

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA.

BY

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accurate knowledge of the subject. This state of the public mind with regard to India has too often afforded a theme of regret or of remonstrance to the friends of both countries. It would be presumptuous to hope that the present work should effect a change; but the importance of our Indian Empire will well justify the attempt, and the opportunity of obtaining access to the best sources of information supplies encouragement.

By the plan proposed to be adopted, the work will be restricted within moderate limits, without leaving any important or interesting event either unnoticed or inadequately related. To explain the mode by which this result is proposed to be attained, a few remarks may be necessary.

The design of the work must be borne in mind: it is intended to illustrate the rise and progress of the British dominion in India. The more striking events in the previous history of that country will be briefly adverted to; the intercourse of Great Britain with India, so long as it was purely commercial, will be noticed with at least an equal degree of conciseness; but in treating of

the political events which have borne onward a company of Merchants into a mighty government, and vested in Great Britain an empire of unparalleled magnificence, the object of the historian will be to produce a complete and permanent record, in consulting which the general reader will find all he can desire to know, and beyond which none but those who have peculiar and extraordinary motives for research, will find it necessary to inquire.

It would neither be wise nor honest to endeavour to recommend a new History of India, by disparaging the merits of preceding works of a similar character. It is cheerfully admitted that some of those works manifest extraordinary industry and research, and that others are excellently adapted to meet the wants of those who seek only a summary view of the great transactions which, within a space of less than a century, have given to England a dependent empire, not greatly inferior to Europe in extent; but it is not inconsistent either with this admission, or with fact, to affirm that our literature does not possess a History of British India, which

is at once popular in its style, comprehensive in its details, and just in its estimate of events, and of those concerned in them. Each of these qualities may be found apart from the rest, but there is no record of British conquest and British rule in India in which they are combined.

The last of the qualities which have been enumerated is undoubtedly the most important. The graces of style are, in historical composition, only desirable as they tend to attract attention to a grave and valuable study, or to place important truths in a striking and interesting point of view. In an abridgment, even completeness of detail must be dispensed with; but unless the historian deal justly in regard both to men and events, his labour is not only useless but mischievous. The History of British India has not always been written with a due regard to this indispensable requisite. Errors have arisen, in some instances, from the influence of preconceived opinions, so deeply rooted, as to raise a desire to make facts conform to them; in others, from imperfect information. The chance of error from the

latter cause is diminished by every fresh accession to the materials of history, and many sources of information which have not previously been available will be resorted to in the progress of this work.

It is not possible to shew any similar ground of security against errors of prejudice ; and on this point the work must be left to furnish its own vindication. No professions of impartiality would gain belief, if unsupported by evidence of its existence, and none will be requisite if, as is confidently hoped, it shall appear that no transaction is related but under the influence of a desire to render neither more nor less than justice to all parties connected with it.

The object of the work and the views with which it has been undertaken are now before the public. The author reserves till a future period the grateful task of acknowledging the various instances of kindness and liberality by which his researches have been facilitated ; but he cannot suffer even the first portion of the work to proceed to press, without advertising to the interest taken in it by Mr. Melvill, Secretary to the East-India Company. To

his suggestion the work owes its commencement, while it is most deeply indebted to the vigilant and friendly attention with which he has watched its progress.

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