



HISTORY SHAPERS

# THE STORY OF LORD CLIVE

JOHN LANG



This edition published 2025  
by Living Book Press  
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-76153-565-9 (hardcover)  
978-1-76153-574-1 (softcover)

First published in 1906.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.



A catalogue record for this  
book is available from the  
National Library of Australia

# THE STORY OF LORD CLIVE

*by*

John Lang



## GET ALL OF THE ‘HISTORY SHAPERS’ BOOKS

### The Story of...

David Livingstone	Robert Bruce	Chalmers of New
H. M. Stanley	General Gordon	Guinea
Abraham Lincoln	Lord Clive	Bishop Patteson
Sir Francis Drake	Captain Cook	Joan of Arc
Sir Walter Raleigh	Nelson	Napoleon
Columbus	Lord Roberts	Cromwell

### PLEASE NOTE

In this series, you will read about historical figures who displayed courage, bravery, self-sacrifice, and many other admirable traits. Their stories remind us that many people in history took bold actions and made tough choices. Yet, even those who achieved great things sometimes held ideas or pursued goals that were not beneficial to everyone. History is full of complex individuals—parts of their lives inspire us to be brave and stand up for what is right, while other parts remind us to consider the unintended consequences of our actions.

As you explore these biographies, we invite you to reflect on the qualities that enabled these figures to achieve greatness and the lessons we can learn from their mistakes. Maybe you too can become a History Shaper—someone who learns from the past and helps to make our world a better place for everyone.

# CONTENTS

1.	Clive's Boyhood	1
2.	Clive Goes to India	7
3.	The Siege of Arcot	22
4.	Kaveripak and Samiaveram	31
5.	The Black Hole of Calcutta	42
6.	The Battle of Plassey	53
7.	Death of Surajah Dowlah— Defeat of the Dutch—Clive's End	69



## CLIVE'S BOYHOOD

**Y**ou have heard of India, of its riches and its grandeur and its glory, of its hundreds of millions of people, and of the great deeds that have been done there. But perhaps you have never heard who it was that gave India to England; you may possibly know nothing of Robert Clive, the boy who, when he was really little more than a boy, laid for us the foundations of the vast Empire in the East over which King Edward VII. now reigns.

Clive was born on 29th September 1725, near Market, Drayton in Shropshire, where his people had owned an estate ever since about the time when Henry the First was King of England, which is a very long time indeed.

Even as a very small boy, Robert Clive was not quite like other boys of his age. Nothing could frighten him. He was like the boy in the fairy-tale who "did not know how to shiver," and he was so entirely without fear that sometimes his mother thought that her son was not quite sound in his mind, and even his father and his uncles were sometimes uneasy about him. At seven years old he was very much like that Scotch terrier whose solemn look was only to be accounted for (so his master said) by the fact that he "couldna get enough o' fighting." Clive was

always fighting; he would fight anything and anybody, and he never gave in, nor knew when he was beaten. If a boy was too strong for him, Clive would fight again and again till he won. That is, of course, what every boy should do, but we don't all do it.

Clive (like a good many other boys, perhaps) would never learn his lessons, no matter how much he might be flogged—and a flogging, in those days was not a thing to laugh at. He was sent from school to school, but everywhere there was the same story: he was idle and bad, they said,—“a dunce” was the least ill name that was given to him. Of all his school-masters there was but one who saw in him any good, only one who said, “This boy may yet become a great man.”

Clive's father is said to have been a man of violent temper, and perhaps it may have been because the father found the son difficult to manage that the little boy was sent away from home when he was only three years old. Whatever the reason, he was sent to Manchester, to the house of a Mr. Bayley, who had married his mother's sister. There Clive stopped for some years, and then, while still a very small boy, he went to a private school at Lostocke in Cheshire.

From Lostocke, when he was eleven, he was sent to Mr. Burslem's school at Market Drayton, and the people of that town talked of “Bob” Clive's doings for many a long year afterwards. In all mischief he was first; wherever it was possible to get into a scrape, Bob Clive got into it. In



the town, amongst the tradesmen, his hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him.

There was in Market Drayton a little band of boys of whom Clive was leader. Without cease they warred against the shopkeepers of the town, keeping the whole place in hot water. The band was really a little band of brigands, who made themselves to every one a nuisance and a terror, and everywhere levied "blackmail." That is to say, if the band took a dislike to any tradesman, Clive, as leader, would go to that tradesman and say to him: "Now, if you do not pay us so much" — perhaps it might be money, or perhaps something else that the boys had set their hearts on — "we'll see that you have no peace; and there's no saying what may happen to your shop windows."

