

MACAULAY'S ESSAY ON HASTINGS.



On the sixth of December, 1732, was born Warren Hastings, the son of a descendant of the illustrious family of Daylesford, who was to play a most important role in England's empire-making. Owing to a series of unfortunate accidents, young Hastings was forced to leave school at the age of sixteen, with a very meagre education. We next find him in the secretary's office at Calcutta, at the time when China was driving the French from the Carnatic, and fastening the chain binding India to the empire. Trouble and disorders provide the stepping-stones for the success of men of genius, and such was the case with Hastings. The chaos and confusion resultant from intrigue and war furnished the rounds by which he was to mount to what was, during the greater part of his rule, the dictatorship of the British possessions. For thirteen years he remained governor, and then returned to England, where he suffered impeachment. After a trial, which lasted upwards of seven years, and during which he had as prosecutors such men as Burke and Shheridan, he was acquitted. The major part of his fortune was spent in his own defence, and he passed the remainder of his life a pensioner of the company whose coffers he sacrificed his fair name, and blighted an otherwise illustrious career to fill. He died in 1818 at the ripe age of eighty-six.

In order to form a correct estimate of the administration of Hastings, we must place in one scale of the balance the good which he accomplished; in the other the means which he took to do it, and his arbitrary domination over the weak, though treacherous, Bengalese and other tribes.

That he was mainly instrumental in saving to the empire the original possessions in India is generally conceded. That he was solely instrumental in adding to these possessions is history. But not upon the preservation of the Indian Empire from a formidable combination of enemies; not upon the fact that despite this combination, he was able to acquire new territory, does the fame of Hastings chiefly rest. He went to India, a youth with scanty education, far from all association with men educated to government, his only training for his future life obtained in a counting-house, and from his own fertile brain he originated a system of government which deduced order from chaos, peace from anarchy. Of few men, indeed, has it been the lot to frame a system of government with such prim-