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EAST INDIA POSSESSIONS.

On the motion of Mr. CANNING, the dropped Order of the Day was read for going into a Committee on the East India Possessions' Bill.

Mr. Secretary CANNING then rose and said: In pursuance, Sir, of the promise I made a few nights back, I propose, in moving that you leave the Chair, to open very shortly the nature of the transaction out of which this measure arises. I take the liberty of presenting myself to the House on the present occasion, although the Bill is in the hands of my Right Honourable Friend, the President of the Board of Controul (Mr. Wynn), because the treaty originated at the time when I had the honour of holding that office, and therefore I am responsible for the principle upon which it is founded. In order to judge of the transaction fairly, Gentlemen will please to recollect the situation in which things stood at the conclusion of the war. It will probably be remembered, that at that period all the possessions which had been taken from the Dutch were restored to them. I am not now called upon to discuss the policy or expediency of that measure; but I think I am prepared to shew that in the existing circumstances of the times, it was highly desirable not to press too hardly upon that country; and at all events the treaty with the Netherlands received the approbation of Parliament. In this state things stood until some time in the year 1816, when I came into office as President of the Board of Controul. There were many stipulations then in progress—many had not been fully explained—many were left open to discussion; and from the natural eagerness, on the one hand, to obtain re-possession of those settlements from which they had been driven by conquest, and from the slowness natural to the transaction, great delay took place, and considerable difficulties arose on account of the great distance from home. In consequence of this a degree of ill humour had sprung up, which required a great deal of management & forbearance to appease. I trust I shall not be supposed unkind in wishing to disparage those who were employed in our own service; but I must state, that there was a view taken of the transaction by the subordinate agents of the East India Company, inconsistent with their capacity of subordinate agents—they questioned the policy of the Treaty, and seemed more disposed to look into the stipulations than to carry them into execution. At a considerable distance from any controul agents are sometimes apt to forget the relation in which they stand to those who entrust them with power; and so it happened, that these Gentlemen placed the Government at home in this perplexing condition. They must either be pledged to support them in all their extremities, or be reduced to the necessity of rescinding their acts; and I think I speak within bounds when I say, that there were at that period, in the year 1816, no less than half a dozen treaties in progress of negociation, without any authority whatsoever [hear, hear!]. At that time I received constant communications that a design was entertained by the Government of the Netherlands to retake all the possessions and recover all the advantages which they had formerly enjoyed; and to exclude the English from all participation in the trade in those seas. As was my duty, I frequently required, in answer to those representations, some specific act which could be substantiated by evidence, so that the question might fairly be brought under consideration. But to all my demands I never could get any thing like a distinct answer; I received constant reiterations of the intentions of the Dutch Government, abundance of vague insinuations, and even, by way of illustration, an obscure reference to the massacre of Amboyna [a laugh]. On the other hand, complaints reached me from the Netherlands of the tardiness of our agents to make restitution; and it happening very unfortunately at that time that a most distinguished Gentleman, of considerable talents and great zeal for the public service, the then Governor of Java, was sent to Bencoolen, and