

British India

“Every nation condemns conquest, and every nation with power to enter upon a career of conquest rushes eagerly upon it.”

CHARLES CREIGHTON HAZEWELL

NOVEMBER 1857 ISSUE

The year 1757 was one of the gloomiest ever known to England. At home, the government was in a state of utter confusion, though the country was at war with France, and France was in alliance with Austria; these two nations having departed from their policy of two centuries and a half, in order that they might crush Frederic of Prussia, England's ally. Frederic was defeated at Kolin, by the Austrians, on the 18th of June, and a Russian army was in possession of East Prussia. A German army in British pay, and commanded by the “Butcher” hero of Culloden, was beaten in July, and capitulated in September. In America, the pusillanimity of the English commanders led to terrible disasters, among which the loss of Fort William Henry, and the massacre of its garrison, were conspicuous events. In India, the English were engaged in doubtful contest with the viceroy of Bengal, who was supported by the French. Even the navy of England appeared at that time to have lost its sense of superiority; for not only had Admiral Byng just been shot for not behaving with proper spirit, but a combined expedition against the coast of France ended in signal failure, and Admiral Holburne declined to attack a French fleet of Louisburg. No wonder that the British people readily believed an author who then published a work to establish the agreeable proposition, “that they were a race of cowards and scoundrels; that nothing could save them; that they were on the point of being enslaved by their enemies, and that they richly deserved their fate.” Such a succession of disasters might well discourage a people, some of whom could recollect the long list of victories which commenced with Blenheim and closed with Malplaquet, and by which the arrogance of the Grand Monarque had been punished.

Yet it is from this very year of misfortune that the power of modern England must take its date. "Adversity," said El Hakim to the Knight of the Leopard, "is like the period of the former and of the latter rain, — cold, comfortless, unfriendly to man and to animal; yet from that season have their birth the flower and the fruit, the date, the rose, and the pomegranate." In the summer of 1757 was formed that ministry which succeeded in carrying England's power and glory to heights which they did not reach even under the Protectorship of Cromwell or the rule of Godolphin. Then were commenced those measures which ended in the expulsion of the French from North America, and gave to England a territory here which may perpetuate her institutions for ages after they shall have ceased to be known in the mother-land. Then was America conquered in Germany, and not only was Frederic so assisted as to be able to contend successfully against the three great houses of Bourbon, Habsburg, and Romanoff, and a horde of lesser dynasties, but British armies, at Minden and Creveldt, renewed on the fields of the continent recollections of the island skill and the island courage. Then was a new spirit breathed into the British marine, by which it has ever since been animated, and which has seldom stopped to count odds. Then began that dashing course of enterprise which gave almost everything to England that was assailable, from Goree to Cuba, and from Cuba to the Philippines. Then was laid the foundation of that Oriental dominion of England which has been the object of so much wonder, and of not a little envy; for on the 23rd of June, 1757, was fought the battle of Plassey, the first of those many Indian victories that illustrate the names of Clive, Coote, Wellesley, Gough, Napier, and numerous other heroes. It seems odd, that the interest in Indian affairs should have been suddenly and strangely revived in the hundredth year after the victory that laid Bengal at the feet of an English adventurer. Had the insurgent Sepoys delayed action but a few weeks, they might have inaugurated their movement on the very centennial anniversary of the birth of British India.

There is nothing like the rule of the English in India to be found in history. It has been compared to the dominion which Rome held over so large a portion of the world; but the comparison has not the merit of aptness. The population of the Roman Empire, in the age of the Antonines, has been estimated at 120,000,000,

including that of Italy. The population of India is not less than 150,000,000, without counting any portion of the conquering race. Rome was favorably situated for the maintenance of her supremacy, as she had been for the work of conquest. Her dominion lay around the Mediterranean, which Italy pierced, looking to the East and the West, and forming, as it were, a great place of arms, whence to subdue or to overawe the nations. Cicero called the Hellenic states and colonies a fringe on the skirts of Barbarism, and the description applies also to the Roman dominion; for though Gaul and Spain were conquered from sea to sea, and the legions were encamped on the Euphrates, and the valley of the Nile was as submissive to the Caesars as it had been to the Lagidae, yet the Mediterranean was the basis of Roman power, and a short journey in almost any direction from it would have taken the traveller completely from under the protection of the eagles. Not so is it with British India. From no European country is India so remote as from England. The two regions are separated by the ocean, by seas, by deserts, and by some of the most powerful nations. Their sole means of union are found in the leading cause of their separation. England owes her Indian empire to her empire of the sea. India will be hers just so long, and no longer, as she shall be able to maintain her naval supremacy. Those who predict her downfall in the East, either as a consequence of the natives throwing off her rule, or through a Russian invasion, forget that she entered India from the sea, and that until she shall have been subdued on that element it would be idle to think of dispossessing her of her Oriental supremacy. Were the long cherished dream of Russia to be realized, — a dream that is said to have troubled the sleep of Peter, and which certainly haunted the mind of Catharine, — and Russian proconsuls ruling on the Ganges, India could no more be to Russia what she has been to England, than the Crimea, had he kept it, could have been to Louis Napoleon what it is to the Czar. The condition of Indian dominion is ocean dominion.

