

THE PROVINCE

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OTTAWA AND HINDUS

Dr. Monroe, Dominion immigration agent, it is understood, has telegraphed to Ottawa to ascertain if the now celebrated Order-in-Council is to be applied to the seventy-eight Hindus who arrived by the C.P.R. steamship, Monteagle on the 22nd of last month. These Hindus were detained at Hong Kong, for one month, before being shipped across the Pacific to this port, and Dr. Monroe appears to be in doubt whether that does not bring them within the category of those who have not come directly from the land of their birth or citizenship. It will probably strike the public that Dr. Monroe is making an exceedingly fine point indeed, in this matter, so fine, in fact, that it has practically reached the vanishing stage.

In the first place, if unavoidable detention at a way port is to bring would-be immigrants under the exclusion provision of this order, none of them is absolutely safe. The Hindus in question left Calcutta with the express intention of coming to British Columbia. They were compelled to sail by way of Hong Kong and to transship at that port. If the vessel was not ready to sail when they arrived there, that was not their fault, and it must be admitted that to penalize them for a mistake or act not their own would be monstrous injustice.

But then the order says that they must come from the land of their citizenship. Now these Hindus are British subjects and Hong Kong is a British possession. This being the case, they were, while residents of Hong Kong, on the soil of the Empire of which they are subjects, and of which we ourselves are subjects.

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There is no charge made against them of residence in an alien country since they left Calcutta, and accordingly exclude them for having remained at Hong Kong would be identical with excluding them for having spent a month in Great Britain, had they come to Canada by that route instead of by the Pacific. It seems to us that to deport these Hindus on the ground of the subjections which Dr. Monro has submitted against them, to Ottawa, would be the next thing to disloyalty – it would be in direct antagonism to every imperialistic sentiment which we profess, and which some of us profess so ardently.

Now had it been left to the Natal Act to deal with these people, they would have been treated in a same and rational manner, and would have been shipped back to India without the slightest reflection being cast upon our imperialism, and without the possibility of ill-feeling being entertained by the unfortunate persons who could not pass the test which that law made necessary. It is quite understandable that we should not want in our country residents who do not reach a certain standard of intelligence, a certain standard of physical performance and a certain standard of equipment for citizenship. The Dominion law admits that there must be reasonable mental and physical qualifications to entitle one to come into the country as a settler. Our fellow-subjects of the Mother Country, even, must satisfy reasonable demands on those respects. And surely it is quite as requisite that those reaching our country should be able to speak our language. Without that equipment they are not only handicapped, but they are, for a long time at least, practically useless and next thing to a burden upon the community. Now, that reasonable knowledge of our language is practically all that the Natal Act requires, and it is what no would-be immigrant should be unable to satisfy. It lies with every alien who desires entry into British Columbia to qualify himself to meet the tests, the reasonable test, which the provincial law, were it in operations, would demand.

These seventy-eight Hindus, if they are deported, as it is not unlikely – because the Dominion Government appears to be in a state of such uncertainty as to what to do, and is not unwilling evidently to sacrifice the whole Indian empire, if it can only crow its friends, the Japanese, into this

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country, - will go back to the land of their birth and tell their fellow countrymen that they, who had fought the battles of the Empire, were refused admission into a British colony, for no reason, whatever, except that they had been unavoidable detained at a British port on their way: and accordingly the unrest in India will be increased. On the other hand, had they been rejected as a result of the operation of the Natal Act, they would have explained, when they returned home, that the law of this country required all immigrants to speak the language and that as they were unable to speak the language they could not be accepted.

But these Hindus, as matters now stand, cannot be rejected. If Dr. Monro, on orders received from the Federal Government, attempts to deport them, all that they have to do is to retain competent counsel to take their case into court, and the law will give them justice which the Government denies them. But no surprises, of course, will be felt if the federal authorities attempt to send these people back whence they came. And should such an attempt be made, and the Hindus appeal to the legal tribunal, perhaps the Government at Ottawa may even show fight. We should then have the picturesque spectacle of a British country, fresh from its triumphs, in court, in defence of the unrestricted entry into British Columbia of coolie labor from Japan, struggling to reject and deport our fellow-subjects from India who by their loyalty and courage, have been largely instrumental in making Britain's Empire in Asia.

We do not want the Hindus in Canada. They are not the class of immigrants which will be of benefit to the country, but between them and the Japanese, who would not take the Indians? They are possible of assimilation in time: the Japanese will never be assimilated, and it would be injurious to the Canadian stock if they should be. The Hindus are not an immoral people, who will say the same of the Japanese. If there had to be a choice, who except the Laurier Government, would hesitate to choose the Indian?