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WESTERN INDIA

REPORTS

THE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Manchester, Liverpool, Blackburn, and Glasgow,

BY THEIR COMMISSIONER,

THE LATE ALEXANDER MACKAY,

EDITED BY JAMES ROBERTSON, ESQ.

With a Preface

BY THOMAS BAZLEY, Esq.

MEMBER OF THE MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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PREFACE.

THE commercial relations between the British East Indies and Great Britain have occupied—from the period when the English first became settlers in India to the present moment—the anxious consideration of the independent mercantile community of this country, and also of those sound statesmen who foresaw that exclusive privileges, obtained by any body of men, would ultimately prove to be both unwise and impolitic.

No new-born zeal has recently induced the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to seek the development of the resources of India. The members of that body have at all times been desirous of promoting a just system of commercial intercourse with that great dependency; and upwards of thirty years ago they began to claim the redress of grievances which had pressed injuriously upon the interests of India and Britain. Commercially, India had been doomed to double injustice: a false policy had given a monopoly of trade, commerce, and government in India to a company rendered powerful chiefly by the protective decrees of the British Parliament. The general colonial policy of Great Britain was highly restrictive and obstructive; and a conflict arose between protected parties, who already had thus a foretaste of the retributive correction that awaited the unjust legislation on which

commerce was then conducted. Against competition with foreign countries the East Indies were amply protected; but as against the British West Indies, so far from any protection being established, the latter possessed high discriminating duties, which greatly retarded the introduction of the products of the East Indies into the home markets of England. Alive to the fairness of equal burdens, the merchants of Manchester assisted to remove the partial and oppressive duties which gave to the West Indies undue advantages, at the cost of the East Indies and of the people of the United Kingdom; and by vigorous efforts on the part of the commercial community generally, the colonial fiscal system assumed some semblance to even-handed justice. With the commercial monopoly, however, of the East India Company, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce never ceased to struggle, by opposing the potent claims of the industrious at home to the unjust pretensions of those who held a surreptitious sympathy with the people whom they misgoverned, and whose solid interests they neglected. Mere selfish interests and objects have not actuated the opponents of monopoly; but with the growing intelligence of the present age has been associated the deep conviction, that just government alone can promote the happiness and prosperity of any people, and that only with the peaceful pursuits of a rightly-regulated community can thriving commerce be identified. An enlightened experience has taught the merchant and manufacturer that the administration of justice, the spread of civilisation, and the diffusion of Christianity, are objects exceeding in importance the accumulation of wealth; but that even those

occupations which are pursued for pecuniary purposes can only be effectively exercised where order prevails, and the just rights of men and of property are recognised. India has not been regarded as a mere field for the cultivation of cotton, sugar, or indigo, by the merchants of Lancashire; but the true and broad interests of that vast dependency have been wisely and energetically advocated by them, as the following extract from the prayer of a general Manchester petition, supported by the authorities of the place, will clearly prove; though it is humiliating to conceive that the subjects of one portion of the British empire have had occasion to plead on behalf of other portions of their fellow-subjects, for the fundamental elements of social advancement and progress:—"That at the earliest practicable period the trade to the interior of India and China may be thrown open, the monopoly in tea cease, the right to proceed to and settle in India be materially enlarged, and the power of banishment, without trial and conviction, for some unknown offence, be put an end to; and further, that inquiry be instituted into the present condition of the countries now subject to the British Crown within the limits of the East India Company's charter, in order that such measures may be adopted as shall most speedily develop the native resources of those regions, and most effectually promote the permanent welfare of their inhabitants."

The East India Company and their adherents predicted that, if they were deprived of their trading monopoly, India would be a lost portion of the British empire; and some unwise partisans declared, that to grant free commercial intercourse with the East Indies would not,

in the least degree, promote or extend the commerce of India with the civilised world. Happily these dark and interested forebodings have not been realised, but, on the contrary, beneficial results have arisen from the removal of those impediments to improvement. Undoubtedly, if there had not proceeded from the thinking people of this country the demand that, to the extent obtained, Indian commerce should be emancipated, and the liberty of the British subject respected, our distant empire would either have fallen, or have been perpetuated in a condition more alarming and unproductive than it is even in its present state. Thanks to the efforts which were made, the legislature, by giving only comparative freedom to India, gave a new impulse to its commerce, and the partial good thereby secured has become a pledge that future judicious changes will be still more eminently beneficial.

