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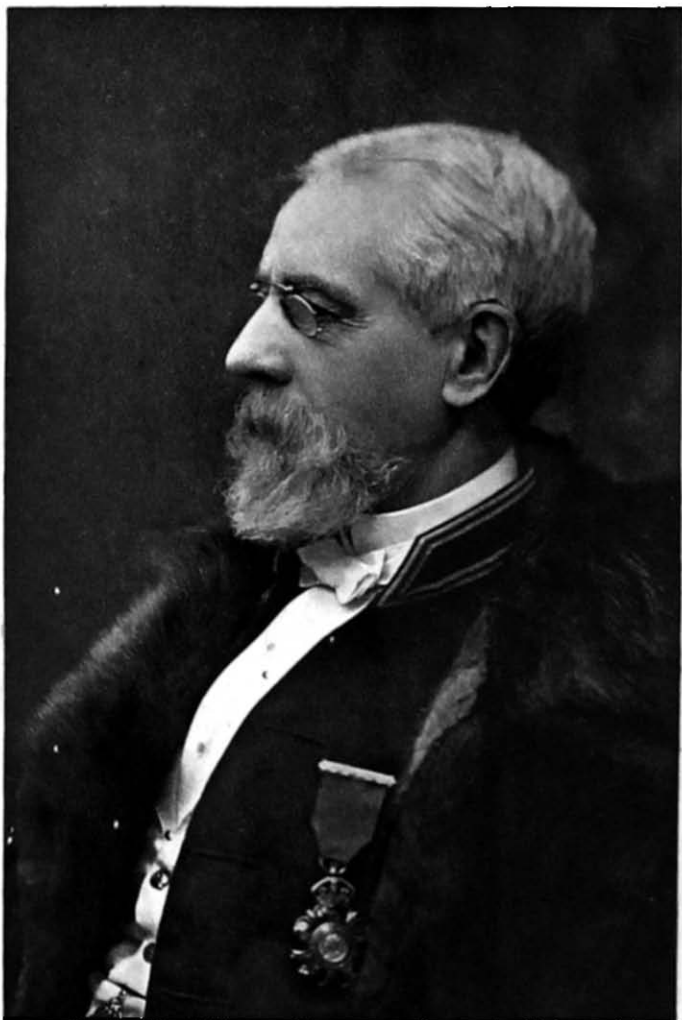
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A SERVANT
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*BEING THE RECOLLECTIONS OF AN
INDIAN OFFICIAL*

BY H. G. KEENE, C.I.E., HON. M.A. OXON.

AUTHOR OF "SKETCHES IN INDIAN INK"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. SIMPSON, R.I. (OF "THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON
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"Not Heaven itself over the past has power;
For what has been has been, and I have had my hour."
DRYDEN.

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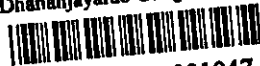
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TO
THE RIGHT HON.
GEORGE ROBERT CANNING, BARON HARRIS
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., ETC.
SOMETIME GOVERNOR OF BOMBAY
WHO, BY FIRM AND JUST ADMINISTRATION, WON A
MEMORABLE PLACE IN THE FOURTH GENERATION OF
A HOUSE DISTINGUISHED FOR NOYAL LABOURS IN
BRITISH INDIA, THESE REMINISCENCES ARE
INSCRIBED
BY HIS OBLIGED FRIEND AND KINSMAN
THE AUTHOR

P R E F A C E

THE contemptuous attitude often adopted towards anything not of to-day should not blind us to the essential difference between the recent past and what is really more or less ancient history. Sam. Johnson is to many a more familiar presence than Carlyle; and more examination papers are set upon the "Forty-Five" than about the War of Secession in the United States, which took such vast proportions less than forty years ago.* In the same way, the political relations of India to the British Empire have gone through great revolutions since the Reform of Parliament in 1832, and especially since the accession of Queen Victoria; yet those changes are perhaps not so fully realised as their intrinsic importance deserve, certainly less than the events in the days of Clive and Warren Hastings. For students who care to go at all deeply into the subject, Sir W. Hunter's book on the late Brian Hodgson will be found as useful as the better-known stories of Mountstuart Elphinstone or Wellesley; it is a glimpse of the later part of the period that is suggested in the chapters that follow here. The writer entered the Service many years after Mr. Hodgson, and at a time when the East India Company had lost the last

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morsels of its commercial character; but the "Covenants" of himself, like those of his contemporaries, were still made out "between the East India Company of the one part, and So-and-So of the other part," like any ordinary "indenture," and contained many conditions only applicable to commercial employ.¹

