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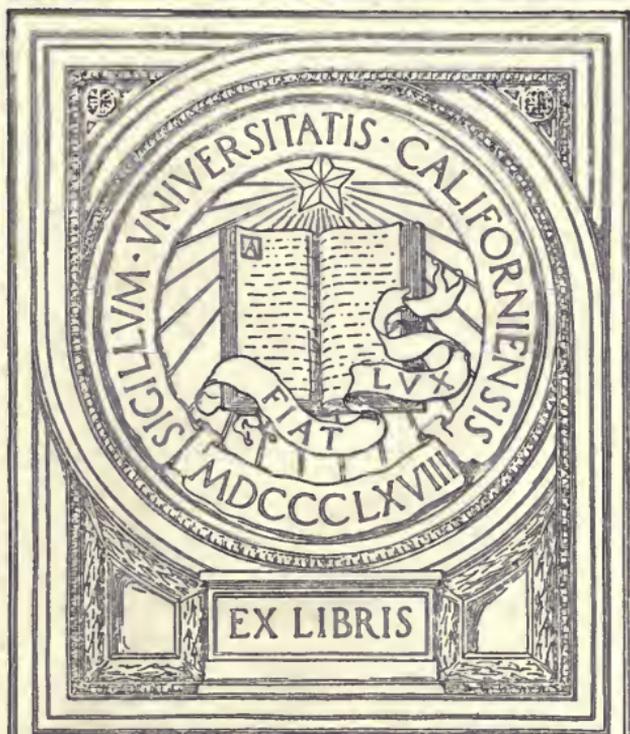


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Substance of the Speech...in
Support of the Amendment...on the
Clause in the East-India Bill

By
Charles Marsh

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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SUBSTANCE
OF
THE SPEECH
OF
CHARLES MARSH, Esq.

IN A COMMITTEE
OF
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

JULY the 1st, 1813,

IN SUPPORT OF
The AMENDMENT moved by Sir THOMAS SUTTON, Bart.

ON THE
Clause in the East-India Bill,

“ Enacting further Facilities to Persons to go out to India for
Religious Purposes.”

L O N D O N:

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1813.

THE GREAT

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R. WATTS, Printer, Broxbourne.

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ADVERTISEMENT.



It has been lamented that such imperfect reports of the following Speech, which is said to have made great impression, have hitherto appeared in the Public Papers. It is for the purpose of preserving its principal heads that I have undertaken the task of editing it. My materials were derived from the collation of the different Newspaper Reports, and an ample copy taken in short-hand of the whole debate on this interesting question. Mr. MARSH having kindly consented to revise it, I now venture to offer it as a faithful statement of his reasonings, if not of the language in which they were conveyed.

THE EDITOR.

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ABSTRACT

It has been pointed out that the reports of the following events which are said to have taken place in the public have already appeared in the Public Papers. It is for the purpose of presenting its principal points that I have condensed the text of the reports. The extracts were derived from the edition of the 1850th year of the report and in the words of the text in the margin which are of the nature of the extracts. The extracts are arranged in the order in which they are given in the original report and are numbered in the margin of the report in the order in which they are given in the original report. The extracts are arranged in the order in which they are given in the original report and are numbered in the margin of the report in the order in which they are given in the original report.

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S P E E C H,

Éc. Éc.

Mr. MARSH spoke to the following effect:—

Mr. Lushington,

I SHOULD have adhered to the prudent silence on the subject of this clause, recommended to us by the Noble Lord who has just sat down, had it not been for the alarming exposition of it which has been given by the Honourable Member* opposite. He has fairly spoken out; and the natives of India cannot mistake the meaning of the proposed enactment. I am anxious, therefore, to offer my feeble protest against it. It appears to me a most portentous novelty in Indian legislation. In all former modes of polity for the government of India, the inviolability of the religious feelings and customs of the natives was considered a sacred and undisputed axiom. And although a resolution

* Mr. Wilberforce.

was voted in 1793, that it was desirable to promote their moral and religious improvement, it was a mere abstract proposition, wholly inoperative, and unembodied in any legislative shape; and therefore did not disturb (as this enactment must do, if it is not a mere dead letter) that wholesome policy, which has hitherto preserved India to us, of abstaining from all interference with the religion of its inhabitants. A departure from that policy will shake our empire in that part of the world to its centre. Not that there can be any danger of an avowed or systematic departure from it; or that on a sudden we should become so weak, or mad, or fanatical, as to renounce all the wisdom which history and experience and common sense have imparted to us. But the real danger is this; that the actual attempt, by Parliamentary enactment, to convert the natives of India; and the mere suspicion on their part, however wild and visionary, that such schemes are in contemplation; will produce the same degree of mischief and disorder. No man can dream, that such a project could be soberly entertained, or deliberately discussed in this House. But it has unfortunately happened; that enough has been said to diffuse this alarm in India: and the clause now inserted in

the Bill, combined with certain resolutions and speeches at public meetings, and the petitions which cover the tables of both Houses of Parliament (all of which, without any squeamish or affected delicacy, profess the conversion of the natives of India to be their object), are but little calculated to dissipate or appease it. Here is at once the text and the commentary; the doctrine, and its exposition.

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It is true, Sir, that all this may be said to proceed from the over-heated speculations of a certain class of persons, who have worked themselves up to a diseased degree of enthusiasm upon this subject. But my apprehensions are, that the natives of India, contemplating the matter through optics peculiar to themselves, will not distinguish between the projects of these gentlemen, and plans countenanced by the authority, and intended to be effectuated by the power of the State. For they are not only most tremblingly sensitive to alarm on the subject of their religion; but they are so little schooled in our political usages, and the genius and form of polity under which they have been nurtured are so dissonant from the genius and frame of ours, that they will not readily separate the acts and opinions

of a large portion of the country acting permissively under the State from the authentic and solemn act of the State itself. That which is permitted, they will hastily infer to be sanctioned. The time, the great legislative question now pending relative to the renewal of the Company's Charter, will corroborate this inference. What other conclusions can they draw from the numerous meetings convened for the avowed purpose of deliberating about the means of converting and civilizing them; the petitions for the same objects from every part of the country; and, above all, the opinions avowed by the Honourable Member, and urged with all the ardour and zeal of his eloquence;—opinions, of which it is the fundamental maxim, that our subjects in the East are sunk in the grossest ignorance and the lowest debasement of moral and social character?

497 In confirmation of the jealousy which must be awakened amongst them by so extraordinary a zeal for their conversion, comes this preamble; evidently emanating from the petitions on the table; framed to promote the prayer, conceived in the spirit, and almost expressed in the language of those addresses. And although it is followed by a proviso, "that the authorities of the

“ local Governments respecting the intercourse of
 “ Europeans with the interior, and the principles
 “ of the British Government, on which the natives
 “ of India have hitherto relied for the free exercise
 “ of their religion, shall be inviolably maintained,”

it is plain, that such a proviso will be nugatory and unavailing. The principle is violated, and then you declare it inviolable. You determine that facilities shall be afforded by law to the Missionaries who are desirous of proceeding to India, with an affected reservation of powers in the local Governments to send them back; without adverting to this obvious consequence, that those powers, if not wholly repealed, will be considerably impaired by the licences granted them by law to go out. For if the control, under which Missionaries have been heretofore permitted in India, was the general power inherent in your Governments abroad to send them home as unlicensed persons, is it not pretty clear that such a control will be greatly enfeebled by the licences antecedently granted them at home? Hitherto, if a Missionary misdemeaned himself, the remedy was at hand. His commorancy being under the connivance and permission of the local Government, it was no longer connived at or permitted. The nuisance was instantly abated.

