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Francis Newman BY

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OUR RELATION TO THE PRINCES OF INDIA.

From "Westminster Review," 1858, much abridged and recast to condense it.

ASSUREDLY, as Englishmen, we desire and hope that English rule in India may not come to a violent end; but it is not at all too early to study how that may be averted. Our dangers must increase with the enlargement of our direct administration, also, in proportion as we reduce the empire to homogeneity, as our most sagacious Indian statesmen have vehemently warned us. A foreign rule, displacing from high posts not only all the native aristocracy but all the native talent, can be permanent only under peculiar and rare conditions, as when the military force of the rulers is overwhelmingly superior, when the talent of their race is manifestly much higher, or when nationally and individually they far excel the subject race in virtue. As to the last point, it is easy to praise Englishmen to the English. Nothing is commoner with us than to chant English uprightness, moderation, and wisdom, and to vilify the natives of India; but our most distinguished men do not speak in this tone. However we may flatter ourselves, neither the native Indians, nor (as far as we can learn) intelligent foreigners will consent to swell the chorus of praise. We have virtues which Indians in general have not, but we sell our virtue dear to them; nor can it be pretended that in talents we excel their highly gifted races. Moreover, the wider our direct rule reaches and the longer it lasts, the less will be our military superiority; nor can any English army take the field without a host of natives to minister in various capacities to its needs. Already there is danger of our suffering in England a drain of men for our Indian armies; and if we are so mad as to rest our supremacy on force alone (as so many now advise), the mere argument of safety would suggest a contraction rather than an extension of our territorial area.

Nothing can be more simple, clear, and decisive than the

arguments of such men as Wellington, Sir Thomas Munroe, and Sir John Malcolm, which urge the importance of maintaining the native princes of India *for the sake of our own safety*; and although among officials a dangerous reaction has set in, yet of the generation not yet past, Elphinstone and Melville and General Briggs, and (we are glad to add) Lord Ellenborough are staunch to the old doctrines. We recommend our readers to the fourth and ninth Tracts of the India Reform Society for a valuable sixpennyworth on this critical subject. Sir Thomas Munroe declares that the natives of our provinces lose every quality that makes a people respectable, and, under our rule, become the most abject in India. Among all the disorders of the native States (says he) the field is open to every man to raise himself; hence among them is a spirit of emulation, of restless enterprize and independence, far preferable to the servility of our Indian subjects.

The abjectness of the British provincials is not only attested by many especial witnesses, but is even insisted on by our panegyrist, in tones which assure us that it is notorious. They say that the mass of the people under our rule are indifferent as to who are their rulers, and incapable of any national feeling: and this is made the justification of perpetuating their political degradation. The principle of our administration has been (and with small exception is still), to exclude natives from all high office. This is that which (as Sir Charles Napier emphatically remarked) debases a nation. There has never been anything like it under the Mussulman kings of India. Under Mogul princes Hindoos have frequently been prime ministers, and from very low grade men have risen into high offices. Nor in China has there been any such degradation of the natives under Tartar dynasties, but superior native talent has always been allowed to rise. Nowhere can be found a parallel to the English rule, except in the old Roman Empire, which trained the provincials into a sort of tame cattle,—industrious, thriving perhaps, rich, sensual, without public aim or spirit, without bravery, incapable as women of self-defence, and liable to be slaughtered by barbarians, the moment the regular army was withdrawn. In important moral respects, the *spirit* of our rule is vastly superior to that of Rome, yet the *form* of our rule is much worse than theirs. For *first*, many provincials were adopted into *full* Roman citizenship, and all such were at once treated in every respect as real equals to the native Romans. *Next*, the climate of India forbids our taking

root in it, and identifying our interest with that of the natives. We never adopt India as our home ; no amalgamation takes place. Mere youths, inexperienced in *English* freedom, go out from England to assume high power over Indians whose habits and language is strange to them. All these youths hope to return home in ripe manhood, with hands not empty. Subjection to the rule of youthful strangers, who will always be foreign in heart and purpose, is peculiarly degrading. In both respects the form of our despotism is more offensive to human feeling than that of the Romans.