Whatever may be the assumptions of any governing power, there is an infallible test which may be applied to ascertain the advantages which its rule confers; and unless material benefits, to the people governed, be the visible and palpable fruits of the government, dissatisfaction will be the result, and an unsound and unwise system may be presumed to exist. Left to itself, the East India Company has not well and wisely governed the territory which it holds. Where are the fruits of an enlightened government in India? Are the people there industrious, happy, and contented? And is material prosperity indicating the success which attends honest labour under a wise rule? Do the courts of law secure impartial justice to the wronged and innocent? Have public works been founded for the convenience and comfort of all, as monuments of

the beneficence of the rulers, or as proofs that the accumulations of capital and industry have been invested to promote present and future progress and improvement? In India such imaginary evidences are fictions. Docks, quays, common roads, railroads, canals, and the ministering agents of civilisation are almost unknown. The peasantry of India are depressed, if not degraded; and the agriculture of the country is grossly neglected. By the evidence of a faithful witness, the state of feeling of the native cultivator is thus described: "If we improve the land, you will raise the rent: how do we know that you will leave us any more than you do now, and why should we go to any more trouble for you?"

From 1822 to the present time, the proceedings of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce record remonstrances against the system of economical misrule in India. That cotton might be grown in larger quantities and of better qualities than heretofore, has been avowed both by the advocates and the opponents of the East India Company; yet no important progress has been made in supplying more extensively this most useful raw material: not more than one-tenth part in quantity of that article, the produce of India, being now consumed in Great Britain; and so miserable is the quality, that its value forms not more than one-twentieth part of the sum paid for the whole consumption of the country. Under the resident direction of Lord Dalhousie, hopes were entertained that the cultivation of cotton would be promoted; but the same withering influence which has previously prevented its extended supplies has prevailed even under his auspices. India was an extensive cotton-growing country before America knew

the plant. To these two countries the railway-system became equally known. Now America holds or has a prospect of possessing 30,000 miles of railroads, whilst India has not more than completed thirty miles. With a population not exceeding 25 millions of people, America is taking of British manufactures about 20 millions sterling in the year; but India, with 150 millions of people, has scarcely received eight millions of exports from this source.

Having clearly and unmistakeably seen the tendencies of the system pursued in the East Indies, and having in vain appealed to the Company and suggested remedies for the evils existing there, only a final alternative appeared to be left,—that of seeking directly from Parliament the means of placing before the legislature such unquestionable evidence, as would form a sound basis on which to found the future direction of the affairs of that country. Much to the honour of the members for Manchester, Indian interests were ably advocated by them in the House of Commons; and in support of the views entertained by their constituents, Mr. Bright moved that a special Royal Commission might be appointed to proceed to India, and there investigate into the causes which kept it in a state unsatisfactory and comparatively unproductive. This most judicious motion had the cordial approbation of the Chamber of Commerce, but the counsels of the timid and the interested prevailed in the legislature; and to India was denied an opportunity of telling for herself her grievances, and of directly pleading for the redress of her known wrongs. Thus here, again, were the true friends of India disappointed and baffled.

Another charter for the future government of India

had to be granted or withheld; but the spirit prevailing in our constitutional courts seemed to be silenced, the House of Commons being impelled, by an influence opposed to investigation and to direct evidence, to resist the claims of 150,000,000 of people to be heard by commissioners of the crown at the bar of the House, though the interested statements of the trading governors were received almost without question. Indignant at the contumely bestowed upon the people of India, and upon the commerce and industry of Britain, the Chambers of Commerce of Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Blackburn, determined to send a competent individual as their representative commissioner, to investigate in person into the impeding causes which retarded the improvement of India, and which, in particular, prevented the extension of the cultivation of cotton. A gentleman of honour, and of the highest personal respectability, was selected to engage in the duties of the proposed mission; and he was instructed to elicit the truth without fear or favour, and to send to this country only such reports of the condition of India as could be implicitly relied on. Having then appointed Mr. Mackay to investigate the obstacles which have impeded the progress of the industry of India, he soon sailed for Bombay to enter upon the duties of his mission. He duly and safely arrived at Bombay, where he received from the directors of the chamber of commerce of that city, and from the principal merchants and other residents, most important information, and he entered upon his journey to the fields of Indian agriculture under the most promising circumstances. In the name of the commercial community of this country, it is only an act of common gratitude to

record the attention bestowed upon Mr. Mackay by those in India who welcomed his arrival among them, and who cheerfully and kindly promoted his object. The following reports afford ample evidence that he faithfully discharged his duty; and from their tone and contents it is most probable, that if he could have been spared to have entirely completed all his intended investigations, there would have resulted from his labours revelations beyond the anticipations of his employers.