In one respect the Indian empire of England resembles the Roman empire. The latter comprised many and widely different countries and races, and so is it with the former. We are so accustomed to speak of India as if it constituted one country, and were inhabited by homogeneous people, that it is difficult to understand that not even in Europe are nations to be found more unlike to one another than in British

India. In Hindostan and the Deccan there are ten different civilized nations, resembling each other no more than Danes resemble Italians, or Spaniards Poles. They differ in moral, physical, and intellectual conditions, — in modes of thought and in modes of life. This is one of the chief causes of England's supremacy, just as similar state of things not only promoted the conquests of Rome, but facilitated her rule after they had been made. The Emperors ruled over Syrians, Greeks, Egyptians, and other Eastern peoples, with ease, because they had little in common, and could not combine against their conquerors. They did the same in the West, because the inhabitants of that quarter, if left to themselves, would have passed their time in endless quarrels. The old world abounded in great cities, all of which owned the supremacy of Rome, from Gades to Thapsacus; and in modern India the most venerable places are compelled to bow before the upstart Calcutta.

The peculiar condition of India a hundred years since enabled the English to lay the foundations of their power in that country so broadly and so deep that nothing short of a moral convulsion can uproot them, though the edifice erected upon them may be rudely shaken by internal revolts, or by the consequences of external wars. Fifty years sooner or forty years later, the English could have made no impression on India as conquerors. Seventy years before the conquest of Bengal the English traders had been plundered by a viceroy who anticipated the tyranny of Surajah Doulah. They determined not to submit to such exactions. They resolved upon war. But the great Aurungzebe was then on the throne of Delhi; and though the Moghul empire had declined somewhat from the standard set up by Akbar and maintained by Shah Jehan, the fighting merchants were soon taught that they were but as children in the hands of its chief. They were driven out of Bengal, and Aurungzebe thought of expelling them from his whole empire. The punishment of death was visited upon some of the East India Company's officers and servants by the Moghul. This severe lesson made a deep impression on the English. They resumed their humble position as traders on sufferance. They never thought of conquest again. It was not until every man who had been concerned in that business had long been in his grave, that the English dared so much as to think of making another war. Though the Moghuls rapidly became powerless after the death of Aurungzebe, the blows struck by anticipation in their behalf protected them for forty years

against the ambition of the intrusive Occidentals, and even for some time after Nadir Shah's Persian invasion had demonstrated that their dynasty was as weak as that of Lodi had been found when Baber came into the land. Whether the English have been right or wrong in making themselves masters of India, it is certain that they were forced upon the work against their own wishes and inclinations, and in self-defence. The very expedition which Clive made use of to effect the subjugation of Bengal had been undertaken on defensive grounds; and so fearful was even that great man of the consequences of a union of the forces of the Moghul with those at the command of the French in the East, that he was at first desirous of making peace with Surajah Doulah himself. When the arrival of reinforcements had induced him to take a bolder course, and the destruction of that fierce viceroy had been resolved upon, it was not until after much doubt and hesitation, and against his original judgment, that that course of action was entered upon which ended in the victory of Plassey. He knew the risk that was run in fighting a pitched battle against force nearly twenty times larger than his own; and had the viceroy been either a respectable ruler or a good soldier, the English, humanly speaking, must have then failed as signally as their predecessors of 1687; but as he was as destitute of humanity as of courage and skill, and could neither animate his followers by affection nor command them by force of character, he was utterly routed. Not six hundred men fell in the battle of Plassey, on both sides, and most of these were on the side of the vanquished. Seldom has it happened that so mighty a change has been effected with so little slaughter. One is reminded of the battles fought by the few Romans under Lucullus against the entire array of the Armenian monarchy.

Had circumstances not led to the display of British power at the time when great prizes were sure to follow even from minor exertions, England never could have become mistress of India. Had the English remained traders forty years longer, or even for half that time, perhaps, they would have encountered very different foes from those which they overthrew so easily when forced to fight for property and life. India was breaking up in 1757, and the process of reformation as about to begin. Had not the English been brought into the vast arena, either a number of powerful monarchies would have been formed, or the whole country would have passed under some new dynasty, which would have revived the power of the state

with that rapidity which is so often exhibited in the East, when new and able men assume the reins of government. Hyder Ali might have made himself the master of all India, had it been his lot to contend only with native rulers and native races. Had this been the course of events, and had circumstances brought him into collision with the East India Company when he had made himself the Moghul's successor, can it be believed that he would have experienced any more difficulty in dealing with them than was found by Aurungzebe? We know that the English found in Hyder a very able foe, with but limited means at his disposal, and when they were masters of half the country, and had been almost uniformly victorious. Can it be supposed that they could have effected anything against all India, ruled by so consummate a statesman as Hyder Ali? There seems to have been something providential in the events that caused them to pass from traders to conquerors, at the only time when such a transition could be made either with safety or success. That their career of conquest has been occasionally marked by injustice and crime proves nothing against the position that they may have been appointed by a higher Power to work out a revolution in the East. "The dark mystery of the moral world," in this as in a thousand other instances, remains impenetrable. Heaven selects its own agents, and all that it becomes us to say concerning such relations is, that they do not appear in all cases to be made from among men specially entitled to the honors of canonization.