But now, he will be enabled to set up his licence at home against the revocation of it abroad; the sanction of the British Government against the jurisdiction of the Colonial Governor. To be sure, the local Governor, if he is determined to execute his duty, must prevail in the controversy, and the Missionary will be sent to England. But is there no risk incurred of giving offence to those through whose patronage or recommendation the Missionary was sent out? Is not the very circumstance of sending him back an implied censure on the discernment, or good sense, or vigilance of those who permitted him to go out? Besides, it is a discretion which must be exercised by the local Governor at the hazard of drawing down on himself, at home, the clamours and resentments of a body of persons, who are every day acquiring fresh accessions of influence and numbers; who are knit together by the strongest sympathy which can unite, and the closest confederacy that can bind a party of men subsisting within the bosom of a community. The slightest affront offered to any member of their fraternity, vibrates as a blow to every one of them. It demands no great effort of fancy to conceive the spiritual denunciations with which every conventicle will ring at the persecution of Brother Carey, or

Brother Ringletaube, should the jurisdiction, which is still nominally left to the local Governments over the Missionaries, happen to visit those pious gentlemen. So that, in effect, though not in form, that control will be removed,—certainly impaired; and the Governments of India will be disarmed of the means of coercing them, when their zeal becomes licentious and dangerous. This, too, in the very teeth of ample and unanswerable documents now upon the table of this House, which demonstrate that this control, even in its fullest extent and vigour, was insufficient to repress the evil arising from the increased number and unguarded conduct of these persons. I refer to Lord Minto's Letter from Calcutta, addressed to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, dated the 2d of November 1807. That letter states several alarming instances of misguided and intemperate zeal; and of low and scurrilous invective, circulated in the native languages, against the feelings, prejudices, and religions of the natives: and it concludes with this impressive admonition:—“On a view of all the circumstances stated in this despatch, your Committee will admit the expediency of adopting such measures

“ as your wisdom will suggest, for the purpose of
 “ discouraging any accession to the number of
 “ Missionaries actually employed under the pro-
 “ tection of the British Government, in the work
 “ of conversion.” I will not shock the ears of
 the House by reading any extracts from these
 publications. They must be offensive to the moral
 taste of every cultivated mind: and to the people
 of that country they exhibit a picture of Chris-
 tianity, by no means clothed in those alluring
 colours, which can alone win over their hearts: or
 understandings; but displaying a fearful and
 disheartening system of terrors, from which the
 affrighted reason of man would gladly fly to the
 most barbarous of superstitions for refuge and
 consolation.

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On what grounds, then, is it proposed to grant
 these gentlemen the further facilities which are
 claimed for them? Is it upon any recommendation
 from those who are on the spot, in high stations
 there; and whose testimony ought to carry with it
 no slight authority, not only as spectators of the
 movements of the native mind, but personal wit-
 nesses of the procedures and character of the
 Missionaries? Is any case of grievance, of hard-
 ship, of persecution made out, which calls for any

new provisions in their favour? Quite the contrary. The Governor-General sends home a strong complaint of their misconduct, with a solemn warning against any augmentation of their numbers. So far from having been visited with persecution; the tolerance they have so long enjoyed is not withdrawn from them, even on the strongest proof of their delinquency. The offensive publications are suppressed, but the authors and circulators of them are still permitted to exercise their callings in India. Nay, the very clause which is now under discussion, gives the Court of Directors, subject to the control of the Board of Commissioners, the general discretionary powers of licensing all persons whatsoever to go out to India. The words of the preamble, therefore, which are exclusively applicable to persons going out for *religious purposes*, are superfluous, with this evil belonging to them; that they indicate a deliberate intention, on the part of the British Government, to send out persons for the express object of proselytism and conversion.

The Noble Lord*, indeed, tells us not to be alarmed, either at the undue increase of Mis-

* Lord Castlereagh.

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sionaries, or the kind and description of those, who are likely to go out under the new provisions, by reminding us of the salutary control, which the Board of India Commissioners will have over their appointment. I confess that my apprehensions on this head would be put to rest, if the Noble Earl* who now presides at that Board were always to remain there, or if his successors were necessarily to be influenced by his prudence and good sense. No man is less infected than my noble friend with the cant and fanaticism of the day. No man is inspired with a more philosophical and dignified contempt of it. But here is the inconvenience of making a law, which, to be beneficial or noxious, depends on a personal discretion. The law is permanent; the discretion is transitory. The Noble Earl's successor may have a different set of opinions on this subject. He may be of the new Evangelical school; careless of the mischiefs which may result from premature schemes of converting the Hindoos; or taught, by contemplating only the end which is to be attained, to consider those mischiefs as light and evanescent. So far, therefore, from pursuing a cautious and

* Earl of Buckinghamshire.

restrictive policy with regard to the Missionaries, he may be of the number of those, who think that the fulness of time is arrived for Hindoo conversion; and that every inspired cobbler, or fanatical tailor, who feels an inward call, has a kind of apostolic right to assist in the spiritual siege, which has been already begun, against the idolatries and superstitions of that degraded and barbarous country.

What man, that has rendered himself by study or observation competent to pronounce upon the subject, will not deprecate a provision so well calculated—from the time at which it is introduced, and the explanations with which it is ushered in—to accelerate the calamities, which folly and fanaticism have been long preparing for us in that country, and of which all that we have experienced in the horrors of Vellore may be considered only as the type and forerunner? The Noble Lord[†] himself does not appear quite at ease as to the harmless or beneficial quality of the measure. He has repeatedly suggested to us, with somewhat indeed of paradox, but with great earnestness, that it was a subject too delicate for debate, and too important for deliberation. Hitherto, indeed,

[†] Lord Castlereagh.

we had been in the habit of considering, that, in a ratio to the delicacy or importance of a legislative proposition, it became matter for grave deliberation and anxious discussion. But with regard to the policy of sending out an enactment which may probably undermine an empire, the course is to be inverted. We are required to enact a secret; to whisper a legislative provision; and to convey it clandestinely and without noise into the Statute Book. This, I say, looks like somewhat of diffidence in the Noble Lord as to the safety or propriety of the measure. That which it is expedient to adopt, it can never be unwise to discuss. But I know the embarrassments of the Noble Lord's situation. I know that this measure must be considered to have been rather wrung from his good-nature, than to be the legitimate fruit of his understanding; and that it has been reluctantly conceded by way of compromise, to brush off as it were the importunities that have so long assailed him. However, as it will be no easy matter to make a law affecting the feelings, the rights, and the happiness of so many millions of men, without letting *them* into the secret; I am disposed to suspect, that the enactment, when it reaches India, will inspire the more alarm, from the very mystery and concealment in

which the noble Lord has endeavoured to envelope it. I cannot therefore shrink from the discussion.

Reasoning only *à priori*, and with the total oblivion and disregard of all facts (if those facts could be forgotten or overlooked), I should entertain strong apprehensions of this clause, from what I myself know concerning the irritable feelings both of the Hindoos and Mussulmauns, upon the subject of their religions. But all *à priori* reasonings would be absurd, with the fatal occurrences of Vellore, in 1806, staring us in the face, and preaching volumes of admonition against the folly or rather the madness of reviving an alarm in India, of which those occurrences have bequeathed us such mournful illustrations. It is a transaction which has been much misunderstood. It was a *religious mutiny*, in the strictest sense of the expression. It originated from a belief artfully instilled by the emissaries of the *Mussulmaun Princes into the minds of the Seapoys, that the British Government intended to convert them *gradually* to Christianity. If any one affects to doubt concerning the origin to which I have traced it, let him read Lord William Bentinck's proclamation of the 3d of December

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* They were confined in the fortress of Vellore.

following, nearly six months after the mutiny; an interval which had been employed in a minute and accurate investigation into the causes which led to it. The fact is distinctly stated in that paper. It was issued by the Government of Madras, to dispel the apprehensions which had worked up the native mind to that dreadful carnage. That proclamation is among the papers on your table. There is also among the same papers, the recorded opinion of Lord Minto, given nearly two years afterwards, of the same tenor, and deduced from the same materials. I know it has been the fashion amongst some reasoners to narrow the causes of this event to the injudicious orders, which had been issued about that time, respecting the shape of the turban, and prohibiting the distinctive marks of caste on parade. But they confound what in human affairs are so frequently unconnected and disjointed; I mean, the cause and the occasion. The cause was in the inherent and fixed antipathy of the natives to any change of their religion. The occasion was, the proposed alteration in their dress, with the prohibitions against wearing their marks of caste; which unhappily furnished a powerful topic to awaken and inflame that antipathy, to those who, being implacably adverse to the British authority, were naturally eager

to seize every opportunity of seducing the native soldiery into their own schemes of alienation and resistance. The orders, though highly obnoxious, would under other circumstances have been submitted to. Similar orders had been cheerfully obeyed, because they had been unconnected with any religious purpose. In truth, much unmerited obloquy has been thrown on a most gallant and honourable officer, now holding a high colonial station, (Sir John Cradock,) for having issued those orders. But it is a justice due to my highly-valued friend, to state, that he had satisfied himself, by the reports of the most experienced official men, that those orders were not at variance with the feelings and prejudices of the natives; and these reports were confirmed by the testimony of some of the oldest native officers, and the opinions of Brahmin and Mahommedan doctors. We must therefore look to the specific circumstances which made the orders in question offensive. They were these. The seapoys were taught to consider them as exterior signs of that gradual conversion to Christianity, which *other* circumstances had given them reason to suspect was meditated by the British Government. Unfortunately, those circumstances were of a kind most likely to strengthen this

