

**HERE AND THERE:
MEMORIES,
INDIAN AND OTHER**

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MEMORIES INDIAN AND OTHER

BY

H. G. KEENE, C.I.E.

AUTHOR OF "A SERVANT OF JOHN COMPANY"
"SKETCHES IN INDIAN DRESS," ETC.

" Ille velut fides arcana sodalibus olim
Credebat libris; neque, si male cesserat, unquam
Decurrens alio, neque si bene."

HORACE, Sat. II. 1, 30 ff.

" He to his books, as if to faithful friends,
Used to impart what others would conceal;
Nor swerved from truth, to favour private ends
Concerning what it pleased him to reveal."

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

London

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1906

PREFATORY NOTE

THE latter half of the following book, relating as it does to men and things in England as observed after an exile of thirty-five years, may perhaps be not without interest to the general reader, who might care to know how such experiences strike a visitor from the planet Mars. But in the earlier section the writer ventures to hope that matter of more serious interest may be found. So many persons are now directly or indirectly connected with India that a certain curiosity may be looked for as to the original character of British administration in that country, and some of the changes which have been caused by the progress of events and of public feeling. The object of the writer is social rather than political, the storing of the flotsam and jetsam of tradition rather than of the solemn facts of history, yet for this also there may be a modest opening.

In the earlier years of the last century, while the red colour was gradually stealing over the map of India, a very anomalous state of things certainly prevailed. To the vast majority of the population the King of England was an absolutely unknown personage, and even the governing classes themselves took no account of that august being. The Company's coinage continued to bear no superscription save the name and title of the pensioned Emperor, who lived in the seclusion of the Delhi

Palace; and when an official proclamation was announced it was in the following terms:—

“The people is of God: the land is of the Emperor: the ordinances are of the Company.”

In accordance with this curious standpoint the law was scarcely changed from that which had existed under the Moghuls, civil suits being tried according to the legal system of the defendant, whether Moslem or Hindu; in either case the Court was assisted by an expert, versed in whichever system was to be followed. In criminal trials the law of Islam was supposed to prevail, though some of its provisions and punishments were mitigated or modified in accordance with Western ideas; and a schedule of misdemeanours was promulgated so that light sentences might be passed for offences not contemplated by Mahomedan law. All this sort of thing necessarily implied great latitude in the administration; indeed in ordinary life the district officer and his assistants were the only representatives of authority, and the welfare of millions of human beings might depend upon the character and intelligence of one man. In such conditions did the British Provinces of India remain from the acquisition of the Lower Provinces by Clive and his immediate successors until the accession to office of Lord William Bentinck, and in all that long period of about seventy years the members of the Civil Service had a free hand. Some rules indeed were issued from time to time by the Governor-General and his Council, by which it was sought to guide and control the local officers, Courts of Justice, and Boards being established, to which dissatisfied parties might appeal, and by which indolence and caprice might be to some extent corrected. But the “Regulations” chiefly related to fiscal subjects, while the power of appeal was greatly impeded by a general poverty, by the defective means of communication, and similar obstacles. It is evident from this slight sketch that great variations must have existed in the administration of the various

districts, according to the temperament and abilities of the Englishmen to whose charge they were entrusted, and the only wonder is that such an unsystematic scheme of instruction worked as well as it did, for even the reforms of Bentinck did not at first strike very deep; and it is hardly too much to say that the methods of administration and the general condition of the people remained almost unaffected until after the Mutiny, and the direct assumption of Indian government by the Crown in 1858. Until the last few years, indeed, the Indian Civil Service was a thing of special and peculiar conditions, arising out of the circumstances in which it had originated. The East India Company had been at first a mere syndicate of merchants, incorporated by royal charter, and their business consisted simply of buying muslins, spices, and other peculiar products of the East, shipping them to London, and disposing of them there to the best advantage. The procuring of these investments required the agency of men in whose ability and honesty some confidence could be reposed, and who, under the titles of "Writers, Merchants, and Factors," resided in fortified counting-houses at the ports of exportation. With the growth of political power their duties became more varied and important. Nevertheless the old title long remained, and up to the time of the Regency the *personnel* of the Indian Civil Service continued to be much what it had been as reorganised by Lord Cornwallis and the Marquis Wellesley, and typical representations will be found in the pages of "Vanity Fair" and "The Newcomes." Thackeray, the author of those books, was born in India, and many of his kindred were members of the Service, so that it is quite likely that, making allowance for caricature, Messrs. Jos. Sedley and James Binnie may have been drawn from the life. Though there were, no doubt, many distinguished exceptions, we shall hardly go wrong in supposing the average civilian of those days to have been an ordinary middle-class Briton, whether from

Edinburgh or from London, principally bent upon making a purse wherewith to retire to his native land, and in the meanwhile leaving the administration of his District principally to his native officials, while he devoted his ample leisure to hog-hunting, shooting tigers from the backs of elephants, playing whist, and smoking a hookah. Nevertheless signs of change were not wanting; in 1806 a College had been established on Hertford Heath, in which nominees of the Directors of the East India Company might be prepared for the duties before them.

