Essay on Clive

Macaulay Thomas Babington
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Macaulay's
Essay on Clive

With Introduction, Notes, etc., by
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INTRODUCTION.

1. Of all Macaulay's Essays that on Clive, if not the most brilliant, is the least open to adverse criticism. The presentment of the hero is substantially accurate; his services as soldier, statesman and founder of our Indian Empire are fully appreciated; his faults are clearly and fairly stated. Only a few exaggerations or misstatements require correction.

Written as a magazine article soon after Macaulay's return from office in India, and mainly from a biographical point of view, the Essay requires some amplification before it can stand as a chapter on Indian history. Rather too much is ascribed to the personal influence of Clive to the exclusion of causes which rendered his success possible. The victory of England was ultimately due to the mismanagement of the French Navy, the preoccupation of the French government with continental wars; and above all to our naval supremacy. At the critical moment we could send reinforcements by sea. The French could not. The issue of the war in India was largely influenced by the fate of French armies in Europe and the great contest for colonial predominance all over the world. Dupleix had to give back Madras in 1749 because France had lost and wished to recover Louisberg in America.
2. The internal condition of India was exactly suited to facilitate its conquest by an European Power. Timur or Tamerlane (1335-1405) had led the first invasion of India by the Moguls—nomads from Central Asia. Baber (1482-1530) made the first permanent settlement, the Moguls now appearing as Mahomedans. Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurungzeb (1658-1707) completed the conquest. But the zealous Mahomedanism of the latter provoked a Hindoo reaction. The Mahrattas founded several independent states whose raids carried anarchy throughout the Peninsula. The Sikhs, originally a religious sect, founded a military confederacy in the Punjab. The feebleness of Aurungzeb's successors enabled the viceroyos (Sabahdars) and Nawabs of the provinces to make their office hereditary and practically independent. The confusion was completed by the Persian invasion of Nadir Shah, who took Delhi in 1738; while Ahmed Shah made six incursions from Afghanistan, took Delhi and drove the Mogul Emperor into exile. If India had been left to itself a Mahratta dominion might have risen in the place of the Mogul empire. But the Mahrattas also had been temporarily crushed by Ahmed Shah at the battle of Paniput.

Thus no native state was capable of offering serious resistance to European encroachment. Rather in the fierce struggle for existence would European help or even tutelage be welcome in order to secure victory over a rival. Dupleix and the French were the first to see and to use the opportunity. To Clive belongs the credit of appropriating Dupleix's ideas and beating him at his own game.
3. The first English East India Company was founded in 1606; their first factory on the mainland at Surat in 1612. The French Company dates from 1664, Pondicherry being founded in 1668.

Government by Chartered Company had been deliberately adopted by all the nations trading to the East. India was distant. Communications were slow. There was a tacit understanding that beyond certain degrees of longitude the ordinary intercourse of diplomacy did not hold. Companies were able to extend commerce, annex territory, or wage private war without necessarily compromising the Home Government.

The rival Companies were very differently managed. The finances of the English company were sound. Behind it were all the wealth and resources of a world-wide trade. The English Navy held the sea. The Directors were thoroughly in touch with the government, but were subject to very little interference.

The French company had financially a more speculative basis. It never paid a dividend. It was patronised and interfered with by the government, to which it was heavily in debt. The volume of trade and the mercantile marine of France were smaller. The fatal indulgence in great continental wars hindered the growth of the navy, and hampered every colonial scheme.

4. Both companies were thoroughly reorganised early in the eighteenth century, and became keen commercial rivals. The eighteen years 1745-63 saw that rivalry become a political one, and subjected to the arbitrament of war. Three problems had to be solved. Could the English turn out the French? Could they win dominion over the native powers? Could they govern them, when
subjugated, with justice and success? In the solution of all three Clive had a principal hand.

Clive’s Indian life lasted from 1744-67, but he was absent in England in 1753-6 and 1760-5. We may conveniently divide the history of the time into four periods.

