

**THE LAND AND
LABOUR OF INDIA,
A REVIEW**

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The land and labour of India, a review by W. Nassau Lees

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W. NASSAU LEES

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A Review

BY

W. NASSAU LEES, LL.D.



WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND
20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.
1867.

PREFACE.

FOUR years ago I ventured to publish a small work treating of the history and mode of conducting certain agricultural enterprizes in India, in which the people of England are interested. Not expecting that the subject, notwithstanding its importance, would prove very attractive to the English public, the edition was small, and the book was soon out of print. It was reviewed, however, very generally, and its reviewers, as a rule, were far more kind and considerate in their estimates of any little merit the work may have possessed, and far more lenient to its many defects, than I had anticipated they would be, or indeed than I had any right to expect. Some portions of the subject I ventured to discuss were very difficult, particularly those involving considerations of the land tenure in India, and the duties and obligations of Government in regard to the development of the wealth of the country. My views on many points were opposed to received opinions in England; and some of my

critics considered them at variance with sound principles of political economy, and consequently erroneous. I was not surprised at this; and had therefore no complaint to make against it. My chief object in writing at all was, that I believed then, as I believe still, that though the principles of political economy are the same all over the world, it is to their judicious application to the circumstances and conditions of things around us, rather than to a blind adherence to the bald principles of the science itself, that we must look for the happiest results. I thought, therefore, that I might serve some useful purpose by attempting to show how widely different are the conditions and circumstances of this great Empire and its peoples to the conditions and circumstances of Europe and the peoples of any of the great nations it contains; and how it was the inability of Englishmen generally to appreciate this fact, which rendered so many well conceived projects for the benefit of India barren of good results.

If, however, the many objected to my notions of what was good for India and her people, and differed from me in my opinion as to what, as between her people and the dominant race, was equitable and just, there were a few, and amongst them those

whom, from their better acquaintance with the social systems of Oriental peoples, I might naturally have looked for a closer sympathy with the subjects I ventured to discuss, who begged me to publish a second edition. The book had no literary merit, and my object in publishing it was not to court literary fame. I sought rather to render my experiences of a country and a people, and their institutions, which it is admitted on all sides Englishmen find it so very difficult to understand, useful to the many, who, whether resident in India or elsewhere, have not had equally good opportunities of observation with myself. But the demand for the work had not been such as to induce me to suppose that it would be widely read, and I did not therefore further obtrude my opinions on the public.

Circumstances however have altered materially since then. When my Review was written (1862), the operatives of the manufacturing districts of England were suffering from the severities of the famine which followed the stoppage of the cotton supplies which ensued on the breaking out of the American war. A cry had been raised in England with the view of inducing Her Majesty's Government to compel the natives of India to grow suffi-

cient cotton to keep the looms of Manchester and Lancashire in full work, and thus save the trade of the cotton spinners from ruin, and the operatives from starvation. But no guarantee was offered that the cotton would be bought when grown, nor any forethought or regard shown for the lamentable consequences that would have overtaken the people of India, if millions of acres of land having been sown with cotton, the American war should have ceased before the crop was reaped.

I had hoped that some more solid benefit to India than enriching the cotton dealers of Bombay would have resulted from the circumstances of England in 1862; but unfortunately those who pressed their views in the direction above-mentioned on Lord Halifax (then Sir Charles Wood), while thousands of their countrymen were suffering from want around them, had not any more practical measures to propose for the regeneration of the agricultural interests of this country, and for the relief of the poor starving operatives at their doors, than discussions on the abstract principles of political economy. I had hoped also that the lesson which experience had taught, and I had humbly laboured to expound in 1862, if read at all, would not be

unproductive of beneficial results from a different point of view. I had hoped, for famine was then stalking abroad in this country, that the great want of India, a comprehensive system of canals and works of irrigation and drainage, to save rich provinces from devastation and their populations from frequent decimation, would long have been taken into serious consideration; that the orders regarding the redemption and permanent settlement of the land revenue would have been re-considered; and that some amelioration would have been made in the laws which are now yearly impoverishing India, by suffering an appreciable portion of the population—her most precious wealth—to be transported to foreign lands.

But my hopes were not realized. A terrible famine visited Orissa, a rich and populous Province, and parts of Lower Bengal, last year. When at its height, when the people were dying of starvation at the rate, it is said, of *four thousand a week*, in the year 1866, the authorities, who held in their keeping the land revenues of Bengal, adopted a course very similar to that adopted by the cotton spinners of Manchester in 1862. At the time the