When one considers the antecedents of the great British Raj, it can easily be forgotten that their advent in India was solely for commercial purposes, with no thought of conquest. It still intrigues historians how a trading company, facing the rivalry of Dutch, Portuguese and French Companies, the vagaries of native Indian rulers, and the changing policies of the capricious Company authorities in Britain, laid the foundations of a great empire.

In these Annals, documents pertaining to the early eighteenth century have been chronologically arranged to form a connected narrative. The compiler, an erudite scholar, has after arduous research presented detailed and lucid introductions. Extracts from the diaries of the Agents vividly portray the early attempts of the British Company to establish themselves in East India, which met with failure time and again. While Volume 1 deals with the period 1704-1710, Volume 2 (1711-1717) has two parts; the first detailing the administration of Wellden, Russell and Hedges, while the second gives an elaborate account of the envoy sent to the Mughal emperor.

Volume 3 covers the period 1718-1722. It becomes evident how the English traders bent only on conducting commerce under the protection of the Indian government gradually had to concede the need for fortified settlements. The early travails of the British coping with an alien land, an insalubrious climate, capricious and arbitrary changes of policy by the Court so many hundred miles away, and the intricacies of Oriental etiquette under the Mughal emperors, are evocatively described.

Historians-students and scholars of medieval and modern Indian history will welcome this reprint of the early days of the British in East India.
THE
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C.R. WILSON

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