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LETTER

TO THE

HONOURABLE

THE EAST-INDIA COMPANY,

IN

REPLY TO THE STATEMENTS

OF

CHARLES BULLER, ESQ. M.P.

CONCERNING THE

IDOL JUGGERNAUT.

BY THE

REV. CLAUD. BUCHANAN.

Extracted from the printed Minutes of the House of Commons.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, STRAND.

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LETTER,

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TO THE COURT OF DIRECTORS OF THE HON.
EAST INDIA COMPANY.

HONOURABLE SIRS,

I WAS yesterday favoured with a copy of a letter addressed by Mr. Charles Buller to your Honourable Court, dated the 19th instant, which has been ordered to be laid on the table of the House of Commons, relating to the worship of the idol Juggernaut; and I now beg leave to submit some remarks on that document. The reference which the writer makes to me by name, and to my publications on this subject, will apologize for my doing myself the honour of addressing your Honourable Court.

Par. 1. Mr. Buller fully confirms, in essential

points, the general statements made by me, concerning the part which the Bengal Government has taken in the superintendance of Juggernaut, and in deriving revenue from the worship of the idol ; but he defends the policy. With that I have nothing to do. He admits, also, that self-immolation under the wheels of the car is practised, but thinks the instances are rare. I am of opinion that they are rare also ; rare, I mean, when compared with the number of females immolated on the funeral pile. He heard of one immolation while he was at Juggernaut ; and I have stated that I saw two.

2. The only part of his letter that I need to notice, is that which relates to the indecency of the exhibition at Juggernaut :—“ On that point,” he says, “ my attention was directed to a publication by the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, who “ speaks of a priest having pronounced certain obscene stanzas in the ears of the people, “ and of certain indecent gestures exhibited by a “ boy and a priest on the car.” On this passage Mr. Buller observes :—“ I do not mean to doubt “ the fact.” “ With respect to the indecent gestures said to have been exhibited on the car, “ all I can say is, that if such things are done “ I never saw them.” In the foregoing quotations I state what I saw in 1806, and Mr. Buller states what he did not see in 1809.

3. On my witnessing the atrocities at Juggernaut in 1806, I wrote letters from the spot to a Member of the Supreme Government, and to the Senior Chaplain in Bengal, containing portions of my journal as now given to the public, and expressing a hope that the Bengal Government would use its influence in suppressing the sanguinary and indecent exhibitions. These letters were afterwards fairly copied, and put into the hands of many. Men’s minds were shocked by the recital, and Government was blamed. It is possible that Mr. Buller may not have heard of these letters, although they were certainly in the hands of his intimate friends ; and in that case no blame is imputable to him for not having alluded to them. Previously to this, one of the members of the Supreme Government (Mr. Udny) had protested against any interference at all with the idol Juggernaut ; and the Marquis Wellesley had declined giving his sanction to the law for the superintendance and controul of the temple. The question now was, whether, under existing circumstances, the enormity of these scenes might not be, in some degree, qualified. What instructions Government might have given to the Superintendent of the temple on this head, I do not know, as I soon after left the country. If they gave none, this is directly contrary to the evidence

of Mr. Graham (himself a member of the Supreme Government), before the Committee of the House of Commons. If the Government did issue some instructions on the subject, then that fact alone may account for the difference of the scenes which were exhibited to me in 1806, and to Mr. Buller in 1809.

4. I shall now however assume, for the sake of argument, that the Bengal Government did not send instructions to the Superintendant of Juggernaut to endeavour to qualify the enormity of the public exhibitions; and shall proceed to review the opposing statements of Mr. Buller and myself, even under that supposition. I shall simply state, in the first place, that what I saw in 1806 was seen, in part at least, by others. I appeal to Henry Hunter, Esq. superintendant of the temple in 1806, and to Captain Paton and Lieutenant Woodcock, military officers in the Company's service, then on duty at Juggernaut, whether they have not at any time witnessed the priest, who for the time directed the car of the idol, standing with his long wand in his hand behind the wooden horses, projecting this wand significantly, and with most unseemly action, using at the same time other indecent gestures, and accompanying these gestures with songs and extempore speeches, ad-

dressed to a multitude composed of both sexes?*

5. Mr. Buller wonders how I should know that the speeches of the priest were indecent, as he thinks it probable I did not understand the vernacular tongue of the province of Orissa. In reply to this, I have to observe, that I had two translations of the language: one from the indecent gestures of the priest, whose attitudes too plainly interpreted his words; and another from my servants around me, who could translate every word he uttered.