misconception: for it did happen, that, for some time before the massacre of Vellore, an unusual degree of countenance had been shewn to the various Missionaries who had insinuated themselves into India. They had been permitted to circulate, with extraordinary industry, in different parts of the Carnatic, translations of the Scriptures into the native languages; and had exerted much inconsiderate zeal in the commentaries and expositions which accompanied them. The ecclesiastics, too, at the principal Presidencies happened at this time to be of the Evangelical school; Mr. Buchanan at Calcutta, and Doctor Kerr at Madras. These gentlemen were zealous patrons of the Sectarian Missionaries. Of course, these persons, thus patronised and caressed, sent home accounts of the flattering reception they had met with. Those accounts induced the Societies in Europe to send out fresh exportations. The indiscreet activity of these persons, and their increased numbers, confirmed the suspicions which had been infused into the minds of the Seapoys concerning the late innovations in their dress. The result was, that dreadful massacre to which it is impossible to look back without trembling. If it is imagined that the plot, which broke out, indeed, only at Vellore, was confined to that garrison, the matter

is much under-rated. It was to have been a general rising on the same day at every principal station in the Peninsula: Nundydroog, Cannanore, Quilon, and even at Madras. And had it not been prematurely executed about a week before the appointed day (in consequence of information given by a native officer, which however was not regarded, but the informer actually confined as a madman), the British name would now have been a mere matter of history in India.

Is it possible, that this House will go off into such a fit of absurdity and fanaticism, or be visited with so fatal a fatuity, as not to keep so awful an event before them, in the grave discussion of matters affecting the religion of that country? That event has interposed the warning of sobriety and wisdom to this headlong, precipitate, busy, meddling, gossiping, officious, interference with matters, which the laws of God and Nature have placed beyond our jurisdiction. What is the lesson it has left us? Why, that our subjects in India, immoveably passive under our political domination, are wakefully sensitive to all attempts at a religious one; that while they are upholding our empire by the steady and willing services of a patient and unwearied attachment, there are still limits to their

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allegiance, however firm and enduring, in those unconquerable feelings, and unbending habits, which bind them, as by links of adamant, to the religion and laws of their country. Surely, Sir, we need not the acting over again of that dreadful drama, to be taught, that all attempts on their religion, however cautiously and covertly made, must not only be unavailing, but calamitous; and if the change in the shape of a turban, or the temporary disuse of the marks on their forehead, drove that most passive and obedient soldiery into the bloody revolt of Vellore, what may we not dread from grave discussions at meetings convened for the avowed purposes of converting them; those purposes avowed in petitions from every town in England, and countenanced by a large portion of the Legislature of Great Britain, while the great question relative to the civil and political administration of that country is still under its deliberation? If the atrocities of Vellore were prompted by unfounded suspicions, or causeless jealousies, I fear, should that dreadful scene be again acted, we shall be deprived even of that consolation: for we are now administering to their religious fears, something more than mere pretexts to feed on. I feel, therefore, most unaffected apprehensions on this

subject; so much, that if my Honourable friend (Sir Thomas Sutton) had not moved his amendment, I should have proposed a clause of a very opposite character from the Noble Lord's; prohibitory, instead of permissive, of the ingress of Missionaries into India; and accompanied with a solemn declaration, that the inviolability of the religion of the natives ought to be the basis of whatever political system it may be expedient to provide for them.

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It is by this policy that India has hitherto been governed. The Court of Directors, I trust, are not unmindful, that it is the only policy, which can keep the native mind tranquil. Were they not so, with the ample communications they have had from India on this most delicate subject, they would exhibit a memorable proof of their unfitness for any share in its government. It would be their own attestation to their own incompetency. But is there not already a most fatal oblivion of that policy? The opinions of more than one member of that Board who scarcely lag behind the wildest enthusiasts in the great work of conversion, have filled me with apprehension. They are omens of the most alarming kind. They convince me, that the powers granted by this clause will be most

unsparingly exercised. But should that not be the consequence, those opinions will corroborate the fears already prevalent amongst the natives, who have so long and habitually contemplated the Court of Directors as the chief depository of their interests, and the organ in which the political power of Great Britain in India chiefly resides. Mr. Cowper, in his evidence, furnished us with a most important aphorism, when he told us, that “an expression of the most distant recommendation on the part of persons in power, is received by the Hindoos and Mussulmans as a kind of order.”

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When I see, therefore, that this spirit of religious enthusiasm, which has so long been at work amongst ourselves, is likely to be let loose on a people not more disjoined from us by their customs and prejudices, than by the ocean that divides us; and that ultimate success is problematical, while intermediate mischief is inevitable; it can be no difficult matter to find out the genuine deductions of duty and reason and common sense. And are these deductions overturned by setting up* the general, vague, indefinite duty of imparting the Christian religion to every country and people, whom the mysterious

* Mr. W. Smith.

ordinances of Heaven have hitherto deprived of it? For, as all human duties lie within certain lines of expediency and practicability, it is plain, that the alleged duty is destroyed and negated by the inexpediency and danger of bringing it into action. In these cases, then, it is our business first to inquire, Whether morality and right reason prescribe any, and what mode of action; or (which is a still more important question) impose on us the obligation of acting at all? Whether, to put it into a form more developed and precise, the alleged duty of acting is not overpowered by the opposite and antagonist duty of not acting at all? For it would be absurd, in any problem of civil or moral duty, to shut from our contemplation the probabilities of success or failure. It would be worse than absurd to overlook the dangers of the experiment; and of an experiment, which, in this instance, is to be tried on a machine so delicate, so complex, and so easily deranged as our empire in India. This appears to me the point we are to decide; remembering at the same time, that the Hindoo religion is not only to be overthrown, but the Christian planted: and taking care to discover, whether we may not eradicate the religion of India without advancing at all nearer to the establishment of our own: and in so doing, get rid of a system

which is beneficial to a certain extent, without being able at last to replace it with a better. The faintest probability of our stopping short of the full accomplishment of our project, of preaching down the Hindoo religion (the first step only in the process), and getting no further, ought of itself to make us wary and cautious in undertaking it. Neither reason nor history tells us, that the adoption of a new religion is a necessary consequence of the abdication of the old. It is one thing to dispel the charm that binds mankind to established habits and antient obligations; and another, to win them over to the discipline of new institutions, and the authority of new doctrines. In that dreadful interval, that dreary void, where the mind is left to wander and grope its way without the props that have hitherto supported, or the lights that hitherto guided it, what are the chances, that they will discern the beauties, or submit to the restraints of the religion, you propose to give them? What then will have been done? You will have extinguished a system, which, with all its demerits, has been the very foundation of your empire in India. You will have destroyed that peculiarity of national character, that singular contexture of moral properties, which has given you an immense territory, an immense revenue, and sixty millions of subjects; while you

will have done nothing more towards the realization of your own schemes, than the destruction of those institutions, that have for ages kept the vices and passions which overrun the Western world from that favoured country. Such may be one result of our experiment. The Missionaries, it seems, from the papers on the table, have begun at this end of the project. Their efforts have been directed to the pious object of disgusting the natives with their religion, their laws, their customs, and every thing that is venerable and authoritative amongst them.

There is no controversy about ends. No man can be more unaffectedly solicitous than myself for the diffusion of Christianity. I should be undeserving of an audience in a Christian assembly, were I cold or indifferent to its blessings. But there are questions, desirable as it may be to infuse Christianity into India, which will give pause to deliberate minds in attempting it. Have I the means of accomplishing my purpose? If I have not, will not the mere attempt be attended with calamities, that constitute an opposite duty to abstain from it? Not that this is the sort of reasoning which will go down with those who are so hotly engaged in the work of conversion; and who (such is the nature and character of all religious enthusiasm) are little likely

to be startled or appalled by the difficulties they will have to encounter, or the miseries they may produce, in the glorious object of making sixty millions of men Baptists or Anabaptists. But, seeing the dangers, and difficulties, and suffering, that must result from the experiment, the conversion of that immense population seems, for the present at least, out of the course of things. It is only through the circumstances that surround him, that Providence deigns to confer with man. For as Providence condescends to act by human instruments and human agencies, it can be no impiety in us, who can calculate only on the efficacy of human means as applied to human objects, to pronounce a purpose discountenanced by so many impediments, and exposed to so many evils, to be out of his destinations. The power of working miracles is not assumed. The conversion of Indostan by an instantaneous effusion of grace is not expected. Force is disclaimed. Not that there is any great magnanimity in disclaiming force; since no force could be effectually applied to an object so incommensurate with all physical means of obtaining it. If, therefore, it is probable that the mere attempt, though unaccompanied with force, will be both abortive and mischievous, I

confess that my understanding is driven into this inference (no doubt a gloomy one), that the mere attempt ought to be discountenanced.

