GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE
INDIAN TEXTS SERIES

When on an archaeological tour in India in the cold season of
1899-1900, I obtained the honour of an interview with the
Viceroy, and was permitted to lay before him the outline of a
scheme for the publication of a series of books of reference on
the history of India. Lord Curzon was pleased so far to approve
of the idea that he wished to have the scheme laid in fuller detail
before him. Accordingly, on my return home, I submitted a draft
scheme to the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society. This received
the approval of the Council, and the following letter was addressed
to the Government of India:

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY,
22, ALBEMARLE STREET,
LONDON, W.,
June 12, 1900.

SIR,

I am desired by the President and Council of this Society
to ask you to be kind enough to lay the following considerations
before His Excellency the Viceroy.

The Society venture to ask the Government of India to take
into consideration the desirability of publishing a series of histori-
cal volumes corresponding to the Rolls Series and the publications
of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, published by the
English Government.

It is perhaps unnecessary to point out how great have been
the results of the publication long ago of two such volumes.
The ‘Mémoires sur les Conrées Occidentales,’ translated by
Julien from the Chinese of Hiouen Thsang, and published by
the French Government in 1857, have been the foundation of
almost all that has been written since on the Archaeology of India.
And the publication, in 1837, by the Government of Ceylon, of
the ‘Great Chronicle’ of that island has afforded evidence on
which many of the main conclusions as to the early history of
India depend.
The cost of such a series as is proposed would be very small. It would be desirable only to undertake such works as are both of real importance, and also of such a character that their publication would not pay commercially—conditions also observed in the case of the Rolls Series. The Society could undertake to produce two volumes annually at a cost of £240 per volume (see detailed estimate annexed), and any sums received by the sale of them could be applied towards the cost of future volumes.

The volumes would consist partly of texts, partly of translations, such as the two above mentioned; partly of indices or dictionaries (similar in method to, but smaller in scale than, Smith's well-known dictionaries) of proper names, personal or geographical, of importance for the history of India; and partly of monographs summarizing the historical data scattered through the numerous Oriental texts now accessible to scholars.

The documents in question would have little or no literary merit. They would be materials out of which the history of the development of the social conditions, the industries, and the political relations of the peoples of India could be reconstructed. The texts to be translated or explored would not be histories in our modern sense, even when they purport to be chronicles. In both these respects they would be like the historical documents published in the Rolls Series.

The series might be called the 'Indian Historical Series.' To be a success it would have to be placed under skilled general editorship, and each volume should be entrusted to a scholar so trained in the methods of historical research as to be able, in introduction, notes, and indices, to gather together or elucidate all the historical information obtainable from the document he edits or explores.

For these reasons it would be desirable that, for the present at least, the series should be supervised here; and the authors of the first volume to appear should be European scholars of the first rank. But the editor might be instructed to make use also of native Indian scholarship whenever it should be possible to do so.

No money would be necessary till January, 1902, as at least eighteen months must elapse, after the approval of the scheme, before any payments would be required.
The above estimate of cost is inclusive—that is, it covers the cost of editorship, authorship, printing, binding, insurance, and other miscellaneous charges—and with the gradual increase of the number of volumes on sale the series would in course of time, it may be hoped, become self-supporting.

The publication of such a series is essential to the future progress of the study of Indian History and Archaeology. And considering the smallness of the amount required and the number of precedents that might be quoted in its favour, this Society venture to hope that the proposed scheme will meet with the approval and support of the Government of India.

I have, etc.,

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS,
Secretary.

After some correspondence the scheme was finally adopted by the Secretary of State for India, in a letter to the Society, dated November 4, 1902, enclosing the following despatch from His Excellency the Governor-General in Council:

To the Right Honourable LORD GEORGE FRANCIS HAMILTON,
His Majesty's Secretary of State for India.
SIMLA,
July 3, 1902,
No. 191 OF 1902.

MY LORD,

We have the honour to forward, for Your Lordship's information, a copy of the correspondence noted in the annexed list, on the subject of a suggestion made by the Royal Asiatic Society, London, regarding the publication by the Indian Government of a series of historical volumes corresponding to the Rolls Series and the publications of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

2. The Society suggest that the volumes should consist partly of texts and partly of translations; and should also include indices or dictionaries of proper names, personal or geographical, of importance for the history of India, and monographs summarizing the historical data scattered through the numerous Oriental texts which are accessible to scholars. The Society are of opinion that, while these documents would have little or no literary merit, they would constitute materials out of which the history of the
development of the social conditions, the industries, and the political relations of the peoples of India could be reconstructed. They suggest that the series might be called the 'Indian Historical Series'; that each volume should be entrusted to a scholar trained in the methods of historical research; that the series should be placed under skilled general editorship in England; and that the editor might be instructed to make use of native Indian scholarship whenever it is possible to do so. The Society offer us their assistance in the matter of publication, and undertake to produce two volumes annually at a cost of £240 per volume.

3. The proposals of the Society meet with our cordial support, and we would make the following suggestions in connection therewith for Your Lordship's approval. We would divide the series into two parts—the one to be called the 'Indian Records Series' and the other the 'Indian Texts Series.' We propose that the 'Indian Records Series' should consist of selections, notes, or compilations from the records of the Indian Governments or of the India Office, supplemented and elucidated where necessary by local inquiry. This series would correspond generally with the English Historical Manuscripts Series, except that the latter deals with private, whereas the former will deal with public records. The greater part of this work would be done in India. But lacunae in our records might often be supplied from the India Office records, and we are of opinion that the general editing of this portion of the work should be done in England.