having been raised from the humble title of Resident, which, in fact, meant nothing more than Superintendent of Pepper [a laugh], to the rank and station of Lieutenant Governor, a suspicion was entertained that there was a design on the part of the English Government to form a new empire in the Indian seas, of which Bencoolen was to be the capital. Out of this state of things arose a feeling of ill humour between two Powers, which, in my judgment, had every reason of sound policy for agreeing, and, in fact, there seemed to have been no prospect of bickering. As the greater part of the imputation against the Indian Government was a design of exclusive trade and an intention to keep the commerce of the Indian seas to themselves, the first step towards a negociation was to get a disavowal of the principle, although no act had been committed. I am aware that such a course is unusual in diplomatic intercourse; but as the great question was the principle to which I have alluded, our first object was to have this principle disavowed. In the course of these mutual animosities, by the enterprising spirit and sound judgment of the Gentleman I have already mentioned, we became possessed of the Island of Sincapore, the advantages of which must be too well known to require now to be explained. It may, perhaps, be expected that I should explain the nature of our title to this possession. As facts and documents are necessary to a clear title, I individually was certainly of opinion that we could not substantiate our title; but as all titles in the East are not of a very accurate and defined nature, I thought it would be a great mistake to apply to this particular case the general principles of European policy, or any high romantic feelings of morality [hear, hear!]. Amongst the charges against the Netherlands, it was urged that they had entered into treaties with all the Eastern Islands, excluding all other European Powers from commercial intercourse. This was a species of Treaty which it was obviously our interest to annual; but, at the same time, I could not help remembering, that we ourselves had entered into similar Treaties with other States. However, the existence of this fact did not take away my desire to abrogate the Treaties to which I have alluded; but, then, there were considerable difficulties to be encountered. This consideration led me to look at the means whereby we could repair the error, and undo the advantages which the Dutch possessed, and accordingly a Treaty was entered into at the restoration of peace to restore to the Dutch some Islands, amounting to 12 in number. These Islands were not of very great size or extent. They were trifling in point of income, and most inconvenient as to the rights and claims which they set up; every one of which were the subjects of constant discussion and irritation, and were sure to continue, so long as our intercourse with them was maintained. It was, therefore, thought desirable to remove all these annoyances, and thus to get shut of all mutual recriminations, for each party could justly upbraid the other with charge of "*et tu quoque*." The results of this Treaty were—an admission of the principles of free trade—a line of demarcation was drawn, separating our territories from theirs, and thus avoiding all differences arising from immediate contact—and ridding them of their Settlements on the Indian Continent [hear!]. All these objects are now attained—we have obtained Sincapore, we have got a free trade, and in return we have given up Bencoolen. So far from Bencoolen having been advantageous in point of revenue; it was a most onerous and inconvenient possession, and when the question of abandoning it altogether was mooted, and the Company ultimately came to the determination of retaining it, it was not on account of its importance, but from their not being able to say into whose hands it might fall. The Hon. Gentleman (Mr. Hume) opposite, will remember that it cost this country 85,000*l.* annually over and above its income, for the maintenance of that barren possession, and the only return we received was the