The English have frequently been denounced, not only for their errors in governing India, but for their conquest of that country. The French have been especially fervent in these denunciations. It is a fact, however, that the French saw nothing wrong in subduing India until all their own plans to that end had utterly failed. The device originated with them, but the English applied it. Dupleix planned for France what Clive executed for England. The French adhered to their plans for years, and it was not until a very recent period that the last remnants of their influence disappeared from India. They saw not the evil involved in the overthrowing of virtuous nabobs and venerable viceroys, until time and a whole train of events had proved that England alone was competent to the full performance of the work. The English in India have not, on all occasions, been saints; but we are unable to see what moral right the French have to reproach them with the enumeration of their

errors. In the East, France was “overcrowded” by England; and that is the sole and the very simple cause of the vast amount of “sympathy” which the French have bestowed upon suffering Indian princes, whose condition in no sense would have been improved, had fortune favored the Gallic race, instead of the Saxon, in their struggle for supremacy in Hindostan.

The prejudice that exists in many minds against England, concerning her Indian empire, is in no small degree owing to something of which she is justly proud; to the talent that characterized the prosecution—his friends called it the persecution—of Warren Hastings. No man, not even Strafford, when borne down by the whole weight of the country party in the first session of the Long Parliament, ever encountered so able a host as that which set itself to erect the ruin of the great British proconsul. He was acquitted by his judges, but he stands blackened forever on the most magnificent pages of his country's eloquence. Burke's speeches are yet read everywhere; and to Burke, Hastings was the principle of Evil incarnate. The two great divisions of civilized mankind hold Burke in lasting remembrance, — the liberals for his labors in the early part of his life, and the conservatives for his writings against the French Revolution; and it is impossible to admire him without condemning Hastings. It is equally impossible to condemn Hastings without condemning the nation for which he performed deeds so vicious and cruel, and which formally acquitted him of each and every charge preferred by Burke and his immortal associates, in the name of the Commons of England. Even those charges were the result, not of conscientious conviction on the part of the Commons, but of Mr. Pitt's determination to crush one who promised to become formidable political rival. The arguments and eloquence of such men as Burke, Fox, Sheridan, and Grey, constitute a splendid armory, from which the enemies of England can forever draw admirable weapons with which to assail her Indian policy; and they have not been backward in making use of this mighty advantage. No one, who has ever sought to defend England's course in the East, but has had experience of the difficulties which those great men have placed in the way of a successful vindication of their country's cause. Either they were honest, or they were not. If honest, what shall be said of the nation which would not listen to them? If dishonest, what are we to think of men, the first statesmen of their age, who, for mere party ends, had

persecuted to his ruin one who was in no respect their inferior, and who had saved India for England? Our own opinion is that Burke and his associates were honest, and that the only dishonest men in the prosecuting party were William Pitt and Henry Dundas, the first being chief minister, and the other second only to the premier himself in the government. Pitt talked much of his conscience, after having absolved Hastings on the very worst of the charges that had been preferred against him, and then condemned him on lighter charges. When Roger Wildrake heard the landlord at Windsor talk much of his conscience, he was led to observe that his measures were less and his charges larger than they had been in those earlier times when sin was allowed to take its natural course. It was so with Pitt, who was guilty of gross injustice, according to his own arguments, and then threw his conscience into the scale against the accused party, when he saw that that party's acquittal would probably lead to his being converted into a successful political rival. Hastings deserved severe censure, and no light punishment, for some of his deeds; but not even Burke would have condemned him to the slow torture to which he was sentenced by one who believed him to be innocent, and the object of party persecution. But the nice distinctions which Englishmen and Americans can make in the cause and course of this famous state trial, because they live in the very atmosphere of party politics, are utterly unknown to the men of continental Europe; and until the end of time, England will be condemned out of the mouths of her most brilliant sons, whenever her foes—and she is too great not to have many and bitter foes—shall discuss the history of her Indian empire.

Every nation condemns conquest, and every nation with power to enter upon a career of conquest rushes eagerly upon it. The harshest condemnation that has visited England because of her Indian successes has proceeded from nations who have never been backward in seizing the lands of other nations. She has been stigmatized as a usurper, and as having destroyed the independence of Indian states. The facts do not warrant these charges. She has rarely had a contest with any power which was not as much an intruder in India as herself. The Moghul dynasty was as foreign to India as the East India Company, or the house of Hanover; and the viceroys sent to rule over its vast and populous provinces had the same bases of power as were possessed by Clive, and Hastings, and Wellesley, and Bentinck, and

Ellenborough, and Dalhousie. The Moghuls obtained Indian dominion by conquests that were rendered easy by Indian troubles; and this is precisely the history of England's Oriental dominion. What difference there is, is favorable to England. The Moghuls were deliberate invaders of India; the founder of that dynasty being an adventurer who sought an empire sword in hand, and won it by violence which no man had provoked. Baber was to India what the Norman William was to England. He long contemplated the conquest of the country, showing a wolf-like perseverance in hunting down his prey. For two-and-twenty years he had his object in view, and invaded India five times before he obtained the throne of Delhi. The English were forced to assume the part of conquerors, and would gladly have remained traders. They did not commence their military career until the Moghul had become a mere shadow, and when that potentate was altogether unable to protect them against the tyrannical practices of his lieutenants. They had to choose between war and extermination, and they belonged to a race which never hesitates when forced to make such a choice. Their wars were waged with the Moghul's viceroys, who were aiming at the foundation of dynastic rule, each in his own government, or with other princes, who were equally usurpers with those viceroys, the Mahratta chiefs, for example, and Hyder Ali. One war led to another, in all of which the English were victorious, until their power extended itself over all India. In one hundred and six years — dating from the capture of Madras by the French in 1746, which event must be taken as the commencement of their military career in India, and closing with the annexation of Pegu, December 28, 1852, — they had completed their work. That, in the course of operations so mightily, and relating to the condition of so many millions of people, they were sometimes guilty of acts of singular injustice, is true, and might be inferred, if there were no facts upon which to base the charge. It is impossible that it should have been otherwise, considering the nature of man, and the character of many of the instruments by which great enterprises are accomplished. But we think it may safely be said, that never was there a career of conquest of such extent accompanied with so little of wrong and suffering to the body of the people. As against the wrong that was perpetrated, and the suffering that was inseparable from wars so numerous and long-continued, are to be set the reign of order and law, under which the mass of the inhabitants have

