



The Committee began its labours by directing, on the motion of Governor Johnstone, an inquiry into the conduct of individuals who, whether in the civil or military service of the Company, had amassed great wealth in India. This inquiry, unanimously agreed to, virtually placed Lord Clive upon his trial.

In the examination to which Lord Clive and other witnesses were subject before this Committee, the connection of the former with Bengal from the beginning of 1757 to the close of 1760, and again from 1765 to 1767, was rigidly scrutinised. The negotiations with Siráju'd daulah, the affair of Amíchand, the presents received from Mír J'afar, the grant of the jaghír, the legacy, the regulations regarding trade, and every matter bearing more or less directly upon these main headings, were brought up, virtually as criminal charges. The prosecution, for so it was except in name, was conducted with all the ability which the concentrated hatred of the enemies of the intended victim could command. Lord Clive himself was subjected to a cross-examination of a most minute and searching character. He was questioned not merely as to what he had done, but as to the motives which prompted his action, the ends at which he had been aiming; whilst his enemies endeavoured directly, and, when a direct purpose could under no circumstances be imagined, by insinuation, to prove that in everything he had been actuated by corrupt or selfish motives. His very accusers sat in judgment upon him, for the hostile sentiments of almost every member of the Committee were not concealed.



In these trying circumstances Lord Clive displayed a dignity and a resolution that could not fail to command respect. His bearing was the bearing of a proud man, standing on his right, assailed by men whom he had righteously baffled. He admitted and justified all that he had done. His treatment of Amichand and his attaching of Admiral Watson's name to the treaty were necessitated, he argued, by the state of affairs. He believed that Mr. Lushington had been authorised by the Admiral to sanction the signature of his name. Under similar circumstances he would act similarly. He admitted the receipt of enormous sums from Mír J'afar, but protested that no obligation of morality or public faith had been thereby violated. Having become, by the victory of Plassey, the arbiter of the situation, with a prince dependent upon his pleasure, an opulent city at his feet, its greatest bankers contending for his smiles, he himself walking through vaults, piled on either hand with gold and jewels, thrown open to him alone, "I stand at this moment," he exclaimed, "astonished at my own moderation!"

At last the Committee made its reports. The first report contained the evidence taken regarding the first administration of Lord Clive; the second referred to the causes which led to the war with Mír Kásim under his successor. These reports were presented to Parliament on the 26th May, printed, and circulated throughout the kingdom in the hope that the feeling they would create against Clive would lead to his inevitable disgrace. But the



enemies of Clive had acted like the ostrich. It is true that the publication of the reports did influence the mind against Clive and against others who had taken money from native princes, but it told with far greater effect against the authors of the prosecution, the Court of Directors and their friends. It convicted them not only of misgovernment, but of an inaptitude for affairs, an ignorance, and a want of grasp which ruined them in the minds of all intelligent observers.

Amongst a large class, indeed, Clive did not suffer by the publication of his evidence. His manly bearing, his self-assertion, his very admissions conciliated their esteem. Nothing had been proved against him which he had not previously avowed. The miscarriage, then, of the clique which had whispered the certainty of disclosures more fatal to his fame as an honest man than any of which the world had been cognisant, produced an effect the reverse of that which his enemies had hoped for. The King took the lead in the manifestation of this change of intelligent public feeling in his favour. Three weeks after the reports of the Committee had been laid upon the table of the House of Commons Clive was nominated and installed as a Knight of the Bath. The Prime Minister, Lord North, and the Secretary of State, Lord Rochfort, seemed to follow in the same direction. The Lord-Lieutenancy of the county of Salop having fallen vacant, Lord Rochfort, with the approval of the Prime Minister, caused it to be intimated to Clive that if the office were agreeable to him they would have



pleasure in submitting his name to the King. The result was that on the 9th October Clive kissed hands for the Lieutenancy of Salop, and in the December following for that of Montgomeryshire.

These civilities renewed the friendly relations of Clive with the Cabinet, and in the winter of that year he drew up and submitted to it the outlines of a measure which had for its object a complete reform in the home-administration of India and the transfer of the territorial sovereignty to the Crown.

But his enemies, though baffled, were not yet beaten. What their action was will be presently related. To the right understanding of it I must first show how the proceedings of the House of Commons tended to give them the opportunity they desired.

When the session of 1773 opened, the Select Committee, of which Colonel Burgoyne was Chairman, resumed its labours. But Lord North at the same time asked and obtained the appointment of a Committee of Secrecy, to be composed of thirteen members, with power to examine the books of the Company and to report to the House upon the state of debts and credits set forth therein, as well as on the system of management generally. The Committee was further directed to state whether or not, in their judgment, the Court of Directors should be allowed to act as, in their despair, they had proposed to act; viz. to send six gentlemen to India to supervise their affairs in that country.

Then was presented the remarkable circumstance



of two committees sitting at the same time, the animus of one being directed to compass the ruin of Lord Clive; the animus of the other being the destruction of the East India Company. The double inquisition resulted, as might have been expected, in a fiasco. The Select Committee proved numberless instances of corrupt reception of money from native chieftains; the Secret Committee convicted the Company of the grossest mismanagement. Despairing of untying, without a labour for which he was constitutionally unfitted, the Gordian knot, Lord North made over the papers of both committees to his attorney-general, Sir John Thurlow, who undertook to devote the Easter recess to examining them, and to make a proposition afterwards. He was true to his word. On the close of the Easter holidays he attended a meeting of the Cabinet summoned specially for the purpose, and informed its members that he had found the affairs of the Company to be so involved, alike from the misconduct of their servants and their own maladministration, that he could see no alternative but to pass through Parliament a measure which should confiscate to the public all the sums acquired by the servants of the Crown and of the Company in India, under the denomination of presents from Indian princes, on the plea that inasmuch as those presents had been obtained by the military force of the country, they belonged properly to the State. The proposal was, as might have been expected, ill-received by many members of the Ministry, and the Cabinet broke up without coming to a decision.



It was, nevertheless, this proposition of Sir John Thurlow's which formed the basis of the new attack against Lord Clive. After the re-assembly of Parliament, Burgoyne, Sullivan, and their friends had resumed attacks which Clive had no difficulty in repulsing—with loss to his accusers. But on the 10th May, Colonel Burgoyne, who a month previously had brought up the third and fourth reports of his committee, and who, in the interval, had been informed of Thurlow's proposal, made his grand demonstration. This took the form of three resolutions, which he proposed to the House to pass. These resolutions ran thus:—First, "that all acquisitions made under the influence of a military force, or by treaty with foreign princes, did of right belong to the State." Secondly, "that to appropriate acquisitions so made to the private emolument of persons entrusted with any civil or military power of the State is illegal." Thirdly, "that very great sums of money, and other valuable property, had been acquired in Bengal from princes and others of that country by persons entrusted with the civil and military powers of the State by means of such powers; which sums of money and valuable property have been appropriated to the private use of such persons."

It would have been difficult to make charges more direct against Lord Clive. Every line in the resolutions pointed at him. If doubt had been possible, Colonel Burgoyne took care to dispel every shadow of it in his speech introducing the resolutions. In that speech all the delinquencies, real



and imaginary, of the victor of Plassey, were emphasised with a bitterness not to be surpassed. Tracing all the misfortunes which had befallen the Company to the treasonable compact which deposed Siráju'd daulah and placed Mír J'afar on his seat, and condemning the "black perfidy" which alone had rendered such a policy possible, Burgoyne denounced the treatment of Amíchand, the forging of the name of Admiral Watson; the subsequent agreement with Mír J'afar which had procured enormous sums, extorted, he said, by military force, under the guise of presents, to the leading servants of the Company in Bengal. The proceedings of the second administration were dealt with in the same bitter and unsparing manner. Before he sat down the orator declared to the House that if the resolutions should meet with their approbation he would not stop there, but would follow them up with others, his object being to compel those who had acquired sums of money in the manner he had stated to make a full and complete restitution.

I pass over the speeches in support of and in opposition to the resolutions, to notice that delivered by Lord Clive. Sketching at some length his own career, especially that part of it under the review of the House, Clive claimed a title to the gratitude of his country. The rewards and honours he had received he balanced against the services he had rendered. To be exposed to calumny and slander was always the lot of a man who had rooted out abuses. The throne itself had not been free from



similar attacks. If such charges were encouraged in high places able men would be disinclined to take upon themselves posts of responsibility and danger. He then replied once again to Burgoyne's charges; defended the legality of accepting presents under the circumstances of the time; and concluded by declaring that if the record of his services at the India Office, if the defence twice made in that House, if the approbation he had already met with, did not constitute an answer to the attack made upon him, he could make no other.

The resolutions were, however, carried. Burgoyne then proceeded to fulfil the promise he had made to follow them up. On the 17th May he brought forward the following resolutions: "That it appears to this House that the Right Honourable Robert Lord Clive, Baron of Plassey, in the kingdom of Ireland, about the time of the deposition of Siráju'd daulah, and the establishment of Mír J'afar on the masnad, through the influence of the powers with which he was entrusted as member of the Select Committee and Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces, did obtain and possess himself of two lakhs of rupees as Commander-in-Chief, a further sum of two lakhs and eighty thousand rupees as member of the Select Committee, and a further sum of sixteen lakhs or more, under the denomination of a private donation; which sums, amounting together to twenty lakhs and eighty thousand rupees, were of value, in English money, of two hundred and thirty-four thousand pounds; and that in so doing the said Robert Clive



abused the power with which he was entrusted, to the evil example of the servants of the public, and to the dishonour and detriment of the State."

In his speech in support of this resolution, Burgoyne went over the same ground he had traversed in his previous oration, and he concluded by begging the House to put aside all partiality and prejudice; to sanction an act of national justice; "to imitate the first example of antiquity, and strike, like Manlius, when the justice of the State requires it."

Clive replied in the most tactical speech he had ever delivered. He first recapitulated his services, and invited attention to the fact that the India Office and the Crown, being in possession of the general tenor of the circumstances upon which his accuser had dwelt, had repeatedly thanked him for those services; he then exposed the interested and revengeful motives of the men who had instigated the attack, sparing not even those in high places, who, from various causes had allowed themselves to sanction it; turning from that subject, he asked prominent attention to the fact that the India Office, now his accuser, had almost forced him to proceed for a second time to Bengal, and had expressed a deep regret that his health had not allowed him to stay there longer. "After certificates such as these, Sir," he concluded, "am I to be brought here like a criminal, and the very best parts of my conduct construed into crimes against the State?"

Stating that the resolution, if carried, would confiscate all he possessed in the world except his paternal fortune of five hundred pounds a year, he continued:



“ But on this I am content to live ; and, perhaps, I shall find more real content of mind and happiness than in the trembling affluence of an unsettled fortune. But, Sir, I must make one more observation. If the definition of the honourable gentleman (Colonel Burgoyne) and of this House, that the State, as expressed in these resolutions, is, *quoad hoc*, the Company, then, Sir, every farthing I enjoy is granted to me. But to be called upon, after sixteen years have elapsed, to account for my conduct in this manner, and, after an uninterrupted enjoyment of my property, to be questioned, and considered as obtaining it unwarrantably, is hard indeed ; it is a treatment I should not think the British Senate capable of. But if such should be the case, I have a conscious innocence within me that tells me my conduct is irreproachable. *Frangas, non flectes*. My enemies may take from me what I have ; they may, as they think, make me poor, but I will be happy. I mean not this as my defence, though I have done for the present. My defence will be heard at that bar ; but, before I sit down, I have one request to make to the House,—that when they come to decide upon my honour they will not forget their own.”