[illegible] the Indian Government gave the [illegible] the money for cultivation; [illegible] the possession should be [illegible] the abandonment [illegible] But it is said [illegible] cultivation of spices. Bu[illegible] ground, gave the plants, and g[illegible] and when the question was whethe[illegible] abandoned, it is a little hard to quarrel w[illegible] when we got something for it [hear, hear!]. [illegible] we have given away a valuable possession to the Du[illegible] because it was considered favourable to the cultivation of spices, but with this I have nothing to do—with this the treaty has nothing to do. But, in fact, Bencoolen gives very little spices, and the East India Company has at this moment in its stores as great a quantity of every species of spice as will do for five or six years consumption, which will supply the period within which will arise the reconsideration of the Charter. The whole danger then to be apprehended is reduced to this, that the country may, perchance, run short of nutmegs, cloves, and cinnamon, for our puddings [a laugh]. By the way, I said cinnamon by mistake, for when we talk of their monopoly in nutmeg, we have the monopoly in cinnamon [hear, hear!]. I could not have the face to argue with the Dutch on the subject of monopoly. If I said, "You have a monopoly of spice"—they would answer, "But you have a monopoly in opium." "We have salt," "but you have cinnamon" [hear, hear!]. It would really require considerable powers of face to reproach the good people of the Netherlands with doing that which we practise ourselves. But to those who mourn over the loss of those savoury ingredients, it may be some consolation to know, that Sincapore possesses a soil and climate admirably suited for their production [a laugh], and they may take comfort in the assurance, that long before any new appetite can be created in this country greatly surpassing any thing which has hitherto been experienced, we shall have a plentiful growth of our own, even if the Dutch should be mad enough to maintain a monopoly so unprofitable [hear, hear!]. What the real value of Sincapore may be, I am not prepared to say, but this I know, that in all discussions on this subject, it has ever been considered the one thing necessary, the *unum necessarium*, to render our Indian possessions complete [hear, hear, hear!]. Be its value, then, what it may, that object is now secured. The cession of Malacca now gives us the continuous possession of the Malaya peninsula, and by the acquisition of Malacca and Sincapore, we have the complete command of the Malacca Straits to the Chinese Sea [hear, hear!]. We have further secured the extinction of the Dutch title on the Continent, and we have given in return a barren settlement, which cost us 85,000*l.* annually to maintain. We have given a profession on our part of a sincere disposition to pursue the principles of free trade, and we have gained in return the same professions from a Power at all times supposed to be adverse to those points, and they are now pledged in the face of the world to maintain free trade to a greater extent than was even yet known in Asia, and to full as great an extent as any other Power in Europe [hear, hear!]. Having therefore laid the foundation of a friendly understanding between the two countries, and obtained for England all that she required; I cannot think that the treaty has done any disservice to the country, having purchased all that we wanted, at no other sacrifice than the surrender of a settlement, which, from principles of policy we were called upon to abandon. It is out of these transactions, Sir, that the present Bill arises; and it is proposed to place the new settlement under the controul of the East India Company, subject, of course, to the same responsibility as for all the other Indian possessions. I now move, Sir, that you leave the Chair.