4. The 'Indian Texts Series' should consist of annotated editions of or translations or abstracts of or compilations from the works of Indian writers, such as Blochmann's 'Ain-i-Akbari,' Stein's 'Raja Tarangini,' Julien's 'Hwen Tsang,' or Beale's 'Buddhist Pilgrims.' As regards less important authors, little more than brief tables of contents would be needed. At the same time, as suggested by the Royal Asiatic Society, indices, dictionaries, and monographs should not be neglected. The former should aim, not so much at complete information as at complete bibliography. The salient facts being given and sufficient information to identify the man or place, mere references would be sufficient to sources of information which are readily accessible to scholars, though information from sources more difficult of access might be abstracted with some fulness. This series would correspond generally with the Rolls Series,
except that it would deal with times prior to British rule. We think that it should be not only edited, but also for the most part written at home, although we would emphasize the suggestion of the Royal Asiatic Society that the editor should be instructed to make use of Indian scholarship (European or Native) to the fullest extent. The management of the series should, however, be left to the Royal Asiatic Society.

5. The two series would thus be quite distinct as regards authorship and editing. We would propose that two volumes a year in each series should be published, and that the Royal Asiatic Society should be entrusted with the publication of both series if, after a scrutiny of their estimate, which we have no means of making, your lordship considers that their terms are reasonable. With this object we would make a grant of Rs. 15,000 a year for the next five years to meet the expenditure involved in the proposals, which we trust will meet with Your Lordship's approval. In that event, we would ask Your Lordship to inform the Royal Asiatic Society of what has been decided upon. We propose to retain in our own hands the decision as to what books should be published in either series, and in what order.

We have, etc.

As will be noticed, the scheme was, by this decision, not only accepted, but doubled; and shortly afterwards the Government added, to be reckoned as extra volumes in the Indian Texts Series, two volumes of the text, and two of the translation of an Arabic history of Gujarat, then recently discovered by Mr. Denison Ross, Principal of the Calcutta Madrasa. Extra volumes have, in like manner, been added to the Indian Records Series. And besides these additions the Government has, in several cases, made extra grants for special illustrations to be inserted in volumes sanctioned under this scheme.

Under the original scheme the Society undertook the publishing; and the proceeds of the sales, without any deduction for publisher's commissions, were to be applied towards the production of future volumes. In this way it was hoped that the scheme would eventually become self-supporting. Since then it has since been thought advisable to place the publishing arrangements in the hands of Mr. Murray; and the India Office has taken
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

charge of the preparation and production of the Records Series, leaving the Texts Series in the hands of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Having accepted the chair of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester, I shall only retain official connection with the scheme long enough to wind up work already commenced under the original publishing arrangements. At the moment of assisting at its launch I have, therefore (though glad to obtain leisure urgently needed for other work), with much regret, to bid it farewell. But it is in able hands. And I may be permitted to express the confident hope that a scheme so generously adopted by Government, and so generously enlarged and improved, will continue through the years to provide a succession of just the sort of books that, as tools to a craftsman, will enable the historian of India to trace out the evolution of social institutions, religion, and literature, in the same manner as the provision of the necessary tools has enabled the historians of Europe to do for the West.

The result cannot fail to be of value for the history of humanity as a whole, for what, in the absence of a better word in English, we are compelled to call Weltgeschichte. Already, in the history of government, of tribal customs, of land tenure, and of marriage, the Indian evidence has been much used by, and has proved of considerable service to, Western scholars. It will certainly prove more so in proportion as it becomes fuller and more exact. There are many similar questions on which the Indian evidence has not been utilized merely because it is not sufficiently known. And there is action and reaction in all these matters. The more the Indian evidence is used and compared with evidence from other sources, the greater is the light thrown upon the real value and bearing and meaning of the facts recorded in India, the clearer are our views of the order in which they should be arranged, the more suggestive and instructive the study tends to be.

To make a few paths and clearings in the thorny jungle of Indian history is not, therefore, mere useless dry-as-dust work. And there is another consideration. It has long been a matter for regret that the natives of India afford us so small a degree of help in the study of the history of their own country or countries. For one Englishman who can read the ancient literatures with facility there must be scores of natives. Yet how
very little of permanent value have they, as yet, accomplished in history. This cannot be for want of intellectual power. As lawyers they show great ability in weighing the value of evidence, and in drawing guarded and reasonable conclusions from complicated documents. And one or two of the native scholars who have devoted their attention to this branch of inquiry have rendered excellent service. Perhaps the methods of the University examinations in India, in which literary fluency counts for so much, and historical criticism for so little, are in some measure answerable for this neglect. But is it too much to hope that, when this series of scholarly handbooks shall have placed in their hands sufficient examples of the right methods in historical research, some of them may be moved by emulation to take up these studies for themselves, and themselves to join, in much larger numbers, in the work? Is it too much even to expect that a more widely diffused knowledge of the history of their own land; of the cause that led to intellectual achievements, and also to long periods of intellectual decay; of the reasons why the social and economic conditions were in some times and places favourable, in others almost disastrous; of the predisposing factors of the rise and fall of governments—is it too much to expect that knowledge of such questions, and of the many similar ones that are included under the name of history, may incidentally also have its due effect in suggesting and strengthening, among the educated youth of India, high ideals of life and policy?

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS.

Harboro Grange,
Ashton-on-Mersey,
August, 5, 1906.