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The History Of Hindostan; From The Earliest Account Of Time, To The Death Of Akbar; Translated From The Persian Of Mahummud Casim Ferishta Of Delhi

Together With A Dissertation Concerning the Religion and Philosophy of the Brahmins ; With An Appendix, Containing the History of the Mogul Empire, from its Decline in the Reign of Mahummud Shaw, to the present Times ; In Two Volumes

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State of Bengal under the East-India Company.

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STATE OF BENGAL
UNDER THE
EAST-INDIA COMPANY.

Observations on the Treaty for the Dewanny.

AN ample field lay open before us; but we have appropriated revolution and war to history. Reflections.
The present disquisition is of an inferior kind; an enquiry, which means not to irritate but to reform. Let it suffice to say, that Bengal suffered from disturbances and violent measures; and that Fortune, though unfavourable, was less fatal, than the rapacity of avaricious men. Peculiarly unhappy, an unwarlike but industrious people, were subdued by a society whose business was commerce. A barbarous enemy may slay a prostrate foe; but a civilized conqueror can only ruin nations without the sword. Monopolies and an exclusive trade joined issue with additional taxations; the unfortunate were deprived of the means, whilst the demands upon them were, with peculiar absurdity, increased.

But



Observations

But to wander no farther into declamation; though the misfortunes of Bengal began with the revolutions and changes which succeeded the death of Surage-ul-Dowla, the system, which advances still with hasty strides, to the complete ruin of that once opulent province, was established several years after that event. A noble governor sent to command in Bengal, by the East India Company, arrived in that kingdom in the May of 1765. The expulsion of the Nabob Cassim Ali, and the reduction of Suja-ul-Dowla, by our arms, had enabled the servants of the Company to establish peace upon their own terms. The treaty which they concluded was absurd; and had it been less exceptionable, it would not probably have pleased a man, who went not to India to be idle.

on the treaty

The various revolutions of Fortune, which had subjected several of the richest provinces of India to the Company's servants, threw the undoubted heir of the Mogul empire into their hands. The governor availed himself of this circumstance. Other Nabobs had converted the unfortunate prince into a tool; and it was now the turn of our governor to do the same, for the benefit of his constituents. Conscious of his power over the emperor, and having the absolute direction of a Nabob, who owed his elevation to the governor, himself, and to his own



crimes, he threw aside the former treaty. A perpetual commission for the office of Dewan, or receiver-general of the revenues of Bengal, Behâr, and Oriffa was obtained, from SHAW ALLUM, for the Company. The office of perpetual Nabob might have been as easily obtained; but the former balanced a thousand disadvantages, by rendering the nature of the tenure perplexed.

In consideration of the Imperial mandate, which, with the revenues, conferred the government of Bengal for ever on the Company, Shaw Allum was to receive an annual pension of three hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds. The annuity was moderate to the lineal successor of Timur. He was, at the same time, guaranteed in the possession of the province of Allahabâd; and thus a kind of provision was made for a prince, who retained nothing of what belonged to his illustrious ancestors, except the empty title of emperor of Hindostan. This treaty, however, though it dazzled with its splendor, was neither solid nor advantageous in itself. The emperor, instead of being placed at Allahabâd, ought to possess the province, out of which his pretended visier Suja-ul-Dowla, had been recently driven; or should that measure be supposed to invest him with dangerous power, the territories of Bulwant Singh, equal in revenue to Allahabâd, might have been conferred

with the emperor



upon him. The Company, being then in possession of all these provinces, might, by its servants, have adopted either of these systems.

Shaw Allum,

To the first measure there are no well-founded objections, and many advantages might be derived from it. The sum of three hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds might have been annually saved, which sum is now sent to a distant province, from whence it never returns. This latter circumstance is of more real prejudice to Bengal and the affairs of the Company, than if half the revenues of the province had been given to the emperor, upon condition of his keeping his court in that country. Had Shaw Allum been put in possession of the dominions of Suja-ul-Dowla, the natural inactivity of his disposition, and the extraordinary expence and magnificence, which he is, in some measure, obliged to support, would have prevented him from being so dangerous a neighbour as even Suja-ul-Dowla. The whole empire was in a state of rebellion; and we were only from convenience his friends.

for the Dewanny.

Arguments crowd in to support this position; but there are still stronger reasons for placing the emperor in the territories of Bulwant Singh. His residence, in such a case, might have been fixed at Patna or Mongeer;



geer; and our army, instead of being cantoned at Allahabad and Cora, two hundred miles from the frontier of our provinces, might have remained in Patna, in the center of our dominions. Bengal, had this measure been adopted, instead of losing the pension paid to the emperor, and the enormous expence of a brigade in a foreign country, would have been enriched by the greater part of the revenues of the territories of Bulwant Singh; for which he had paid twenty-two lacks of roupees to Suja-ul-Dowla, though in reality he collected double that sum upon the subject.

The latter position will appear more obvious from the following state. Bengal, had the measure been adopted, would annually have saved,

The pension paid to the emperor,	£. 325,000
The expence of a brigade, - - -	187,500
Twenty lacks from the territories of	
Bulwant Singh spent at Patna,	250,000
	<hr/>
	762,500

This measure alone, we may venture to affirm, would have preserved Bengal in a flourishing condition, in spite of avarice and mismanagement. It would, at the same time, have been attended with many salutary effects in our political system in India. The emperor would have been more immediately under our eye; for

Its loss and inconvenience

Observation on the

to the Company.



though he at present labours under an eclipse, he may, some time or other, shine forth like a comet, in the hands of an ambitious and able man. We are now obliged to protect and support him, under manifest disadvantages. His territories border on the Mahrattors, Jates, and Rohillas; and he is under a perpetual apprehension from these nations. Had the measure, the advantages of which we have described, been taken, Sujaul-Dowla would have come in between him and these powers; but, at present, our army at Allahabâd becomes a security to that prince; whose apprehensions would otherwise have induced him to adhere more firmly than he now shews an inclination, to his treaty with the Company.

