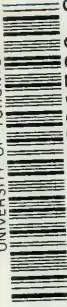


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A letter from a layman in  
India on the policy of  
the East India Company  
in matters of religion

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*From the Author.*

# A LETTER

FROM

A LAYMAN IN INDIA,

ON THE

POLICY OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY  
IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

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LONDON :

W. H. DALTON, BOOKSELLER TO THE QUEEN,  
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THE  
POLICY OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY  
IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

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Calcutta, Dec. 23, 1857.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE noticed in some of the newspapers an attempt to excuse the policy of the East India Company in matters of religion, and to create the impression that the expulsion of Dr. Judson from India, the treatment of the Serampore missionaries, and the dismissal of the converted Sepoy from the army in 1819, were merely illustrations of a bygone and exploded system, which has now no remaining influence. Even if this were the fact, the study of the past would not be unseasonable, for I am persuaded that not a little of our present sufferings must be regarded as the fruit of bygone sins. Can we suppose that the Judge of all the earth has looked with favour, or with indifference, on the long continued series of offences against His truth and His people which signalized all the early years of the East India Company's government? Look at the map of India, and consider the time when the

undaunted missionary Chamberlain first ventured up to Hurdwar, the famous gate of the Ganges, and preached the Gospel to the myriads who thronged there from all parts of India, and blush to remember that for that act he was seized by the Government, and sent down a prisoner, under a military guard, to Calcutta. Can we look at the endowment of Native shrines by professedly Christian officers; at the offerings presented in the name of Government; at the pertinacious adherence for so many years to the system of teaching in the Government colleges the errors of Hindu and Mahomedan history, science, and religion; at the records of private degradation in the Hindu tomb over one of our best known generals, and the tales of civilians heading the Mohurrum processions, and living in Native style,—and not tremble in apprehension of certain and terrible chastisements? But we are told that every thing of the kind is now altered, and that the whole spirit of the Government has changed. I should be sorry to indulge in any exaggerations, or to conceal the fact that great changes have occurred, or that many old things have passed away. But be it remembered that it was not till after a struggle in the British Parliament, that (in 1813) permission was obtained for the settlement of Missionaries in India; and that it was only in consequence of a similar struggle, that the first blow was struck (by Lord Glenelg's memorable despatch) at the connection of Government with idolatry, in its shrines and

festivals. There has been, however, an undoubted improvement in the tone of British society in India ; and public opinion began to be increasingly felt in its controlling and animating influence, from the period of the liberation of the press by Sir C. Metcalfe. Still it is certain that the old leaven is working with considerable, though diminished, influence ; and that the manifestations of it which past history affords, may at any moment be renewed, if the British people do not effectually suppress it. I wish therefore now to state some facts, which will shew that serious evils still exist, and that evidence has recently been afforded of the unsatisfactory policy of the Company's Government.

I conclude that attention at home has already been called to some of the *most* recent illustrations of our Government's real temper, such as the launch of a new Pilot brig under the heathen name of the Deva ; the proclamation of a day of Humiliation ignoring Christianity, and inviting " all faithful subjects to join in an offering of prayer ;" and the refusal to receive an address from the Kishnagur Native Christians, while addresses from the Hindus and Mahomedans were welcomed. It is a melancholy fact that up to the time of General Sir Henry Havelock's first telegraphic message attributing his success to the blessing of God, not a syllable had been published by Government from which it could be inferred that any God was acknowledged by it at all, save a brief message from our friend Henry Tucker of Benares,

who reverently referred the safety of that great city to the mercy of God. But I pass by these things, and will recapitulate as concisely as I can some facts known to you, and which I think should be known by all Christian men at home. For I much fear that unless some care be taken fully to inform the public mind, we shall see the present cry for a Christian policy in India pass away without any substantial result, just as the demand for administrative reform during the Crimean War, was speedily mocked by the appointment of General Anson to be Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army.