Moreover, however good our intentions, the circumstances must thwart them. Only the higher and lucrative posts are accepted by Englishmen ; the lower paid offices are filled by natives, to whom we virtually commit the enormous force of the British Executive. While our own officers were ill paid, they were corrupt and flagitious in avarice : who then can expect anything better from the Indians whom we employ ? If anyone be sanguine, let him reflect on the recent revelations concerning the practice of torture as the ordinary mode in half of India for collecting revenue. This was notorious to our missionaries, notorious to our indigo planters ; yet was scoffed at as a dream by our highest officials in Parliament, even when attested there by Mr Danby Seymour, an M.P., who had visited India for the very purpose of investigating its truth. Finally, after three years' delay, a Royal Commission reported that *all was true* ; only the officials had been ignorant of it, to whom the police gave no information, well assured that the English Sâhib would be pleased when abundant revenue was collected, and would make no anxious inquiry into details. Yet our public and even our high officials think that it is only through these *regular channels* that truth is to be learned ! *

In the affairs of Baroda and Bombay it was brought to light by General Outram, how naturally every honest free-speaking Hindoo is repelled by a bureaucrat as a rude and bad fellow, while a smooth, false, cringing man is thought loyal and trustworthy. Readers may consult the evidence given before the

* Note in 1885. — About twenty-three years ago my colleague in University College, London, Mr Goldstüchle, Professor of Sanskrit, told me that he had purchased a MS. copy of Sir Charles Metcalfe's despatches, which contained his letters to the Secret Committee. Therein Sir Charles revealed in 1820 the whole system of torture, condemning it emphatically. Yet thirty years later our high officers were ignorant of it, and scornfully incredulous of its existence.—F. W. N.

Lords' Committee in 1853; and more recently (1857) the pamphlet of Malcolm Lewin, late judge in Madras, who quotes *inter alia* the avowal of Mr Haliday, deputy-governor of Bengal, against our own police, whom he *calls thieves and robbers, or leagued with thieves and robbers*; and adds, that the *administration of justice is little better than a lottery.*" This may be interpreted to mean, that the English judge, who decides *without a jury*, often understands the local dialect imperfectly, is a bad discriminator of true and false witness, and is largely guided by his native clerk, ill paid, and open to bribery.

Not many years ago the *Edinburgh Review*, writing with the caution of a Whig organ when Whigs are in power, ominously remarked, that the natives of our provinces show an indifference to repelling invaders, such as never before was known under any other sway. Thus when the Sikhs invaded India in the first Punjaub war no native gave us warning where the enemy lay. The British army marched unawares almost into the lion's mouth, and had to fight the battle of Moodkee against a superior force, just when it had thrown itself to rest after an exhausting march. Who can say what result would then have followed if that *one* battle had been to us a clear defeat?

In our own time new influences have acted on India, creditable to us, yet not guaranteeing safety. Indians have been accustomed to a free press. Science and Literature steal in with English education. Chinese stagnation is impossible. Increased facility of visits to England is destined to affect the Indians powerfully. Those who come to us had endured in India to be snubbed by officials and scoffed at by youngsters. At the Cape or in Egypt they meet with quiet unconcern or respect, in England they are courted or petted. Here they learn what a land of freedom means, and that our *people* are innocent, ignorant, incredulous of their grievances, and desire full justice for them. They go back admiring England more, but less contented with their own state; perhaps more determined not to be trampled down.

Meanwhile the native Governments open a career to active and adventurous spirits, and, as Sir John Malcolm insists, *hold them in check*, and will do so "until *our impolicy* has annihilated or suffered to die of themselves those high princes and chiefs who have the hereditary attachment of millions." In the same spirit Lord Ellenborough says: "I never stood so strong with my own army as when I was surrounded with native princes. Indians like to see respect shown to these." And in recent events the above has

been strikingly confirmed. Had there not been an Indian prince on the throne of the Nizam to resist the popular tide, the whole vast area of Hyder Abad might have overflowed with insurrection. So again Sindia and Holkar, in Central and Western India, checked the ambitious and dangerous spirits. We write these words, of course, from an English point of view ; but let us try to rise higher, and ask, What is best for all ? In the native rule, the natives have a free career, and the prince is despotic ; true, but he is very open to our counsels, especially if we visibly rule well. If we do but rule well on our own area, our example will speak for itself, and better rule, better habits will overspread all India ; but to absorb more and more territory, while the people of our own dominions are excluded from office, is a greedy infatuation. In the opinion of most Englishmen Charles II. ruled badly enough. He spent the public money on his concubines, and left his sailors unpaid ; and as he also accepted a pension from the king of France, he might be compared to an Afghan prince, sustained on his throne by the Honourable East India Company.