Mr. HUME said, that the giving up these possessions to the Dutch was one of the grossest blunders that diplomacy had ever been guilty of. We had, by our attention to the interests of the natives, brought Java to a state of civilization equal, he would say, at least to that of the people of Ireland. The Dutch, on the contrary, had never, while they had possession of that island, employed any other measures to civilize the people but those of brute force, and were completely hated by the natives, as those Governments always would be who relied on such measures; and now, hated as they were, had our Government, with a violation of good faith, delivered the natives over to them bound hand and foot. The present cession was directly contrary to the policy which was vaunted of by the Noble Lord in 1814. We had acquired Banca under the express condition, we had received it from the natives under the stipulation of not giving it up to the Dutch. And what were the privileges we had obtained for this violation of good faith? The privilege of selling two hundred chests of opium, which, under the most favourable circumstances, could only produce a trifling profit. We had obtained, in fact, nothing for what we had given up. By giving up Banca, we gave up the only port we possessed. One day the Ministers magnify, when it suits their purposes, the honour and good faith of the nation, and tell us not to think any pecuniary sacrifice too great which allows them to be preserved; another, they sacrifice both good faith and the interests of the country. What the Right Honourable Gentleman had this night stated, was directly at variance with what the Noble Lord had stated in 1814, and directly contrary to the line of policy he then recommended. The Right Honourable Gentleman had attempted to throw ridicule on a public servant, Governor Raffles, stigmatizing him as a superintendant of pepper. Other Gentlemen might, perhaps, agree with the Right Honourable Gentleman, but he could tell both them and him, if this Gentleman's plans had been attended to and followed, the Government and the Country would have escaped the obloquy which they would now receive. The Government had blundered, and now the Right Hon. Gentleman ridiculed those plans which would have saved them from blundering. Gentlemen high in office might [illegible] be disposed to look with great contempt on agents and servants at a distance, but it very often happened that the plans were better adapted to the wants of the people they were acquainted with than those higher officers who were not on the spot. They knew the interests of the parties better, and he was persuaded that Governor Raffles' plans were better than those of the Right Honourable Gentleman. He wished the Right Hon. Gentleman would look at the history of India [hear, hear! from Mr. Canning], and he would find the whole policy formerly pursued by this country was the reverse of that which he was now following. He did not know why, because he had all of a sudden turned round, that he should ridicule Governor Raffles for following the principles which had so long guided our Indian Government. The Right Honourable Gentleman, too, throws ridicule on the romantic principle of keeping faith, and adhering to our engagements [no, no! from Mr. Canning]. The language of the Right Honourable Gentleman implied that, and every cession, we had now made, was a gross violation of public faith and public honour. He (Mr. Hume) had formerly proposed that our extensive establishments at Bencoolen, and Prince of Wales's Island, should be got rid of, and this might have been done without any violation of faith; but he would never agree to the proposal of giving these places up to the Dutch. All the treaties we had concluded since 1785, would shew that we were delivering over our friends and allies to the most hated and most detested Power of all the Europeans that were ever in India. He himself had seen this. The Malays were so exasperated by the treatment of the Dutch, that it was not safe for any ship of any other nation to encounter a Malay vessel. By a different treatment we have succeeded in pacifying them, and making them so civilised that it became safe to trade with them. At Bencoolen, up to 1818, the natives had kept the possession of the territory, giving up to us only the fort, and a short distance around it, for a commercial establishment. We had acquired no rights of dominion. On a particular occasion, the Attorney-General at Bengal had been appealed to, and gave as his opinion that we had acquired no rigut of dominion. He (Mr. Hume) had no objection to abandon the country—let the Government do so; but we had no right to give it up to the Dutch, making over to them rights we had ourselves never possessed. In 1818, the Indepeneence of this place was secured by Treaty; and he did not suppose the Right Honourable Gentleman would deny the validity of this Treaty, and the present Treaty with the Dutch was a direct violation of that treaty with the natives; we had no right whatever to make over the possession of the Fort to the Dutch. He would also contend, that handing Achem over to the Dutch was another breach of good faith. By doing what we had done, also, we had restored that monopoly the Dutch formerly possessed of the spices, and at the end of six years, when our present stock was exhausted, we should have to pay the same high prices as formerly. It would be the ruin also of all the settlers who had gone there, relying on the good faith of our Government. Their plantations were now in a thriving state, and by our own act we were ruining them, and giving up the natives to a power that had made itself hated throughout India, and was detested. He happened to know that a Memorial had been sent to the Government on this subject, and no answer had yet been given to it. By the present cession, we left ourselves no port in the Straits of Sunda in case of war [hear, hear, hear!]. Honourable Members might say, "hear!" but we had given up the island to the Dutch, and had only preserved Malacca, which was no better than a pig-sty. The Dutch, he would contend, had no right whatever to Sincapore. They had never settled it. We had excluded ourselves from the Eastern Archipelago, and could not trade with a single Dutch port there. We had lost all these advantages for that pig-sty Malacca and 200 lbs. of opium. The great advantages of this Eastern Archipelago were well known from that work, by Mr. Crawford, which he recollected had been quoted by a Noble Lord in another place. The Honourable Member read a small extract from Mr. Crawford's book, to shew the value of this Archipelago. The present treaty was contrary to our interest, and he was quite sure that all the merchants in India would cry "shame!" He contended that the House ought not to pass the Bill. The Right Hon. Gentleman had said something of monopolies to them. Nobody was more opposed than he (Mr. Hume). The monopolies of salt and of opium possessed by the East India Company were infamous. Their treatment of Holkar, with regard to the monopoly of opium, was most disgraceful. They would not allow him to sell it to any body but themselves, and they were obliged to send it to China to find a market for it. He thought this ought not to be supported, but the present cession was not doing away a monopoly, it was only changing the monopolists. He entreated the House not now to pass this Bill, there was no hurry; the measure might be postponed without injuring any body, and he should, therefore move, as an Amendment, that the House, instead of now going into a Committee, should go into a Committee that day six months.