Do not be alarmed at my going back to the Company's Regulation, No. 39 of 1793, for it is in force, and has practical effect still. That Regulation recites, that "Cauzies (Cazis, the Mohammedan political and religious officers) are stationed at the cities of Patna, Dacca, and Moorshedabad, and the principal towns, and in the pergunnahs (districts) for the purpose of preparing and attesting deeds of transfer and other law papers, celebrating marriages, and *performing such religious duties or ceremonies* prescribed by the Mahomedan law, as have hitherto been discharged by them under the British Government;" and then in Section 4, it provides that "when the office of Cauzy in any pergunnah, city, or town, shall become vacant, the judge of the zillah, or city court, within whose jurisdiction the place may be situated, is immediately to report the vacancy to the Governor-General in Council, and recommend

such person as may appear to him best qualified for the succession, from his character and legal knowledge.”

This Regulation extends to all Bengal, Behar, and the North-western Provinces, and is in force still. And not long before the present insurrection broke out, Mr. Robertson the excellent judge of Bareilly, who was murdered by Khan Bahadoor Khan, the treacherous Mahommedan law officer, was placed in a position of great difficulty from conscientious scruples on the occasion of a vacancy in the office of Cazi of his district. He felt painfully the obligation imposed on him to nominate a Mahommedan to an office which avowedly had religious duties; and I believe that he represented his difficulty, without any satisfactory result, to the Government.

It would be now a matter of curious inquiry, how many of these “cauzies” (paid and appointed by our so-called Christian government) have remained faithful, and have not instigated rebellion in our disturbed districts!

But I pass on to another Regulation, which has had a still wider influence, and which remains unrepealed in our Indian Statute book. It is the Bengal Regulation, No. 19 of 1810.

“Whereas considerable endowments have been granted in land, by the preceding governments of this country, and by individuals, for the support of Mosques, Hindoo Temples, Colleges, and for



*other pious and beneficial purposes; and whereas there are grounds to suppose, that the produce of such lands is in many instances appropriated, contrary to the intentions of the donors,—and whereas it is an important duty of every Government to provide that all such endowments be applied according to the real intent and will of the grantor,—the general superintendence of all lands, granted for the support of Mosques, Hindoo Temples, Colleges, and for other pious and beneficial purposes,—is hereby vested in the Board of Revenue and Board of Commissioners, &c. It shall be the duty of the Board of Revenue and Board of Commissioners to take care that all endowments made for the maintenance of establishments of the above description, be duly appropriated to the purpose for which they were destined by the government, or individual by whom such endowments were granted.”*

There is a similar Regulation in the Madras Code; and under both the collectors of the various districts were clothed with the trust of superintending the application of vast amounts of property to all kinds of idolatrous and superstitious purposes.

Lord Glenelg's Despatch gave the death-blow to this system, but it still lingers in life. The Regulations are still existing, and I know of at least one case (in Jyepore) where the Christian collector is guardian of a heathen shrine. It is not many years since a judge there, represented the case to Government, and requested that Hindu trustees might be

nominated and the trust made over to them; but in official language he was (in effect) desired to mind his own business.

But let us look at the Legislation of the present year. The Penal Code of the Law Commission, originally prepared by Mr. Macaulay, after about eighteen years of continuous deliberation, was read a second time in our Legislative Council here on the 3rd January of this present year, 1857. In the Chapter of Offences relating to Religion and Caste, there are the following clauses. "Whoever voluntarily causes disturbance to any assembly lawfully engaged in the performance of religious worship, or religious ceremonies,—shall be punished with imprisonment," which may extend to three years, or with fine, or to both. This is the wording which is not very distinct. It is plain enough, however, that whoever preaches at a Hindu or Mahomedan assembly, such as their festivals, where myriads congregate, might be punished under this clause.

Again, "Whoever, with the intention of wounding the feelings or insulting the religion of any person, commits any trespass on any place of sepulture, or any place set apart for the performance of funeral rites, or offers any indignity to any human corpse, or causes disturbance to any persons assembled for the performance of funeral ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both."