It seems no easy matter, however, to persuade Gentlemen of the impracticability of their project; and having, by some rapid process of reasoning, made up their minds to its practicability, they seem to laugh at its dangers. But they are ignorant of the very elements of their experiment; of the raw material they have to work upon; in one word, of the Hindoo mind and character. They appear never to have reflected, that this artificial being, moulded and fashioned, I had almost said created, by his religious institutions, (and all his institutions are religious ones,) is distinguished by properties, that give him no affinity to the proselytes who crowd their tabernacles and conventicles. They apply to this most singular people the same reasonings that are applicable to mankind in general; wholly unmindful of that deep colour of character which has divided them, almost since the foundation of the earth, from the common family of the world. For the same peculiarity which the philosophical Historian attributed to the antient Germans, might with equal truth be attributed to the Hindoos: "*Propriam atque synceram,*

et tantum sui similem gentem." : Rendering therefore full homage, as I am disposed to do, to the purity and benevolence of the motives which actuate the advocates for conversion, I am convinced, that had they been sufficiently skilled in the genius and moral constitution of the Hindoos to appreciate the temporal misery which every Hindoo convert must suffer, their humanity would long ago have taken the alarm, and probably dissuaded them from the further prosecution of their scheme. Can it be necessary then to remind them of the stupendous moral effects produced in that country by the division of castes? The loss of caste is the immediate consequence of conversion; and it is the most dreadful ill with which an Hindoo can be visited. It throws upon him every variety of wretchedness. It extinguishes all the wholesome charities and kindly affections. His very kindred desert him. It becomes an abomination to eat with him, or even to speak to him. The hand is accursed that ministers to him. All mankind fly from him, as from an infection. His only refuge from this overwhelming force of misery is death; a solitary, friendless, uncomforted death, amid the scoffs, and scorn, and revilings of his species. I am drawing no fancied picture. The reports of the Missiona-

ries themselves have given more than one instance of it. The very few converts, whom they have made among those who are entitled to the privilege of caste, have endured all this : a circumstance that will account satisfactorily, I should think, for this most curious and important fact ; that amongst persons of caste, that is, amongst those who essentially are and alone ought to be denominated Hindoos, they have hardly made any converts at all. The great mass of their proselytes, scarcely exceeding eighty in seven years, are drawn from the Chandalâhs, or Pariars, or out-casts ; a portion of the population who are shut out from the Hindoo religion, and who, being condemned to the lowest poverty and the most sordid occupations, are glad to procure, by what the Missionaries call conversion, whatever pittance they are enabled to dole out for their subsistence. As to the Church of Syrian Christians, which has so long subsisted in the province of Travancore, let us be on our guard against the ingenuity with which it is made to form a part of the argument. They are not descendants from the original inhabitants of Hindostan ; of course, therefore, they can never be said, in fairness, to have been converted from the Hindoo religion to Christianity. They are the remnant of a Church planted there

in the early ages of Christianity ; where they have remained, without any material increase of numbers, from their primitive institution ; tolerated and despised by the successive Rajahs. They are an independent community amongst themselves ; and are not only too narrowly watched to make converts ; but, I believe, from the influence of mutual habits and intercourses between them and the community in the bosom of which they are permitted to reside, wholly indisposed to molest them by any unseasonable or indiscreet attack on their feelings or prejudices.

511 This division of caste has always erected an invincible barrier to the proselytism of the Hindoos. A Gentoo considers the privileges of his caste as exclusive and incommunicable. It is this that imparts to him the highest prerogatives of his nature. Man is not separated by a wider discrimination from the inferior world, than that which the pride and dignity of caste have interposed in that country between the several orders of mankind. He acquires a class of emotions incident to the character that elevates him. He breathes, as it were, a more ethereal element. Taught to revere himself by the same standard which secures to him the esteem and reverence of others, he considers the loss, or

even the pollution and degradation of his caste, as evils worse than death. The same feelings descend through each successive gradation; each caste cultivating the same spirit of an exclusive character: all of them united in one common sentiment of contempt of the Pariars, or out-casts, amongst whom they class the Christian Missionary and his convert; the Pastor and his disciple. Some new power, therefore, hitherto undiscovered in the moral world, and equivalent to that which the old philosopher required in the physical, will be requisite to pull down this consolidated fabric of pride and superstition, which has stood, unmoved and undecaying, the sudden shock of so many revolutions, and the silent lapse of so many ages. If you begin with one caste, you have to fight in another against the same host of feelings, motives, and affections, which render place and homage and distinction despotic over the heart of man. Your struggles are only begun when you have converted one caste. They are perpetually to be renewed. Never, never, will the scheme of Hindoo conversion be realized, till you persuade an immense population to suffer, by whole tribes, the severest martyrdoms that have yet been sustained for the sake of religion; to tear themselves from every habit that sways in the human

bosom; from the sweets of social communion; the ties of friendship; the charities of kindred; from all that life contains to support or adorn it; and all this—to embrace a new religion proffered them by polluted hands; a religion on the threshold and in the very vestibule of which are planted all the appalling forms of penury, contempt, scorn, and despair:

Vestibulum ante ipsum

Luctus et ultrices posuerunt cubilia curæ,

Et metus et male suada fames, et turpis egestas.

And are the Missionaries, whom this Bill is to let loose upon India, fit engines to accomplish the greatest revolution that has yet taken place in the history of the world? With what weapons will they descend into the contest with the acute, intelligent Hindoo, prepared to defend his religion by reasonings drawn from the resources of a keen and enlightened casuistry, and wielded with all the vigour of a sharp and exercised intellect? Will these people, crawling from the holes and caverns of their original destinations, apostates from the loom and the anvil, and renegades from the lowest handicraft employments, be a match for the cool and sedate controversies they will have to encounter, should the Brahmins condescend to enter into the arena against the maimed and crippled gladiators

that presume to grapple with their faith? What can be apprehended but the disgrace and discomfiture of whole hosts of tub-preachers in the conflict? And will this advance us one inch nearer our object?

In whatever aspect I view the question, the impracticability of converting India by such means to Christianity looks me in the face. The advocates for the scheme have scarcely favoured us with one argument, that shews it to be practicable. In some of the papers, however, published by the Baptists, there appears a faint historical analogy, from which they infer the probability of success; and a learned and Honourable Gentleman near me* put it in the shape of an interrogatory to one of the witnesses at the bar. He asked Mr. Graham, "Whether the natives of India were more attached to their superstition, or more under the influence of the Brahmins, than our ancestors in this island were to their superstitions, under the influence of the Druids?" The witness, it may be recollected, very modestly declined speaking of the Druids from his own personal knowledge; but expressed himself pretty strongly as to the folly and danger

~~to persuade ourselves that we could ever succeed in~~

~~bringing our converts to Mr. Stephen.~~

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of interfering with the religion of India. Does the learned and Honourable Gentleman think that there is the slightest analogy between the two religions? The religion of the Druids was extirpated from this island by the antient Romans, because its institutions were too intractable and unyielding, to give them quiet possession of their conquest. But it was not extirpated till their priests were slaughtered, their sacred groves and temples destroyed, and their population ravaged, with every species of bloody and ferocious violence. I advert to the finishing stroke given to that religion in Britain, under Suetonius Paulinus. To make the analogy, however, at all an approximation to an argument, the Honourable Member is bound also to contend, that the Roman procedure towards the Druids is to be followed as a precedent by us with regard to the Hindoos. The Honourable Member's humanity starts at the suggestion. Why, then, the argument drawn from the analogy is destroyed. But whatever points of resemblance there may be between the two religions, they will be found to furnish an argument against our interference with that of the Hindoos. Those points of resemblance are these: the exclusive character common to both; the domination of the priest-

hood; the indissoluble and adamantine strength with which the soul and all its faculties were bound to the Druidical, as they are now to the Brahminical system; the jealousy, with which the Druids once preserved, and the Hindoos still preserve, the inviolability of their faith. Why then, if the civilized conquerors of antient Europe, deeming it expedient to get rid of the Druidical superstition, and not, as it may be presumed, ignorant of the most efficacious means of effecting it, found that there was no other mode but extirpation,—the matter is settled. The means of extirpating the Hindoo religion are not in our hands; extirpation is out of the question; and we must endure the evil. But here the resemblance stops. The points in which these religions differ, will supply much stronger illustrations (if they were wanted) of the danger and folly of interfering with that of the Hindoos. The superstition of the Druids inspired a spirit of resistance to the civil and military yoke of their conquerors. That of the Hindoos makes them the passive, unresisting subjects of theirs. It is of the very essence and nature of the Hindoo religion to extinguish and subdue the spirit of civil resistance. Accordingly, the natives of Hindostan have borne with the most unrepining acquiescence

from their Patan, Tartar, and Mahommedan invaders, every shape and mode and alternation of oppression. But neither the Tartar nor the Mahommedan sword could subdue their religion.