6. The writer has argued, in two different places of his letter, as if I had said that "my ears were shocked by hearing the songs." I have used no such words, nor any thing like them. My words are these: "I felt a consciousness of doing wrong, in *witnessing* this disgusting exhibition; and was somewhat appalled by the magnitude and horror of the *spectacle*."

7. The writer marvels, in the next place, that I should have heard any thing distinctly, on account

* I might also refer to Captain Comyn (or Cummin) a visitor, and to other gentlemen who might have visited Juggernaut about that period, some of whom may possibly be now in England.

of the noise of the people "clapping their hands, "talking, shouting, and merry-making," in a crowd "of about one hundred thousand;" particularly "when, owing to the distance of the platform on "which the priest stands, one could not by any "endeavours get within ten yards of him." Mr. Buller would leave it to be inferred here, that I was not within "ten yards" of the priest:—whereas I state, in the printed account, that "I "went on in the procession *close* by the tower;" and, in the letters circulated at Calcutta, it was stated, that I was so close to the tower as "to receive a garland of flowers from the hand of the "priest." The fact was, I could touch the car with my hand, during almost the whole time.

8. Mr. Buller observes again, that the "noise "of the people was incessant, and without intermission, so that he could not hear any thing "that was said." Doubtless he could not hear what was said by the priest, if he stood at a distance. It is proper to explain here that, on these occasions, Europeans in India usually look on at a distance, on account of the press of the people. At Juggernaut, in 1806, the English gentlemen usually sat in the Cutchery, or public office, to see the procession pass. I sat there for a while on different days; but I could hear or see nothing distinctly, except at the moment of passing, and I joined the procession. Mr. Buller

mentions that some ladies were with him: it is therefore probable that Mr. Buller sat all the while with the ladies in the Cutchery, and that they did not follow the idol for two or three hours, to see what was transacting among the people, at their celebration of the famed Rutt Jatra.

9. Mr. Buller thinks that the noise of the people about the car is "incessant, without intermission;" but if he had joined the car, he would have found that this is not the case. When the priest pronounces his stanzas, which he does generally while the car stands still, there is a solemn silence among the people who are near it, and they listen with keen attention; at the conclusion they respond with a sensual yell of approbation, and then urge the car along. Many such yells I am sure Mr. Buller must have heard, although he might not have known what it was that produced them. To suppose that the priest should, on any public occasion, address the people and not be listened to, is hardly consistent. Mr. Buller's acknowledged ignorance of this notorious circumstance, viz. that there is a frequent intermission of the noise of the people about the car, and a gaping attention to devour the words of the priest, entirely convinces me that he must be wholly ignorant of many im-

portant particulars of the native scenes at Juggernaut.

10. I do not impute it as a fault to Mr. Buller, that he has come away so imperfectly informed respecting the scenes of Juggernaut; nor do I much wonder at it. In the eight years during which I believe we resided together in Calcutta, I never met Mr. Buller once, that I can remember in the district of the natives, attending a Sahamuron*, or witnessing their processions or religious rites. I never heard that he had any taste for investigating the existing customs of the people, or any solicitude to understand the character of their superstition, whether for the purpose of extending Christianity or of palliating idolatry. And I dare say he will candidly confess, that while he held his high station at Juggernaut, he never dreamed of putting his person to inconvenience or danger, by prosecuting researches of this kind; and that, instead of visiting frequently, with such intent, the noisome precincts of the polluted town and temple, he preferred the salubrious gales at his residence, on the pleasant shores of the neighbouring sea. I do not, I say, impute it as a fault to Mr. Buller, that he has not

* Burning of women.

a taste for such inquiries; but I wonder exceedingly that, under such circumstances, he should, in an official letter to your Honourable Court, intended to be laid on the table of the House of Commons, have urged (at least with gravity) two objections so frivolous as the following: First, that possibly I did not understand the dialect of Orissa; and second, that probably, if I did understand it, I was at too great a distance from the speaker to hear what was said. On these two inuendos rests the whole argument of Mr. Buller, on the point in question addressed to your Honourable Court.