Unfortunately Mr. Mackay had a weak constitution, and having contracted organic disease before he left this country, his health under the debilitating climate of India totally failed; but not before he had, to a very great extent, executed his trust. On finding that his general symptoms indicated a fatal termination, he proceeded, after a sojourn of about a year in India, to return home, and embarked for that purpose. When he went on ship-board he was in the most delicate and declining state of health; and instead of being improved by sea-breezes, his powers continued to sink, till finally death took him "to that bourne whence no traveller returns." Mr. Mackay's death was a source of grief to his friends on board the vessel, to those in India, and in Great Britain; but to those who had induced him to leave his native land to promote the good of India, was added, beyond that grief, the deep disappointment that a life employed and ended in honourable usefulness could no longer benefit his fellow-men. Fortunately he was accompanied on his homeward voyage by gentlemen who sympathised with him, who ministered as far as possible to his comfort, and who took especial care of his papers,

his reports having preceded him. To the personal merits of Mr. Mackay, to his truthfulness and untiring industry, a higher tribute of praise is due than could with propriety be introduced into a work of commercial and political elucidation. That India is a country of vast resources, is corroborated by Mr. Mackay: that it abounds in the elements of usefulness and prosperity to itself, that it has the power of yielding staple productions capable of supplying the industry of Great Britain with raw materials for the profitable employment of labour, and with many articles for domestic consumption, all of which would form payment for home manufactures; but that it is the victim of misrule and of patronage cannot, under the existing state of things, be too often reiterated.

The Reports of the late Mr. Mackay are, therefore, now commended to his countrymen as beneficial legacies, which, if accepted and acted upon, may become the sources of national wealth, and the enduring monitors of a people who still remain in comparative misery and in the darkness of ignorance, and whose territory is a reproach from its unproductiveness. Legislation has not yet provided remedies for the evils of India. During the last session of parliament, it is true that another bill for the rule of India was passed, and the Charter of the East India Company was to some extent modified, but renewed. It is feared that the little interest which the natives of India have accorded to them by that bill, in the progress and welfare of that territory, will prevent the exercise of talents and labours which might certainly, if exerted, tend to advance them and their soil in a career of solid and lasting improvement. It would be unjust to

withhold from the bill of the last session the transitory character which it deserves. It provides for constant agitation in Indian affairs. The mercantile community see not in that bill any adequate provision for the encouragement of agricultural productions; nor do they discover that the cultivation of cotton can be largely entered upon from any facilities being provided, or rather by the withdrawal of obstacles which have hitherto prevented the extended growth of it; and therefore, as increased returns for manufactured exports are not yet visible in the future, the trade between Great Britain and the East Indies must continue to languish. As the natives of India are scarcely recognised in the present governing scheme of their country, their apathy is retained and deliberately provided for. Leadenhall Street and Cannon Row still exist as two rival and inharmonious agents for promoting delay and complicating the dispatch of public business. But the governing principle for India is so far left open, and apparently undecided, that hereafter the business of parliament will probably be annually embarrassed by the large question of "Justice to India" being necessarily debated.

Taking practical results as the tests of good government, the administration of the affairs of India cannot be regarded as either beneficial to the people governed or honourable to their rulers. Instead of the evidences of peaceful progress and industry abounding, neglect is every where apparent; and amid the destitution produced by constant wars and accessions of territory, the governing power only displays its disregard of the interests of the people in its old dominion, whilst that continually increasing territory, forming a new and extending dominion,

engrosses life, time, and wealth, which would be more advantageously applied in ruling with justice and discretion those who have long been dependent on British rule and protection.

Whether an imperial government shall administer the affairs of India, aided by native agency, or the ruling power shall continue to be delegated to a joint-stock proprietary, the people of Great Britain will demand that substantial justice shall be done to that dependency,—that British laws and language shall not be the means of degradation to any portion of their mighty empire; but that with the government of India, under whatever name or auspices, shall be identified the cause of civilisation, of justice, and of Christianity. No honest government need perform the duties of its citizens; for the latter, unfettered under a rule which secures inviolate the rights of life and of property, will inevitably promote their own interest and the prosperity of their country. In India the rulers need not be themselves growers of cotton or cultivators of the soil; but they should at least “stand out of the sunshine” of their people, that the gifts of Providence may uninterruptedly be acquired by those who industriously seek them. Surely the rulers of the British nation have not yet to learn that good government, established on the immutable principles of justice, is the only foundation on which to rest the prosperity of British subjects, either in the temperate or torrid zone.

THOMAS BAZLEY,

President of the Chamber of Commerce, Manchester.

HATFIELD, MANCHESTER, October 1852.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE sudden death of the late Mr. Alexander Mackay rendered it necessary that his papers should undergo revision before being put into the hands of the public. This task the Editor was induced to undertake at the suggestion of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, with a view to the publication of such of them as related to his mission to India.

