

Sir John Lawrence had thus extended to the cultivators of Oudh and the Punjab the protection which Canning had given to the ryots of Bengal. 'No more useful or beneficent legislation', says a distinguished Indian economist and historian, 'was ever undertaken by the British Government in India . . . legislation which respected the great and protected the weak, and which was based on the unwritten customs and ancient rights of India.'¹

Two severe famines visited India during Lawrence's period of office. The first in 1866 was most severe in Orissa, a division of Bengal extending south-west of Calcutta to the northern boundary line of the province of Madras. Though it occupied geographically an apparently favourable central position between two great presidencies of British India, it was in reality isolated to an extraordinary degree owing to its physical features and lack of natural means of communication. On the landward side it was separated from northern and central India by the almost impassable tangle of hills and jungle in which the plateau of Chota Nagpur ends; its seaboard, very badly provided with harbours, was almost unapproachable by ordinary craft for the greater part of the year. The river Mahanadi, in spite of its broad stream and imposing volume of waters, is practically useless for navigation and only potent for destruction through its violent inundations and shifting channels. Most of the roads at that time were impossible for wheeled traffic and only traversable by pack mules; the people as a whole were poor, indolent, backward, and feckless. In such a country the ravages of famine were particularly difficult to deal with. 'The inhabitants', said the Famine Commission Report, 'shut up between pathless jungles and an impracticable sea' were 'in the position of passengers in a ship without provisions'. From one to two millions are said to have perished, and the

¹ R. C. Dutt, *India in the Victorian Age*, 1904, p. 271.