

**THE PEASANTRY OF BENGAL: BEING A
VIEW OF THEIR CONDITION UNDER THE
HINDU, THE MAHOMEDAN, AND THE
ENGLISH RULE, AND A CONSIDERATION
OF THE MEANS CALCULATED TO
IMPROVE THEIR FUTURE PROSPECTS**

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ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT

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PROSPECTS.

BY

ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT, B.C.S.,

BARRISTER-AT-LAW, MIDDLE TEMPLE.

I paint the oat,
As truth will paint it, and as birds will not.
CHABRE.

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LONDON:—TRÜBNER & CO.,
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STREET, CALCUTTA.

TO MY YOUNGER BROTHER

ABINASH CHUNDER DUTT.

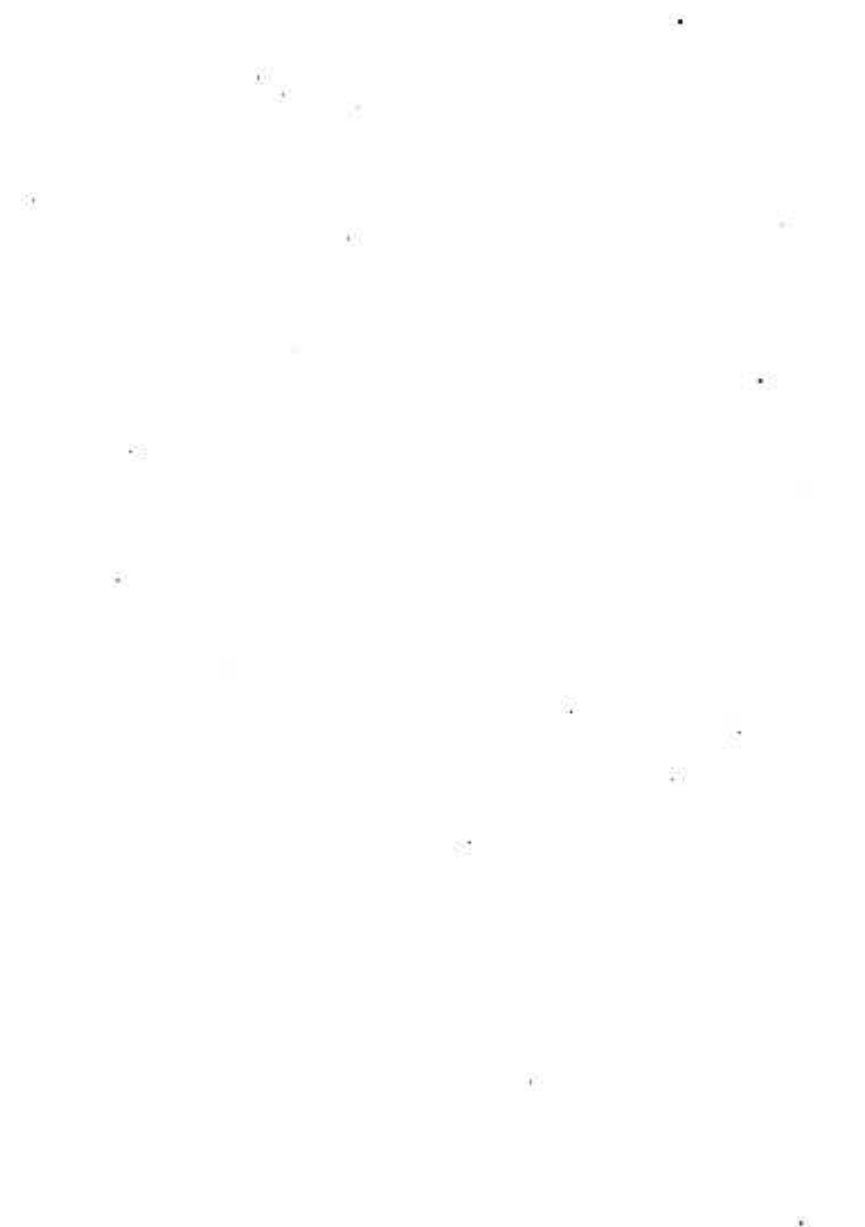
The following pages

ARE DEDICATED

AS

A TOKEN OF

A BROTHER'S SINCERE AFFECTION.



PREFACE.

MOST of the following chapters previously appeared in the pages of the *Bengal Magazine*, and their republication in the form of a book calls for an explanation, the more specially as they do not pretend to any merit such as would justify their reappearance. The only explanation, however, that is offered, lies in the importance of the subject, as well as in the very painful conviction which the writer has often felt, that the claims of the cultivating classes have somehow been ignored and unrecognized. An attempt therefore to direct the attention of the public to the subject will, it is hoped, be considered pardonable.

The rulers of the country have never been wanting in sympathy for the poorest classes of the people; but a want of a thorough knowledge of the country, as also a recognition of the all-devouring claims of the zemindars have rendered such sympathy to a certain extent ineffectual. Legislating for a foreign people is always a difficult task, but the difficulty in the present instance is aggravated by the total want of enlightened public opinion to help legislation; for public opinion, such as it is in this country, is one-sided and partial, and would oftener mislead

than lead in the right direction. In advocating our rights we often betray ourselves sadly wanting in sympathy for the uneducated millions who really constitute the nation. Whoever has carefully examined the proceedings of our associations and the articles in our newspapers must be painfully alive to the truth of this remark. Rights of our educated countrymen to be employed in the higher grades of public service, rights of the leaders of our community to a place in the legislative councils, rights of zemindars to exemption from all land impositions,—these have been frequently advocated and insisted upon with vigour and eloquence;—but the claims of the peasantry to be educated and to be represented, to be freed from the trammels of ignorance and saved from the oppression of zemindars,—such ideas have invariably emanated from our rulers and not from us. While legislation has been busy for the best part of a century in restricting the powers of the zemindars, our press English or Vernacular sees no such necessity,—while legislation for the past several years has been planning mass education, we have been calculating the probable loss that such a measure would inflict on high education. And yet high education concerns hardly one man in a thousand, and all that has been written or spoken in its favor,—all that has fired the patriotism of our countrymen and has

filled the columns of our newspapers was for the interest and benefit of our man in a thousand,—the claims of the remaining nine hundred and ninety-nine being ignored or forgotten! All honor to the legislation which has disregarded such public opinion and has toiled for the million as well as for the upper ten thousand.

It is not pretended that such a short sketch as this book is, can contain any new facts or any very detailed description of our villages. On the contrary there is nothing in this book which is not known to the ordinary reader, or which may not be learnt by a few years' residence in the mofussil. We are not aware, however, that the measures of reform, pointed out in the following pages, were ever advocated before, and it is for these that the book ventures to claim a passing notice. We are aware we have been treading on very delicate grounds in advocating such measures. It is an unfortunate fact,—and we write this in shame and sorrow,—that the welfare of the country is identified by our educated countrymen with the interests of the zemindars. Patriotism is another name for the advocacy of zemindars' rights and interests, and a word spoken in favor of the claims of the cultivators is regarded and branded as a certain sign of denationalization. It is not hoped that such public opinion will be at all shaken by anything we