After some further discussion the consideration of the motion was adjourned, and it was ordered that evidence should be heard at the bar. On the 21st May a few witnesses were examined, and Lord Clive's evidence given before the Select Committee was read. The debate on the original motion was then resumed by Mr. Stanley, who proposed to omit



from it the words more directly inculcating the honour of Clive.* Mr. Fuller, who seconded the amendment, carried its intention even further by proposing to strike out the sentence which suggested that the action referred to in the original motion was the consequence of undue influence.† The amendment in its more comprehensive form was debated with great warmth. Clive laboured under the disadvantage of counting amongst his opponents the Prime Minister, the careless and indolent Lord North, the Attorney General, and many of those whose votes were dependent on the action of the Minister. He had against him, likewise, all the influence of the India Office, and of the holders of East India Stock. He was not himself present during the critical part of the debate. He had left the House in an early part of the evening, after having made an impassioned appeal to the House to take, if they would, his fortune, but to leave his honour intact. In his absence his case was managed by the Solicitor General, Wedderburn, afterwards Lord Loughborough. After a protracted debate the House proceeded to a division. The numbers were one hundred and fifty-five in favour of the amendment, ninety-five against it. This division stripped Burgoyne's motion of all its

* "And in so doing, the said Robert Lord Clive abused the powers with which he was intrusted to the evil example of the servants of the public, and to the dishonour and detriment of the State."

† "Through the influence of the powers with which he was entrusted, as a member of the Select Committee, and Commander-in-Chief of the British forces."



rancour. It left it a base narration of facts which no one disputed.* Incensed to see the fruit of their labours vanish from their grasp, the opponents of Lord Clive made a desperate effort to restore the battle. One of the most influential amongst them rose, after the result of the division had been declared, and moved, "that Lord Clive did, in so doing, abuse the powers with which he was entrusted, to the evil example of the servants of the public."

The House had declared itself strongly in the preceding division against the introduction of any words which could be interpreted as affixing a stigma to the name of Clive, and it was not prepared to eat its own words at the dictation of a minority. After a brief discussion, the previous question was carried without a division. Finally, at 5 o'clock in the morning, the friends of Lord Clive succeeded in inducing the House to accept, by an unchallenged vote, a motion which brought the long contest to a close. The House passed the resolution: "That Robert, Lord Clive, did, at the same time, render great and meritorious services to his country."

* "That it appears to this House that the Right Honourable Robert, Lord Clive, Baron of Plassey in the Kingdom of Ireland, about the time of the deposition of Siráju'd daulah, and the succession of Mír J'afar on the masnad, did obtain and possess himself of two lakhs of rupees as Commander-in-Chief, a further sum of two lakhs and eighty thousand rupees as member of the Select Committee, and a further sum of sixteen lakhs or more, under the denomination of a private donation; which sums, amounting together to twenty lakhs and eighty thousand rupees, were of the value, in English money, of two hundred and thirty-four thousand pounds."



As long as the contest, so deeply affecting his character, had continued, Lord Clive had borne up against it with a manliness, a courage, and a fortitude worthy of all praise. It had been a heart-breaking effort for one who felt that he, and he alone, had given to his country an empire larger than the two islands which constitute the home of her children. But the strain had been too great for a mind which from its early days had been subject to prolonged fits of melancholy, and for a constitution which had been shattered not less by exposure and disease, than by the remedies which that disease had necessitated.* The mental relief caused by the excitement of the opposition was followed by a reaction almost permanent in its character. It is true that there were occasions when—to use the words of the brilliant essayist—"his genius flashed through the gloom." His condition, however, had passed almost beyond the region of hope. It was in vain that, immediately after the breaking up of Parliament he visited Bath; that, finding the waters of that place had lost their accustomed virtue, he then proceeded to the continent. By degrees correspondence with his numerous and attached friends, which had constituted one of his greatest resources in his trials and difficulties, became irksome to him. The increasingly acute pain caused by his bodily infirmities, especially by gall-stones, gradually but steadily worked an effect upon his

* To give relief to the pain which his maladies caused him, Clive had been forced to take increasing quantities of opium.



mental system. The travels abroad failed permanently to benefit him. After his return to England in 1774 the disease, working in two directions, continued to make progress. His mind had not the sustaining power which the consciousness that his great services were rightly appreciated by his fellow-countrymen would have given it. Far from that, the conviction that he was an object of hatred to many, and that his enemies, whom he knew to be as corrupt as they were unscrupulous, had the ear of the public, and had roused against him a mass of hatred and prejudice hardly to be surpassed, tended to sap the basis of the sustaining power which throughout the crisis had supported him. Little wonder, then, that under an acute paroxysm of intense pain, the mind, weakened and disappointed, gave way, or that, at such a moment, he should have been tempted to try the remedy which had failed him in his youth. - He died by his own hand on the 22nd November 1774, just after he had completed his forty-ninth year.



CHAPTER XX.

CHARACTER.

THE character of Lord Clive is an open book which all who run may read. He possessed, above all things, genius. But that genius, uncultivated in early youth, transferred in manhood to a stage in which the higher virtues knew no place, where successful speculation at first in trade, and afterwards in the larger scheme of territorial aggrandisement, at the expense of rivals less skilful or of a race physically inferior, was the end and aim of existence, never acquired that exquisite sensibility which a more refined training might have given it. Like the genius of Napoleon, it remained to the last as rough as when it was hewn from the rock of nature, and not only as rough, but as disfigured by the mire and the clay which were adhering to it at the beginning. It is possible that a training of a higher character, earlier surroundings of a loftier and more refined tone, might have purified it entirely. It is, I say, possible: it is by no means certain. Nature might have asserted herself to the very end.

But that genius was there, a genius at first undefined, impatient of control, striving to burst its bonds, is undeniable. In his boyhood it gave evidence of its existence by the fascination which its owner exercised over his companions. They obeyed without a murmur the orders of this untutored being who hated learning, and who protested in all his actions against the discipline of a school. One of his masters, and one only, had the wit to discover the latent germs, which, undeveloped, made this boy to differ so much from other boys. But even he failed to guide them. The moral nature of the lad remained, during the entire period of school training, absolutely untouched by the discipline of his masters. It emerged from school-training as crude, as raw, as unpolished, as at the beginning. Beyond the most elementary education, Clive had imbibed no instruction which could discipline his mind. He entered the world at the age of nineteen an unlettered savage, unfit, as his friends painfully acknowledged, as he himself felt, to enrol himself in any of the professions open to a man of his position, qualified only by the power he felt within him for a life of adventure.

He went to India. For the first time he writhed under the restraints of real discipline. In a climate in which, for eight months in the year, out-door pursuits except in the very early morning or in the evening are forbidden, he was forced to apply himself to sedentary occupations as uninteresting as they were distasteful. He no longer possessed there the resources which, at school, had enabled him to



glide lightly through the hours of nominal labour. He had no congenial friends, no admiring comrades, with whom to plan, during those hours, the daring projects to be executed as soon as they should be free. Forced into communion with himself he found still no resources. He wanted action, and there was no action. Nor did the atmosphere around him contribute to alleviate the gloom induced by this introspection. From morning to night and from night to morning but one idea irradiated the scene. That idea was how, by private trade, sufficient money might be accumulated to enable each man entitled to trade privately to return with a fortune to his native land. And was it for this that he had come to India? Was it that, after years of drudgery in a bad climate, he might accumulate an income sufficient to enable him to live in the country he had quitted because he panted for the action which in it was denied him? The thought was intolerable. We can scarcely wonder that the despair produced by a contemplation of the only possible future before him drove him to attempt his existence. What was life to him, if life was to be drudgery to end only in vacuity?

Suddenly the scene changed. Action, after all, had become possible in India. The aggression of the French drove Clive and his co-patriots from Madras to Fort St. David. There he took part in the defence of that place against the attacks directed against it by Dupleix. A world gradually opened out to him in which he felt qualified to play a part. He recognised intuitively his fitness for the new situa-

tion. The instincts of his boyhood, the instincts which had commanded the obedience of his fellows, returned to him as fresh and as strong as they had been in those early days. Only, here, he was under restrictions : he was shut out from command : he was simply a volunteer, prevented even from offering suggestions or from criticising audibly the operations of others.

The new world had, then, its drawbacks. Genius had found action, it is true, but it was not the spontaneous action which is the fruit of its own vivid inspiration. Imagine Napoleon under the command of Cartaux !* We see there Clive under Gingen ! The situation was too intolerable.

Genius revolted ! With the miserable generalship which had forced Gingen to flee before d'Auteuil from Valkonda, Clive would have nought to do. Whatever might be the risk, he would speak out. Careless, then, of consequences ; eager only to show how it might still be possible to remedy the evil ; Clive returned to Fort St. David and communicated with Governor Saunders. Half convinced, but still somewhat distrusting the critic who was not a professional critic, Saunders subjected Clive to new proofs. When these had been satisfactorily given, he transferred him to the military service, and sent him to examine the city beleaguered by the French, and the fall of which would be fatal to the interests of which he had charge. Clive went, saw, and

* One of the incapable Generals under whom Bonaparte served before Toulon.



reported. The clear nature of his reports, the decided character of his recommendations, completed the influence he had gained over Saunders. Thenceforward every trammel was removed.

At last genius was unfettered. The result was seen at Arkát, at Kávérípák, at Trichinápalli. The military conduct of Clive at those places, alike in protracted defence and in brilliant attack, his masterly combinations, his coolness and daring in danger, under surprise, his quick eye to seize every point of the situation, entitle him to a place amongst great captains. If he made a mistake, he repaired it so completely as to cause the enemy to regret that they had endeavoured to take advantage of it. But he made few mistakes. His conceptions were always brilliant, his plans were always masterly, his execution was always effective. In less than eighteen months he had conquered India south of the river Krishna—nominally for Muhammad Ali, really for his own countrymen.

Those months were the most brilliant of his life. They were the first in which he really lived. Existence previously had had so few charms for him that he would have been well content to let it go. But from the moment Saunders gave him leave to march on Arkát, he was born again. The gate to the world, wherein the ideas which overpowered him would have full and free scope, had been opened to him. He had action at last, action of his own creation, action the consequence of the conceptions of his own genius. Then he revelled in life, then he felt all



the buoyancy of existence, the entire correspondence between the brain and the will which makes a strong man irresistible. He lived in those months. The savage of Lostock and Market Drayton had at last found his sphere in which the distorted genius of those early days would develop itself. They were to him what 1796 was to Napoleon. Their effect was not very dissimilar. In the midst of all his triumphs Clive remained a savage still. Genius had asserted itself. The time and the opportunity had not yet arrived for nature!

In due course that time and that opportunity arrived. A visit to England had proved to Clive that his schoolboy instincts were right; that his untutored and undisciplined nature was not trained to mingle with satisfaction in the ordinary social life of England. Again he panted for action. Again did he proceed to India in search of it.

