

Letter, "India."

Karl Marx.

The *New York Daily Tribune*, August 5, 1853

(1,200 words)

The progress of the India bill through the Committee has little interest. It is significant, that all amendments are thrown out now by the Coalition coalescing with the Tories against their own allies of the Manchester School.

The actual state of India may be illustrated by a few facts. The Home Establishment absorbs 3 per cent. of the net revenue, and the annual interest for Home Debt and Dividends 14 per cent.—together 17 per cent. If we deduct these annual remittances from India to England, the *military charges* amount to about two-thirds of the whole expenditure available for India, or to 66 per cent., while the charges for Public Works do not amount to more than  $2\frac{3}{4}$  per cent. of the general revenue, or for Bengal 1 per cent., Agra  $7\frac{3}{4}$ , Punjab  $\frac{1}{8}$ , Madras  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and Bombay 1 per cent. of their respective revenues. These figures are the official ones of the Company itself.

On the other hand nearly three-fifths of the whole net revenue are derived from the *land*, about one-seventh from *opium*, and upward of one-ninth from *salt*. These resources together yield 85 per cent. of the whole receipts.

As to minor items of receipts and charges, it may suffice to state that the *Moturpha* revenue maintained in the Presidency of Madras, and levied on shops, looms, sheep, cattle, sundry professions, &c., yields somewhat about £50,000, while the yearly dinners of the East India House cost about the same sum.

The great bulk of the revenue is derived from the land. As the various kinds of Indian land-tenure have recently been described in so many places, and in popular style, too, I propose to limit

my observations on the subject to a few general remarks on the Zemindari and Ryotwar systems.

The Zemindari and the Ryotwar were both of them agrarian revolutions, effected by British ukases, and opposed to each other, the one aristocratic, the other democratic; the one a caricature of English landlordism, the other of French peasant-proprietorship; but pernicious, both combining the most contradictory character — both made not for the people, who cultivate the soil, nor for the holder, who owns it, but for the Government that taxes it.

By the Zemindari system, the people of the Presidency of Bengal were depossessed at once of their hereditary claims to the soil, in favor of the native tax gatherers called *Zemindars*. By the Ryotwar system introduced into the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay, the native nobility, with their territorial claims, *meras sees*, *jagheers*, &c., were reduced with the common people to the holding of minute fields, cultivated by themselves in favor of the Collector of the East India Company. But a curious sort of English landlord was the Zemindar, receiving only one-tenth of the rent, while he had to make over nine-tenths of it to the Government. A curious sort of French peasant was the Ryot, without any permanent title in the soil, and with the taxation changing every year in proportion to his harvest. The original class of Zemindars, notwithstanding their unmitigated and uncontrolled rapacity against the depossessed mass of the ex-hereditary landholders, soon melted away under the pressure of the Company, in order to be replaced by mercantile speculators who now hold all the land of Bengal, with exception of the estates returned under the direct management of the Government. These speculators have introduced a variety of the Zemindari tenure called *patnee*. Not content to be placed with regard to the British Government in the situation of middlemen, they have created in their turn a class of “hereditary” middlemen called *patnetas*, who created again their sub-*patnetas*, &c., so that

a perfect scale of hierarchy of middlemen has sprung up, which presses with its entire weight on the unfortunate cultivator. As to the Ryots in Madras and Bombay, the system soon degenerated into one of forced cultivation, and the land lost all its value.

“The land,” says Mr. Campbell, “would be sold for balances by the Collector, as in Bengal, but generally is not, for a very good reason, viz.: that nobody will buy it.”

Thus, in Bengal, we have a combination of English landlordism, of the Irish middlemen system, of the Austrian system, transforming the landlord into the tax-gatherer, and of the Asiatic system making the State the real landlord. In Madras and Bombay we have a French peasant proprietor who is at the same time a serf, and a *métayer* of the State. The drawbacks of all these various systems accumulate upon him without his enjoying any of their redeeming features. The Ryot is subject, like the French peasant, to the extortion of the private usurer; but he has no hereditary, no permanent title in his land, like the French peasant. Like the serf he is forced to cultivation, but he is not secured against want like the serf. Like the *métayer* he has to divide his produce with the State, but the State is not obliged, with regard to him, to advance the funds and the stock, as it is obliged to do with regard to the *métayer*. In Bengal, as in Madras and Bombay, under the *Zemindari* as under the *Ryotwar*, the Ryots—and they form 11-12ths of the whole Indian population — have been wretchedly pauperized; and if they are, morally speaking, not sunk as low as the Irish cottiers, they owe it to their climate, the men of the South being possessed of less wants, and of more imagination than the men of the North.

