

CHAPTER XIII.

Advances to Haidar from Poona ministers for a compact against the English—Capture of Mahe by the English and Haidar's protest—Attempts by the Madras Government to conciliate Haidar and their failure.

While Haidar was still engaged in the festivities connected with the marriages with the family of Nawab of Savanoor, there arrived at Seringapatam an envoy from the Poona ministers by name Ganesha Rao ostensibly to convey congratulations and presents for the marriages contracted, but in reality to negotiate with Haidar and to persuade him to join a political confederacy between the Poona ministers and the Nizam of Hyderabad for the purpose of driving out the English altogether from India. Haidar lent a willing ear to the overtures of Ganesha Rao and it must be admitted that he had good reasons on his side. For when he was threatened with a Mahratta invasion under Peshwa Madhava Rao in 1773, the Madras Government had failed to respond to his call for help as per terms of the treaty of 1769 which terminated the first Mysore War with the English. Haidar was fully aware of the value of continuing his alliance with the English, for as he himself subsequently is stated to have declared he could not dry up the sea and prevent the English from approaching the shores of India. As the political exigencies of the time necessitated his having an ally for support, Haidar had made overtures to the French and M. Bellicombe who was then Governor of Pondicherry foreseeing an opportunity of restoring the prestige of his nation in India readily furnished him with stores and ammunition and promised him assistance. Subsequently M. Lally nephew of the famous Count De Lally whom political considerations had induced to quit the service of Basalat Jung to that of Nizam Ali now transferred himself with 100 European infantry, 50 European cavalry, 1000 native infantry and 2 guns under his command to the service of Haidar.

In 1778 the French Government espoused the cause of the American colonists in their revolt against England and as a

consequence the Madras Government seized Pondicherry in the month of October of that year. Subsequently Mahe was also captured in spite of the protest lodged by Haidar that it was an infraction of his rights as the place was a protectorate under him and was the port through which he received his munitions from Europe. On receipt of this protest, the Madras Government considered it advisable to conciliate Haidar Ali and accordingly selected for the purpose a missionary named Schwartz. He was a German by birth and belonged to the Danish Mission Society which had been established at Tanjore. He is described as a man of considerable information, well acquainted with some of the languages of the country, of amiable demeanour, and of considerable purity of manners and of simplicity of deportment. Sir Thomas Rumboldt, the Governor of Madras, now selected this amiable prelate and entrusted to him a secret mission to Haidar at Seringapatam to sound his mind as to his intention for a lasting peace with the English.

Schwartz started on the 5th of July 1779 from Madras and reached Caroor, Haidar's frontier garrison town at a distance of about 40 miles from Trichnopoly on the evening of the next day. Here he had to remain a whole month in expectation of Haidar's reply to a letter he had addressed to him and ultimately reached Seringapatam on the 25th August following. From two letters addressed to his friends we get interesting details relating to Haidar's personality and administration as well as side-lights on a number of other matters.

“ Here (Caroor) I had always enough to do ” wrote Schwartz, “ going out daily among the heathens with the catechist and announcing to them the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation. I constantly instructed and at the end of the month baptised some servants of my landlord a German officer of Haidar's and had Divine Service and daily prayers with him and his household. On the 6th August we left Caroor and proceeded on our journey. On the 23rd we made a halt at Mallanamuley, according to my custom it being Sunday—a fine town where there is a strong bridge of 23 very substantial arches over the river Kapini built by

Dalavoy Devaraj about 1735. After each rain, the magistrates of the place must send people to replace any earth that may have been washed away. Haidar's economical rule is to repair all damages without losing an instant, whereby all is kept in good condition and with little expense. The Europeans in the Carnatic leave everything to go to ruins. We next arrived near the fort of Mysore. A high mountain with a pagoda on its summit was formerly dangerous to travellers. The pagan inhabitants of that mountain imagining that their idol was highly gratified with the sacrifice of noses etc., used to rush out upon travellers, cut off their noses and offer them unto their idol. But Haidar had most rigourously prohibited it. The glacis of the fort had the appearance of the finest green velvet. Here also I observed that wherever some earth had been washed away by rain, the people instantly repaired it. On the 25th August we arrived at Seringapatam. I had a tent on the glacis of the fort because an epidemic of fever raged within. I had full liberty to go into the fort at all times, nobody preventing me.