State of Commerce in Bengal, under the Company.

Observations
on the

THE prosperity and opulence which Bengal enjoyed during the government of the house of Timur, and even under the revolted viceroys, proceeded from her lucrative commerce, as much as from the fertility of her soil. Rich in the industry of her inhabitants, she became independent of the partial rapine of impolitic governors, who plundered only to squander away. The money, which entered by injustice at one door of the treasury, was carried out at another by luxury. The court of the



Nabob was the heart, which only received the various currents of wealth, to throw it with vigour, through every vein of the kingdom.

We may date the commencement of decline, from the day on which Bengal fell under the dominion of foreigners; who were more anxious to improve the present moment to their own emolument, than, by providing against waste, to secure a permanent advantage to the British nation. With a peculiar want of foresight, they began to drain the reservoir, without turning into it any stream to prevent it from being exhausted. From observation, we descend to facts.

present com-
merce of
Bengal.

The annual investments of the Company, for which no specie is received, amounts, at an average of ten years,

to - - - - -	£. 927,500
Those of the Dutch, for which the servants of the Company take bills on Europe, for remitting fortunes acquired in Bengal, - - -	200,000
Those of the French, paid for to the natives, in the same way, - - -	350,000
Those of the Portuguese and Danes, - - -	100,000
	<u>£. 1,577,500</u>

Observations
on the



by the cruelties of Nadir Shaw; and since his assassina-
 tion, which only received the various
 Bengal, it shall hereafter appear, to
 replace all this waste, scarce annually
 receives in bullion, 100,000
 She loses, therefore, yearly, to Europe, £. 1,477,500

Cause of its
 decline

The above estimate of the exports of Bengal, for
 which she receives no specie, is formed on the prime
 cost of her manufactures. The balance against her
 comprehends the savings of the Company on the reve-
 nue, the value of British exports, the private fortunes of
 individuals, which center in this kingdom. This
 ruinous commerce with Europe is not balanced, by a
 lucrative intercourse with the various states of Asia.
 The increase of the demand for the manufactures of
 Bengal, for our markets here, and the revolutions which
 shook and greatly depopulated that kingdom, have
 raised the price of goods. The demand would, upon
 this head, sink in proportion in the East; but besides,
 the internal state of the various countries, which
 formerly exchanged bullion for the goods of Bengal, has
 been long unfavourable to foreign commerce.

with Persia,
 Egypt,

Persia, about thirty years ago a great and a flourishing
 empire, has been torn to pieces, and almost depopulated



by the cruelties of Nadir Shaw; and, since his assassination, by unremitting civil wars. The few inhabitants, who escaped the rage of the sword, sit down in the midst of poverty. Georgia and Armenia, who shared in the troubles of Persia, share also her untoward fate. Indigence has shut up the doors of commerce; vanity has disappeared with wealth, and men content themselves with the coarse manufactures of their native countries. The Turkish empire has long declined on its southern and eastern frontiers. Egypt rebelled: Babylonia, under its Basha, revolted. The distracted state of the former has almost shut up the trade, by caravans, from Suez to Cairo; from the latter of which, the manufactures of Bengal were conveyed by sea to all the ports of the Ottoman dominions.

The rapacity of the Basha of Bagdat, which is increased by the necessity of keeping a great standing force to support his usurpation, has environed with terror the walls of Bassora, which circumstance has almost annihilated its commerce with Syria. Scarce a caravan passes from the gulph of Persia to Aleppo once in two years; and when it does, it is but poor and small. Formerly, in every season, several rich and numerous caravans crossed the desert to Syria; but the few that venture at present, being too weak to protect themselves against the wan-
dering

Syria,
Babylonia,



dering Arabs, are stop'd by every tribe, and are obliged to purchase safety with exorbitant duties. Trade is in a manner unknown; the merchants of Buffora are ruined; and there were, last year, in the warehouses of that city, of the manufactures of Bengal, to the value of two hundred thousand pounds, which could not be sold for half the prime cost.

the rest of
Hindoſtan,

The number of independent kingdoms, which have started up from the ruins of the Mogul empire, has almost destroyed the inland commerce of Bengal with the upper parts of Hindoſtan. Every prince levies heavy duties upon all goods that paſs through his dominions. The merchants, who formerly came down toward the mouths of the Ganges to purchase commodities, have discontinued a trade, not only ruined by impoſts, but even unſafe from banditti. The province of Oud and Aſſam are the only inland countries with which Bengal drives, at preſent, any trade. The former has greatly the balance in its favour againſt us of late years, from the money expended by ſeven thouſand of our own troops, which till of late have been ſtationed in the neighbourhood of the dominions of Sujaul-Dowla, in conſequence of an impolitic treaty, and to answer private views. The commerce of ſalt, beetle-nut, and tobacco, with Aſſam, is almoſt balanced by
the



the quantity of silk, Mugadutties and lack, which we receive from that kingdom in return.

The trade of Bengal, with the kingdoms and islands of the eastern Asia, still continues in some degree; but it has been long on the decline. The coasting trade with the maritime provinces of Hindostan has, upon various accounts, decayed. We may venture to affirm, upon the whole, that the balance in favour of Bengal, from all its Asiatic commerce, exceeds not annually one hundred thousand pounds. The council of Calcutta have calculated it at less than half that sum. They estimated, in the year 1768, the importation of bullion into Bengal, for the space of four years, at fifteen lacks of roupees; which amounts annually to forty-six thousand pounds of our money. But the cause of this decay lies more in negligence, than in the present state of the maritime regions and islands beyond the eastern mouth of the Ganges.

and the regions of eastern Asia.

