

AGRICULTURAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN BENGAL

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Agricultural and administrative reform in Bengal by Baron Antony Patrick Macdonnell
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IN
BENGAL.

BY
A BENGAL CIVILIAN.

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1883.



PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following pages have been written amid the pressure of urgent work, and the writer has had but little time to think over the form in which his ideas might best be presented to the public. He believes, however, that those to whom he addresses himself will think more of the matter of which he writes than of the manner, and will excuse defects of literary style if the questions discussed be worthy of their attention.

CALCUTTA, *November*, 1888.

AGRICULTURAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN BENGAL.

I.

IN asking the attention of that increasing portion of the public who take an interest in the welfare of our great Indian dependency to the following observations on some questions connected with agriculture and administration in Bengal, I may admit that I am doubtful if the time is well chosen. The public mind in England has recently been to some extent, and in India to a very great extent continues to be, so agitated with questions connected with self-government and with the proposed amendment of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, that there would seem to be but little chance of time being spared for the consideration of less exciting topics. Yet, unexciting though the subject of these pages may be, it is in reality of more importance to our Indian empire than even the question of local self-government, and of far greater consequence than Mr. Ilbert's Bill, over which so much enthusiasm has been expended and so much bitterness excited.

There are certain considerations, besides, which suggest that the time is not altogether inopportune for discussing the subjects to which I desire to invite attention. These subjects are intimately connected with the impending Rent Legislation in Bengal; with the action which is being taken in other provinces of our Indian empire in connexion with agricultural reform; with certain administrative improvements which are being introduced into Bengal; and finally with the approaching Industrial Exhibition at Calcutta. I am therefore not entirely without hope that the subject of the following remarks may receive even at the present time some share of attention both in England and in India.

The birth of Agricultural Reform in India may, like the birth of Financial Reform, be assigned to the administration of the lamented Lord Mayo, under whose auspices an Agricultural Department under the Government of India first assumed tangible shape. Lord Mayo's object was to establish a department which was to take cognisance of all matters connected with the practical improvement and development of the agricultural resources of the country; and in furtherance of that object the administration of the land revenue, the development of manufacturing and mining industries, the promotion of trade and commerce, and the collection of agricultural and commercial statistics, were to be under the control of the new department. The project, however, suffered from its founder's death, and, notwithstanding Sir John Strachey's successful

efforts to give it vitality in the North-Western Provinces, it was abandoned as an Imperial measure in 1877.

The idea of an Agricultural Department for India was revived in 1881, in consequence of the report of the Indian Famine Commission. Struck with the absence of proper means of collecting reliable information in times of prosperity, on which the action which adverse times require might be based, the Indian Famine Commission made certain recommendations. Looking at the condition of the country from two points of view, namely, the prevention and the relief of famine, the Commission recommended in the first place that better methods of cultivation should be introduced into India and agricultural knowledge more widely diffused. In the second place, they recommended that measures should be adopted for the collection and record of those results of past experience and current events which would enable the Government to deal systematically, effectively, and economically with famine when it might arise.

These recommendations were in the main approved by the Government of India and by Her Majesty's Government, much stress being laid, in the orders issued by the Secretary of State, on the importance of establishing under local administrations suitable machinery for the collection and record of statistical information, and for the improvement of agriculture throughout the country. It was the want of such machinery which marred