

CHAPTER XXI.

War continued—Capture of Bangalore—Fall of Krishna Rao—Junction with the Nizam's Army—March on Seringapatam—Cornwallis' retreat due to failure of supplies—Junction with the Mahratta Army.

In the last chapter we left the two contending armies at short distances near Bangalore. The British army took up its position to the north-east of the fort on the 5th of March 1791 and Lord Cornwallis lost no time in capturing the pettah and besieging the fort. The pettah was encircled by a deep ditch and a thick-set hedge of thorns affording protection against hostile incursions. To the south of the pettah was the fort originally built of mud by Kempe Gowda but later in 1761 it was enlarged and built of stone by order of Haidar. On the 7th of March 1791 the attack to capture the pettah succeeded in spite of the desperate efforts made by Tippu who was encamped near Kengeri to send reinforcements under Kamruddin Khan and by the evening of that day the pettah was in the hands of the English. To the joy of Lord Cornwallis, within the pettah were found large supplies of grain, which for the time being alleviated the distress occasioned by the shortage of supplies.

Lord Cornwallis next turned his attention to the fort. This was of an oval figure extending somewhat nine hundred yards in its longest diameter. It was fortified with a broad double rampart. There were two entrances to it, one at each end. That on the north called the Delhi Gate consisted of five strong, large gates finished with considerable elegance. That on the south called the Mysore Gate consisted of only four. Both these gates were covered with outworks. The ramparts of the fort were extremely well built. The ditch was deep and wide, but dry in most parts of it. Within the fort were situated a mint, a foundry for brass cannon, a machine for boring them, another for musket barrels, an arsenal for military stores and magazines for grain and gunpowder. The most splendid fabric within the fort was the palace.

Cornwallis proceeded to approach the fort from the north-east corner and on the 21st of March which was a bright moonlit night the assault began at 11 o'clock. The assaulting party found an undefended narrow passage and making their way through it approached the breach where the defenders were vigorously attacked and routed, with the result that the fort fell into the hands of the English in a short time. Tippu who was encamped near Jigani at this time to the south-west of the fort was aware of the assault being delivered, but his efforts to afford succour to the garrison proved futile. Kirmani's remarks on the conduct of Tippu at this time are interesting and reveal his indecisiveness at a time when ready decision was most necessary. "Although at the time of the assault Tippu mounted his horse and with his troops stood ready to engage the enemy, still he restrained his hand from shedding the blood of God's people, and although Kamruddin Khan and Syed Sahib often requested orders to charge the English troops, Tippu replied that the time would come by and by, for that the favourable opportunity had passed and that they were on no account to allow their men to fall into disorder."

Bahadur Khan the Killedar of the fort was killed while putting forth a vigorous defence. The body of the Killedar was found the next day amidst a heap of the slain and pierced through and through with balls and bayonets. Lord Cornwallis sent a message to Tippu with an offer of the corpse for interment, to which the latter with equal spirit and prudence replied that the proper place for the burial of a soldier was the spot where he fell and in consequence the body was buried in the fort by the people of the Mahomedan religion and with every mark of distinction.

Before proceeding further, an incident which brought about the ruin of Krishna Rao, Minister of Thosheekhane who had rendered, as we have seen, along with Purnaiya material help in facilitating the accession of Tippu on his father's death to the headship of the Mysore State, may be related. One of the emissaries of Colonel Reade who, as we already know, was Cornwallis' intelligence officer was detached with a letter in the Kanada language concealed in his hollow bamboo which passed for a

walkingstick. The letter was traced to one Muhammad Abbas a Hindu who had been converted to the Mahomedan faith and the name of Seshagiri Rao the brother of Krishna Rao was also found implicated. But before he could be seized, it was found that Seshagiri Rao having heard of the letter had fled to his brother at Seringapatam. On Muhammad Abbas being brought to the presence of Tippu, he denied no part of his guilt and boldly refused to reveal the names of those implicated with him. He was put to death by being publicly dragged round the camp tied to the foot of an elephant.