To see why
it is so

To draw a conclusion from the observations made: Though Bengal, by her industry, yields to Europe, of manufactures, to the annual amount of one million five hundred and seventy-seven thousand five hundred pounds, for which she receives nothing; yet,

Estimate of
the loss



if the balance of her trade with Asia amounts to one hundred thousand pounds, she may still continue to flourish under a proper system of internal regulation. The paradox is hitherto supportable by argument and proof; but there still remain heavy articles to be brought into the account against Bengal. Some of the articles, from their complicated nature, must be stated from opinion: Others rest on incontrovertible facts. The estimate of the first shall be made as low as possible: The latter are established beyond the power of cavil itself.

of specie
to Bengal.

The specie carried from Bengal by the expelled Nabob, Cassim Ali, is supposed	£.
to amount to	1,250,000
Specie carried away by men of property, who have deserted the kingdom since the power of the company prevailed,	2,500,000
The expences of the war, for one whole year, in the dominions of Suja-ul-Dowla, at five lacks per month; which, after deducting fifty lacks, paid by treaty by that prince, amounts to	1,250,000
Carry over	3,875,000
Specie	

Brought over	£. 3,875,000
Specie sent from Bengal to pay a brigade, consisting of seven thousand men, stationed for five years, after the peace, at Allahabâd, at the annual expence of fifteen lacks	937,500
Specie sent from that kingdom to China and Madrafs, including the expences of troops on the coast, detached from the establishment of Bengal	1,500,000
Specie brought to England	100,000
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Exported of specie	6,412,500
Deduct the imports of bullion for twelve years, at the annual sum of one hundred thousand pounds	1,200,000
<hr/>	
Decrease in the specie of Bengal since the accession of the company to the dominion of that kingdom	5,212,500

This ruinous state of the commerce of Bengal is, by no means, exaggerated. To deprive every adversary of argument, the calculations are, by the Author of the Enquiry, purposely rendered extremely low. A comparative view of the former situation of that once opulent kingdom with its present condition, will throw

Her present compared



additional light on the subject. In the days of the empire, the balance of trade for which Bengal received bullion, has been estimated at £. 1,687,500

Deduct the annual revenue sent in specie to Delhi 1,250,000

Yearly acquisition in money 437,500

with her ancient commerce.

The kingdom of Bengal, it appears, has not, in the midst of her misfortunes, fallen off greatly from her former exports of manufactures. She still sends to Europe, within one hundred and ten thousand pounds a-year of the quantity, for which she received the above balance of bullion, in the days of her prosperity. This, had not her specie been exported, would not have impoverished her. But let us suppose that her whole currency amounted to fifteen millions; the entire loss of a third part of that sum must have inevitably distressed her; and an annual decrease of near half a million must, if not prevented, in a few years, totally ruin the little commerce that still remains. The prospect is gloomy. The taxes must be lessened, and the ruin, which we have brought on an unfortunate country, will recoil upon ourselves.

Reflections on the

To illustrate the argument by comparison. Were the paper-currency of Great Britain totally suppressed,



and her gold and silver currency, which is estimated at seven millions, left for the purposes of trade and taxation, it is evident, that ruinous consequences must ensue; but none will pretend to affirm, that the nation, by such a measure, would become one farthing poorer than before. Trade, however, from the want of a sufficient quantity of the signs of wealth and property, would be cramped in all its veins. The interest of money, in spite of laws, would rise to an enormous pitch. The same want of currency would, at the same time, become such a check upon luxury, that the price of labour, and especially of provisions, would fall, unless the latter were kept up by rigorously enforcing the present taxes without abatement. The price of provisions, in that case, would rise every day, and the poor would daily become less able to purchase. The people would, in a very few years, be stripped of all their property, and national beggary would be followed by national ruin.

Bengal, from the decrease of her specie, feels, in fact, the miseries which we have in speculation just described. Were not her taxes enforced by oppression, provisions would fall in proportion to the decrease of wealth; supposing the number of inhabitants and state of cultivation to continue the same. But the reverse happens, from our endeavouring to keep up the revenues to their former

with her 20.
cient com-
metre.

ruinous state
of Bengal.



former pitch. The farmer cannot sell his grain without a price, which bears a proportion to the rents which he is obliged to pay; whilst his cultivation decreases for want of a sufficient stock. The consumer, at the same time, must have food. If he is a manufacturer or labourer, he must raise his goods or his wages to answer the price of bread. The evils of a forced state of society encrease. Famine, with all its horrors, ensues, and, by sweeping away some millions of wretched people, gives, to the unhappy survivors, the respite of a few years.

Observations on Monopolies.

Reflections

THE Monopolies established by the servants of the Company in Bengal, furnish an ample field for animadversion. But other writers have already occupied that province. The brevity which the Author of the Enquiry has prescribed to his work, induces him to pass lightly over ground that has been trodden before. It is superfluous to insist upon the prejudice which Monopoly has done to the natural rights of the natives, and to the privileges which they possessed, by prescription, from Despotism itself. This part of the subject has been handled with ability by others: we shall slightly touch upon what has escaped their observation.

