

violence and corruption. Varying areas acted differently to Prohibition and the events that followed; some with corrupt and illegal acts, while others tried to maintain a normal life without alcohol.

This essay looked at three counties in Illinois to see how Illinois reacted to the implementation of the eighteenth amendment and Prohibition. One can see there were major differences between the three areas and the geographic, economic, and cultural variables affected how each area responded. An overwhelming theme within these areas seemed to be the readiness to break the law for both a drink and what the citizens believed in. Alcohol did not just represent an intoxicating drink; it represented freedom. Bootleggers represented the liberators of the tyrannical rule of the eighteenth amendment. No matter how hard the authorities tried to break down the structure of the illegal consumption and distribution of alcohol, it was almost impossible to stop. The only thing that could stop this illegal activity from taking place was, ironically enough, the repeal of the eighteenth amendment. When it was repealed in 1933, the bootleggers were out of business and Americans were allowed once again to consume alcohol. Despite Prohibition and its flaws, it did teach America one thing: they were willing to break the law in order to reinforce their beliefs. This was first shown during the Boston Tea Party and continued during the corrupt period of Prohibition.

“No Occasion for Coffins”: Humanitarianism and the Bengal Famine of 1770

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Adam Morrisette, a graduate student in History, wrote this paper in summer 2009 for Dr. David Smith's HIS 5400 course on Eighteenth-Century Europe.

In 1771, newspapers across London were printing a letter from an anonymous writer describing a horrific scene half a world away. The letter was from a servant of the East India Company in Calcutta. The scene he described was that of a horrible famine ravaging the Bengal province of India. Drought, greed, and mismanagement caused a famine so severe that, according to this writer:

By the time the famine had been about a fortnight over the land, we were greatly affected at Calcutta; many thousands falling daily in the streets and fields, whose bodies, mangled by dogs, jackalls, and vultures, in that hot season . . . made us dread the consequences of a plague.¹

By the end of 1770, the famine may have eradicated as many as one-third of the population of Bengal. David Arnold writes, “In terms of the enormous loss of life and the intensity and extent of human suffering involved, the Bengal famine of 1770 must count as one of the greatest catastrophes of the eighteenth century and, indeed, of modern times.”²

Despite the magnitude and tragedy of the Bengal famine, relatively little was written about it in the British press. Only a few accounts of the famine appeared in the newspapers and often the same accounts were printed over and over. Early accounts of the scale and potential repercussions of the famine were varied and contradictory. Initially, the greatest concern was how the famine would affect the value of East India Company stocks. Gradually, the debate shifted to what role the East India Company may have played in the famine and whether or not the East India Company needed more oversight and regulation. Interestingly, very little discussion of the famine as a humanitarian crisis occurred initially. The famine was seen largely as a natural disaster. Furthermore, Arnold asserts,

¹ *The Annual Register, or a view of the history, politics, and literature, for the year 1771* (London, 1779), 206, www.gale.cengage.com/EighteenthCentury.

² David Arnold, "Hunger in the Garden of Plenty," in *Dreadful Visitation: Confronting Natural Catastrophe in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alessa Johns, 81-111 (New York: Routledge, 1999), 86.

“The Bengal famine was perhaps the first Asian ‘disaster’ in modern times to have an impact on Europe, but it did so by reinforcing an identification of Asia with nature rather than by emphasizing a common humanity.”³ Enlightenment thinkers saw in the Bengal famine evidence of the progress “enlightened” society had made, as opposed to Indian society, which was still at the mercy of nature.⁴

Some people at the time, however, did see the Bengal famine as a humanitarian crisis resulting from the East India Company’s greedy business practices and mismanagement of the famine. Some descriptions of the famine and critiques of the East India Company show at least some degree of compassion and empathy for Bengali suffering during the famine. Arnold’s assertion that an emphasis on “common humanity” was not what caused the Bengal famine to have an impact in Europe may be true. One cannot, however, completely ignore contemporary humanitarian concerns over the Bengal famine. At the time of, and in the years after, the Bengal famine, a small, but vocal, number of individuals addressed the Bengal famine as not only an economic and natural catastrophe, but also as a humanitarian disaster.

