

TALES OF BENGAL

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Tales of Bengal by S. B. Banerjea

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S. B. BANERJEA

**TALES
OF BENGAL**

TALES OF BENGAL

WORKS BY THE
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(MARGARET E. NOBLE).

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BY

S. B. BANERJEA

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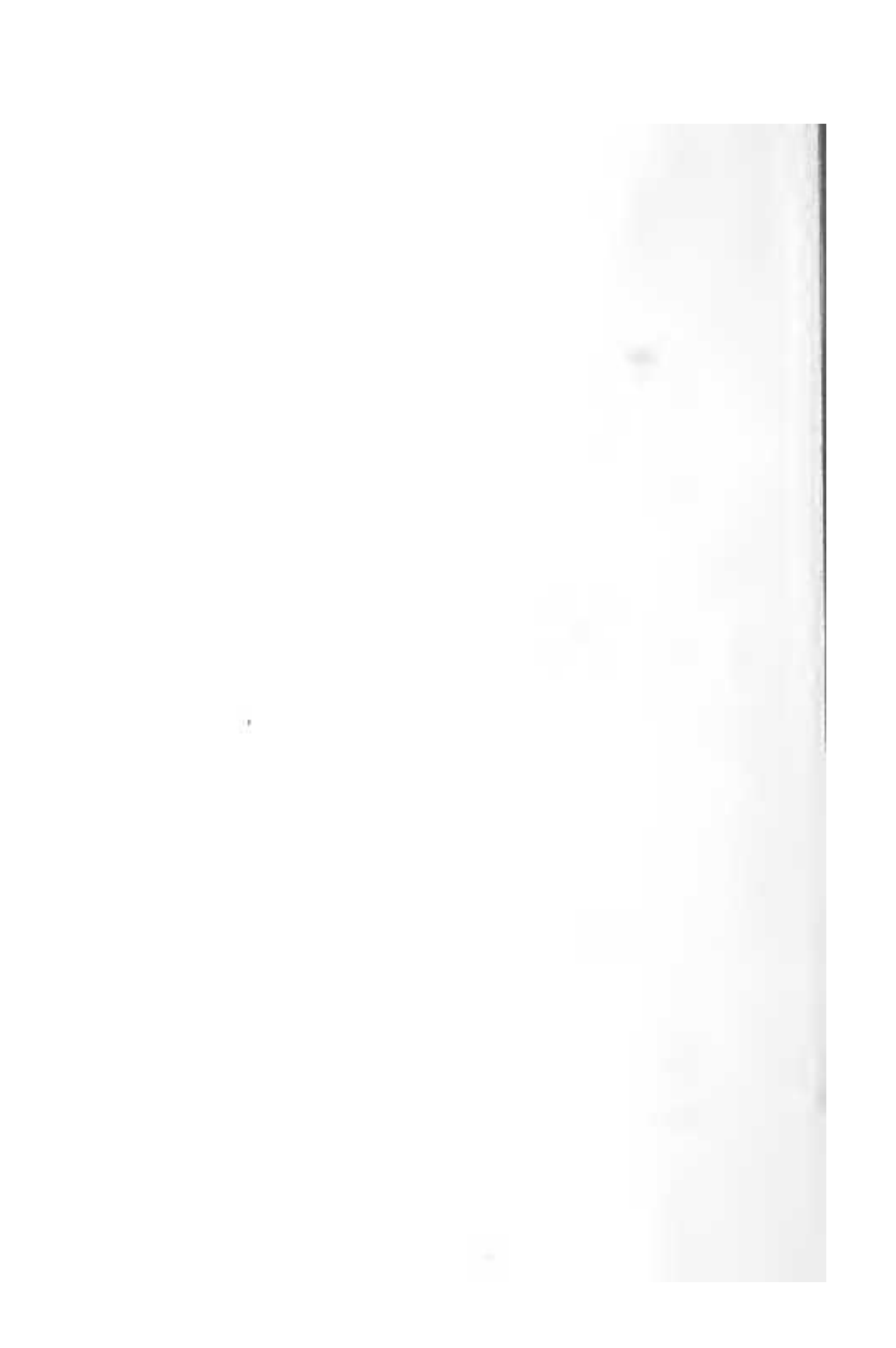
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INTRODUCTION.

THAT "east is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet," is an axiom with most Englishmen to whom the oriental character seems an insoluble enigma. This form of agnosticism is unworthy of a nation which is responsible for the happiness of 300,000,000 Asiatics. It is not justified by history, which teaches us that civilisation is the result of the mutual action of Europe and Asia; and that the advanced races of India are our own kinsfolk.

The scene of Mr. Banerjea's tales has been won from the sea by alluvial action. Its soil, enriched by yearly deposits of silt, yields abundantly without the aid of manure. A hothouse climate and regular rainfall made Bengal the predestined breeding-ground of mankind; the seat of an ancient and complex civilisation. But subsistence is too easily secured in those fertile plains. Malaria, due to the absence of subsoil drainage, is ubiquitous, and the standard of vitality extremely low. Bengal has always been at

the mercy of invaders. The earliest inroad was prompted by economic necessity. About 2000 B.C. a congeries of races which are now styled "Aryan" were driven by the shrinkage of water from their pasture-grounds in Central Asia. They penetrated Europe in successive hordes, who were ancestors of our Celts, Hellenes, Slavs, Teutons and Scandinavians. Sanskrit was the Aryans' mother-tongue, and it forms the basis of nearly every European language. A later swarm turned the western flank of the Himalayas, and descended on Upper India. Their rigid discipline, resulting from vigorous group-selection, gave the invaders an easy victory over the negroid hunters and fishermen who peopled India. All races of Aryan descent exhibit the same characteristics. They split into endogamous castes, each of which pursues its own interests at the expense of other castes. From the dawn of history we find kings, nobles and priests riding roughshod over a mass of herdsmen, cultivators and artisans. These ruling castes are imbued with pride of colour. The Aryans' fair complexions differentiated them from the coal-black aborigines; *varna* in Sanskrit means "caste" and "colour". Their æsthetic instinct finds expression in a passionate love of poetry, and a tangible object in the tribal chiefs. Loyalty is