

**CORRESPONDENCE RELATING
TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
AN ORIENTAL COLLEGE IN
LONDON**

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PHILINDUS ORIENTAL COLLEGE (LONDON)

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RELATING TO

THE ESTABLISHMENT

OF AN

ORIENTAL COLLEGE

IN LONDON.

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WITH NOTES AND ADDITIONS.

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No. I.

THE NEGLECT OF THE STUDY OF THE INDIAN LANGUAGES CONSIDERED AS A CAUSE OF THE INDIAN REBELLION.

To the Editor of the Times.

SIR,

It is one thing to inquire into the causes of a rebellion, another to inquire into the causes of its partial success. To remove the causes of a rebellion is in many cases impossible, in some even undesirable; but to guard against its possible success is under all circumstances the duty of a watchful Government. The sudden and unexpected explosion of a rebellion, if successful only for a few days, causes irreparable mischief by the first unchecked outburst of lawless passion and ferocity; and nothing is more incumbent upon the governors of a conquered country than to keep themselves well informed of the state of public feeling, to watch every point indicated as dangerous, and to be prepared on these points for every emergency.

Whatever the causes of the Indian rebellion may have been, one thing is clear and admitted by all parties: the Government was taken entirely by surprise. The civil and military officers of the East India Company had been as ignorant of the state of public feeling among the natives of India, as of the state of public feeling among the inhabitants of the moon. This is a fact not to be lost sight of in the troubled waters of politics. We may turn a deaf ear to all personal accusations and recriminations. But this one fact remains unshaken. 50,000 English lived in daily contact with 150,000,000 of natives, employing them as servants, using them as assistants, intrusting them with the military defences of the country, and raising them in many cases to places of considerable responsibility and emolument, and not one of the 50,000 knew what was known, more or less, to every one of the 150,000,000; and not one of the 150,000,000 gave warning to any one of the 50,000. The Greeks would have said that the gods had interposed a cloud, a natural philosopher might suppose that there was a kind of non-conductor, between the two parties. And, indeed, there was such a cloud; there was such a non-conductor. It was the ignorance of the language that prevented the officers of the East India Company from having any real intercourse with the natives, and taking any interest in their personal conversation. It was the ignorance of the language which created a feeling of estrangement, mistrust, and contempt on both sides. If we travel in France and do our best to learn something of the language, we are apt

to treat every Frenchman who will kindly carry on a conversation with us with marked respect. Whatever our superiority may be in all other respects, we admit, at least, that the Frenchman speaks French better than we do, and we give him credit for it. But once let us make up our minds that it is useless to try to learn their jargon, that if we do them the honour of travelling through their country it is their business to find out what we want, and the result will be that we are laughed at and disliked, and that we return the same feelings with ample interest.

At the end of such a continental journey our views of the manners, the feelings, the policy, and religion of the country we travelled through, though we may lay them down with great authority, are about as likely to be correct as the views which the majority of the civil and military officers entertain about the natives of India. This was not always so. In former times there were always (among the civilians particularly) a few eminent men who had acquired a thorough knowledge of the spoken dialects, who were familiar with the ancient literature and the various systems of religion of the country, and who had studied the national and religious prejudices of the natives in the very sources from which they flowed. These men—and we mention at random the names of Sir William Jones, Colebrooke, Macnaghten, Wilson, Sleeman, Mill—were respected and trusted by the natives, and they formed a kind of channel through which a knowledge of the real state of the feeling of the country with regard to any measure of importance could be obtained. The presence of any one of these men at Delhi or Lucknow would have been worth a regiment,—nay, many regiments. During the last 20 years, however, the prosecution of Oriental studies has been systematically discouraged. A fond hope was entertained that English would soon become the general language of India, and an impression got abroad that the time given to the study of Arabic and Sanskrit and Hindustani was sheer waste. At how much a knowledge of the languages of India was valued may be seen by the regulations now in force with regard to the examination of candidates for the Indian civil service. In the first examination a candidate may gain 375 marks by Sanskrit and Arabic. He may gain as many marks by Italian. In the second examination (which has simply been dropped without any bill of indemnity being asked for) a candidate cannot gain more than 200 marks by one of the vernacular languages. He may gain 1,000 marks by law, 400 by political economy, 400 by the history of India. These facts speak for themselves.

