

**KEIGWIN'S REBELLION
(1683-4); AN
EPISODE IN THE HISTORY
OF BOMBAY, VOL. 6**

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V O L U M E 6
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P R E F A C E

THE authorities for the events connected with Keigwin's Rebellion fall naturally under three heads; manuscript records, contemporary travellers or writers, and later historians.

1. *Manuscript Records.* These, as might be expected in so unexplored a field, are by far the most important sources of information. The old East India Company kept most careful records of the correspondence to and from India, and also of the Consultations of the various Councils in the East, and of the letters that passed between the different factories; and enough of these remain to give a very complete picture of the affairs in Western India during the period we have to deal with. They may be divided as below:

1. *Original Correspondence*, known as the O. Cs. These are a series of MS. volumes containing the originals of a vast number of letters received by the Court from its servants, together with their enclosures, and are certainly the most important material available for the period.

2. *Factory Records of Surat and Bombay.* The factory records are arranged according to factories; thus there is one series of volumes for Surat, and another for Bombay. They contain copies of letters both dispatched and received, and minutes of the consultations held.

3. *Letter Books* containing copies of the letters sent from England by the Company to their various factories, arranged according to date.

4. *Court Books*, which contain the minutes of the Court meetings in Leadenhall Street.

5. *Miscellaneous Factory Records*, among which is one volume (No. 16) devoted entirely to the struggle between John Child and the Interloping partners Pettit and Bowcher.

6. *Manuscript Records at Bombay.* We have unfortunately not had the opportunity of consulting the original records, but

the most important documents are available to the public in Forrest's *Selections from the Bombay State Papers*, a publication of the utmost value to the student, and one to which we are much indebted.¹

7. *Orme's MSS.*² This is a collection in the India Office comprising a large number of invaluable extracts in that historian's holograph from old records of the Company, of many of which we have been unable to find the originals; they have probably perished in the interval, so that only Orme's copies survive.

Outside the Company's records in the India Office the material is not very great. In the Record Office the State Papers for this period have not yet been calendared, so that it is possible that we may have missed interesting documents; apart from duplicates of India Office records, we are chiefly indebted to this Office for some interesting letters from Dr. John St. John, the Bombay Admiralty Judge, and for the logs of the *Phoenix*, sent out by the King to put down the Rebellion, and of the *Assistance*, the ship in command of which Keigwin met his death.

In the Bodleian Library, among the Rawlinson MSS., are duplicates of several papers referring to the rebellion, and a few notes written by Sir Josia Child.

The Heralds' Office and Somerset House have supplied us with information about Josia and John Child that has been most unaccountably overlooked by previous historians, seeing how easily accessible it must always have been. The Heralds' Office records, too, are the only authority for the previous life of Sir Thomas Grantham, already brought to light by Yule in his edition of Hedges' *Diary*.

II. *Contemporary Writers.* The most important of these are Fryer, Hamilton, and Ovington. The last named came to India as a chaplain in 1689, and his *Voyage to Surat* is useful only as giving an excellent account of the conditions of

¹ Our references to 'Forrest', in this work, are to vol. i. of the 'Home Series' of these Selections.

² Robert Orme, 1723-1801, was Historiographer to the East India Company from 1769 till his death.

life among the English in Western India. John Fryer, whose *New Account of East India and Persia* is even better in this respect than Ovington's book, is in other ways most tantalizing. He was one of the Company's doctors from 1672 to 1681, and must have been intimately acquainted with nearly all the characters of our story. He was in Bombay when Aungier put down the abortive mutiny of 1674, in which John Child and his father-in-law Captain Shaxton were involved; he travelled down the coast with Henry Gary and was the guest at Carwar of Henry Oxinden; in 1678 he was John Pettit's travelling companion from Gombroon to Shiraz in Persia, and was in Surat during the extraordinary trial and acquittal of that much-suffering man by Rolt and his Council; and he finally sailed for England with Caesar Chambrélan by the same shipping as the departing president, leaving John Child in charge of Surat. Had he given us his views on the persecution of John Child's rival they could hardly have failed to be at least of great interest, yet the name of Pettit never so much as occurs in his book; and so great is his reserve on all controversial topics of the time that we are able to glean very little of historical value from him, beyond his account of Henry Oxinden's mission to Sivaji, which does not bear on our subject at all.

Far otherwise is it with Alexander Hamilton, against whom the charge of excessive reserve is the last that could be brought with justice. This blade, as John Child would have called him, was one of the many Interlopers who defied the Company's Charter and traded on their own account in Indian waters. He first came to India within a few years of Keigwin's rebellion, and he served as a volunteer in the defence of Bombay against the Mogul army in 1690. With many of the actors in our story he was therefore personally acquainted, including General Child and George Bowcher; so that, although not an eyewitness, he must have heard many first-hand accounts of the rebellion from both sides. Hamilton was a violent partisan and an enthusiastic gossip, and his sympathies, as became his calling, were all against the monopolist company; with the result that his book, *A New Account of the East*

Indies, is a perfect storehouse of scandalous libels against John Child in particular, and the Company's officers in general. Indeed, so carried away is the old Interloper by his feelings, that he defeats his own purpose; for in his zeal to blacken his opponents' characters he continually scorns not only the truth but the most elementary plausibility, so that it finally becomes scarcely possible to believe a word that he says.

But although, where his prejudices are concerned, it is necessary so largely to discount Hamilton's version of events, his work is by far the most valuable authority on our period, outside the official correspondence in the India Office. For if his libels can in no case be accepted as proof of Child's villainy, yet, viewed *en bloc*, they are excellent evidence of the light in which the President appeared to his opponents, and of the kind of story about him that was going the rounds of the little community in Western India; and however unreliable in detail, his book certainly reflects accurately enough the general atmosphere of opinion of at least a large section of his contemporaries. Moreover, the reader, however sceptical, can hardly avoid conviction on many points; the President's prodigious unpopularity, for instance, and his blustering and domineering character, remain as an insoluble sediment when the extraordinary mixture of Alexander Hamilton has been allowed to settle.

III. *Later Historians.* No satisfactory account of Keigwin's rebellion has been written; and indeed, strange as it may appear, the world remains in almost total ignorance of the administrations of Oxinden, Aungier, and Child, administrations that cover a period in which the English Company in India grew from a seed to a sapling, and in which are to be found the origins of our Empire. At the beginning of this period the President of Surat was the local manager of a business concern, and at the end of it he was the head of an executive government with municipalities, law courts, taxation and a standing army. The development of Bombay which took place in the last half of the seventeenth century is certainly one of the most interesting studies in our Imperial history; yet we have been unable to find a single writer—nor