Generally the shopkeepers paid up, for they knew that Clive might be trusted to do what he said he would do. They had tried being defiant, but it did not pay. Once a tradesman had refused what was demanded, and the band had straightway, during heavy rain, built a dam in the gutter near his shop, so that the flood-water swamped the place and his goods were damaged. And when, before the water poured into the shop, the dam had burst at a weak spot, Clive threw himself into the breach, and with his body kept the water from escaping until the other boys repaired the dam. The shopkeeper, in self-defence, was forced to pay what the boys asked.

Nowadays such pranks could not be played in a town, but at that time, you see, there were no regular police,

and what was called the "Watch" was formed of feeble old men who were no match for mischievous boys. They were not very much good for anything, those old men, except to toddle about of nights, with a lantern, calling the hour.

"Two o'clock; and a fine frosty morning," perhaps they would shout in a long-drawn wail, at that hour. It is not easy to see of what particular use they were, except perhaps to make people, snug in bed, turn over sleepily and draw the blankets more snugly about their ears; just as the mate of a sailing-ship sometimes, when in port, orders a middy to call him at eight bells in the morning watch (the mate's usual time for going on duty when at sea), so that he may have the pleasure of turning round and dropping off asleep again.

But it was not only in mischief that Clive was leader. In everything where pluck was needed he was always first, and he never seemed to see danger, nor to shrink from risks that others dared not face. The greater the danger, during all his life the greater was his coolness.

There is at Market Drayton a church with a lofty tower, eighty feet or more in height. Near the top there are stone gargoyles (old-fashioned projecting waterspouts), shaped like a dragon's head and neck. Up to one of these Clive climbed at the risk of his life, and there, astride of a gargoyle, he sat, perfectly happy and fearless, with nothing to hold on by but the stone spout, whilst his boy friends and the townspeople stood shivering, each second expecting

THERE HE SAT, PERFECTLY HAPPY AND FEARLESS.

to see him lose his balance and come crashing on to the stones below.

It was a dangerous climb to get up; but it is always easier to climb up than it is to climb down. When you climb down you must look down, in order to see where your feet are to go, and to look down causes most people to become dizzy. Then people lose their heads, and sometimes can go no farther, either up or down. They clutch tightly till their hands become cramped, and then, if no help is possible, their grip loosens and they fall.

How Clive got safely to the ground is a mystery; the slightest mistake meant death. What he went up for is also a mystery. Old books say that it was “to get a smooth stone which lay on the projecting spout, for the pleasure of jerking it.” But it is not easy to see how the “smooth stone” got on to the spout, nor, if it were there, how it could be seen from the ground. It seems much more likely that Clive climbed up to get a jackdaw’s nest from some part of the tower.

## CLIVE GOES TO INDIA

**A**fter a few years at Market Drayton, Clive was sent to a public school—Merchant Taylors; but after a very brief stay he went to a private school in Hertfordshire, where, he remained till 1743.

In that year there came a big change in his life. His father got for him the appointment of what was called a writer in the East India Company's service, and Clive eagerly accepted it. Probably it seemed to him to be a great appointment, bringing with it endless possibilities. But had he guessed the truth, had he known what going to India as a writer meant in those days, and how humdrum his life there was likely to be, it is possible that he would have been no more anxious to go than he had been to work, as his father wanted him to do, in a lawyer's office at home. He thought, probably, that he was going out to a life in which there might come plenty of fighting and never-ending possibilities of excitement and adventure. He did not know that to be a writer in the East India Company's service meant simply to be a clerk in a merchant's office, to sit all day at a desk adding up columns of dry figures, and doing other like drudgery.

The East India Company then was but a company of

traders, holding no land in India beyond the small patches where were their trading stations, and for them paying rent to the native rajahs (or princes), who, in their turn, undertook the protection of the stations. Soldiers the company then had but few, and these mostly ill armed and not very well disciplined natives.

Such a life as was then possible for an Englishman in India was the last that was likely to suit Clive. The pay, too, was very poor, and though men sometimes made fortunes in India, it was only after years of hard drudgery; and generally, when they did make a fortune, in the making of it they lost their health.