This time action came to seek him. The renown he had gained in Southern India indicated him as the fittest person to recover the lost prestige of the English in Bengal. He proceeded to Bengal, recaptured Calcutta, terrified the Núwáb* who had condoned, if he did not sanction, the slaughter of our countrymen, into the signing of a treaty, the clauses of which he dictated; crushed, in the teeth of his remonstrances, the French settlement on the Huglí; and by these successes obtained for his countrymen a position in the fairest province of India far surpassing any which they had held before. He did not stop there. Partly—at the outset, I believe, entirely—because he



was under orders to return to Madras as soon as he should have restored order in Bengal, and he felt convinced that his departure would be the signal for the renewal of the attack which in the preceding year had been so fatal; partly—as time went on—because in the vacillating and impulsive nature of Siráju'd daulah he had detected the qualities which make their owner an easy prey:—he determined not to abandon his task until he had for ever rendered the Núwáb powerless for mischief. So far his proceedings, so far likewise the end and aim of his policy, need no justification. His open and avowed object being to make the English settlement in Bengal secure against an attack such as that which only a few months earlier had destroyed it, he was bound to take the measures which, in his honour and conscience, he believed to be necessary to attain that end. He knew well that it was his own name—the name of Clive—not the name of the English—which had become a terror to the Núwáb. That prince had driven the English without Clive from their hearths and homes in Calcutta; the English led by Clive had recovered those hearths and homes, had stormed his own town of Huglí, had captured the French settlement, and now threatened him. Every communication between the two had satisfied Clive that his was the name which had frightened the Núwáb, which stood prominently forward as the protector of English interests in Bengal. He was justified, therefore, in resolving, before he should quit Bengal, to render the Núwáb powerless for mischief.



It was only when he came to ponder over the measures he should adopt to carry out this aim that the heavy clay of his baser nature was manifested. The negotiations carried on by means of Amíchand with the wealthy bankers and the discontented nobles of Murshidábád gradually roused into action the passions which, for want of opportunity perhaps, had been dormant in this lower stratum. It can never be congenial to a lofty mind to urge a subordinate to use all his endeavours to induce the influential people with whom he comes in contact to betray their master. To bring himself to incite such a line of conduct was the first step made by Clive in the fatal path of mental degradation. The next step was infinitely more debasing. The negotiations with Amíchand and others at the Court of Murshidábád had given Clive a very exaggerated idea of the treasures at the disposal of the ruling prince. From the carrying out of a measure which should simply render the Núwáb powerless for mischief, his mind passed, then, at a bound, to a scheme which, whilst attaining that end, should at the same time enrich himself. The intelligence received from Murshidábád that there were two highly influential nobles bidding for his support to betray their master, nurtured this conception. Thenceforward it became a deliberate plan. From the moment it took possession of his mind every scruple vanished, the baser nature triumphed; the flaws in the stone which had till then shone out with so pure and bright a lustre became manifest to every observer.



The baser nature triumphed. Revelling in its triumph it caused its master to perpetrate deeds from which, before he had been tempted, Clive himself would have shrunk back with horror. The price to be paid to himself for the death of Sirāju'd daulah—for in the East deposition means death—two hundred and thirty-four thousand pounds, was a great temptation to the man who, only thirteen years before, had landed in Madras a penniless and unfriended lad. It was a temptation so great, so absorbing, that to clutch at the amount the baser nature had no thought for the victim—the misguided boy still in his teens—who might yet, with opportunity, redeem the faults of his early training. One word from Clive could have ensured that his life, at least, should be spared; the baser nature would not allow him to speak that word. Was it to be expected that it should? It had already made of him the betrayer of the agent who had served him well, who had woven the plot which was to give him the wealth he coveted! Had he one single feeling of sympathy for the wretch whom his falseness drove to madness? He speaks of him throughout his correspondence as a miserable tool who was to be discarded because he had demanded too much, and the threatened betrayal by whom of the plot against Sirāju'd daulah would have been fatal to his plans.

The very thought that when so close to accomplishment those plans might fail, that, through the action of one man he might be baulked of the fortune dangling before his eyes, roused the baser nature to



the committal of a deed which for ever stamps its perpetrator. It made of Clive a forger!

The deed accomplished, the price of treason paid, genius once more re-asserted itself. Not, however, the pure unalloyed genius of the Southern India days, genius revelling in its freedom from swathing bonds, genius able to execute the plans it had conceived. No; side by side with that genius stalked the baser nature, the nature which, having tasted, continued to cry "Give, give!" Thus having, by an insistence on the prompt payment of the price of treason, reduced the supplanter of Sirájū'd daulah to the position of a dependant, unable, without his aid, to maintain order amongst his subjects, still less to repel foreign invasion, Clive insisted that for every service rendered there should be a corresponding reward. Sometimes the reward took the shape of money paid to the general coffers, but the baser nature never forgot the interests of its owner. This was especially manifested by the transfer to Clive himself in 1759, as a personal gift, of the zamíndarí of the whole of the districts south of Calcutta, then rented by the Company, and valued at thirty thousand pounds a year. His desperate clinging to this fatal gift, following, as that gift did, other large appropriations, was the main cause of the contentions with the India Office which were a principal factor in the troubles of his later life!

For the second time Clive visited England. Again, in spite of his wealth, his fame, his services, he felt ill at ease in the social life of his native land.



Whispers regarding the means whereby his wealth had been acquired had preceded him. His title to the estates which brought him, by his own admission, twenty-seven thousand pounds a year, was questioned. If he was not then looked upon with the suspicion which all but overwhelmed him at a later period, his society was not courted. Command virtually irresponsible had given him a brusqueness of manner which did not conciliate, nor did the stern expression of a countenance never well-favoured prepossess men in his favour. His ambition, too, was thwarted. He failed to obtain a seat in the House of Commons, he quarrelled with the India Office; he recognised every day that his achievements in Bengal were appreciated far below their value. He was inwardly intensely relieved when he was suddenly invited to return to that Presidency, to restore there the order which had disappeared on his departure.

The disorder which had supervened on his departure from the provinces he had conquered is to be traced to himself. His successors had made of his example a principle, and had carried that principle into the transactions of every-day life. Following the lines which he had laid down, the Government of Bengal had twice during the four years of his absence sold to the highest bidder the *Súbahdári* of the three provinces. A principle which governed the disposal of the highest office in the state had come very rapidly to be applied to every office. Free-trade licenses, the monopoly of certain grades of the Company's servants,



were sent likewise into the market. Justice was bought and sold. Honour, morality, virtue, the sense of right and wrong, had disappeared. The literature of the period, of which some exists still, proves that, from highest to lowest, corruption, and all the baser children of corruption, reigned supreme in the British settlements. So great was the scandal, that it forced even from Olive, on his return in 1765, the exclamation, "Alas! how is the English name sunk!" *

But, after all, the men he found in Bengal had simply applied to every department the example which Olive had given them when dealing with the highest. It was that fatal transaction with Mír J'afar, that sudden accumulation of wealth by the sale of the highest office in Bengal, which had stimulated the cupidity of every office-holder in the country. Granted that the overthrow of Siráju'd daulah, that the bargaining with Mír J'afar, had been necessary for the security of English interests in India, high morality required that the pecuniary advantages derived therefrom should be accumulated for the Company of which

* "If I were to dwell upon the situation of the Company's affairs in Bengal," he writes in another letter, "both civil and military, a volume would not be sufficient. The inhabitants of the country have been laid under contribution by both civil and military, their goods taken from them at an under-price, and presents of money have either been extorted from them, or given for interfering in the affairs of government by insisting on men of high employments being turned out, and others appointed in their room."



Clive was the servant, by the use of whose resources alone he had been able to carry out his part of the compact! But for the servants to take the kernel and leave the master the shell, for the servants to take the profit and charge the master with the cost—that was an example which, occurring in a country more than ten thousand miles distant from supervision, could not fail to be elevated into a principle.

Slight reason, then, had Clive, on his return to India in 1765, to be surprised at the universality of the application of the principle which he had inaugurated. But the Clive who returned to India in 1765, was not, to all outward appearance, the Clive who had quitted that country in 1760. The man who had filled his coffers by the disposal of a vice-regal throne; who, defending his conduct in after years, expressed surprise at his own moderation at that eventful period; who had not scrupled to accept from Mír J'afar, in return for services rendered to that prince as a servant of the Company, lands valued at thirty thousand pounds a year, and then rented by the Company, thus assuming the position of landlord to his masters—returned to India a hater of corruption, an ardent lover of all the virtues, a man determined, at all costs, to put down vice, to repress bribery, to make the taking of presents illegal—to cleanse, in a word, the Augæan stable, the existence of which his example in preceding years had made possible!

Clive's second administration in Bengal, regarded as



a detached work, merits the highest praise. Could he have obliterated all the details of the first administration, he would have descended to posterity with a crown of real glory encircling his brows. He was there the stern, just, thorough, resolute man, waging war against corruption and its kindred vices, eradicating the system which had made those vices possible, punishing the guilty, urging upon his masters a course of action which would have destroyed every excuse for dabbling in trade. All that he did he did thoroughly, completely, well. He could not make a perfect cure, because the one course which would have been effectual to that end—the placing on a proper footing of the salaries of public servants—was not permitted by his masters. But he did everything but that. He suppressed a mutiny—of which he likewise was the indirect author—with a firmness, a coolness, and a success which form an example to all ages. He conducted a political negotiation, which secured for the English possessions a solid frontier. He showed himself in all respects the virtuous, resolute, far-sighted reformer and statesman.

But who was he who thus, in little more than two years, roughly rooted out the evil system he found existing? It was the same man who had planted that system. Well might the corrupt councillors who, administering Bengal in the early part of 1765, had, before the arrival of Clive, sold, for their own profit, the Súbahdárí of the three provinces—well might they argue that of all men living he who was coming to sit



above them could find no fault with their proceedings; for had not he set them the example? And when he did come, when he did find fault, when he openly reproached them, was not their anger, was not their indignation, well founded? Almost any other man but this man, they argued, would have had the right to reprove them. But for one who had realised, by similar means, an enormous fortune; who, by virtue of the position acquired by such an accumulation, was now sent to rule over them; for such a man to prohibit actions in them which he never scrupled to commit himself—that was the veriest hypocrisy; that was the cant of the profligate who has outlived his powers; that was, in very deed, Satan reproving sin. This thought, undoubtedly, underlay the unpopularity of Clive during his second administration; it underlay the hostility after his return to England, which shortened his life. The rebukes which men could have borne, the reforms to which men would have submitted, from one whose hands were pure, they could not tolerate from a man who was revelling in wealth acquired by means which he denounced when put into action by others!

There was reason in this objection. Men will not stand to be lectured by a man who has profited by the vices which he denounces in them. The manner in which Clive had made his fortune ought to have prevented him, being the man he was, from returning to India. It would be a mistake to suppose that he returned thither a changed man. His nature had hardened, that was all. The clay had become as



solid as the crystal of which it now formed a part. He had never repented of the manner in which he had acquired his fortune. None of the actions which posterity has reprobated caused his conscience the smallest uneasiness. He justified every action—even to the forging of Admiral Watson's name and his treatment of Amichand—to his friends, to himself, later on before Parliament. He had simply become hardened. He felt the stronger from his hardening. He even, if we may judge from his correspondence, felt most righteously indignant at the perpetration by others of the vices which had made his fortune. Who has not witnessed a father reproaching in his son the sins which he himself as a young man had committed? There we see Clive; the only difference being that, whilst the father had not profited from his youthful depravities, the fortune acquired by Clive stood against him and condemned him!

