

ENGLAND'S WORK IN INDIA

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England's Work in India by W. W. Hunter

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W. W. HUNTER

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WORK IN INDIA**

England's Work in India.

BY W. W. HUNTER, C.I.E. LL.D.

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PREFACE.

IN this little book I try to show what British rule has done for India, and the work which now awaits it. The first two chapters deal with the primary duties of every Government—namely, the protection of its subjects, and the development of the country. The last two chapters treat of what may be called the secondary, but not less important, functions of an Asiatic administration, connected with the food-supply and self-government of the people. The former, when delivered separately as lectures, gave rise to a too favourable, the latter to an unduly despondent, view of our position. I hope, when read together, they will leave behind only a calm resolve, that as Englishmen in time past faithfully did the work which fell to them in India, so Englishmen will now with a firm heart enter on the new duties which are there being forced upon us.

W. W. H.

December 1880.

The Work Done.

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ENGLAND'S WORK IN INDIA.

THE WORK DONE.

I. PROTECTION OF PERSON AND PROPERTY.

BRITISH rule in India is again upon its trial. On the one hand, the Government finds itself face to face with problems which, on a much smaller scale in Ireland, are the despair of our wisest statesmen. On the other hand, doubters have arisen who dispute whether our supremacy in the East is a gain either to ourselves or to the peoples over whom we rule. The question as to the benefit of our Indian connection to ourselves is a rhetorical rather than a serious one. For with the downfall of British rule in India would disappear that security of person and property which forms the first essential for our commerce with the East. I, for one, am not afraid of the cry of 'Perish India!' when I remember that that cry means, Perish the greatest customer of England in all the world; perish its chief market for Manchester goods; perish 50 millions sterling of British trade per annum. What we have reason to fear

is not the cry of 'Perish India!' but the murmur against the responsibilities which our rule in India involves.

If, however, as some have recently alleged, that rule has failed to benefit the Indian races, then I can sympathize with those who question whether we should extend the responsibilities which Indian rule entails. For no government has a right to exist which does not exist in the interests of the governed. The test of British rule in India is, not what it has done for ourselves, but what it has done for the Indian people. By this test our work in the East must stand or fall. If our attempt to administer that vast and distant empire has turned out a failure; if its people are not more free, more secure, and more prosperous under British rule than they were under their native dynasties; then the wise course for Great Britain would seem to be to curtail her former responsibilities, to accept no new ones, and to withdraw as far as may be from an undertaking to which she had proved unequal.

If, on the other hand, we find that our countrymen have not failed in their splendid and difficult task; if we find that British rule in India means order in place of anarchy, protection by the law instead of oppression by the sword, and a vast free people dwelling in safety where of old each man was beaten down beneath whosoever was stronger than himself, then I think that Great Britain may with a firm heart continue to accept the great responsibility which has fallen to her, and that she may calmly face each new duty which that responsibility involves.

During the last ten years it has been my business to visit, almost every winter, the twelve provinces of India, and to superintend a survey of their population and resources. The Indian Government has, so to speak, ordered me to conduct for it a great stock-taking after a century of British rule. I have often amused myself, during my solitary peregrinations, by imagining what a Hindu of the last century would think of the present state of his country if he could revisit the earth. I have supposed that his first surprise at the outward physical changes had subsided; that he had got accustomed to the fact that thousands of square miles of jungle, which in his time were inhabited only by wild beasts, have been turned into fertile crop-lands; that fever-smitten swamps have been covered with healthy, well-drained cities; that the mountain walls which shut off the interior of India from the seaports have been pierced by roads and scaled by railways; that the great rivers which formed the barriers between provinces, and desolated the country with their floods, have now been controlled to the uses of man, spanned by bridges, and tapped by canals. But what would strike him as more surprising than these outward changes is the security of the people. In provinces where every man, from the prince to the peasant, a hundred years ago, went armed, he would look round in vain for a match-lock or a sword. He would find the multitudinous native states of India, which he remembered in jealous isolation broken only by merciless wars, now trading quietly with each other, bound together by railways

and roads, by the post and the telegraph. He would find, moreover, much that was new as well as much that was changed. He would see the country dotted with imposing edifices in a strange foreign architecture, of which he could not guess the uses. He would ask what wealthy prince had reared for himself that spacious palace? He would be answered that the building was no pleasure-house for the rich, but a hospital for the poor. He would inquire, In honour of what new deity is this splendid shrine? He would be told that it was no new temple to the gods, but a school for the people. Instead of bristling fortresses, he would see courts of justice; in place of a Muhammadan general in charge of each district, he would find an English magistrate; instead of a swarming soldiery, he would discover a police.

He would also detect some mournful features in the landscape. In provinces where, a hundred years ago, there was plenty of land for every one who wished to till it, he would see human beings so densely crowded together as to exhaust the soil, and yet fail to wring from it enough to eat. Among a people whose sole means of subsistence was agriculture, he would find a landless proletariat springing up, while millions more were clinging with a despairing grip to their half-acre of earth a-piece, under a burden of rack-rent or usury. On the one hand, he would see great bodies of traders and husbandmen living in a security and comfort unknown in the palmiest days of the Mughals. On the other hand, he would ask himself, as I have often asked