been able to cultivate their fields in quiet, and with the assurance that they should reap where they had sowed, undisturbed by the incursions of robber-bands. The cessation of the Mahratta invasions alone is an ample compensation for whatever of evil may have marked the course of British conquest. The stop that has been put to the cruelties of the native rulers ought not to be forgotten in estimating the amount of evil and of good which that conquest has brought upon India. The world has been shocked by the cruelties of which the rebellious Sepoys have been guilty; but they can astonish no one who is familiar with the history of the races to which these mutineers belong. An indifference to life, and a love of cruelty for cruelty's sake, are common characteristics of most of the Orientals, and are chiefly conspicuous in the ruling classes. The reader of Indian history sickens over details compared with which all that is told of the horrors of the Black Hole of Calcutta is tame and common-place. The English have prevented repetitions of those outrages on humanity, wherever it has been in their power to coerce the princes. They have pared the claws and drawn the teeth of these human tigers. They have acted humanely; yet it may be doubted if they would not have consulted their own immediate interests more closely, if they had acted the part of tyrants rather than of protectors. By ruling through the princes, and allowing them to act as “middle-men,” they would have been less troubled with mutinies, and could have amassed greater sums of money. It is to their credit that they have pursued the nobler course; nor ought they to repent of it even in the midst of disasters brought upon them, we are firmly convinced, as much by the mildness of their rule as by any other cause that can be mentioned.

It is yet too early to attempt to account for the rebellion of the Bengal army. That rebellion took the world by surprise, and nowhere more so, it would seem, than in England. A remarkable proof of this is to be found in the tone and language of the debate that took place in the British House of Commons on the 27th of July, in which Mr. Disraeli, Lord Palmerston, Lord John Russell, Mr. Whiteside, Mr. T. Baring, Sir T. E. Perry, Mr. Mangles, Mr. Vernon Smith, and others, participated. That debate was most lively and interesting; and the reading of the ample report in the “Times” revives the recollection of the great field-days of the English senate. Mr. Disraeli's speech is a masterpiece, and would have done honor to times when

eloquence was far more common than it is now. Yet the conclusion to which the careful reader of the report must come is, that neither Mr. Disraeli, nor the Premier, nor the President of the Board of Control, nor the Chairman of the Directors of the East India Company, nor any other of the speakers, had a definite idea of the cause of the sudden mutiny of the Sepoys. It is impossible not to admire Mr. Disraeli's talents, as displayed in this speech; and equally impossible is it to find in that speech anything, that an intelligent observer of Indian affairs can regard as settling the question, Why did the Sepoys of the Bengal army mutiny in 1857? Everything that he brought forward as a cause of the mutiny was distinctly proved not to be worthy of the name of a cause. Yet the men who could show that he had failed to clear up the mystery could themselves throw no light upon it. The government was especially ignorant of all that it should have known; and there is something almost ludicrous in the tone of the speech made by the President of the Board of Control.

It is not for us to speak authoritatively as to the cause of the Sepoy mutiny, but we venture to express our concurrence with those who have regarded it as, in considerable measure, of Mahometan origin. The Mahometan rule was displaced by the British rule. The Mahometans were for centuries the aristocracy of India, standing to the genuine Indians in pretty much the same relation that the Normans held to the Saxons in England; only it is but justice to them to say, that they rarely bore themselves so offensively towards the Indians as the Normans were accustomed to bear themselves towards the English. They have never lost the recollection of their former statue, or ceased to sigh for its restoration. Nor is the time so very remote when they were yet great in the land. Old men among them can recollect when Tippoo Saib was treated as an equal by the English, and have not forgotten how powerful was his father, Hyder. Some few aged Mussulmans there may be yet living who heard from their sires or grandsires, who saw it with their mortal eyes, of the glories of the magnificent Aurungzebe, ere the Persian, or the Affghan, or the Mahratta had carried fire and sword into Shahjehanabad. Two not over-long lives would measure the whole interval of time between the punishment of the English by Aurungzebe and the mutiny at Meerut. Time enough has not yet elapsed to cause the Mahometans to forget what they have been, or to cease to hope