11. Mr. Buller observes, that nothing improper in the exhibition could have been apprehended when he was at Juggernaut, otherwise the gentlemen would not have asked the ladies to witness the procession. This is specious; but it amounts to little when the circumstances are explained. Mr. Hunter, in 1806, (long before Mr. Buller's arrival at Juggernaut), would doubtless discountenance any indecency as much as he could, and would request the officiating priest to suppress it, at least in the presence of Europeans. I certainly had some conversation with Mr. Hunter on the subject. There was no lady at Juggernaut when I was there. On occasion of the first lady coming to the place, we may believe that some endeavour would be made, by the interference of the Company's officers, to

prevent any thing improper from being practised, while the idol passed the Cutchery. If the director of the car was aware that any particular practice would give offence to the superintendant of the temple (whose local influence we may suppose is very great), he would without doubt, in deference to his rank and authority, suppress it in his presence, or while passing the Cutchery. But this decides nothing as to the character of the Hindoo festival of the Rutt Jatra. Had Mr. Buller accompanied the car in a private character for a few days, he would have returned to England with very different impressions of the orgies of Juggernaut*.

12. It will now be proper to advert to the stanzas of the officiating priest while directing the car. Mr. Buller admits, that "the songs in question, if he may rely on the information he received, are denominated Cubbee." He was rightly informed. They are licentious songs, recounting the amours of their gods, and are replete with obscenity. Mr. Buller apologises for the use of the Cubbee in these words: "But whoever knows any thing of the Hindoos, must be aware that their veneration for antiquity will not allow

* I use the old orthography in writing this word. English organs cannot pronounce *Jag,h-nat,h*.

"them to depart from any thing which has once formed a part of their ceremonies." This is truly said. If left to themselves, without instruction or regard, the Hindoo people will never depart from their ancient superstitions, however sanguinary or obscene.

13. As to Mr. Buller's attempt to justify the recital of the Cubbee in the public festivals of the Hindoos, by intimating, that it is "a species of song not very unlike that which is admitted into our own sacred writings;" I will not suffer myself to make any comment upon it in a letter addressed to your Honourable Court. Mr. Buller adds, "Ours" (i. e. our Cubbee) "I imagine are not at present read in any parts of our service."

14. The observations and arguments of Mr. Buller, in his letter, go to countenance an opinion that there is no obscenity in the Hindoo worship; that its ancient character has suddenly disappeared; or at least, if it exist in the derivative streams, that it is not to be found at the fountain head. He says that he not only never saw, but that he never heard of any such thing. Mr. Buller knows well, that if he did not choose to make inquiry, the natives would never let him hear any thing to their disadvantage. But I must beg leave most respectfully to assure your Honour,

able Court, that Mr. Buller is entirely mistaken in his estimate of the character of the Hindoo worship. The two characteristics of the worship of Brahma, are impurity and blood. The emblems of the former vice are engraved in durable sculpture every where on the walls of the temple. Why are they thus engraved? Because they constitute the very essence of the Brahminical superstition. No labour of language, no qualification of expression, can ever do away this most notorious fact. I would add, that there is not a single authentic historian of the Hindoo manners and religion from Tavernier down to this time, who has ventured to dissemble it.

15. Having said thus much on subjects which Mr. Buller controverts, I think it fit now to notice a subject which he does not controvert, namely, the horrible effects of the concourse of Pilgrims at Juggernaut. Mr. Buller considers "that the pilgrims come from all parts of Hindostan, from upwards of 1600 miles distance; and that a large proportion of these consist of the old and infirm, who come for the express purpose of laying their bones within the precincts of the city." He further argues, that even if there were ten immolations at a single festival, it would not be surprising, considering the extent of the population; "for I suppose," he adds, "the whole of

"the Hindoo population, as far as Cabul, to be not much short of two hundred millions."