Whilst, therefore, it is impossible not to award the highest meed of praise to the second administration of Clive, our admiration must stop there. It cannot extend to the man himself. To have been consistent, Clive should have despoiled himself of the gains he had acquired by the means he was denouncing. He was not capable of this sacrifice. He was, then, as his enemies declared, in the position of Satan reproving sin.

He returned to England, to meet on landing the maledictions and the maledictory effects of the men whom he had denounced for corruption. They did not spare him. Every hour he was made to feel



their implacable resentment. The poisoned arrows discharged by them at his most vulnerable points were numerous enough "to darken the face of the sun." In the council chamber of the nation, in the baronial hall, in the drawing-room, in the hovel of the working man, the stories of the atrocities of this "bold bad man" were circulated and believed. Not one stratum of society was exempt from their influence. Literature, represented by Johnson, denounced him; the peasantry believed he had built the walls of his house so thick in order to keep out the devil. In the pulpit, on the stage, in the ante-chambers of the palace, in the coffee-rooms of Fleet Street and the Strand, the cry was still the same.

Clive bore up against the hue and cry, which would have overwhelmed a lesser man, with the same manly and daring courage which had already carried him through so many dangers. Not for an instant would he bow his head to the storm. Proudly he confronted his enemies, admitted the deeds they imputed to him, justified them, claimed credit even for moderation, and then, turning on those who had hounded on every class of society to persecute him, denounced them with unmeasured scorn. He, at least, had rendered services which had added provinces equal in extent to a European kingdom to the Empire; never had so large a territory been gained at so small an outlay; his actions, now imputed to him as crimes, had been condoned by his masters. But for those who brought these charges! It was they who, by making



of a special act performed under extraordinary circumstances a precedent, and exaggerating that precedent until it had taken the shape of an immoral and unjustifiable principle, had imperilled the British hold on the provinces he had conquered, and brought the British name into disrepute. It was because he had baffled their cupidity and foiled their schemes that they now accused him before his countrymen, that they attempted to make him the author of the evils which, in effect, he had remedied.

The defence of Clive against the secret innuendoes, the exaggerations, the spoken and whispered calumnies by which he had been assailed, was, in fact, complete. The open charges he never, I repeat, attempted to deny. He justified alike his treatment of Amichand, the use which he had made of the name of Watson, his appropriation of the two hundred and thirty-four thousand pounds which the victory of Plassey had gained for him. But the under-current of public feeling was too strong to be turned by such a defence as his. Calumny had done its work too completely. With the great mass of mankind the admission of the major premiss, an admission compulsory because so easy of demonstration, stood forward as a proof that the minor premiss, which might be denied because not capable of being brought clearly home, must be true also. On the public, then, on society, the defence of Clive fell as the spear hurled by Priam fell on the armour of Achilles. Even in the House of Commons, though he was able to avert a hostile verdict, his friends deemed it unwise to



propose an approval of the conduct which had been impugned. The sums he had accepted to compass the dethronement of Siráju'd daulah were recorded; the House refused, by accepting the previous question, to come to a decision as to whether his acceptance of those sums was worthy of condemnation; and he was declared to have rendered great and meritorious services to his country. All that the House of Commons did was to affirm a truism. It shrank from passing an opinion. The verdict was tantamount to a lenient censure!

Clive did not long survive this contest. The bitter struggle had told on a constitution enfeebled by disease. The mind which had been sustained by the excitement of the contest, could not bear the silence of the reaction. And such a reaction! What had he now to live for, this man who had been the arbiter of the fate of millions? All that would have made the evening of life enjoyable—

That which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
He must not look to have.

He had them not. He felt that he was hated, that in the eyes of the multitude he was a cruel tyrant who had despoiled the poor to enrich himself. He was shut out even, it seemed to him, from employment. The burden of living, even at the age of forty-nine, was, under such circumstances, too great.

And yet there had been a better life open to his splendid genius. It may be profitable to imagine what Clive might have been if in the fatal year of his



life, 1757, he had been able to subdue the corroding desire of enriching himself quickly. We may grant, and fairly grant, that he felt then the absolute necessity, for the security of British interests, of replacing Siráju'd daulah by Mír J'afar ; we may even grant that he felt the necessity, for the security of the same interests, of so hampering Mír J'afar by enforced payments of money, as to deprive him of the power of turning against his allies. What a position would have been his if he had paid the money so acquired into the coffers of the Company, instead of dividing it with his fellow-servants of the Company ! No need would then have been felt for forging the name of Watson, or for breaking faith with Amíchand ! Clive would have returned to England the immaculate hero ; the illustrious warrior who, with hands unspotted, had given the nucleus of a new empire to his country. Nor would that have been his only reward. He would not, it is true, have amassed the fortune which he actually acquired ; but it may well be surmised that neither his country nor the Court of Directors would have allowed him to remain a poor man. It is even possible that, in their appreciation of his disinterested conduct, the India House might have allowed him to retain, without a murmur, the jaghír which Mír J'afar, just prior to his return to England, had conferred upon him. That, however, is but a trifling detail. The fact would have stood out that this man, who had conquered Bengal, had achieved a more difficult conquest over himself. Still young, gifted, ambitious, what a career was not open to him ! Untrained as a



speaker, his first great speech in the House of Commons had wonderfully impressed so critical a judge of eloquence as was Lord Chatham. What if he had been able to use his oratorical powers, not to defend himself, but to serve his country! There is no limit to the vista which such a contemplation offers. A great reputation, a lofty and spotless character, genius unmeasured, great oratorical power, and forty-four! Everything was possible.

It was not to be. The want of scruple, which impelled him to throw aside every principle in order to clutch at the moneys of Siráju'd daulah, made of a life, which might have been brilliant beyond comparison, a failure ending in self-immolation. Clive laid the foundation of the British Empire in India; but he did not leave behind him that which a man as unscrupulous as himself, the great Napoleon, truly declared to be the best inheritance a man can leave to his children—"a reputation without spot."

Can it be that there is something in the career of the conqueror which deadens conscience and scorns scruple? Look at Alexander, at Caius Julius, at Frederic II., at Napoleon! Clive was not worse than they. The work of Clive was, all things considered, as great as that of Alexander; it has endured far longer than that of Napoleon. Frederic triumphed to the last in spite of his want of scruple; and his work, continued on the same basis, triumphs still. It was that want, however, which was fatal personally to Alexander and to Caius Julius, fatal politically to



CSL

496

LORD CLIVE.

Napoleon. The reader has seen how fatal it was to the conqueror of Plassey!

To sum up. Clive was a great soldier, a great administrator, a born leader of his fellows. The bluntness of his moral perceptions prevented him from being a great man!



INDEX.

A.

ADAMS, Major John, high military character of, 351; defeats the troops of Mír Kásim, at Katwá, at Gheriah and Undwa Nálá, 352.

Adlercron, Colonel, a candidate for the Bengal command, 161.

Adyar, the French beat the troops of the Núwáb on the, 32.

Aix-la-Chapelle, terms of the treaty of, compel Dupleix to restore Madras to the English, 35.

Ají, victory of the English on the, 352.

Ambúr, battle of, 49; effects of the, 50.

Amichand, warns the English deputies of the designs of the Núwáb, 176, and *note*; is instructed to work on the mind of the Núwáb in the interests of the English, 195; intrigues with Nandkumár to withhold assistance from the French, 198; reticence regarding the terms made with Mír J'afar displayed by Mr. Watts towards, 228; forces Mr. Watts

Amichand—*cont.*

to reveal the secret, 229; evidence regarding the assertion that he threatened to reveal the plot tends to exculpate him, 229-33; is induced to proceed to Calcutta, 244; is shown the fictitious treaty and is satisfied, 244-5; is undeceived after Plassey, 275, and *note*; the shock causes softening of the brain terminating in death, 276.

Amyatt, Mr., advises Rámna-rain to "act as he found to his own advantage," 301; is despatched on a mission to Mungér, 349.

Angria family, the, pursue a piratical profession at Gheriah, 150; made great havoc on French, English, and Dutch vessels, 151.

Anwaru'd-dín, Núwáb of the Karnáta, prohibits the English from waging war in Southern India, 27; refuses to intervene against the French, 30; orders Dupleix to restore Madras, 31; sends a force to compel him, 31; is defeated and slain by Chanda Sáhib, 49.

Arkát, is abandoned on the approach of Clive, 70; effect of the occupation of, on the contending parties, 74; description of, 76; siege of, 77-86; compared with the siege of Lakhnao in 1857, 87.

Army, officers of the Bengal, origin of the receipt of double batta by, 396; cling to it in spite of the order for its abolition, 396-8; memorialise the Government for its restoration, 400; reason of the discontent of, 401; political position which would make a combination of, dangerous, 402; conspiracy of, 401-4; at Mungér and Bânkípúr resign their commissions, 412-13; action of at Calcutta, 414-15; on the frontier, 415; combinations of, are suppressed at Alláhábád and at Súrajpúr, 417-18; at Mungér, 419-24; at Bânkípúr, 425; are on their knees, 426; conditions of service of, altered, 427; individual instances of, Parker, Duffield, Robertson, how dealt with, 428.

Arní, battle of, 91-4.

Awadh (Oudh), the Núwáb-Vazír of, espouses the cause of Mír Kásim, and is defeated at Patná, 354; and at Baksar, 355; position of the Núwáb Vazír of, at the time of the second arrival of Clive, 380; treaty of, with Clive, 383-7.

B.

BAJBAJ, action near, between Clive and Mánakehand, 164-7; extraordinary capture of, 168.

Baksar, the Núwáb-Vazír of Awadh is defeated at, 355.

Bálájí Rao, chief of Birár, sends an agent to Calcutta to offer to co-operate with the English against Siráj'u'd daulah, 238.

Bardhwan, affords an illustration of the corruption of the civil servants of the Company in 1765, 371-2.

Barker, Sir Robert, conduct of, on obtaining an inkling of the combination of the officers under his command, 405; declines to accept the resignation of their commissions by his officers, 413; despatches four ringleaders to Calcutta, 414.

Batta, origin of, under its modifications of single, double, and half, 395; reasons why the India House latterly viewed it with disfavour, 396; the abolition of ordered; why not carried out, 396-8; Clive abolishes it, 399.

Beecher, Mr., a weak-kneed member of Council, 199.

Boscawen, Admiral, besieges Pondichery but is foiled, 33; in vain urges the English to action, 42; leaves India, 43, 50.

Burgoyne, Colonel, leads the second attack against Lord Clive in the House of Commons, 460; first report of the Committee of, 462-3; Committee of, resumes its labours, 464; repeats his attacks against Clive, 466-8; is defeated, 472.

Bussy, defeats Anwaru'd-dín at Ambúr, 49; storms the fortress of Jinji, 55.

C.

CAILLAUD, Major, is appointed to succeed Clive, and comes

*Caillaud, Maj.—cont.*

round to Bengal, 326; proceeds with a force to Murshidábád, 327; is summoned to Calcutta to take part in the deliberations following the death of Míran, 341-2; advice given by, 342; receives, at a later period, a portion of Mír Kásim's bribe, 344.