The prospect thus opened was one of unlimited duration. Men did not usually retire, as they now often do, the instant that they have served long enough to be entitled to their pension, but remained in the country as long as they were able to render useful service, and until they had accumulated enough money to yield a comfortable provision for themselves and families. It had been the wish of my good father—who had painful experience of what life in the Indian Civil Service might be—that his son should take his degree at Oxford and go to the Chancery Bar. It was, however, soon made apparent that the sacrifices which such a scheme implied would fall not only on him, but on his other children; and he had to be persuaded that an Indian career, with whatever drawbacks, was a sure and speedy means of provision. Being led to inquire into the present prospects of "a Bengal writer," he was given on this head the most satisfactory information; and one gentleman, who never got beyond the dignity of District Judge at Saharanpore, assured him that, with ordinary luck,

¹ The Company, in this deed, bound itself to give the Covenant officer such rise in rank, "salary, compensation, and emoluments for his services as he shall be entitled to . . . according to the Regulations of the said Service and the Orders of the Company."

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a man in the Civil Service might add to his pension a little fortune of £30,000 derived from lawful savings. This, I think, was the hope with which he was ultimately led to ask his old friend, General Sir James Law Lushington, for a Bengal nomination for his first-born; and one entered the Service less with the hope of becoming a Knight of the Bath than that of returning to a literary life in London on a modest competence.

Curiously enough, the last post which fell to my lot was none other than the identical Judgeship of Saharanpore which had been held by the very gentleman whose information had decided my father's wavering disposition. But times had changed. The Queen's direct administration had been followed by many changes, and amongst them had been a new rule for limiting the duration of our period of service. Whether a Civil Servant had saved money or not, he now had to retire on a given date. To one having a numerous offspring, for some only of whom he had then been able to provide, here was a serious calamity, and it cannot be denied that in this respect at least the palmy days of the Indian Civil Service have long been no more.

The fall of our generous patrons is not the only important change that the few surviving men of my time have seen. When we went out the Overland Route was hardly organised, and many young officers went round the Cape in sailing ships. When we arrived we found Bengal administered by the Company's Governor-General, whose immediate predecessor, indeed, had been recalled by the

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mandate of the Court of Directors only a very few years before. There were no railways, telegraphs, or universities in India, the Criminal Law was a chaos, Civil Law did not exist. The Bengal sepoy was trusted, or at least flattered, paraded to see his white comrades flogged,—a punishment from which his own back was specially exempt; his suits in Court had preferential attention, his passage through a District was like the march of an invading army. Duelling was prevalent amongst officers; there were no libraries or rational amusements; brandy-and-water, gambling, and tiger-shooting often formed the chief business of life in the intervals of the campaign.

The progress from that state of things has been, on the whole, in the right direction. Some few things may have been really better in the Company's days, especially in the relations between the higher European officials and the peoples of India at large. If there were no universities in the country, there was no class of half-educated young Natives discontented because their degrees and diplomas did not immediately lead to lucrative employ. If the Haileybury Civilians did not possess the highest scholarship, they belonged to the old Anglo-Indian families, and had often been born in the country, where their names were well known, and in which they were content to live and, not seldom, to die. One gentleman, who ended his days as a "Joint Magistrate" during the earlier part of my service, had been some sixty years in harness, and had even acted as Governor of a Province. There was not then the sharp line which now divides the Executive branch from the

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Secretariat, and men passed freely from work at headquarters to work in the Mofussil, and back again.

Should any critical reader feel inclined to object to the following narrative on the ground of the obscure sphere in which the writer moved, it may be difficult to make a good defence. We read the recollections of Lord Roberts and Sir Richard Temple, because such men have conducted affairs on a grand scale, and swayed the destinies of vast multitudes of mankind. But a District Judge has done nothing of that kind, and the record of his experience cannot possibly compete with theirs in interest. This is true enough, and there can be only two excuses for him. He may have seen the world beyond the four walls of his Court-house, and he may wed his experience to the common interests of humanity. There was a talk about Indian Judges at Tom Davies' in 1775, of which the record will be found in Boswell. A remark of Dr. Johnson's is to the point. "It is wonderful," he said, "when a calculation is made, how little the mind is actually employed in the discharge of any profession. No man would be a Judge upon the condition of being totally a Judge." To like purpose is a saying of Montaigne, who was himself a good public servant during part of his life. "Je ne veux pas qu'on refuse, aux charges qu'on prend, l'attention, les pas, les paroles, la sueur et le sang au besoin. Mais c'est par emprunt et accidentalement, l'esprit se tenant en repos et en santé" (L. III. Ess. x.).