16. Mr. Buller would maintain the proposition, "that the imposition of the tax diminishes the number of pilgrims." But the events of this last year render this proposition very questionable. I would observe in the mean time, that Mr. Buller would place the policy of the tax on a new ground, namely, "the diminution of the number of pilgrims, and the consequent prevention of famine and death." Unfortunately for this argument, it is a well-known fact, that while the temple was under the native dominion, when the tax on admission was higher than it is now, and when a discipline was preserved among the people which we would not think it right to exert, the concourse of pilgrims was yet immense, in peaceable times incredibly great, and the consequent evils in the necessary proportion. Mr. Buller describes the state of Juggernaut, about 1805, in the following words: "During the time that access was allowed to the temple without the tax, the throng of people at the place was so great, and such a considerable number of the poorer classes took that opportunity of visiting the temple, that I was informed that several persons perished from actual want of subsistence. The scenes on the road were, I am told,

“truly shocking*. But since the tax has been continued, the numbers of the pilgrims, particularly of the lower classes, have considerably diminished.”—“I should regret to see the tax abolished, as the abolition of it would render it difficult to restrain and regulate the numerous bodies of pilgrims who resort to the place; and it would in all probability be the cause of the revival of those horrid scenes of distress which were before experienced, when the tax was discontinued, and of which the traces are still to be met with in the numerous human bones on the road.”

17. Your Honourable Court will be concerned to hear that the accounts lately received represent the state of Juggernaut as being more shocking than ever. The “revival of those horrid scenes,” which Mr. Buller only anticipated from the abolition of the tax, has taken place during its continuance. In the Periodical Accounts recently published, which have been transmitted by the Baptist Mission in India, there is a communication from the correspondents of the Society in Orissa, Messrs. Peter, Smith, and Green. Mr. Peter had been stationed for some time as Missionary at

* These scenes took place just previously to Dr. Buchanan's visit to Juggernaut, which was in 1806.

Balasore, from whence he proceeded to preach at Buddruck, Gaj-poor, and Cuttack, in his way towards Juggernaut. He states, that the anxiety of the pilgrims to hear him explain the Christian faith (for he is a native born, of dark complexion, and speaks the language like themselves) was unaccountably great; that their avidity to receive copies of the Holy Scriptures was extreme; and that it was altogether beyond his ability to supply the demand. He adds, that the English Colonel and his officers have been present on those occasions. Messrs. Smith and Green write from Cuttack, that the worship of the idol Juggernaut had been more numerous attended than usual. “You would have been astonished,” say they, “to see the vast number of pilgrims crossing the river at Cuttack. As far as the eye could reach we could not see the end of the ranks; it put us in mind of an army going to battle.”—“You can easily conceive what a multitude of men, women, and children must have been assembled at the temple, for one hundred and fifty, or thereabouts, to have been killed in the crowd. They trod one upon another in approaching the temple gate. Ten Sepoys per company from all the battalions, from Barrackpore to this station, had permission to visit the temple. A famine was produced in the country, and great numbers of the pilgrims died of hunger and thirst.

“ We talked to some of them, but it was of no use. They said, whether we survive or not, we will see the temple of Juggernaut before our death. Numbers killed themselves by falling under the wheels of the idol’s car. They laid themselves flat on their backs, for the very purpose of being crushed to death by it*.” The number of the pilgrims here said to have been killed in the crowd, may perhaps be overstated, as the writers probably received the report of the natives. But if two-thirds of the number were deducted, the horrible circumstances of the case remain the same.

18. I shall add the testimony of Dr. Carey on the subject of the consumption of human lives at Juggernaut at this time. I need not add, that Dr. Carey is a man of unquestionable integrity ; that he has been long held in estimation by the most respectable characters in Bengal, and possesses very superior opportunities of knowing what is passing in India generally. In a letter lately received, he thus expresses himself :

“ Idolatry destroys more than the sword, yet in a way which is scarcely perceived. The numbers who die in their long pilgrimages,

* Periodical Accounts of Baptist Mission, No. xxiii.

