The India of the Queen, and Other Essays

Skrine Francis Henry
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Author: Skrine Francis Henry

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THE INDIA OF THE QUEEN
A HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.


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DEDICATION

I dedicate these Essays to the dear memory of their Author, who loved the races of India, and ever strove to reveal their needs and aspirations to his countrymen.

J. H.
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INTRODUCTION

'I do love these Indian races so much, and I do so long to obtain a hearing for India in Europe!' Thus wrote Sir William Hunter in early manhood, when the glamour of the East fell upon him and inspired the guiding principles of his strenuous career. They were 'first to enable England to learn India's wants; next to help England to think fairly of India; and, finally, to make the world feel the beauty and pathos of Indian life.' The firstfruits of this resolve were seen in the 'Annals of Rural Bengal,' which told the ryot's simple story and the blind struggles of his masters at the dawn of British rule. For more than a third of a century no year passed by without its contribution to Indian literature from the same practised and sympathetic pen. Apart from his books, which would fill a library, Sir William Hunter's many-sided energy found an outlet in journalism; and many of his ephemerides have a value extending far beyond the day for which they were written. Lady Hunter has made a selection of the most noteworthy; and she is deeply indebted to the editors of 'The Times,' the 'Pioneer' of Allahabad, the 'Nineteenth Century,' the 'Fortnightly' and 'Contemporary' Reviews: to Messrs. Smith & Elder and Messrs. W. H. Allen & Co. for permission to reproduce them in a permanent form.

In 1887 Sir William Hunter bade farewell to the land which he had served so well, and returned to English life. A time when the innermost fibres of our national existence were stirred by the first Jubilee was propitious for a review of the
changes which had passed over India during the Victorian era. He complied with a request that he should describe them in 'The Times'; and 'The India of the Queen' afforded him some solace in the deep distress caused by the loss of his only daughter. These brilliant essays were published in the leading journal between November 4 and December 8, 1887; and they attracted wide notice by the grace of their style and the sympathy which thrills in every line. 'The Expansion of India,' with which the series opens, enunciates a truth which had been grasped by no previous writer. As in physics the greater attracts the less, so the possession of India had, in fifty years, converted our group of islands set in a Northern sea from a European into an Asiatic Power. Russia is undergoing the self-same evolution, and the forces let loose in its progress will change the whole current of civilisation. In India the process has assumed three well-marked phases. The first was an era of conquest; and its presiding spirit was the Marquis of Dalhousie, whose life-story was told by Sir William Hunter in 1891. Entering on his high office with an earnest desire to promote peace and material progress, he believed himself compelled by the inexorable logic of events to annex the Punjab, Oudh, and the greater portion of Burma. This policy was one of the many causes of the cataclysm of 1857, which is a landmark in Indian history. Speaking broadly, the Mutiny came of an attempt to centralise while the moral and material appliances were wanting which alone could weld all India into a homogeneous whole. It was not merely difference of race and language which kept its peoples apart; for we have again and again seen alien communities knit together by loyalty to a common Head. Nor was it even divergence of religion, which is independent of racial distinctions and sometimes destroys them. The nations of India were isolated by the distances of their peninsula, which is fifteen times larger than the United Kingdom and is scarred by rivers and mountain ranges on an almost inconceivable scale. A strong central government became