

CHAPTER XIV.

Commencement of the Second Mysore War—Battle of Polilore (Pullalur)—Baillie's Defeat—Capture of Arcot.

Haidar's military preparations by this time reached completion for his revenge on the English. He had collected ample funds in his treasury and had an efficient army trained by the French. He could now put in the field forty-five thousand cavalry, thirty thousand infantry and one hundred guns. His transport and supply services had also been placed upon an efficient basis. Haidar, therefore, entered with much avidity into the plans proposed by the Poona ministers. Nizam Ali joined the confederacy because he was dissatisfied with the English on account of the discontinuance of the tribute due for the Circars and because also in connection with the lease of Guntur to Muhammad Ali the former's suzerainty over his brother Basalat Jung had been ignored. At the end of the negotiations with the Poona ministers, it was settled that Haidar was to be confirmed in his possession of the territories north of the Thungabhadra up to the Krishna and the general scheme of the confederacy was that the Mahrattas were to invade Berar, Central and Northern India, Nizam Ali was to subjugate the Circars and Haidar Ali was to invade the Madras territories and Southern India.

On the departure of Ganesha Rao after his agreement with Haidar, the latter began to bestir himself for the mobilisation of a sufficient number of troops for the invasion of the Carnatic, taking every precaution for the defence of his own territories. He started from Seringapatam in the month of June 1780 and marched to his frontier slowly and with much circumspection. He had purchased to his side several Killedars holding charge of forts belonging to Muhammad Ali on the route of the army of Mysore beyond the frontier and had also told off a number of his spies to obtain employment in the British army as guides. With his preparations thus completed, he descended on the plains through Baramahal and the Changama Pass and proceeded on his march pillaging and burning villages. A body of horse under his second son Kareer

Sahib plundered Port Novo in the same month. From Pulicat to Pondicherry a line of desolation extending from thirty to fifty-five miles inland was drawn within the territories of the Madras Government and similarly round Vellore also the country was laid waste, though not to the same extent. Haidar's object in so doing is explained as proceeding not from any inhuman motives but by the military necessity of isolating Fort St. George and thereby preventing any help coming from the north and the west. Edmund Burke, the famous orator and statesman of England, in his oration on the impeachment of Warren Hastings at a subsequent period refers to these conflagrations of Haidar in these highly coloured words :—

“ Having terminated his disputes with every enemy and rival who buried their mutual animosities in their common detestation, he drew from every quarter whatever savage ferocity could add to his new rudiments in the art of destruction ; and compounding all the materials of fury, havoc and desolation into one black cloud, he hung for a while on the declivities of the mountains. Whilst the authors of all these evils were idly and stupidly gazing on, this menacing cloud suddenly burst and poured down the whole of its contents upon the plains of the Carnatic. Then ensued a scene of war, the like of which no eye had seen, no heart conceived and which no tongue can adequately tell. All the horrors of war before known or heard of were mercy to that new havoc. A storm of universal fire blasted every field, consumed every house, destroyed every temple. The miserable inhabitants fleeing from their flaming villages in part were slaughtered ; others without regard to sex, to age, to the respect of rank or the sacredness of function—fathers torn from children, husbands from wives—enveloped in a whirlwind of cavalry and amid the goading spears of drivers and the trampling of pursuing horses, were swept into a captivity in a hostile and unknown land. Those who were able to evade this tempest fled to the walled cities ; but in escaping from fire, sword and exile, they fell into the jaws of famine.”

The Madras Government on account of divided opinions among the members of the Council had made no preparations to meet this eruption which Haidar's secret preparations and prompti-

tude of action had brought on the unfortunate inhabitants. The Madras Government had also no cavalry of its own and depended on Muhammad Ali for this branch of the service. But Muhammad Ali having kept the pay of his cavalry in arrears, they were discontented and many of them deserted and had joined the army of Haidar. Further, the Intelligence Branch of the Madras Service was very ill-organised. However, when the Madras Government became alive to the danger, they directed Colonel Baillie who was in command of a detachment at Guntur to proceed southward immediately. Colonel Braithwaite who was at Pondicherry was similarly directed to march from that place towards Madras by way of Chingalpet and a force from Trichnopoly was instructed to intercept the communications of the enemy through the passes leading to the Baramahal. A field army was also assembled at Conjeevaram and its command was given to Sir Hector Munro, Commander-in-chief of the Madras army.

Sir Hector Munro left Madras on the 26th August 1780 and marched towards Conjeevaram. Colonel Baillie who was at Guntur and who had been instructed to join the main army at Conjeevaram left Guntur with his detachment, but on account of floods in the river Korttalaiyâr which he had to cross, he was held up for a number of days on the north side of the bank and was only enabled to cross to southern bank on the 3rd September of the same year and to continue his march towards Conjeevaram. Haidar who in the meanwhile was besieging Arcot kept himself thoroughly well informed through his harkars of the movements of the English troops and in order to prevent a junction between Baillie and Munro placed himself in an advantageous position between them and directed his son Tippu to intercept the former.