that they may yet surpass their fathers. They are not actuated by anything of a sentimental character, but desire to win back, and to enjoy at the expense of the Indian races, the solid advantages of which they have been deprived through the ascendancy of a Christian people in the East. “Mahometans in India sigh for the restoration of the old Mahometan *régime*,” says Colonel Sleeman, “not from any particular attachment to the descendants of Tymour, but with precisely the same feelings that Whigs and Tories sigh for the return to power of their respective parties in England; it would give them all the offices in a country where office is everything. Among them, as among ourselves, every man is disposed to rate his own abilities higher, and to have a good deal of confidence in his own good luck; and all think, that if the field were once opened to them by such change, they should very soon be able to find good positions for themselves and their children in it. Perhaps there are few communities in the world, among whom education is more generally diffused than among the Mahometans in India. He who holds an office worth twenty rupees a month commonly gives his sons an education equal to that of a prime-minister.” [Note: *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Officer*, Vol. II. pp. 282, 283. Colonel Sleeman's work is one of the best ever published on India, — learned, liberal, and philosophical. It has been highly praised by so competent a judge as Mr.. Grote.] This very capability for rule must render them not only all the more desirous of obtaining it, but exceedingly dangerous as seekers after it. They are not an ignorant rabble, but men who have an intelligent idea of what they want, and rational modes of effecting its realization. Colonel Sleeman adds, “It is not only the desire for office that makes the educated Mahometans cherish the recollection of the old *régime* in Hindostan; they say, 'We pray every night for the Emperor and his family, because our forefathers ate of the salt of his forefathers,' — that is, our ancestors were in the service of his ancestors, and consequently were of the aristocracy of the country. Whether they really were so matters not; they persuade themselves or their children that they were.” In this way the idea of superiority has been kept up among the Mahometans of India; and they have continued to hope for the restoration of their old political supremacy, as pious Jews dream of the rebuilding of Zion. That they were at the bottom of the Meerut mutiny may be taken for granted. That they took for their leader the heir of the Moghul shows the

Mahometan nature of the outbreak. At the same time, we believe that if it had not been for the imbecility of Hewitt, who commanded at Meerut, the mutiny never would have occurred, or the mutineers would have been promptly put down. Even after they had escaped from Meerut, Delhi never could have fallen into their hands, if that city—so important, morally and geographically, as well as in a military point of view—had not been without a garrison. That a station of such consequence, stored so abundantly with all the munitions of war, should have been left in an utterly defenceless condition, is a fact that creates inexpressible astonishment, notwithstanding all that happened during the Russian war. Mr. Whiteside, in the debate of the 27th of July, stated that the late General Sir C. J. Napier “said of Delhi, that to guard against surprise, considering its position, its treasures, and its magazines, it should always be defended by twelve thousand picked men.” From all that appears, there were not twelve hundred men, or anything like that number, of any kind, in Delhi, last May, to protect either the inhabitants or the stores there deposited. Such another instance of neglect it would be impossible to find in history, after due warning given. Long ago, Albany Fonblanque said, “The sign of the fool with his finger in his mouth, and the sentiment, 'Who'd have thought it?' is the precise emblem of English jurisprudence.” The same sign would seem to be applicable to some other branches of the English public service, as well as to that of the law. Perhaps it was because of the warning that nothing was done, — that being the usual course with governments; while it was thought a duty to treat with sort of spiteful neglect every warning that came from Sir C. J. Napier, because he had a rough, fiery way of expressing his opinion of the folly of those who are perpetually giving occasion for warnings which they never heed, — as if in all ages roughness and fire had not been especial characteristics of the prophetic office.

The Indian Revolt

“The anticipated mutiny has now come, its first symptoms were treated with utter want of judgment, and its power is shaking the whole fabric of the English rule in India.”

CHARLES CREIGHTON HAZEWELL

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For the first time in the history of the English dominion in India, its power has been shaken from within its own possessions, and by its own subjects. Whatever attacks have been made upon it heretofore have been from without, and its career of conquest has been the result to which they have led. But now no external enemy threatens it, and the English in India have found themselves suddenly and unexpectedly engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with a portion of their subjects, not so much for dominion as for life. There had been signs and warnings, indeed, of the coming storm; but the feeling of security in possession and the confidence of moral strength were so strong, that the signs had been neglected and the warnings disregarded.

No one in our time has played the part of Cassandra with more foresight and vehemence than the late Sir Charles Napier. He saw the quarter in which the storm was gathering, and he affirmed that it was at hand. In 1850, after a short period of service as commander-in-chief of the forces in India, he resigned his place, owing to a difference between himself and the government, and immediately afterwards prepared a memoir in justification of his course, accompanied with remarks upon the general administration of affairs in that country. It was written with all his accustomed clearness of mind, vigor of expression, and intensity of personal feeling, — but it was not published until after his death, which took place in 1853, when it appeared under the editorship of his brother, Lieutenant-General Sir W. F. P. Napier, with the title of “Defects, Civil and Military, of the Indian Government.” Its interest is greatly enhanced when read by the light of recent events. It is in great part occupied with a narrative of the exhibition of a mutinous spirit which appeared in 1849 in some thirty Sepoy battalions, in regard to a reduction of their pay, and of

the means taken to check and subdue it. On the third page is a sentence which read now is of terrible import: "Mutiny with [among?] the Sepoys is the *most* formidable danger menacing our Indian empire." And a few pages farther on occurs the following striking passage: "The ablest and most experienced civil and military servants of the East India Company consider mutiny as one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest danger threatening India, — a danger also that may come unexpectedly, and, if the first symptoms be not carefully treated, with a power to shake Leadenhall."

The anticipated mutiny has now come, its first symptoms were treated with utter want of judgment, and its power is shaking the whole fabric of the English rule in India.

