

THE BATTLE OF PLASSEY  
From *Our Empire Story* by H E Marshall

Clive did not stay long in England. He soon returned to India with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and upon the terrible day of the Black Hole he landed again at Fort St. David. But in those days news travelled slowly, and it was not until August that the people of Madras heard of the cruel deed. Then, gathering an army of fifteen thousand sepoy and nine hundred British soldiers, Clive set out to avenge the death of his fellow-countrymen. The little army went by sea, with Admiral Watson in command of the ships. Madras is a long way from Calcutta, and sailing in those days was a slow business, for the ships were often at the mercy of the winds. And although Clive set out in October, it was December before he reached Bengal.

Clive lost no time in attacking the Nawab, and very soon Calcutta was in his hands. The Nawab marched to meet Clive with thousands of soldiers, with elephants, and horses, and cannon, which were both great and many. But Clive, with his little army, beat the Nawab so thoroughly that he was soon suing for peace.

This Clive granted, the Nawab promising to restore all that he had stolen from Calcutta and to give more privileges to the British than they had had before. This was not a great triumph, and it hardly seemed as if Suraj-ud-Daula was punished enough for his cruel treatment of the British. But perhaps Clive thought that it would be difficult to force him to do more as he was so powerful.

But Suraj-ud-Daula was treacherous as well as cruel. He had made promises, which he never meant to keep, merely in order to gain peace. Now he tried in every way that he could to wriggle out of these promises. He secretly wrote to the French and asked them to help him against the British. He did all manner of things, changing his mind again and again.

Clive at last grew tired of the Nawab's lying and wriggling, and made up his mind to put an end to it.

Britain and France were again at war, for the Seven Years' War had begun. So Clive now besieged the French factory at Chandranagor. The French fought bravely, but Clive was more than a match for them, and after ten days they gave in.

With the loss of Chandranagor French power in the north of India was at an end. For more than eighty years they had struggled with their rivals, the British, in trade. Now that struggle was over. Clive, having thus put an end to Suraj-ud-Daula's hope of help from the French, next turned to crush him.

Suraj-ud-Daula, who was wicked and treacherous, was hated by all, and many even of his own followers were ready to betray him. Now, although it does not seem a very fine thing to do, Clive joined with these traitors in order to bring about the downfall of the Nawab.

Mir Jafar, the commander-in-chief of Suraj-ud-Daula's army, was one of the discontented. Now Clive promised to make him Nawab if he would betray his master.

Another of the traitors was Omi Chand, a very wealthy and very greedy Indian banker.

Clive plotted with these men, and all was nearly arranged when Omi Chand threatened to tell the Nawab all about it, unless the British promised him an immense sum of money for himself.

Omi Chand was as wicked and as treacherous as Suraj-ud-Daula, “The greatest villain upon earth,” Clive calls him, and he thought that the best way to meet his lying was by lying. Clive had two treaties drawn up. One was written upon red paper and one on white. The one on red paper was only a sham treaty and in it Omi Chand was promised all that he wanted. In the other, which was the real treaty, his name was not mentioned. All the council signed both treaties except Admiral Watson. He would have nothing to do with the deceit. But Clive was not to be stopped, and some one else signed Admiral Watson's name for him.

Of course this was wrong, and this deed shows like a black blot among all the splendid and brave acts of Clive's life. But the position of the British in India was full of danger. They were but a handful of white men in the midst of millions of dark foes, and Clive thought that it was only by meeting treachery by treachery that he could save them all from death. And he was never ashamed of it.

Long afterward, when his enemies accused him of this deed, he said that he would do it again if the need came, “Yes, a hundred times!” When Clive was ready to fight he sent a letter to Suraj-ud-Daula which made him see that he could no longer trifle. Then he gathered his army and marched to Plassey to meet the foe.

But now Mir Jafar, who had quarrelled with the Nawab, made friends or seemed to make friends with him again. Clive knew not what to do. Was Mir Jafar going to keep his word and help him, or was he not? Without his help the risk of a battle was almost too great. If the British lost, it would mean an end to their power in Bengal. In this difficulty Clive called a council of war, and asked his officers what they would advise. “Shall we attack or shall we wait for more help?” he asked. Seven officers voted to attack, thirteen, Clive himself among them, voted to wait.

So it was settled. There was to be no battle.

After the council was over, Clive went away by himself and walked about for an hour thinking it all out again. As he was sitting under some trees still in doubt, a letter from Mir Jafar was brought to him. In this letter Mir Jafar swore that he was still faithful to Clive. This might be true or it might be false, but Clive had made up his mind. He would fight, come what would. Returning to the camp he gave orders to march.

At six o'clock in the morning of **23rd June** 1757, the battle of Plassey began, and by five in the afternoon the huge Indian army with elephants and camels, horses and clumsy ox-drawn cannon, was fleeing from the field. Mir Jafar had not helped Clive, neither, however, had he helped the Nawab. He had stood aloof waiting to see which side would win. And when the Nawab's most trusty general was killed and the Nawab himself in despair threw his turban on the ground at Mir Jafar's feet, begging for help, Mir Jafar soothed him with soft words. But instead of helping him he sent more messages to Clive.

Plassey is one of the most important of Indian battles. It is not important because of the number killed—on Clive's side there were only twenty-two and on the Nawab's five or six hundred. It is important because at one blow it gave to Britain the whole of Bengal, for Mir Jafar was merely a tool in the hands of the British.

When the battle was over Mir Jafar was not sure how Clive would receive him. But Clive had got all that he wanted, so he greeted him as the new Nawab, and with the usual great ceremonies he was seated upon the throne.

But when Omi Chand appeared to receive his reward it was very different Clive, although he was many years in India, never learned to speak any of the Indian tongues. So now he turned to his secretary, "It is time to undeceive Omi Chand," he said.

"Omi Chand," said the secretary, "the red treaty is a trick. You are to have nothing."

The greedy banker could hardly believe his ears. Already he had been gloating over his ill-gotten gains. The shock of disappointment was too great. He fell back fainting in the arms of his servants. He never recovered from the bitter blow. His mind was so shattered that he became quite foolish and childish and died some months later.

Suraj-ud-Daula fell into the hands of Mir Jafar who put his late master cruelly to death. In this the British had no hand. But Mir Jafar, although he had got what he wanted, and was Nawab, soon found that it was not all a bed of roses. He had to pay immense sums of money to the British as a reward for having made him Nawab. To get this money he ground his people cruelly. Used as they were to tyranny, the oppression of Mir Jafar was more than even they could bear, and they rebelled. Outside enemies threatened him too, and to put the rebellion down and drive out these enemies, Mir Jafar was obliged to ask help from Clive.

Clive gave the help but demanded still more money. So the Nawab was little better off than before. Mir Jafar raged with wrath. He felt that he was a mere puppet and that the British were the real rulers and he longed to be rid of them. So now he began to plot with the Dutch, who still had a factory in Bengal. But in a fight both by land and sea the British beat the Dutch. The power of Holland in India was destroyed for ever, and the British were supreme in Bengal.