

THE CLAIMS OF AN INDIAN PRINCE.

The *Times* gives prominence to what it calls a "somewhat singular letter" from Maharajah Duleep Singh. It is as follows:—

Sir,—As the era of doing justice and restoration appears to have dawned, judging from the recent truly liberal and noble act of the present Liberal Government, headed by, now, the great Gladstone the Just, I am encouraged to lay before the British nation, through the medium of the *Times*, the injustice which I have suffered in the hope that although generosity may not be lavished upon me to the same extent as has been bestowed upon King Cetywayo, yet that some magnanimity might be shown towards me by this great Christian Empire.

When I succeeded to the throne of the Punjab I was only an infant, and the Khalsa soldiery, becoming more and more mutinous and overbearing during both my uncle's and my mother's Regencies, at last, unprovoked, crossed the Sutlej and attacked the friendly British Power, and was completely defeated and entirely routed by the English army.

Had at that time my dominions been annexed to the British territories, I would have now not a word to say, for I was at that time an independent Chief at the head of an independent people, and any penalty which might have been then inflicted would have been perfectly just; but that kind, true English gentleman, the late Lord Hardinge, in consideration of the friendship which had existed between the British Empire and the "Lion of the Punjab," replaced me on my throne and the diamond Koh-i-noor on my arm at one of the Durbars. The Council of Regency which was then created to govern the country during my minority, finding that it was not in their power to rule the Punjab unaided, applied for assistance to the representative of the British Government, who, after stipulating for absolute power to control every Government department, entered into the Bhyrowal Treaty with me, by which was guaranteed that I should be protected on my throne until I attained the age of 16 years, the British also furnishing troops both for the above object and preservation of peace in the country, in consideration of a certain sum to be paid to them annually by my Durbar, for the maintenance of that force.

Thus the British nation, with open eyes, assumed my guardianship, the nature of which is clearly defined in a proclamation subsequently issued by Lord Hardinge's orders on the 20th of August, 1847, which declares that the tender age of the Maharajah Duleep Singh causes him to feel the interest of a father in the education and guardianship of the young Prince.—(Vide Punjab Papers at the British Museum.)

Two English officers carrying letters bearing my signature were despatched by the British Resident, in conjunction with my Durbar, to take possession of the fortress of Multan and the surrounding district in my name, but my servant, Moolraj, refusing to acknowledge my authority, caused them to be put to death, whereupon both the late Sir F. Currie and the brave Sir Herbert Edwardes most urgently requested the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces at Simla, as there were not sufficient English soldiers at Lahore at the time, to send some European troops without delay in order to crush this rebellion in the bud, as they affirmed that the consequences could not be calculated which might follow if it were allowed to spread; but the late Lord Gough, with the concurrence of the late Marquis of Dalhousie, refused to comply with their wishes, alleging the unhealthiness of the season as his reason for doing so.

My case at that time was exactly similar to what the Khedive's is at this moment; Araby being in his present position to his master what Moolraj was to me—viz., a rebel.

At last very tardily, the British Government sent troops (as has been done in Egypt) to quell the rebellion, which had by that time vastly increased in the Punjab, and who entered my territories, headed by a proclamation, issued by Lord Dalhousie's orders, to the following effect:—

"Inclosure 8 in No. 42.—To the subjects, servants, and dependents of the Lahore State, and residents of all classes and castes, whether Sikhs, Musulmans or others within the territories of Maharajah Duleep Singh. . . . Whereas certain evil-disposed persons and traitors have excited rebellion and insurrection, and have seduced portions of the population of the Punjab from their allegiance, and have raised an armed opposition to the British authority; and whereas the condign punishment of the insurgents is necessary. . . . therefore the British Army, under the command of the Right Hon. the Commander-in-Chief, has entered the Punjab districts. The army will not return to its cantonments until the full punishment of all insurgents has been effected, all opposition to the constituted authority put down, and obedience and order have been re-established."

Thus it is clear from the above that the British Commander-in-Chief did not enter my dominions as a conqueror, nor the army to stay there, and, therefore, it is not correct to assert, as some do, that the Punjab was a military conquest.

"And whereas it is not the desire of the British Government that those who are innocent of the above offences who have taken no part, secretly or openly, in the disturbances, and who have remained faithful in their obedience to the Government of Maharajah Duleep Singh. . . . should suffer with the guilty."

But after order was restored, and finding only a helpless child to deal with, and the temptation being too strong, Lord Dalhousie annexed the Punjab, instead of carrying out the solemn compact entered into by the British Government at Bhyrowal, sold almost all my personal, as well as all my private property, consisting of jewels, gold and silver plate, even some of my wearing apparel and household furniture, and distributed the proceeds, amounting (I was told) to £250,000, as prize-money among those very troops who had come to put down rebellion against my authority.

Thus I, the innocent, who never lifted up even my little finger against the British Government, was made to suffer in the same manner with my own subjects who would not acknowledge my authority, in spite of the declaration of the above-quoted Proclamation that it is not the desire of the British Government that the innocent should suffer with the guilty.

