

Copy of a LETTER from *Charles Buller*, Esquire, to the Court of Directors of The *East India* Company; dated the 19th May 1813:—Detailing the Conduct of the Bengal Government, with reference to the Temple of JAGGERNAUT.

To the Court of DIRECTORS of The Honourable *East India* Company.

Honourable Sirs,

CONSIDERING the very exaggerated and unfounded opinions which appear to be entertained in England in regard to the conduct of the Bengal Government at Jaghanath, and in respect to the atrocities said to be practised there; it has been suggested to me, as I was so long on the spot, and as I had so much to do in framing the existing regulations relative to the tax levied from the Pilgrims, that I should take an opportunity of giving such information as might place the matter in its proper point of view. The best mode, therefore, which presents itself to me of communicating the information I possess, is to address myself to your honourable Court.

The object I have in view is, to correct the erroneous opinions which seem to prevail in regard to the conduct of our Government, with reference to the Temple, and to remove the exaggerated ideas entertained in respect to the atrocities said to be practised there.

With respect to the first point, as far as I can recollect, it seems to be supposed that our Government at Bengal is busied in the controul and regulation of Hindoo worship; and that it is actively employed in the encouragement of idolatry, for the purpose of revenue. Your honourable Court must be fully aware how studiously the regulations have guarded against committing the Government in any way whatever, respecting questions which might arise relative to the interior concerns of the Temple. The clauses which refer to the power reserved by Government of removing the Patron of the Temple, and to the permission given to the head Ministerial Officers to remonstrate against any orders issued by the Patron, afford the only possible opportunity for Government to interfere in regard to the interior. But considering the vast power vested in the Patron, and the means which he has of extensive oppression and extortion, I considered those powers to be essentially necessary; and although I am perfectly sensible that they never will be exercised, except in an extreme case, yet the result of my subsequent experience at the Board of Revenue, has tended to shew, that it was prudent to adopt the clauses in question.

With regard to the encouragement of idolatry, most assuredly nothing of the kind occurs on the part of Government, unless indeed it be supposed, that the liberal wish to protect and secure its native subjects in the due exercise of their religious as well as civil liberties, be pronounced to be an encouragement of idolatry. If an anxious desire, on the part of Government, to remove all unlawful impediments and obstacles from out of the way of the Hindoos worshipping with ease and convenience to themselves, be construed into an encouragement of idolatry, in that case, I apprehend the Bengal Government must plead guilty to the charge.

With regard to the revenue, that seems to me to be a question which has been considerably misunderstood; for from the mode in which I have heard gentlemen express themselves with reference to that point, they appear to consider this revenue to be taken as a price for the permission of idolatry, and consequently they seem to think, that if the Government would consent to give up the revenue, the idolatry would of course cease; surely nothing can be more erroneous than the above opinion, for I suppose no one would venture to say, that the ruling power in Hindostan, whatever its religion may be, should interfere to prevent the Hindoos from having access to their own Temples. If then, you allow access to the temple at Jaghanath, such access must be subjected to restraint and regulation; and I know not a more powerful means of restraint and regulation than is afforded by the tax. I can speak from my own knowledge of the fact; that the imposition of the tax, so far from operating as an encouragement to persons to resort there, has had a direct contrary tendency; for during the time that access was allowed without the tax, the throng of people

## PAPER RELATING TO

people at the place was so great, and such a considerable number of the poorer classes took that opportunity of visiting the Temple, that I was informed that several persons perished from actual want of subsistence. The scenes on the road, were, I am told, truly shocking; but since the tax has been continued, the numbers of the Pilgrims, particularly of the lower classes, have considerably diminished. I have passed several times backwards and forwards between Cattach and Jaghanath (and that too, just previous to the Ruth Jatrah, or festival of the Charist) without seeing many objects of wretchedness. I certainly have seen two or three poor wretched objects, exhausted by their long journey, and almost starving; but this is no very great matter of surprise, when it is recollected that the Pilgrims come from all parts of Hindostan, from upwards of 1,600 miles distance, and that a large proportion of these consist of the old and infirm, who come for the express purpose of laying their bones within the precincts of the city. It seems to me, that the question of revenue lies within a very small compass; if it be thought that it is inconsistent with our religion, to permit the Hindoos to resort to their Temples, the tax in that case is obviously improper; but if it be the duty of our Government to allow its native subjects to worship according to their own ideas, I should regret to see the tax abolished, as the abolition of it would render it difficult to restrain and regulate the numerous bodies of Pilgrims who resort to the place; and it would, in all probability, be the cause of the revival of those horrid scenes of distress which were before experienced, when the tax was discontinued, and of which the traces are still to be met with in the numerous human bones on the road. I have heard it observed, that the tax in question is something similar to a tax upon gambling houses, or other houses of ill fame: but surely there is a most essential difference between the two cases; the objection to the former, I understand to be this; that the taxation amounts virtually to a licence of that, which is, in its nature, immoral; but in this case, I do not understand there is any question whether the Government is to allow its subjects access to their own Temples; Government must admit the access, whether it takes a tax or not: under that circumstance therefore, I cannot see what possible objection there is to the continuance of an established tax of this nature, particularly when it is taken into consideration what large pensions in land and money are allowed by our Government in all parts of the country, for keeping up the religious institutions, both of the Hindoos and the Mussulman's.