Calcutta, attacked by Siráju'd daulah, 157; garrison of, 157; shameful behaviour of a portion of the English in, 157-8; surrenders to Siráju'd daulah, 159; evacuated by Mánakchand, and occupied by the English, 169; joy of the inhabitants of, 171; Council of, send two deputies to treat with the Núwáb, 176.

Carnac, Major, defeats the Núwáb-Vazír of Awadh near Patná, 354; appointed a coadjutor of Clive, 337; and commander of the forces in Bengal, 357; proceeding of, with reference to the new covenants, 400.

Carstairs, Colonel, takes Patná, but is driven out, pursued, and beaten by the troops of Mír Kásim, 350, 351.

Champion, Major, appointed to a command in Bengal, 357; is deputed by Lord Clive, with other officers, to Mungér to check the mutiny of the officers, 414; arrives at Mungér and takes steps to bring officers and men to a sense of duty, 419-20.

Chanda Sáhí, position of in the beginning of 1751, 3-8; marches into North and South Arkát, 9; drives the English from Valkonda, 10; attacks them at Utatúr, 12; occupies Shrirangam, 14; besieges

Chanda Sáhí—cont.

Trichinápalli, 15; past history of, 47; allies himself with Mozaffar Jang and Dupleix, 48; defeats Anwaru'd dín and becomes Núwáb of the Karnátak, 49; false move of, in marching against Tanjúr, 51; allows himself to be duped by the Rájá and raises the siege, 52-3; throws himself on Dupleix for aid, 54; completely defeats Muhammad Ali, 55; invests Trichinápalli, 59; despatches a considerable force to besiege Arkát, 73; follows the fortunes of the French, 99-137; is murdered after having surrendered, 138.

Chandernagore, *vide* Chandanagar.

Chandranagar, the French at, 174-5; deputies from in Calcutta, 194; description of, 202; engineer of, deserts to the English, 203; garrison of, 203, and *note*; siege of, 204-11; reflections on capture of, 211-13.

Chengalpatt, besieged and captured by Clive, 142.

Civil Service, general corruption of the members of the, in 1765, 357-74; bitterness felt by the members of the, towards Clive, 374.

Clive, impressions made upon the mind of, by the position of affairs at Trichinápalli, 16; resolution taken by, in consequence, 17; birth, education, and early life of, 18-20; is sent as a writer to Madras, 21; voyage of, to India, 122; early experiences of, in India, 23; effect of the life on, 24, 25; escapes from Madras in disguise, 30; new life of, at Fort St. David, 31; part taken

Clive—*cont.*

by, in siege of Pondichery, 33, and *note*; accompanies the expedition against Tanjūr, 36; leads the storming party against Devikōta, 37-8; Lawrence's opinion of, 43; is appointed Commissary to the troops, 43; cruises for the recovery of his health in the Bay of Bengal, 44; returns to Fort St. David and marches, as Commissary, with the force under Gingen, 61; resigns his office and returns to Fort St. David, 62; communicates his ideas to Mr. Saunders, 62; is sent to accompany a force to Verdachelam, and returns, 63; resigns the civil, and enters the military service of the Company, 63; proceeds with a force to Trichināpalli, 64; thoughts suggested to, by the English position at that place, 64-5; proposes to carry the war into the enemy's country, 67; sets out for Arkāt, 69; takes possession of it without fighting, 70; attacks the enemy at Timari, 71-2; strengthens and victuals the fort of Arkāt, 72; sends a force to escort his guns from Kānchipuram, 73; defence by, of Arkāt, 77-87; joy of, and its cause, at his success, 88; political position attained to by, 89; marches against Rīza Sahib, 90; defeats him at Arnī, 91-4; returns to Madras and prepares for a march on Trichināpalli, 95; experience of, of Indian warfare not yet quite complete, 95-6; prepares to meet the rising in North Arkāt, 104; sets out from Madras, 105; search of, for the enemy, 105-6; is surprised near Kāveripāk,

Clive—*cont.*

107; wonderful coolness and self-possession of, 107; after two hours fighting bastard-prudence advises him to retreat, 109; neglects her counsel, finds out the weak point of the enemy, and beats him, 110-11; is ordered to return to Fort St. David, 113; is superseded by Lawrence and sets out for Trichināpalli, 113; "imprudence" of, contrasted with the "prudence" of Law, 115-16; reconnoitres Law's position, devises and executes a plan which causes the defeat of that leader, 120-21; propounds a plan for completely destroying his army, 122; which is accepted, 123; crosses the Kolrūn and encamps at Samiaveram, 124; storms Mansurpēt and Lālgudi, 126; baffles d'Auteuil and returns to Samiaveram, 127; is surprised by the French at Samiaveram, 128; critical situation, and coolness of, 129-31; foils the enemy, and pursues them, 133; critical view of the conduct of, 134; the narrow escapes of, 134; captures Paichandah, and forces d'Auteuil to surrender with his whole army, 136-7; returns to Madras, and is sent to capture Kovilam and Chengalpatt, 139; composition of the force of, 139-40; marches against Kovilam, 140; captures it, 141; marches against Chengalpatt, 141; captures it, 142; marries, and proceeds to England, 142; reflections upon the position attained by, 142-43; reception of, in England, 144; gratitude of, 145; fortune of, how acquired, 145

*Olive—cont.*

attempts to enter Parliament, but fails, 146; eagerness of, for employment, 147; applies to return to India, 149; proceeds to Bombay, 150; captures Gheriah, 153, 154; returns to Fort St. David, 154; is appointed to command the expedition to Bengal, and sails, 162; reaches the Huglí, 162; proceeds up the river towards Calcutta, 163; lands, engages the enemy, beats them, and, by an accident, captures Bajbaj, 164-69; differences between, and the Admiral, 170; detaches a force against the town of Huglí, 172; impression made upon, by the declaration of war between France and England, 173; unsuccessfully tries to entice the Núwáb into an alliance against the French at Chandranagar, 174; forms an intrenched camp at Kásipúr, 175; moves against the Núwáb's army, but is maltreated and retires, 176; resolving to attack the Núwáb's camp, requests the co-operation of Admiral Watson, 177; account of the attack made by, on the Núwáb's camp, 178-84; criticism on the plan and conduct of, 185-87; results of the action of, on the Núwáb, 187-89; jealousy of, of the French, 190-91; asks the Núwáb to sanction an attack upon Chandranagar, 192; the Núwáb's temporising answer induces him to persist in his scheme, 193; renounces it, 195; urges a treaty of neutrality but is opposed by Watson, 196-7; returns to his old idea of attacking the French, 198;

Olive—cont.

marches his army towards Chandranagar, 200; besieges Chandranagar, 203-10; takes it, 211; orders the Núwáb to surrender to him the remaining possessions of the French in Bengal, 215; encourages a conspiracy to make Mír J'afar Núwáb, 222; continues to press that policy on Mr. Watts, 225; feels that the crisis is at hand, 226; terms of the convention with Mír J'afar sanctioned by, 228; resolves to counterplot Amfchand, 234; proposes a counterfeit agreement and forges the signature of Admiral Watson, 234-7; justification offered by, for his conduct, 237 *note*; attempts to entrap the Núwáb into an avowal of his designs, 239; finding the time for action arrived, sets out for Murshidábád, 245; despatches a statement of his grievances to the Núwáb, and states that he is coming for redress, 246; reaches Paltí with his army, and despatches Eyre Coote to summon Katwá, 249-51; is disturbed by the tenor of the letters from Mír J'afar, 251-3; summons a Council of War, 253-4; declares against fighting, 254; is oppressed by the decision of a majority in favour of his views, 255; retires to reconsider the question and the arguments, and gives orders to advance, 255-6; crosses the Bhágirathí, 257; unsatisfactory correspondence of with Mír J'afar, 257, 258; bivouacs in a mango grove beyond Plassey, 259; watches the development of the movements

Clive—*cont.*

of Siráju'd daulah's army, 262; makes corresponding movements, 263; withdraws his troops within the grove, 264; determines to maintain his position till nightfall, and then try a surprise, 265; enters the hunting-box to sleep, 268; is roused by Kilpatrick, and orders an advance, 269; doubts of, regarding Mir J'afar, 270; attacks the disorganised enemy, 271; and wins the battle, 272; sends messages to Mir J'afar to meet him, 272; salutes Mir J'afar as Súbahdar of the three provinces, 274; proceeds to Murshidábád, and pays a ceremonial visit to Mir J'afar, 275; comment on the conduct of, with reference to Amíchand, 276-7; difficulties of, in distributing the spoils of Plassey, 284; draws Mir J'afar within his toils, 286; despatches Eyre Coote to follow up Plassey, 286; sends troops to re-establish the Náváb's authority, 288; obtains the monopoly of the manufacture of saltpetre, 290; is nominated by the Mughul a Commander of six thousand horse, 291; frustrates the schemes of Miran, 291; fortifies Calcutta, 293; is put aside by the Court of Directors, 294; overcomes the difficulty and becomes President of the Council, 295; reorganises the native army, 298; despatches troops to the Northern Sirkárs, 299; marches against the Sháhzádah, 300; gives a sum of money to the Sháhzádah to enable him to retire, 303; pacifies

Clive—*cont.*

the country and learns Forde's victory at Machhlípatanam, 303; forces a Dutch vessel to quit the Huglí, 305; action of, on learning the arrival of a Dutch armament in the Huglí, 306, 307; gives directions to Forde and Knox, 308; correspondence of, with the Dutch and Mir J'afar, 309, 310; orders Forde and Knox to march against the Dutch, 310; plans of, 311; orders an attack on the Dutch ships, 312; laconic instructions to Forde to fight, 316; generous policy of, toward the Dutch after victory, 319, 320; concise summary of the policy of, towards Siráju'd daulah and Mir J'afar, 320-22; resolves to visit England, 322-3; selects Mr. Vansittart to succeed him, 323; unable to appoint Forde, chooses Caillaud to command the army in his room; 324-6; accompanies Caillaud to Murshidábád, 327; painful parting of, with Mir J'afar, 328; sails for England, 329; reception of, in England, disappointing, causes of the same, 331-2; the right of to the jaghír disputed, 332; the part taken by, in politics, 333; contest of, with Mr. Sullivan, 334; causes of the reaction in the India Office in favour of, 334-36; resolves to return to India to occupy the chief office in Bengal, 337; sets out for that presidency, 338; last warning of, to his successor, 329, 339; reaches Madras and receives accounts of the state of Bengal, 356; arrives in Calcutta and makes important

Clive—*cont.*

changes in the military commands, 357; hardening of the nature of, 362; reply of, to the allegations of the corrupt party, 363; orders the signing of the new covenants, 364; deals with private trade, 365; is prevented, by the short-sightedness of the Court of Directors, from the effectual disposal of the question, 366; stops the abuses of which Mír Kásim had complained, 367; deals with the salt monopoly, 368-9; reforms the Council, 370; is thwarted by Mr. Sumner, 371; invites Nájwáb Nujmu'd daulah to Calcutta, 373; forces certain corrupt civil servants to retire, 374; opinion of, of the Nájwáb, 375; endeavours to reform his surroundings, 375; general tenor of the reforms inaugurated by, 376-8; political scheme devised by, 379; proceeds to Murshidábád, 381; reduces the Nájwáb to be a mere cypher, 382-3; journeys to the frontier, and concludes a treaty with the Nájwáb-Vazír and the Emperor, 383-7; final selection of, of a new frontier, 386; is bequeathed by Mír J'afar a legacy of five lakhs of rupees, 389; disposes of it in favour of the army, 390; beneficial result of the measures of, illustrated on the death of Nujmu'd daulah, 391; the system of administration of, is to govern in the Nájwáb-Nazim's name, 392; belief of, that the Allahábád frontier is a permanent frontier, 393; is informed of the combination of the officers of the army on the batta question, 405; posi-