“Haidar's palace is a fine building in the Indian style. Opposite to it is an open place. On both sides are ranges of open buildings where the military and civil servants have their offices and constantly attend and Haidar Naik can overlook them from his balcony. Here reigns no pomp but the utmost regularity and despatch. Although Haidar sometimes rewards his servants, the principal motive is fear. Two hundred people with whips stand always ready to use them. Not a day passes on which numbers are not flogged. Haidar applies the same cat to all transgressors alike, gentlemen and horse-keepers, tax-gatherers and his own sons and when he has inflicted such a public scourging upon the greatest gentlemen, he does not dismiss them. No! they remain in the same office and bear the marks of stripes on their backs as public warnings. For he seems to think that almost all people who seek to enrich themselves are devoid of all principles of honour.

“Once of an evening, I went into the palace and saw a number of men of rank sitting round about. Their faces betrayed a conscious terror and Haidar's Persian Secretary told me that they were

Collectors of Districts, but to me they appeared as criminals expecting death. Few however could give a satisfactory account and consequently the most dreadful punishments were daily inflicted. I hardly know whether I shall mention how one of these gentlemen was punished. Many who read it may think the account exaggerated, but the poor man was tied up, two men came with their whips and cut him dreadfully and with sharp nail was his flesh torn asunder and then scourged afresh, his shrieks rending the air. Although the punishments are so dreadful, yet there are people enough who seek such employments and outbid each other and the Brahmins are by far the worst in this traffic.

“When I came to Haidar, he desired me to sit down alongside of him. The floor was covered with the most exquisite tapestry. He received me very politely, listened in a friendly manner and with seeming pleasure to all what I had to say. He spoke very openly and without reserve and said that the Europeans had broken their solemn engagements and promises but that nevertheless he was willing to live in peace with them. At last he directed a letter to be written, had it read unto me and said, “What I have spoken with you, that I have shortly mentioned in the letter. You will explain the whole more at length.

“When I sat near Haidar Naik, I particularly observed in what a regular succession and with what rapid despatch his affairs proceeded one after the other. Whenever he made a pause in speaking, an account was read to him of the districts and letters received. He heard them and ordered the answers immediately. The writers ran, wrote the letters, read them and Haidar affixed his seal. Thus one evening a great many letters were expedited. Haidar can neither read nor write but his memory is excellent. He orders one man to write a letter and read it to him. Then he calls another to read it again. If the writer has in the least deviated from his orders, his head pays for it.

“What religion people profess or whether they profess any at all, that is perfectly indifferent to him. He has none himself and leaves every one to his choice,

“His army is under the care of four chief officers called Bakshis. One might call them paymasters. But they have to do not only with the pay but also with the recruiting services and other things which belong to an army. They are also judges who settle differences. With these men I had frequent discourses. Some spoke Persian, others only Hindusthani, but all were Mahomedans. They asked what the right prayer was and to whom we ought to pray. I declared to them how we being sinful men and therefore deserving God’s curse and eternal death could not come before God but in the name of our mediator Jesus Christ. I explained to them also the Lord’s Prayer. To persons who understood Tamil, I explained the doctrines in Tamil, to the others in the Hindusthani language.

“As the ministers of Haidar’s court are mainly Brahmins, I had many conversations with them. Some answered with modesty and others did not choose to talk on so great a subject and only hinted that their noble pagodas were not built in vain. I said the edifices may indeed serve for some use but not the idols which they adored.

“Without the fort were some hundred Europeans commanded by a Frenchman and a squadron of Hussars under the command of Captain Budene a German. Part of these troops were Germans, others Frenchmen. I found also some Malabar Christians. Every Sunday I performed Divine Service in German and in Malayalam without asking anybody’s leave but I did it being bound in conscience to do my duty. We sang, preached and prayed and nobody presumed to hinder us.

“In Haidar Naik’s palace the high and the low came to me and asked what our doctrine was, so that I could speak as long as I had strength. Haidar’s youngest son saw and saluted me in the Durbar or hall of audience. He sent to request me to come into his apartment. I sent him word that I would gladly come if his father permitted it; without his father’s leave I might hurt both him and myself. Of this, he was perfectly sensible. The most intimate friends dare not speak their sentiments freely. Haidar has

his spies everywhere. But I knew that I might speak of religion night and day without giving him the least offence.

