

CHAPTER XXII.

Fresh preparations of Lord Cornwallis—Capture of Nandidoorg and Savandoorg—Second march on Seringapatam—Tippu's position—The British attack—Foot-hold secured on the island of Seringapatam.

On arriving at Bangalore, Lord Cornwallis' first thoughts were directed towards establishing an unimpeded line of communications between Bangalore and Madras on the one side and Seringapatam on the other as well as to arrange efficiently for an adequate and unobstructed supply of all provisions needed for the army. For the latter purpose Cornwallis authorised Colonel Reade his commissariat officer to engage a number of Lambanies, known in Northern India as Brinjaris, who although moving with their whole train of women and children were not only capable of military defence but also of military enterprise when opportunities arose. Usually after a war, they sought some forest inhabited by wild animals and obtained permission of the Government in power to occupy such tracts and destroying the wild animals made the place a safe nursery for their herds and for the growth of roots and corn. Detachments of these people also went from time to time to the sea-shore carrying grain or drugs and bringing in return a cargo of salt. The free command of their own time and means which the nature of Lord Cornwallis' operations permitted him to allow rendered these Lambanies the most efficient branch of his commissariat.

Cornwallis next addressed himself to start military operations for the capture of a large number of hill-forts which interfered with the free transport of his own troops towards the capital of Mysore. The capture of these hill-forts was also intended to afford protection to the territories of the East India Company from the inroads of small divisions of Tippu's cavalry. It would be tedious to describe in detail all the operations undertaken to reduce these hill-forts and it is enough to mention here the capture of the two important hill-fortresses of Nandidoorg, 36 miles north of Bangalore and Savandoorg, 18 miles to the west,

The Nandidoorg fort was a hill of granite, 1750 feet high and about 20 miles round at the base. The summit of the hill was difficult of access by nature and had been rendered further so by art. On the 22nd September 1791 Major Gowdie finding the northern face of the hill-fort unassailable made a circuit to the west and finally sat down before the place on the 27th. Cornwallis had encamped with a body of troops near by and gave orders for the assault of the fort on the 19th October by the light of the moon. When the troops detailed for rushing the breach which had by this time been effected were awaiting the signal, some one among them in a voice loud enough to be heard remarked that there was a mine under the breach; whereupon General Meadows who was to lead the storming party without a moment's hesitation exclaimed that if there was a mine it must be a mine of gold. This caused a ripple of merriment to run down the ranks and completely obliterated any ill effects that the ill-judged remark had produced. The defence of the fort was in the hands of Latif Ali Beg, an able Mysorean officer and no sooner did the storming party rush to the breach than it was discovered by the Mysore garrison. The fort was cannon, musketry and rockets was immediately opened upon the assailants and heavy stones were rolled down which gaining increased power and velocity in their descent made great havoc among the ascending troops. The storming party however effected a lodgement in the breaches which were two in number and having pursued the defenders with sufficient rapidity to prevent their barricading the gate of the inner wall, forced it open and entered the interior of the place. The principal people and fighting men taken were sent as prisoners to Vellore. With the reduction of Nandidoorg, all impediments in the way of free communications between Bangalore and the Eastern Coast were removed.

The other hill-fort Savandooorg was situated on a stupendous rock of granite, 4000 feet above the sea-level. The hill was smooth and precipitous on all sides, with a circumference of about ten miles, being also surrounded at the time by a thick jungle of bamboos and other trees which made the rock difficult of approach. It was however regarded that the capture of this hill-fort was

essential to maintain the line of communications free and Lord Cornwallis accordingly sent in advance a detachment under Colonel Stuart of the Highlanders, while he himself made a disposition of the remainder of the army at a distance of about eight miles from the foot of the hill to watch every avenue from Seringapatam by which the operations of the siege could be disturbed. Colonel Stuart, according to Wilks, encamped within three miles of the place on the 10th of December 1791 and immediately commenced the arduous labour of cutting a gun road through the rugged forest to the foot of the rock. The batteries opened on the 17th and the breach in the lower wall of the rock at a height of about 1500 feet from the base was deemed practicable on the 20th. Lord Cornwallis had at this time arrived from his camp to witness the assault which was delivered on the morning of the 21st December. The defenders were dislodged and the assailants ascended the rock without any material opposition. The Killedar who vigorously defended the fort was killed by a shot and his death made it easy for the pursuers to enter the citadel. The other forts which were either captured or surrendered were Uttaridoorg, Ramgiri and Sivangiri. Hulyurdoorg which had been retaken and occupied by the Mysore troops was recaptured by the English and was held as a post of communication and there remained nothing intervening except Kabbaldoorg which was not deemed of sufficient importance for being captured.