From the very start Clive hated the life. There was no Suez Canal in those days; no great mail-steamers ploughed steadily along at seventeen or eighteen knots an hour, to land their passengers at Bombay or Calcutta before a month has passed. A voyage to India in the middle of the eighteenth century was not a thing to be lightly undertaken. And so Clive learned.

He sailed from England early in the year 1743, and he did not reach Madras till near the end of 1744. The ship fell in with bad weather and had to put into Rio de Janeiro for repairs. There she lay for nine months. Then she lay at anchor at the Cape of Good Hope for another long spell; and so, when at last Clive landed at Madras, he had no money left, and he was obliged to borrow from the captain of the ship, who charged him very heavy interest for the loan.

Nor did Clive's bad luck end here. The friend to whom he had brought letters of introduction had left India and had gone home. Thus Clive was utterly "on his beam-ends." He was desperately home-sick; he was short of money; the work of a clerk was hateful to him; he did not like his fellow-clerks, and kept apart from them. Thus he was not only without money, but without friends. There never was a less promising start of a great career.

Clive's first few months in India were wretched—so wretched, indeed, that it is said the poor boy, weary of his poverty and the dull grind of life, tried to commit suicide. It is told how one day an acquaintance happened to come into the room where Clive sat, miserable and alone, a loaded pistol lying by his side on the table.

"Will you fire that pistol out of the window?" asked Clive.

His companion took it up and pulled the trigger. Bang! went the pistol, filling the room with smoke.

"Surely," cried Clive, starting up with white face, "I must be meant for something great in this life! I have twice snapped that pistol at my head to-day, and each time it has missed fire."

After this Clive began to make a few friends, and to keep less to himself; but even then he did not cease to be home-sick, nor, to repent of having chosen such a profession. "I have not enjoyed a happy day since I left my native land," he wrote to a cousin; and all his letters home were full of misery. About this time, however,

the Governor of Madras took pity on him and gave him the run of his library; and thus Clive's days became less gloomy, for he was fond of reading, and made good use of the Governor's permission.

But the time had not yet come when events were to give Clive his opportunity, and to show of what stuff the lad was made.

You must know that in those old days the French were our great trading rivals in India. As early as the year 1625 the English had made a settlement at a place thirty-six miles to the south of what is now Madras, and seven years later they had got from a native rajah, a grant of a small piece of land, on which they had built a fort for the protection of their storehouses. This place was named Madras, and the fort they called Fort St. George.

Both town and fort were very small, the latter not worthy of the name—having, indeed, no greater strength than a mud wall, protected by four small batteries, could give, and without outworks of any kind. It was not a place capable of much defense, even had there been troops enough to defend it. But in 1744 the whole English population did not exceed three hundred souls. Of these, perhaps two hundred were soldiers, but very few of them had ever “smelt powder.”

Down the coast, less than one hundred miles south from Madras, there was in those days a French Settlement at a place known as Puducheri, a name which in



time became changed to Pondicherry, by which it is still known. The place remains to this day a French colony.

Naturally, when in 1745 the news reached India that war had been declared between England and France, the settlers in the English and French colonies expected soon to be at each other's throats. But the Governor of Pondicherry, acting on orders from Paris, wrote to the Governor of Madras suggesting that the war in Europe should not be allowed to extend to these colonies. The Governor of Madras, however, had received orders to a different effect from London. He was told that an English squadron was on its way to Madras and would shortly arrive, and that this squadron was meant to be used for the purpose of destroying the French settlements and all their shipping. The Governor of Madras, therefore, was unable to agree to the proposal of the French Governor.

Thereupon M. Dupleix, the French Governor, sent a message to the native prince from whom both English and French rented the land on which their settlements stood, asking him for help, or at least that he would prevent the English from attacking the French at Pondicherry. This prince, who was called the Nawab of the Karnatic, had never seen the English fight, and he had, indeed, a very poor opinion of all Europeans as fighting-men. He sent word to Mr. Morse, the Governor of Madras, telling him that he (the Nawab) would not allow any fighting between the English and the French, and Mr. Morse thought it well to obey this order. For a time, therefore,

there was peace between the two colonies, though the English squadron which had been sent out had captured a great many French vessels.

But in June 1746, Commodore Peyton, who was then in command of the squadron, heard that some French men-of-war had been seen cruising off the coast of Ceylon, which was then a Dutch colony. He accordingly sailed south, and on 6th July met the French squadron. A battle raged all that afternoon and part of the next day, when Peyton, finding that one of his largest ships was badly damaged, made sail, and left to the French squadron all the honour of the fight. It was not a very glorious action for us.

