AN ECHO OF THE INDIAN MUTINY : THE PROPOSED BANISHMENT OF BAHADUR SHAH 11 TO THE CAPE COLONY, 1857.

In 1862 Behadur Shah II, titular of the Mughal empire, and the last king of Delhi, died in Rangoon, an exile from India.[1] He might well have been banished to the Cape Colony. He had been King of Delhi since 1837, but the title was an empty one, for he had no kingdom and subsisted on a pension from his loyal courtiers. He owed his position to the British who, through the East India Company, had conquered India. It was useful for them to keep alive the ideas of an uninterrupted succession. Indeed, it would have been undiplomatic forciably to deprive Bahadur Shah of the ancient title of emperor. Although he was an ornament, idling away his time writing excellent Urdu poetry, in the eyes of millions of Muslims he was the real ruler of India. Thus he was a danger to the government of the Company, representing "that legitimate authority which alone could accord legal saction to armed resistance to the Company's Government."[2] But until 1857 there was no occasion to be apprehensive about him.

However, all this was changed by the Mutiny of 1857. When the rebels from Meerut invested Delhi in May, the aging King was forced by circumstances rather than inclination to assume sovereign power.[3] But he did not hold the reins of government for long. Four months later the British occupied Delhi and Bahadur Shah surrendered to Lt. W. S. R. Hodson on condition that his life was to be spared.[4]

In captivity he cut a sorry figure. On the day after his surrender, someone saw him thus: "Sitting crosslegged on a cushion placed on a common native *charpoy,* or bed, in the verandah of a courtyard, was the last representative of the Great Mughul dynasty. There was nothing imposing in his appearance, save a long white beard which reached his girdle. About middle height, and upwards of seventy years old, he was dressed in white, with a conical-shaped turban of the same colour and material, while at his back two attendants stood, waving over his head large fans of peacocks' feathers, the emblem of sovereignty — a piteable farce in the case of one who was already shorn of his regal attributes . . ."[5]

Yet this sad figure was now a serious embarrassment to the Government of India. Lt. Hodson had disobeyed orders by bargaining with the King of Delhi and promising him his life. The Government of India had stipulated that there were to be no negotiations with someone whom they considered to be guilty of high treason and responsible for the massacre of prisoners in the royal palace. The first accusation was partly true; the second one was false. Nevertheless, if he had surrendered uncon-

1. Lionel J. Trotter, *History of India under Queen Victoria from 1836 to 1880* (London, 1886), ii, p. 34.
2. Surendra Nath, Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (Calcutta, 1957), p. 68.
3. *Ibid.,* pp. 70-72.
4. *Ibid.,* pp. 109-110.
5. C. J. Griffith, *Siege of Delhi* (London, 1910), pp. 201-202.

ditionally, he would almost certainly have been tried and hanged. This was the view of the Viceroy, Lord Canning, who prejudged the hapless King on the basis of imperfect information received about his capture.[6] The conditional surrender saddled the Government of India with an unwelcome and dangerous state prisoner. Canning was justifiably apprehensive about detaining Bahadur Shah in India. In casting around for a solution he addressed himself to Sir George Grey, then Governor of the Cape Colony, pointing out his difficulty: "There is no place in India where his presence, however well he might be guarded, would not produce excitement and constant uneasiness amongst large and dangerous classes, and much risk of embarrassment to the government. The mischief which lies in the mere name of the Dynasty of Timour has been thoroughly established during the late events and the fanatical Mussulman would infallibly cling to the wreck of the House so long as a fragment of it remained in sight or in mind."[7]

Bahadur Shah had be banished; but where? Penang and Singapore were possibilities, but they were too close to India and communication with India was too easy and constant. "We have no other," he confided to Grey, "and I know none, which would be so convenient and safe, as some spot in the Cape Colony."[8] If Grey was willing to receive him he would be transported from Delhi to Calcutta as quickly as possible. "I am very desirous that he should not linger a day on the road, or in this part of India, and that the day of his arrival in Calcutta should be the day of his embarkation. I may therefore be induced to despatch him before I can receive an answer from you." However, there was a legal difficulty. An Act of the Cape Legislature might be necessary to enable Gray to detain him. "But at the worst he might be kept on board the vessel which brought him until an Act were passed, if you should find any solid objection to his passing into your country before that." Canning was indifferent about where Grey intended to locate Bahadur Shah. If he were "a little distance" from the coast, only a few police would be necessary. "The cutting off of all communications with India would be the object to be kept in view — of his escape there would be no fear." He warned Grey that the matter should be regarded as confidential until he was certain about the fate of the King who might still have to hang for his crimes.[9]