This again is the exact wording. The meaning, however, is again plain enough. If you saw a party of Hindus carrying down a poor sick relative to the river side to murder him, and perform funeral ceremonies in the usual way, or a party of them engaged in a Suttee, you might not disturb them; and if you happened to walk across a Mahomedan place of interment, or sit down weary on a Mahomedan tomb, it would be a question if you had not a criminal "intention;" and *you are aware that Native Judges as well as Englishmen are to administer this law: except in the case of civil servants, who are not to be amenable to their jurisdiction!*

Further as to preaching. "Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person, or makes any gesture in the sight of that person, or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both."

I send you herewith the petition of the Missionaries, which was presented on the 30th May last, against this legislation; and I leave you to judge of the animus of the Government that could propose such a measure, and contemplate its administration by Native Judges.

To my mind a fact not less significant was "the warning" given to the "Friend of India" under the

Press Act. The offensive sentence in the "Friend" was the expression of the hope, that a hundred years hence we might have "a respected Government and a Christian population." For saying that, the "Friend of India," notwithstanding all its services to Government, was warned that it was risking suppression!

But I have heard other things. Some strange despatches are said to have come out, on the subject of Education. Whatever panic there was here, as to the work of Missions, seems to have been felt last July and August in full force in Leadenhall Street and Cannon Row. It is no secret that a letter of Sir J. Melvill, Secretary to the East India Company, (sent undoubtedly with the sanction of the Board of Control), addressed to the Under Secretary-at-War, on the 12th August last, in reference to certain Roman Catholic priests and Presbyterian chaplains for the troops, ends in these words:

*"The gentlemen appointed to these duties should be specially warned against any interference with the religion of the Natives."*

Perhaps Lord Panmure might be asked if he did so specially warn them? I hope and believe not.

But let us go back a little. It is a fact, which any Member of Parliament who would move for the papers might authenticate, that in 1846 or 1847, orders came out to Lord Hardinge, desiring him to inform all the civil and military servants of the

Company, that they must not connect themselves publicly with any Missionary undertaking. That order was communicated to the Sudder Court, and I know of one answer that was sent back. Lord Hardinge after that had the good sense to put the despatch aside altogether.

May I ask you to request some one in the House to insist upon the production of that despatch?

Then, again, there is a famous case which should be known at home, and which occurred in October, 1848. There was a lad, aged fifteen, named Baba Padarang, who was in the Mission school at Kamptee, adjoining the city of Nagpore. He was convinced of the truth of Christianity, and was about to be baptized, when a great commotion was made by the Brahmins, who instigated the Rajah of Nagpore to demand that he should be delivered up, under the treaty which bound the British Government not to interfere with the Rajah's "*disaffected subjects*." As such, the British Resident, Captain Ramsay, now Major Ramsay at Nepaul, demanded him from the Missionaries, who were compelled to surrender him. The poor lad was then cruelly treated, and was imprisoned 110 days. Of course there was no "disaffection," except his desire to be baptized. The case excited, as you may suppose, much attention at the time, and for some months afterwards; but Captain Ramsay was upheld by the Supreme Government, and the British Government did that in Nagpore, a petty dependent

state, which England would not do for the Emperor of the French in the case of Louis Blanc or Ledru Rollin. I leave you to consider this case. You will see it in the "Calcutta Christian Observer" for 1848 and 1849.

Still more recently : Mr. Graves, the respected Principal of one of the Government Colleges, was in the habit of receiving into his house on Sundays such of the young men as wished to come to read the Christian Scriptures in private. This was in Hooghly ; I think in 1850. Complaint was made to the Council of Education, and the option was given Mr. Graves of discontinuing his practice or resigning his appointment.

And so in 1854, the Calcutta Bible Society's Committee requested permission of the Council of Education to place a copy of the Christian Scriptures, in English and the vernacular languages, in the library of each Government school and college. It was notorious that the Koran was there, and the Hindu Scriptures, (such as they are) ; but the Council said, that to receive the Bible Society's grant would be a breach of "neutrality," and it was declined. Ultimately one of the members proposed that the Christian Scriptures should be purchased for the libraries, but I know not if it was done.

