

THE POLITICAL EXAMINER.

If I might give a short hint to an impartial writer it would be to tell him his fate. If he resolved to venture upon the dangerous precipice of telling unbiassed truth let him proclaim war with mankind—neither to give nor to take quarter. If he tells the crimes of great men they fall upon him with the iron hands of the law; if he tells them of virtues, when they have any, then the mob attacks him with slander. But if he regards truth, let him expect martyrdom on both sides, and then he may go on fearless; and this is the course I take myself.—
DE FOE.

DUTCH POLITICS.

The Dutch are not considered by the other nations of Europe to be a very excitable people, and yet at this moment they are in a high state of political excitement. The quarrel is between Liberals and Conservatives, or, as usual, between freedom and monopoly. The Dutch Ministry is of the latter party, and it appoints to the government of the Netherland Possessions in the East Indies an ex-Minister, and somewhat of a rat. This is the richest post in the gift of the Crown, for it is one of much power and patronage, with palaces and a salary of 12,000*l.* a-year, equal to that of our Governors of Madras and Bombay. The Dutch Liberals are indignant at seeing a rat made a Governor-General, for the Governor in question had a few months ago been a Liberal. A vote of censure on the Ministry for the unpopular appointment is, in consequence, passed in both Chambers of the Legislature. If such a vote had been carried in both Houses of our Parliament, the result would be the resignation of the Ministry and the cancelling of the appointment. Not so with the Dutch, who are new to the practice of parliamentary government. The Dutch Ministry, unwilling to lose office for a blunder, only dissolve the Lower Chamber, and there is every prospect that a new Chamber will increase the majority against them.

What has brought the political quarrel to a crisis, strange enough to say, is the government, or to speak of it by its just and proper name, the flagrant misgovernment of a tropical island in the southern hemisphere. This is Java, the only colony of the Dutch that pays the cost of holding. Indeed it not only does this, but defrays also the cost of the many profitless possessions annexed to it, and even contributes a small tribute to Holland. This island, famous in the east for its beauty, fertility, and civilization, is about half as large again as Ireland. It is a country of lofty mountains, which supply extensive plains and valleys with perennial water for irrigation. It was already a populous and even civilized country when Europeans first saw it in the early years of the sixteenth century, when it was the granary of the whole Archipelago from Malacca to the Moluccas, furnishing it also with manufactures in cotton, iron, and bronze. Java may indeed be said unhesitatingly to be the most beautiful and most fertile spot of the earth's surface of equal extent. Cuba and Hayti are, in these respects, not to be compared to it, nor is even the great and fertile island of the Philippines, best known to us by the name of the Philippine capital, Manilla, which is on it. As to our own Jamaica, it would hardly make one of the poorest provinces of Java.

In the very beginning of the seventeenth century the Dutch made their first appearance in Java, and in the course of two centuries conquered a considerable part of it, but not the whole island, for some of the richest provinces were still in the hands of its native princes. During these two hundred years of occupancy they made but little progress, continuing the forced labour of the native Governments, and harassing the industry of the inhabitants with mischievous commercial monopolies of no profit to themselves. The English conquered Java and the rest of the Indian possessions of the Dutch, then forming part of the ephemeral empire of the great Napoleon, in 1811. They held Java for five years only, in which brief time they swept away the *corvée* labour of the native Governments and the monopolies of the Dutch, proclaiming freedom of labour and freedom of commerce, a revolution, for such it was, which brought joy to the people of Java, and was unaccompanied by either danger or temporary inconvenience.

