

**THE ENGLISH IN INDIA:
LETTERS FROM NAGPORE,
WRITTEN IN 1857-58**

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The English in India: Letters from Nagpore, Written in 1857-58 by Evans Bell

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EVANS BELL

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BY

CAPTAIN EVANS BELL,

SECOND MADRAS EUROPEAN LIGHT INFANTRY;
ASSISTANT TO THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S AGENT AT NAGPORE.

"So far from thinking with you that my reforming efforts are useless, I hold them to be of consequence. In all struggles the meanest, if he does his utmost, is of use: the drum-boy, eight years old, ought to imagine the battle rests on himself and his drum."—SIR CHARLES NAPEIR.

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MDCCCLIX.

226. e. 3.

"Speciosities are specious—ah me! A Cagliostro, many Cagliostros, prominent world-leaders, do prosper by their quackery for a day. It is like a forged bank-note; they get it passed out of *their* worthless hands: others, not they, have to smart for it. Nature bursts up in fire-flames, French Revolutions, and such like, proclaiming with terrible veracity that forged notes are forged."

Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. 69.



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* These letters originally appeared in the *Leader* and *Daily News* newspapers, and have merely received a few verbal corrections.



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LETTERS FROM NAGPORE.

LETTER I.

THE INDIAN ARMY.

NAGPORE, *November, 1857.*

THE map of India will show you what a central position this large city occupies in the peninsula; and the course of events within the last six months has proved it to be as critical and influential a position politically as it is locally central. Here the two great languages of Central and Western India, the Mahratta and the Oordoo, meet and partially coalesce, and nearly all the races of Hindostan, the Deccan, and the Carnatic are to be found either settled in trade or in the public service, or following in the train of the large brigade of Madras troops. For with the exception of two or three small detachments of one or two companies on the banks of the Nerbudda, this has been for years the advanced post of the Madras army. Here then, if anywhere, the contagion of the mutiny would first have affected that large body of native troops who have hitherto proved themselves so worthy of reliance.

Dreadful as were the events of last May, June, July, and August, great as have been our humiliation and loss, we have for this time escaped from possibilities a thousand times more appalling. Nothing less than a war of extermination, the natural plan of a weak and ignorant people struggling against a dominant alien race, was aimed at by the Nana Sahib and the other spontaneous leaders of the insurrection; nothing less was hoped by all, and fully expected by the great majority of the mutineers and rebels than that their signal would be taken and their example followed by all the Nawabs and Rajahs of India, and by the armies of the three presidencies, and in short that a simultaneous rising should take place all over the peninsula. None but the wilfully blind can fail to see how nearly their expectations were fulfilled. The Bombay army, though far from the scene of action, and but partially associated in race and customs with the actors, has in a sufficiently alarming manner responded to the cry for war and vengeance on the European masters of India. The Madras army has come through the crisis without any outward agitation; but those who know them best know well where the sympathies of the sepoy were during the uncertain and anxious period of this terrible outbreak. The Madras army has always been kept in a state of stricter discipline than the Bengal army, and its ranks are in a great measure

recruited from humbler and more tractable ranks of the population. But more than one-third of its numbers is composed of Mussulmans, and a good proportion of these are what is called "ashraff," or nobly born, men of respectable families, who formerly, according to their traditions, could aspire to posts of the greatest distinction in the service of the Nabobs and Rajahs of the Deccan, Mysore, and the Carnatic. Our great mistake in almost every department of the Government and administration of India has always been the notion that the natives were a cold, spiritless race, who cared for nothing but the satisfaction of their daily wants, and who were almost entirely devoid of ambition, national feeling, and attachment to their ancient princes and nobles. From sheer want of sympathy our Government has been purely *doctrinaire*, unable to believe that a well-arranged and well-intended *system* could ever fail to produce the desired result, and forgetting that no machine can ever be stronger than its weakest point. Our weakest point has been caused by the deluge of young ignorant Englishmen, whom the lust of patronage has sent forth in a stream, increasing steadily during the last quarter of a century. This had led to the establishment of the "damned nigger" system in every department, civil and military. Boys just emancipated from school, who care for nothing but beer and billiards, whose very ignorance of their