

COLONIAL GRIEVANCES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

SIR,—The colony of the Straits Settlements was, previous to 1867, a part of the Bengal Presidency, and under the non-interfering government of the East India Company the communities of Singapore, Malacca, and Penang had worked out for themselves a position of political and commercial importance.

Situated in the great highway from India to China, Singapore had become not only a centre and rendezvous for Imperial purposes, as shown in the China wars of 1847 and 1860, but a vast depot of eastern commerce, the value of its trade in 1864 amounting to nearly 18 millions sterling. A large population of Chinese and Malays had been attracted to the European settlement, and become permanently located there. The free trade policy inaugurated by Sir Stamford Raffles drew thither year by year the mercantile fleets of Europe and America, and native boats from every island of the Malayan Archipelago; while the extreme lightness of taxation proved at once the prosperity of the country, and tended further to increase it. But the distance of the island from the Central Government in India called forth a desire for an authority on the spot which should more thoroughly ally itself with local interests, and extend intercourse and friendship with the native States of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Ten years were employed in negotiations with the Indian and Home Governments, and then on 1st of April, 1867, Sir Harry St. George Ord, called by Lord Derby from the charge of a convict establishment in the West Indies, assumed control of the new colony, a Legislative Council was constituted, and an era of so-called self-government began. Two years of it have expired, and the results may be thus summed up:

1. An increased annual expenditure of 50,000*l.*
2. The accumulation of a colonial debt of about the same amount.
3. The loss of the independence of the judges, and a consequent distrust in the minds of the native population of the perfect rectitude and justness of the Law Courts.
4. The introduction of a number of legislative acts, the mere titles of which would fill the space of this letter; many of them being measures of a repressive character, passed in defiance of the wishes of the colonists, and some of them threatening the destruction of that free-trade policy which has been the very life of the settlement.
5. The conversion of a community loyal and contented into one of the most open and decided hostility to the Colonial and resentment against the Home Government.
6. The creation of a conviction among the Chinese population that neither their personal safety nor property are any longer secured to them, and a consequent emigration of a number of respectable traders.

The increased expenditure and debt has been mainly brought about by increased salaries (for were there not friends of Tory Ministers to be provided for?)—the institution of new offices (for were not the friends many, and had not they waited long?) There was an Auditor-General to add up a debit balance, a Colonial Treasurer to take charge of it, a Colonial Engineer to build a Government-house! It will be seen that there was a probability of these gentlemen being overworked, and so "travelling expenses" for change of air were demanded. The house that had sufficed the late Governor must make way for a palace for the new-comer, and some 25,000*l.* was called for as a first instalment on this account; two steamers and a steam yacht, the latter costing 20,000*l.*, were required for the convenience and pleasure of his Excellency, and thus it has come to pass that in the short space of two years an increased expenditure of over 95,000*l.* has been incurred, not one farthing of which has been of any direct service to the taxpayers from whom the money was extorted. Had they, indeed, been allowed any real voice in the appropriation of it, it might have been different, but even this poor satisfaction was denied them. By the constitution of the colony only three non-official members were permitted in the Legislative Council, but even in the election of these the community had no voice, and since almost every one of the official members (six) owed his place to the Governor, and might be punished for the slightest show of independence, it can be easily understood how supreme a matter of indifference to Sir Harry Ord was the yea or nay of the free members of his council, the fact being that under pretence of a constitutional government an arbitrary despotism had been established. The dignity and independence of the judicial office is jealously enough guarded in this country, and should be still more so, if possible, among an Oriental population. And yet this safeguard of liberty has been done away with in Singapore, and the judges, who formerly were answerable to no one but her Majesty in Council, now hold their office at pleasure of the local Governor. Can it be wondered at if the colonists indignantly complain, not only that they are being treated in this respect in a manner that none of their countrymen at home would submit to, but that their representations and protests against the continuance of such a state of things should have been repulsed by the late administration with official hauteur. Let me close my letter by stating the terms upon which the colonists of the Straits Settlements desire to be treated.

1. That the Legislative Council shall be reorganised; at least one-half of it to consist of non-official members, thus ensuring that the real interests of the colony shall be the chief object of the Government.
2. That the official members of the Legislature shall not be bound to vote under the dictation of the Governor, nor shall any penalties follow from their independent expression of opinion.
3. That the judges of the Supreme Courts shall be absolutely independent of the local Government.
4. That a Governor shall be appointed whose previous career may at least give promise of his ability to manage the interests of a large commercial community.

I have endeavoured to be as brief as possible; there is every prospect of the question now discussed coming before Parliament during the present session. I am only anxious that the matter should in the meantime be put clearly before the public. Let it not be answered that this is a mere mercantile question raised by those interested in the Straits trade. It is matter enough for regret when the prosperity of a settlement is endangered by the folly of an incompetent ruler; it were of far more serious import should a claim for free and just government, urged as it will be, temperately, but with vigour and determination, be disregarded and refused a hearing in England.—I am, &c.,

M. S. A.