Now suppose that in political benevolence Louis the Great had successfully invaded England and deposed our worthless king, what should we think of his ejecting all Englishmen from all high office, and giving every lucrative post in Army or State to Frenchmen, *because* our king had ruled badly ? This is a precise parallel to that which a powerful clique of our officials and too many journalists urge upon us. Since such treatment would make our nation intensely hate Frenchmen, can any one think it attracts for us love from Indians ? To extend the area of this system is good neither for India nor for England.

Lord Dalhousie is emphatically a type of the new school of Anglo-Indians. Under him the royalty of Oudh has been confiscated on the plea that the king ruled ill, and the royalty of Sattara also, though the king ruled excellently ; Sattara without any other special reason assigned than because its revenue (argued Lord Dalhousie) would aid the British treasury ! But lo ! the exchequer of Sattara, full to overflowing under a native prince, has declined and come to a deficit under English rule, which is too expensive for so poor a country as India must be judged.

Lord Dalhousie, whom the Whigs kept in power for eight years, seems to have turned suddenly round, reversing the policy and principles of his distinguished predecessors in the high office of Governor-General. The smaller principalities which he has absorbed could not be formidable to us, and were our natural

friends. Sattara was his first victim. It does not seem to have occurred to him, any more than if he had been an Austrian or a Russian, *that the people had any natural rights*. This noble lord's policy deserves ample discussion, but we wish not to lose ourselves in details, but fix the reader's attention on principles, which his dealings with Oudh makes signal. "I cannot conceive it *possible* (says he) for *any* one to dispute the policy of our taking advantage of any *just* opportunity" of confiscating native royalties; because (he adds) "independent royalties may be a source of annoyance, but can never add to the resources of the British treasury." Surely one of the worst points in our Indian system is the want of *local* treasuries. All the local rates for keeping up roads, bridges, canals, and tanks are poured away into the central treasury in Calcutta, and too often spent in war or on armaments. This most fatal mischief is arrested by the existence of independent principedoms. As to the *justice* of the noble lord's procedure and the meaning of treaties, he makes himself the judge, while he betrays his hankering after the spoil. How can he expect Indians to admit his claim, or believe that he is sincere in avowing zeal for the welfare of the people of Oudh? To his accusation that Oudh is ill-governed, the Oudh princes reply that it is governed *better than Bengal*; and that it is we who hinder them from governing better, by our interferences based on treaties violently imposed, and by our extortion of annual subsidies and forced loans; and that now we take advantage of our own wrong, making ourselves judges for our own benefit, and executors of our own sentence. Every word of this retort is but the assertion of open fact, simply undeniable. The people of Oudh (according to Bishop Heber thirty-eight years ago) were prosperous under their native rule, and said to him, "Of all calamities, heaven keep us from becoming British subjects," and in the recent war we found them our decided enemies.

On taking possession of the country, among our earliest measures "for the benefit of the people" had been the ejection of the great landlords and introducing of the village system, under which the tenants pay rent direct to the treasury. If this system is good as well as ancient, the more the pity that we have elsewhere ourselves destroyed it; but whatever its merit, the change is very violent. There are those in England who think it would be better if all the rural rents of our nobles and squires were paid into the Queen's Treasury; but what sort of commotion would the sudden ejection of a whole aristocracy into

destitution cause in half the country? What if to this were added the ejection of the whole civil service, judges and magistrates, and all high officers of the army, and if foreigners were put into their places? In Oudh Lord Dalhousie's severity went (we understand) to the wonderful extreme of seizing the jewels of the princesses as public property. Surely so far from wondering at the revolt of Oudh, as soon as they saw their chance in the violent factions of the English themselves in Calcutta, and in our distraction by Chinese and Persian war, the wonder would be, if they had *not* revolted. The local mutiny of Sepoys could not have spread into a great war, but for intense passions previously pent up, to which our rulers were signally blind. Our Stock Exchange and its chief organ believe that Asiatics have no hearts, do not remember injuries, and may be safely trampled on.

