WILEY

A History of British India. by William Wilson Hunter

Review by: W. J. Ashley

The Economic Journal, Vol. 10, No. 39 (Sep., 1900), pp. 370-372

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of the [Royal Economic Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2957220>

Accessed: 21/12/2014 15:52

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Wiley and Royal Economic Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Economic Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

REVIEWS

A History of British India. By SIR WILLIAM WILSON HUNTER, K.C.S.I., &c. Vol. I. To the Overthrow of the English in the Spice Archipelago. (London: Longmans.) 1899. Pp. 475.

THE delay in noticing this book in these pages is the more regrettable, since it has deprived me of the opportunity of joining, during the lifetime of its lamented author, in the chorus of praise with which it has deservedly been received. But it has enabled me the better to judge of its effect upon a body of readers to whom Sir William Hunter was evidently anxious to appeal. With a statesman-like prescience, he concluded his preface with the following words:

America starts on her career of Asiatic rule with an amplitude of resources, and with a sense of moral responsibility which no previous state of Christendom brought to the work. . . . I hail their advent in the East as a new power for good, not alone for the island races who come under their care, but also in that great settlement of European spheres of influence in Asia, which, if we could see aright, forms a world-problem of our day.

During the academic year now closing, I have prescribed this book, among some two score others, to a large class of students of Economic History in Harvard University. And somewhat to my surprise, it has interested them far more than any of the others, though several of those are interesting enough. Two or three men have even told me that they were glad they had taken that "course," if only because it had led them to read "Hunter." And this must be ascribed, in equal measure perhaps, both to its qualities of style and to its direct appeal to their sense of duty as Americans. For, indeed, events are already beginning to show that with the annexation of the Philippines began a new chapter in the history of the East. It may be some time before the new formulæ are devised for American diplomacy, but the present trouble with the Boxers has given American statesmen an opportunity to show that they are equal, at any rate, to that task. "Without violating its unbroken practice," we are told, "in *refusing to join any concert of action* taken by the representatives at Peking of other Govern-

ments, the Secretary of State has instructed the American minister in China *to act on parallel lines* with those representatives!"

Sir William Hunter had a great opportunity, and this first volume shows that, had he lived, he would have known how to use it. There existed,—and now we have to say, there still exists,—no standard narrative history of British India save that of James Mill; and Mill's work, in spite of Wilson's notes, sufficiently betrays the fact that it was written in 1817. Since that time whole branches of Oriental learning have come into existence; and, moreover, during the last two or three decades, the early records of European traders in the East have been made accessible by a series of model publications. Such volumes as the *Court Records* and the *First Letter Book* of the East India Company enable the reader to penetrate into every detail of the first English ventures, and to realise, as never before, their relation to contemporary business. And on the history of the Portuguese and Dutch trade, also, there has of late years been a stream of scholarly publications. It was the task of Sir William Hunter to bring together in orderly fashion this new material, and to present it in an attractive form to the general public.

It must not be regarded as ingratitude if I add that, valuable as is Sir William Hunter's work, there are sides of the subject to which he gives scant attention, which yet are of first importance for any complete understanding of his subject. It must, I am aware, seem like Mr. Dick's devotion to King Charles' Head when I add that these sides of the subject are the economic. But a moment's reflection will justify the criticism. Why did Europeans wish to reach the East Indies? For trade, says Sir William Hunter, and truly enough. But he nowhere tells us definitely what the trader went for, and why he went for it. The reader will pick up, after a time, some references to spices, and if he is very alert, he will perceive a difference between finer and coarser spices. But all this should have been distinctly set forth and explained, not only for its bearing on the 17th century, but because a gradual change in European habits of consumption, leading to a change in commercial demand, was one of the great underlying facts which determined the fortunes of the East Indies in the 18th century. Or again, it is implied that the failure of the English company in its struggle with the Dutch for the Spice Islands was due in the main to the contrast between the settled national policy of the Dutch Government and "the quicksand diplomacy of the first James and Charles." A wise policy can do much, but it can no more dispense with capital when it is a matter of trade than a man can lift himself by his bootstraps. Our author hastens to add that on the side of the Dutch there was "a vast national subscription," while England "cared to risk only a small capital." But the question for the philosophical historian is, Had England anything but a small capital to risk? And he will ask the other question, Whence did Holland derive its larger resources? It will be found, I think, that much of the capital of

Amsterdam which went into the Eastern ventures, was in its origin Antwerp capital, which had for a couple of generations been there engaged in the distribution of Portuguese spices over Western Europe. As Temple wrote in his book on the Netherlands, "Before the Revolts, the subjects of the Low Countries . . . had become versed in the ways and sensible of the infinite gains of the trade of the Indies. And after the Union, a greater confluence of people falling down into the United Provinces than could manage their stock or find employment at land, great multitudes turned their endeavours to sea, and fell not only into the trade of England, France and the Northern Seas, but ventured upon that of the East Indies."

And yet it goes hard even with the economist to point out deficiencies in Sir William Hunter's work when he remembers the two chapters (VI and VII) in which he deals with the tangled subject of the Separate Voyages (1601—1612), and the creation of the first Joint Stock. We should be glad to hear that Sir William Hunter had left sufficient manuscript behind him to furnish at least an additional chapter or so; and if such were printed we should expect to find a lucid account of what Mill leaves so very obscure—the period of Separate Joint Stocks, from 1612 till towards the end of the Commonwealth.

W. J. ASHLEY

England in the Age of Wycliffe. By GEORGE MACAULAY TREVELYAN. (London: Longmans, Green and Co.) 1899. Pp. vii, 380.

The Peasants' Rising and the Lollards. A collection of unpublished documents forming an Appendix to *England in the Age of Wycliffe*. Edited by EDGAR POWELL and G. M. TREVELYAN. (London: Longmans, Green and Co.) 1899. Pp. xiii, 81.

The End of Villainage in England. By THOMAS WALKER PAGE. Publications of the American Economic Association, 3rd series, vol. i, No. 2. (New York: Macmillan; London: Swan, Sonnenschein and Co.) 1900. Pp. 99.

MR. TREVELYAN's interesting style, and his pleasant gift of epigram—qualities worthy of the names he bears—have given his book on the Age of Wycliffe a merited success. But the Peasants' Rising—which forms the subject of the chapter to which the economist will naturally first turn—is hardly the sort of theme with which Mr. Trevelyan's qualities are most competent to deal. In describing the cause of the movement itself Mr. Trevelyan is at his best; and the documents printed in 1896 by Mr. Edgar Powell (*The East Anglia Rising*), and those subsequently transcribed by him for Mr. Trevelyan, have made it possible to add a good many picturesque details, and to determine more precisely the districts affected. But in the discussion of the