The demands upon the exiles of those days were peculiar. If a Civil Officer gave way to the influences of

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his surroundings, he might become absorbed and almost denationalised. So long as he gave no trouble, and "got on" with the Native officials, he caused no scandal, sent in his periodical returns, and was taken for granted by the folks at headquarters. Mr. Thomason, my first Lieutenant-Governor, was once heard to say that "it was only by winter touring that he learned that the officers whose work showed worst on paper were often the most beloved in the Districts." With gun on shoulder they wandered from place to place all the cold-weather; when the heat or the rain drove them to the shelter of a bungalow, they often found themselves almost without white neighbours, and seldom spoke the English language. The life around them was archaic, the moral tone mediæval; flattery and obsequiousness dulled their perceptions. If a regiment marched through a District, the Civil Administrators eyed the march with suspicion, often not unjustified; if a European planter had any controversy with his tenants or neighbours, the Civilians usually sided with the Natives. The few men who resisted all the corroding influences were looked on as outcasts by many of their brother officers, and hated by all their Native subordinates; while the respect of the people was an idle and passive support, if perchance it was obtained.

Southey, in the depths of his impecunious youth, was offered an appointment on the Indian Civil Service. Then newly married, and with no other prospect but what Grub Street could offer to an Oxonian of scholarly habits and unfashionable political principles, he declined the offer almost

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without one moment's deliberation. A man who thought for himself must be in solitude there, he believed. Yet the outlook had its attractions—so many years of exile with a certain provision at the end. Was a young man wise who struck such a bargain? Southey thought not; and India lost a valuable servant, though one who would never have surrendered his independence. Nowadays the privations are considerably less than in the end of the eighteenth century. Yet all the European members of the Service still look forward to a retirement in the British islands, where they hope to find compensation for the need, sorrow, sickness, and other adversity that they may meet with in their transitory life of Indian probation. A few ardent reformers are understood to propose that pensions at the end of service shall only be granted to such ex-officials as will agree to pass the residue of their lives in India, but things have not come to that pass yet.

If it should be urged that a society that produced men like Thackeray's "Colonel Newcome" must have been good enough for Southey, I should be disposed to answer that, so far as my observation went, such men never existed. I do not think the character of Colonel Newcome a fair type of the Bengal officer. Simple-hearted, knightly men there were amongst them,—Henry Lawrence is a familiar example. But Henry Lawrence was a man of intellect, who rose to higher levels than the command of a corps of Native Cavalry. When Lawrence was sent as Resident to Khatmandu, he thought of writing for the *Calcutta Review* ;

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but he distrusted his powers, and, by way of improving his style, read Macaulay's Essays and studied Lindley Murray. Driven to Europe by ill-health, he was met in Regent Street dressed as he dressed in India; his frock-coat was "antiquated," and a shawl thrown over his shoulders "gilt but to flout the ruins grey." The stares of the bystanders caused him to wonder. "Do they look upon me as a great Guy?" he asked. So far we recognise the idea: Thomas Newcome might be quite fancied acting in this way. But can we go further, and fancy Thomas ruling the Punjab, and quelling revolt in Oude? No; the better class of regimental officer, such as Thomas Newcome was supposed to have been, was a different man; and Thackeray in his idealisation has lost the likeness. Probably no art could have depicted the dulness, the want of initiative, the coarse manners and language, of many of those who had gone out to India at from sixteen to eighteen years of age, before even their schooling was properly over, and certainly without experience of the world; and who had ever since been surrounded by obsequious barbarians.

Most of the men with whom Southey would have lived, if he had gone to India, were no great improvement on those whom Johnson had in view when the conversation at Mr. Strahan's turned on the subject in 1779. According to Boswell, the Sage emitted the opinion that it was better to have £10,000 after a given period of labour in England, than twice that amount after a similar career in India, "because," he explained, "you must compute what you *give* for money; and a man who has lived ten years

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in India has given up ten years of social comfort." Even in the India of that day there were, no doubt, some very good men, as Johnson must have known,—Warren Hastings, Mr. Justice Chambers, and Sir William Jones being all among his acquaintances; and perhaps he got his notion of the lack of "social comfort" from some of these. No better men than these were to be found in Southey's time, or even later, although a few Anglo-Indians (such as Torrens and Elliot) always held up the lamp of culture, and were sometimes backed by eminent Natives. But the culture has become now much more diffused, and the general level is higher than it was at any time before the Mutiny, even if there are few or none of the commanding personalities one notices in those days.