Cornwallis' arrangements for the march on Seringapatam were now complete. His communications were protected and supplies of provisions for both men and animals were assured. The army had been all brought up to strength. With the British army of about 22,000 fighting men went the Nizam's contingent of 18,000 under Sikander Jah and a Mahratta army of 12,000 under Haripanth. Abercrombie's army some nine thousand strong from Bombay side had already reached the head of the Ghauts on its way towards Seringapatam. It was also expected that Parasuram Bhow who was engaged in plundering the country between Chitaldrug and Bednore would with his 20,000 men arrive in time to assist the allies.

Lord Cornwallis held a review of all these troops on the 31st January 1792 at which General Meadows, Sikander Jah, the Mahratta chiefs and Sirdars were present, and an English officer who was present at this review has recorded the following description of it. "Many of these dignitaries were seated on magnificently accoutred elephants and were preceded by chopdars calling their titles aloud. They had passed the sepoy's at rather a quick pace but went very slow opposite to the European corps. The troops were all in new clothing, their arms and accoutrements glittering in the sun and themselves as well dressed as they could have been for a review in time of peace; all order and silence, nothing heard or seen but the uniform sound and motion in presenting their arms accompanied by the drums and music of the corps, chequered and separated by the parties of artillery extended at the drag-ropes of their guns. The sight was beautiful even to those accustomed to military parade, while the contrast was no less striking between the good sense of our generals on horseback and the absurd state of the chiefs looking down from their elephants than between the silence and order of the British troops and the noise and irregularity of the mob that accompanied the eastern potentates."

On the 1st of February the allied armies commenced their move on Seringapatam from Hulyurdoorg. The British army marched in three columns—the battering tumbrils and heavy carriages advancing by the great road formed the centre column; secondly, a line of infantry with field pieces marched by a parallel road about 100 yards distant; thirdly, the smaller store-carts and baggage proceeded by another road; and beyond these were the camels, elephants, bullocks, coolies and camp followers of every description, the whole flanked by cavalry which formed the advance and rear-guards. Co-laterally with the British troops marched the Hyderabad and Mahratta contingents. As these troops marched, they found every human dwelling in flames. Tippu's cavalry hovered on the flanks of the allied army at a distance and attempted to dispute the passage of the river at Maddur. These horsemen however fell back after some resistance, laying waste the country as they retired. The last day's march was made on the 5th of February along a route passing over some

barren hills and from there the ramparts of Seringapatam became visible. Seringapatam was estimated to be garrisoned by about 45,000 men and 5000 cavalry with 800 cannon. The allied armies had frequently to halt under fiery showers of rockets but steadily pushing on reached their place of encampment near Hirodé, otherwise known as the French Rocks.

During the interval between Cornwallis' retreat and return, Tippu had made some attempts to harass the enemy by sending out divisions of his army to different parts of the country. But his efforts produced little effect and did not prevent Cornwallis from reaching Seringapatam. After Cornwallis took up his position near French Rocks, he found Tippu with the main body of his troops lay encamped between him and the fort of Seringapatam on the northern bank of the Kaveri river. Tippu seems to have done so under the wrong belief that the enemy would not dare to deliver their attack till General Abercrombie who was near Periapatam at some distance on the southern side of the river joined. Cornwallis however was not a man who would allow the grass to grow under his feet and after carrying out a number of reconnaissances he decided that the attack on Tippu's army should take place on the night of the 6th February 1792. The utmost secrecy was maintained, only the British Officers being warned after the termination of the evening parade, while no mention of what was on foot was allowed to reach either the Mahratta troops or the Nizam's contingent until the force detailed for the assault had left on their march. The assaulting troops were divided into three columns and the hour of departure was fixed at 8-30 p.m.