Soon after came out Sir Charles Wood's despatch, (signed perforce by the Court of Directors), abolishing the Council of Education, and desiring that the

Professors might be at liberty to give private religious instruction, and that the Bible should be placed in every library.

Have I said enough to show that Christian people at home have abundant need to be watchful, and to see to it that we have here a Christian policy indeed? But what does a Christian policy mean? First of all, I think, the non-recognition of Caste in any form. Let it be treated simply as East Indian slavery has been treated. If men keep it up voluntarily among themselves, well; but let us have nothing whatever to do with it. And next, the non-recognition of Hindu and Mahomedan holidays. Seasons of recreation there should be in this climate; but it is a wicked thing to sanction such abominations as the Churruck and the Hooli Poojah. Then let all customs hostile to public morals and human life, such as the public swinging at the Churruck, and the Ghaut Murders, be summarily abolished. Let the Regulations I have quoted of 1793 and 1810, be repealed at once. And let the spirit of our Government be changed. Let us not have repetitions of Baba Padarang's case. Let us not (as now) teach the Mahomedans in the Madrissa the Arabic lore that puffs them up, and which is essentially part of their anti-social and anti-Christian religion. Let us help forward elementary education through the land. Let us do justice and love mercy, not grind and oppress the ryots as heretofore. And, as a means

to these ends, let us have a single and responsible government at home, not a double government with divided responsibility. And let us have fixed responsibility here, not a Governor-General with a Council, to whose shoulders blame may be shifted. Let us use the English language here in public proceedings; and adopt a natural, and rational, and simple system in our Courts of Law. Let English enterprise be encouraged, and monopoly and exclusiveness broken down. Let us have a free press. Above all, let the Church of Christ awake to her duties, and no longer trifle with Indian Missions by sending barely one man to each half million of the population.)

I confess that I see much evil in prospect, as well as much ultimate good. We must cover a large part of the country with European, Seik, and savage Goorkha soldiers; there will be a famine in many districts; there will be terrible suffering in the hot season; the animosity of race against race will not soon be extinguished; and the day is distant when confidence and security will prevail.

Then, in Oude, is not our position most distressing? We annexed the country to deliver it, as we said, from a bad and ruinous government; and I am not one who disapproves of Lord Dalhousie's policy. The alterations that policy received at home are another matter. But the country was annexed under the express sanction of the Court of Directors,

*What right the English had to destroy the national language of a country?*



and the English Cabinet. Three regiments had just before been taken away for the Russian war. With the annexation in prospect, they were not restored, and (as declared in the House of Lords) it was not intended to restore them till July 1857—fifteen months after the annexation! Lord Canning took charge immediately the annexation was completed, on the 1st March, 1856. He took no precaution whatever to secure the country. He would not disarm the people. He disbanded great numbers of troops (44,000, I believe); a portion of the King's army he incorporated with our own; and he did not dismantle a single fort. He introduced a Revenue Settlement, which was a universal confiscation to all the chief landed proprietors; and he sent swarms of our wretched Native Law Officers into the land, who introduced the trickery and the oppression of our Courts. Poor Sir Henry Lawrence was appointed Commissioner too late. He found everything in terrible confusion. Then came the mutiny. Like his brother, Sir John, he saw (as his published telegraphic messages show) the magnitude of the crisis at a glance. While the Government here talked of a passing cloud, he bid them send for Europeans from every possible quarter. Then came the siege of Lucknow. One of the chief and best civilians in the Upper Provinces begged the Government to let Havelock invite the aid of the Talookdars, by promising to revise the settlement. His proposition

was declared to be totally inadmissible. We have now the whole country in arms against us. The people have not been informed of our future intentions; they have received no explanation of our past conduct. We are sending Goorkha savages to lay waste and destroy, and we are on the eve of a war of extermination. And this is the improved and excellent government that was to reconcile the country to the annexation!

And as to the King of Oude and his Prime Minister. We have seized their country, kept them close prisoners for months, have taken possession of the Crown jewels, and seized many of the chief men of the land as state prisoners. Have we any evidence against the King? It is said not any. What, then, is our position? What will the people of England say? What will impartial history say? Will God bless this conduct?

