'We are of opinion that a Statistical Survey of the country would be attended with much utility: we therefore recommend proper steps to be taken for the execution of the same.' This despatch from the Court of Directors of the East India Company forms the beginning of the history of statistical surveys in India. A comprehensive and coordinated scheme of Statistical Survey for each of the 12 great provinces of the then British India was, however, launched in 1867 as a result of a directive received from the Secretary of State. The work was entrusted to W.W. Hunter, the then Director-General of Statistics to the Government of India. The Statistical Account of the then provinces of Bengal and Assam comprising 59 districts was prepared under his personal supervision.

The Statistical Account of Bengal was published in 20 volumes. Each volume proceeds on a uniform pattern: Starting with a description of geography, general aspects, physical features, etc., of each district, it proceeds to a description of its people, their occupations, ethnic divisions and creeds, their material condition and distribution into town and country. Agriculture follows with very revealing information on land tenures, prices and wages, rates of rent and size of holdings, and the natural calamities to which the district is subject. Commerce, means of communication, manufactures, capital and interest, and other industrial aspects form the next item. The working of District Administration is then discussed in great detail: its revenue and expenditure; the statistics of protection to person and property, the police, the jails, and the criminal classes; the statistics of education and of the post office, with notices of any local institution, and the statistics of the Administrative Subdivisions. Each

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Volume IX.

Districts of Murshidábád and Pábná.

The Account of Pábná has been compiled by M. H. Kisch, Esq., C.S.,
Assistant to the Director-General of Statistics.

Trübner & Co., London 1876.
PREFACE TO VOLUME IX.

OF THE

STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF BENGAL.

This volume treats of Murshidábád, the metropolitan District of Lower Bengal in the last century, and of Pábná, the District which has become the central mart for the great new staple of Bengal in the present day. Murshidábád forms one of the few examples of a District which has declined in opulence and importance under British rule. In 1765 we found it overflowing with the wealth of a luxurious court and capital; during the early years of our Government it continued to be the seat of the supreme civil and criminal tribunals; nor was it until 1790 that the final appeal in criminal suits was definitively transferred from the 'mutilated Chiefship' to Calcutta. Murshidábád, moreover, was the commercial not less than the political capital of Lower Bengal. The great native bankers kept their hoards within its walls. Kásimbázár, in its immediate neighbourhood, formed the site of one of the oldest and most splendid of the Company's mercantile settlements. The history of Murshidábád during the last century was the history of Lower Bengal. It is now a decaying rural town; and of the fortified
warehouses of Kásimbázár, all that remains are some brick ruins in a swamp.

The existence of Pábná, as a separate District, dates only from 1832; and it was not till 1859 that it became altogether a separate administrative unit. Lying at the point of the angle formed by the convergence of the Ganges and Bráhma-putra, it commands the two river highways of Eastern India. Its marts, often of mushroom growth, have become centres for collecting and re-distributing the exports and imports of rich provinces; and the Sirájganj merchants transact, on an arid sandbank, half the jute trade of Bengal. The rural population have proved themselves quick to appreciate and to act upon the rights which English rule secures to rich and poor. They have fought out with keen persistence, but with few ebullitions of violence, the struggle between landlord and tenant, and are conducting before our eyes an agrarian revolution by due course of law.

The Districts of Murshidábád and Pábná, dealt with in this volume, contained in 1872 a population of 2,565,220 souls, and covered an area, as estimated for the Census of that year, of 4616 square miles. I beg to express my obligations to my friend Mr. J. S. Cotton, late Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, for his help in compiling the Murshidábád Account.

W. W. H.

1876.