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EVIDENCE
OF OUR
TRANSACTIONS
IN THE
EAST INDIES,
WITH
AN ENQUIRY INTO THE
GENERAL CONDUCT OF *GREAT BRITAIN*
TO OTHER COUNTRIES,
FROM THE
PEACE OF *PARIS*, IN 1763.

By Mr. PARKER, of LINCOLN'S-INN.

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P R E F A C E:

THE first of the following pages contain an account of the country called *The Territorial Acquisitions of the English East India Company*; consisting of the Provinces of Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa, in the Mogul empire: and with this account of the country is a short view of the history of its inhabitants, said to be about fifteen millions in number, at the commencement of our first wars among them, in the year 1757. In the pages that follow, is a state of the Evidence of our proceedings, till the servants of the India Company had completed the conquest of the country; with an account of the sums proved or acknowledged to have been received by the Company and its servants, from the princes and natives of India, to the year 1771.

THE sums proved or allowed to have been received, amount to many millions; and from the circumstances which accompanied the collection of them, it is said, in the papers referred to, that about three millions of people were destroyed, starved, and driven away from the country acquired in the name of our India Company, and under the government of its servants.

By other papers in this volume, it appears a public enquiry into the whole of these proceedings took place in 1772. The Chairman of the Committee (General Burgoyne) says, in his report of the evidence, “That such a scene of iniquity, rapine, and injustice — such unheard-of cruelties — such open violations of every rule of morality,

every tie of religion, and every principle of good government, was never before discovered ; and that, through the whole of the investigation, he could not find a single sound spot whereon to lay his finger, it being all equally one mass of most unheard-of villainies, and the most notorious corruption :—that there were accounts of crimes shocking to human nature, and transactions that were carried into execution by perfidy and murder.”

THE resolution made on this report appears to be “That great and meritorious services had been rendered to this country” by the chief person employed by the Company to that time in India : and this resolution has had the effect of an entire acquittal, both of the Company, in whose name the proceedings were carried on, and of all its servants, whose conduct to the people of India is thus reported.

IN the latter part of this volume, under the title of “An Enquiry into the general Conduct of Great Britain to other Countries,” there are a few declarations against these proceedings, in the words of persons of high rank in the state : and the design with which the whole is now laid before the public is, that the evidence may be in the way of being considered, in opposition to those opinions ; which in substance declare, that our conduct contains every injury which the people of one country can well do to those of another ; and how far it may be proper to allow all these proceedings to stand under the apparent sanction of the whole kingdom, and go down to the next and all future ages with that approval they have hitherto obtained in the age in which those transactions have taken place.

As it was a part of the following remark which first occasioned an attention to this subject, it may have its weight with the reader in leading him to consider it. — * April 16th 1772. The report

* Parliamentary Debates, vol. X. p. 71.

made of the Select Committee: Sir George Savile (who was one) informed the House; “that he wished to decline being of the Committee; that it was a sort of rule, that a Member, being against the whole of a bill, ought not to be on the Committee on such bill; that he therefore, being against the whole system of India affairs, ought not to be on that Committee. He looked on their trade as destructive, either from bringing in too great an increase of money, which would overturn the liberty of this Country, or from many of the importations, Tea especially, being destructive of the healths of the people of England. He also protested against the territorial acquisitions, as public robberies, in the name of the kingdom; that in abetting, in any sort, this kind of transaction, he should look on himself as an accomplice; he therefore hoped the House would not think he meant any disrespect in not attending the Committee.” And what is published as the words of another member of the Committee (Sir William Meredith) may give the reader a further view of this branch of our national conduct.

“By all that we read in tale or history, never did such a system exist as that, where mercantile avarice was the only principle; and force the only means of carrying on a government: comparisons of other tyrannies give no idea of English tyranny in Bengal; in Bengal the rich and poor fare alike; they who have lands are dispossessed; if money, it is extorted; if the mechanic has a loom, his manufacture is cut out; if he has grain, it is carried off; if he is suspected of having secret treasure, he is put to the torture to discover it.” And, speaking of the country, he says — “How we came by this territory, may God forgive! but, believing there is a God above us, I believe also, that acquisitions made by shedding the blood of innocent princes, and by wringing from an innocent people their substance, can never prosper.”

THE whole of these proceedings have also been summed up and made

made public in these words:—" I need not carry your Lordships
 " out of your own knowledge, or out of your own dominions, to
 " make you conceive what misery this right of taxation is capable
 " of producing in a provincial government: we need only recol-
 " lect, that our countrymen in India have, in the space of five or
 " six years, in virtue of this right, destroyed, starved, and driven
 " away more inhabitants from Bengal, than are to be found in all
 " our American Colonies. This is no exaggeration, but plain
 " matter of fact collected from the accounts sent over by Mr.
 " Hastings."

