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**Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain**

Scotsman Charles Grant (1746–1823) travelled to India in 1767. During his 22-year stay, he rose through the ranks of the East India Company, serving as a member of the company's board of trade. Following his return to Britain, he served three times as the company's chairman and was also elected to Parliament. His conversion to a fervent form of Christianity had occurred in 1776, making him a well-known advocate of evangelisation in the newly acquired British territories. In this work, he launches a strong attack on Hindu belief, labelling it as depraved, degenerate and despotic. "The true cure of darkness is the introduction of light," he argues. Written in 1792 but first published in 1797, this work was also presented to Parliament in 1813 in a bid to influence the renewal and amendment of the East India Company's charter.
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Observations on the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain

Particularly with Respect to Morals; and on the Means of Improving It

CHARLES GRANT
OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
STATE OF SOCIETY
AMONG THE
ASIATIC SUBJECTS OF GREAT-BRITAIN,
PARTICULARLY
WITH RESPECT TO MORALS;
AND ON
THE MEANS OF IMPROVING IT.

WRITTEN CHIEFLY IN THE YEAR 1792.
To the Honorable the Court of Directors for the Affairs of the East-India Company.

Honorable Sirs,

According to the intimation which I lately took the liberty of giving, I have now the honor to submit to your consideration, a treatise which bears upon a subject pressed by repeated proposals on your attention, namely, the communication of Christianity to the natives of our possessions in the East.

That this is a question of importance, will hardly be denied; and from the numerous letters which have been addressed to the Court, in favor of such communication, as well as from the share of general regard now bestowed on subjects of that nature, it appears to be a question on which an explicit determination, on the part of the Company, is become necessary.

It is therefore in different views, worthy of a full and candid discussion; and such I have been solicitous to give it, actuated solely by motives of duty, arising from the several relations in which I find myself placed. For, in becoming an advocate, as I profess myself to be, for making known to our Asiatic subjects, the pure and benign principles of our divine religion,
I not only pay that obedience which is due to its authoritative injunctions, but, in my sincere opinion, highly consult the true interest of the Company, and the general welfare of the many millions living under its government. Nor can I doubt, that this will be the verdict of serious deliberation, however a hasty view of the subject, under some of its aspects, may have unnecessarily excited alarm.

In earlier periods, the Company manifested a laudable zeal for extending, as far as its means then went, the knowledge of the Gospel to the Pagan tribes, among whom its factories were placed. It has since prospered and become great, in a way to which the commercial history of the world affords no parallel; and for this it is indebted to the fostering and protecting care of divine Providence. It owes therefore, the warmest gratitude for the past, and it equally needs the support of the same beneficent Power in time to come; for the “changes and chances” to which human affairs are always liable, and especially the emphatic lesson of vicissitude which the present day has supplied, may assure us, that neither elevation nor safety can be maintained by any of the nations or rulers, of the earth, but through Him who governs the whole. The duty therefore of the Company, as part of a Christian community, its peculiar superadded obligations, its enlarged means, and its continual dependence upon the divine favor, all call upon it to honor God, by diffusing the knowledge of that revelation which he has vouchsafed to mankind.

In urging this momentous work however, I wish to be clearly understood, as connoting with the formation and execution of any scheme for the performance of it, every prudent care, every just precaution, which may be suitable to the nature of the undertaking, and to the wise, humble, mild spirit.
spirit of that religion which is to be recommended. At present I presume to offer no specific proposal, contending only for the general principle; but if that is recognized, I shall be most ready to submit the ideas I entertain of the manner in which it might be safely brought into operation.

If the considerations already adduced, did not sufficiently guard me against the censure of launching beyond the ordinary lines of business, I might justly plead, that the office which you, Gentlemen, exercise, and which I have the honor to hold in common with you, summons, not unfrequently, your attention to subjects of the highest nature,—to the principles of government, and the interests of nations; subjects upon which, having mentioned them, I may be permitted to observe, that even a deliberative voice, though to that you are not restrained, attaches a trust of great importance to the station of a Director.

But with respect to the execution of the treatise which is now offered to your perusal, I am sensible that I need the utmost indulgence. Incapable at best to do justice to the several topics which it embraces, I might yet in India, the center of materials and information relating to them, have produced something less unworthy of notice; but though I held there the leading opinions now advanced, no idea of giving any publicity to them, by writing, ever occurred to me, until after my return to this country, when persuaded of the expediency of some attempt of that kind, and incited by a particular occasion, I several years ago, hastily drew up the substance of the present essay. It has however since been by me unfurled, and my other avocations have allowed me only to revive it, not to form a new work, as would certainly have been desirable. To meet a variety of opinions, and to fortify the argument which is maintained in it, many things are introduced which must be already known
known to you, and indeed things which in my own first views, I should have deemed superfluous; for according to my apprehension, the main question is so clear as to need little auxiliary illustration. Under all these disadvantages, however, I am content to come forward, at the call of a greater interest, forming no pretension to literary merit, nor having on that score, any higher hope, than that you may be pleased to receive this tract on the footing of one of those many Papers of Business, with which the records of your governments have been furnished, by the observation and experience of men whose time and thoughts have been chiefly employed in the concerns of active life.

I have the honor to be, with the greatest respect,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble servant,

East-India House,
August 16th, 1797.

CHARLES GRANT.
As, in order to bring this trait more conveniently under the view of those, to whom the consideration of the subject which it discusses immediately belongs, it has been judged expedient to print a few copies, and the performance may thence come into the hands of persons to whom the writer of it can offer no verbal explanation, he begs leave, in this manner, to account for some things, of which the propriety might otherwise possibly be questioned.

Among these, he alludes more particularly to the slight appropriate views he has ventured to give, in the first chapter, of certain portions of the general history and politics of British India; which may be supposed to have no necessary connection with his main object, and rather to lead to the introduction of controverted topics, into a discussion in which they should not mix. To such a supposition he has to reply, that the past effects of British government upon our Indian territories, appeared to him to afford a fair and strong argument, in support of the scheme which he had taken upon him to recommend: and that some preliminary elucidations, respecting the British transactions and possessions in the East, seemed also to be requisite. Upon these considerations, he originally wrote a first part to his trait, but with so much repugnance to enlarge, or to awaken any controversial ideas or feelings, that the whole of that part occupied only eight or nine manuscript pages. When finished, however, he found it to be so defective, as not to answer his purpose. The effects of our earlier territorial measures appeared only in results, which amounted to no more than mere assertions; assertions that, in order to be admitted, required to be proved. This
This compelled him to enter into a more detailed review, to produce the facts from which he had drawn his results, and in producing them, to accompany them with as many of their relative circumstances, as should set a clear representation before the reader.

It is thus that he has been eventually carried within the confines of a province, in which he had as little intention as claim to appear. He certainly pretends not to intrude into the company of those who are established there; and he has sought to pass, with cautious speed, through some thorny spots which lay in his way, to a point important in his progress.

From the same cause, also, in part, but more from the desire of establishing the positions he advanced, by large proofs and quotations, this treatise, he sees with concern, has even in its printed form, dwelled to a size which he fears may be an obstacle to the perusal of it; but if he might venture to say any thing upon a point so difficult to be expressed, it would be to express a wish that his solicitude to provide for the satisfaction of the reader's mind, may not prove the means of depriving him of his attention.

Sensible that in this, and many other respects, his humble attempt stands in need of candid allowances, he would entreat that at least it may be judged of, not by any detached part, but from the whole; and that whatever may be its faults, they may not be charged to the cause he pleads,—a cause which he is convinced, like truth, to be approved, needs only to be justly seen.
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