514 Well then, let us survey the ground we occupy, before we advance further. We have a mighty empire in India, from which a great revenue has hitherto been derived, and an exuberant tide of wealth may hereafter flow in upon us; a civil and a military government cheerfully and quietly obeyed by many millions of its inhabitants, disciplined and nurtured to that obedience by the peculiar genius and character of the religion we are anxious to destroy. It is required of us, in defiance of all that experience and reason have taught us, that we should throw away what we have acquired, or at least incur the hazard of losing it, in order to erect a spiritual ascendancy on the ruins of our political dominion. Such, also, are the inconsistencies and contradictions that beset us in this extraordinary discussion, that the very Gentlemen*, who are the most eager for this Evangelical project,—alarmed at the perils that threaten their exclusive privileges, and in defence of those privileges imploring us

* Mr. Grant, and Mr. Thornton.

jealously to shut the door of India, even on those who, being invited thither by commercial enterprize, must have an obvious interest in carrying on a quiet, prudent, and conciliatory intercourse with the natives—feel no scruple to tell us, that there is no danger in opening every port to swarms of Missionaries, and hosts of fanatics; men, whose nature and character it is, to consider themselves absolved from all human restraints, and free from all human motives, in effecting the objects of their calling. Nay, the same reasoners, while they would convince us that so fixed and immutable are the prejudices and customs of our subjects in the East, that it is absurd to expect that they will consume our woollen cloths and hard-ware manufactures, have no compunction, in the same breath, to contend that those prejudices and customs, fixed and immutable as they are, would by no means impede the reception of the coarsest texture of theology, that can be dealt out from the shops of the Anabaptists, or woven in the loom of their fevered and fanatic fancies. It is in vain to tell them, that every European throat will be cut, if the Missionaries are encouraged, and the attempt at conversion persisted in. The answer is—These are

ridiculous fears ; bugbears (to use the Honourable Member's phrase) that haunt the imaginations of that part of the House, who, having been in India, are the least competent to pronounce on the subject. It savours indeed somewhat of paradox, that we should be disqualified from bearing testimony by the only circumstance that can entitle us to credence. It is our fate, however, to hear things pushed still nearer to the brink of absurdity. For the Honourable Gentleman, to shew that no danger is to be apprehended from Missionaries, assures us that they have carried their zeal so far, as to publish and circulate the most indecent attacks upon the customs and opinions of the natives, and that no commotion has yet followed:—a fact which suggests a strong argument for recalling those who are now in India, or preventing any more from going out; but which is not quite so clear in favour of granting them fresh facilities. The fact itself, however, is questionable. The conduct of the Missionaries has already excited much disquietude amongst the natives. The papers on the table, particularly the letters from the Bengal Government, shew it. But had they been wholly passive and silent, whilst these

* Mr. Wilberforce.

persons were reviling their institutions, would it be good reasoning to suppose, that there was no point of endurance beyond which they would cease to be the contemptuous witnesses only of the folly and phrenzy of the Missionaries? It is comparatively but yesterday that we became the dominant power in that country. When we had no political ascendancy there, they were not alarmed at the prospect of a religious one. It is not so, now. Every other power in India has been gradually absorbed into our own. They can bear that. They are unmoved spectators of your rapid strides to territorial conquest and political power. But when, with all this territorial influence and political power, you begin to make laws, and preach parliamentary sermons about their religion, they will begin to connect your politics and your religion together, and endeavour to shake off the one, to secure themselves from the other.

What matters all this to a finished and graduated doctor in the new Evangelical academies? He is not disturbed by the prospect of a little mischief. The end sanctifies the means. The people of India are sunk into such gross heathenism; their superstitions are so brutal; their national character is such a compound of fraud, falsehood, perjury, cunning, and I

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know not what vices, that the duty of converting them takes the lead of every other in importance, and is influenced neither by those times, seasons, or opportunities which regulate and controul the other duties of life. Such is the senseless cant of the day. I have no scruple in saying, that this cant is founded on the falsest assumptions. I say nothing of the total want of philosophical precision in comprehending the mixed character of an immense population covering an immense territory within the terms of one general national description. But this I will say; that if such is our opinion of our fellow subjects in India, we are unfit to govern them. It is a mischievous hypothesis, corrupting the very fountains of pure and beneficent administration. Hatred and contempt for those whom you govern, must, in the very nature of things, convert your government into a stern and savage oppression. On the other hand, a favourable estimate of the character of this very people (it is a striking passage in their history) softened even the rugged features of a Mahomedan government into a paternal and protecting policy. The Emperor Akber, a name dear to Oriental students, under the influence of an enlightened vizier (Abulfazel) who had learned to form a correct estimate of the Hindoo virtues, governed them, as

we are told, with such equity and moderation as to deserve and obtain the title, which has alone transmitted his memory to posterity, of "guardian of mankind."

I hope therefore that I heard not aright, when an Honourable Member* discoursed of the Hindoos as a people destitute of civilization, and degraded in the scale of human intellect. Is it possible that such things can be imagined? Whence has the Honourable Member, whose learning in their customs and history, I am bound by the courtesy of the House not to call in question, whence has he derived this theory of their moral and intellectual inferiority? Is it in the remains to be traced through that vast continent, of a system of law and polity, which shews them to have been a people abounding in all the arts which embellish life, and all the institutions which uphold it, from an æra long before the dawn of our most venerable establishments, and before the primæval silence of our forests had been broken by the voice of man; professing also the great principles of natural theology, the providence of God, and the future rewards of virtue, before our ancestors had arrived at the rudest elements of a religion? Is it

* Mr. W. Smith.

in that habitual government of the passions, that absolute subjugation of the will to the reason, which would shame the Stoic doctrine, and falls little short of that purity and perfection of the Christian discipline which the best of us rather hopes, than expects to attain? Indeed, when I turn my eyes either to the present condition or antient grandeur of that country; when I contemplate the magnificence of her structures; her spacious reservoirs constructed at an immense expence, pouring fertility and plenty over the land, the monuments of a benevolence expanding its cares over remote ages; when I survey the solid and embellished architecture of her temples; the elaborate and exquisite skill of her manufactures and fabrics; her literature, sacred and profane; her gaudy and enamelled poetry, on which a wild and prodigal fancy has lavished all its opulence: when I turn to her philosophers, lawyers, and moralists, who have left the oracles of political and ethical wisdom, to restrain the passions and to awe the vices which disturb the commonwealth; when I look at the peaceful and harmonious alliances of families, guarded and secured by the household virtues; when I see amongst a cheerful and well-ordered society the benignant and softening influences of religion and morality; a system of

manners, founded on a mild and polished obeisance, and preserving the surface of social life smooth and unruffled;—I cannot hear without surprise, mingled with horror, of sending out Baptists and Anabaptists to civilize or convert such a people, at the hazard of disturbing or deforming institutions, which appear to have hitherto been the means ordained by Providence of making them virtuous and happy.

Where is the evidence to support the bill of indictment which the Honourable Member has drawn up against the natives of India? Here we are, as usual, treated with general and unmeaning invective. But it seems, that the Hindoos are addicted to perjury; and Sir James Mackintosh is cited as an authority, because he lamented, in pretty strong language, the prevalence of judicial perjury, from the numerous instances of it which fell under his own observation, as Judge of the Recorder's Court at Bombay,—a jurisdiction, by the bye, scarcely exceeding five miles. And what judge in this country has not made the same complaint? But is this a fair sample of the national character of Hindostan? Is it a rational ground upon which criminal judgment ought to be pronounced on the aggregate population of that vast territory? What would be

thought of that reasoner on the manners and moral qualities of the people of Great Britain, who, happening to be present at the trial of a horse-cause at Nisi Prius, and hearing twenty witnesses swearing flatly to the soundness and perfection of the animal when he was sold, and as many on the other side swearing that he was spavined or wind-galled and a mass of defects, should jump into the conclusion, that perjury was the general characteristic of her enlightened and cultivated inhabitants? Is it candid, or just, or correct, to dip your hands into the feculence and pollution of a great empire for a specimen of its general character? The Hindoos, like every mixed portion of mankind, are infected with the great and lesser vices, which disfigure human society:—fraud, theft, perjury, and the other offences, which it is the province of law and police to keep down. But is that enough for the Honourable Gentlemen, who are so intent on the conversion of the Hindoos? Will that chequered state of virtue and crime, which with different modifications is the moral condition of every civilized nation, authorise a wild and visionary attempt to pull down antient establishments which have struck their root deep into the hearts and affections of a people? At any rate, these revolutionary

projectors have a tremendous burden of proof thrown upon them. They are bound to prove that the people, whose habits, laws, and religion they are about to break up, is so far depressed beneath our own level in morals and civilization ; so brutalized by their superstitions ; so regardless of that universal law of nature which holds together the common confederation of man ; so loose from the yoke of manners, and the restraints of moral discipline, and, by consequence, incapable of holding those relations which pre-suppose and require some progress in culture and refinement ;—in one word, is in so helpless and savage a condition, as to constitute it a duty on our part to give them a religion, in order to raise them to an equality with the species to which they nominally belong.

