

# HISTORY

OF

## BRITISH INDIA.

---



---

### BOOK VI.

FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA,  
 IN 1784, TO THE TERMINATION OF THE WAR WITH THE MAHRATTAS, IN 1805.

---



---

#### CHAP. I.

*Administration of Mr. Macpherson—State of the Government in India, internal, and external—Board of Control pays, without Inquiry, the Debts of the Nabob of Arcot—Orders the Assignment of the Carnatic Revenues to be given up—Absorbs the Power of the Directors—Lord Cornwallis appointed Governor-General—Commencement of the Proceedings in Parliament relative to the Impeachment of Mr. Hastings—The best Mode of proceeding rejected by the House of Commons—Articles of Charge against Mr. Hastings—Three Bills to amend the East India Act—Proceedings in Parliament relative to the Impeachment of Mr. Hastings—Impeachment voted—Proceedings in Parliament tending to the Impeachment of Sir Elijah Impey—Motion for Impeachment negatived—Mr. Pitt's declaratory Act.*

UPON the departure of Mr. Hastings from Bengal, Mr. Macpherson succeeded, as senior in council, to the power and dignity of Chief Governor of the British establishments in India. Certain peculiarities marked the history of this

CHAP. I.  
 1785.  
 Mr. Macpher-

BOOK VI. gentleman in the service of the Company. He sailed to Madras in 1766, purser of an India ship; and having obtained the means of an introduction to the Nabob of Arcot, insinuated himself quickly into his inmost confidence. As the Nabob had, from the first moment of his deliverance from the terror of the French, been in a state of perpetual struggle with the servants of the Company for a larger share of power, Mr. Macpherson appears to have flattered him with the hopes of advantage from an application to the British minister; and to have prevailed upon the Nabob to make use of himself as the organ of the attempt. The project was, to persuade the minister, that the Nabob was suffering under a load of oppression by the Company's servants. Mr. Macpherson arrived in England, in execution of this commission, towards the end of the year 1768. Upon his return to Madras he was, during the administration of Governor Dupré, admitted into the civil service of the Company, and employed by that Governor in the most confidential transactions; particularly, in writing his dispatches, to which the superior skill of Mr. Macpherson in the art of composition afforded a recommendation. In the year 1776, Lord Pigot was Governor of Madras. Mr. Macpherson had ascended to the rank of a factor in the Company's service; when a paper, purporting to be a memorial to the Nabob of Arcot, was presented to the Council by their President. It had no signature; but recapitulated various services, which the writer had rendered to the Nabob in England; and the concurrence of circumstances rendered it but little possible that he should be any other person than Mr. Macpherson. Mr. Macpherson was called before the Board; and asked whether, or not he acknowledged the production. Mr. Macpherson replied, "That he could not give a precise answer; that it was not written in his hand, nor signed by him; and that it referred to transactions before he was in the Company's service." Lord Pigot regarded this answer as not only evasive, but a satisfactory proof that Mr. Macpherson was the author; and as the transactions appeared to him to be those of a man unfit for the service of the Company, he therefore moved that he should be dismissed. The following are words of the memorial; "The object of this commission was to procure relief from the oppressions under which the Nabob was labouring: To procure this wished-for relief, the means to be employed were, if possible, to raise in the breast of the Prime Minister a favourable respect for the Nabob; then to lay before him the distress of the Prince; likewise to show the advantage which would arise to the state, from granting him the proper protection." In describing his first interview with the Minister, the Duke of Grafton, the memorialist said, "I expatiated upon the superior merits of the Nabob; showed

## HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.

3

that he was the person to whom Britain owed the rise of her power in India ; that his attachment and unsullied honour to the English were unparalleled. I then dwelt upon his personal merits, as a statesman and a gentleman ; and showed, that though he had assurances of protection, under the sovereign hand, he was treated with indignity, and even tyranny." " Having represented," continues the author, " the Nabob's distress, and the oppressions under which he laboured, in the most cautious manner to his Grace, I availed myself of the disputes which subsisted, or were rather commencing, between his Grace, as First Lord of the Treasury, and the India Directors, to enforce the propriety of supporting the Nabob." Another of the topics which he says he always laboured was, " that the firm support of his Highness was the best restraint which government had upon the usurpations of the servants of a certain Company." The memorialist also desires the Nabob to recollect, whether he was not the inventor of the plea, by which the Nabob claimed to be a party to the treaty of Paris ; that is, to rank himself with the princes of Europe, as a member of their general system ; and to make the King of France an arbiter between him and the English. Beside the general project of relieving the Nabob from oppression, that is, from the necessity of paying his debts, and of yielding any thing from the revenues of the country towards its defence, the memorialist claims the merit of having exerted himself in favour of two other favourite designs of the Nabob ; that of usurping the seat of the Subah of Deccan, and that of disinheriting his elder in favour of his second son. Beside the arguments which the memorialist employed upon the minister, and the publications by which he boasts of having influenced the public mind, he recurred to other instruments of persuasion. He offered presents to the minister, but they were rejected ; and then to the minister's secretary, but they were rejected again. His next offer, but under the necessary portion of disguise, was that of a present to the nation ; a sum of seventy lacs, or even more, to be given to the minister, on loan for the public service, at an interest of two per cent.