Salt,



Salt, in almost every country, is one of the necessaries of life. In Bengal, which still contains near fifteen millions of people, the consumption of this article must be very great; for, besides what they themselves consume, they mix great quantities with the food of their cattle. Salt is produced by filtrating the earth near the mouths of the Ganges, and by then boiling the water which is impregnated with saline particles. The process is simple and cheap, where wood for fuel costs nothing. The low price at which salt could be conveyed through all the branches of the Ganges, rendered it an advantageous article of trade with the inland ports of Hindostan. Great quantities were sent to Benâris and Mirzapour, from the markets of which, the provinces of Oud and Allahabâd, the territories of the Raja of Bundela, and of all the petty princes of the kingdom of Malava, were supplied. This trade, by a society of Monopolists in Calcutta, was seized in the year 1765. Avarice got the better of prudence; and a rage for present gain cut off all future prospects. The article of salt was raised two hundred *per cent.*; and the foreign purchasers, finding that they could be supplied at a much cheaper rate with rock-salt from the dominions of the Rohillas near Delhi, this valuable commerce at once was lost.

on the ruin-
ous



Monopolies
in Bengal.

Beetle-nut and Tobacco have, by the strength of habit, become almost necessaries of life in Hindostan. The first is produced in many parts of the Decan; and the latter is cultivated over all the empire. There was, however, a considerable exportation from Bengal in these articles; and it, unfortunately for that country, attracted the notice of the Monopolists. But, as if Monopolies were not sufficient to destroy the inland commerce of Bengal, with the rest of Hindostan, an edict was issued, in the year 1768, prohibiting all the servants of the Company, the free merchants, Armenians, Portuguese, and all foreigners whatsoever, from carrying goods beyond the limits of our province, under the pain of confiscation, and the severest punishments inflicted on their agents.

The Directors vindicated.

The Court of Directors, it is but justice to declare, have invariably opposed the above-recited destructive monopolies. But the commands of fugitive and transient masters are weak in opposition to interest. The fluctuations in Leadenhall-street, deprived the mandates which issued from it of all their authority; and the presidency abroad frequently received orders, from their constituents at home, with the same inattention that the Nizâm of Golconda would pay to the Firmân of the unfortunate



unfortunate Shaw Allum. The Directors, in short, are only to blame in an acquiescence to a disobedience to the orders of their predecessors in office. Carrying frequently the animosity of prior contention into their measures, they forgot the attention due to their own power, in the pleasure of seeing a slur thrown on that of their opponents. They are also blameable for the suspicious veil of secrecy with which they affect to cover their affairs. The door of information is, in some measure, shut up; the inferior servants are precluded, by an ill-founded fear, from laying open to them the state of Government abroad, and it was perhaps the interest of their superior servants to conceal a part of the truth. Substantial darkness has by these means settled on objects, which, it is even the interest of the Company, as well as of the nation, should be known to the world.

Mode of collecting the Revenues.

THE princes, whom we raised in Bengal, vanished imperceptibly from their thrones. Light and unsubstantial as the shew of power with which, as in derision, we invested them, they disappeared, like Romulus, but without a storm. The benefits derived from former revolutions, created a love of change; and the angel of



death, if not our friend, was opportune in his frequent visits to the Mufnud. In the course of five years, three Nabobs expired; and the unfledged sovereign, who acceded to the nominal government of Bengal on the March of 1770, has enjoyed already, considering the times, a long reign. Nabobs, to own the truth, are useless; and they are dismissed to their fathers, without either ceremony or noise.

Nabobs.

In the year 1765, upon the demise of Jaffier, whom we had, for the first time, raised in 1757 to the government for his convenient treachery to his master, Nijim-ul-Dowla, his son by a common prostitute, was, in the eighteenth year of his age, placed upon the throne, in the capital of Murshedabad. Soon after the accession of this prince, a noble governor, on the part of the Company, arrived at Calcutta, and executed the treaty which has furnished materials for a preceding section. Mahommed Riza, a man of less integrity than abilities, was made prime minister; activity being a virtue more necessary to the intention of his creation than honesty. The wretched Nijim-ul-Dowla was a mere name; a figure of state more despicable, if possible, than the meanness of his family and parts. The whole executive government turned upon Mahommed Riza. A resident was sent from Calcutta to check the accounts of the



nominal government; as if one man, who knew very little of the language, manners, and opinions of the people, could prevent the frauds of an artful minister, and ten thousand of his dependents, versed in the management of finance. The consequence might be foreseen with little penetration. Unable, and perhaps unwilling to oppose the current, the resident fell down with the stream, and became so far a check upon Mahommed, that he appropriated to himself a part of what the minister might otherwise have thrown into his own treasure.

Mahommed Riza, as a small salary of office, received annually one hundred and twelve thousand five hundred pounds, with three hundred and seventy five thousand pounds a-year to be distributed in pensions among his friends. The minister, with his other good qualities, had no local attachment to friends. They were of various complexions and religions; fair-faced Europeans, as well as swarthy Indians; and, though professing Mahomedanism himself, he was so far from being an enemy to the uncircumcised, that it is said the most of his pensions and gratuities were bestowed on good Christians born in Great Britain and Ireland. Mahomed, however, did not take up his whole time with acts of benevolence to our nation. He applied himself to

Mahommed
Riza Chan.



business; and he was more rigid in executing the government which the revolted Nabobs had established in Bengal, than fond of introducing innovations more favourable to the prosperity of the country.