But these are reasonings, which however applicable to the savages that roam along the river Niger, or the Caffres and Hottentots who people the south of that continent, are not quite so applicable to the natives of India. They, Sir, are under the guidance of a religious system, favourable in the main to morality and right conduct ; mixed indeed with superstitions which dishonour, and absurdities which deform it ; but many of which are already worn out ; and many

will hereafter give way to more enlightened habits of thinking in the progress of that gradual march of human societies, which reason and philosophy tell us is never stationary or retrograde in the affairs of mankind. As to their civilization (it is almost ridiculous gravely to argue the question), let it not be forgotten what Colonel Munro, not the least intelligent of the witnesses who have been examined upon the state of India, told us with so much emphasis : that, “ if civilization was to become an article of trade between the two countries, he was convinced that this country would gain by the import cargo.” The same witness has distinctly pointed out to us in the Hindoos one of the most infallible indications of refinement which can characterize a cultured people. It is a maxim which history and philosophy have established, that no nation can be barbarous or uncivilized, where the female condition is respectable and happy. That gentleman, among the most striking of the Hindoo characteristics, has enumerated the deference and respect which is paid to the women ; the obeisance which usuriously pays back what it receives in the grace and splendour which it throws over social life, and which, producing and reproduced, is at once the parent and the fruit of good insti-

tutions. The Honourable Member for Norwich, however, not unmindful of the obvious effect of that testimony, triumphantly quotes from the Institutes of Menû, the great lawgiver of India, a passage in which I think six cardinal vices are attributed to women: and then he asks us, whether the influence of that religion can be beneficial, when it appears, from such high authority, that the female condition is so despicable and degraded? Those vices were, an inordinate love of finery, immoderate lust, anger, and other propensities, which I will not enumerate. Now, the Honourable Member appears to me strangely inconclusive in his argument. The lawgiver, like other moral teachers, denounces the frailties and infirmities to which the heart is inclined. Looking into the female bosom, he found what the female bosom, in every state of society, would furnish; a fluttering, busy group of vanities, of desires, of passions; the theme of satirists and moral writers in all ages and countries. Pope said, that "Every woman is at heart a rake." Would it not be more than nonsense to adopt it as the criterion of the manners or morals of our countrywomen? But the denunciation of failings to which we are prone by the very law and condition of our existence, is no

proof of their undue or excessive prevalence. It is legitimate reasoning to infer the defective morality of a country, from its immoral practices; but not to prove its immoral practices by the moral admonitions against them. It is unfair to infer a debauched and vicious state of female manners, from the precepts of moralists, or the denunciation of lawgivers against female vice and debauchery, or to deduce the existence of the offence from the existence of the propensity. Religion, law, and morality are barriers between propensities and vices. To say that women are by nature subject to the impulses of lust, is to say nothing more, than that they are subject, by the laws of Nature, to an instinct which she ordained for the conservation of the species; an instinct, which,

— “ Through some certain strainers well refined,

Is gentle love ;—

and against the unhallowed or unlawful indulgence of which the warning of morality and wisdom is wisely interposed. The inference deducible from the passage is not that the morals of the women are defective, but that the system of moral precept is perfect. It shews a pure and finished moral law, which, winding itself into all the labyrinths and recesses of the heart, anxiously shuts up every crevice

and avenue through which vice or passion may pollute it. The same observations will apply to the rest of the catalogue. If Menû said that the women of India were prone to anger, does it prove that every woman in India is a scold? But I will dwell no longer on an argument which carries with it its own refutation.

The natives of India are a sober, quiet, inoffensive, industrious race; passive, courteous, faithful. I fear, were we to descend for an illustration of their national character to the lowest classes of their population, that an equal portion of our own countrymen, taken from the same condition of life, would cut but a despicable figure in the comparison. To be sure, we have heard much declamation on the immoral exhibitions of the dancing girls; a class of women dedicated most undeniably to prostitution, but, at the same time, not to shameless open prostitution, and by no means obtruding themselves upon public observation. Yet, in striking the balance of national character, it would be rather unjust to overlook the disgusting spectacles of vice and brutality exhibited in the streets of the metropolis of this country, from which we are to send out Missionaries to reform the dancing girls of Hindostan; spectacles, which choke the public way, and shock the public eye with all that vice

has in it of the loathsome, polluted, or deformed. Is it uncandid to observe, that these victims of depravity afford at home, at our own doors, and under our own eyes, a much more ample harvest for the spiritual labours of our Evangelical reformers, than that which they are seeking abroad? With what colour of reason, or good sense, or consistency, can we send out crusades against the same vices in distant countries, with which our own is overrun? With what face can we impute those vices to their defective morality or pernicious superstitions; while, in the very bosom of Christendom, among the most polished states and the most enlightened communities, they are shooting up with still ranker luxuriance? There is however one relation of life, on which all its comfort and most of its security depends, and in this the Hindoos are punctiliously faithful; I mean that of servants. I cannot help demanding the testimony of those who have resided in India, to this fact; a fact, which pleads for them, I should hope, with the more efficacy, from the dreadful occurrences which have of late destroyed the confidence, and impaired the safety of that most important of the social connexions in this country. You entrust your servants in India, without apprehension, with money, jewels, plate. You sleep amongst them with open doors. You travel

through remote and unfrequented countries, and your life and property are safe under their protection. Can all this be the fruit of a superstition, which morality and right reason require us to extirpate, as a nuisance and an abomination? I know not, whether the Hindoo virtues are the offspring of their religion, or their nature. Those virtues have been remarked by all who have resided there. They will not be denied, but by those, in whom a selfish and fanatical pride has extinguished every spark of charity or candour. But their religion, imperfect as it is when compared with the purer morality and more efficient sanctions of our own, must not be excluded from the influences which have moulded the Hindoo character. Their sacred books unquestionably contain the leading principles of morality imparted in all the varied modes of fable, apophthegm, and allegory, and clothed, in the characteristic graces of Oriental diction. The duties of conjugal life, temperance, parental affection, filial piety, truth, justice, mercy, reverence for the aged, respect for the young, hospitality even to enemies, with the whole class and category of minor offices; these are not only strongly enforced, but beautifully inculcated in their Vedas and Purahnas.

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The immolation of widows, however, on the funeral pile of their deceased husbands, and the dreadful custom of infanticide are made the principal chargés in the Honourable Member's bill of indictment against the Hindoos. As to the former practice, it is right to observe, that it is enjoined by no positive precept of the Hindoo religion. On the contrary, one of the most authoritative of their sacred texts declares, "that a wife, "whether she ascends the funeral pile of her "lord, or survives for his benefit (that is, to perform certain expiatory ceremonies in his behalf), "is still "a faithful wife." I cite from the text of Mr. Colebrooke's Digest of the Hindoo law. It is, in truth, a species of voluntary martyrdom, meritorious, but by no means obligatory. Shocking as it is to the moral taste, I know not, whether it is strictly chargeable on the Hindoo religion. It is a species of overstrained interpretation of its duties; and the offspring of that fanaticism which will inevitably grow up, and has more or less grown up, under every system of religion. But let us not look at the frequency of the sacrifice abstractedly from the immense population of India. For it is not a correct mode of making the estimate, to take the number