Clive—*cont.*

tion of, and of the government, 406-8; meets it with vigour and resolution, 408; conduct of, a model to all ages, 409; he forms a committee to watch and deal with the conspiracy, 410; tramples it down at Murshidábád, 411; sends officers to Munger and follows himself, 412; faith of, in the British officer, 416; further measures of, against the mutineers, 418; arrives at Munger, 422; harangues the troops, 422-3; coolness of, causes the collapse of the mutiny, 426, 432-3; other measures which divided the attention of, 434; receives a flattering tribute from the Court of Directors, 435; summary of the second administration of, 436; valedictory minutes of, 438; regarding foreign policy, 439; quits India for ever, 440; causes at work during his absence from England to weaken his influence, 441-5; reception of, in England, 445; reasons of the cooling of the relations of, with the Court of Directors, 446; health of, greatly in need of repose, 447; description of, by Macaulay, of the storm which he was to encounter, 448-9; proceeds to the continent, but returns before the cure is perfect, 450-51; enters the House of Commons, 451; mistake made by, in not attaching himself to one of the great parties, 452; possible cause of the conduct of, 453; renews his relations with the ministry, 455; receives the first intimation of the attack about to be made upon him, 455; is

INDEX.

Olive—*cont.*

attacked by Mr. Sullivan, 456; reply of, 457; throws away his victory, 458-9; increased and increasing unpopularity of, 459-60; is examined by Colonel Burgoyne's committee, 461; admissions of, 462; how, was affected by the first report of the committee, 462-3; receives marks of the favour of the Court, 463-4; is again attacked by Burgoyne, 466-8; defends himself, 467, 469, 470; leaves the House whilst it proceeds to the final debate, 471; the verdict regarding, tantamount to a verdict of not proven, 472; the strain of the contest shows itself after the contest is concluded, 473; dies, 474; character of, 475-96.

Combination of Bengal officers on the batta question, 395 to 432.

Committee, first report of Colonel Burgoyne's, 462-3.

Conjeveram, *vide* Kānchipuram.

Coote Eyre, Captain, takes possession of Bajbaj, 168; and of Calcutta, 169; captures the town and fort of Katwā, 251; arguments of, in favour of fighting, at the Council of War, before Plassey, 254-5; pursues the enemy after Plassey, 272; follows up the victory of Plassey, 286-7; cannot be spared from Madras to succeed Clive, 326.

Cope, Captain, is despatched with a force to defend Trichināpalli, 7, 59; is defeated before Madura, 8; is sent to aid Rājā Sāhujī to recover his throne, 36; is forced to retreat, 37; is despatched to Trichināpalli, 50; sends twenty

Cope, Capt.—*cont.*

men to aid in the defence of Tanjūr, 51; is mortally wounded, 101.

Council of War, names and votes of the officers summoned by Clive to the, before Plassey, 254-5.

Council, Calcutta, shameless conduct of the, 227, 234, 343-4, 347-8, 357, 362.

Cupidity of the members of the Calcutta Council with respect to Mīr J'afar, 227, 234; with respect to Mīr Kāsim, 343-4, 347-8, 360-62; illustrated by the case of Bardhwān, 372; the instance not an isolated instance, 373.

D.

DALTON joins Lawrence before Trichināpalli, 120; is despatched to attack d'Auteuil, 135; places himself under Clive's orders, 135.

D'Auteuil, character of, 7; accompanies Chanda Sāhib into North and South Arkāt, 9; aids him to drive the English from Valkonda, 10; pursues them, 11; occupies Shrirāngam, 14; takes up a position before Trichināpalli, 15; is relieved of his command, 14; aids Chanda Sāhib in defeating Muhammad Ali on the Ponnār, 55; is despatched by Dupleix to relieve Law, 124-5; reaches Utatūr and tries to open communications with Law, 125; is baffled and returns, 127; disquieted by Dalton, abandons Utatūr, 135; surrenders with his whole force to Clive, 137.

De la Touche, commands at Jinji, 55; by means of a conspiracy causes the death of Názir Jang and the succession of Muzaffar Jang, 56.

Devikáta, is stormed by the English, 39-41; moral of the campaign against, 41-2.

Directors, the Court of, proceedings of, regarding double batta and their consequences, 396-402.

Drake, Mr., reply of, to Siráju'd daulah, 156; shamefully abandons Calcutta, 158; casuistic minute of, 199.

Dúlab Rám, Rájá, proceeds with an army to aid the French at Chandranagar, but is persuaded to hold his hand, 208; is ordered with his army to Palási, 214; becomes disgusted with the Núwáb, 220; is consulted by Mír J'afar regarding the English demands, objects to their magnitude, but is bribed into assent, 242; position taken by, at Plassey, 262; treacherous advice given by, to Siráju'd daulah, 267; withdraws his troops from the field, 267; is ill-treated by Mír J'afar, 285; is reconciled to him, 289; is again dismissed from office, 296.

Dupleix, position of, in 1751, 1, 2; is duped by Muhammad Ali, 4; moral and physical force at the disposal of, in 1751, 6; the one weak spot in, 7; character and aims of, 25; proposes to the Governor of Madras neutrality in India but is refused, 27; is saved from English hostilities by the Núwáb of the Karnátak, 27; he nevertheless orders an attack upon the English, 28;

Dupleix—*cont.*

refuses, after the capture of Madras, to ratify the arrangement made by La Bourdonnais, 30; declines to restore Madras to the Núwáb, 31; views of, confirmed by the victory on the Adyar, 32; sends an army against Fort St. David, 32; attack of, is repulsed, 33; is forced, by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, to restore Madras to the English, 35; espouses the cause of Chanda Sáhib, 48; supplies him and Muzaffar Jang with money and troops, 50; reorganises their army, 54; is nominated Núwáb of the Karnátak and receives titles and honours, 57; arranges for a permanent French influence at Haidarábád, 57; obtains the cession of Machh-lípatanam from Salábat Jang, 58; is all but supreme in Southern India, 59; effect of Clive's success at Arkát upon, 97; reflection on the orders issued by, to Law and Chanda Salib, 98; unfortunate position of, with respect to a general, 99; splendid administrative power of, 99; mental agony and wonderful energy of, 102; rouses North Arkát against the English, 103; policy of, seems on the point of triumph, 114; is baffled by the feebleness of Law, 115; despair of, in consequence, 116; despatches d'Auteuil to supersede Law, 124-5; regains predominance in Southern India on the departure of Clive, 147; declines to accede to a compromise with Saunders, 148; is replaced by Godeheu, 148.

INDEX.

Dutch, The, send an expedition against Angria, which fails, 151; jealousy of, of the English, 304; intrigue with Mir J'afar, 304; rumours regarding the intentions and action of, 305; seven ships of, arrive in the Hugli, 306; attack and capture English vessels and property, 310; land their troops and march them towards Chinsurah, 311; squadron of, annihilated by the English, 313; troops of, beaten at Chandranagar, 315; and at Biderra, 316-18; sue for peace to Clive, 319; conditions granted to, 320.

E.

ELLIS, Mr., fills a high position in Bengal, 345; prepares to attack Patná, 349; attacks, and takes it, but is driven out, besieged, and ultimately taken prisoner, 350-51.

English, position of the, in Southern India, in 1750-1, 3; invasion of Tanjūr by the, 36; ships of the, are dispersed or lost, 36; real object of the, in invading Tanjūr, 37; agree to assist Nazir Jang, 52; reflection of the change of the position of, in Southern India, effected by Clive, 143; send expeditions against the Angria family, 152-4; loss of, in the capture of Chandranagar, 211; strength of the army marching to Plassey, 257; difficulties of the, in their march, 258; bivouac in the mango grove, 259.

Expedition of the English against Tanjūr, 36-41.

F.

FLETCHER, Sir Robert, conduct of, with respect to the combination of the officers under his command, 405; informs Lord Clive of the combination, 405-6; accepts the resignation of their commissions by his officers, 413; is accused by officers and men of complicity, 419-20; treacherous conduct of, 421-2, 429; is brought to a court-martial and cashiered, 430-31; ultimate fate of, 421 *note*.

Floyer, Governor, declines the urgent entreaties of Boscawen to resist French aggression, 42-3; reasons for the conduct of, 50; is succeeded by Mr. Saunders, 56.

Forde, Colonel, succeeds Kilpatrick in command of the Bengal troops, and is sent to the Northern Sirkárs, 298; gains victories at Kondúr and Machhlípatanam, 303; arrives in Calcutta in time to deal with the Dutch, 308; defeats the Dutch at Chandranagar, 315; and at Biderra, 316-17; the great merits of, and Clive's patronage, fail to obtain for him a command in India, 324-6; ultimate fate of, 454.

Fort, William, is traced out of, Calcutta, 293.

France, declares war against England, 25; possessions of, in India, 25.

French, the, undertake the siege of Tanjūr, 51; are forced to

French—*cont.*

raise the siege, 53; all but obtain supremacy in Southern India, 59; effect upon, of the capture of Arkát by Clive, 75; attempt to surprise Clive at Samíaveram, 128-34; the army of, surrenders at Valkondah, 137; and at Shrirangam, 138; reflections upon the change in the position of, effected by Clive, 142-8.

G.

GHERIAH (or Vijiyadrag), the piratical nest of the Angria family, 150-51.

Ghériah, Mír Kásim's army defeated at, by Major Adams, 353.

Gingen, Captain, is despatched to watch d'Auteuil and Chanda Sáhib, 9; attempts to take Valkondah but is repulsed, 10; is forced to retire towards Trichinápalli, 11; reaches Utatúr, 12; and Pajchandah, 13; retreats into Shrirangam, 14; falls back on Trichinápalli, 14, 59; conduct of, at Trichinápalli justified, 101.

Glenn, Lieutenant, defeats the Bengal troops on the Kíj, 352.

Godeheu, M., supersedes Dupleix, 148.

H.

HASTINGS, Warren, joins Kilpatrick's force at Fattá, 160; appointed member of the Calcutta Council, 345; supports Vansittart, 347-9.

Hay, Mr., is despatched on a mission to Mungér, 349.

Holwell, Mr., assumes the government of Calcutta during the siege, 158; temporarily acts as Governor pending the arrival of Mr. Vansittart, 340; portion received by, of Mír Kásim's plunder, 343; is removed from the service, 344.

Huglí, town of, stormed by the English, 172.

Huglí river, defeat of the Dutch ships in the, 311-14.

I.

INNIS, Captain, marches with troops to Arkát but is beaten at Trivatúr, 81; is joined by Captain Kilpatrick and again advances, successfully, 83.

J.

