

**RECOLLECTIONS OF
CALCUTTA FOR OVER
HALF A CENTURY**

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Recollections of Calcutta for over half a century by Montague Massey

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MONTAGUE MASSEY

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CALCUTTA FOR OVER
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Montgomery

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For the benefit of the Red Cross Fund

Recollections of Calcutta
for over half a century



By MONTAGUE MASSEY



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



CALCUTTA: THACKER, SPINK & CO
1918

DEDICATED
TO
THE LADY CARMICHAEL

THE FOUNDER OF

THE BENGAL WOMEN'S WAR FUND

INTRODUCTION.

I THINK it would be advisable for me to state at the outset that these reminiscences are entirely devoid of sensational elements, in order to prevent any possible disappointment and remove from the minds of those, and I know several, who have conceived the idea that I am about to disclose matters that, as far as I am concerned, must for ever lie buried in the past. There are certain startling incidents still fresh in my memory that I could relate, but they would be out of place in a work of this nature. A considerable amount of the subject-matter contained herein is devoted to a descriptive account of the wonderful transformation that has overtaken the city since my first arrival in the sixties, and to the many and varied structural improvements and additions that have been, and are still being, made in streets and buildings, both public and private. The origin and conception of this little work is due to the inspiration of my friend Walter Exley of the *Statesman* staff. I had often before been approached by friends and others on the subject of writing and publishing what I could tell of Calcutta of the olden days, but I had always felt some diffidence in doing so partly because

I thought it might not prove sufficiently interesting. But when Mr. Exley appeared on the scene last July, introduced to me by a mutual friend, matters seemed somehow to assume a different aspect. In the first place I felt that I was talking to a man of considerable knowledge and experience in journalistic affairs, and one whose opinion was worth listening to, and it was in consequence of what he told me that for the first time I seriously contemplated putting into effect what I had so frequently hesitated to do in the past. He assured me I was mistaken in the view I had held, and that what I could relate would make attractive reading to the present generation of Europeans, not only in the city, but also in the mofussil. I finally yielded to persuasion, and throwing back my memory over the years tried to conjure up visions of Calcutta of the past. A good deal in the earlier part refers to a period which few, if any, Europeans at present in this country know of except through the medium of books. The three articles published in the columns of the *Statesman* of the 22nd and 29th July and 5th August were the first outcome of our conversation. I then left Calcutta for a tour up-country as stated on page 28, and the work was temporarily suspended. It was not until the early part of September, when I had settled down for a season at Naini Tal, that I

resumed the threads of my narrative. It was at first my intention to continue publishing a series of short articles in the columns of the *Statesman*, but as I proceeded it gradually dawned upon my mind that I could achieve a twofold object by compiling my recollections in book form in aid of the Red Cross Fund. Whether it was due to this new and additional incentive which may perhaps have had the effect of stimulating my mental powers I know not, but as I continued to write on, scenes and events long since forgotten seemed gradually to well up out of the dim and far distant past and visualize on the tablets of my memory. I was thus enabled to extend and develop the scope of the work beyond the limit I had originally contemplated. My one and ardent hope now is that the book may prove a financial success for the benefit of the funds of the Society on whose behalf it is published. That some who perhaps might not care to take a copy simply for its own sake will not hesitate to do so and thus assist by his or her own personal action in however small a degree in carrying on the good and noble work which must awaken in our hearts all the best and finest instincts of our nature, as well as our warmest and deepest sympathies.

I have to express my great thanks to Lady Carmichael for her kindness and courtesy in

having graciously accorded me permission to dedicate the work to her on behalf of the Red Cross Fund.

My thanks are also due to my friend P. Tennyson Cole, the eminent portrait painter, who did me the honour of painting my portrait for the book at considerable sacrifice of his very valuable time. Unfortunately, however, it was found impossible to make use of the portrait, as the time at our disposal was too short to permit of its reproduction.

I am deeply indebted to the Honourable Maharajadhiraj Bahadur of Burdwan who kindly placed at my disposal a collection of priceless and invaluable old views of Calcutta which are now quite unobtainable and for having had copies printed off from the negatives and for granting me permission to reproduce them in my book.

I have also to thank my friend Harold Sudlow for designing the sketch on the outer covering, which I think considerably enhances the appearance of the book. I must further acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. J. Zorab, Superintending Engineer, Presidency Circle, P. W. D., who refreshed my memory as to certain details in the alteration of some of the public buildings, while furnishing me with information as to some others, with which I had not been previously acquainted. Last of all,