About 11 o'clock the head of the central column encountered some of Tippu's cavalry who were escorting a number of rocket-men proceeding to disturb the sleep of Sikander Jah. The cavalry immediately hurried back carrying the news of the British advance to Tippu's camp. There was at this time on either side of the river opposite to the island of Seringapatam a space of land enclosed by a bound-hedge or fringe of bamboo jungle offering protection against raiding horsemen. Shortly after the central column reached this hedge on the northern bank of the river, it was

met with a very heavy fire. The attacking party however pressed on and reached Tippu's camp which was found evacuated. At the ford which had been chosen for crossing the river, a section of the attacking party found a mass of fugitive Mysorean soldiers, shouting, splashing and falling over one another, but using their bayonets freely, the party reached the southern branch of the river and took up a position on its bank. Another party of the British troops shortly followed and took a position in the pettah of Shahar Ganjam. Various other parties proceeded similarly to occupy suitable positions and in one of these parties was Lord Cornwallis himself. About 1 a. m. there were thus in different parts of the island and just outside it strong detachments in occupation of various important points, though several of the detachments were in complete ignorance of one another.

Later Cornwallis realised that the position where they stood at the time was very insecure inasmuch as when the dawn broke they would be subjected to heavy casualties from the guns of the fortress and a retirement was therefore desirable to the Karighat hill. He accordingly directed Colonel Sandys who was with him to ascertain whether Karighat hill was in possession of the Mysore troops or in that of the British. Colonel Sandys thereupon rode off with an escort. It now became very dark, for the moon was about to set. En route a very broad and deep nullah or channel had to be negotiated and somehow or other Sandys became separated from his escort and reached the opposite bank unattended. Sandys proceeded further alone and on reaching the foot of the hill heard a man coughing. Not knowing whether the cough was that of a friend or of a foe, he rode on up the hill with his sword drawn and pistols cocked. After going a little way, he stopped as a death-like silence reigned which gave him a very weird sensation, but composing himself and looking upward towards the summit of the hill he shouted out at the top of his voice as to who commanded there. Whereupon a figure rising as if out of the ground seized the reins of his horse, while a voice replied that General Meadows commanded. The speaker was Major Close and in a moment General Meadows and the remainder of his staff came crowding up. Colonel Sandys then started back to carry the news to Cornwallis.

Sandys soon met Cornwallis with his men retiring from under the guns of the fort towards Karighat hill and reported to him of his having met General Meadows. On the 7th vigorous attacks were made by Tippu's troops to dislodge the English detachments from their positions on the island but all attempts proved unsuccessful. Tippu then withdrew his forces from the bound-hedge enclosure on the north bank and retreated into the fortress.

In contrast with the above account may be given the account of Kirmani contained in his "Life of Tippu":—"Tippu who was with his army on the north bank of the river and whose spies, scouts and intelligencers had given him no information of the advance of the enemy was completely deceived and as he had no time or opportunity to oppose them ordered his musketeers and archers to file off to the rear and retire to the city and place it in the best order of defence, while he himself mounted his horse and with a few faithful servants turned his face to the field of battle. From the darkness of the night however, the troops fell into disorder and not being able to distinguish friends and foes fought among themselves. In this confusion Imam Khan and Mir Muhammad Siphadar with their regiments arrested the advance of the enemy and performed their duty right manfully but they were at length both slain. During this time General Meadows with the greatest gallantry advanced and at one assault took possession of the walls of the city or the suburb of Ganjam and the Lal Bagh. The loss of these by the neglect of Mehdi Khan, the Naib Dewan, left a great chasm in the foundations of the kingdom, for it happened that on that night the whole of the garrison of the fort above mentioned was sent for without the orders of Tippu under the pretence of distributing pay, and the walls and the towers being left entirely bare of defenders the General was victorious. As soon therefore as the morning dawned, these regiments marched to attack the batteries and advanced to the foot of the ramparts. It happened that the Sipah-Salar of the English army was himself present in the battery and remained firm and drove back the storming party and although they repeated their attacks again and again, victory refused to show them her lovely face, and most of the brave men sacrificed their

lives in these unavailing attacks." Kirmani also has recorded that the Ahmady Chelas, about 10,000 in number, availing themselves of the confusion which ensued marched off with their wives and children to the western woods of Coorg and thence to their respective homes. Many of the Assud Illahis also took advantage of the same opportunity, and with many fugitives and followers passed over on the Mysore side of the bridge, several of them not stopping till they reached Nanjangud, a distance of 25 miles.