

Forty-one Years in India

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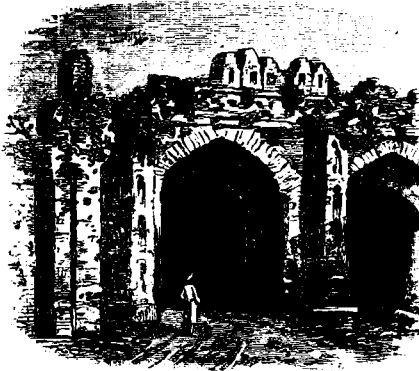
FORTY-ONE YEARS IN INDIA

FROM

Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief

BY

FIELD-MARSHAL
LORD ROBERTS OF KANDAHAR
V.C., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.



KASHMIR GATE AT DELHI

WITH PORTRAITS AND MAPS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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1897

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TO THE COUNTRY TO WHICH I AM SO PROUD OF BELONGING,
TO THE ARMY TO WHICH I AM SO DEEPLY INDEBTED,
AND TO MY WIFE,
WITHOUT WHOSE LOVING HELP
MY 'FORTY-ONE YEARS IN INDIA'
COULD NOT BE THE HAPPY RETROSPECT IT IS,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

P R E F A C E.

I WOULD never have ventured to intrude upon the public with my personal reminiscences had I not been urged to do so by friends who, being interested themselves in what I was able to tell them of India as my father knew it, and as I found it and left it, persuaded me that my experiences of the many and various aspects under which I have known the wonderful land of my adoption and its interesting peoples would be useful to my countrymen. It was thought that I might thus contribute towards a more intimate knowledge of the glorious heritage our forefathers have bequeathed to us, than the greater number of them possess, and towards helping them to understand the characteristics and requirements of the numerous and widely different races by whom India is inhabited.

It is difficult for people who know nothing of Natives to understand and appreciate the value they set on cherished customs, peculiar idiosyncrasies, and fixed prejudices, all of which must be carefully studied by those who are placed in the position of their Rulers, if the suzerain Power is to keep their respect and gain their gratitude and affection.

The Natives of India are particularly observant of char-

acter, and intelligent in gauging the capabilities of those who govern them; and it is because the English Government is trusted that a mere handful of Englishmen are able to direct the administration of a country with nearly three hundred millions of inhabitants, differing in race, religion, and manners of life. Throughout all the changes which India has undergone, political and social, during the present century, this feeling has been maintained, and it will last so long as the services are filled by honourable men who sympathize with the Natives, respect their prejudices, and do not interfere unnecessarily with their habits and customs.

My father and I spent between us nearly ninety years in India. The most wonderful of the many changes that took place during that time may be said to date from the Mutiny. I have endeavoured in the following pages to explain the causes which, I believe, brought about that terrible event—an event which for a while produced a much-to-be-regretted feeling of racial antagonism. Happily, this feeling did not last long; even when things looked blackest for us, it was softened by acts of kindness shown to Europeans in distress, and by the knowledge that, but for the assistance afforded by the Natives themselves, the restoration of order, and the suppression of a fierce military insurrection, would have been a far more arduous task. Delhi could not have been taken without Sikhs and Gurkhas; Lucknow could not have been defended without the Hindustani soldiers who so nobly responded to Sir Henry Lawrence's call; and nothing that Sir John Lawrence might have done could have prevented our losing, for a time, the whole of the country

north of Calcutta, had not the men of the Punjab and the Derajat* remained true to our cause.

It has been suggested that all outward signs of the Mutiny should be obliterated, that the monument on the Ridge at Delhi should be levelled, and the picturesque Residency at Lucknow allowed to fall into decay. This view does not commend itself to me. These relics of that tremendous struggle are memorials of heroic services performed by Her Majesty's soldiers, Native as well as British; and by the civilians who shared the duties and dangers of the army. They are valuable as reminders that we must never again allow ourselves to be lulled into fancied security; and above all, they stand as warnings that we should never do anything that can possibly be interpreted by the Natives into disregard for their various forms of religion.

The Mutiny was not an unmitigated evil, for to it we owe the consolidation of our power in India, as it hastened on the construction of the roads, railways, and telegraphs, so wisely and thoughtfully planned by the Marquis of Dalhousie, and which have done more than anything to increase the prosperity of the people and preserve order throughout the country. It was the Mutiny which brought Lord Canning into closer communication with the Princes of India, and paved the way for Lord Lytton's brilliant conception of the Imperial Assemblage—a great political success, which laid the foundation of that feeling of confidence which now, happily, exists between the Ruling Chiefs and the Queen-Empress. And it was the Mutiny which compelled us to reorganize our Indian Army and make it the admirable fighting machine it now is.

* Tracts beyond the Indus.

In the account I have given of our relations with Afghanistan and the border tribes, I have endeavoured to bring before my readers the change of our position in India that has been the inevitable consequence of the propinquity upon our North-West Frontier of a first-class European Power. The change has come about so gradually, and has been so repeatedly pronounced to be chimerical by authorities in whom the people of Great Britain had every reason to feel confidence, that until recently it had attracted little public attention, and even now a great majority of my countrymen may scarcely have realized the probability of England and Russia ever being near enough to each other in Asia to come into actual conflict. I impute no blame to the Russians for their advance towards India. The force of circumstances—the inevitable result of the contact of civilization with barbarism—impelled them to cross the Jaxartes and extend their territories to the Khanates of Turkestan and the banks of the Oxus, just as the same uncontrollable force carried us across the Sutlej and extended our territories to the valley of the Indus. The object I have at heart is to make my fellow-subjects recognize that, under these altered conditions, Great Britain now occupies in Asia the position of a Continental Power, and that her interests in that part of the globe must be protected by Continental means of defence.

The few who have carefully and steadily watched the course of events, entertained no doubt from the first as to the soundness of these views; and their aim has always been, as mine is now, not to sound an alarm, but to give a warning, and to show the danger of shutting our eyes to plain facts and their probable consequences.

Whatever may be the future course of events, I have no fear of the result if we are only true to ourselves and to India. Thinking Natives thoroughly understand the situation ; they believe that the time must come when the territories of Great Britain and Russia in their part of Asia will be separated only by a common boundary line, and they would consider that we were wanting in the most essential attributes of Rulers if we did not take all possible precautions, and make every possible preparation to meet such an eventuality.

I send out this book in the earnest hope that the friendly anticipations of those who advised me to write it may not be seriously disappointed ; and that those who care to read a plain, unvarnished tale of Indian life and adventure, will bear in mind that the writer is a soldier, not a man of letters, and will therefore forgive all faults of style or language.

ROBERTS.

30th September, 1896.

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