Conjointly with the land-tax we have to consider the salt-tax. Notoriously the Company retain the monopoly of that article which they sell at three times its mercantile value — and this in

a country where it is furnished by the sea, by the lakes, by the mountains and the earth itself. The practical working of this monopoly was described by the Earl of Albemarle in the following words:

“A great proportion of the salt for inland consumption throughout the country is purchased from the Company by large wholesale merchants at less than 4 rupees per *maund*; these mix a fixed proportion of sand, chiefly got a few miles to the south-east of Dacca, and send the mixture to a second, or, counting the Government as the first, to a third monopolist at about 5 or 6 rupees. This dealer adds more earth or ashes, and thus passing through more bands, from the large towns to villages, the price is still raised from 8 to 10 rupees and the proportion of adulteration from 25 to 40 per cent. [. . .] It appears that the people [. . .] pay from £21, 17s. 2d. to £27, 6s. 2d. for their salt, or in other words, from 30 to 36 times as much as the wealthy people of Great Britain.”

As an instance of English bourgeois morals, I may allege, that Mr. Campbell defends the Opium monopoly because it prevents the Chinese from consuming too much of the drug, and that he defends the Brandy monopoly (licenses for spirit-selling in India) because it has wonderfully increased the consumption of Brandy in India.

The Zemindar tenure, the Ryotwar, and the salt tax, combined with the Indian climate, were the hotbeds of the cholera — India’s ravages upon the Western World — a striking and severe example of the solidarity of human woes and wrongs.

Karl Marx

Letter, "Trade with China."

Karl Marx.

*The New York Daily Tribune*, December 3, 1859

(1,800 words)

At a time when very wild views obtained as to the impulse American and British commerce were sure to receive from the throwing open, as it was called, of the Celestial Empire, we undertook to show, by a somewhat elaborate review of Chinese foreign commerce since the commencement of this century, that those high-flown anticipations had no solid ground to stand upon. Quite apart from the opium trade, which we proved to grow in an inverse ratio to the sale of Western manufactures, we found the main obstacle to any sudden expansion of the import trade to China in the economical structure of Chinese society, depending upon the combination of minute agriculture with domestic industry. We may now, in corroboration of our former statements, refer to the Blue Book entitled, *Correspondence Relative to Lord Elgin's Special Missions to China and Japan*.

Wherever the real demand for commodities imported into Asiatic countries does not answer the supposed demand which in most instances is calculated on such superficial data as the extent of the new market, the magnitude of its population, and the vent foreign wares used to find at some outstanding seaports — commercial men, in their eagerness at securing a larger area of exchange, are too prone to account for their disappointment by the circumstance that artificial arrangements, invented by barbarian Governments, stand in their way, and may, consequently, be cleared away by main force. This very delusion has, in our epoch, converted the British merchant, for instance, into the reckless supporter of every Minister who, by piratical aggressions, promises to extort a treaty of commerce from the barbarian. Thus the artificial obstacles foreign commerce was supposed to encounter on the part of the Chinese authorities, formed, in fact, the great pretext which, in the eyes of the

mercantile world, justified every outrage committed on the Celestial Empire. The valuable information contained in Lord Elgin's Blue Book will, with every unprejudiced mind, go far to dispel such dangerous delusions.

The Blue Book contains a report, dated in 1852, of Mr. Mitchell, a British agent at Canton, to Sir George Bonham, from which we quote the following passage:

“Our Commercial Treaty with this country (China) has now (1852) been nearly ten years in full work, every presumed impediment has been removed, one thousand miles of new coast have been opened up to us, and four new marts established at the very thresholds of the producing districts, and at the best possible points upon the seaboard. And yet, what is the result as far as the promised increase in the consumption of our manufactures is concerned? Why, plainly this: That at the end of ten years the tables of the Board of Trade show us that Sir Henry Pottinger found a larger trade in existence when he signed the Supplementary Treaty in 1843 than his Treaty itself shows us at the end of 1850! — that is to say, as far as our home manufactures are concerned, which is the sole question we are now considering.”

Mr. Mitchell admits that the trade between India and China, consisting almost exclusively in an exchange of silver for opium, has been greatly developed since the treaty, of 1842, but, even in regard to this trade, he adds:

“It developed itself in as fast a ratio, from 1834 to 1844, as it has done from the latter date to the present, which latter period may be taken as its working under the supposed protection of the

Treaty; while, on the other hand, we have the great fact staring us in the face, in the Tables of the Board of Trade, that the export of our manufacturing stuffs to China was less by nearly three-quarters of a million sterling at the close of 1850 than it was at the close of 1844.”