The anonymous author of the letter in the *Annual Register* did not see the famine as just a natural disaster. He noted that “our gentlemen in many places purchased the rice at 120 and 140 seers for a rupee, which they afterwards sold for 15 seers for a rupee . . . so that the persons principally concerned have made great fortunes by it.”⁵ The East India Company, it seems, participated in creating, and greatly exacerbating, the famine by monopolizing rice in anticipation of the coming dearth. The East India Company also continued to collect taxes, which further prevented Bengalis from being able to purchase necessary provisions.⁶ The authority to collect taxes was only one part of the responsibilities and duties of the Diwan, which was granted to the East India Company in 1765. To understand how the East India Company assumed such a position of power in India, one must look to East India Company’s history in India prior to the famine.

The rise of the British East India Company from a trading company to a colonial power is a long and complicated one. The British East India Company came into existence at the beginning of the seventeenth century. By the 1630s, The East India Company had begun to establish its presence in India. By the middle of the century, the company had erected factories and fortifications and gained exclusive rights to operate in and trade with Bengal. Bengal grew throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and “By 1707 this enlarged Bengal was

³ Ibid, 105-106.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Annual Register*, 205.

⁶ Archie Baron, *An Indian Affair* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2001), 78.

beginning to emerge as an autonomous political entity.”⁷ Bengal was a province of the Mughal empire and, like other provinces, was ruled by two governors, the Subahdar and Diwan. P.J. Marshall writes, “The Subahdar was responsible for the nizamat, the maintenance of law and order, the command of the armed forces, and the administration of criminal justice. The Diwan controlled finance and taxation and administered civil justice. By about 1717 the two offices were combined.”⁸

In that same year, the East India Company was granted exemption from customs payments in exchange for an annual payment. British trading operations in Bengal continued largely unchecked until 1756. In that year, Siraj-ud-daula became the new Nawab of the Bengal province. Unlike his predecessors, whom the East India Company were able bribe into leaving them alone, Siraj did not like the growing power and customs-free status of the East India Company. He eventually successfully attacked and took over Calcutta. This would prove to be the ultimate undoing of Bengali control of the province.

Colonel Robert Clive and a military force from Madras were able to retake Calcutta from Siraj. Clive did not, however, stop with the retaking of Calcutta. The East India Company declared war on Siraj. Archie Baron writes, “The true story of the conquest of Bengal is that it was (mostly Indian) private enterprise attempting to throw off the shackles of public control. An unstable ruler was threatening their security and prosperity. Indian bankers and merchants conspired with the Company to depose one troublesome Nawab and replace him with another.”⁹

The East India Company, along with the Indian merchants, managed to sway Mir Jafar, a relative of Siraj and one of his military commanders, to their side. This would be crucial in the final showdown between Siraj and the East India Company. On June 23, 1757, Colonel Clive met Siraj at the battle of Plassey. Clive’s forces were greatly outnumbered. It was immediately apparent, however, that Mir Jafar had come through on his end of the bargain. As the battle continued, “it was quickly clear that the enemy troops were not counter-attacking. Thousands on the British flanks had turned spectator and were evidently loyal to Mir Jafar.”¹⁰ Robert Clive’s forces were victorious. Mir Jafar became the new Nawab, and the East India Company returned to business free from interference. The authority of the Nawabs continued to decline over the next few years until, in 1765, the Emperor made the East India Company the Diwan of Bengal. Many consider this to be beginning of the British Empire in India.

⁷ P.J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Baron, 50 -52.

¹⁰ Ibid, 56.

The significance of this event cannot be overstated in the years leading up to the Bengal famine. The East India Company was no longer simply a British company trading in Bengal. The East India Company was now the governor of the Bengal province. As mentioned previously, the Diwan was responsible for enforcing laws, collecting taxes, and civil administration. When the famine of 1770 was looming on the horizon, the East India Company largely forgot all of their duties as Diwan, except those that produced profit. Furthermore, if the agents of the East India Company had, in fact, bought up all the rice in anticipation of a dearth, they had gone far beyond shirking their duties as Diwan; they had grossly abused their position with no regard for the Bengalis that were, technically, under their protection. How would the British public view such a tremendous abuse of power and disregard for life? Would the public take notice of the East India Company's role in the famine of 1770? Would the public see the famine of 1770 as a humanitarian crisis or only as a potential economic disaster brought on by natural disaster? The public response to the famine of 1770 was complex. There were many factors that played into the varied responses to the famine of 1770, including Enlightenment thought, developing ideas of empathy and human rights, and the evolving British press.