“ either through want or fatigue, or from dysenteries, and fevers, caught by lying out, and want of accommodation, is incredible. I only mention one idol, the famous Juggernaut in Orissa, to which twelve or thirteen pilgrimages are made every year. It is calculated that the number who go thither is, on some occasions, 600,000 persons, and scarcely ever less than 100,000. I suppose, at the lowest calculation, that, in the year, 1,200,000 persons attend. Now, if only one in ten died, the mortality caused by this one idol would be 120,000 in a year ; but some are of opinion that not many more than one in ten survive, and return home again. Besides these, I calculate that 10,000 women annually burn with the bodies of their deceased husbands, and the multitudes destroyed in other methods would swell the catalogue to an extent almost exceeding credibility*.”

With regard to the number of women who burn themselves annually in India, there are two circumstances which render it probable, that it is at least as great as Dr. Carey computes it. The first is, that Mr. Buller, who was long Secretary to the Board of Revenue in India, has calculated that the population, extending as far as Cabul, is not much short of “ two hundred millions.” The

* Periodical Accounts of Baptist Mission, No. xxiii.

other circumstance is, that a Report has arrived, printed in Bengal at the press of the Missionaries (and your Honourable Court knows the attention of your Bengal Government to every thing that is printed there), stating, that "Seventy Females had burned themselves in the months of May and June last, between Cossimbazar (about two hundred miles above Calcutta) and the mouth of the Hooghly river, leaving one hundred and eighty-four orphans." The name and age of every woman are given, and also the places where the burning took place, and where the orphans live. These unhappy witnesses can satisfy those persons who may doubt the truth of the printed account.

19. There is a disposition prevalent at present to disparage the testimony of the Christian Missionaries. It is supposed by their adversaries that, if they can in any way impeach the credit of a promoter of Christianity, they gain somewhat in the present question. But the cause of Christianity will prevail. It will be found, that the profession of Christianity and a desire to promote it, are generally accompanied by a love of truth. The respectability of the Christian Missionary will increase in this nation, while the character and testimony of the supporters of Brahma will sink and be diminished. It is true, an ardent zeal

for the diffusion of the blessings of religion will, in some cases, particularly in the view of impious scenes, excite indignation, and may produce too high a colouring in statement (which is exceedingly reprehensible), and narrators may make mistakes in description. But still the substance of the fact (which they think it necessary to communicate to their country in defence of the honour of Christianity) will remain. In like manner, a writer, animated by a zeal of a contrary character, may be able, by the power of high embellishment, by noticing indifferent circumstances and entirely suppressing others, to represent the idol Juggernaut as being merely one of "the gay and elegant deities of Greece and Rome;" but the substance of the fact, as stated by others, will remain the same; it will still continue true, that Juggernaut is a fountain of vice and misery to millions of mankind, that the sanguinary and obscene character of the worship is in the highest degree revolting, and that it will be a most happy event when our Christian nation shall dissolve its connection with that polluted place.

20. The annual waste of human life, from the causes that have been mentioned, in the territories under the dominion of the Honourable the East-India Company, is a subject of appalling contemplation. Every friend of humanity must be often

putting the question, Is this scene to continue for ever? Can there be no melioration of human existence in India? Are there no means of mitigating the anguish of reflection in England, when we consider that the desolations of Juggernaut exist under our government? Yes, we answer, there are means. We have seen with what avidity the Holy Scriptures are received by the pilgrims. These pilgrims come from every part of India; some from Cabul, a distance of 1600 miles, and some from Samarchand. They are the representatives of a population, amounting, as we have seen, to "two hundred millions." They are of every caste, and many of them of no caste at all. The Bible is, by the inscrutable providence of God, at hand: it has been translated into the languages of India. Would it not, then, be worthy of the East-India Company to order ten thousand copies to be distributed annually at Juggernaut, in any manner that prudence would justify, and experience direct, as a sacred return for the revenue we derive from it, if it should be thought right that that revenue should still be continued. The Scriptures would thus be carried to the extremities of India and the East. Is it possible that the shadow of an objection should arise against such a measure, innoxious, as it is humane and heavenly in its tendency? Are we afraid that "the wretches who come to lay their bones within

"the precincts of Juggernaut" would mutiny and take away our dominion? Would not the consequence be rather, that "the blessing of Him that "was ready to perish" would rest upon you?

I have the honour to be,

Honourable Sirs,

Your most obedient Servant,

C. BUCHANAN.

Kirby Hall, Borobridge,
25th May, 1813.

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