5. (i.) 1744-9. The result of the conflict caused in India by the outbreak of the war of the Austrian Succession was to strengthen greatly the prestige of the French. We had nothing to show against the capture of Madras. But its restoration at the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle left both sides in much the same position as at first. Clive had found his vocation as a soldier. Lawrence had founded our Indian army. Dupleix had shown how easily a few Europeans could rout a host of Asiatics when he defeated an attempt of the Nawab of the Carnatic to claim Madras from the French.

6. (ii.) 1750-4. Dupleix now took advantage of a disputed succession to establish in the Carnatic and in the Deccan rulers favourable to the French. Though peace reigned in Europe the two Companies fought as allies of rival pretenders. The French carried all before them until that stroke of genius, Clive’s capture and defence of Arcot, turned the tide. Clive returned to England before peace was made in 1754. Ultimately the success of France in the Deccan was balanced by British success in the Carnatic. But the net result was in our favour: for the French Government gave up the ‘forward’ policy of Dupleix and recalled him to die in penury and disgrace.

7. (iii.) 1756-63. A wholly new work in a new quarter awaited Clive on his return to India. Trouble
INTRODUCTION.

had arisen with a native state independently of French
intrigue. The victory of Plassey avenged the Black
Hole of Calcutta and placed a friendly ruler—Mir
Jaffar—in Bengal. But the new Nawab was com-
pletely dependent for his safety on the Company's
support. His treasury was drained to reward his English
allies. The native nobles were ready to revolt in resent-
ment at the indignity of their position. Doubtless Clive
foresaw this result, and calculated that native rule would
soon become impossible, and in its default the Company
would have to take over the government. The defeat
of the curiously belated attempt of the Dutch to assert
their claims belongs to the same period.

8. Meanwhile round Madras passed away for ever the
dream of a French Empire in India. The outbreak of
the Seven Years' War incited the French to revive
the schemes of Dupleix. Lally arrived in India with a
large force, fortunately after Plassey had been fought
and won. English influence was finally established in
the Deccan. The victory of Coote at Wandewash (1759)
and the surrender of Lally at Pondicherry (1761) ended
the war. In these operations Clive took no part beyond
organising the conquest by Forde of the Northern
Circars, a district which the Nizam had given Bussy for
the support of his army. By the peace of 1763 France
lost, besides her place in India, her American colonies,
her African settlements and some of her best West India
islands. From that date she has never seriously
challenged our sway in India. Her support of Hyder
Ali in 1781-3 was intended rather to worry us than
with any hope of achieving success.

9. (iv.) 1765-7. In his last period of office Clive's
work was threefold—to purge the Civil Service, to reform the army, to settle the lines of imperial policy on the practical incorporation of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa in an English dominion.

The last-named act was necessitated by events which happened during his absence in England. Mir Kásim, who procured from the Calcutta Council the deposition in his own favour of Mir Jaffar, was in his way a real patriot, his ultimate object being to use his power to drive the English out. He had indeed reasonable grievances in the misgovernment which Clive eventually put down. His designs were detected before they were matured. He achieved one success—the defeat and capture of an English force near Patna in 1763. The prisoners then taken, 150 in number, were treacherously murdered by his general Sumroo. But the victory of Major Hector Munro at Buxar (Baksar) over Mir Kásim and Shuja-ud-daula, the Nawab of Oudh, ended the war before Clive’s arrival. It was this battle, not, as Macaulay says with some exaggeration, the mere reappearance of Clive in 1765, which ensured peace.

10. Clive’s settlement must now be briefly summarised. He confirmed the succession of Nujm-ud-daulá in Bengal, while severely punishing the corruption of the Council of Calcutta which had given him his power. The Native States the minister charged with the collection of revenue was called the Diwán. Clive put the Company in that position, paying to the Nawab a sum sufficient to maintain his court. He also in part took over the duties of police and the administration of the law. Certain fortresses were to have English garrisons. While all real power was thus centred in English hands he was