On 8th July the French vessels anchored off Pondicherry, and the admiral of the fleet and the Governor of Pondicherry resolved now to attack Madras. Accordingly, on 15th September, the Frenchmen, under Admiral La Bourdonnais, arrived off Fort St. George, landed 1100 European troops and some sipahis (or sepoys, as we now call them), and demanded that the place should be surrendered.

Mr. Morse, the Governor, had also (as well as M. Dupleix) applied to the Nawab for help. But, with his request he had not sent the present which an Indian prince always expected to receive when a favour was begged from him, and therefore the Nawab gave no reply to the English. As Mr. Morse had no troops with which to fight the French force, he was therefore obliged to surrender,

and on 21st September it was agreed that the town and fort should be given up, and that the English garrison and all the English in the town should be prisoners of war.

Thus Clive became a prisoner in the hands of the French.

And now things began to take shape in the way which gave him his opportunity. Such were the beginnings from which Clive started his wonderful career.

When the Nawab heard of the taking of Madras by the French, he sent to M. Dupleix a message ordering him to give up the place. But Dupleix put off from day to day, and finally, the Nawab, seeing that the French had no intention of obeying his orders, sent an army of 10,000 men to turn them out. Meantime a tremendous storm had driven the French fleet away from the coast of India, and Dupleix was thus left with only a few hundred French troops and 700 sepoys. The leader of the Nawab's army, fancying that his task was a very simple one, attacked the French at the village of St. Thomé, but, after a tremendous fight, the better discipline of the French troops defeated the native army with great slaughter.

This was the first time that a European force had fought against a native army, and the result caused M. Dupleix to fancy that henceforward he had nothing to fear in India. He had beaten the English, and now he had defeated the Nawab. Vaingloriously, he despised both.

On 9th November the commander of the French troops, Colonel Paradis, entered Madras. Upsetting the arrange-

ments which had been already made by Admiral La Bourdonnais, he ordered all the English who should refuse to take an oath of allegiance to the French Governor, to leave the town within four days. The English officials to be removed to Pondicherry as prisoners on parole. That is to say, they were to stay in Pondicherry and to give their word of honour never again during the war to fight against, or to take any part against, the French, or to help their own side. But many of the English refused to give this parole, and several of them escaped and made their way to Fort St. David, a small place about sixteen miles south of Pondicherry, which had been bought by the English in 1691.

Clive was one of those who refused to give his parole.

Disguised as natives, he and a friend escaped, and hardly had they arrived at Fort St. David when fighting began there. The French were determined to turn the English out of India, and they laid siege to the place, trying again and again to take it by assault. But assault after assault failed, and each time that the French were beaten back, Clive's dash and bravery were noticed by everybody. Now he was in his element; this was a man's game, he felt, and at last he was free from the hated desk and the detested columns of figures. Life was worth living.

But his whole time was not taken up in fighting the French. One evening during the siege, Clive was playing at cards after dinner, and he was losing steadily. Presently something occurred which made him very carefully watch

the play, and very soon he saw without any possibility of doubt that his opponent, an officer, was cheating. Clive threw down his cards, and told him that he declined to play longer or to pay the money he had lost.

"Do you accuse me of cheating, sir?" roared the officer, starting; up in a fury.

"Yes, I do," said Clive.

"You shall very humbly apologise to me for that insult, sir; or you shall fight me."

"Very well," said Clive, "I will fight you. I refuse to apologize. You *did* cheat."

Pistols were got, and the two went out, without seconds, to fight. Seconds were friends who were usually taken, to load the pistols, and to see that the fighting was quite fair and that neither of the fighters fired before the signal was given. It was very unusual for a fight to take place without some one to see fair play.

Duels with pistols were fought in several different ways.

Sometimes the fighters stood twelve paces apart, and fired when the word was given. Sometimes they stood back to back, and, at the word "march," walked twelve yards away from each other, firing as soon as they could turn round after reaching the twelfth step.

And sometimes only one of two pistols was loaded, and the fighters, separated only by the width of a handkerchief, drew lots for choice of pistols and for first shot, neither knowing, of course, which was the loaded pistol.

Then the man who had drawn the right to shoot first, fired, and if he had had the luck also to choose the loaded pistol, his opponent was as good as a dead man. But if, on the other hand, the first man had not happened to choose the loaded pistol, then he, in his turn, was certain to die.