One day toward the end of January last, a workman employed in the magazine at Barrackpore, an important station about seventeen miles from Calcutta, stopped to ask a Sepoy for some water from his drinking-vessel. Being refused, because he was of low caste, and his touch would defile the vessel, he said, with a sneer, "What caste are you of, who bite pig's grease and cow's fat on your cartridges?" Practice with the new Enfield rifle had just been introduced, and the cartridges were greased for use in order not to foul the gun. The rumor spread among the Sepoys that there was a trick played upon them, — that this was but a device to pollute them and destroy their caste, and the first step toward a general and forcible conversion of the soldiers to Christianity. The groundlessness of the idea upon which this alarm was founded afforded no hindrance to its ready reception, nor was the absurdity of the design attributed to the ruling powers apparent to the obscured and timid intellect of the Sepoys. The consequences of loss of caste are so feared, — and are in reality of so trying a nature, — that upon this point the sensitiveness of the Sepoy is always extreme, and his suspicions are easily aroused. Their superstitious and religious customs "interfere in many strange ways with their military duties." "The brave men of the 35th Native Infantry," says Sir Charles Napier, "lost caste because they did their duty at Jelalabad; that is, they fought like soldiers, and ate what could be had to sustain their strength for battle." But they are under a double

rule, of religious and of military discipline, — and if the two come into conflict, the latter is likely to give way.

The discontent at Barrackpore soon manifested itself in ways not to be mistaken. There were incendiary fires within the lines. It was discovered that messengers had been sent to regiments at other stations, with incitements to insubordination. The officer in command at Barrackpore, General Hearsay, addressed the troops on parade, explained to them that the cartridges were not prepared with the obnoxious materials supposed, and set forth the groundlessness of their suspicions. The address was well received at first, but had no permanent effect. The ill-feeling spread to other troops and other stations. The government seems to have taken no measure of precaution in view of the impending trouble, and contented itself with despatching telegraphic messages to the more distant stations, where the new rifle practice was being introduced, ordering that the native troops were “to have no practice ammunition served out to them, but only to watch the firing of the Europeans.” On the 26th of February, the 19th regiment, then stationed at Berhampore, refused to receive the cartridges that were served out, and were prevented from open violence only by the presence of a superior English force. After great delay, it was determined that this regiment should be disbanded. The authorities were not even yet alarmed; they were uneasy, but even their uneasiness does not seem to have been shared by the majority of the English residents in India. It was not until the 3d of April that the sentence passed upon the 19th regiment was executed. The affair was dallied with, and inefficiency and dilatoriness prevailed everywhere.

But meanwhile the disaffection was spreading. The order for confining the use of the new cartridges to the Europeans seems to have been looked upon by the native regiments as a confirmation of their suspicions with regard to them. The more daring and evil-disposed of the soldiers stimulated the alarm, and roused the prejudices of their more timid and unreasoning companions. No general plan of revolt seems to have been formed, but the materials of discontent were gradually being concentrated; the inflammable spirits of the Sepoys were ready to burst into a blaze. Strong and judicious measures, promptly put into action, might even now

have allayed the excitement and dissipated the danger. But the imbecile commander-in-chief was enjoying himself and shirking care in the mountains; and Lord Canning and his advisers at Calcutta seem to have preferred to allow the troops to take the initiative in their own way. Generally throughout Northern India the common routine of affairs went on at the different stations, and the ill-feeling and insubordination among the Sepoys scarcely disturbed the established quiet and monotony of Anglo-Indian life. But the storm was rising, — and the following extracts from a letter, hitherto unpublished, written on the 30th of May, by an officer of great distinction, and now in high command before Delhi, will show the manner of its breaking.

“A fortnight ago no community in the world could have been living in greater security of life and property than ours. Clouds there were that indicated to thoughtful minds a coming storm, and in the most dangerous quarter; but the actual outbreak was a matter of an hour, and has fallen on us like a judgment from Heaven, — sudden, irresistible as yet, terrible in its effects, and still spreading from place to place. I dare say you may have observed among the Indian news of late months, that here and there throughout the country mutinies of native regiments had been taking place. They had, however, been isolated cases, and the government thought it did enough to check the spirit of disaffection by disbanding the corps involved. The failure of the remedy was, however, complete, and, instead of having to deal now with mutinies of separate regiments, we stand face to face with a general mutiny of the Sepoy army of Bengal. To those who have thought most deeply of the perils of the English empire in India this has always seemed the monster one. It was thought to have been guarded against by the strong ties of mercenary interest that bound the army to the state, and there was, probably, but one class of feelings that would have been strong enough to have broken these ties, — those, namely, of religious sympathy or prejudice. The overt ground of the general mutiny was offence to caste feelings, given by the introduction into the army of certain cartridges said to have been prepared with hog's lard and cow's fat. The men must bite off the ends of these cartridges; so the Mahometans are defiled by the unclean animal, and the Hindoos by the contact of the dead cow. Of course the cartridges are *not* prepared as stated, and they form the mere handle for

designing men to work with. They are, I believe, equally innocent of lard and fat; but that a general dread of being Christianized has by some means or other been created is without doubt, though there is still much that is mysterious in the process by which it has been instilled into the Sepoy mind, and I question if the government itself has any accurate information on the subject.