JAFAR, Mír, a type of the Mughul nobility, 218; character of, 219; dissatisfaction of, with Siráju'd daulah, 220; proposes to aid the English against the Núwáb, 222; mistrust displayed by, with respect to Amichand, 228; details of secret treaty made between the Calcutta Council and, 233 and *note*; consults Dúlab Rám about the English demands, 242; is removed from the command of the army, 243; urges the English to prompt action, 243; incurs the hostility of the Núwáb

J'afar, Mír—*cont.*

and urges Mr. Watts to leave for Calcutta, 248; tone of correspondence of, with Clive before Plassey, 257-8; position of, at the battle, 262; touching appeal made by Siráju'd daulah to, 266; treachery of, 266; conduct of, suspicions of Clive, 269-70; halts his troops, 271; terror of, on entering the English camp, 273; is greeted as Súbahdár and proceeds to Murshidábád, 274; grants an interview to Siráju'd daulah, 279; allows him to be murdered, 279-80; the difficulties of, begin, 282; alienates his nobles and dependants, 285; fall into the meshes of Clive, 286; alternatives presenting themselves to, 288; resolves to keep to his engagements with Clive, 289; grants Clive the salt monopoly, 290; again intrigues against Clive, 296; again implores his assistance, 297; intrigues with the Dutch, 304; double dealing of, 304-8; falls completely and for ever under English tutelage, 321-2; distress and agony of, at parting with Clive, 328; is deposed in favour of Mír Kásim, 344; is reinstated, 351; dies, 358; legacy of, 389.

James, Commodore, commands an expedition against the Angria family and captures Súwarndrúg and Bánkot, 152; arrives in the Huglí with three ships, 198.

Johnstone, Mr., cupidity and shameless conduct of, and of his brother, 360-61; is forced by Clive to leave the service, 374.

K.

KANCHIPURAM, is occupied by Clive, 69; is taken and retaken, 94-5; is taken by Ríza Sahib, 103; retaken by Clive, 106.

Karnátak, political state of, in 1751, 1.

Kásim, Mír, character of, 343; proceeds to Calcutta and buys the Súbahdári of Bengal from the members of Council, 343; prices paid by, to those members, 243-4; makes extensive reforms in the administration, 345; removes his capital to Mungér, 345-6; reforms his army on the English system, 346; complains to the Calcutta Council of the injury caused him by their lax administration, 347; has an interview with Vansittart and comes to terms, 347-8; establishes free trade throughout his dominions, 349; the troops of recapture Patná and defeat the English, 350; writes a remarkable letter to the Calcutta Council, 351; troops of, defeated on the Ají and at Katwá, 352; at Ghéria and at Undwá Nálá, 353; abandons Bihár and implores the aid of the Núwáb-Vazír of Awadh, 354.

Kásimbázár, captured by Siráju'd daulah, 157.

Kásipúr, description of Clive's encampment at, 175.

Katwá, taken by Eyre Coote, 251; deliberations regarding the advisability of halting at, 251-3; Mír Kásim's army defeated at, by Major Adams, 352.

Kávéri, description of the, 12.



- Kávérípák, decisive battle of, 106-11; enormous results of the victory of, 111-12.
- Keene, Captain, gallant conduct of, at Kávérípák, 111.
- Kilpatrick, Captain, advances with reinforcements towards Arkát, 84; is depatched with a force to the Huglí after the capture of Calcutta, 159; reaches Fattá, 160; is detached to attack Huglí, 172; supports Clive in Council, 199; makes the decisive movement at Plassey, 268; is re-proved by Clive, who, however, adopts his ideas, 269; dies, 298.
- Knox, Captain, comes round to Calcutta with Forde, and is employed to deal with the Dutch, 308; joins Forde before Biderra, 315.
- Koíládí, position of, 12, 13; is captured by the French, 15; Lawrence baffles the French at, 118.
- Kolrún, description of the, 12, 13.
- Kovilam, is besieged and captured by Clive, 140-41; "effects" of the French commandant of, 141.
- L.
- LA BOURDONNAIS, character of, 28; sails to attack Madras, 29; captures the place, 30; private arrangement of, with the English governor, 30 and note.
- Lakhnáo, siege of, compared with siege of Arkát, 87.
- Lálgudi, position of, 13; importance of, to the French, Lálgudi—cont. 126; falls into the hands of Clive, 126.
- Latham, Captain, compromises the dispute between Clive and Watson, 170.
- Law of Lauriston, succeeds to d'Auteuil before Trichinápalli, 15; distinguishes himself at the siege of Pondichery, 34; defects in the character of, 99; those defects fatal to the French cause, 100; idea of, of "prudence," 115, 117; want of grasp of, 116; detaches a small force to meet Lawrence, 117; is foiled by that leader, 120; attacks him and is beaten, 120-21; retreats into Shrirangam, 122; allows Mansurpét and Lálgudi to fall into the hands of Clive, 126; uses badly a great opportunity, 127; is once again too late, 135-6; surrenders with his whole army, 137-8; scene between, and Núwáb Siráj'u'd daulah, 223; sets out for Bhágulpúr, 235; fails to save Siráj'u'd daulah, 286.
- Lawrence, Major Stringer, is taken prisoner at the siege of Pondichery, 34; is the first to discover the military capacity of Clive, 35; commands the second expedition against Tanjúr and besieges Devikóta, 38; takes it by storm, 40; marches to co-operate with Názir Jang, 54; transfers command of the army to Cope, and proceeds to Europe, 56-7; returns to India, and assumes command of the expeditionary force marching to Trichinápalli, 113; opinion of, of Clive, 114; arrives within eighteen miles of Trichinápalli, 114; baffles the

Lawrence, Maj.—*cont.*

French at Koiládi, 118; and reaches the Sugarloaf rock, joined by Dalton and Musári Rao, 120; turns out to meet Law's attack and beats him, 120-21; grasp of, not equal to that of Clive, 122; embraces Clive's ideas and puts them in force, 123; despaches Dalton to beat up d'Auteuil at Utatúr, 135; forces Law and his whole army to surrender, 137-8; returns to Fort St. David, 138; suggestion to send, to Bengal, 161.

Le Beaune, Lieutenant, is sent from Faltá to Madras, 160; antecedents of, 160.

Legacy of Mír J'afar, after being enjoyed for more than a century by the Bengal army, reverts to the descendants of Lord Clive, 390.

M.

MACHHLÍPATANAM, description of, 14; siege of, 99-138.

Madras, defences of in 1746, 29; is attacked by, and surrenders to La Bourdonnais, 30; is besieged by Máphuz Khán, 31; is restored to the English, 35; state of, immediately prior to Clive's return, 149; intelligence of the capture of Kásimbázár reaches, 159.

McGuire, Mr., receives his share of Mír Kásim's bribe, 344; is removed from the service, 345.

Maisúr, inducements held out to the Rájá of, to declare for the English, 74, 100; declares for them, 100; impression made on the Dalwai of, by the achievements of Clive,

Maisúr—*cont.*

123; Rájá of, sympathises with the French, 147.

Mánakehand, Governor of Calcutta for the Núwáb, 163; marches against Clive, 165; is beaten, and terrified into abandoning Calcutta, 166-9; is cast into prison and has to purchase his freedom, 220.

Manningham, Mr., is despatched from Faltá to Madras, 160; antecedents of, 160.

Mansarpét, importance to Law, 126; is stormed by Clive, 126.

Máphuz Khán, is sent by his father to compel the French to yield Madras, 31; is repulsed by the Governor of Madras, on the 2nd, and completely defeated by Paradis, on the 3rd November, 32; is defeated and taken prisoner by Chanda Sáhib, 49.

Maráthás, plundering instincts of the, exemplified, 90; Clive, forms a league against, 385.

Maskar enters the service of Mír Kásim, 346.

Maskelyne, Miss, married to Clive, 142.

Mír J'afar, *vide* J'afar.

Mír Kásim, *vide* Kásim.

Míran, son of Mír J'afar, orders the murder of Siráju'd daulah, 280; intrigues against Clive, 291; double-faced behaviour of, towards the Dutch, 319; is struck dead by lightning, 341.

Mír Múdn, the one faithful general of Siráju'd daulah, occupies an advanced position at Plassey, 262; is killed when charging the English position, 265; fatal consequences of the death of, 266.

Morse, Mr., Governor of Madras,

Morse, Mr.—*cont.*

refuses to accede to the French proposal for neutrality in India, 27; is attacked by La Bourdonnais, 28; unskilful negotiations of, 29.

Mughul, blows struck at the empire by Nádír Sháh and Ahmed Sháh, 296.

Muhammad Ali, offers to negotiate with Dupleix, 4; duplicity of, 4; is defeated by Chanda Sáhib and flees, 49; joins Názir Jang at Valdáur, 53; is completely defeated by Chanda Sáhib and flees to Arkát, 55; despair of, 114; impression made upon, by the achievements of Clive, 123; the real difficulties of, begin after his triumph at Trichinápalí, 138.

Munro, Major, defeats the Núwáb-Vazír of Awadh at Baksar, 355.

Murári Rao, inducements held out to, to join the English, 74; agrees to join them, 82; the troops of, begin to appear on the scene, 83; and engage in the battle of Arní, 91-4; impression made upon, by Clive, 123; joins the French, 147.

Muzaffar Jang, is nominated successor to Nizám-ul-Mulk as Súbahdár of the Dakhan, 46; is supplanted by Názir Jang, 47; proceeds to Satárah and allies himself with Chanda Sáhib, 47-8; surrenders to his uncle, 54; "from a prison to a throne," 56; nominates Dupleix Núwáb of the Karnátak, and confers honours upon him, 57; is murdered, 58.

Mysore, *vide* Maisúr.

N.

NANDKUMÁR, Governor of Huglí for Siráj'u'd daulah, is bribed by Amíchand, 198; prevents the Núwáb's troops from aiding the French, 208; Olive's aversion to, 376.

Názir Jang seizes the Súbahdárship of the Dakhan on the death of his father, 47; supports his claims with an army, 53; is betrayed and slain, 56.

North, Lord, slight relations of, with Lord Clive, 452-5, 463; obtains the appointment of a committee to examine the books of the East India Company, 464.

Nujmu'd daulah buys the Súbahdári of Bengal from the Calcutta Council, 359; visits Calcutta, 373; dies, 390.

O.

OMICHAND, *vide* Amíchand, and *note* to page 176.

Oudh, *vide* Awadh.

P.

PAICHANDAH, position of, 13; is occupied and then evacuated by the English, 13, 14; is held by Law, 125; is captured by the English, 136.

Palási, *vide* Plassey, also page 272, *note*.

Paradis completely defeats Máphuz Khán on the Adyar, 32;

Paradis—*cont.*

is killed at the siege of Pondichery, 34.

Patná, Clive visits, 290; Sháh Álam besieges, and is repulsed before, 301-2; is taken by Mr. Ellis, and recaptured by the troops of Mír Kásim, 350; Carnac defeats the Núwáb-Vazír of Awadh near, 354.

Petros is the medium of Mír Jafar's proposal to the English to depose his master, 222.

Pigot, Mr., accompanies Clive and a small force to Verdachelam, and returns, 63; despatches a force to Bengal after the capture of Calcutta, 159; is a candidate for command of the greater expedition, 161.

Plassey, distance from Clive's camp on the Bhágirathí to, 258; battle of, 259 to 272; immediate results of the battle of, 292; result of, in 1766, 389.