Impolit'c

The Nabobs of Bengal, it has been already observed, began the ruinous policy of farming out the lands annually; leaving the wretched tenants to the oppression and tyranny of temporary Zemindars. At the commencement of every year, there is a general congress of all the great farmers, at the capital of Bengal; which meeting is, in the language of the country, called *Punea*. The object of the congress is to settle the accounts of the former year, and to give the lands for another, to the highest bidder. The competition between the farmers is favourable to the private interest of Mahommed Riza, and his friend the resident; but it is destructive to the poor, and consequently to the Company's affairs.

and cruel

The charge of travelling, from the more distant divisions of the province, and the expence of living in the capital, are but a very inconsiderable part of the loss of the farmers in this visit to court. Pretences are never wanting to intimidate them, on account of their past conduct; and where no competitors offer of themselves, some are created by the minister, to raise anxiety and terror.



terror. Presents are an infallible remedy for quashing all enquiries into former oppressions; and a bribe secures to them the power of exercising, for another year, their tyrannies over the unhappy tenants. It would be endless to trace the intrigues of the farmers upon this occasion: it would be difficult to expose all the artful villany of the minister. The Zemindars, however wealthy they may be, feign such poverty, as not to be able to make up the balances of the preceding year. They have even been known to carry the farce so far, as to suffer a severe whipping before they would produce their money.

The avarice of Mahommed Riza is the cause of this unmanly behaviour in the wretched farmers. When they seem rich, the impost is raised; and the bribe must in proportion be greater. Their love of money is often more powerful than the fear of bodily pain. When they have long groaned under the lash, some banker or money-broker appears, who, for the exorbitant interest of ten per cent. per month, discharges the debt. The farmer, by such means as these, often deceives the vigilance of the minister and resident, and obtains his lands for another year, because no one else will offer a sum which the possessor finds so much difficulty to pay. A friend, in the secret, gives security for the rents;



and a present, thrown into the hands of the minister, suspends, for the time, the discipline of the whip.

collecting
the revenue.

In the year 1767, the Author of the Enquiry, who resided, at the time, in Bengal, had the curiosity to calculate the expence of the Bundubuff, or yearly settlement. He formed his estimate from the accounts of various Zemindars, and he avers, without exaggeration, that the expences amounted to twenty-seven and one-half per cent. of the rents of their lands; which may amount to a million sterling. These trivial perquisites were shared between Mahommed Riza, his friends, and the bankers of Murshedabad. The place of the Company's resident at the Durbâr, or the court of the Nabob, was HONESTLY worth one hundred and fifty thousand pounds a-year.

The bad

These embezzlements and fraudulent practices were not, however, so detrimental to the Company's affairs, from the actual decrease in the revenues, as from the general depravity of manners, and the oppressions which they introduced. When the sources of government are corrupted, they poison the whole stream. Every petty officer in the state, every clerk of the revenues, assumed the tyrant in his own department. Justice was totally suspended; and the fear of being plundered by a superior,

rior,



rior, was the only check that remained against the commission of the most atrocious crimes. Every instance of abstaining from the most cruel oppressions, proceeded from indolence: every act of tyranny from the love of money. The distemper of avarice, in the extreme, seemed to infect all, whom the wrath of God against a devoted people, had placed in power.

The consequences of this mode of letting the lands of Bengal, were such as might, with little foresight, have been expected; had not stronger impressions, than those of reason been necessary to convince men of a profitable error. Nothing in the conquered provinces was premeditated but rapine. Every thing, but plunder, was left to chance and necessity, who impose their own laws. The farmers, having no certainty of holding the lands beyond the year, made no improvements. Their profit must be immediate, to satisfy the hand of Avarice, which was suspended over their heads. Impressed with the uncertainty of their situation, they raised the rents, to the last farthing, on the wretched tenants; who, unwilling to forsake their ancient habitations and household gods, submitted to impositions which they could not pay. They looked up to Heaven in their distress; but no redress remained for the wretched.

consequences

Year



of that mode.

Year after year brought new tyrants, or confirmed the old, in the practice of their former oppressions. The tenants being, at length, ruined, the farmers were unable to make good their contracts with government. Their cruelty to their inferiors recoiled, at length, on themselves. Many of them were bound to stakes and whipped; but their poverty ceased to be feigned. Their complaints were heard in every square of Murshedabâd; and not a few of them expired in agonies, under the lash. Many of the inferior tenants, reduced to despair, fled the country, hoping to derive from other despotisms, that lenity, which our indolence, to speak the best of ourselves, denied. Those that remained were deprived of the small stock necessary for cultivation; and a great part of the lands lay waste. Every governor thought it incumbent upon him to keep up the revenues to their former pitch; but, in spite of the permitted cruelty of Mahommed Riza, they continued, every year, to decrease. It could not have happened otherwise; unless Heaven had wrought miracles as a reward for our VIRTUES.

Wretched
state of the
country.

In proportion as an unfortunate people became less able to bear the established taxation, the modes of collecting it became more oppressive. Seven entire battalions were added to our military establishment to enforce



inforce the collections. They carried terror and ruin through the country; but poverty was more prevalent than obstinacy every where. This new force became an enormous expence to the Company; and the unnatural pressure on the people raised the price of provisions. The manufacturers, to be able to purchase bread, shewed an inclination to raise the price of their goods. It was soon perceived that, should this be permitted, the manufactures of Bengal would not answer in Europe, so as even to indemnify the Company for prime cost, for duties and other expences, exclusive of the profit which a commercial body had a right to expect. The prices must be kept down; but this could not be done without violence. Provisions became daily dearer; and the demand for goods encreased.

The officers chiefly employed in the management of the revenues, being needy adventurers from Persia and the upper India, carried avarice, as well as the arbitrary ideas of their own distracted governments, into their departments. Solicitous to obtain an immediate advantage to themselves, they forgot the interest of their employers; and practised every species of rapine and violence on the timid inhabitants of Bengal. The wealth, which, in the space of a few years, they accumulated, enabled them to return into their native

from the
officers



countries; and thus they furnished another cause of the decline of specie in the kingdom. These foreign collectors maintained a numerous train of needy dependents, who, under the protection of their tyrannical masters, assumed the privilege of rapine and peculation. Venality ceased to be a crime; and dexterity in the art of imposition, was deemed a recommendation to the first offices of trust.

of govern-
ment.

