

"One Forest Guard died in Buxa from the effects of blows received when he was endeavouring to extinguish a forest fire into which he was driven by a **rhinoceros**." This is the last sentence of the Progress Report of Forest Administration in the Lower Provinces of Bengal, immediately above the signature of Mr. A. L. McIntire, Officiating Conservator of Forests. We venture to think that Mr. McIntire's meaning would have been more accurately expressed if he had written: "A Forest Guard died in Buxa from the effects of burns received when he was driven by a **rhinoceros** into a forest fire which he was endeavouring to extinguish." As the sentence stands, it reads more like a conceit of Baron Munchausen's than an incident in the prosaic course of Forest Administration. The sentence is a small matter, but when the lack of proper synthesis, which characterises it pervades a whole report, the distraction caused to those who have to read it is by no means inconsiderable. Our idea of an Administration Report is that it should be a compact record of organised experience. The central object should be prominently kept in view, and the mass of details grouped around it in their natural and logical sequence. A sprawling narrative of items is hardly worth the paper on which it is printed, not to speak of the time and expense wasted in its preparation. An expert who rises to the top of his profession generally does so not merely because of his positive knowledge but also, in a measure, because he possesses the power of organisation. We have no doubt that if the reporting officers came to regard this part of their work less as a disagreeable necessity, and more as a valuable and important part of their duties, which it really is, there would be far less room for complaint in respect of their reports. It is easy to exaggerate the value of mere literary ability in the work of administration, but that is not our purpose. A man who knows his subject thoroughly, and is saturated with it, usually develops an unconscious talent of artistic presentation so far as that subject is concerned. If it seems as if this is not true of Indian officials, it is because, we are afraid, Indian official reports are manufactured in the servants' hall, so to speak.

So far as the arrangement and form of the Report of the Bengal Forest Administration goes there is nothing to complain. In the Lieutenant-Governorships especially, the general form of reports is commonly fixed after some very good model, and the work of the officer who has to write the report is considerably lightened. The year under report cannot be described as an year of progress in Forest Administration in Bengal. The protection of forests and their development are the two most important duties of this Department. In both these respects the Bengal Administration has very poor results to show. As regards protection, it is plain that the Department has proved itself to be totally incapable of coping with its work. The number of offences increased by 39 per cent. over that of the previous year. In 74 out of 107 cases of forest fires, the offenders remained undetected, and of the remainder, eight cases are said to have been compounded for special reasons. What these special reasons were is not stated. On general grounds, the practice of "compounding" forest offences is open to the gravest objection, as it opens the door to peculation and extortion. The reasons given for this large increase of offences are far from convincing. In one locality, it "is supposed to be due to the wearing off of the effects of punishments inflicted in previous years!" We trust the Bengal Government will take early measures to strengthen its Forest staff and to infuse into it greater energy and resourcefulness. Let the number of offences be restricted if need be to the more serious forms, but let there be no mistake about the intention of Government to treat them really as offences. When out of a total of 3,500 cases 3,266 cases are compounded at the rate of Rs. 4-12-3 per head of the offenders, the Forest Laws cease to be penal and should be classed as fiscal. When we come to the development of Forests, the Report says: "It appears to be generally understood by Divisional Officers that, at the present time, the improvement of Forests under their charge depends mainly, or almost entirely, on the encouragement of the natural reproduction of valuable indigenous trees, by careful protection of the forests, by preventing fires, and by comparatively inexpensive improvement fellings, including creeper-cutting, where such works are required." It is curious, however, that in the Pari division the reproduction of *sal* was good in the reserves but poor in the protected forests. The remarks contained in the last Report of

the Forêt, Administration in the Central Provinces regarding the freer reproduction in forests where grazing is allowed under precautions than in the strictly protected areas, would seem to derive confirmation from the experience of Pari. The attempts made at artificial reproduction have generally been failures, except in the case of rubber which is now said to have passed the stage of experiment.