On the evening of the 5th September 1780, Baillie arrived at Perambakam, 14 miles from Conjeevaram. Tippu commenced his attack on the 6th September and Colonel Baillie being much hard pressed thereby applied to Munro at Conjeevaram for help. Haidar with his army lay two miles away between Baillie and Munro and the latter who had a store of provisions in the pagoda

at Conjeevaram hesitated to attack Haidar for fear that if the British troops left Conjeevaram, Haidar would take possession of the place and appropriate the supplies. On the 8th September however, Munro sent out Colonel Fletcher with a strong detachment to the aid of Baillie and this officer reached Baillie's camp the next morning by making a wide detour and thus avoiding the enemy. On the evening of the same day Colonel Baillie thus reinforced broke up his camp at Perambakam and began his march to join Munro at Conjeevaram. He had barely started and advanced about 5 miles, when Tippu's troops appeared and began to cause considerable harassment to him and to his troops. Colonel Baillie on account of the night being dark ordered a halt till daybreak at the place which they had reached, so that they might obtain a better view of the surrounding country. During the night Tippu received considerable reinforcements from his father and at 4 a.m. on the 10th of September, Haidar having ascertained that Munro showed no signs of moving, himself with his main army marched to join his son. With the first streak of dawn on the 10th, Baillie was astir and resumed his march towards Conjeevaram.

The first two miles were covered without any incident. But as the head of the column debouched from a long avenue of trees into an open plain, it was heavily fired upon by one of Tippu's batteries, behind which at a short distance a village named Polilore (Pullalur) was strongly held by a body of Mysore troops. For a short time Baillie marched on disregarding the fire of the battery. A body of Tippu's cavalry now attacked Baillie's forces, with the result that a number of them stampeded and streamed back in the utmost disorder upon the main body, being heavily pushed by the pursuing cavalry on the way. Baillie then decided to take up the best position he could and await the arrival of Munro, Conjeevaram being at a distance of only seven miles. In this expectation however he was disappointed and when two of his ammunition tumbrils exploded, some of his troops were thereby considerably shaken giving rise to much confusion.

Biccaji Scindia an officer of high rank in the Mysore cavalry noticed this confusion and turned it to advantage, having also a

special motive to do so. Haidar had been much incensed by the junction of Colonel Fletcher's detachment with Colonel Baillie's force and had held Biccaji Scindia responsible for this event and had overwhelmed him in public with the foulest abuse. Now Biccaji determined to regain his reputation or to perish in the attempt and sword in hand at the head of his cavalry he charged upon the wavering British troops. The charge was desperate and the troops attacked broke and fled. Biccaji Scindia perished in the charge with fifteen of his family members. The struggle went on for sometime longer but at last Colonel Baillie was forced to raise his handkerchief on the point of his sword as a token of surrender. In this battle Colonel Lally was at the head of the French contingent of Haidar's troops. David Baird who led the assault on Seringapatam in 1799 and Colonel Baillie were among the British prisoners sent to Seringapatam. When Colonel Baillie was taken to Haidar's presence, the latter, it is stated, expressed regret at the fate that had overtaken the British officer and presented him with a sum of one thousand rupees expressing a wish that he and his fellow-prisoners should eat, drink, sleep and be happy.

John Lindsay one of the prisoners who kept a journal has recorded that on their march to Seringapatam which began on the 22nd September 1780, they travelled in a palanquin without any carpet or bedding. During the long march of two hundred and forty miles to Seringapatam, the prisoners halted each day in some place, where after being placed out in the sun to be stared at by the people for some hours, they were then locked up sometimes in cowsheds for the night, often even without a mat to lie on. Even at such times however, there were not wanting acts of humanity. Lindsay relates that one day when he was very ill from dysentery, a sepoy belonging to his escort approached him and offered to prepare and give him some medicine, if he would take it. Lindsay agreed. Thereupon the sepoy is stated to have gone away and to have returned in a short time with a mixture of green pomegranate juice and some milk. This Lindsay drank and fell into a deep sleep and awoke very much better. The sepoy whose pay was only six rupees a month also offered one rupee to Lindsay, which however the latter is said to have declined. On the 6th November the

prisoners reached Seringapatam and continued to be under restraint there till 1784 when peace was concluded and they were released, Baillie however having died in the interval.

Haidar caused his victory to be commemorated in a fresco-painting on a wall of the Daria Dawlat Bagh at Seringapatam which may be seen even to-day and which to the country people is generally known as Lally-Baillie Yuddha or battle. In this picture Colonel Baillie is depicted as sitting in a palanquin gnawing his thumb with annoyance. In the midst of the melee Tippu is depicted as sitting on horseback.

Haidar after the victory of Polilore (Pullalur) returned to Arcot on the 19th September and resumed the siege of that place. The place finally surrendered to him about the beginning of November. Achanna Pandit who was Governor of the place on behalf of Muhammad Ali and other high officers were restored to their appointments and treated with consideration. Mir Sadak whose name we shall hear in the future and who was Kotwal at this time of the bazaar of Muhammad Ali's army and was also his general adviser was appointed Subadar of the City of Arcot.