Lord Dalhousie, in writing to the Secret Committee of the late Court of Directors, in order to justify his unjust act, among other arguments employs the following. He says:—

"It has been objected that the present dynasty in the Punjab cannot with justice be subverted, since the Maharajah Duleep Singh, being yet a minor, can hardly be held responsible for the acts of the nation. With deference to those by whom these views have been entertained, I must dissent entirely from the soundness of this doctrine. It is, I venture to think, altogether untenable as a principle; it has been disregarded heretofore in practice, and disregarded in the case of the Maharajah Duleep Singh. When in 1845 the Khalsa army invaded our territories the Maharajah was not held to be free from responsibility, nor was he exempted from the consequences of the acts of the people. On the contrary, the Government of India confiscated to itself the richest provinces of the Maharajah's kingdom, and was pleaded for the moderation which had exacted no more. If the Maharajah was not exempted from responsibility on the plea of his tender years at the age of eight, he cannot on that plea be entitled to exemption from a like responsibility now that he is three years older."

But in thus arguing his Lordship became blind to the fact that in 1845 when the Khalsa army invaded the British territories I was an independent Chief, but after the ratification of the Bhyrowal Treaty I was made the ward of the British nation, and how could I, under these circumstances, be held responsible for the neglect of my guardians in not crushing Moolraj's rebellion, at once, the necessity of doing which was clearly and repeatedly pointed out by the British Resident at Lahore.

Again his Lordship says, "The British Government has rigidly observed the obligations which the treaty imposed on them, and fully acted up to the spirit and letter of its contract." No doubt all this was or may have been true, except so far that neither peace was preserved in the country nor I protected on my throne till I attained the age of 16 years; two very important stipulations of that treaty.

He further alleges—"In return for the aid of the British troops they (my Durbar) bound themselves to pay to us a subsidy of 22 lakhs (£220,000) per annum. . . . from the day when that treaty was signed to the present hour not one rupee has ever been paid."

Now, the above statement is not correct, because of the following despatch which exists:— "Enclosure No. 5 in No. 23:" the Acting Resident at Lahore affirms, "The Durbar has paid into this treasury gold to the value of Rs. 13,56,637 0a. 6p." (£135,837 14s. 1d., taking the value of a rupee at 2s.).

Likewise Lord Dalhousie alludes to Sirdar Chutter Singh's conduct. Enclosure 19 in No. 36 will show those who care to look for it the reprimand which Captain Abbott then received from the Resident for his treatment of that Chief, who, after that, with his sons, without doubt,

believed that the Bhyrowal Treaty was not going to be carried out; and, judging from the events which followed, were they right in their views or were they not?

1. Thus I have been most unjustly deprived of my kingdom, yielding, as shown by Lord Dalhousie's own computation in (I think) 1850, a surplus revenue of some £500,000, and no doubt now vastly exceeds that sum.

2. I have also been prevented, unjustly, from receiving the rentals of my private estates (*vide* Prinsep's "History of the Sikhs," compiled for the Government of India) in the Punjab, amounting to some £130,000 per annum since 1849, although my private property is not confiscated by the terms of the annexation which I was compelled to sign by my guardians when I was a minor, and therefore I presume it is an illegal document, and I am still the lawful Sovereign of the Punjab; but this is of no moment, for I am quite content to be the subject of my most gracious Sovereign, no matter how it was brought about, for her graciousness towards me has been boundless.

3. All my personal property has also been taken from me, excepting £20,000 worth, which I was informed by the late Sir John Login was permitted to be taken with me to Fettehgar when I was exiled; and the rest, amounting to some £250,000, disposed of as stated before. What is still more unjust in my case is, that most of my servants who remained faithful to me were permitted to retain all their personal and private property and to enjoy the rentals of their landed estates (or jagheers), given to them by me and my predecessors, whereas I, their master, who did not even lift up my little finger against the British nation, was not considered worthy to be treated on the same footing of equality with them, because, I suppose, my sin being that I happened to be the ward of a Christian Power.

The enormous British liberality permits a life stipend of £25,000 per annum, which is reduced by certain charges (known to the proper authorities) to some £13,000, to be paid to me from the revenues of India.

Lately, an Act of Parliament has been passed by which, some months hence, the munificent sum of some £2,000 will be added to my above-stated available income, but on the absolute condition that my estates must be sold at my death, thus causing my dearly-loved English home to be broken up and compelling my descendants to seek some other asylum.

A very meagre provision, considering of what and how I have been deprived, has also been made for my successors.

If one righteous man was found in the two most wicked cities of the world, I pray God that at least one honourable, just, and noble Englishman may be forthcoming out of this Christian land of liberty and justice to advocate my cause in Parliament, otherwise what chance have I of obtaining justice, considering that my despoiler, guardian, judge, advocate, and jury is the British nation itself!

Generous and Christian Englishmen, accord me a just and liberal treatment for the sake of the fair name of your nation, of which I have now the honour to be a naturalized member, for it is more blessed to give than to take.

I have the honour to remain, Sir, your most obliged servant

DULEEP SINGH,
Elveden-hall, Thetford, Suffolk, Aug. 28.