Tippu next sent Syed Sahib to Seringapatam to seize the culprits there and inflict punishments on them. Having arrived at Seringapatam with a body of horse, he entered the fort and proceeded to pay his respects to Tippu's mother which she received seating herself in the hall of audience. At this time the commander of the garrison at the capital who was suspected of being implicated in the affair vehemently declared his innocence and threw the blame on Krishna Rao. Syed Sahib thereupon is said to have sent a chopdar to summon Krishna Rao to the hall of audience, but the latter being aware of the danger, returned for answer that it was unusual to be sent for in that manner and refused to move out of his house. Syed Sahib believing that this conduct on the part of Krishna Rao confirmed him also as a traitor sent a body of men to his house to seize him. They forced their way into his house which he had bolted from inside and put him to death and threw his body into a side-drain.

Now returning to Cornwallis at Bangalore. He was occupied for about a week in removing his camp to a fresh ground and in repairing the breaches which had been made in the fort of Bangalore. Making the necessary preliminary preparations and leaving a sufficient body of troops for the protection of the place against any surprise attacks by the Mysore forces, Cornwallis moved in a northerly direction towards Devanhalli with the main object of meeting the Nizam's contingent of cavalry which was on its way to Bangalore. En route he took possession of Devanhalli and Chikballapur and restored them to the pategars who were their former

owners. After Cornwallis left, these places were retaken by Tippu's troops and several of the men of the two garrisons suffered as rebels amputation of a leg and an arm each. Cornwallis after a march of about seventy miles was able to meet the Nizam's contingent and effecting a junction with it returned to Bangalore on the 28th April 1791. Here he had to decide whether he should embark on military operations at once and proceed to Seringapatam or to postpone them to a more convenient date. The political situation in Europe consequent on the outbreak of the French Revolution and the East India Company's diminishing finances both combined to influence Cornwallis to decide in favour of proceeding to Seringapatam immediately. There were two routes to choose from, the direct one by Chennapatna about eighty miles and the circuitous one by Kankanhalli about ninety-four miles. Cornwallis preferred the longer route as it led him early to the neighbourhood of the Kaveri river, which it was essential he should cross as soon as possible in order to join hands with General Abercrombie who was proceeding from Bombay with a body of troops. Both routes passed through tracts stripped bare of fodder and cattle and deserted by men.

On the 3rd May the Grand Army, as the combined Hyderabad and British armies were called, started on its march. After three marches, the army arrived within ten miles of the Kaveri and here a halt was made for two days to re-adjust the loads as many bullocks had died owing to insufficient forage. On the 9th the march was resumed. Many officers managed to hire on their own account carriages which their owners would not consent to submit to the control of a public department, followers of various kinds, chiefly the relations of sepoys including women and grown up boys were also prevailed on to carry for remuneration military materials. By means of these expedients Cornwallis was able to reach Arakere, about nine miles east of Seringapatam below the Kaveri on the 13th of May. Tippu had by this time returned to Seringapatam from Chennapatna where he had encamped when Cornwallis started on the Kankanhalli route. On the 14th May when Lord Cornwallis made a reconnaissance, he found the Mysore army drawn up in a position at a distance of about six miles, with the Kaveri on their

right, the hill of Karighat on their left and a swamp in front. On the 15th May Cornwallis intending to bring on a general action proceeded to occupy a rocky ridge intervening between the two armies. Tippu however promptly changed his front and getting possession of this ridge poured a heavy fire on the advancing English column and ultimately succeeded in withdrawing his guns and men into the island of Seringapatam. In the meanwhile, he had also successfully prevented all intelligence reaching Cornwallis regarding General Abercrombie's movements.

On reaching Kannambadi at some distance up the river from Arakere, Cornwallis became convinced that on account of the shortage of provisions and the great loss of baggage animals he could not pursue the campaign to a successful termination and accordingly sent out orders on the 21st of May to General Abercrombie to return to Malabar for the time being. In his own camp the men suffered extreme privations, the rations of rice issued to the fighting men having been reduced to one-half. Many followers also had actually died of hunger and more were verging in various degrees to the same extremity. These overwhelming difficulties induced Lord Cornwallis to return to Bangalore and he accordingly commenced his march on the 26th May after destroying his siege train, throwing his shot into the river and burning his carts and tumbrils. Tippu on learning of this retreat ordered the firing of a royal salute from the ramparts of Seringapatam and the illumination of the town.

