

**ENGLISH MEN OF
ACTION.
WARREN HASTINGS**

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English Men of Action. Warren Hastings by Sir Alfred Lyall

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SIR ALFRED LYALL

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English Men of Action

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WARREN HASTINGS

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CHAPTER I

FIRST PERIOD OF INDIAN SERVICE

WARREN HASTINGS was born at Daylesford, in Worcestershire, in December, 1732. He was of good and ancient stock; although Burke, the son of a country solicitor, has described his origin as low, obscure, and vulgar—an unfounded calumny ventilated, like many others of the sort, by Sir Philip Francis. One of his name certainly held the manor of Daylesford in the time of Henry the Second; but the family suffered heavily in the great civil war of the seventeenth century, when John Hastings, then at Yelford Hastings in Oxfordshire, lost the greater part of his lands and his money in the service of Charles the First; and in 1715 Daylesford was sold to a merchant of Gloucester by Warren Hastings' great-grandfather. Subsequent generations must have been pressing rather closely on each other, for Warren Hastings himself was born only seventeen years later, his father having married, without means, at the age of fifteen. The poor mother died a few days after giving birth to her second son; while the father married again, took holy orders when he was old enough, and died obscurely in the West Indies; having failed through improvidence in most of life's affairs, though he succeeded in accidentally producing a very remarkable son.

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Perhaps no man of undisputed genius ever inherited less, in mind or money, from his parents, or owed them fewer obligations of any kind. It is not possible to find in Pynaston Hastings any trace of the character or intellectual qualities of his son; the mother died in child-birth, while the father seems to have abandoned him very soon afterwards; for in a petition presented to the Lord Chancellor by their uncle in 1733, on behalf of Warren Hastings and his sister Anne, it is said that their father had withdrawn himself to some distant place, leaving the children wholly unprovided for. The boy was at first placed by the grandfather at a charity school; but at the age of twelve he had the good luck to be sent by his uncle, who had taken charge of him, to Westminster. The system and mode of life at the large public schools of England, with all their grave deficiencies in regard to methodical teaching, have been usually good for the development of character and scholarship in boys of real intellectual ability. Their innate tastes and aptitudes, which need only free play and example, find room and stimulus, where the average schoolboy only discovers that loose discipline means liberty to be idle. Hastings worked hard, was good on the river, and was elected to a king's scholarship in the year 1747, as the names engraved on the wall of his dormitory still testify. But his uncle died, and he was made over to the care of a distant connection, who happened to be a director of the East India Company, and who insisted, against the remonstrance of the Westminster head-master, that Hastings should give up his high hopes of distinction at a university, and should learn accounts from Mr. Smith of Christ's Hospital