CHAP. I.  
 1785.

As the memorialist in these transactions appeared distinctly to have lent or sold himself to the Nabob, to act in hostility to the Company, it was decided in the Council, by a majority of nine to two, that Mr. Macpherson should be dismissed from the service. Four of the members, not satisfied with a silent acquiescence in the reasons of the President, add, that " a man of the intriguing disposition which that paper shows Mr. Macpherson to be, is, we think, very unfit to be employed as a servant of the Company ; more especially as we believe Mr. Macpherson has been concerned in the intrigues, which the greater part of

Book VI. the Board must be sensible have lately been carried on at the Nabob's Durbar,  
 1785. to the detriment of the Company's service, and which may have impeded the  
 execution of their late orders."

As the Board regarded the evidence against Mr. Macpherson as conclusive, they held it unnecessary to call upon him for a defence. To the Directors, the offence, when it came before them, must have appeared of a very trivial sort. About the restoration of Mr. Macpherson they seem not to have hesitated. Their only anxiety was to restore him, without submission to the condition, namely, the votes of three-fourths of the Directors, and three-fourths of the Proprietors, prescribed by the act. The opinion obtained from the Company's council was, that though his dismissal, pronounced without receiving his defence, was informal, he could not, without submission to the clause of the act, be restored. The counsel added, "And it is worth considering, if Mr. Macpherson should be restored, whether he is a proper person to be continued in the Company's service: He has, in my opinion, too much connexion with the Nabob of Arcot; and when the Company's interest and Nabob's are opposite, (as they will often happen), they will greatly disturb a man of honour and integrity." As this opinion appears not to have concurred with the wishes of the leading portion of the Directors, they made an experiment whether a more favourable opinion could not be obtained from another quarter. They consulted the Solicitor-General, Wedderburne, who had sufficient power over technical language to satisfy them completely. He pronounced the dismissal of Mr. Macpherson not a dismissal; and by consequence, the clause of the act, which regarded dismissal, had in this case no application. Mr. Macpherson was immediately restored. In announcing, however, this decree to the Governor and Council of Madras, the letter of the Court of Directors has the following words; "But, as his behaviour was disrespectful to your Board, and, in other particulars, very reprehensible, we direct that you give him a severe reprimand, and acquaint him that a like conduct will meet with a severer punishment." From the humiliation, however, of such a reprimand, and such a menace, the Court of Directors, who commanded them, afforded him effectual protection. Though restored to his rank and emoluments in the service, he was allowed to remain in England, till January, 1781, when he was chosen to fill the high office, vacant by the resignation of Mr. Barwell, in the Supreme Council of Bengal. This appointment excited the attention of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, who took it under examination, and deemed it of sufficient importance to make it the subject of their third report. The conduct of Mr. Mac-

## HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.

5

pherson, who undertook the office of a secret enemy of the Company, and became the willing and mercenary instrument of designs levelled against his country; the conduct of the Court of Directors in shielding such a man from the punishment awarded for his offence, nay, distinguishing him, as if he had been a model of excellence, by a most unusual act of reward; lifting him up from a low rank in the service, and placing him all at once in nearly the highest and most important office which they had to bestow, the Select Committee condemned, in language of the greatest severity. The design of the Nabob to exempt himself from all dependance upon the Company, the Committee represented as early formed, systematically pursued, and pregnant with danger. He endeavoured to negotiate a treaty of neutrality with the French, which would have secured that nation at Pondicherry. He carried on, to the perpetual disturbance of the Company's government, a perpetual system of intrigue, in pursuance of his plan. Of Mr. Macpherson's construction of the article in the treaty of Paris respecting the guarantee of his independence by France, he was eager to take advantage, and to interpose that nation between himself and the English. "By means of such flattering delusions," say the Committee, "the ambition of the Nabob Mahomed Ali had been, before this invention, as well as ever since, stimulated to desperate designs and enterprises; which have disturbed the peace of India, shaken the lawful government of the Company at Madras, wasted his own revenues, and at length brought the power of Great Britain in that part of the world to the verge of ruin."