But I conclude that these, and all other matters relating to India, will be investigated by Parliament. There is need enough! The statements made in both Houses last Session exhibit a surprising want of information even in our most able men. But many now, who are considering the effects of past neglect, have been roused to a sense of India's claims and their own responsibilities. May it please God to raise up for us Christian rulers—men fearing God and hating covetousness—who will faithfully and firmly maintain their own principles; whose

hearts are touched with sympathy for the poor, in their spiritual and temporal distresses ; and whose example, whose influence, and whose measures, will be followed by the Divine blessing !

I am,

Yours in Christian regard,

W.

Calcutta, Dec. 23, 1857.

## POSTSCRIPT.

The above statements derive still greater importance from the reported fact, that the Board of Control has disallowed the liberal regulations of Sir John Lawrence, for the employment in Government offices in the Punjaub, of native Christians equally with other classes, from which hitherto they have been excluded. It is also rumoured that the intolerant despatch which Lord Hardinge refused to publish or enforce, is to be revived and put into operation.

Statements fully corroborative of the facts given above will be found in the following extracts from a letter addressed to "The Times" on the 8th of October last, by Mr. J. L. Thomas, late Member of Council in Madras :—

"Look, again, at the salutes from our ramparts, even on a Sunday, in honour of idolatrous and Mahometan festivals. These sounded in my ears during a long period of my residence in India."

"Look at the offerings presented in the name of the Government to idols ; to the grants from the public treasury, in seasons of famine and drought, for idolatrous rites to propitiate the Hindoo deities for rain ; and to that whole system of support and supervision of Hindoo temples and their affairs, now happily almost abolished, and which was felt by myself and by every Christian officer required to carry out the system as a practical disavowal of our Christianity. I must here remind Colonel Sykes that

this system is even now in force by law, for the legislative enactments enjoining it are still unrepealed."

"I hold the present orders of the Indian Government, putting a positive prohibition on the reading of the Scriptures by heathen and Mahometan boys in every government place of education throughout India, even when such reading is perfectly optional with, and consented to, by the youth and his parents, as a disavowal of our Christian character, and that it is, and can only be viewed as a repudiation of our faith by the Hindoo and Mahometan world."

"I cannot pass by, also, the Court's orders of comparatively a late date, sent to the Government of India, to proclaim to every native of India that they would proscribe any one of their Christian servants who should afford pecuniary aid or countenance to missions, or to any such efforts for the enlightenment of the people. These orders, I know, were not enforced, although they were, as we are expressly told by the then Chairman of the Court, in furtherance of "the policy so long observed by our Government." But why were they not enforced? Let Colonel Sykes move for these orders in the House, and when they are produced, with the minute of Mr. Frederick Millet, who upon their receipt at once placed his seat in the Supreme Council in the hands of the Court of Directors, the public may judge whether there has been, as I allege, a negation by the Government of our Christianity."

"Further, let the orders be produced interdicting any provision at the cost of Government for the Christian instruction of the degraded tribes, Naides, of Malabar, held by the Hindoo to be so impure that none but a native Christian who had risen above caste prejudices would approach them. Let us have, also, the recent orders sent in the case of the wretched uncivilized Santhals of Bengal—neither (be it observed) Hindoo or Mahometan—and contrast these orders with what has been done for the uncivilized races at the Cape, New Zealand, and elsewhere, and see whether there has not been an abnegation by our Indian Government of our Christianity."

The connection of the Government of India with idolatry is far from being at an end. The following facts are given on the authority of the *Bombay Guardian* of Nov. 21, 1857. In the Madras Presidency there are now 8292 idols and temples, receiving from Government an annual payment of £87,678. In the Bombay Presidency there are 26,589 idols and temples under state patronage, receiving grants to the amount of £30,587 10s, to which must be added the allowance for temple lands, giving a total for the Bombay Presidency of £69,859 6s. For the whole of the Company's territories there is annually expended in the support of idolatry, by the servants of the Company, the large sum of £171,558 12s.

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