The Age of Enlightenment saw many new and radical changes in the way people looked at the rights of man, the role of government, and the world around them. The frequent invocation of reason in understanding the natural world led to new ways of understanding politics, economy, society, and religion. The Enlightenment also led to a widely held notion that humans had asserted their dominance over nature, as well as a belief that humans could have an effect even on the outcome of natural events. David Arnold argues that one of the most profound effects of the Bengal famine of 1770 was on the understanding of how reason could prevail over nature.¹¹

David Arnold's *Hunger in the Garden of Plenty: The Bengal Famine of 1770* is one of the most recent works on the Bengal famine of 1770.¹² Arnold is one of the few historians to present an argument regarding the impact and legacy of the Bengal famine in eighteenth-century Britain. Strangely, despite the severity and magnitude of the famine, it seems to attract almost as little attention now as it did in the past. Arnold notes, "Despite the enormous mortality and its impact on contemporary European attitudes, the Bengal famine had to a remarkable degree lapsed from official memory by the mid-nineteenth century."¹³ Arnold asserts that it wasn't until the late nineteenth century that W.W. Hunter researched the Bengal famine of 1770 and explored its impact on subsequent British colonial

¹¹ Arnold, 105–106.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 86–87.

history in India.¹⁴ Arnold asserts that the famine of 1770 served to present India as an example of uncontrolled nature and did not emphasize "common humanity."¹⁵ In the wake of the famine, nature seemed to rapidly reclaim uninhabited areas of Bengal. This only furthered the notion that the problem at work in Bengal was the inability of the "unenlightened" Bengalis to control nature. This, of course, was used later as an argument in defense of the British colonization of Bengal. W.W. Hunter argued, according to Arnold, that "Nature, barely checked by human agency, had ruled in 1770; by the time of the Orissa famine of 1866 . . . nature had been tamed and made subservient to 'modern civilization'."¹⁶

Arnold goes on to argue that accounts of the 1770 famine led to an even wider gap between England and India. Rather than creating a sense of compassion or humanitarianism, accounts of the famine made Indian culture and society even more foreign and less understandable. Some writers argued that Indians were largely responsible for their suffering "for not responding with the kind of anger and active protest that would have characterized Europe's poor and hungry in similar circumstances."¹⁷ Arnold argues that stereotypes like these only served to depict the Indians as "unenlightened" as compared to the British.¹⁸

Finally, Arnold addresses the actual British reaction to the accounts of horrendous suffering and carnage during the Bengal famine of 1770. Arnold asserts that most of these reactions are "self-reflexive" and focus much more on "what Europeans think, see, and feel about the assault on their sensibilities and 'humanity' than they inform us about Indian experience and suffering."¹⁹ Arnold suggests that British and European responses to accounts of the famine focused more on how such horrific scenes offended their sensibilities than on any concern for the suffering of the Indians.

Arnold, however, goes on to write, "Ultimately, it might be argued, that suffering did not go unheeded, for reports of the enormous mortality and needless misery in Bengal fueled criticism of the company's rapacious revenue collecting and the corruption, extortion, and monopolistic trading practices of its servants."²⁰ Nevertheless, Arnold argues again that the criticisms aimed at the East India Company did not come out of concern for the welfare of Indians; rather, they stemmed from a "concern that the growth of empire overseas might corrupt British morals, institutions, and 'traditional liberties' nearer home."²¹

¹⁴ Ibid, 87.

¹⁵ Ibid, 105–106.

¹⁶ Ibid, 93.

¹⁷ Ibid, 96.

¹⁸ Ibid, 97.

¹⁹ Ibid, 98.

²⁰ Ibid, 99.

²¹ Ibid, 100.

Arnold makes a good argument. It is not, however, without flaws. Arnold asserts over and over that the British reaction to the famine of 1770 had, essentially, nothing to do with humanitarian concerns about the suffering in Bengal. Rather, he asserts that the terrible accounts of the famine disseminated through the British press mainly succeeded in two things: depicting India as a country still ruled by nature and creating fears that the practices of the East India Company might corrupt British morals, which led to a call for investigation and regulation of the company. It seems, however, that Arnold is making a large assumption when he argues that humanitarian ideas played little to no role in the British reaction to the famine.