In 1816, at a moment when it was thought that a mighty barrier against French ambition might be erected by binding together, with a diplomatic chain, two small nations of opposite race, language, and religion, Java and the other Indian possessions were handed over to the Dutch. For a few years they continued the system of free labour and free trade established by the English, and thought by the English to have been established for futurity, but the old rulers soon relapsed to their old habits. Their first movement in this retrograde direction, every future step of which proved to be a fresh hurt given to the freedom of commercial intercourse, was the establishment of a commercial company in Holland, with privileges for

carrying on the commerce of the Indies. Of this company, at its institution, the sovereign himself was a sleeping partner. The next step was to impose double duties on all foreign produce and manufactures, and the same on all exports by foreign shipping. The import duties on British goods, by British ships, is 25 per cent. of the local market value, while it is 12½ per cent. only on goods imported from Holland. This is still persevered in, when in the neighbouring British territories the duties levied on Dutch goods are the same as on British.

The last blow to freedom, which may be called its *coup de grace*, was given, in 1830, by the appointment of one General John van den Bosch as Governor-General, a rough and ignorant soldier, who may be called a statesman when that distinction is bestowed on one who has set all the commercial and financial principles laid down by Adam Smith ninety years ago, and acted upon in this country for twenty years, at utter defiance. He it was who introduced the notorious "culture system," which has been inflicted on the industrious and docile natives of Java, now numbering 13,500,000, for thirty-six long years. It consisted in seizing the lands and labour of Java at such arbitrary valuation as the Government should think proper to specify, and appropriating them to the cultivation of exportable productions, usually for European consumption. These productions are almost all of them exotics. The staples are the sugar-cane and the coffee-plant, but the Government also dabbles in indigo, in cochineal—which has been, since the discovery of America, the exclusive product of the climate of Mexico—and in tea, which is as unsuited to the climate of Java as the vine, and the cinnamon, which is the exclusive product of a corner of Ceylon. The minor products, as might well be looked for, have all been dead failures; and as to the two staples, the sugar, both as to quantity and quality, in spite of the forced labours of thirteen millions and a half of Javanese, has been beaten hollow by the forced labour of 2,000,000 of slaves in Brazil, and of half a million of slaves in Cuba. The contrast is even greater, and at all events more satisfactory, when we compare the produce of coffee in Ceylon with that in Java. With an inferior soil, which requires to be fertilized by guano from Peru, a few private English proprietors in Ceylon, with the imported labours of free immigrants, produce a better article, and more of it, than fertile Java, with the forced labour of its millions.

But on the commerce of the East Indian possessions what has been the result of the course of policy which has been pursued? The total annual value of the joint exports and imports of all the Indian possessions, including that of Java with its forced labour, amounts yearly, as far as we can see, to about 13,000,000*l.* a-year, and in this valuation are included the cloves and nutmegs of the spice islands, and all the tin of Banea, the largest in the world, far outstripping in quantity, and even excelling in quality, the produce of Cornwall, its only competitor. The commerce of the three little free emporia which we ourselves hold in the Straits of Malacca amounts in value to 15,000,000*l.*, and as this is but a *depôt* trade, we are glad to find that the produce of the Dutch monopolies contributes a considerable item to the amount.

But the most important question for consideration is the effect of the system of compulsory labour and the assumption by the Government of some of the richest lands of Java for the culture of exotics. Rice is the universal bread of the Javanese, and the lands to produce it are brought by an expensive process, the labour of generations, into a suitable form for its culture, by canals, sluices, and dykes of irrigation. The difference between rice lands and those that are not prepared for irrigation is something like that between water and dry meadow in England, only that the increase of produce is far greater, for the watered land yields from fivefold up to tenfold the produce of dry land. Java, as already stated, had been from time immemorial the granary of the whole Malay Archipelago, but since the institution of the "culture system" it has ceased to export at all, and is sometimes even an importer of corn. The countries it used to supply are now supplied from the British possessions on the eastern coast of the gulf of Bengal, in which there is no "culture system." No wonder that there is no export of rice, when the abduction of land and labour from its culture has raised its cost by full 200 per cent., equivalent to raising the price of the quarter of wheat in England from fifty shillings to one hundred and fifty.

Can it be surprising that the lovers of freedom and free commerce in Holland should be indignant when they find their blind and blundering Government insisting on the continuance of a system of misrule so utterly disgraceful to their country?