Mahommed Riza made it his invariable policy to keep the servants of the Company in ignorance of the true state of affairs; and when any deception was practised, another was formed to conceal it from view. He entered into a collusion with many of the farmers. Occasional accounts were framed; and the usual accounts were studiously involved in inextricable confusion. Men, averse to trouble, throw them aside; and neglect their duty in their indolence. The servants of Mohommed Riza not only escape censure, but retain their places; and thus iniquity furnishes to itself a new field, for a repetition of its execrable talents.

Extortions

To investigate the various demands and extortions of the Aumins, or the protectors of the people, who, instead of defending, pillage their charge, would be endless. These, by a collusion with the Zemindars, prey with

with them on the unfortunate tenants. The Gomâstas, or agents, Dellols, Pikes, Pikars, Burkândaz, and other vermin, employed in the collection and investment, establish a thousand modes of oppression and extortion. An ignorant and unhappy people see these officers of government through the medium of fear; and comply, in melancholy silence, with their exorbitant demands. No collector, not even his principal servant, travels over any part of his district, without imposing upon the village in which he chuses to rest, a tax of rice, fowl, kid, fruits, and every other luxury of the table, for himself and his dependents. He also levies fines, at pleasure, for frivolous offences, and under various, and often false pretexts. The crime consists, in the ability of the person to pay the fine; and nothing but excess of misery and poverty is safe from the griping hand of Avarice.

The Zemindars, or principal farmers, copy the officers of government, in tyranny. The Riots, or wretched tenants, are forced to give their labour gratuitously, to this transitory lord of a year, whenever he chuses to employ their toil in his fields, when their own farms lie waste for want of cultivation. There is not one article of consumption with which the poor tenants are not obliged to supply the general farmer.

of the collectors.



The quantity brought is frequently more than his consumpt demands; and, in these cases, they are forced, under the inspection of his servants, to carry their own property to market, and to dispose of it for the use of their lord. They even frequently raise or fall the exchange upon the roupees, against the wretched husbandmen; and, without even the strength of custom, they exact, from the lower sort, fees upon births, marriages, and contracts. There is scarce an occurrence upon which they have not invented arbitrary imposts.

Negligence
of the Com-
pany,

The Company, having never examined into the real tenures by which many possess their lands, left an ample field for sequestration, fraud, and encroachment. The Talookdars, or the favourites and dependents of former Nabobs, hold, by grants from their patrons, extensive tracts of land. Some of these grants convey a kind of freehold; others, estates at a very low rent, possessing, besides, particular exemptions and extraordinary immunities. These alienations were never valid, in the days of the empire, without being renewed by every viceroy; and no good reason remains, why they should now exist, as the illegal means of oppression, in the hands of petty tyrants. They have even added encroachment upon the adjacent lands, to the injustice by which they possess their own; and they have presumed to lay tolls on ferries,

ferries, and imposts upon markets, even beyond the limits of their imperfect grants. This encroachment on the rights of the Company is, however, a kind of benefit to the people. The possessor of the grant, considers the lands which it describes, as his own property; and he is, from a natural selfishness, more a friend to his inferiors than the fugitive Zemindar of a year.

To render clear affairs hitherto little understood, we must descend into more particulars. The frauds and oppressions committed in Bengal, in the collection of the revenue, are as various as they are without number. The interior policy subsisting in that kingdom, will throw new light on the subject. Some of the lands in Bengal go under the designation of Comâr, having no native tenants, being cultivated by vagrant husbandmen, who wander from place to place in quest of labour. A farmer takes frequently large tracts of these lands upon contract. He obliges himself to be answerable to government for the produce; but he keeps the accounts himself. The vagrant husbandmen whom he employs, having neither implements of agriculture nor stock, are, from time to time, supplied with small sums by the farmer, and, when the harvest is gathered in, he appropriates to himself two thirds of the crop; after paying himself from the remainder, for the interest of the sums advanced to the vagrants. The accounts delivered in to government contain

in examining
into



contain every thing but the truth; and this mode, from our indolence, becoming most profitable to the Zemindar, he wishes to depopulate the country, in some measure, for his own gain.

various

The lands, which are under the immediate management of government, are, in the language of the country, called Cofs. They differ from the Comâr in various particulars. Stewards are appointed to superintend them, without the power of making new contracts with the tenants, or of raising upon them the rents, being accountable only for the rents of the lands, as they stand upon the rolls of the district. These rolls, however, are in general false and defective. Some lands, to serve particular friends, are greatly under-rated; and others are entirely concealed by the address of the stewards. To grant certain immunities to the stewards themselves, was formerly much in practice. They were permitted to possess, for their subsistence, gardens, pastures, ponds for fish, and fields for rice. These privileges have been greatly enlarged since Bengal fell under the Company; and the stewards have fixed no decent bounds to their encroachments.

fictitious tenures.

The lands distinguished by the name of Riotty, are possessed and cultivated by the native inhabitants under Zemindars, or farmers, who contract for them with government for an annual sum. The rents are partly levied,

vied on a measurement, and partly on the various productions which are sent to market, and converted into money by the farmer. The ruinous effects of this mode of collecting the revenue have been already explained. There are, besides, great quantities of waste lands, which are of two kinds; lands struck off the public books, at a former period, which are now cultivated, but not brought to account; and such as are really waste, which comprehend at least one fourth part of Bengal. Of the former there are many large fertile tracts, well cultivated, which have been appropriated by Zemindars and their dependents; and they find means, in their accounts, with an indolent government, to avoid all scrutiny into their usurpations.

