

THE ENGLISH ARMY IN INDIA.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—A mutiny among the European soldiers in India, however partial in its character, is not an agreeable termination to the struggle in which we have just been engaged with the mutinous Sepoys. And yet that a mutiny has broken out which may be largely developed or altogether suppressed by the time the next mail reaches us is beyond a doubt. The British soldiers of the late Company's army, with recent additions to the anomalous army in India which does not belong to the Company, and has not the honour of belonging to the Queen's regular forces, number upwards of 25,000 men—the great majority of these men were enlisted and attested to serve the East India Company, and they took their oaths and their bounty without any reference whatever to the service of the Crown. In some instances the men, however, were attested to serve either the Queen or the Company, but the number of such cases is very small. On the passing of the Act by which the Crown assumed the direct government of India no communication whatever was made to those men—their wishes were in no way consulted or regarded, and it was accepted by the authorities as a perfectly indisputable proposition that, by a clause in an Act of Parliament, these soldiers could be handed over from the service of the East India Company to that of the Crown. The 56th clause of the Act provided that the civil and military servants of the Company should be transferred to the service of the Crown, which assumed all the same relations with them as the old Company had held. The officers, civil and military, did not object to the transfer, although, had they been so disposed, they might have raised some very troublesome questions on certain points of their new position. For a time the men seemed content, but it was only for a short time, and very speedily the stories which spread from station to station that the soldiers were displeased with the mode in which they had been treated reached the ears of the Commander-in-Chief, and at last official communications on the subject were addressed to Lord Clyde by more than one officer respecting the disposition and complaints of these men. Lord Clyde, a pure soldier, felt considerable sympathy with the men. He knew that there is no man who "stands on his rights" with such tenacity as the British soldier—that he insists with all respect, but with great firmness, on being heard by his superiors when he has matter of complaint, and that his free will in making his military engagements is so carefully preserved that if he be attested for the 1st Regiment of Foot it is quite beyond any power with which the soldier is familiar or acquainted to transfer him (for example) to the 2d Regiment of Foot. General Mansfield shared the views of Lord Clyde, and they both concurred with those officers in India who had any military reputation, in thinking the Legislature had shown little consideration or judgment, if it had not altogether exceeded its power, in transferring the men as if they were chairs and tables of the India-house without even affecting to consult them on the subject. But at the same time they were determined to maintain discipline. Lord Clyde directed the various officers in command to inform the men who complained of the transfer that their complaints would be submitted to Government, and their demands for re-enlistment with a fresh bounty, or a discharge, should be laid before the authorities of the Crown, but that meantime they must do their duty, and that any neglect of it would be punished in the usual manner. This occurred in the month of last November. The men appeared to be satisfied, and were sanguine that a new bounty would be awarded to them. The principal complaints at that time came from the artillery, and the men of the late Company's Fusileer regiments, which I must still designate in that way for want of a better name, but they were not numerous. To them, however, were speedily joined the men of the newly raised regiments of European Light Cavalry, who being well suited in weight and stature for light cavalry, were at once assailed by their comrades in all the stations where they were quartered by the name of "The Dumpies." These were all young men, who had no service and little discipline. They had nothing to gain by claiming their discharge, they had nothing to lose if they were dismissed, for they had made but little way towards their pension. But they saw a good opening for claiming a re-enlistment and a bounty thereupon, and they thought that they could either get that bounty or obtain their discharge in a country where they would speedily find employment. They were in a frame of mind which induced them to assume an uncompromising attitude and to show those who "chaffed" them that "they would stand no nonsense." Lord Clyde's representations to Lord Canning on the subject were received in a very unfavourable spirit. The Governor-General, fortified by the opinion of Major-General Birch, who knows nothing of soldiers or their feelings, took his stand on the 56th clause, and declared the demands of the soldiers to be utterly untenable and not to be listened to for a moment. Lord Clyde still proposed compromise, but the Governor-General was inflexible. The Advocate-General, an able and sound lawyer, was rigid in his position on clause 56, and all that could be done was to lay the matter before the Home Government, which, after more or less deliberation, confirmed the view that once a British subject enters the service of a trustee of the State he can be transferred to the service of the State itself against his consent. Now, the British soldier knows little and cares nothing for the doctrine of trusts, he sets more value on his personal dignity, and has greater self-respect than many of his betters will believe, and he stood on his rights. When the decision of Government was made known to the men the more violent, rash, or inconsiderate, and all the younger soldiers, appear—so far as we know, at one of the stations at all events—to have adopted a course of conduct which was highly mutinous. At Meerut, an ill-omened name, between the 1st and 5th of May events had occurred of such a character as to induce Lord Clyde to leave Simla in order to repair to the scene of the disorders, and on the date the mail left his Excellency, attended by General Mansfield, Major Norman, and Colonel Metcalfe, was about starting for Umballa on his way to the former station. The men implicated in the mutinous demonstrations belong to Tomb's famous troop of Bengal Horse Artillery and to the 2d European Light Cavalry, which are stationed at Meerut with a Royal Field Battery, Her Majesty's 75th Regiment, and other troops. On Saturday morning, April 30, a meeting of the men of these corps was held at a small village a mile beyond the artillery parade ground at Meerut, at which it was proposed that the Artillery should take their guns and horses away and not give them up till their grievances were redressed. They said "Why should those who joined us from different regiments receive their bounty while it is refused to us? If we are Queen's troops why give the bounty to one and refuse it to others? What right have they to treat us like so many Hessians?" They complained also of the form of the reply made to their demands, and it was arranged, as I hear, to act decisively on Monday morning. Early on Sunday morning two men of the European Light Cavalry, who had volunteered into the regiment from the 9th Lancers, reported the proceedings to their officers, and the military authorities at the station were at once put on the alert, and during Sunday measures were adopted to meet the emergency, and the brigadier telegraphed to Lord Clyde at Simla.