In respect to the atrocities said to be practised at the place, they refer to the immolations under the wheels of the car on which the idol is carried. That such things occur, there can be no doubt; but certainly not to the extent, nor exactly from the same motive, as seems to be supposed by many in England. It would appear to be a prevailing opinion, that these immolations are of frequent occurrences; that they are a duty prescribed to the Hindoos by their religion; and, consequently, that such duty is often carried into performance. Whether it be a duty or not, I cannot positively say; but I believe it to be no part of their religion, and that, in point of fact, it is no more a duty prescribed to the Hindoos, than it was a duty prescribed to the Christian Asceticks to live in the austere and curious modes in which many of them formerly did, in the early ages of Christianity. Indeed, the infrequency of the act is the fullest proof, I conceive, that it is not an act of duty prescribed to any sect of Hindoos whatever. I was at Jaghanath during the whole of the Ruth Jatrah (in 1809 I think it was), and I heard but of one instance of an immolation under the wheels of the car. I should not suppose it possible that another instance could have happened during that festival, without my hearing of it. But supposing, instead of one, there were ten times the number, what would it amount to?—that out of a population of nearly two hundred millions, (for I suppose the whole of the Hindoo population, as far as Cabul, to be not much short of two hundred millions), there are to be found ten fanatics, fools, and madmen enough to commit such an act at Jaghanath.

There is another matter to be mentioned, but of which I was totally ignorant till very lately, when it was particularly pointed out to me, in order that I might say whether it were correct or otherwise. I allude to the circumstances of the indecency said to be exhibited on the car of the idol. On that point my attention was directed to a publication by the Rev. Dr. Claudius Buchanan, who speaks of a priest having pronounced certain obscene stanzas in the ears of the people, and of certain indecent gestures exhibited by a boy and priest on the car. With respect to the song, how the author came to know what the priest was repeating, he does not state. I do not mean to doubt the fact, but I do think, if the procession was any thing at all like that which

I saw,

I saw, there is no room to suppose that the author's ears, even if he did understand the language, could have been shocked by his actually hearing the songs. To give some idea of the thing to gentlemen in England, I would beg them to represent to themselves the car in progress between Charing Cross and Parliament Street, the whole of the way as crowded as possible with people, clapping their hands, talking, shouting and merry-making; and can it be conceived, that in such a noise a person could have his ears shocked by hearing what the priest was repeating, when, owing to the distance of the platform on which he stands, one could not by any endeavours get within ten yards of him; I am sure I could not hear any thing which was said; and during the whole of the time I was present, the noise was incessant, without intermission, and according to the nature of things I conceive it must be so, in a crowd of about one hundred thousand. Upon this point, however, if I can rely upon the information I have received, the songs in question are denominated by the natives cubbee, a species of song not very unlike that which is admitted into our own sacred writings. Ours I imagine are not at present read in any parts of our service; but whoever knows any thing of the Hindoos, must be aware that their veneration for antiquity will not allow them to depart from any thing which has once formed a part of their ceremonies. With respect to the indecent gestures said to have been exhibited on the car, all I can say is, that if such things are done, I never saw them, and what is more, I never heard of them till I came to England; to give you an irrefragable proof of what I have asserted relative to my ignorance, and to the ignorance of the other gentlemen on the spot, of any thing of the nature alledged ever happening, I need only mention that I believe there was not a single lady at the station who did not accompany her husband to see the procession. Had we had the slightest surmise of that which is asserted to be a fact, most unquestionably those ladies would not have been there. But I do most solemnly declare, that I never did hear the most distant hint of any thing indecent having been seen, or of anything in the slightest degree resembling indecency. With regard to the Temple, there certainly are indecent figures on it, but certainly not more than what we see every day in representations of ancient sculpture; indeed they are so badly done, that I do declare, that if they had not been pointed out to me, I should never have known that they were there.

It has been suggested, that I should say something more about the charge which has been made against our Government, for not interfering to put a stop to the immolations; if I had been asked before Mr. Graham gave his evidence before the House of Commons, I should have said, that I did not know that the Government had interfered at all. I never heard of it, and as it appears to me so utterly impossible for the Government to interfere with effect, I should have supposed they never had attempted it. I have said before, that I understand that is no part of a duty prescribed to any sect of Hindoos, to devote themselves under the wheels of the car. I believe, from every thing I have heard, that the Brahmins have no concern at all in encouraging the fanatic to destroy himself, and that in point of fact, they are as ignorant of any one's having the intention of devoting himself, as we are here. I never heard that there are any previous ablutions or purifications, which are usual when the Priests interfere on such momentous occasions. How then can the Government interfere? The man, I believe, does not communicate his intention, and I think it not at all unlikely that he himself does not intend it, till a little before he throws himself under the wheels; as for preventing it at the spot, it is utterly impossible. In such a crowd no one knows what his next neighbour is about. In short it appears to me, that people may with as much justice censure our Government at home, for not preventing suicide in the variety of ways in which we are informed it is practised, as they may the Government abroad, for not preventing the immolations in question.

I have the honour to be,  
honourable Sirs,  
Your most obedient Servant,

London, }  
19th May 1813. }

(Signed) C. BULLER.

(East India Affairs.)

Copy of a LETTER from *Charles Buller, Esq.*  
to the Court of Directors of The *East India*  
Company; dated the 19th May 1813:—Detailing  
the Conduct of the *Bengal* Government, with  
reference to the Temple of JAGGERNAUT.

---

---

*Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be printed,*  
*24 May 1813.*

---