To add to the mismanagement, lands are set apart for almost every officer under the government; a mode of salary which makes no appearance upon the annual accounts, but which, notwithstanding, amounts to more than all the apparent charges of collection. Great hurt arises to the revenues from this practice, and the abuse subsists without reformation. The lands of all the officers ought instantly to be resumed, and their salaries to be paid out of the exchequer. Many of the collectors have also imposed partial duties upon the subject; and thus have added oppression and injustice to the people, to their usurpations upon government.

and encroachments.

Justice



Perversion of
justice.

Justice is suffered to be greatly perverted by the officers above specified, and others, who, from their inherent art or abilities, substitute their own decisions where government have established no legal judges. The custom of imposing mulcts and fines in all cases, is an intolerable grievance to a wretched people. The rich suffer, by having money to give; the poor, by being deprived of restitution, because they have none. Every Mahomedan, who can mutter over the Coran, raises himself to a judge, without either licence or appointment; and every Brahmin, at the head of a tribe, distributes justice according to his own fancy, without controul. The latter threatens the ignorant with the dreadful punishment of excommunication; and thus his own moderation becomes the measure of the fums which he receives from an unfortunate race of men.

Salutary regulations
made in
1770.

Such, in the year 1767, was the true state of Bengal: but, it is to be hoped, that the regulations of 1770 have reformed many abuses. A plan was in that year digested, and begun to be carried into execution by men who could not be strangers to any one of the above particulars; though, from their strict adherence to the regulations of a noble governor, to which they were tied down by express orders from the Court of Directors, the abuses were permitted to exist till the country was beggared and depopulated. The effect



which the plan may have, cannot yet be estimated with precision. Were we, however, to judge from the improvements in Burdwan, which has been under the management of a very able servant for some years past, and has greatly increased in revenue and population, the new regulations will be attended with very considerable advantages to the Company. But even Burdwan owed part of its prosperity to the misery and distress of the surrounding districts. The plan adopted will be far from effectuating the reformation and increase of the revenue which are now required; for the balance of the revenue could, in the year 1770, hardly discharge the four hundred thousand pounds paid annually to government. If our information is just, what mighty advantages have the Company derived from their great acquisitions in Bengal?

Idea of the present Government of Bengal.

THE total suspension of all justice, among the natives of Bengal, was another cause of national decay. Men who retained some property in spite of the violence of the times, instead of being protected by British laws, found that they had not even the justice of a despot to depend upon when they were wronged. The officers of the Nabob, AS THEY WERE CALLED, committed

Total suspension of all justice.



mitted every species of violence, under the pretence of the orders of the Company. When any person complained to the governor and council, he was referred back to those very men of whom he had complained. The heavy crime of having appealed to British justice was thrown in his face, by oppressors who were at once judges and party; and ruin and corporal punishment were added to his other wrongs. The spirit which asserts the natural rights of mankind, was called insolence, till it was totally broken by oppression; and men were even cautious in venting their complaints in secret, fearing that the very walls of their most private apartments had ears.

Every thing
left to the
summary de-
cision of
placemen
Kings.

Apology for
the Compa-
ny's gover-
nors.

These grievances, however, proceeded not from the inhumanity of the British governors in Bengal. The Author of the Enquiry can aver, from personal knowledge, that the successors of a certain noble lord were men of probity and honour, enemies to oppression and cruelty of every kind. But the whole weight of such a monstrous and heterogeneous chaos of government, consisting of military, political, commercial and judicial affairs, falling upon the shoulders of men unexperienced in the regulation and management of the great machine of state, it was impossible for them to give the necessary attention to all departments. The multiplicity of af-
fairs.



fairs overwhelmed them with its weight; and the kingdom suffered more from a total want of system, than from any premeditated design.

The courts of justice, which the wisdom of the house of Timur had established in the cities, and various divisions of the provinces, were either annihilated, or they lost their power under the summary despotism of the revolted Nabobs. Mahommed Riza, as the acting minister, had the whole executive power in his hands; and those who retained the name of judges were only the executioners of his partial and violent decisions. The Company's governor could not, in the nature of things, enter into the cause of every individual, in a very populous kingdom. When he consulted his own ease, he yielded to a kind of necessity; and he had to his own conscience the plausible excuse of having remanded the complaints to the judgment of a man who was perfectly acquainted with the manners, customs and prejudices of the natives.

Every thing left to the summary decisions of Mahommed Riza.

But even friendship itself will not permit the Writer of the Enquiry to justify the political conduct of any of those men who possessed the supreme power in Bengal. Many regulations, obvious in themselves, might have been formed; many pernicious practices be abolished,

Impolitic and ruinous



lished, which have been continued either through negligence or motives of another kind. Among the latter, ought to be numbered the custom of striking roupees every year, and issuing them out at five per centum above the real weight and standard. To explain the subject, a dry dissertation must be introduced. The new-coined roupees are issued from the mint at sixteen per centum more than the current roupee; a coin merely imaginary, for the convenience of reducing all money to a certain denomination. The Sicca roupee, as the coin is called, continues to circulate, at the above value, till towards the latter end of the first year. The dealers in money, as the roupee loses three per centum of its value at the beginning of the second year, refuse to receive it in payment, without a deduction of one or two per centum as it advances to that period.

conduct of

In the beginning of the second year, the roupee, by this most preposterous of all regulations, has lost three per centum of its imaginary value. In this manner it continues gradually to fall, till the third year after coinage; and, from that time forward it remains at eleven per centum, the intrinsic value of the silver. The possessor of the roupee may then, upon the payment of three per centum to the mint, have the same re-coined into a new Sicca of the imaginary value of sixteen per centum.