Other historians have addressed the idea of humanitarianism in the eighteenth century and argued that one can see a rise in humanitarianism during the century. In her book *Inventing Human Rights: A History*, Lynn Hunt contends that notions of human rights and empathy across gender, race, and international borders started appearing in the eighteenth century.²² Hunt writes, "Learning to empathize opened the path to human rights, but it did not ensure that everyone would be able to take that path right away."²³ If, in fact, the eighteenth century did see a rise in empathy and thought about human rights, it seems a reasonable assumption that, by the later eighteenth century, those reading accounts of the terrible famine in Bengal would have been able to empathize with the suffering of the Indians. Arnold argues that most of the reactions of the British towards the famine actually stemmed from concern over how it offended the sensibilities of those who read about it.²⁴ One could argue that such vivid accounts of agony and death as those found in the anonymous letter to the Annual Register not only offended sensibilities, but also created empathy.

Thomas Haskell has also written about the development of humanitarianism in the eighteenth century. In a two-part article entitled "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility," Haskell argues that humanitarianism develops along with capitalism in the eighteenth century.²⁵ He contends that the same concepts that allow capitalism to function also lay the foundation for humanitarianism to take hold. Haskell asserts that there are "four preconditions to the emergence of humanitarianism as a historical phenomenon."²⁶ First, "we must adhere to ethical maxims that make helping strangers the right thing to do before we

²² Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 38-39.

²³ Ibid, 68.

²⁴ Arnold, 98.

²⁵ Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *The American Historical Review*, 1985: 339-361.

Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2," *The American Historical Review*, 1985: 547-566.

²⁶ Haskell Pt. 1, 357.

can feel obliged to aid them."²⁷ Second, "we must perceive ourselves to be causally involved in the evil intent."²⁸ Third, "We cannot regard ourselves as causally involved in another's suffering unless we see a way to stop it."²⁹ Last, "the recipes for intervention available to us must be ones of sufficient ordinariness, familiarity, certainty of effect, and ease of operation that our failure to use them would constitute a suspension of routine, an out-of-the-ordinary event, possibly even an intentional act in itself."³⁰

Haskell argues that, more specifically than capitalism, the growth of the market was responsible for creating an environment in which humanitarianism could grow. The market relied on specific human qualities to function properly: moral responsibility and causal perception.³¹ At the center of a functioning market was the expectation that people could be relied upon to honor their deals and contracts; this led to a concept of moral responsibility.³² The market also made people acutely aware of the concept of cause and effect. Through their experiences in the market, people could see that their actions did have noticeable effects; this led to a greater causal perception.³³ These same qualities, Haskell argues, allowed people to take notice of and address humanitarian issues. Once people could be convinced that they did, in fact, play a part in humanitarian issues, they could be convinced that they had a moral responsibility to address them.³⁴

Hunt and Haskell both agree that the origins of humanitarianism, empathy, and attention to human rights are in the eighteenth century. If this is the case, were some of the reactions to the Bengal famine of 1770 based on empathy towards Indians and concern over the famine as a humanitarian crisis? To look for evidence of this, one must turn to sources contemporary to the famine. The most readily available sources are eighteenth-century newspapers. As the public sphere grew throughout the eighteenth century, the press became one of the main media by which ideas were disseminated and discussed. Accounts of and reactions to the Bengal famine of 1770 in eighteenth-century newspapers illustrate the diversity of contemporary opinion about the subject.

One of the most famous and often cited accounts of the Bengal famine is that of the anonymous writer to the Annual Register. Either the whole letter or excerpts from it appeared in many different newspapers. Several important points about this letter should be noted. The anonymous writer began his letter by writing, "As soon as the dryness of the season foretold the approaching dearth of rice, our gentlemen in the Company's

²⁷Ibid, 358.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹ Haskell Pt. 2, 563.

³² Ibid, 553.

³³ Ibid, 563.

