

**THE
STORY OF
MY LIFE**

MEADOWS TAYLOR



SHORAPUR

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MEADOWS TAYLOR

EDITED BY
HIS DAUGHTER

With a Preface by Henry Reeve



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PREFACE.

FOR several years before his death, the writer of these Memoirs had been urged by his friends to leave on record some account of his adventurous and useful life. The materials at hand were authentic and abundant; for not only was he possessed of an excellent memory and great powers of retaining and narrating numerous and complicated details with entire accuracy, but during the forty years he spent in India, he carried on a copious correspondence with his father and other members of his family, and a great portion of these voluminous letters has been not only preserved, but carefully transcribed in England. I venture, therefore, to say that nothing is related in these volumes upon vague recollection or traditional evidence, but every incident is told as it happened.

Although it was not the fate of Meadows Taylor to rise to a high rank in the civil or military administration of India, and he cannot lay claim to the



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distinction and fame which belong to the illustrious founders and servants of the British empire in the East, there were circumstances in his career not less remarkable than in the lives of greater men. He was one of the last of those who went out to India as simple adventurers—to use the term in no disparaging sense, for Clive and Dupleix were no more—and who achieved whatever success he had in life solely by his own energy and perseverance, independent of the patronage of the great Company or the authority of the Crown. A lad of fifteen, after a few years spent at a second-rate school, and a few months in the drudgery of a Liverpool merchant's counting-house, is sent to Bombay upon a vague and fallacious promise of mercantile employment. It was long before the days of Indian examinations and Competition Wallahs. Arrived at Bombay, the house of business he was to enter proved to be no better than a shop, and its chief an embarrassed tradesman. By the influence and assistance of a kinsman, a commission was obtained for the misfortune-stricken boy in the Nizam's military contingent. Thus only he started in life. But the stress of circumstances and the tenacity of his own character had already taught him the all-important lesson of self-reliance and independence. Already, on the voyage, he had commenced the study of Eastern languages, to which he applied himself with extreme assiduity in his new position, perceiving

that until a man has mastered the language of a country he can know little of its inhabitants, and may remain for ever a stranger to the intelligence and the hearts of those over whom he exercises authority. His perfect acquaintance with the languages of Southern India, Telooگو, and Mahratta, as well as Hindoostanee, was no doubt the foundation of his extraordinary influence over the natives of the country, and of his insight into their motives and character. It was also the first step to his advancement in his profession. At seventeen he was employed as interpreter on courts-martial, and recommended for much higher duty by the Resident; and at eighteen he found himself Assistant Police Superintendent of a district comprising a population of a million souls. Nor were the duties of that office light. They involved not only direct authority over the ordinary relations of society, but the active pursuit of bands of dacoits, Thugs, and robbers, who infested a half-civilised territory. Occasionally, military expeditions were necessary to reduce some lawless chief of higher degree to obedience. The head of the police was, in short, the representative of law and order in a wild country. These duties, at this early age, Meadows Taylor performed, and with such success as to merit the notice of the sagacious old Minister of the Nizam, Chundoo Lall, and the approval of the Resident.

It would be superfluous in this preface to notice

the details of his advancement in life, which are more fully related by himself in the following pages. But I may venture to point out one or two considerations on which the simplicity and modesty of his own nature forbade him to dwell. By mere perseverance and industry, he carried on the work of self-education through life with very remarkable results; and this, chiefly, at military stations in the interior of the Deccan, with no advantages of books or European society. Having mastered the native languages, he soon found that the government of an Indian district and population means that English intelligence, integrity, and foresight are to supply all that is wanting in these respects to a less civilised people; and he applied himself to make good from such resources as he possessed all these deficiencies. Thus he taught himself the art, and even invented a new method, of land-surveying, because the revenue settlement of the country depends upon it; and without augmenting the burdens of the people, he largely increased the revenue of the State in several districts. He taught himself engineering, because the construction of roads, tanks, and buildings was an essential part of the improvement of the country. He acquired a considerable knowledge of law, both Hindoo, Mohammedan, and English, because he had to administer justice to the people; and he framed for himself a simple code and rules of procedure applicable to a country where there were no courts