To a general charge of egotism the author must reluctantly plead guilty, only submitting in extenuation that he has not offended wilfully. The Memoir that follows was written some years ago for family purposes; when publication was proposed, it was revised in order to remove matter which would not interest a wider circle. Unfortunately it then appeared that personal experiences could not be entirely excluded without destroying the whole substance of the narrative. Those who cannot accept this plea must make whatever allowance they find possible for the ineradicable nature of autobiography. A residuum of less subjective nature will, it is hoped, appear. There is so much in Indian affairs that is exceptional, that an honest picture of this kind may perhaps be accepted as a contribution to general information.

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Note.—For permission to use much of the ensuing matter, the author has to acknowledge the courtesy of the editor and the proprietor of the *Calcutta Review*, where the first draft appeared. The illustrations are from sketches of his own, which have been adapted for publication by Mr. William Simpson, R.I., to whom they are indebted for whatever artistic qualities they may be found to possess.

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THE relations between the doctrinaires at Indian headquarters and the disheartened officials who toil in the districts appear to be no better than when the great Metcalfe deplored "the caste of Bengal Councillor." Here is the last comment of the *Pioneer*—an Indian journal no less known for loyalty than for the judgment and ability with which it is invariably conducted.

"The controversy that was lately on foot in these columns as to the practical division of the Civil Service into two bodies—the select Secretariat and the majority in the ruck—was not one that ever stood any chance of being solved on mere assertion. One side says, 'We are the fittest: the others are bad bargains, or at best mediocrities.' To which these others make answer, 'No doubt you are selected: but by whom? It is easy to call names, but look at the facts. It is we who do the work of the country, while you go on recruiting your body from drudges and prigs, and constitute an apostolical succession of assumed infallibility.' The side, however, that follows facts has at anyrate the best of it in point of method. One body keeps the peace, collects the revenue, bridges the gulf between rulers and ruled; and—is generally taken for granted, left in dull places and unwholesome climates, and cheerfully dismissed at the end with no more reward than a pension such as may be earned by the most soulless officer that ever taught a sepoy the goose step. The other passes from a cold weather capital to a summer sanitarium,

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never learning more of the people than can be seen from the windows of a railway carriage: builds its monuments on foundations supplied by the reports of the local officers: decorates itself in the annual shower of Stars of India: and retires to the Council or to dignified leisure with the reputation of an Indian expert."—*Pioneer Mail*, 22nd July 1897.

Readers of Mr. Crooke's work on the N.-W. Provinces may judge of the kind of man who retires from the service with his usefulness unexhausted: exceptional, but still exemplary.

A remarkable utterance published in a Vienna journal of August 1897 is there attributed to a Hindu, and may be made the occasion of a final word on the present state of the Indian Empire. The Hindu to whom these remarks are—with evident truth—ascribed says in effect, that the natives of India are all at heart rebels against the British Government of which, nevertheless, he declares that the presence is, and long will be, essential to their welfare.

The importance of the services rendered to the various parts of India by British supervision and influence have often been observed by intelligent travellers from various parts of Christendom; but this is the first conspicuous instance in a Continental publication of the sentiments of an impartial Asiatic who, while testifying to the very great value of British tutelage to his compatriots, bears evidence to the unpopular character of the administration.

Without attempting an exact distribution of blame, we can easily discover some reasons why a rule admitted to be essential should yet be irksome; but we may at the same time be permitted to indulge the hope that present discontent has been exaggerated, while future conciliation may still further lead to its assuagement. In the first place, this general readiness to revolt is in itself paradoxical; why should vast multitudes of humble peasants be

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always ready, as the Hindu tells us, to "sweep away" the rulers to whom they are under such obligations as he confesses? It was not so in 1857 when the rod of power appeared to have fallen from our hands; it will not surely be so when peace and prosperity return and the people recover their temper.

But, secondly, can the present rulers and administrators help the Natives to a more amiable frame of mind? There was a time when the rulers of India were tolerant and sympathetic, as may be seen by anyone who will take the trouble to turn to the letters of Munro, Metcalfe, Malcolm, and Elphinstone. Can it not be so again? Men do not mutiny unless they are humiliated and miserable; neither of which conditions ought to afflict the Indian subjects of the Queen.

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