To these declarations of what the subjects of this country have done to the people of India, may be added two passages from opinions given on a question between the East India Company and one of its principal servants, as to the payment of a large yearly sum out of a part of the territory acquired in India:—" If it be
 " considered, as I think it, mere usurpation by the hand of force,
 " participated with his auxiliary, it will fall under the same con-
 " sideration as the rest of the *plundering and fraud* committed by
 " the Europeans there: this makes a history not very fit or decent
 " to be discussed by a court of justice in a civilized country."—
 " I am most clearly of opinion, that the claim has no foundation
 " in the Mogul constitution—and that his Lordship's pretensions
 " are not to be supported by any principles of municipal law or na-
 " tural justice." These are the sentiments of Lord Thurlow and Lord Ashburton, in their opinions on the case of the East India Company and Lord Clive. The grounds of that nobleman's claim being the same as the title of the Company to all those revenues of which it was but a part; the millions received by the Company, and the thousands claimed by Lord Clive, were of course equally received and claimed contrary to the principles of natural justice. And, so long as the subjects of this country, forming the India Company, continue to have the sanction of the

whole community, the conduct of the state stands in an avowed opposition to the principles of natural justice: the penalties of which are, a return of equal injuries to the society offending against those principles: for the certainty of which the history of mankind may be appealed to, as bearing one uniform testimony. — “That injustice is always productive of calamities to its authors: that they who deceive others shall be deceived themselves: the people of one nation, that spoil and plunder those of another, shall in their turn be spoiled and plundered; and they that destroy others must themselves be destroyed.” Jeremiah xxxiii. 1. Revelation xiii. 10.

THE conduct of this country to the people of Africa makes the next part of this volume. The papers on this subject contain an account of the country; the manner in which the inhabitants of it were living before we went among them; the means by which they are made slaves to the subjects of this country; the numbers brought away, and the numbers destroyed. By the papers referred to, it appears their country afforded them a plentiful supply of whatever their wants required; that in general they lived in peace among themselves; that they are made slaves to the subjects of this country by means of those inducements that are offered to them to procure us slaves, and which the most unworthy of them embrace, and fall upon their countrymen, their wives, and children, and take them by force in great numbers at once, or seize upon them wherever they are found unable to defend themselves; the persons of those only being sacred who unite in our designs, all the rest of the inhabitants of that extensive coast living in continual fear of being laid hold on and delivered into our hands, and sent away into endless slavery; to which they shew their unwillingness by defending themselves to the last degree; and in the desperate battles they fight, to prevent their being made our slaves, great numbers are annually destroyed, of which there is no account. But it appears by the accounts of the numbers taken away

by

by the subjects of this kingdom, in different years, that on an average there were more than seventy thousand men, women, and children forced away from their native country in each year during the currency of the trade, till it was interrupted by the present war; and that about about one-third part of the number either die of grief, destroy themselves, perish under the inconveniences they suffer on board of ship, or soon after they arrive in our colonies and plantations; so that in fourteen years from 1760, from which time the present age may be allowed to be answerable for its own conduct, the total number carried away from Africa, by the subjects of Great Britain, is more than six hundred and fifty thousand persons; and the number destroyed is above three hundred and twenty thousand; besides all that are killed in defending themselves from being taken and sold to us: and by some of the accounts given from those that were on the coast of that country at the time, it appears that some thousands were killed in the battles that were fought to furnish a single ship with her cargo of slaves. This seems to be the substance of what is said in the papers on this subject; but the variety of misery of which the whole is made up, is neither to be described or even conceived by any person that would sit down to consider the various stages of distress which these people are made to pass through by our means.

THAT the principles of natural justice, and all that is due from men to men, is violated and trampled under foot by this trade, need not be said; and on the side of humanity the following authorities may have their weight: — “The laws of England take no notice of negroes being different from other men—there is no such thing as a slave by the laws of England.” (Lord Chief Justice Holt.) “Whatever inconveniences may follow, I cannot say that it is allowed by the laws of England.” (Lord Chief Justice Mansfield.) “It is repugnant to reason, and the principles of natural law, that such a state should subsist any where.” (Sir William Blackstone. *)

* Lord Raymond's Reports, 1274; Mr. Lofft's, 19; Commentaries i. 423.

And if the people of this country suffered all this misery, instead of inflicting it, how justly should we think it was established by the Supreme Governor of the world, "That the people of one country, who enslave those of another, shall themselves be enslaved; and that a nation, thus allowing innocent blood to be shed by its subjects, should be made a desolate wilderness." Revelation xiii. 10. Joel iii. 19.