Lest it should be supposed that we exaggerate the impediments which a deficient knowledge of the vernacular dialects throws into the way of a familiar and easy intercourse between the governing and governed classes of India we add a few extracts from competent authorities :—

Lieutenant-Colonel Sleeman, one of the most distinguished officers of the East India Company, a man always quoted as one of their crack Oriental scholars, writes, after a long life spent in the service of the Company:—

“The best of us Europeans feel our deficiencies in conversation with Mahomedans of high rank and education, when we are called upon to talk upon subjects beyond the every-day occurrences of life. A Mahomedan gentleman of education is tolerably well acquainted with astronomy as it was taught by Ptolemy; with the logic and ethics of Aristotle and Plato, with the works of Hippocrates and Galen, through those of Avicenna, or, as they call him, Boosalee Shena; and he is very capable of talking upon all subjects of philosophy, literature, science, and the arts, and very much inclined to do so, and of understanding the nature of the improvements that have been made in them in modern times. But, however capable we may feel of discussing these subjects, or explaining these improvements in our own language, we all feel ourselves very much at a loss when we attempt to do it in theirs. Perhaps few Europeans have mixed and conversed more freely with all classes than I have, and yet I feel myself sadly deficient when I enter, as I often do, into discussion with Mahomedan gentlemen of education upon the subject of the character of the Governments and institutions of different countries—their effects upon the character and condition of the people; the arts and sciences; the faculties and operations of the human mind, and the thousand other things which are subjects of every-day conversation among educated and thinking men in our own country. I feel that they could understand me quite well if I could find words for my ideas. But these I cannot find, though their languages abound in them; nor have I ever met the European gentleman who could. East Indians can, but they commonly want the ideas as much as we want the language. The chief cause of this deficiency is the want of sufficient intercourse with men in whose presence we should be ashamed to appear ignorant; this is the great secret, and all should know and acknowledge it. We are not ashamed to convey our orders to our native servants in a barbarous language. Military officers seldom speak to their sepahes and native officers about anything but arms, accoutrements, and drill, or to other natives about anything but the sports of the field; and as long as they are understood they care not one straw in what language they express themselves. The conversation of the civil servants with their native officers takes sometimes a wider range; but they have the same philosophical indifference as to the language in which they attempt to convey their ideas; and I have heard some of our highest diplomatic characters talking without the slightest feeling of shame or embarrassment to native Princes on the most ordinary subjects of every day's interest in a language which no human being but themselves could understand. We shall remain the same till some change of system inspires us with stronger motives to please and conciliate the educated classes of the native community. They may be reconciled, but they can never be charmed out of their prejudices or the errors of their preconceived opinions by such language as the European gentlemen are now in the habit of speaking to them. We must learn their language better, or we must teach

them our own, before we can venture to introduce among them those free institutions which would oblige us to meet them on equal terms at the bar, at the bench, and in the Senate. Perhaps two of the best secular works that were ever written upon the faculties and operations of the human mind, and the duties of men in their relations with each other, are those of Imamod Deen Ghuzzalee, and Nuseerod Deen of Thous. Their idol was Plato, but their works are of a more practical character than his, and less dry than those of Aristotle."