of these immolations in one particular province, and then multiply them by the whole extent of India; a criterion, by which Mr. Chambers has unfairly computed their prevalence. In many provinces instances of this superstition have never, in others very rarely, happened. But it may safely be affirmed, that the custom itself is wearing away even in the northern provinces. Yet conceding, to their fullest extent, the statements of those Gentlemen who have given us such warm pictures of the horrors of this dreadful rite, the evil could not, with any precision, be attributed to the Hindoo religion. It may be an erroneous interpretation of its ordinances, an aberration from its principles, but by no means a necessary consequence from its precepts. What would be said of the candour and fairness of that enemy of the Christian faith, who should array against Christianity all the absurdities, nay, the cruelties practised by persons calling themselves Christians, in obedience, as they imagine, to its ordinances? With what affecting pictures might he not embellish the controversy? What dark and gloomy shades might he not throw over that pure and perfect dispensation of happiness to man! Might he not, for instance, describe the horrid sacrifice, still

practised in the greater part of Christendom, which dooms youth and beauty to the walls of a Convent? With what nice strokes of art might he not describe the lingering torments of that living death, compared to which the flames which consume the Hindoo widow, are almost mercy and benevolence itself? How might he not dilate upon the sufferings of the victim, as all the scenes of youth and the visions of hope first recede from her eyes; when the feverish devotion, which lifted her for a while above the world, begins to subside, and all its beloved scenes of friendship, of paternal endearment, its loves, its gaieties, throng again upon her remembrance? I know the argument, with which a Protestant reasoner would defend his faith. We have reformed all this. We have brought Christianity back to its original purity. And is the Hindoo, in whose religious code the self-devotion of the widow is no more to be found, than the dedication of nuns to celibacy and confinement is to be found in the gospel—is he to be denied the benefit of the same argument? The same kind of reasoning is applicable to the other crime, that of infanticide, on which the Honourable Member*

* Mr. W. Smith.

also enlarged. So far from its being an injunction of the Hindoo religion, it is strongly inhibited by their law. Nay, the horror of this practice seems to have been so present to the mind of the law-giver, that it is the standard both of the guilt and punishment of acts, which have the remotest tendency to prevent the birth of the offspring! For it is declared by Menû, that a woman who bathes immediately after conception, commits a crime equal to infanticide. Infanticide did indeed prevail in one or two provinces, and superstition and ignorance clothed it in the garb of a religious duty. But by what legitimate reasoning can a practice be charged on their religion, which that religion has not only not enjoined, but absolutely inhibited; and which so far from being prevalent through Hindostan, (as it has been most unfairly stated,) has scarcely been heard of, but amongst the inhabitants of a very few provinces, bearing scarce any proportion to the general population of the country? Granting, however, the existence of the evil, are there no means of subduing it, or of bringing a people back to the instincts of nature and of affection, but by letting loose amongst them a description of reformers, who will in all probability drive them into a more

obstinate adherence to the very crimes, and errors they pretend to correct? The evil, however, has been extirpated, and without the aid of Missionaries, by Mr. Duncan, the late governor of Bombay, in one of the countries under his government; and Lord Wellesley, in the same manner, abolished the unnatural custom of exposing children at the Island of Sauger. How did they proceed? They proclaimed to the natives, upon the authority of their own Pundits and Brahmins, that the practice was unlawful, and as much at variance with the injunctions of the Hindoo religion as with universal law and natural reason; at the same time denouncing the punishment of murder on those who should hereafter commit the offence. Here then is an instance in which that religion inhibits and corrects the very evil of which it is supposed to have been the parent.

So much then for the vices of the Hindoo character, and the brutal superstitions (such is the polished eloquence of the London Tavern) of the Hindoo religion. But, Sir, it is a singular symptom of this epidemic enthusiasm for the conversion of the Hindoos, that Missionaries are to be sent out of all sects and persuasions and opinions, however diversified and contradictory. No matter what

sort of Christianity is imparted, so that it goes by that name: Calvinists, Unitarians, Methodists, Moravians. Provided India is supplied with a plentiful assortment of sects, no one seems to feel the least solicitude whether the Christianity that is to be taught there, be the genuine language of its author, or the dream of mysticism and folly. I own, that to me it does not appear quite a matter of indifference, if Missionaries must be sent out, what the doctrines are, that they are to teach. I am disposed to think, that Christianity may be imparted in such forms as to render it something more than problematic, whether it would be an improvement on the religion it supplanted; that it may be so defiled and adulterated in the vessels from which it is administered, as to lose all its restoring and healthful virtues. Are there not nominal systems of Christianity, which are at an equal distance from its primitive perfection with the very superstition which we are striving to abolish? It might, therefore, become an important investigation, whether the blessings of a corrupted Christianity so far outweigh the evils of a tolerably enlightened heathenism, as to make it worth while to exchange that which is appropriately Hindoo, for that which, after all, is not Christian.

For instance, if a Christianity is sent out to them, attributing to the beneficent Author of nature the same morose, capricious, revengeful passions which agitate the human tyrant, but with infinity to his power; and endless duration to his inflictions; if it was the primary tenet of that doctrine that the same Being had made a fanciful and arbitrary destination of a large portion of his creatures, without blame or delinquency, nay, before their birth, to everlasting misery; and to have as fancifully and capriciously destined the rest to an eternal happiness, unearned by one real merit, or one virtuous aspiration;—and if, in this gloomy creed, an assent to mystical propositions, was the chief claim to salvation, while it pronounced the purest and most exalted morals to be equivalent to the most abandoned wickedness*;—reason and common sense might be allowed to throw out a few scruples against the subversion of the established morals or theology of India; however absurd or superstitious, if such was the system by which they were to be superseded. Suppose, then, that the Missionaries of this persuasion were to establish their

* These consequences have been unanswerably traced to the Calvinistic scheme by the Bishop of Lincoln, in his learned Refutation of Calvinism, p. 258.

creed amongst the natives of Hindostan. It is obvious that they will have lost all the excellencies of the Hindoo system; but who will say that they will have got the advantages of the Christian? Compute their gains. Amongst other prominent peculiarities of their religion, its severe and inviolable prohibitions against the use of intoxicating liquors will have been overthrown. It is scarcely possible to estimate the complete revolution, which this single circumstance will produce in their manners and morals. It will destroy every shade and tint of their national character. It will overturn the mounds, by which they have been secured from the whole rabble of vices, which scourge the Western world; vices, of which drunkenness is the prolific parent, and which render the mass of the population of our own country the most profligate and abandoned in Europe. It is not that other religions do not prohibit this species of intemperance; but the Oriental are the only ones that render it impossible. I really believe, that if the foundations of your power in India were accurately explored, you would find that it was to this national peculiarity (which must be destroyed, if you disturb the sanctions of their law and their religion) you chiefly owed the discipline of your native army,

and the obedience of your native subjects. In exchange for this, they will have been initiated into the mysteries of election and reprobation. I leave it to those who are versed in moral calculations, to decide, what will have been gained to ourselves by giving them Calvinism and fermented liquors; and whether predestination and gin will be a compensation to the natives of India, for the changes, which will overwhelm their habits, and morals, and religion?

527 Can we overlook, also, the difficulties which will be interposed to the progress of conversion by the jarring and contradictory doctrines of the Missionaries themselves? For there seems to be no kind of anxiety to introduce into India that unity of faith, on which the mind of man may find settlement and repose. The Church of England is to send out no Missionaries at all. She is provided indeed with her Bishop and her Archdeacons; and is to loll, in dignified ease, upon her episcopal cushions. But the supporters of the Clause have reserved all their zeal for the Sectarians. The whole task of conversion, is abandoned to them; and the Parliament of Great Britain is called upon to grant new facilities to the diffusion of dissent and schism from every doctrine

which the Law and the Civil Magistrate have sanctioned. It is a most ingenious scheme for the dissemination, on the widest scale, of every opinion and dogma that is at variance with the National Church. But is it the best way of communicating Christianity to a people hitherto estranged from its blessings, to start among them so many sects and doctrines? You will have Calvinists, Independents, Presbyterians, Moravians, Swedenborgians, Unitarians, and other tribes and denominations. It is not, of course, proposed to give them an Eclectic Christianity composed of a little of each; or a piebald, incongruous, patchwork Christianity, that is to combine all the varieties into which the Christian world is divided. Has it, however, never occurred to these Gentlemen, that although schisms and sects may, and in the nature of things must, arise subsequently to the establishment of a new religion, it is in vain to think of beginning a religion with these contrarieties and divisions? The Hindoo may fairly enough be permitted to ask: "Gentlemen, which is the Christianity I am to embrace? You are proposing to us a religion which is to supplant the rites, the doctrines, the laws, the manners of our fathers; and you yourselves are not agreed what that religion is. You require us to

“ assent to certain mysteries, of an incarnation, a
 “ miraculous conception, and to other tenets, which
 “ some of you hold to be of the vital essence of your
 “ creed. But others amongst you deride these
 “ mysteries: and the very passages in your Shasters,
 “ to which you refer for the testimony of your doc-
 “ trines, they tell us are forged and interpolated.”
 Surely such perplexities as these must create doubts
 and distractions, which will frustrate the whole
 scheme of conversion.