THE rest of these pages contain a short view of what appears to have been the conduct of the British nation to other countries—to the Caribbees of St. Vincent's—to the people of Corsica, Turkey, and Poland, &c. And it is hoped the change that has taken place in the circumstances of the British empire between the years 1763 and 1782—the whole of what we have suffered, the dangers to which we stand exposed, and the load of expence that has been laid upon the labours of industry, will warrant any attempt which may shew in the least degree the necessity of such an enquiry into our national conduct, as may discover whether this change in our circumstances may not have proceeded from ourselves, and be the just and necessary result of our own conduct; and how far it may be due to the rest of the world, and to our own safety, to reverse those national sentences which have been given within our own times, and which have had the effect of sanctions to that conduct of the subjects, which, within the last twenty years, has rendered miserable and destroyed millions of mankind; and which must lead a considerable part of the world to look forward with dread to the time when they shall hear of our recovering that state of peace, which, when last in our possession, was made use of as the season wherein to plunder, oppress, enslave, and to spread war and ruin in distant countries, whose inhabitants never came to do us any injury; and who have never received from us any acknowledgment or reparation for the wrongs they have suffered at our hands—wrong which, by the plainest rules of justice, demand the abolishing of

the very being of those trading societies, in whose names such enormities have been practised in India and in Africa, and which, so long as they continue to exist in this nation, from the character they have obtained, cannot but place the whole community, in the esteem of a great part of the world, as in a state of avowed opposition to all the rights of other nations, whenever we have the power to deprive them of their possessions or enslave their persons — a conduct which, when passing with impunity in any country, or with the countenance of any state, is as expressive of defiance of the power and justice of the DIVINE BEING, as rebellion in subjects is of contempt to the government under which they live; nothing being more consistent with reason, or more plainly declared in the revealed will of the common CREATOR of mankind, than that he himself is offended whenever any of their just and natural rights are invaded.

10th May, 1782.

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‘sent subject that can direct us to a just determination, is, Who committed the first hostilities? It is evident that the first act of hostility was committed by us; and, in my opinion, the Caribbes are justified in what they have done, and I heartily second the motion.’

Between twelve and one there were two divisions; the first on the question That it appears the measure to extirpate the Caribbes was not grounded upon sufficient reasons, but upon the opinions of persons interested in their destruction. Upon this the numbers were, 206; Opposition, 88. The second question was, That it appears the military were not sent in the proper season, and that the expedition was likely to end in the ruin of some of the best troops in the service. Upon this the numbers were, 199; Opposition, 78.— A motion was also made, and the question put, that an address be presented to his Majesty, that he would acquaint the House by whose advice the attacking the Caribbes was undertaken in the unhealthy season of the year, against the known humanity of his Majesty’s temper, disgraceful to his Majesty’s arms, and to the character of the British nation; which likewise passed in the negative.

C O N C L U S I O N.

T H I S resolution acquitted the subjects of Great Britain of any crime in all they did to the Caribbes of St Vincent’s, whatever were the number of these poor people that were destroyed in consequence of the desire to have their lands; and all the sanction which such a national acquittal can give, to the same conduct in the subjects of this kingdom in any other part of the world, remains in full force to this day.

THE accounts of the trade to Africa shew that the people of that country have, in consequence of it, been kept in a state of war and confusion, by the people of Great Britain for many years, that a great number, of which no account is given, lose their lives in the battles that are fought to force them into our hands; and that on an average of the accounts of the number taken away in different years, there appears to be more than seventy thousand yearly; and the accounts agreeing that at least one third of the number lose their lives in consequence of our taking them away, in fourteen years, from 1760, above three hundred thousand men, women and children will have been destroyed, and double that number taken into slavery to the subjects of the crown of Great Britain. And to all that these people have hitherto suffered at our hands, whenever any of our colonies or plantations may be again in a state of peace, the subjects of Great Britain have the sanction of the state to enter again upon this trade, and spread all that misery among the people of Africa, which any people must live in, who are in constant fear of being forced away without distinction of rank, age, or sex, into a foreign slavery.

THE accounts of the conduct of the subjects of Great Britain in India shews, that many millions of money have been brought away from the people of that country, by means the most unjust and violent; that the princes of India have been deprived of their dominions by force, in the name of the East India Company; and that in the course of these proceedings as many of the natives have been destroyed, or fled from the fear of us from their country, as there were of inhabitants in our American colonies before the war began—that is, about three millions.—That all this conduct down to the year 1772, has been before the representatives of the people of Great-Britain, and their solemn resolution has been, That great and meritorious services have been rendered by the principal person concerned in these transactions to that time in India, and not a single person has received blame, censure, or punishment, for any thing that has been done by the subjects of Great-Britain to the princes and nations of India, from the commencement of our first wars to the year 1772; but that the nation has made all that has been done as much its own, as that which is done by a few, can be made the act of all who participate with them in what has been obtained, and acquit them of all blame as to the manner by which they did it. And to this day that society of the subjects of this kingdom, in whose name all these crimes have been committed against every principle of justice, humanity, and whatever is allowed to be right among mankind, is suffered to have its

its being in the very bosom of the state, to have its name held up as honourable, and to receive the full patronage of the whole kingdom; and from the first knowledge of all the wrong done by the people of Great-Britain in India to this day, there has not been a single county, city, or incorporate body in the whole kingdom that has uttered a single complaint.—All that has been done, and the impunity with which the whole has been allowed to pass, has been made as public as any national concern could well be made, and neither from the whole nation, assembled by its representatives, nor from any one of the elective bodies into which the kingdom is divided, has there been a single negative, but for now nigh ten years has all this conduct obtained the uniform sanction of the state.

T H E E N D.