³⁴ Ibid, 565

service, particularly those at the Subordinates, whose stations gave them the best opportunities, were as early as possible in buying up all they could lay hold of."³⁵ The writer immediately began his account by implicating East India Company agents in contributing to the famine by buying up rice in anticipation of the coming famine. This particular passage was printed in many different articles throughout many different newspapers. It, undoubtedly, raised concerns that the greed of East India Company servants had superseded concern over the possible outcome of their actions.

The anonymous writer presented horrifying images of scores of dead bodies littering the streets being eaten by all sorts of animals. The anonymous writer continued his account:

One could not pass along the streets without seeing multitudes in their last agonies, crying out as you passed, My God! My God! have mercy upon me, I am starving; whilst on the other sides, numbers of dead were seen with dogs, jackals, hogs, vultures, and other beasts and birds of prey feeding on their carcasses. It was remarked by the natives, that greater numbers of these animals came down at this time, than was ever known; which upon this melancholy occasion was of great service; as the vultures and other birds take the eyes and intestines, whilst the other animals gnaw the feet and hands; so that very little of the body remained for the Cutcherry people to carry to river . . . I have observed two of them with a dooly carrying twenty heads, and the remains of the carcasses that had been left by the beasts of prey, to the river at a time. At this time we could touch fish, river was so full of carcasses; and of those who did eat it, many died suddenly. Pork, ducks, and geese, also lived mostly off carnage; so that our only meat was mutton when we could get it.³⁶

Passages like these must have struck a chord with readers. The terrible imagery of the famine, combined with the accusation that East India Company agents had contributed to it by hoarding rice, must have been shocking to readers at the time. Other accounts of the famine must have been equally as disturbing.

Another letter that was printed in many papers at the time was from an officer in Calcutta. The officer wrote, "The dearth has been so very great for the last six months that, in the company's districts alone (upon a moderate computation) there have died upwards of three hundred thousand

³⁵ *Annual Register*, 205.

³⁶ *Annual Register*, 206–207.

inhabitants through mere want."³⁷ His estimate was, most likely, very low. The officer went on to say that there were many charities, but not enough to make a difference, and that "hunger drives many of them [Indians] to such distress, that the strongest frequently in some parts of the country fall upon the weaker, and devour them."³⁸ Another article reported that "There was no occasion for Coffins where the Living devoured the dead."³⁹ Despite reflecting how desperate the famine had become, stories of cannibalism most likely did not help to create empathy for the starving Indians. The rest of the story, however, may have. The officer wrote, "Balls, concerts and all public entertainments ought to subside at this time of general scarcity; but I am sorry to say they have not; and under the doors and windows of these places of amusement, lie many dead bodies, and others again in all agonies of death."⁴⁰ Stories like this one, along with stories of buying up rice, must have significantly contributed to the feeling that the East India Company required more oversight.

Although the officer's report of the death toll was rather low, other reports of the famine reported in the paper placed the death toll in the millions. One letter writer stated, "The misery occasioned by the famine in the province of Bengal is incredible. I believe I speak within compass when I say at least two millions of souls have perished within these few months."⁴¹ An article in the *Public Register* reads, "There has been a universal Famine throughout the Kingdom of Bengal. . . . Some of the letters say, that on this Account a Million and half of people have perished; according to other letters, the Number is not less than three Millions; but they all agree, that there are scarcely enough left alive to bury the dead."⁴² Not all the accounts attempted to present the famine as such a horrible disaster. Some articles tried to assuage fears that the famine would have an effect on the East India Company. An article in the *London Evening Post* reads:

In Bengal there has nothing materially bad happened, but the scarcity of provisions; which affects the natives, and not the European inhabitants, who are all able to obtain them, though at a dearer price.The consequence of this famine is not any other way injurious to the company, than by the diminution of the people, who should pay the taxes...and of

³⁷ *Weekly Magazine, or, Edinburgh Amusement*, "EAST-INDIES," April 11, 1771: 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Public Advertiser*, March 30, 1771.

⁴⁰ EAST-INDIES, Apr 11: 57.

⁴¹ *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, "Extract of Letter from Bengal, dated Sept. 16, brought by the Lapwing Packet," March 23, 1771.