The people of Oudh are familiar with firearms. So martial is their character, that they have long furnished to the Bengal army a formidable part of its strength. They are quite able without our aid to hold their own in any quarrel with their king or nobles, *if only we would withdraw our forces* and leave the princes exposed to their anger—a procedure which we never for a moment have contemplated. By enlisting in our army, the men of Oudh never were denationalised. They always looked to Oudh as the abode of their old age; hence by our annexation of their native soil all felt their homes invaded and their national freedom destroyed. The Court of Oudh was driven to despair. It had heard that the embassy of the Queen mother to England was futile. She had been (as if in mockery) introduced to Queen Victoria, with a prohibition of political topics! Neither Parliament nor the Law Courts would listen even to her claim of moneys lent to the East India Company, for some one had ruled that royal money was public money; therefore belonged to the occupants of power in Oudh. To despair was now joined indignation at our ingratitude for signal benefits received from them. Indeed, it is believed in Calcutta (though we cannot guarantee it as a certain fact) that the Great Mogul, titular king of Delhi (from whom the East India Company received the original diploma authorizing it to collect Indian revenue; the diploma *which legitimates its position with native Indians*) had proposed a scheme of war against the Company because of a personal grievance of his own a few years earlier; but the king of Oudh had replied he must first try peaceable protest by embassy to the home government in England. The embassy was vain, and insurrection broke out.

Possibly, if the case of Sattara had been listened to by Parliament, when pressed by Joseph Hume, all those deplorable events might have been prevented. But Parliament was not willing to quarrel with a Whig Ministry in order to save the national rights of a little people whose name was wholly new; forgetting that in little cases of public law great principles are involved. The appeal was virtually *judicial*, and its rejection on the grounds of *policy* was a fatal injustice, fatally punished. Had Parliament considered that however convenient a particular minister may be, justice is something more than a convenience, it would have cut the chain of causes which ended in the Indian insurrection, misnamed as "the War of the Mutiny." How now may the *recurrence* of these frightful evils be prevented?

New principles are evidently needed. The Indian side of every argument must be heard, as well as that which from English channels our newspapers (generally as partizans) dish up to soothe the conscience and pamper the pride of the English people. It is but a few years since, in our direst distress, after our defeat at Chillianwallah in the second Punjaub war,—when all India might have risen against us if any one prince had stood up—the King of Oudh re-established us by his liberal supplies. Somewhat earlier, after the terrible destruction of our whole army in Cábul, it was the King of Oudh who supplied Lord Ellenborough with transport not otherwise attainable, and enabled him to push a new force into Afghanistan. Lord Dalhousie cannot have been ignorant of such services, but he looked to the future, not to the past, estimating (as he wrote) that in Oudh he should need, "*in the first instance*, four commissioners of divisions, twelve deputy commissioners of districts, eighteen assistant commissioners, eighteen extra assistants, the commissioners receiving £3300 a year each; also judicial and financial commissioners, £3900 a year." Such arguments are, no doubt, painfully weighty against justice, truth, and mercy, and are *as likely to prevail in the future as in the past*, if we shut our eyes to the deeds of the Executive.

Clearly the first change needed in our relation with the princes of India, is that *the Government must not be judge in its own quarrel to its own aggrandizement*. The cases of Sattara and Oudh do not stand alone. Space commands us to adduce only one more typical instance—that of Coorg. The rajahs of Coorg had been to us faithful and valuable allies. The last rajah got into high words with our Resident at Mysore, from whom he demanded the surrender of a fugitive, whom he alleged to be a murderer.

When refused, he arrested a native official of our Government as a hostage, to enforce the surrender of the fugitive. This conduct was instantly accepted by us as a challenge to war. We invaded Coorg, dethroned the rajah, and *annexed his dominions*. His predecessors, our good friends and allies, had prudently invested money (about £100,000) in the Madras public debts. The last rajah, until we quarrelled with him, had received the dividends. After his deposition the capital was judged to be forfeited. To the ex-rajah's letters for fourteen years no reply was given by our Indian authorities. At last he came to England with his daughter, whom he wished to bring up as a Christian, having become a Christian himself. Queen Victoria became godmother to the young lady. But when the prince pleaded for his £100,000 he could get in England no other reply, than that *they had had no information about it from India, and therefore could take no notice of it*. Moreover, by threatening to stop his salary and starve his family at Benares, the Indian House forced him to return. Such is the rajah's story. We take it from the seventh Tract of the India Reform Society. We admit that if our Indian officials were called into public defence, they might tell facts which soften the hardships of the case; but the intense essential hardship will remain, that the Executive Government should be judge in its own quarrel, and act without public process to give solemnity and moral weight. What sort of high spirit could an English duke afford to indulge in, if some official had *power* to pick a quarrel with him, to confiscate his funded property, invade his baronial estates, and make his children outcasts or mere pensioners dependent on the good-will of invisible officials?

India needs a HIGH COURT, supreme arbiter and interpreter of Treaties and all other documents; a Court before which both the Government and the Princes should be able to sue and liable to be sued, publicly; and, except by verdict of the Court, the Government should have no more power to touch a prince's inheritance than that of an English duke.