CHAP. I.  
 1785.

A copy of this report was by the Directors sent out to Bengal, where Mr. Macpherson was then performing so important a part in the government of India. It was a call upon him for a defence of his own conduct and of theirs. The apology was written, under date the 30th of March, 1783. It consisted of the following particulars; First, an assertion, that the transactions in which he had been engaged for the Nabob of Arcot, were made fully known to the Company's Governor of Madras, at the time when he entered into the Company's service, and that he had never presented any memorial of those transactions to the Nabob, but what had that Governor's approbation; Secondly, of a display of the meritorious proceedings of the Supreme Government in Bengal, from the time when he became a member of it.\*

Upon the first part of this apology, it is obvious to remark, that it consisted

\* For these facts, see the Third Report of the Select Committee formed in 1781; and Mr. Macpherson's Letter to the Court of Directors, dated Calcutta, 30th of March, 1783, printed by order of the House of Commons, among the papers laid before them in 1787.

Book VI.  
 1785.

entirely of his own affirmation of what passed between himself and a man that was dead. Besides, if it was true, it only proved that a certain governor sanctioned a certain conduct ; not that such conduct was innocent. The secret concurrence of a governor, if in any thing wrong, was a collusion between two individuals, not the sanction of government. Upon the second part, an observation equally conclusive was, that the plea was foreign to the charge ; for surely the acts of the Supreme Council, whether excellent or the reverse, during the time in which Mr. Macpherson had possessed a seat at the Board, were no proof that nearly twenty years before he had not committed an act, which ought to have excluded him from the service.

As Mr. Hastings remained in India till the passing of Mr. Pitt's bill left no longer any doubt of his recall, Mr. Macpherson had time to rise to seniority in the Council ; and by virtue of his station, occupied, when left vacant, the Governor-General's chair.

State of the  
 Company's  
 government.

The state of the revenues; the affairs of Oude ; and the proceedings of Scindia, the great Mahratta chief, occupied first the attention of the new administration.

The state, in which Mr. Macpherson received the government, he represents as far from happy and prosperous. In a statement, bearing date the 4th of March, 1785, " The public distress," he says, " was never so pressing as in this moment. The season of the heavy collections is over ; the demands of Madras and Bombay are most pressing ; and our arrears to the army are upwards of fifty lacs." \* To the Court of Directors, when rendering an account of his government upon the intimation of his recall, he represents himself, as having been called upon " to act as their Governor-General, at a season of peculiar difficulty, when the close of a ruinous war, and the relaxed habits of their service, had left all their armies in arrear, and their presidencies in disorder." † The loose language, in which the Indian Governors indulge, makes it impossible

\* Letter to Major Palmer, printed among extracts from papers in No. 2, vol. vii. presented to the House of Commons on the 13th of March, 1786.

† Copy of a letter to the Court of Directors, dated 10th August, 1786, printed by order of the House of Commons.—The Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1810, in their Third Report, p. 370, say, " The effects of the war which ended in the year 1783 were particularly prejudicial to the financial system of India. The revenues had been absorbed, the pay and allowances of both the civil and military branches of the service were greatly in arrear ; the credit of the Company was extremely depressed : and, added to all, the whole system had fallen into such irregularity and confusion, that the real state of affairs could not be *ascertained* till the conclusion of the year 1785-6." Such is the state, in which India was left, by the administration of Mr. Hastings.

## HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.

7

to know very exactly what Mr. Macpherson indicated, by the term “relaxed habits” of the service; undoubtedly, however, he meant bad government; since he described them as among the causes of some of the worst effects,—armies all in arrear—and presidencies all in disorder.

CHAP. I.  
 1785.

