she may be able to turn her attention towards India, without that previous “note of preparation,” and hostility with neighbouring states, which her present situation would render unavoidable. A reference to the line of policy adopted by the East India Company, and the various means by which

the whole country, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayah Mountains, has been reduced under the direct sway or acknowledged influence of the English, would readily suggest those measures by which a paramount control in Central Asia might be obtained with very little outward appearance of injustice or violence. The disputes which always attend the succession to the throne in Persia,* are fruitful in crimes, of which political hypocrisy might take advantage, to read a great moral lesson to that unfortunate nation; and such is the uncertainty of life, as well as right, among the members of the royal family, that any of them, whatever might be his pretensions, would gladly cede one half of the kingdom to an auxiliary who was powerful enough to secure him in the undisturbed possession of the remainder. This is by far the most rapid, as well as the most effectual mode, by which Russia can obtain that vantage ground which will enable her to affront the Eastern world. In order to accomplish a measure to her so desirable, the tranquillity of Europe, though of course favourable, is by no means indispensable; since the usual garrisons and provincial detachments, stationed in the

By late accounts, it appears that the Shekakee tribe, the most powerful in Azerbaijan, has joined the Russians: the father of Jehangir Khan, their chief, it will be recollected, disputed the crown with the present Shah.

neighbourhood of the Persian frontier, are at any time sufficient for the intimidation of a state, at once so uninformed in matters of political science, and so little entitled to respect on account of its military capabilities. By means of one of those treaties, which a power so formidable can always negotiate with one of the competitors for the throne of a nation torn by internal dissensions, and in momentary dread of the incursions of the fierce and lawless tribes in its vicinity, Russia might obtain by cession, or under the condition of a temporary occupation, or by means of a permanent subsidiary force, not only the command of as much territory as would be necessary to facilitate her advance upon the Indian frontier, but a stipulation for such farther aid in cattle, provisions, or men, as Persia might be able to afford. Such, indeed, is the unsettled state of the Shah's dominions, even in the most ~~quiet~~ times, that it may well be doubted if such a treaty, coupled as it would be with actual assistance and great moral influence in repressing insurrections of all kinds, would be mainly disadvantageous to him at any given period; but at the present moment, when the course of affairs in the western world tends, if not to the total expulsion of the Mohammedans from Europe, at least to a very great retrenchment of their power in that quarter, Persia may

shortly feel the necessity of strengthening her western frontier, to guard against that re-action which the spirit of the Turkish Government will probably display when confined almost entirely to her Asiatic possessions. If Russia, therefore, were to exact the assistance of the reigning Shah, in subduing the country lying in the direct route to India by the Oxus and the Amu; or in acquiring military possession of Candahar, as the price of her support on the Tigris and Euphrates, and the confines of Kurdistan and Armenia; there would be little doubt of her success in the object she cannot but have most at heart,—that of bringing within the reach of her grasp the brightest jewel in the crown of her illustrious rival.

The route leading from Russia to the Indies is not, as before remarked, by the south of the Caspian and Khorasan alone, but may be traced out east of the Caspian, by Khiva and the course of the Oxus and Amu to Bokhara, Samarcand, and Balkh; or east of the Sea of Aral, by the Kirgies Desert, and the Sur, or Sihoon, to nearly the same point in the great line of trade established between eastern Russia and Central Asia. Indeed, there can be little doubt that the attention of the Court of Petersburg has already been directed to this line, and that, whatever may have been the ostensible object of the recent Missions to Khiva

and Bokhara, no ordinary anxiety has been evinced to ascertain how far an improvement in commercial intercourse might be turned to account in paving the way for the establishment of a political influence amongst hordes of barbarians, who, though apparently accessible to no kindness or conciliation, appear only to need the presence of some really formidable authority, to be reduced to the same state of tranquillity as the fierce and lawless inhabitants on the confines of Georgia and Armenia, and other districts into which Russia has successively introduced her system of rule.

But under whatever circumstances the invasion of India might be attempted, it is probable that the attacking army, instead of marching directly from Russia, would be composed principally of troops stationed in recent conquests, or in the employ of Persia, as a subsidiary force, or as an army of occupation. Thus the Russian troops, though apparently more closely connected with the parent country, are likely to lose much of their energy by a long sojourn in distant and, perhaps, uncongenial climes; and when to this circumstance is added the probability of a considerable admixture of Asiatic recruits, to fill up occasional vacancies, it may be supposed that the invading army would assimilate pretty nearly, as

to its component parts, to the force which the English might be able to collect in defence of their possessions. Yet, supposing this to be the case, without any qualification, supposing the two armies to contain the same number of Europeans, the remainder being composed of natives of the countries in the possession of each nation respectively, still the advantage would rest with the invaders. A mixture of different nations in one army, if not permitted to impair its discipline, is no detriment to it, but probably the contrary, in offensive operations; but in defence, some feeling to counterbalance the effect of occasional failure is indispensable,—that feeling is patriotism: and it may be assumed as an axiom, that whilst, for invasion, an army may be composed of soldiers of one or of many nations, indifferently; for defence, every man in it ought to have a strong interest in the soil which he endeavours to protect.

In order, effectually, to oppose the invasion of India, it would be desirable to occupy the Punjab. That region once passed, there would no longer be any natural obstacles, of which the defenders could avail themselves, in opposing a direct advance into the heart of Hindostan. The Punjab, indeed, has always been the field in which the rulers of Delhi have defended themselves with the greatest advantage; when that is in possession of

the enemy, no alternative remains to the invaded, beyond that of committing the fortune of the war to the event of one great battle on the plains of Kurnaul or Panniput—already too often fatal to Hindostan—or of allowing the enemy to ravage and lay waste the country, and to advance unmolested to the siege of Delhi, in the confidence that, even if unsuccessful, they will always have a strong country in their rear to retreat to and to encamp in, until the recurrence of the fair season for their operations, or the arrival of reinforcements from the other side of the Indus. On the other hand, the Indian army, by having the Punjab organized in its rear, would not only command the services of the warlike race inhabiting those tracts, but it would possess the advantage of receiving supplies by the Indus, and its tributary streams, instead of the circuitous route of the Bay of Bengal and the Ganges. The right flank of their army, too, would be greatly strengthened by the force which occupies the protected hill-states, extending its posts along the mountains to the borders of Cashmere, so as to bear upon the left and rear of the enemy.

It must not, however, be forgotten, that if the banks of the Indus be selected as the most favourable position in which to expect the attack, the British troops will have an immense march to