ENGLAND AND INDIA: A RECORD OF PROGRESS DURING A HUNDRED YEARS, 1785-1885

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England and India: A Record of Progress During a Hundred Years, 1785-1885 by Romesh C.

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1785-1885

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ENGLAND AND INDIA



PREFACE

THE present year has been a year of rejoicing all over the British Empire in all parts of the globe; in India it has been the most disastrous year since the country passed under British rule. A severe plague has all but depopulated the great cities of one province; a destructive earthquake has ruined the towns and villages of another; and a famine, the most widespread in its area ever known in India, has desolated the country from one extremity to the other.

But the famine of 1897 is only one of a series of such calamities which have visited India almost periodically within the present century. Famines are a thing of the past in Western Europe; in India every generation, every period of twenty years, has its tale of distress to tell. The year of the accession of the Queen was marked by a severe famine which desolated Northern India, and counted its victims by the million. The year of the Indian Mutiny was the commencement of the next twenty years, marked by three great famines—the famines of the North-West, of Orissa, and of Behar. The year in which the Queen assumed the title of the Empress of India was the year of a more terrible famine in Madras, which swept away five millions of the people of Southern India. And the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee has, unfortunately, been

marked in India by another widespread famine which embraces the greater part of India within its sphere, and which, in spite of relief operations, is likely to count its victims by the million. The years 1837, 1857, 1877, and 1897 are sad landmarks in the modern history of India—landmarks not of progress and prosperity, but of desolation and disasters.

Englishmen will not contemplate these facts with complaisance. It is not gratifying to know that a country, possessing a rich and fertile soil, and a frogal and industrious population, is still subject to recurring famines after a century and a half of British rule. It is not pleasant to learn that, after an uninterrupted peace of forty years, the people of India show no signs of increasing prosperity and greater security from distress. And it is sad to contemplate that, in spite of a civilized administration, of the construction of railways and canals, of the vast extension of cultivation, and of the prosperity of foreign trade, India is still periodically desolated by calamities such as are unknown in Europe.

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The great famine in Bengal of 1770 aroused the attention of Englishmen to the defects of the East India Company's administration in the last century, and was followed by the Regulating Act in 1774, by Pitt's India Act in 1784, and by Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793. Unless we are greatly mistaken, the sad events of the present year will once more direct the attention of Englishmen to Indian affairs, and will lead to reforms which are urgently needed. Under the Company's rule, the renewal of the Charter every twenty years was an occasion for an inquiry into Indian affairs. We have lost the salutary effect of those periodical inquiries now, and the direct administration of India by the Crown has, along with

many great and obvious advantages, this one disadvantage -that the administration is virtually responsible to none. But although the periodical inquiries into Indian administration have unfortunately been discontinued, recent events are directing the attention of Englishmen to Indian affairs, and will before long require some investigation into the condition of the Indian people. Thoughtful men will ask themselves if the recurrence of destructive famines, five times within the forty years of the direct government of India by the Crown, indicates the normal state of a rich and fertile country; and if the death of eight or ten millions of human beings from starvation, within this period, indicates the normal condition of an industrial and frugal population living in uninterrupted peace. These are questions which will require some definite inquiry and some definite answer.

And if an impartial inquiry be made into these matters, as it must sooner or later, it will be found that the present administration of India, honest and able as it undoubtedly is, has drifted into some serious blunders. And the worst of these blunders is its inordinate expenditure, which is impoverishing the people, and making them defenceless against droughts and famines. It will be found that the continuous increase of the State-demand from the produce of the soil, which is virtually the only means of subsistence for the mass of the people in India, is making them incapable of saving in good years, and resourceless in bad vears. It will be found that the imperial policy of England in the east, to secure a 'scientific frontier,' and to maintain an adequate army against Russia at the cost of India, is exhausting that rich and fertile country. It will be found that a system of almost unlimited borrowing of English capital, and of increasing the public debt of