Mr. ROBERTSON condemned the Treaty altogether. By the surrender of Bencoolen, we gave up a most valuable settlement, and endangered the security of the China trade. The revenue arising from that trade amounted to three millions, and it ought to be a question with the Government, whether upon light grounds it would endanger such a trade?

Mr. BRIGHT observed, that we were called upon by this Treaty to give up a part and parcel of the British dominions to the Dutch, a nation that history recorded to be the most oppressive masters, at least in the East Indies, of all the nations that got dominion there. Bencoolen was a part of the British dominions, and he could not recognise any power in the Executive Government to alienate it.

Mr. ASTELL contended that there was nothing in the treaty to create alarm, and that the concessions on the part of the Dutch were at least equal to those made by our Government.

Mr. TRANT observed that the line of arrangement which the treaty had sanctioned, had received the approbation of the commercial houses in India who were interested in the trade of the Indian Archipelago. The cession of the Dutch settlements on the Continent of India was of great importance in relation to policy as well as revenue, and he suggested that it would be highly desirable, by treaties with the French, Danes, and Portuguese, to obtain from them the cession of the other European [illegible]lements on that Continent, which were much more injuri[illegible] than beneficial to them.

[illegible] RES, in allusion to what had been said of the [illegible] Dutch Government in India, said, that, [illegible] Sir C. FORB[illegible] [illegible]ch difference between the Dutch [illegible] grasping spirit of the [illegible] It was six of one and half [illegible] In this respect there was not m[illegible] [illegible] principle of both of [illegible] and English Powers in that quarter. [illegible] a dozen of the other [a laugh]. The ruling [illegible]ation was a divi[illegible] them was rapine. The Treaty now under consider[illegible] of natives [illegible] sion of the spoil without the least regard to the millions [illegible] [illegible]ing whose interests were implicated, each party giving and ta[illegible] what they had no right to render or to receive. By the last ar[illegible] rival from Sincapore, he had received the first number of a [illegible] paper published there, which contained intelligence of considerable importance, as showing what the conduct of the Dutch was likely to be under this Treaty. The magnitude of the Island of Borneo was well known; it was the largest in those seas, and contained a vast population. The intelligence stated that an expedition sent out by the Dutch in Borneo, had just returned, after reducing several hitherto independent States. The natives had, in fact, yielded without the least resistance; for the name of the Dutch was as terrible in the Islands as the English on the Continent of India. He doubted whether the fact of this expedition was known or contemplated by the negociations on the part of England. The trade with Borneo was in the hands of the Dutch, who imposed a duty of twelve per cent., on other European vessels importing goods, while their own paid only six. He had considerable doubts, whether the Dutch Authorities in India would act up to the spirit of the treaty, though he had no doubt of the good faith of the negociators in Europe. A very imperfect controul was exercised over the Dutch Governors, whose conduct was often the subject of complaint in their own countrymen, as well as others. The conduct of our own Company in India was calculated to diminish the advantages which should result to England from our Eastern possessions, and was grasping & monopolizing in the extreme. In Sincapore, which had been considered a free port, the Bengal Government had imposed an additional duty of 6s. per lb. on Turkey opium, in order to secure the trade for the opium which they monopolized in India. There had also been a report of their extending the Salt monopoly, which existed in Bengal, to the Western part of the Continent of India. As to the treaty, he thought, after the delays respecting it, the final conclusion of it was precipitate. It would have been well, after having delayed it so long, to have waited for the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles, who could have supplied the Ministers with information respecting the Indian Islands, of which they were necessarily defective. He objected, too, to the cession of Cochin, with the Sovereign of which we had a defensive alliance. He felt some satisfaction to find, on the part of the Dutch, a disposition to give up the spice monopoly.

Mr. MONEY differed from his Honourable Friend (Sir C. Forbes) and highly approved of the treaty. He remarked that an article in the treaty particularly guarded against the repetition of such an occurrence as his Honourable Friend had mentioned in the case of Borneo. In Borneo the Dutch had only a few military settlements at the mouths of rivers, and we were left at full liberty to trade with all that great island, abounding in population, and the richest productions of the earth. The native trade to Sincapore, from the Eastern Archipelago, was very considerable; 100 vessels had arrived at that port from the Eastern Archipelago, manned by from 30 to 80 men each. The Dutch settlements on the Indian Continent ceded by the treaty, had been represented as insignificant. Territorially they were so: but these settlements, fifteen in all, might be most mischievous as affording a refuge to disaffected subjects, and the means of clandestine trade. What should we think if a foreign nation had one settlement at Richmond, & another at Gravesend? Yet this was parallel to the case of two Dutch settlements in India—one was above, another below Calcutta. He contended that there would be no danger, on account of the cession of Bencoolen, of the interruption of our commerce through the Sunda; and as to the alleged want of a harbour, he could state, that near Sincapore an island had been surveyed, which was found to contain an excellent harbour, where line of battle ships could lie close to the land, and which would form a very advantageous place for refitting. On the whole he thought the advantages of the treaty would secure for those who framed it a claim on the gratitude of all who were interested in the commerce of the East.

After a few words from Colonel BAILLIE, the Amendment was negatived without a division, and the House went into the Committee.

Mr. HUME wished to know whether that was the proper time to introduce a clause for compensating those settlers who would be inevitably ruined by being bound hand and foot, and delivered to the Dutch?

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. Courtenay) informed the Honourable Gentleman, that any proposal for compensation must be the subject of consideration in a separate Committee.

Mr. HUME begged to know what were the intentions of his Majesty's Government on the subject?

Mr. Secretary CANNING replied, that if it could be shown by any of the settlers that they had been ruined, he should not object to their receiving compensation; but he could not agree to any such proposition as that of the Honourable Member's before-hand.

Mr. HUME wished to know how the Settlers could be assured of being compensated?

Mr. CANNING said, that when the time came, if it should come, their claims would be considered. To hold out in advance a compensation for suffering would be the way to create suffering.

After some further conversation, the Bill went through the Committee, the Report was received, and the Bill was ordered to be read a third time this day.