As will be subsequently seen (Part I., pp. 4, 5), some modifications in the system of appointment were proposed in Parliament in 1813, and although these were not fully adopted, a certain number of nominations were allotted to the Board of Control, and some changes introduced into the constitution of the College. The civilians now gradually became somewhat better than of old. Under Lord W. Bentinck the laws were reformed and the details of administration improved, though the officers might still be regarded as falling into three classes—the good, the bad, and the indifferent. The good outnumbered the bad, and the Service, which had never been wanting in distinguished men, continued to produce officers who rose to a level with their opportunities. Elphinstone, Metcalfe, Jenkins, were the result of the old system; among their immediate successors were Torrens and Elliot, Colvin and John Lawrence, with many others whose names are still well known in India. What the ordinary bulk of the Service was may be conjectured from the works of Mrs. Parkes and the Hon. Emily Eden; men whose pursuits were the same as those of their predecessors, but with much less leisure and much more attention to official duty. The Secretariat of those days contained many able men who stamped their mark upon the future. The District Officer was the jack-of-all-trades, though perhaps often master of none, the agent of some

twenty departments, responsible for the management of jails, schools, dispensaries, road and ferry funds, the maintenance of village records and surveys, the assessment of the land revenue, the management of stamps and taxes, the solemnisation of Christian marriages, and the church services on Sundays.

When it is remembered that these multifarious duties were interspersed with the daily trial of criminal charges and summary suits, the charge of the Treasury, and the preparation of monthly, quarterly, and yearly returns and reports, it will be seen that the Early Victorian District Officer had plenty of work on his hands; and it may fairly be said that when the great revolt of 1857 arrived, it found the greater part of the Service, in those regions to which it extended, in possession of most of the strings of administration.

The officers of the bad class, often spoken of as the Company's "hard bargains," could never have been very numerous, for the administration of the country proceeded with considerable success. From time to time, however, there were undoubtedly isolated cases of misconduct and negligence. For example, in 1812, when the Prince Regent insisted on appointing Lord Moira to the government of India, that nobleman, before leaving England, met at dinner in London a Mr. B——, then on furlough, and contemplating retirement from the Service on the completion of his leave. Interested in Mr. B——'s accounts of his experience, the Governor-General elect asked if he could not be induced to return to India, and it was finally agreed that Mr. B—— was to resume his place in the Service on a salary of rupees five thousand per mensem. Unhappily when they arrived in India no such post was for the moment available, and the only thing that could be done for Mr. B—— was to make him Commissioner of Customs at Mirzapore, with a salary somewhat less than what he had stipulated for. The duties of his office consisted chiefly in signing permits

while he pulled at his after-breakfast *chillum*; but he declared that for four thousand a month he could not afford to write his full name, and during his tenure of office the papers continued to be attested by writing but the initials R. B. B. This statement rests upon the testimony of the late Mr. Ralph John Tayler, who added that when the Governor-General, on an official tour, came up the River Ganges, his house-boat stuck on a sand-bank opposite the Commissioner's compound; but the offended Mr. B—— resolutely refused to extend any sort of hospitality to His Excellency. A little later there was a Collector at Cawnpore, who may be indicated by the letter R——, the initial of his name. This gentleman, having lost a considerable sum of money at cock-fighting to a neighbouring Nawab, was imprudent enough to make payment out of the public Treasury in his charge, and the sum was entered by the clerks in what was then known as "the inefficient balance." The attention of the Board of Revenue falling on this item, one of their members repaired to Cawnpore to examine Mr. R——'s accounts, and the unfortunate Collector, instead of waiting to explain matters and make provision for replacing the defalcation, lost heart, and fled secretly from the station with his wife. Hastening to his friend the Nawab, he stated his difficulty, and obtained from him a farm, on which he proceeded to cultivate indigo. A proclamation was issued by the Government, offering a reward for Mr. R——'s discovery and apprehension, but although military officers from the nearest British station continued to visit Mr. and Mrs. R—— on their newly acquired estate, the Government could obtain no trace of his whereabouts until he was murdered one evening by a neighbouring Zemindar with whom he had got into a boundary dispute, and the widow repaired to Lucknow, where she sought the protection of the British Resident, another member of the Service, who made her his wife. This man also came to grief, for he had for some time