This



This gain of two per centum is intended as an inducement to bring in the silver, that the government may have an opportunity, every year, of robbing the public of three per centum upon the greater part of their current specie. To support this most iniquitous system, the revenues are directed to be paid in the new Sicca roupees, otherwise the money-changer will make such deductions, as must occasion a very considerable loss to the unfortunate people. This evil is attended by another. The course of exchange in the markets varies toward the worst, from this cruel regulation by government, from combinations among the bankers, and the demand for particular roupees to discharge the revenue.

This mode of levying an annual tax on the silver currency, is not of the invention of the British governors of Bengal. The regulation derived its first existence from the well-known bankers, the Jaggat Seats of Murshedabad, in the short reign of the inconsiderate Surageul-Dowla. The error lies in its being adopted. But we drop this part of the subject, and return to the present state of government. To do justice to the Court of Directors, their repeated orders have checked the violence and rapine of the nominal government of the Nabob. Some of the Company's servants superintend, in various

the mint.

to Subna

various



various divisions of the country, the collection of the revenue. The pension, and emoluments of Mahommed Riza have been lessened with his power. The kingdom, in point of civil regulation, if civil regulation can exist without regular courts of justice, is on a better footing than before. But much remains to be done! The distresses of an unfortunate people continue to increase, through causes which must be explained.

General Observations.

Conclusions

THE idea of the present state and government of Bengal conveyed, in the preceding sections, justifies the following conclusion, That the Company, in the management of that great kingdom, have hitherto mistaken their own interest. To increase the revenues was the point to which their servants invariably directed their attention; but the means employed defeated their views, and became ruinous to a people whom their arms had subdued. Though they exported the specie, though they checked commerce by monopoly, they heaped oppression upon additional taxes, as if rigour were necessary to power.

Much

Much penetration was not necessary to discover, that it was not by the revenues of Bengal alone that either the British nation or the Company were to be enriched. A country destitute of mines, deprived of foreign commerce, must, however opulent from better times, in the end be exhausted. The transitory acquisition, upon the opinion that all the specie of Bengal had centered in Great Britain, would have no desirable effect. The fugitive wealth would glide through our hands; and we would have only our folly to regret, when the sources would happen to become dry. Bengal, without ruin to itself, could spare none of its specie; and the objects to which our aim should have been directed, are as obvious as they are salutary. We ought to have encouraged agriculture, the trade with the rest of Asia, and internal manufacture.

Agriculture constitutes the wealth of every state, not merely commercial. Bengal, a kingdom six hundred miles in length, and three hundred in breadth, is composed of one vast plain of the most fertile soil in the world. Watered by many navigable rivers, inhabited by fifteen millions of industrious people, capable of producing provisions for double the number, as appears from the desarts which oppression has made; it seems

marked



marked out, by the hand of Nature, as the most advantageous region of the earth for agriculture. Where taxes are moderate, where security of property is joined to a rich soil, cultivation will encrease, the necessaries of life will become cheap, as well as the gross materials which manufacturers require. Manufactures, by these means, would not only fall in their price, but they would be produced in a greater quantity; larger investments might be made by the Company, the consumption would encrease, and the profits rise. Bengal can, in short, be only useful in the prosperity and industry of its inhabitants. Deprive it of the last remains of its wealth, and you ruin an unfortunate people, without enriching yourselves.

preceding

In the place of those placid regulations, which render mankind useful to their lords, we substituted, with preposterous policy, force, the abrupt expedient of barbarous conquerors. The pressure of taxation has, in the space of a few years, trebled the price of provisions of all kinds. The Company have, in the mean time, been endeavouring, by every possible measure, to encrease their investments, without raising the price. Various oppressions have, for this purpose, been adopted. This wretched expedient is of short duration. The manufacturer



may, for one year, perhaps for two, redouble his industry; but whilst the works of his hands is forced from him at a stated and arbitrary price, he sinks under an uncommon effort, subject to despair. The principal servants of the Company, to conceal the evil, have found themselves obliged, either to remit in the quality of the goods, or to raise the price to the manufacturer. Both expedients have been in part adopted; but it is a temporary remedy, without the hopes of effectuating a cure.

The reasons already mentioned have contributed to destroy the trade of Bengal with the rest of Asia. Merchants can only procure the gleanings of the Company. The quality is inferior, and the prices high. Nations, formerly supplied from Bengal, found themselves under the necessity of establishing manufactures of the same kind at home, or to adapt their clothing to their poverty. Argument on this head is superfluous. The plan must be totally and radically changed. The question is not to oblige the people to become silk-winders, spinners and weavers, and to take the fruits of their labour, as it is practised at present, at an arbitrary price. Industry cannot be forced upon a people; let them derive advantage from toil, and indolence shall lose its

Observations.



hold. Ingenuity expires under the foolish despotism which defeats its own ends; and human nature, in its most wretched state, revolts against labour, which produces nothing but an increase of toil.

FOR RESTORING BENGAL

TO ITS FORMER PROSPERITY.

Preliminary Observations.

Reflections on the Government of India.

GOVERNMENT, among the natives of a country, rises imperceptibly from that impendable obscurity with which time and barbarism have covered the origin of mankind. When states are subdued by foreign enemies, who are advanced in the arts of civil life a new constitution generally starts up from their pressure upon the old. Some laws of the conquerors must necessarily supersede some of the regulations of the conquered; but the ancient form of government remains in all the lesser departments of the state. When the conquerors extended their empire over that country, many of the indigenous laws of the northern nations of Asia were introduced; but the great system, in most of its parts, descended from