“I sat often with Haidar in a hall that is open on the garden side. In the garden trees were grafted and bore two sorts of fruit. He had also fine cypress trees, fountains, etc. I observed a number of young boys bringing some earth into the garden. On enquiry I was informed that Haidar had raised a battallion of orphans who have nobody else to provide for them and whom he educates at his own expense, for he allowed no orphan to be neglected in all his dominions. He feeds and clothes them and gives little wooden firelocks with which they exercise. His care for orphans gave me great pleasure..... On the last evening when I took my leave from Haidar, he requested me to speak Persian as I had done with his people. I did so and explained the motive of my journey to him:—“You may perhaps wonder,” said I “what could have induced me, a priest who has nothing to do with political concerns to come to you and that on an errand which does not properly belong to my sacerdotal functions. But as I was plainly told that the sole object of my journey was the preservation and confirmation of peace, and having witnessed more than once the misery and horrors attending on war, I thought within my own mind how happy I should deem myself if I could be of service in cementing a durable friendship between the two Governments and thus securing the blessings of peace to this devoted country and its inhabitants. This I considered as a commission in nowise derogatory to the office of a minister of God, who is a God of peace.” He said with great cordiality—“Very well, very well. I am of the same opinion with you and wish that the English may be as studious of peace as you are. If they offer me the hand of peace and concord, I shall not withdraw mine.

“I then took my leave of him. On reaching my palanquin, I found that Haidar had sent three hundred rupees for my travelling expenses.....”

The visit of Schwartz to Haidar took place at a very unpropitious time for the Madras Government. For Haidar had

received information of a detachment of English troops attempting to march through his newly acquired territory of Kadapa for the aid of Basalat Jung at Adoni and of its having been driven back. Haidar in a letter which he entrusted to Schwartz for delivery to the Governor of Madras upbraided in severe terms the Madras Government for their breach of faith in not coming to his aid against the Mahrattas in accordance with the treaty of 1769 and reviewed as plainly as he could the conduct of the English as connected with Muhammad Ali from the fraud of Trichnopoly in 1752 to their violation of the treaty of 1769. He referred to their hostile conduct at Mahe, to their attempt to march troops through his territories to those of Basalat jung, to the conduct of Muhammad Ali's officers on the frontiers and to the Company's servants at Tellicherry furnishing protection and aid to the rebellious inhabitants as so many evidences of their determination to break with him at all events and concluded by saying, "I have not yet taken revenge—it is no matter. But if you henceforth forgetting all treaties and engagements of the Company still are intent on breaking with me, what advantage can attend writing to you? When such improper conduct is pursued, what engagements will remain inviolate? I leave you to judge on whose part the engagements and promises have been broken. You are acquainted with everything. It is right to act in all things with prudence and foresight."

Although the mission of Schwartz proved fruitless, Sir Thomas Rumboldt, the Governor of Madras, was not discouraged. Another occasion arose for sending an envoy to Haidar to obtain the release of certain Englishmen who had arrived in a Danish ship at Calicut and who under orders of Haidar had been made prisoners and sent to Seringapatam. One Mr. Gray a Bengal ex-civilian was chosen for the purpose and proceeded to Amboor, where he had to wait for sometime till passports for his entry into the Mysore territories arrived from Haidar. By this time Haidar had released the English prisoners as they did not belong to the military service and they met Mr. Gray on the 3rd February 1780 while the latter was still at Amboor. Gray however had also been charged with the function of contracting a fresh amicable alliance with Haidar and he accordingly

made up his mind to proceed to Seringapatam in pursuit of the second object. He arrived at that place in February 1780 and found that Haidar was not inclined to show him that courtsey and honour which as an envoy from a foreign State he regarded himself entitled to. On the succeeding evening, Gray was allowed to proceed to visit Haidar and he delivered the letter and the presents he had brought—a Hogskin saddle and a gun. The next morning however the presents were returned as not befitting either the giver or the receiver, with an assurance that thereby no hostile intentions were meant to be conveyed. Haidar gave no personal interview to this envoy and showed no earnest desire for friendship with the English. Gray had to wait at Seringapatam till certain instructions which he had asked for arrived from the Madras Government and on the 19th March following when these instructions arrived, Haidar without caring to know what they were allowed him to depart.