⁴² *Public Register or The Freeman's Journal*, "LONDON," March 26, 1771.

the manufactures of some of the commodities which the company deal in.⁴³

Articles like this were not uncommon in papers at the time. The East India Company was large, and many people owned stock in the company. Despite the humanitarian crisis, the priority for many was the value of their stock. In fact, despite the tremendous toll the famine had taken on Bengal in 1770, some writers, only a year after the famine, claimed, "Bengal is perfectly recovered from the Effects of the Famine."⁴⁴

Thus far, we have seen accounts of the famine ranging from the terrible to the dismissive. Furthermore, some articles attempted to cast blame on the East India Company while others tried to blame the Indians. It wasn't until the end of 1771 and after that articles and letters showing more humanitarian concerns over the famine in Bengal began to appear. An article in *Bingley's Journal* from November 1771 reads, "A Mr. B---- is arrived from Bengal, who is said to have amassed above hundred thousand pounds by a monopoly of rice; and to which monopoly, it is said, was chiefly owing the late terrible and affecting famine in that country, by which nearly 100,000 unhappy people lost their lives. Who would wish the enjoyment of riches at such a price?"⁴⁵ Here, finally, we see concern for the value of human life over that of wealth. The writer of this article effectively raised the question of what is worth more: the lives of those who suffered and died in the famine of 1770 or the money that was made off of it. It is also toward the end of 1771 that people begin to be held accountable for their actions in Bengal. One article reads, "It is confidently reported, that the late famine in the East Indies was an artificial one, and caused by some people who will be called before a British Court of Justice, to answer for the same."⁴⁶ Here there is a shift from simple disapproval of those who may have contributed to the famine to a suggestion that they could be held criminally liable for having helped create the famine.

In 1772, some of the letters most critical of the East India Company started appearing in the papers. It is also with these letters that one starts to see criticism of the East India Company's practices, not just on administrative and financial grounds, but also on humanitarian grounds. A writer using the pseudonym Publicus published a letter in the *Public Advertiser* in 1772 addressed to George Colebrooke.⁴⁷ George Colebrooke was the current director of the East India Company and had been the director of the company during the famine of 1770. Publicus' long letter is a

⁴³ *London Evening Post*, "LONDON," March 30, 1771.

⁴⁴ *Public Advertiser*, "To the printer of the Public Advertiser," Aug 12, 1772.

⁴⁵ *Bingley's Journal*, "LONDON," November 23, 1771.

⁴⁶ *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, "LONDON," August 27, 1771.

⁴⁷ *Public Advertiser*, "For the Public Advertiser. To Sir GEORGE COLEBROOKE.," January 24, 1772.

criticism of George Colebrooke's unscrupulous trading practices while director of the East India Company. It is, however, the last paragraph of the letter that ties his criticisms to humanitarian concerns. Publicus wrote:

Thus have I run through all your different Excuses for being an East India Stock-jobber, or at least all that have come to my Knowledge. When you exhibit any new ones, I will endeavour to do the same Justice to them . . . I do not esteem it criminal in a Man to encrease his Riches to any Extent, nor do I esteem it criminal in a rich Man to pick Half a crown out of the Kennel; for if he alone knows it that dirty Pickle to be Half a Crown, he has an undoubted right to avail himself of his superior Knowledge. But that such Men should have the Disposal of the Kingdoms of Bengal, Bahar, and Orixia, with the Power of inflicting War, Famine and Pestilence upon fourteen millions of their mild Inhabitants; that such Men should be able to appoint the lowest of the Dependants, to the uncheck'd Collection of four Millions of territorial Revenue, and to the Command of Armies of 60,000 Men, is, I must acknowledge, such a Solicism in Politicks, as reflects the highest Dishonour upon that supreme Government under which it is tolerated.⁴⁸

Publicus not only pointed out the potential for humanitarian abuses inherent in the structure and administration of the East India Company, but also went as far as to say that the actions of the East India Company reflected poorly on the British government for tolerating them. Although this letter is only the opinion of one man, it shows a shift in thought from criticism of the economic and administrative actions of the East India Company to criticism of East India Company's disregard for human life.

