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BRITAIN'S Record in INDIA

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FOREWORD

THE importance of a true appreciation of the aims and achievements of British administration in India was never greater than it is at the present time. In the near future, and in any event not later than 1929, a Royal Commission must be appointed under the Government of India Act to inquire into the working of the Constitution embodied in that legislative measure, and to report as to whether it is desirable to extend or restrict the degree of responsible government existing in India. It is significant that as the time approaches for the great inquest to be held persistent efforts are being made in England to create the belief that British rule in India means cruel repression of the people; that a reign of terror has been maintained by successive Viceroys, and that almost every evil that afflicts the country may be traced to British malevolence or wrongdoing. A leader in the campaign of calumny is found in Dr. V. H. Rutherford, a former member of the House of Commons, whose recent book, entitled "Modern India," teems with reckless misrepresentations of

the actions of his own countrymen. In this volume Viceroys like Lord Chelmsford and Lord Reading are held up to obloquy, British officials of the Indian Civil Service are represented as greedy, incompetent and arrogant bureaucrats, and it is asserted that British exploitation is the main cause of Indian poverty. It would be an endless task to follow Dr. Rutherford through his maze of misrepresentation. But it is possible to show briefly that the British connection is of inestimable value to the people of India, to whom it secures justice, internal order and safety from foreign aggression.

Before exposing the baselessness of Dr. Rutherford's indictment it is pertinent to cite an instance of his controversial methods. In concluding a chapter on "How the People Live," he asserts that the Material and Moral Progress Report for 1922, written by Dr. L. F. Rushbrook Williams and published by the Government of India, "tells us that the masses of the Indian population are beset with poverty of a kind which finds no parallel in the more exigent but less tropical countries of Europe." This quotation is used to bolster up Dr. Rutherford's baseless allegation that the British are responsible for poverty in India. But the writer carefully omitted to cite Dr. Williams's statement in the same chapter of the report that, "it is plain to the observer that

there is considerable indirect evidence as to a growing prosperity rather than to an increasing poverty" among the masses, and his further assertion that a certain amount of direct evidence is available which points to an improvement in the economic position of the Indian peasant.

Moreover, Dr. Rushbrook Williams definitely challenged the truth of the charge Dr. Rutherford is seeking to establish. "The theory that the Indian masses are ground down by the exactions of an extravagant Government," he wrote, "though a favourite theme of eloquence in the newspaper Press, will not hold water for a single instant in the face of the facts. Despite the high salaries paid to her officials, India probably possesses at this moment the cheapest administration in the world. Non-official estimates, carefully compiled, put the average incidence of taxation, including industrial profits, at Rs. 6 (9s.) per head per annum. The actual demand of the State upon the land works out in most places at about 5 per cent. of the gross produce, a figure which may be compared with the corresponding average of 17 per cent. in the case of Japan." Dr. Williams then discussed the basic causes of poverty, and summed up the situation with accuracy when he declared the problem to be a gigantic one, with its roots in certain long-standing customs and deficiencies which themselves

make for distress as the population increases, while resources are confined within traditional limits by hide-bound precedent.

The value of Dr. Rutherford's book as a contribution to the truth about India may be judged by his selection of an isolated sentence from a long exposition of the condition of the masses and utilising it to support a theory wholly repugnant to the context. Nor was the statement attributed to Dr. Williams accurately reproduced; for what that gentleman actually wrote was that "a *considerable proportion* of the masses are beset with poverty of a kind which finds no parallel in the more exigent but less tropical countries of Europe."