“It was on the 10th of the present month [May] that the outburst of the mutinous spirit took place in our own neighborhood, — at Meerut. The immediate cause was the punishment of eighty-five troopers of the 3d Light Cavalry, who had refused to use the obnoxious cartridges, and had been sentenced by a native court-martial to ten years' imprisonment. On Saturday, the 9th, the men were put in irons, in presence of their comrades, and marched off to jail. On Sunday, the 10th, just at the time of evening service, the mutiny broke out. Three regiments left their lines, fell upon every European, man, woman, or child, they met or could find, murdered them all, burnt half the houses in the station, and, after working such a night of mischief and horror as devils might have delighted in, marched off to Delhi en masse, where three other regiments ripe for mutiny were stationed. On the junction of the two brigades, the horrors of Meerut were repeated in the imperial city, and every European who could be found was massacred with revolting barbarity. In fact, the spirit was that of a servile war. Annihilation of the ruling race was felt to be the only chance of safety or impunity; so no one of the ruling race was spared. Many, however, effected their escape, and, after all sorts of perils and sufferings, succeeded in reaching military stations containing European troops.

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“From the crisis of the mutiny our local anxieties have lessened. The country round is in utter confusion. Bands of robbers are murdering and plundering defenceless people. Civil government has practically ceased from the land. The most loathsome irresolution and incapacity have been exhibited in some of the highest quarters. A full month will elapse before the mutineers are checked by any organized resistance. A force is, or is supposed to be, marching on Delhi; but the outbreak

occurred on the 10th of May, and this day is the first of June and Delhi has seen no British colors and heard no British guns as yet.

* * *

“As to the empire, it will be all the stronger after this storm. It is not five or six thousand mutinous mercenaries, or ten times the number, that will change the destiny of England in India. Though we small fragments of the great machine may fall at our posts, there is that vitality in the English people that will bound stronger against misfortunes and build up the damaged fabric anew.”

So far the letter from which we have quoted. — It was not until the 8th of June that an English force appeared before the walls of Delhi. For four weeks the mutineers had been left in undisturbed possession of the city, a possession which was of incalculable advantage to them by adding to their moral strength the prestige of a name which has always been associated with the sceptre of Indian empire. The masters of Delhi are the masters not only of a city, but of a deeply rooted tradition of supremacy. The delay had told. Almost every day in the latter half of May was marked by a new mutiny in different military stations, widely separated from each other, throughout the North-Western Provinces and Bengal. The tidings of the possession of Delhi by the mutineers stimulated the daring madness of regiments that had been touched by disaffection. Some mutinied from mere panic, some from bitterness of hate. Some fled away quietly with their arms, to join the force that had now swelled to an army in the city of the Great Moghul; some repeated the atrocities of Meerut, and set up a separate standard of revolt, to which all the disaffected and all the worst characters of the district flocked, to gratify their lust for revenge of real or fancied wrongs, or their baser passions for plunder and unmeaning cruelty. The malignity of a subtle, acute, semi-civilized race, unrestrained by law or by moral feeling, broke out in its most frightful forms. Cowardice possessed of strength never wreaked more horrible sufferings upon its victims, and the bloody and barbarous annals of Indian history show no more bloody and barbarous page.

The course of English life in those stations where the worst cruelties and the bitterest sufferings have been inflicted on the unhappy Europeans has been for a long time so peaceful and undisturbed, it has gone on for the most part in such pleasant and easy quiet and with such absolute security, that the agony of sudden alarm and unwarned violence has added its bitterness to the overwhelming horror. It is not as in border settlements, where the inhabitants choose their lot knowing that they are exposed to the incursions of savage enemies, — but it is as if on a night in one of the most peaceful of long-settled towns, troops of men, with a sort of civilization that renders their attack worse than that of savages, should be let loose to work their worst will of lust and cruelty. The details are too recent, too horrible, and as yet too broken and irregular, to be recounted here.

Although, at the first sally of the mutineers from Delhi against the force that had at length arrived, a considerable advantage was gained by the Europeans, this advantage was followed up by no decisive blow. The number of troops was too small to attempt an assault against an army of thirty thousand men, each man of whom was a trained soldier. The English force was unprovided with any sufficient siege battery. It could do little more than encamp, throw up intrenchments for its own defence, and wait for attacks to be made upon it, — attacks which it usually repulsed with great loss to the attackers. The month of June is the hottest month of the year at Delhi; the average height of the thermometer being 92 degrees. There, in such weather, the force must sit still, watch the pouring in of reinforcements and supplies to the city which it was too small to invest, and hear from day to day fresh tidings of disaster and revolt on every hand, — tidings of evil which there could scarcely be any hope of checking, until this central point of the mutiny had fallen before the British arms. A position more dispiriting can scarcely be imagined; and to all these causes for despondency were added the incompetency and fatuity of the Indian government, and the procrastination of the home government in the forwarding of the necessary reinforcements.

Delhi has been often besieged, but seldom has a siege been laid to it that at first sight would have appeared more desperate than this. The city is strong in its artificial defences, and Nature lends her force to the native troops within the walls.

If they could hold out through the summer, September was likely to be as great a general for them as the famous two upon whom the Czar relied in the Crimea. A wall of gray stone, strengthened by the modern science of English engineers, and nearly seven miles in circumference, surrounds the city upon three sides, while the fourth is defended by a wide offset of the Jumna, and by a portion of the high, embattled, red stone wall of the palace, which almost equals the city wall in strength, and is itself more than a mile in length. Few cities in the East present a more striking aspect from without. Over the battlements of the walls rise the slender minarets and shining domes of the mosques, the pavilions and the towers of the gates, the balustraded roofs of the higher and finer houses, the light foliage of acacias, and the dark crests of tall date-palms. It is a new city, only two hundred and twenty-six years old. Shah Jehan, its founder, was fond of splendor in building, was lavish of expense, and was eager to make his city imperial in appearance as in name. The great mosque that he built here is the noblest and most beautiful in all India. His palace might be set in comparison with that of Aladdin; it was the fulfilment of an Oriental voluptuary's dream. All that Eastern taste could devise of beauty, that Eastern lavishness could fancy of adornment, or voluptuousness demand of luxury, was brought together and displayed here. But its day of splendor was not long; and now, instead of furnishing a home to a court, which, if wicked, was at least magnificent, it is the abode of demoralized pensioners, who, having lost the reality, retain the pride and the vices of power. For years it has been utterly given over to dirt and to decay. Its beautiful halls and chambers, rich with marbles and mosaics, its "Pearl" *musjid*, its delicious gardens, its shady summer-houses, its fountains, and all its walks and pleasure-grounds are neglected, abused, and occupied by the filthy retainers of an effete court.