In another letter printed in the *Public Advertiser*, a writer using the pseudonym Nemesis criticized the new code of laws proposed by the East India Company. Nemesis questioned not only the effectiveness of these laws, but also how they would be enforced.⁴⁹ Nemesis commented that the only proposed law that he saw as having any merit was one that would prevent East India Company servants from private trading, one of the main factors that may have led to the famine of 1770. He went on, however, to write that the problem was in enforcing the law. Nemesis wrote:

They ay, with an equally ration Prospect of Success, add a Clause to this Law enacting, that the Tygers of Bengal shall

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Public Advertiser*, "To the Printer of the Public Advertiser," March 19, 1772.

not from henceforth slaughter Men and Cattle, under the Penalty of forfeiting Teeth and Claws: And I can assure you, that the Act of Parliament will as effectually restrain the Tyger from gorging his Maw with slaughtered Prey, as it will prevent the despotic Deputy of a Sovereign Mercantile Company from satiating his Avarice by destructive Monopolies. For it is no less possible to enforce Penalty on the one as on the other.⁵⁰

Nemesis was trying to suggest that this law was as unenforceable as passing a law that tigers could no longer kill people or cattle. In doing so, however, he compared the greedy agents of the East India Company to predators preying on Indian citizens. Like Publicus' criticism of the East India Company, Nemesis' criticism also brought humanitarian concerns to bear on the activities of the East India Company.

Another interesting publication that shows an emerging idea of "common humanity" is a printed speech attributed to the Bishop of St. Asaph.⁵¹ In this speech, regarding the Massachusetts Bay colony, the Bishop spoke of the tendency of provincial governors to abuse their power, especially through taxation. The Bishop went on to say:

Taxation in their hand, is an unlimited power of oppression.... Arbitrary taxation is plunder authorized by law: It is the support and essence of tyranny; and has done more mischief to mankind than those other three scourges from heaven, famine, pestilence and the sword. I need not carry your Lordships out of your own knowledge, or out of your own dominions, to make you conceive what misery this right of taxation is capable of producing in a provincial government. We need only recollect that our countrymen in India, have in the space of five or six years, in virtue of this right; destroyed, starved, and driven away more inhabitants from Bengal, than are to be found at present in all our American colonies....⁵²

The most striking element of this speech is the use of criticisms regarding the East India Company's abuses of power in India as an example of what could happen in the American colonies if tyrannical governors were left

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *London Evening Post*, "A SPEECH intended to have been spoken on the Bill for ALTERING THE CHARTER of the Colony of MASSACHUSETTS BAY," August 4, 1774.

⁵² Ibid.

unchecked. This shows recognition of a "common humanity" between the inhabitants of the American and Indian colonies.

One final example is from a letter in the *Morning Chronicle* and *London Advertiser* to the "Proprietors of East-India Stock."⁵³ In his letter, he called himself a "sincere lover of liberty and independence" and urged caution towards the growing power of the East India Company and its potential to undermine the virtues of British government. He wrote about a person "to well known here to be named" that was a "principal engrosser of the comparatively small quantity of rice" that was available during the famine of 1770.⁵⁴ He made a fortune selling the rice. The author of the letter referred to this person as a "savage, unfeeling monster (man, I cannot call him)."⁵⁵ Here, only a few years after the famine, the men responsible for monopolizing rice during the famine of 1770 were no longer simply criticized for bad business practices; they were compared to inhuman monsters. Only a few years after the Bengal famine, a new sentiment was emerging: the famine of 1770 was no longer seen as simply a financial and administrative disaster, but as a humanitarian catastrophe.

When one considers the magnitude and savage nature of the Bengal famine of 1770, one must wonder why it seems to receive so little attention in history. The Bengal famine of 1770 and humanitarianism in the eighteenth century both deserve further research and writing. People were clearly discussing the famine at the time. Reactions to the famine were varied and changed throughout the later eighteenth century. Did the Bengal famine cause people to start raising humanitarian concerns? Some historians place the beginnings of humanitarianism and notions of human rights in the eighteenth century. Toward the end of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth century, abolitionist writers and philosophers started to question and criticize the practice of slavery. Although few in number, the sources presented here show humanitarian concerns developing over the Bengal famine of 1770, and at the very least they indicate the seeds of humanitarian thought. The Bengal famine of 1770, while often overlooked in history, was one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the eighteenth century; some contemporaries, it seems, also saw it this way.

⁵³ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, "For the MORNING CHRONICLE. To the Proprietors of the East-India Stock.," April 12, 1775.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.