528 It will be perceived, that I have chiefly confined
 my remarks to the Hindoos, who, in all questions
 relative to India, must occupy the principal share
 of the discussion. They will of course apply with
 equal force to the Mahommedans. Bernier,
 who travelled into India during the Mogul govern-
 ment, who has been cited as an authority in this
 debate, and whose writings were admitted by the
 House of Lords, on the trial of Mr. Hastings, as
 good evidence of Oriental customs, and who, be-
 sides, evinces no inconsiderable portion of zeal for
 the introduction of Christianity into the East,
 having witnessed the efforts of the Capuchin and
 Jesuit Missionaries at the courts of Delhi and Agra,
 speaks most despairingly as to the practicability
 of converting the Mussulmaun population. He

cautions his readers against the stories that other travellers had spread of the progress of Christianity in the Mogul states, and against too easy a credulity in the facility of diffusing it. The sect, he says, (I quote from memory) is too libertine and attractive to be abandoned. It is the necessary tendency of doctrines which have been propagated originally by the sword, afterwards to spread of themselves; nor do I see, he adds, that they can be overthrown or extirpated, but *by the means by which they have been propagated*—unless by one of those extraordinary interpositions of Heaven, which we may occasionally look for, and of which striking appearances have been exhibited in China and Japan. Now, Sir, need I refer the House to the result of the attempt in China and Japan, which M. Bernier did not live to witness?

But I am aware, that these reasonings would be entitled to little weight, if there were not absolute peril in the attempt. Perhaps any kind of Christianity, even the gloom of Calvinism, or the impoverished and scanty creed of the Unitarian, would be an improvement on the ancient religion of India. That, unfortunately, is not now the question. It is one of the necessities of human affairs, that the choice of man is for the most part placed betwixt evils. The preservation of an

empire is delegated to us. No matter how it was obtained. It is in our hands. Of all tenures, it is the most delicate. The threads and ligaments which hold it together are so fine and gossamery, that one incautious movement may snap it asunder. It is a chain which no artificer can repair. But we hold it on this simple condition—abstinence from all aggression on the religions of the country. If the existence of those religions be an evil, it is one which we must endure. The alternative is the loss of our empire. It is idle casuistry to set ourselves about gravely balancing and computing these evils, as if they were arithmetical quantities. It is, in truth, only with the political question, that the House ought to concern itself. Political considerations in this place have an acknowledged ascendancy. All the dignity of our character, and the efficiency of our function, would be destroyed, if our theology was admitted into a partnership with our policy; and religious enthusiasm, the most intractable of all passions, should disturb us in our legislative duties. In this view of the subject, it is enough for us, that the religious revolution which is proposed, involves in it political changes which must destroy our Eastern establish-

ments. Without tracing all its consequences, it is sufficient to keep before our eyes, this direct and primary one; the abolition of castes, that astonishing and singular institution, which, compressing the restlessness of ambition and the impatience of subjection by the united weight of an irreversible law and an inveterate habit, gives you sixty millions of passive, obedient, industrious citizens, of whom the great mass are by that very institution; which you propose to abolish, irrevocably disarmed, and destined to the pursuits and arts of peace. It is enough for that practical, sober wisdom, which has hitherto presided over our councils, that the overthrow of such an institution would let loose all the elements of strife, and discontent, of active and robust rebellion, before which your dreams of empire, of commerce, of revenue, would be scattered as vapour by the blast. I ask you, then, whether it is worth while to make an attempt, which must be subversive of our existence in India? The moral obligation to diffuse Christianity, binding and authoritative as it is, vanishes, when it is placed against the ills and mischiefs of the experiment. There never was a moral obligation to produce woe, and bloodshed, and civil disorder. Such an obligation would not exist, were the wildest barbarians the subjects of

the experiment. But, when, in addition to these considerations, which are sanctioned by justice, and policy, and virtue, it is remembered, that the people we are so anxious to convert, are, in the main, a moral and virtuous people; not undisciplined to civil arts, nor uninfluenced by those principles of religion which give security to life, and impart consolation in death; the obligation assumes a contrary character; and common sense, reason, and even religion itself, cry out aloud against our interference. I shall therefore vote for the amendment.

I am sensible, Sir, that the matter is not exhausted. But I feel too deeply the indulgence of the House, to abuse it with any farther observations on a subject, which unfolds itself as I advance, and to which I feel, the more I think of it, my own incompetence to render even imperfect justice.

THE END.

AUGUST, 1813.

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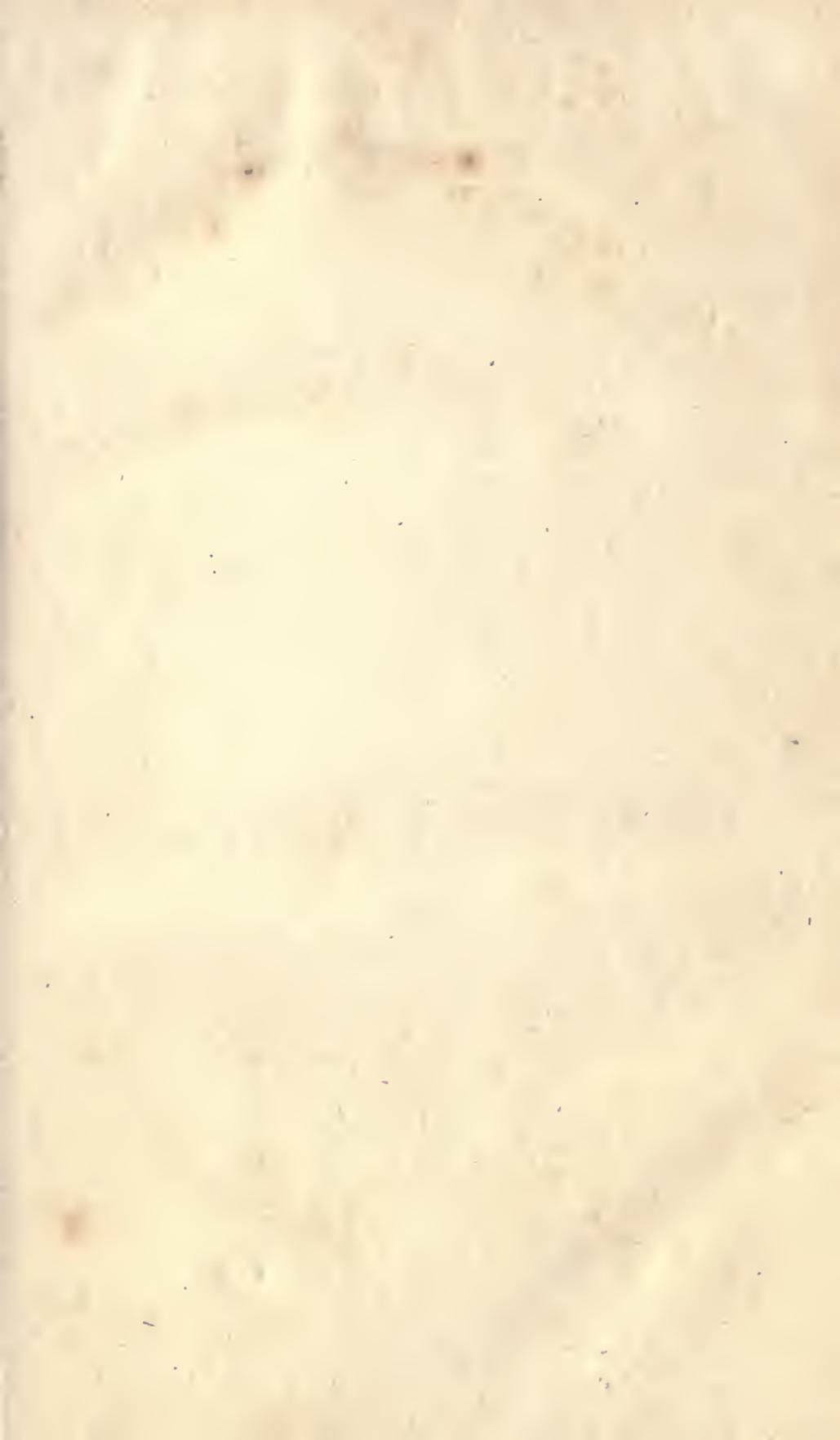
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