

DELHI RECORDS.

1
1919.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.
HOME DEPARTMENT.

POLITICAL—DEPOSIT.

Proceedings, August 1919, no. 52.

Request of Sir Rabindranath Tagore that he may be relieved of his title of Knighthood in view of the policy followed by Government in dealing with the recent troubles in the Punjab.

PREVIOUS REFERENCES.

Political A., September 1918, nos. 45-51.

LATER REFERENCES.

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NOTES.

POLITICAL DEPOSIT—AUGUST 1919.

No. 52.

REQUEST OF SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE THAT HE MAY BE RELIEVED OF HIS TITLE OF KNIGHTHOOD IN VIEW OF THE POLICY FOLLOWED BY GOVERNMENT IN DEALING WITH THE RECENT TROUBLES IN THE PUNJAB.

Dated Calcutta, the 31st May 1919.

From—SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE, Kt., 5, Dwarka Nath Tagore's Lane,
To—His Excellency the Viceroy.

The enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent and remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers, possibly congratulating themselves for what they imagine as salutary lessons. This callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings, without receiving the least check from the same authority—relentlessly careful in smothering every cry of pain and expression of judgment from the organs representing the sufferers. Knowing that our appeals have been in vain and that the passion of vengeance is blinding the nobler vision of statesmanship in our Government, which could so easily afford to be magnanimous as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition, the very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen, who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.

These are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of Knighthood, which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor, for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration.

Dated the 2nd June 1919.

From—Associated, Calcutta,
To—MR. BUCK, Simla.

Please consult censor regarding following text Tagore letter to Viceroy and issue I. N. A. and cable London if desirable owing to nature of statements made in letter I have withheld publication but now discover *Englishman* has received copy direct from Tagore and is publishing full text. Tagore has also sent vernacular version to Indian press which will probably publish. *Begins*. Your Excellency the enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has with a rude shock reverted to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishment inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized Governments barring some conspicuous exceptions recent and remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population disarmed and resourceless by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political

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Demi-official letter from Mr. E. J. Buck, Simla, to S. R. Hignell, Esq., C.I.E., I.C.S., Private Secretary to His Excellency the Viceroy, dated the 2nd June 1919.

Herewith copy as promised.

Demi-official letter from S. R. Hignell, Esq., C.I.E., I.C.S., Private Secretary to His Excellency the Viceroy, to the Hon'ble Sir William Marris, K.C.I.E., I.C.S., Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated the 3rd June 1919.

I spoke about the enclosed papers this morning. Will you kindly advise as to the reply to be sent to Sir Rabindranath Tagore after referring to the Subramania Aiyar precedent. Please return the enclosures with your reply.

The papers about Sir Subramania Aiyar renouncing his titles are put up. It will be seen that the Madras Government formally and officially reported the renunciation to the Foreign and Political Department. That department then informed the Government of Madras demi-officially that the Statutes of the Order did not provide for voluntary resignation and that after consultation with the Secretary of State it was decided not to advertise Sir S. Aiyar as a martyr by dismissing him from the Order or depriving him of the title of Dewan Bahadur. That in the circumstances his name would remain on the list of K.C.I.E.'s and Dewan Bahadurs but his insignia and badge would remain in deposit with the Government of Madras.

In this case Sir R. Tagore has addressed His Excellency direct. Perhaps he should be told by Private Secretary to Viceroy to deposit his insignia with the Government of Bengal who would then report formally, and then the action would follow the lines taken in the case of Sir S. Aiyar.

A. L.,—4-6-19.

There is no question of depositing insignia in this case, as Sir R. Tagore is a knight, not a member of any order.

I do not know if it is possible to resign "the title of knighthood," which is conferred by the King or by His Excellency as the King's representative. Foreign and Political Department may be consulted as to this. The insolence of resigning an honour conferred by the King for literary attainments on the ground of disagreement with the policy of Government is patent.

H. D. CRAIK,—4-6-19.

The case of Subramania Aiyar shows the difficulty of dealing with these impracticable people. So far as I understand the position, knighthood is nowadays a status conferred by and presumably revocable by the King, but not discardable at the option of the subject. If this is so, Sir Rabindra Tagore might be told that the Government of India, or perhaps that His Excellency the Viceroy, ^{do}/_{does} not propose to move His Majesty in the matter, but that the Government of India will instruct local Governments to respect his wishes not to be addressed