Mr. Nassan Lees, Principal of the Mohammedan College in Calcutta, gives the following account of an Indian court of law in 1857 :—

"While the junior civil servant should be balancing in his mind the evidence of the witnesses, his whole attention is engrossed in endeavouring to understand what is being said. Few who have not seen it can realize the idea of a Bengali native court; the din, the hubbub, the discordance of the many voices, Bengali, English, and Hindustani, is truly astounding. On the one side are heard the gentle tones of a mild Hindu, pouring in soft supplication his griefs, with accompanying promises, into the ear of some native *Amlak*. On the other, the ear is assailed by the harshest language often, the most virulent abuse, bandied between two witnesses, or lookers on, apparently in the last stage of a violent altercation; and to this is added the unnecessary vociferations of some dozen policemen, who rush gesticulating violently, to the spot, to increase the confusion. But above all rises the shrill cry of 'Mercy Company! Mercy! The slave is dead. He is dead,' from some miserable wretch who has been unjustly cast in the amount of some 30 or 40 rupees, to gratify the revengeful feelings of a countrymen on better terms than himself with the *Sar-rishtadar*, or native head clerk, who not improbably will have disposed of his good offices for one half the sum in dispute. Meanwhile, behold the assistant, the head of the petty Court. Besieged by witnesses, beset alike by plaintiffs, defendants, and Court officials all speaking at once; addressed, perhaps, in three, if not in four, native tongues, he sits confounded—bewildered. In vain he essays to comprehend the cause of the uproar; of what is said around him he cannot understand a sentence. Fain would he explain or proclaim silence; he cannot speak a word. Oh, that an iambic would still the storm, a quotation from Goethe or Dante, an aphorism of Bacon's, an explanation of D'Alembert's Principles, or the definition of a differential co-efficient! But, alas! such things here are of little practical use. The clamour increases. The distress of the assistant augments; until at last, his court in a state of the highest disorder, and unable to right it, he rushes in confusion from his seat, vowing never to return till he can understand something at least of what is said to him, and say a few sentences intelligibly in some Oriental language."

Sir Charles Trevelyan says :—

"I know from my Indian experience that a knowledge of the native languages is an indispensable preliminary to understanding and taking an interest in native races, as well as to acquiring their goodwill and gaining influence over them. Without it officers charged

with important public affairs, feeling themselves at the mercy of a class of interpreters whose moral character is of a very questionable kind, live in a state of chronic irritation with the natives, which is extremely adverse both to the satisfactory transaction of business and to the still more important object of giving to the people of the country a just impression of the character and intentions of our nation."

"Indophilus" in his letter to *The Times* writes:—

"After the cadets have been selected, they ought *all of them* to have at least one year's professional instruction at a military college."

One of the principal objects of this professional instruction at a military college should be:—

"To teach them the elements of the native languages, which can be learnt with greater facility and exactness from well-instructed European professors than from munshis and pandits."

And again:—

"It should not be left, as it is at present, to the discretion of a young man whether he will pass in the native languages or not. The power of understanding his men and of rendering himself intelligible should be considered an indispensable qualification, and those who cannot or will not acquire this necessary accomplishment should be removed from the service. The office of regimental interpreter and the practice of interpreting at courts-martial should be abolished. Every officer should be presumed to understand the language of his soldiers."

Long before the outbreak of the Indian rebellion another of your correspondents, pointing out the dangerous neglect of the study of Oriental languages, of Sanskrit in particular, wrote;—

"A crisis in the social, moral, and religious state of India may not be far distant, and it will depend on the position which the Europeans scattered over that immense country may be able to take in controlling and directing that movement whether it is to lead to violent concussion or to a healthy regeneration. It is difficult to prove mathematically how so small a matter as the study of Sanskrit could have any bearing on the solution of such mighty problems; and those who look upon it as a kind of lightning-rod, and point to the clouds rising on the political and social horizon of India, expose themselves to be treated as alarmists, who exaggerate the danger in order to raise the importance of the remedy which they recommend."

A man need not have been in India to see that in order to govern a people, and to gain the confidence and goodwill of a conquered race, it is necessary to know their language. At the late meeting in Willis's Rooms on the missions in India, Sir W. P. Wood gave utterance to the same conviction.

"Much might be done," he said, "by bringing the English and native minds as much as possible in contact. This was comparatively easy, for the Government might require that no native should take an office unless he could speak the English tongue, and that no Englishman should be placed in a position of authority unless he was well acquainted with the native languages. Great good must undoubtedly arise from such a regulation."