It was uncommonly like cold-blooded murder, but it had this advantage, that it gave a man who was a bad shot an equal chance with the man who was a good one, and it sometimes made a bully think twice before he challenged anybody, because the challenged man had the right to say how he would fight.

There were many men in those bad old days who were such practised shots that if a glove were thrown up in the air, they could put a bullet through the thumb of the glove before it reached the ground. Such men were almost certain to kill their adversary in a duel, and they were for ever picking quarrels with, and shooting, poor wretches who had no chance to stand up to them. There is no dueling now, happily, except in France, where they don't often do each other any harm, and in Germany, where the students slice each other's faces, and swagger about, showing their scars.

Clive and his opponent fought at twelve paces, and there being no seconds, one of themselves gave the signal, "Are you ready?"

"Fire!" Clive's pistol went off first. He missed.

"Now, sir," said his adversary, who had not fired,

marching quickly up, and putting his pistol to Clive's head, "beg for your life."

"Very well," answered Clive, "I ask you for my life."

"Now, withdraw your charge of cheating, and make me a most humble apology."

"I refuse to do anything of the kind," said Clive.

"I'll blow your brains out where you stand, unless you apologise at once. Quick!" cried the officer, pressing the cold muzzle of his pistol to Clive's forehead.

"Fire away!" said Clive coolly. "I said you cheated, and I say so still. You did cheat, and I refuse to pay."

His enemy looked at him steadily for a minute, uncertain what to do or say. Then flinging away his pistol, he left the ground, muttering, "The boy is mad."

Clive afterwards always refused to give any account of this card party. "No," he said, "the man has given me my life, and though I will not pay him money which was not fairly won, and will not again be friendly with him, yet I will never do him an injury."

On another occasion during the siege, some one accused Clive of having "shown the white feather." Ammunition was badly wanted for the battery of which Clive was in command, and, in his hurry, instead of sending a corporal or sergeant, Clive himself ran for it.

An officer in another battery, seeing him running towards the rear, said that Clive went himself in order to get out of danger. Clive was furious, and demanded that the officer should apologise. This was refused, whereupon

Clive challenged the man. As they were retiring to a quiet place to fight, the officer turned and struck Clive, who at once drew his sword, and was with difficulty prevented from killing him. A court of inquiry was at once held, and the officer who had accused Clive of being a coward was ordered to beg his pardon in front of the whole battalion. But this did not satisfy Clive. The man must also fight him, he said. The officer, however, refused to fight, whereupon Clive, waving his cane over the wretched man's head, said—

“You are too great a coward for me to thrash as you deserve. You cur!”

The man resigned his commission next day, and left the army.

Many assaults on Fort St. David had now been made, and after the failure of the fourth assault the tables were turned on the French. Instead of being the besiegers they became the besieged.

An English squadron arrived on the coast, and later, a fleet under Admiral Boscawen brought troops. The French retired to Pondicherry, and the English laid siege to it. But they in their turn were beaten back, in spite of much brave fighting, in which Clive always greatly distinguished himself. Finally, after a siege lasting two months, the English retired to Fort St. David, having lost over a thousand men by wounds and through sickness. But before the French could again attack that place, news arrived of the signing of peace by England and France at



Aix-la-Chapelle. By this Treaty of Peace the French were obliged to hand back Madras to the English, which they did with very ill grace, leaving the place in bad condition, and with most of the fortifications rendered useless.

But, though there was for a time no fighting in Europe between the two nations, there was far from being peace between them in India. M. Dupleix found that he still had something to fear there.

The native princes who had helped the French against the English continued their warfare against the Indian allies of England. Thus both nations were obliged to help those who already had helped them. The Rajah of Tanjore, whose throne during the fighting had been taken from him, was one of the allies of the English, and the Governor of Fort St. David now sent a force of 430 Europeans and 1000 sepoy to help him to recover his throne. At least that was the reason given out; but the truth probably was that the English wanted to have for themselves the Fort of Devikota, which stands on the sea at the mouth of the River Coleroon, and this seemed a good chance to get possession of it.

Clive went with the force as a volunteer. The expedition failed, partly because the officer in command, Captain Cope, was no great soldier, and partly because the ex-Rajah had amongst the natives few friends who would give him help. The season too was against it; the heavy rains of the monsoon had begun, when marching is almost impossible.