

**BRITISH RULE IN  
INDIA; A  
HISTORICAL SKETCH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649405398

British Rule in India; A Historical Sketch by Harriet Martineau

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

"A nation of shopkeepers."—NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

"Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,  
I see the lords of humankind pass by,  
Intent on high designs."—GOLDSMITH.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

BOMBAY: SMITH, TAYLOR AND CO.

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1857.

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## PREFACE.

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THE *Times* of September 16th, 1857, begins its leading article thus. "It is not saying much, perhaps, but there are few countries and few histories about which the English know less than they do about India." Whether this statement is true in its whole breadth or not, it expresses the view under which this volume was proposed by myself, and encouraged by persons who are better judges than I can be of the amount of existing knowledge of India and its affairs. The aim of the work, and the treatment of its subject, are as humble as can well be. I simply wish to put in the way of others a convenience which I should often have been glad of myself for obtaining a general notion of what our Indian empire is, how we came by it, and what has gone forward in it since it first became connected with England. I have adhered strictly to the object of the book, because I had not scope for anything beyond narrative. To form a judgment on past transactions, and speculations on future destinies, would have been at least as interesting to myself as relating

events: but it is not what is most wanted at the present moment. A clear conception of past incidents and of the present field of action is the first requisite. Political criticism and speculation must necessarily follow, and be the great national business of the coming time; and that time will be when "the tempest and whirlwind of our passion" under our present calamity have run their course. Our hearts are palpitating too strongly at this moment to leave our judgment free and fair. When the emotion has calmed down, no doubt the natural effect of all powerful emotion will appear in the strengthening and enlightening of the judicial, inventive and reflective faculties, and India will be governed incomparably better than it has ever been yet. But the English people have much to do before that stage is reached; and the very first thing to be done, in order to will and act worthily, and even to mourn duly and righteously, is to learn the broad facts of Anglo-Indian history. As these facts are scarcely to be had but by the study of bulky works, and of many of them, I have attempted a brief sketch which may be better than nothing to many who have little leisure, and may serve as an introduction to further study to those who have more.

H. M.

# BRITISH RULE IN INDIA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE TERRAIN.

1593.

“It was a mountain at whose verdant feet  
A spacious plain, outstretched in circuit wide,  
Lay pleasant: from his side two rivers flowed,  
One winding, th’ other straight, and left between  
Fair champaign with less rivers intertwined:  
High cities and high-towered, that well might seem  
The seats of mightiest monarchs; and so large  
The prospect was, that here and there was room  
For barren desert, fountainless and dry.”—MILTON.

WHAT is the British India which is now, per force, occupying so much of our thoughts and conversation? Hitherto we have, for the most part, been satisfied with very vague notions of what our great Asiatic dependency is like, and of how we came by it, and of the precise nature and extent of our concern with it. We have regarded it as the business of a particular class of our society to understand and transact Indian affairs, while the great majority



might fairly admit the whole subject of that remote, and odd, and troublesome settlement of ours to be very tiresome, and one which might be left to those who understood it. The time for this kind of insolent negligence is past—suddenly brought to an end by calamity, which may probably have been engendered by that very selfishness. We shall all have to bear our share in the efforts and sacrifices which this calamity will impose on the nation; and we might all be glad, at the present moment, to know as much as every “old Indian” whom we have been accustomed to let alone with his speciality. It will do us no harm, therefore, to look a little into this matter, to brush up such knowledge as we may ever have had, and to gain somewhat more, however cursorily, as to what British India is, how we came there, and what our relations have been with it, up to the present day.

It is not difficult to choose a stand-point of place and time from which to ascertain what our great dependency is like. The time which suits us best is that in which an Englishman first landed on the coast to trade. The place must be that which is best suited for the widest survey.

The central part of Asia is a table-land, believed to be, in its highest platform, ten thousand feet above the sea level. The descent of the land to the sea is variously accomplished in the different maritime countries of Asia, but nowhere more im-

pressively than in that which belongs to us. The subsidence of the land from 10,000 to 1,000 feet above the sea is made by a steep slope, like a diversified wall with embrasures, covering an area of from 90 to 120 miles in breadth, and running a line of 1,500 miles. The area of this embankment is not less than 150,000 square miles. From a time beyond record the ridge of this slope has been called by the people who live below it the *Abode of Cold*, or of *Snow*—Himálaya. With them this was not a mere figure of speech; for, high up above the clouds, where adventurous trespassers found the air hardly fit for mortal breathing, dwells the god (not the least in a pantheon of many millions) who is the *Father of the Ganges*, and father-in-law of Siva, the Destroyer. For many millions of years the god lived in repose, watching over his great progeny of rivers from his solitude, approached no nearer than by the few herdsmen who came up from either side after their goats which had browsed the slopes of thyme and marjoram too high; or by the daring traders who, with mountain sheep for their beasts of burden, threaded the passes with their woven fabrics, or with camel's hair or silky wool. But now, intrusion has become so common, the secret of the rarity of the atmosphere is so vulgarised, and our countrymen have such a propensity to live above the clouds in the hottest weather, that we need not scruple to mount to the *Abode of Cold*—to the very palace of

the old divinity—and use his stand-point, and borrow his eyes, for our survey of our own dominions lying below.

Turning first to the right, we see (with eyesight, however, many times magnified) nothing but high table-land, stretching westwards beyond Persia itself—a table-land fringed with the Affghanistan peaks which we have no concern with at present—our period being that in which our first trader set foot on the shore below; that is, in 1593. Looking nearer, we see five rivers gushing from the embrasures of the great wall—from the ravines of the mountain range. Having flowed from sacred lakes in Thibet, these rivers are holy in their way; and the territory they enclose is rich and populous in comparison with that outside. We look down on some busy scenes in the Punjaub, even three centuries ago; while the Sandy Valley through which the Indus rolls his strong body of waters shows no life, except where parties of fighting men are on the way to pillage their enemies, and lay waste the villages which rise up round the wells. East of the five rivers, the Himálaya slope becomes lovely. Averaging four or five thousand feet in height, it presents now forests of the stern woodland character of the north; and now vast expanses of grass and wild flowers; and then dark ravines, leading down to sunny platforms, where the solitary Englishman below would have found