

A VINDICATION OF WARREN HASTINGS

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A vindication of Warren Hastings by G. W. Hastings

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G. W. HASTINGS

**A VINDICATION OF
WARREN HASTINGS**



MINIATURE PORTRAIT OF WARREN HASTINGS
By Ozias Humphry. (Considered by his wife the best likeness.)

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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OF
WARREN HASTINGS

BY
G. W. HASTINGS

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PREFACE

THE simple object of this book is to exhibit as clearly as may be, and therefore without prejudice or passion, in language that may be understood of all, the proofs, contained in three volumes of *State Papers*, edited by Mr. G. E. Forrest, and published by order of the Indian Government, that Warren Hastings, the man who made our Indian Empire and preserved it for the Crown, was wholly innocent of the crimes so often and so grievously laid to his charge.

Some of these proofs have already been given to the public (notably by Sir John Strachey in his admirable volume on the Rohilla War¹), but in disconnected form, and in some cases imperfectly. A full light has been thrown on the whole history of the case by the labours of Mr. Forrest, and there is no excuse now for evading the discussion of any part of the subject.

This book, professedly founded on the volumes above referred to, deals with six principal heads of accusation made by various speakers and writers, and it is confidently submitted that in no single case can a verdict of guilty be maintained, in the face of present knowledge, against the 'Great Accused'. If this be so, it is surely time that the truth should be openly and generously acknowledged, and the injustice of past generations be done away.

¹ *Hastings and the Rohilla War*, by Sir John Strachey, G.C.S.I.

No attempt at personal biography is attempted here. There have been several efforts in that direction, but the results have not been encouraging. They have been rather beacons to warn, than lights to illumine. Gleig's *Memoirs* are valuable, but can hardly be called interesting. It is strange how little he made of a great subject; and judging by his preface he was himself conscious of the failure. He was rudely attacked by Macaulay, though it is demonstrable that as to more than one historical event Gleig was right and his supercilious critic wrong. Yet it is true that if Gleig had written in the days of the *Dunciad* he would inevitably have been enrolled among the minions of the dull goddess.

Sir Alfred Lyall, to whose pages a respectful obligation is here expressed, committed himself, or rather was misled by others, to the grotesque legend that Warren Hastings was the son of a boy of sixteen, mated to a maiden equally immature. It is hoped that the chapter on Daylesford in this book will dispose once for all of an absurdity, for which Gleig, in his *Memoirs*, is primarily responsible. It is much more a subject for regret that Sir Alfred Lyall has treated some of the historical questions in his biography in an unsatisfactory way, not so much by direct condemnation as by leaving them in critical doubt, when such writers as Sir John Strachey and Sir James Stephen do not hesitate as to a decisive acquittal.

Sir Charles Lawson has contrived to import into his somewhat mixed narrative a variety of observations, interesting in their way, which may suggest a doubt whether he saw much of Daylesford, or had any trustworthy information from the Hastings family. He has not retailed the story current among North Oxfordshire peasants that Warren Hastings bought his second wife for her exact weight in gold; but if he had done so, it

would have been quite as true as some of the facts stated. As, for instance, that Simon Hastings was buried in Daylesford church, or that the estate was sold in 1853 to a Mr. Byass, or that Sir James Stephen was a Judge at Calcutta. These are only samples. In fact, a demon of error seems to haunt every attempt at a Life of Warren Hastings.

Warned by the fate of others, the author of the present book has preferred to deal with proof rather than with conjecture. Perhaps he knows a little more than some who have written confidently, and he believes that the best tribute to the illustrious dead is to preserve a sacred silence on some domestic matters, while vindicating, to the best of a small ability, the public fame of an historic statesman.

It is not without some claim, inherited and personal, that the author ventures to speak. His grandfather was present in Westminster Hall at the Impeachment, heard the speeches of Burke and Sheridan, and described them in his latest years to a listener who remembers still. His father stood in the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford when Warren Hastings received the degree of D.C.L. at the hands of the University, and lived to refer to that occasion forty years after, when he himself was honoured with a similar compliment. And lastly, the author is one of the very few now living who knew Daylesford House, outside and in, as it had been when Warren Hastings was there, preserved scrupulously in the exact state by Sir Charles and Lady Imhoff, then its custodians, to whose personal kindness, after long lapse of time, he refers with not unemotional regard.

Many changes, since that epoch, have passed over Daylesford. Other times, other men. Save for a simple urn, marked with an immortal name, the place has become,

or is becoming, unhistorical. But that is local only. The fame of Warren Hastings does not moulder with his ashes. It will live while the English tongue endures; and it may be that something has been done herein to clear that fame alike from the inventions of malice and the delusions of error.

NOTICE TO READERS

The References in the Notes are :—

State Papers means Selections from the Letters, Dispatches, and other State Papers preserved in the Foreign Department of the Government of India, 1772–85, edited by George W. Forrest, B.A., in Three Volumes.

Lyall means *Warren Hastings*, by Sir Alfred Lyall.

Gleig means *Memoirs of Warren Hastings*, by Gleig, in Three Volumes.

Stephen means *The Story of Nuncoomar*, by Sir James Stephen.