Mr. Mackay had transmitted nearly the whole of the following Reports from India, at intervals extending over a period of about twelve months. They were prepared at a time when he was much occupied with engagements and correspondence connected with his mission, and the last of them were written while he was in a declining state of health. It will not, therefore, surprise any one to learn, that in their original state they are somewhat diffuse,—a fault which, had the author lived, he would have been careful to correct. This he intimates in one of his last letters, in which he says, “To remedy this” (the length of the Reports), “and to bring them within practicable compass, I have begun a General Report upon the whole Presidency.”

In accordance, then, with the intentions of the author, the Editor has ventured to compress the following Reports within more moderate compass, by condensing such passages as seemed to be unnecessarily amplified. In all cases, however, where such alterations have been made, care has been taken that they do not injure the author's meaning, or affect his line of argument.

Of the General Report named above, only a few pages were written. This is the more to be regretted, because this Report was intended to embrace the result of his inquiries in the pro-

vinces of Candeish and Berar,—as large as any, if not the largest cotton-producing fields in India.* He also intimates in one of his letters, that the same Report would contain his observations on the "Administration of Justice," and on the "Condition and Character of the People." No trace of his views on these branches of his subject has been found among his papers, and it is therefore believed they have not been separately recorded.

There are still in the Editor's possession a number of papers relating to the provinces of Candeish and Berar, a summary of which, on account of the importance of those provinces as cotton-growing fields, it was at one time thought desirable to give in an appendix. But on their further examination, they were found to be from correspondents in those provinces, in reply to queries addressed to them by Mr. Mackay. As there are no means of knowing what reliance is to be placed on the information thus afforded, nor of the value attached to them by the author, the Editor would not consider himself at liberty to introduce even an abstract of their contents into the same volume with the Reports. It may, however, be mentioned that, in connexion with those provinces, they entirely corroborate the statements made in the Reports on Guzerat and the Southern Mahratta Country.

It is to be regretted that these Reports were not published in the early part of the year, or at all events before the "India Government Bill" was carried in Parliament. This delay arose from unavoidable circumstances, to which it is not now necessary to make further allusion.

After having carefully examined Mr. Mackay's papers, the Editor may be permitted to refer to the great loss which the cause of Indian reform has suffered from his premature death. Had the state of his health permitted him to complete his inquiries, not merely in the presidency of Bombay—to which his mission was more directly applicable—but also in those of Calcutta and Madras, and had his life been spared until now, it

* See Report of Committee of Commons on Growth of Cotton in India in 1842. Replies to questions 1315, 1822, 4743, and 6350.

may be inferred, from the mass of information he collected during his brief stay in India, that his knowledge of the state of that country would have been of the utmost value to the Imperial Government. Abuses, now overlooked or concealed, would have been exposed; and profiting by his assistance, a more decided progress would probably have been made in removing some of the many evils under which India now labours.

It is scarcely the duty of the Editor to refer to the contents of the Reports, but he cannot refrain from noticing the decisive evidence they contain respecting the obstacles which impede the extension of the Indian cotton-trade. By reason of oppressive taxation, the cultivators are impoverished, and unable to adopt improved methods of cultivation. They are without the means of adequately irrigating their lands; and the works for that purpose which once existed are, in too many instances, permitted to sink into decay. From the corruption of native officials and others, facilities are given for the adulteration of the cotton during the processes of cleaning and packing. The almost entire absence of roads and bridges hinders its reaching the sea-coast;* and for want of harbours and piers, it can with difficulty be shipped to this or to any other market. So long as these difficulties exist—and very little has yet been done to overcome them—it can scarcely be expected that the supply of cotton from India to this country will increase much in quantity,† or be of a quality fit for general consumption. The same obstacles which thus hinder the development of the cotton trade must prove adverse to the increase of every other, must keep the people in a state of indolence and poverty, and prevent the country from making any advance in wealth or population.

* See Fifth Report on Indian Territories, 1853. Reply to question 8174.

† The imports of Indian cotton into this country in the three years ending 1849 were greater than in any three years previous to 1849. During the last five years our imports have increased in consequence of the high prices which have ruled in this market, and of the unsettled state of that of China.

The Chambers of Commerce concerned in the appointment of this mission have fully attained the object they had in view, by showing the many abuses which exist in the administration of Indian affairs, hindering the progress and prosperity of the native population, and obstructing the enlargement of their commercial intercourse with this country. The information given to the public, through this and other channels, will compel the Imperial Government to adopt measures to ameliorate the condition of the immense population of India, and to develop the boundless resources of that country; and such measures will not fail to give renewed activity to the commercial enterprise of our countrymen, and will enable them to open up new channels for the employment of their capital and of their industry.

JAMES ROBERTSON.

Manchester, November 1st, 1853.

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ERRATUM.

Page 8, note, correct as follows :

The cotton-crop of America for 1852-3 amounted to 3,262,863 bales, of which 1,736,860 were exported to Great Britain.—*Ed.*