Grey's reaction was favourable. The shock waves of the Mutiny had been felt throughout the Empire. The Cape had sent horses and men, and now the Governor was prepared to be helpful about the King of Delhi. He replied to Canning and also wrote to Henry Labouchere in the Colonial Office, enclosing copies of his correspondence with the Viceroy. He assured Canning that there would be no difficulty about

6. Canning to Grey, 11 Oct. 1857 (Private), L/PS/3/60 (India Office Records, London).
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*

enabling legislation. A proclamation of the High Commissioner in British Kaffraria had the force of law. Therefore he would first issue the necessary proclamation and then locate Bahadur Shah in King William's Town. It would be impossible for him to escape from this "very healthy and agreeable residence."[10] The Cape Parliament could be asked to pass a law giving the same effect to the sentence passed upon the King of Delhi as if it had been passed by the Supreme Court of the Cape Colony. Grey tempered his desire to help Canning with a judious appraisal of the mood of the newly fledged representative government in the Cape Colony. He thought it best not to call upon the British Parliament in interfere in the matter, "for the Legislature here will readily pass the necessary Law upon the subject, and this will accustom them to legislate upon matters which concern the empire in general, as well as upon those which regard their own individual interests; moreover, it is clearly right in a Colony possessing a representative Legislature with full Legislative powers, that the interference of the British Parliament should be as infrequent and as little obtruding as possible.

In London there was a general desire to smooth the way for Canning's suggestion. The Board of Control[11] had received a despatch from Canning outlining his plans for exiling Bahadur Shah to the Cape Colony. This was passed on to the Colonial Office which had meanwhile received Grey's views on the matter. Herman Merivale, Permanent Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, sent a copy of Grey's despatch to the Board of Control where it was purused by Thomas Waterfield, a clerk in the Secret Department. He found Grey's letter "very satisfactory."[12]

However, Lord Ellenborough, President of the Board of Control, was unhappy about the proposal. He informed Ross Mangles, Chairman of the Court of Directors that, in his view, Lord Canning had no power to transport the King of Delhi to the Cape. When he had been Governor-General of India he had contemplated exiling the King of Oude to the Cape and had run across a difficulty. India could only transport to certain Crown colonies of which the Cape was not one. Therefore, if Bahadur Shah were to land there he would be a free man. Indeed, it was conceivable that he could bring an action against the members of the Government of India for wrongfully sending him to that place.[13] Canning should be informed privately of the danger for both he and Grey would get themselves into a scrape if the Cape Parliament did not take instant action and "all Sir. G. Grey does without legislature authority will be at his own peril." Clearly Ellenborough did not wish to leave the outcome of such an important matter, involving the reputation

10. Grey to Labouchere, 11 Nov. 1857 (Confidential), L/PS/3/60.
11. The Home Government of India consisted of the Board of Control and the Court of Directors. In October 1858 this "double government" was superceded by the India Office.
12. Minute by Waterfield on Merivale to the Secretary to the India Board, 20 January 1858, L/PS/3/60.
13. Ellenborough to Mangles, 2 March 1858, Ellenborough Papers, 30/12/9, (Public Record Office, London).

of Sir George Grey, in the hands of an unpredictable colonial legislature.

Thus Bahadur Shah was exiled to Rangoon, after all. The exchange of correspondence between the Viceroy, the Governor of the Cape Colony, the Colonial Office and the Board of Control was a fruitless exercise. Yet this episode in the scrapbook of Empire should not be judged by its lack of positive achievement. Its importance lies elsewhere. The incident reveals Grey's awareness of the sensitivity of the Cape parliament towards interference by Britain. It was also an example of co-operation within the Empire when one of its parts was threatened. It improved Merivale's acquaintance with the Home Government of India: in 1861 he was to become Permanent Under Secretary of State in the India Office. The British Indian and "colonial" empires were more thighly knit together than is generally realized.

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