That the treaty Of 1842 had no influence at all in fostering the British export trade to China will be seen from the following tabular statement:

DECLARED VALUE IN POUNDS STERLING

	1849	1850	1851	1852	1853
Cotton Goods	1,001,283	1,020,915	1,598,829	1,905,321	1,408,439
Woollen Goods	370,878	404,797	373,399	434,616	203,875
Other articles	164,948	148,433	189,040	163,662	137,289
Total	1,537,109	1,574,145	2,161,268	2,503,599	1,749,597
	1854	1855	1856	1857	
Cotton Goods	640,820	883,985	1,544,235	1,731,909	
Woollen Goods	156,959	134,070	268,642	286,852	
Other articles	202,937	259,889	403,246	431,221	
Total	1,000,716	1,277,944	2,216,123	2,449,982	

Now, comparing these figures with the Chinese demand for British manufactures in 1843, stated by Mr. Mitchell to have amounted to £1,750,000, it will be seen that in five out of the last nine years the British exports fell far below the level of 1843, and in 1854 were only 10-17 of what they had been in 1843. Mr. Mitchell, in the first instance, explains this startling fact by some reasons which appear too general to prove anything in particular. He says:

“The habits of the Chinese are so thrifty, and so hereditary, that they wear just what their fathers wore before them; that is to say, just enough and no more of anything, no matter how cheap it may be offered

them. No working Chinaman can afford to put on a new coat which shall not last him at least three years and stand the wear and tear of the roughest drudgery during that period. Now, a garment of that description must contain at least three times the weight of raw cotton which we put into the heaviest goods we import to China; that is to say, it must be three times as heavy as the heaviest drills and domestics we can afford to send out here.”

Absence of wants, and predilection for hereditary models of dress, are obstacles which civilized commerce has to encounter in all new markets. As to the thickness and strength of drills, might British and American manufacturers not adapt their wares to the peculiar requirements of the Chinese? But here, we come to the real point at issue. In 1844, Mr. Mitchell sent some samples of the native cloth of every quality to England, with the prices specified. His correspondents assured him that they could not produce it in Manchester, and much less ship it to China, at the rates quoted. Whence this inability in the most advanced factory system of the world to undersell cloth woven by hand in the most primitive looms? The combination we have already pointed to, of minute agriculture with domestic industry, solves the riddle. We quote again from Mr. Mitchell:

“When the harvest is gathered, all hands in the farmhouse, young and old together, turn to carding, spinning, and weaving this cotton; and out of this home-spun stuff a heavy and durable material, adapted to the rough handling it has to go through for two or three years, they clothe themselves, and the surplus they carry to the nearest town, where the shopkeeper buys it for the use of the population of the towns, and the boat people on the rivers. With this homespun stuff, nine out of every ten human beings in this country are clothed, the manufacture



varying in quality from the coarsest dungaree to the finest Nanking, all produced in the farm-houses, and costing the producer literally nothing beyond the value of the raw material, or rather of the sugar which he exchanged for it, the produce of his own husbandry. Our manufacturers have only to contemplate for a moment the admirable economy of this system, and, so to speak, its exquisite dovetailing with the other pursuits of the farmer, to be satisfied, at a glance, that they have no chance whatever in the competition, as far as the coarser fabrics are concerned. It is, perhaps, characteristic of China alone, of all countries in the world, that the loom is to be found in every well-conditioned homestead. The people of all other countries content themselves with carding and spinning, and at that point stop short, sending the yarn to the professional weaver to be made into cloth. It was reserved for the thrifty Chinaman to carry the thing out to perfection. He not only cards and spins his cotton, but he weaves it himself, with the help of his wives and daughters, and farm servants, and hardly ever confines himself to producing for the mere wants of his family, but makes it an essential part of his season's operations to produce a certain quantity of cloth for the supply of neighbouring towns and rivers.

“The Fui-kien farmer is thus not merely a farmer, but an agriculturist and a manufacturer in one. He produces this cloth literally for nothing, beyond the cost of the raw material: he produces it, as shown, under his own roof-tree, by the hands of his women and farm servants; it costs neither extra labour nor extra time. He keeps his domestics spinning and weaving while his crops are growing, and after they are harvested, during rainy weather, when out-of-

door labour cannot be pursued. In short, at every available interval throughout the year round, does this model of domestic industry pursue his calling, and engage himself upon something useful.”

As a complement of Mr. Mitchell’s statement may be considered the following description Lord Elgin gives of the rural population he met with during his voyage up the Yang-tse-kiang:

“What I have seen leads me to think that the rural population of China is, generally speaking, well-doing and contented. I worked very hard, though with only indifferent success, to obtain from them accurate information respecting the extent of their holdings, the nature of their tenure, the taxation which they have to pay, and other kindred matters. I arrived at the conclusion that, for the most part, they hold their lands, which are of very limited extent, in full property from the Crown, subject to certain annual charges of no very exorbitant amount, and that these advantages, improved by assiduous industry, supply abundantly their simple wants, whether in respect of food or clothing.”

It is this same combination of husbandry with manufacturing industry, which, for a long time, withstood, and still checks, the export of British wares to East India; but there that combination was based upon a peculiar constitution of the landed property which the British, in their position as the supreme landlords of the country, had it in their power to undermine, and thus forcibly convert part of the Hindu self-sustaining communities into mere farms, producing opium, cotton, indigo, hemp, and other raw materials, in exchange, for British stuff. In China the English have not yet wielded this power, nor are they likely ever to do so.