The Governor-General and Council stood pledged to Mr. Hastings for the maintenance of his new system for the management of Oude. To reduce, however, the drain upon the Nabob’s treasury produced by allowances and gratuities to the Company’s servants, a rule was introduced, that every thing of this nature should appear upon the face of his accounts, be recorded by the Council, and transmitted for the inspection of the Court of Directors. A body of troops had been assigned by the Nabob to Mr. Hastings, as a body guard, during his residence in Oude; and to these troops had been appointed British officers at the Nabob’s expense. This too was a burthen upon the Nabob which the Governor-General deemed it improper any longer to impose. The expense, however, of Major Palmer, the private agent of Mr. Hastings, left at the seat of the Nabob when the ostensible resident was withdrawn, he was induced “from motives (he says) of delicacy, to the late Governor-General, and his arrangements in the upper provinces,” not immediately to remove; though the expense was enormous,\* and the agent employed for no other function than to transmit to the Presidency the letters of the Vizir and present those addressed to him by the Governor-General. The Futy-gur detachment, from the changes which had taken place on the frontiers of Oude, it was also, for the present, deemed unsafe to withdraw. But the Governor-General declared his resolution of confining the military burthen imposed upon the Vizir to the smallest amount, consistent with the security of his dominions; and for this he conceived that one complete brigade, in constant readiness, and punctually paid, would suffice. †

Nabob of  
 Oude.

The proceedings of Scindia were already an object of great jealousy, if not of dread. In 1781, Mr. Hastings, apparently engrossed by one object, the accomplishment of peace with Scindia, and through his medium with the government at Poonah, overlooked or misunderstood the dangers which were involved in the aggrandisement of the Mahratta chief, and expressly instructed the English ambassador to throw no obstacles in the way of the designs which he entertained against the remaining territories of the Mogul. Toward the end of the year 1782,

\* In all 112,950*l.* of which 22,800*l.* was in salary to Major Palmer alone. The expense of the residency, under Mr. Bristow, which Mr. Hastings had represented as frightfully enormous, amounted to 64,202*l.* See Burke’s Charges, No. 16, sect. 89.

† See the letter to Major Palmer, quoted in the preceding page.

BOOK VI.  
 1785.

The Emperor,  
 Shah Aulum.

died Nujeef Khan, whose talents had, even in its present decline, given a portion of stability to the imperial throne. The remaining chiefs by whom it was surrounded immediately broke into general discord. In the petty, but virulent warfare in which they engaged, the unhappy Emperor was banded from hand to hand, according as each, attaining a precarious ascendancy, became master of his person; and he was equally enslaved, and oppressed by them all. About six months after the death of Nujeef Khan, Mr. Hastings, though he had directed Colonel Muir, not to insert any thing in the treaty with Scindia “which might expressly mark our knowledge of his views, or concurrence in them,” namely, his views on the territory of Shah Aulum; and though he had on that occasion declared, that “our connexion with the Mogul had long been suspended, and he wished never to see it renewed, as it had proved a fatal drain to the wealth of Bengal, and the treasury of the Company,” sent certain agents, among whom were Major Browne, and Major Davy, to the court of the Emperor at Delhi; and, by means of them, entered into negotiations, if not engagements, of which the nature has never been satisfactorily explained. It appears, that an offer was made, on conditions which were accepted, to provide for the expense of any troops which the King might require; and Major Browne, in his dispatch to Mr. Hastings, laid before the Board, declared, that “The business of assisting the Shah can and must go on, if we wish to be secure in India, or regarded as a nation of faith and honour.”\* The proposition, however, which was made by the Governor-General, to grant assistance to the Mogul, was disrelished by the other members of the Board; and the scheme was defeated. At what mark it was aimed, we no where distinctly perceive.† “I avow,” says Mr. Hastings, “that I would have afforded effectual assistance to the Mogul, that is, to the King Shah Aulum, if powers had been granted to me; but my Council differed in opinion with me, and nothing was done.” This is all the information which, in his answer to the charge on this subject, Mr. Hastings condescends to yield. When urging upon the Directors his wishes for sending troops to the assistance of the Mogul, he had indeed held a language, contradictory both to his former and his subsequent declarations. If the King’s authority, he said, “is suffered to receive its final extinction, it is impossible to foresee what power may arise out of its ruins, or what events may be linked in the same chain of revolution with it. But your

\* Letter from Major Brown to Mr. Hastings, dated at Delhi, 30th December, 1783.

† The papers on this subject were refused by ministry, or rather by the House of Commons, under the guidance of the minister. See the Debates in Parliament, under date March 7th and 18th, 1786.



## HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.

9

CHAP. I.  
 1785.

interests *may* suffer by it : your reputation certainly *will*—as his right to our assistance has been constantly acknowledged—and, by a train of consequences to which our government has not intentionally given birth, but most especially by the movements, which its influence, by too near an approach, has excited, it has unfortunately become the efficient instrument of a great portion of the King's present distresses and dangers." Mr. Burke, however, affirms, with a strength which the circumstances will not warrant, that the pretended desire of Mr. Hastings to free the Emperor from thralldom under the Delhi chiefs, was not his real design, because not consistent with some of his declarations, and some of his acts. While Mr. Hastings was at Lucknow, in 1784, the eldest son, and heir apparent of the Emperor, repaired to Oude, to solicit the protection of the Governor-General and Nabob. He was received with marks of distinction, which had no tendency to extinguish hope, and was described by Mr. Hastings as a person of considerable qualifications, well versed in affairs. His solicitations for aid to deliver his father from oppression, and re-establish in some degree the fortunes of his house, Mr. Hastings informed him, were opposed, by the present temper of the English nation, as well as by that of his colleagues in the government ; and he advised an intermediate application to Scindia, as the most powerful Mahratta Prince, the ally of the English nation, and a man who, unless early prevented, was likely to take an opposite part. To Scindia, Mr. Hastings, as he informed the Court of Directors, had himself written, on the very first advice he received of the flight of the Mogul Prince, not only to apprize him of that event, but to solicit his advice. Scindia immediately sent to Lucknow his familiar and confidential ministers, with whom Mr. Hastings held several secret conferences, without the presence even of a secretary. He reported no more than the result of these conferences ; namely, " that the inclinations of the Mahratta chief were not very dissimilar from his own ; " and he added, that neither in this, nor in any other instance, would he suffer himself to be drawn into measures which should tend to weaken the connexion between the English government and Scindia ; " nor, in this, even to oppose his inclinations." What his inclinations were, at the time of the negotiation with Colonel Muir, the reader will remember : What were the recent declarations of Mr. Hastings, respecting the obligations both of justice and of policy, to support the Emperor, has been immediately stated : What were the inclinations of Scindia at the present moment, Mr. Hastings is far from disclosing : The actions of Scindia made them soon distinctly appear.\* The Emperor, from the impulse of a feeble mind, which deems any

\* The insinuations of Mr. Burke that the negotiation of the Governor-General with the Mogul

10 HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.

Book VI.  
 1785.

evil less than that under which it is immediately suffering, listened to the insidious overtures of Scindia, who offered him deliverance from the undutiful servants that enthralled him. Partly by intrigue, and partly by force, Scindia got possession easily of the imperial person, and with the imperial person, of all the pretensions, and all the territories, which belonged to the imperial throne. Nor was it long before he manifested the value of that friendship of his to the English, which Mr. Hastings claimed so much of merit for maintaining. Mr. Hastings had not yet left Calcutta, when a body of the Seiks invaded Rohilcund; and it was on strong grounds believed, that they received encouragement from Scindia to the attempt. That ambitious chief proceeded in his plans with so much expedition, that before the end of March he was master of Agra; and the fort of Ally Ghur, which could not long be defended, remained, in that part of India, the only place of strength, beyond the confines of the Vizir, which was not in his power. He afforded protection to Cheyte Sing, and gave him a command in his army. He had already treated the Vizir with so little delicacy, that nothing but the prospect of effectual resistance, as Major Palmer and Mr. Anderson united in representing, could be expected to restrain him within the bounds of justice.\* What was more, he compelled the Emperor to declare him Vicegerent of the Mogul empire, an authority which superseded that of the Vizir; and consolidated in the hands of the Mahrattas all the legal sovereignty of India. These advantages he failed not to direct immediately against the Company themselves; and incited the Mogul to make a demand of the tribute due to him from the English. On the charge, however, of connivance with the designs of Scindia, Mr. Hastings has the follow-

covered an insidious design to betray him into the hands of Scindia, receives its greatest confirmation from what Mr. Pitt was brought to say in the House of Commons, on the 18th of March, 1786, in the debate on the production of Delhi papers. "If he were inclined to lay open secrets which the interests of the country required should be concealed, he could easily prove," he said, "that the junction of the Mogul with the Mahratta powers was of the highest advantage to the Company." Two other objects, which were always found an efficient source of terror, as terror is always, in such hands, a most convenient instrument of persuasion, were, on this occasion, brought forward by the minister. These were, Tippoo Saib, and the French. These two, he said, were, at that time, plotting against the Company; and Tippoo was making efforts, by holding out dazzling projects to the Mogul, to realize the great advantage of the imperial authority and name. "In order to counteract this," said Mr. Pitt, "it became necessary for the servants of the Company to exert themselves to the utmost to ingratiate themselves with the Court of Delhi, and by that means secure to their employers that great body of strength and influence which would naturally result from the countenance of the Shah." Ibid. It was "a body of strength and influence" on which Mr. Hastings set a high value, in his instructions for the negotiation with Scindia!

\* Extracts from Papers in No. 2, vol. vii. ut supra.