Meanwhile, however, two more meetings took place, one in the graveyard and the other, I believe, at half-past 1 on Monday morning in the Bengal Artillery barracks.

A review of the F. Troop Royal Horse Artillery was ordered for Monday morning as a pretence to get out the guns should they be wanted, and the 75th Regiment would be mustered at the usual hour on Monday morning, the 2d of May, and at 5 o'clock a.m. (parade time) none of the Bengal Artillery, except Captain Cox's company* and a very few non-commissioned officers and men turned out. The officers went to the men's room, and in about an hour, or more it may be, succeeded by argument in prevailing upon the men to fall in on parade. The general and brigadier then harangued the men of Tomb's troop of Bengal Horse Artillery, Winkle's company of Bengal Artillery, and the depot, during which the scene, to those who have a soldier's heart, was and must have been most touching. One could not feel pity that such soldiers, men who had served well and truly, belonging to such a world-distinguished regiment, who had freely exposed their lives when called on by duty, should lower the prestige of the English army in the eyes of the world by committing an act of mutiny. After having endeavoured, in the plainest manner and most kindly, to explain to the men their fault, General Bradford called on all who would serve the Queen to step to the front. As one man the old soldiers of the division stepped out; a second's hesitation, and some men of average services followed, but the remainder—about one-third—stood fast; they were disarmed and marched to their barracks. Captain Cox's company, which marched in a few days previous from active service, was entirely free from taint, and to them the above does not refer. The 2d Light Cavalry, meanwhile, had one or two troops turned out for muster, but the remainder would not leave their barrack-rooms until the arrival of the Gene-

* I believe half of Tomb's troop were present.

ral, when they were fallen in, and, having been expostulated with, their loyalty was similarly tested; but, excepting the volunteers from the 9th Lancers, not one man, I am told, came forward. They were ordered to remain in their barracks, but, to use a common expression, the General "might as well have talked to a brick," and, about 9 or 10 o'clock that night some of them left their lines; the Royal Horse Artillery and 75th were turned out and the latter picketed by companies at all roads accessible to the charge of a body of the disaffected. They were called in next morning, all being quiet. During Tuesday nothing occurred except the capture of a solitary Light Cavalry man in the Artillery Barracks, who was made a prisoner immediately, and flogged.

On Wednesday, during the day, all was quiet, but about 10 o'clock the men of the Bengal Artillery who were true, the Royal Horse Artillery and 75th were again turned out, on account of the 2d European Light Cavalry, who had desired their syces to "saddle and bring round" their horses, which the syces refused to do. All was quiet, however, at about 12 o'clock.

On Thursday all seemed quiet, but the infantry pickets were still posted near the Bengal Artillery guns, and Fraser's troop was in readiness to act. Lord Clyde was expected, and it was believed the worst was over. Admitting it to be so, what will the Government do? Let them take it as indisputable that the feelings of the British Indian army on this point are identical, though the men may not be so foolish and ill-disciplined or violent as their comrades at Meerut. The news will spread in the most exaggerated form through all the Sikhs, and it is stated already that a sergeant of the Goorkha regiment at Meerut told Mr. Boisragon, the magistrate, that the men of the 75th would not fire on their fellow-countrymen and old comrades of Tomb's troop, if they were called upon to act. True or not, the story shows how the natives are watching every movement around them, and how important it is that there should be prompt and cheerful obedience on the part of the British army in India, whether they are acknowledged to be the Queen's or belong to the hybrid without a name, which at the present moment has been excited, as we have seen, to assume an unbecoming and dangerous attitude. There is, thank God, no necessity for meeting the question whether British soldiers would have been obliged to turn their arms upon their fellow-countrymen; but had such a contingency arisen, the consequences would have been most disastrous, and Government, if wise, will not lose a day in coming to a satisfactory settlement of this alarming difficulty.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
PRINCIPIS OBSTA.