The city stands partly on the sandy border of the river, partly on a low range of rocks. With its suburbs it may contain about one hundred and sixty thousand inhabitants, a little more than half of whom are Hindoos, and the remainder nominally Mahometans, in creed. Around the wall stretches a wide, barren, irregular plain, covered, mile after mile, with the ruins of earlier Delhis, and the tombs of the great or the rich men of the Mahometan dynasty. There is no other such monumental plain as this in the world. It is as full of traditions and historic

memories as of ruins; and in this respect, as in many others, Delhi bears a striking resemblance to Rome, — for the Roman Campagna is the only field which in its crowd of memories may be compared with it, and the imperial city of India holds in the Mahometan mind much the same place that Rome occupies in that of the Christian.

Before these pages are printed it is not unlikely that the news of the fall of Delhi will have reached us. The troops of the besiegers amounted in the middle of August to about five thousand five hundred men. Other troops near them, and reinforcements on the way, may by the end of the month have increased their force to ten thousand. At the last accounts a siege train was expected to arrive on the 3d of September, and an assault might be made very shortly afterwards. But September is an unhealthy month, and there may be delays. *Delhi door ust*, — “Delhi is far off,” — a favorite Indian proverb. But the chances are in favor of its being now in British hands.¹

With its fall the war will be virtually ended, — for the reconquest of the disturbed territories will be a matter of little difficulty, when undertaken with the aid of the twenty thousand English troops who will arrive in India before the end of the year.

The settlement of the country, after these long disturbances, cannot be expected to take place at once; civil government has been too much interrupted to resume immediately its ordinary operation. But as this great revolt has had in very small degree the character of a popular rising, and as the vast mass of natives are in general not discontented with the English rule, order will be reestablished with comparative rapidity, and the course of life will before many months resume much of its accustomed aspect.

The struggle of the trained and ambitious classes against the English power will but have served to confirm it. The revolt overcome, the last great danger menacing English security in India will have disappeared. England will have learnt much from the trials she has had to pass through, and that essential changes will take place within a few years in the constitution of the Indian government there can be no doubt. But it is to be remembered that for the past thirty years, English rule in India

has been, with all its defects, an enlightened and beneficent rule. The crimes with which it has been charged, the crimes of which it has been guilty, are small in amount, compared with the good it has effected. Moreover, they are not the result of inherent vices in the system of government, so much as of the character of exceptional individuals employed to carry out that system, and of the native character itself. — But on these points we do not propose now to enter.

If the close of this revolt be not stained with retaliating cruelties, if English soldiers remember mercy, then the whole history of this time will be a proud addition to the annals of England. For though it will display the incompetency and the folly of her governments, it will show how these were remedied by the energy and spirit of individuals; it will tell of the daring and gallantry of her men, of their patient endurance, of their undaunted courage, — and it will tell, too, with a voice full of tears, of the sorrows, and of the brave and tender hearts, and of the unshaken religious faith supporting them to the end, of the women who died in the hands of their enemies. The names of Havelock and Lawrence will be reckoned in the list of England's worthies, and the story of the garrison of Cawnpore will be treasured up forever among England's saddest and most touching memories.

1. It is earnestly to be hoped that the officers in command of the British force will not yield to the savage suggestions and incitements of the English press, with regard to the fate of Delhi. The tone of feeling which has been shown in many quarters in England has been utterly disgraceful. Indiscriminate cruelty and brutality are no fitting vengeance for the Hindoo and Mahometan barbarities. The sack of Delhi and the massacre of its people would bring the English conquerors down to the level of the conquered. Great sins cry out for great punishments, — but let the punishment fall on the guilty, and not involve the innocent. The strength of English rule in India must be in her justice, in her severity, — but not in the force and irresistible violence of her passions. To destroy the city would be to destroy one of the great ornaments of her empire, — to murder the people would be to commence the new period of her rule with a revolting crime.

“For five days,” says the historian, “Tamerlane remained a tranquil spectator of the sack and conflagration of Delhi and the massacre of its inhabitants, while he was celebrating a feast in honor of his victory. When the troops were wearied with slaughter, and nothing was left to plunder, he gave orders for the prosecution of his march, and on the day of his departure he offered up to the Divine Majesty the sincere and humble tribute of grateful praise.”

“It is said that Nadir Shah, during the massacre that he had commanded, sat in gloomy silence in the

little mosque of Roknu-doulah, which stands at the present day in the Great Bazaar. Here the Emperor and his nobles at length took courage to present themselves. They stood before him with downcast eyes, until Nadir commanded them to speak, when the Emperor burst into tears, and entreated Nadir to spare his subjects.” ↩