On approaching Chinkurli, Cornwallis was agreeably surprised to find that two bodies of Mahratta troops, one under Haripanth and the other under Parasuram Bhow had approached within sight and were ready to form a junction with his own troops. Tippu's light cavalry had successfully prevented all news of the approaching Mahratta armies from reaching Cornwallis till they were actually in sight. The stores provided by the Mahrattas enabled the starving people of Cornwallis' army to obtain liberal supplies and satisfy the cravings of nature. Before we proceed to the succeeding events, it may be of interest to the readers if a description of the Mahratta army and the bazaar attached to it is

given here from an account written by one Edward Moore who was serving at this time under Parasuram Bhow.

Parasuram Bhow's army consisted entirely of cavalry, lacking somewhat in cohesion and discipline. The Mahratta trooper is described as a curious mixture of good and bad horsemanship. In the lines he was indefatigable in his attention to the grooming and feeding of his horse but even during the longest day in the field he never for one moment dismounted. The artillery consisted largely of big and small brass pounders cast at Poona. Both carriages and wheels were very clumsy, the latter generally being made of solid wood throughout. All the guns were heaped up with baggage and could not under any circumstances come into action in less time than half-an-hour. The heaviest guns required as many as two hundred bullocks each to drag them but the amount of ammunition carried for each gun was small. The Mahratta infantry was not a very superior body and was viewed with contempt by their cavalry.

Next, it is stated by Edward Moore that the bazaar attached to a Mahratta army was of immense size. At each halt a regular lay out was observed. Each street had its name and on both sides of it were allotted frontages to the merchants and craftsmen who always occupied the same relative places and who could thus be easily found by their respective customers. Every trade was carried on and bankers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, braziers, carpenters, tailors, embroiderers, distillers, bakers, cooks, saddlers, grain merchants and others could be seen following their own avocations as in a well-regulated city in time of peace. Among the trades practised was that of a tanner. A circular hole dug in the earth, a raw hide adapted to it at the bottom and sides and secured above with a series of skewers run through its edges into the earth formed the tanpit. On marching days the tanpit with its contents in the shape of a bag formed one side of a load for a horse or bullock and the liquid preparation was either emptied or preserved according to the length of the march. The best tanning material was equally accessible and portable and the English officers obtained from these ambulatory tanpits what their own Indian capitals could not then produce except as European imports.

The number of camp followers, according to Moore, was astounding and there were more women than men. There were 20,000 fighting men with Parasuram Bhow and 12,000 with Hari-panth and the number of camp followers to each fighting man was 12 to 1 and the animals—elephants, horses, camels, bullocks and donkeys—were fifteen times as numerous as the fighting men. It is reckoned that the number of camp followers was about 320 thousand and of animals 480 thousand. To these must be added those of the Nizam's contingent and of the British army. Edward Moore may well be believed when he wrote that when the allies were on the march together, to an observer on an eminence the whole countryside as far as the eye could reach appeared covered by a moving mass of human beings and animals.

Now resuming our narrative. The Grand Army halted some seven miles from Seringapatam till 6th June, when the retirement on Bangalore was again begun. En route Parasuram Bhow and his army parted company with the Grand Army and marched to the north towards Sira, it being understood that Parasuram Bhow would return in time to take part in the coming operations against Seringapatam. By the 11th of July the Grand Army was back again at Bangalore after an absence of 68 days.

During all this time Tippu remained inactive and Kirmani's observations in ostensible support of this attitude are somewhat curious.....“And although at witnessing the miserable state of the English army some of the faithful Amirs and Khans represented to Tippu that that was the time to attack the English and that if he would give orders they would pursue them and cast the stone of dispersion and defeat among them and by their prowess bring them with their hands and feet bound before him, still his foresight and intelligence did not perceive any advantage in separating his brave army from himself and therefore he would not consent to it.”