of law and no written laws at all. He studied geology and botany, because he observed the direct bearing of these sciences on the productiveness of the soil. He brought to the knowledge of Europe the curious antiquities of Southern India, so nearly allied in form to some of the remains of Ireland, Cornwall, and France. He beguiled his leisure hours with painting and music, in which he had, I know not how, acquired considerable proficiency; and he cultivated literature with no mean success, as is proved by the series of novels beginning with the 'Confessions of a Thug,' in which the manners and superstitions of India are portrayed with wonderful fidelity, and by the 'Manual of Indian History,' which is the most complete summary in existence of the annals of that country. His various literary productions, which have stood the test of time, and still exercise a fascinating power over the reader, are not so much works of imagination as living pictures of the men and women amongst whom he dwelt. There is hardly a character in these volumes that was not drawn from some real person, whom he had seen and known in his various expeditions or in the repression of crime. And he acquired, as if by nature, an extraordinary force and flexibility of style, which brings the native of India, with his peculiar forms of language, his superstitions, his virtues, and his crimes, within the range of the English reader, as no other work has done. The tales

of 'Tara,' 'Ralph Darnell,' 'Tippoo Suldaun,' and 'Seeta,' were designed by their author to mark the principal epochs of Indian history at long intervals of time, and the state of society in each of them; and they form a complete work, which deserves to retain a lasting place in English literature. And when it is considered that they were for the most part written by a young officer who spent his life in active service, remote from all literary society, they are an astonishing proof of natural genius. I mention these things, not by way of panegyric, but because I hope that many a young Englishman may enter upon the duties of an Indian career with this book in his pocket, and may learn from it what may be done, in the course of a single life, to develop and improve his own character and attainments, and to promote the welfare of the people committed to his charge.

But there is a higher element and a more important lesson in this record of a life spent in the service of India. Meadows Taylor gave to the people of India not only his head, but his heart. He had the liveliest sympathy and affection for the natives of India. Thoroughly understanding their traditions and their manners, he treated men and women of all ranks with the consideration and respect due to an ancient society. The wild Beydurs whom he encountered upon his first arrival at Shorapoor—men who were the terror of the country and the myr-

midons of the court—said to him, after their first interview, “ We perceive that you respect us, and we will be faithful to you for ever.” And in the more polished spheres of Indian life he touched the pride of the native nobility with so light and kindly a hand, that they were as eager to court his friendship as the peasantry were to receive his counsel and his benefits. British rule in India has, beyond all doubt, conferred the great benefits of peace and civilisation on the country; but it is sometimes wanting in gentleness and sympathy. There lies probably its greatest danger in the future. Some examples there are of men who have touched the hearts of the natives and enjoyed in return their enthusiastic and devoted regard, such as the Lawrences, Outram, and Malcolm; but they are rare. I think the author of these recollections was one of them. Wherever he went, the natives knew and believed that they had a protector and a friend. The sphere of his power and influence was not wide, at least in comparison with the vast extent and population of the Indian empire; but as far as it extended they were complete. Probably there were few men in India who, at the moment of the Mutiny of 1857, could have crossed the river into Berar without troops, and held a firm grasp on the passions of an excited people: and the confidence inspired by men of this character largely contributed to save the south of India from the calamities which were devastating the North-

Western Provinces of Bengal. Not only was the maintenance of peace in the Deccan a matter of the utmost importance to the suppression of the disturbances in the North-West, but Colonel Taylor was able most materially to assist the operations of Sir Hugh Rose's army by moving up cattle and supplies, which were indispensable to the sustenance of the troops.

The chief object we have in view in giving this volume to the world, and the chief object of the author in writing it, is to impress upon those who may be called upon to take any part in the administration of India, and especially on the young men who now annually leave our schools and examination papers for that purpose, that their ability, happiness, and success in the great work before them will depend very much on the estimate they form of the native character, and on the respect and regard they show to the natives in the several ranks of society. The highest are on a par with the oldest and proudest aristocracy in the world. The lowest are entitled to be treated as members of an old and civilised society.

Meadows Taylor was never, properly speaking, in the civil service of the East India Company or the Crown, nor did he hold any military appointment in the British Indian army. He was through life an officer of the Nizam. He never even visited Calcutta or Bengal. But the administration of the

Nizam, both civil and military, is, to a certain extent, that of a protected government, and is largely influenced by the decisions and policy of the Governor-General of India in Council.

He remained at Shorapoor many years. When the arrangement was made with the Nizam for the liquidation of the claims of the British Government by the cession of certain portions of territory, the district of Western Berar was placed under the management of Captain Taylor; and the services rendered by him were so far eventually recognised by the Government of India, that he retired, after more than thirty-eight years' service, with the pension of his rank in the British service, not unaccompanied with honorary distinctions which he valued.

The time is past when so adventurous and singular a career is possible in India or elsewhere. The world grows more methodical, and routine takes the place of individual effort. But the same qualities of head and heart are still the only guides to success in the government of a people different from ourselves in race, religion, and manners, but united to Great Britain by a common allegiance and common duties.

HENRY REEVE.

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