Playdell, Mr., is removed from the service, 344.

Pondichery, the chief settlement of the French in Southern India, 25; is vainly besieged by the English under Boscawen, 33.

Pratáp Singh, Rájá of Tanjúr, territories of are invaded by the English, 36, 40; signs a treaty with the English, 41 (*vide* Tanjúr).

Prudence contrasted with bastard-prudence and imprudence, 108, 115-16, 117, 122, 249.

Pudukota, the poligár of, declares for the English, 74; sends troops to aid them, 101.

R.

RAMNARAIN, Governor of Bihár, goes into rebellion against Mír Jafar, 385; submits and is confined in his government, 290; astute behaviour of, 300-2; repulses the Sháh-zádah from before Patná, 302.

Reforms, internal, inaugurated by Lord Clive, 357-78.

Renault de St. Germain, Monsieur, Governor of Chandranagar, 174; rejects the Núwáb's offer of alliance against the English, and proposes a policy of neutrality, 174; sends deputies to Calcutta, 194; suspicions of, aroused by the delay of the English to conclude, 194; painful situation in which he is placed by the English, 201; gallant defence of Chandranagar made by, 203-211; external supports fail, 208; surrenders, 211.

Rous, Mr., succeeds Mr. Sullivan as Chairman of the Court of Directors, 337; continues chairman during Clive's absence in India, 441.

Rizá Khan, Muhammad, is appointed Deputy Núwáb, 361; aversion of Clive to, 375; Clive associates other councillors with, 376.

Ríza Sáhib is directed by Chanda Sáhib to besiege Arkát, 75; takes up a position before it, and besieges it, 77-86; raises the siege, 87; is defeated by Clive at Arní, 91-94; incites North Arkát to rise against the English, 103; wastes splendid opportunities, 103-4.



S.

SAHUJI, Rájá, obtains the assistance of the English to recover his throne, 36; result to, of the success of his allies, 42.

Saif'u'd daulah becomes, by the death of his brother, Núwáb Názim of Bengal, 391.

Salábat Jang, succeeds Muzaffar Jang as Súbahdár of the Dakhan, 58; bestows Machh-lípatanam upon Dupleix, 58.

Samiaveram occupied by Clive, 124; the French attempt to surprise him at, 128; desperate contest at, ending in favour of the English, 129-34.

Samrá, or Sombre, enters the service of Mír Kásim, 346.

Saunders, Mr., succeeds Mr. Floyer as Governor of Madras, 3, 56; is worked upon by Muhammad Ali to assist him against the French, 4; despatches a force under Cope to Trichinápalli, 7; another under Gingen to check d'Auteuil, 8; accepts Clive's proposal to carry the war into the enemy's country, 67; offers to make great concessions to Dupleix, 147; dictates terms to Godeheu, 148.

Serafton, Mr., assistant to Mr. Watts, 227; is sent to bring Mír Jafar into the English camp, 273.

Sháh A'lam, breaks loose from the control of his father and invades Bihár, 296-7; applies to Clive to aid him, 299; is fooled by Rámnarain, and repulsed from before Patná, 301-2; begs an allowance from Clive to enable him to

Sháh A'lam—*cont.*]

retire, 302-3; is driven from Bihár, 354-5; position of, 380; terms of the agreement concluded by, with Clive, 384-7; insincerity of, 385.

Sháhzádah, the, *vide* Sháh A'lam.

Ships, English, gallant conduct of the, in the Huglí, 311-14.

Shrírangham, island of, described, 13; occupied alternately by the French and English, 14; the French retreat into, 122; surrender at, 137-8.

Siráj'u'd daulah, Núwáb of Bengal, Bihár, and Orísá, cause of anger of, against the English, 156; takes possession of Kásimbázár and marches against Calcutta, 157; the consequences of the capture by, of Calcutta, 159; is extremely irritated against Clive, and proposes an alliance to the French, 174; moves with his army against Calcutta, 175; treats the deputies sent to negotiate with him cavalierly, 176; attack by Clive on the camp of, 178-184; is utterly demoralised, proposes favourable terms, and retreats, 187-9; is urged by Clive to allow him to attack Chandranagar, first temporises, 192; then peremptorily forbids it, 194; is terrified by the news of Ahmad Sháh's invasion, and implores the aid of Clive, 197; is terrified by Admiral Watson into giving a *quasi* consent, 200; retracts it, 200; embarrassment caused to, by his own weak nature, 206; orders Rájá Dúlab Rám to aid the French, 208; fury of, on

Siráju'd daulah—*cont.*

hearing of the capture of Chandranagar, 213; change and change again of the feelings of, 213-14; directs Rájá Dúlab Rám to march on Palási, 214; feelings of Clive and the English with regard to, 215; vacillation of, 216-18; some causes of the alienation of the subjects of, 220; weakness of, works in favour of the English, 222; touching scenes between, and M. Law, prior to the enforced departure of the latter, 223-4; the tension between, and Clive becomes stronger, 225; hostile mood of, towards the English, 226; mistrust entertained by, of the English, 237; displays the cordiality of his feelings when his suspicions have been disarmed, 240; recalls his army from Palási, 241; removes Mír J'afar from the command of the army, 243; obtains some inkling that Mír J'afar is plotting against him, 247; threatens to destroy him, 247; is stunned by the flight of Mr. Watts and effects a reconciliation with Mír J'afar, 249; orders his army to Palási, 250; encamps near Palási, 260; strength and position of the army of, 260-62; dismay of, on learning the death of Mír Múdn, 266; touching appeal of, to Mír J'afar, 266; is treacherously urged by Dúlab Rám to quit the field, 267; follows his advice, and flees to Murshidábád, 267; arrives there, 277; attempts to join Law, but is seized at Bhágalpúr and brought back, 278; brought

Siráju'd daulah—*cont.*

into the presence of Mír J'afar, implores his life, 279; is murdered, 280; historical judgment upon, 280-81.

Sirkars, the Northern, ceded to France, 147.

Smith, Captain F., cowers the mutinous Europeans at Munger with two battalions of sipáhis, 421.

Smith, Colonel Richard, commands at the frontier station of Súrjapúr, 415; despatches five of the ringleaders of the mutiny to Calcutta, 417; places about half the remainder under arrest and despatches them to Calcutta, 418; succeeds Carnac as Commander-in-Chief, 440.

Smith, Major, commands at Alláhábád, 417; deals effectively with the mutinous officers, 417.

Smith, Mr. Culling, receives his share of Mír Kásim's bribe, 344.

Southern India, state of, under the later Mughuls, 46; state of, on the departure of Clive, 143; after his departure, 147; after the recall of Dupleix, 148.

St. Frais, commands French contingent with Siráju'd daulah's army, 261; opens the battle of Plassey, 263; gallant conduct of, 264, 269, 270; is, at last, forced back, 272.

St. Germain, Renault de, Monsieur, *vide* Renault.

Strahan, capture of Bajbaj by, 168 and *note*.

Sullivan, Mr., hostility of, to Lord Clive, 334; the reaction in favour of Clive paralyses, for a time, 336; is succeeded

**Sullivan, Mr.—*cont.***

as Chairman by Mr. Rous, 337; attacks Lord Clive in the House of Commons, 456.

Sumner, Mr., receives his share of Mir Kásim's bribe, 344; is removed from the service, 344-5; accompanies Clive to India as a member of the Select Committee, 337; unfitness of, for the position, 371.

T.

TANJÚR, position of, in 1751, 3; dominions of the Rájá of, attacked by the English, 36; is besieged by the French, 51; diplomatic skill and astuteness of the Rájá of, 52; forces the French to retreat, 53; Rájá of, declares for the English, 74; sends troops to aid them, 100; sympathises with the French, 147.

Thurlow, Sir John, proposal of, relative to Clive and the servants of the Company, 465; forms a basis of attack against Clive, 466.

Tímari, attack upon, and action at, 71-2; capture of, 89.

Treaty, details of secret, between Mir J'afar and Calcutta Government, 233 and *note*.

Trichinápalli, the possession of, necessary for the French scheme, 3; description of, 14; siege of, 101-3; at its last gasp, 114; manœuvres before, and final triumph of the English at, 114-38; again blockaded by the French, 147.

U.

UNDWÁ NÁLÁ, total defeat of Mir Kásim's army at, by Major Adams, 353.

Utatúr, is occupied by d'Auteuil, 125-27; is abandoned by d'Auteuil and occupied by Clive, 137.

V.

VANSITTART, Mr., is selected by Clive to succeed him, 323; character of, 324, 339, 340; warning of Clive to, 329, 339; the earlier colleagues of, 340; state of affairs in Bengal when he assumed office, 341; summons Major Caillaud to Calcutta, 342; accepts a large sum from Mir Kásim to replace Mir J'afar by the former, 343; replaces him, 344; proceeds to Mungér to negotiate with Mir Kásim, 347; comes to terms with him, 348; despatches Messrs. Hay and Amyatt to reason with the Núwáb, 349.

Verelst, Mr., succeeds Lord Clive in Bengal, 440.

Vijiyadrúg (*vide* Gheriah), 150.

W.

WATSON, Admiral, sails to attack Ghéria, 153; directs Clive to assault it, 154; proceeds with the fleet to the Huglí, 162; differences between, and Clive, 170; despatches five hundred and sixty sailors to assist

Watson, Admiral—*cont.*

Clive in his attack on the Nûwâb's camp, 177; refuses his consent to a treaty of neutrality with the French, 196-7; writes a savage letter to the Nûwâb, 199; and terrifies him into a quasi consent to the English views, which the Nûwâb vainly retracts, 200; moves up the river to Chaudranagar, 203; conducts the river siege of that place, 205-11; declines to affix his signature to the counterfeit treaty with Mîr J'afar, 235; no ground for supposing that he gave authority for the application of his signature by another, 237, *note*; prefers a claim for a larger share in the spoils of Plassey, 283; dies, 283, *note*.

Watts, Mr., surrenders Kâsim-bâzâr and pledges the destruction of the fortifications of Calcutta, 156, 157; accompanies the Nûwâb to Murshidâbâd, 195; character of, and position of, at the Court of the Nûwâb, 217; signification of the instructions sent to, 218; receives and transmits to Calcutta proposals from Yâr Lûtf for the deposition of the Nûwâb, 221; is ordered by Clive to close with the proposals of Mîr J'afar, 222-25; prepares for the final

Watts, Mr.—*cont.*

struggle, 227; negotiates the terms with Mîr J'afar, 228; is advised not to disclose those terms to Amîchand, 228; is forced, by the suspicions of Amîchand, to disclose them, 229; visits Mîr J'afar in disguise, and has an interview with him, 243; arranges that Amîchand shall precede him to Calcutta, 244; escapes from Murshidâbâd and joins the English army, 248; finds the treasury of Murshidâbâd contains much less than had been anticipated, 274.

Wilson, Captain, commands the ships which destroy the Dutch squadron in the Hugli, 311-14.

Y.

YÂR LÛTF KHAN, makes proposals to Mr. Watts to depose the Nûwâb in his own favour, 221; position taken by, at Plassey, 262; treacherously withdraws his troops from the field, 267.

Young, Captain, eternal infamy of, 158.

Yûnas Khân, joins the English at Trichinâpalli, 101; accompanies Clive across the Kolrûn, 124.

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