

CHAPTER XXVI.

The last Mysore War—The English army on the march—Junction with the Hyderabad Contingent—Battle of Siddeswar—Battle of Malavalli.

Mornington on receipt of Tippu's letter did not consider it prudent to countermand the army from marching further and he merely contented himself by entrusting to General Harris a letter addressed to Tippu expressing his regret that his urgent representations of dangers arising from delay had produced no effect and that the necessities of the season had forced him to set the army in motion for the common security of the allies, that the deputation of Major Doveton was no longer necessary and that General Harris the commander-in-chief of the advancing army had been empowered to receive any embassy that Tippu might despatch.

The troops under General Harris were comprised of 15,000 infantry, 2,600 cavalry, 600 European artillery men, 2,500 gun-lascars and pioneers with 100 guns. An army numbering 6,400 men was also despatched from Bombay under General Stuart to march through the friendly country of Coorg and join the main army at Seringapatam. A fleet under Admiral Rainier was directed to the Malabar coast to meet the French fleet, if any portion of the latter should arrive with reinforcements for the Sultan. A contingent under Arthur Wellesley consisting of 6,500 subsidiary and 3,600 of the old French corps, with 6,000 horse, regular and irregular, also marched from Hyderabad to effect a junction with Harris' troops at a convenient place. Including the large number of followers, the army in the aggregate was estimated to consist of a quarter of a million men and together with the animals was calculated to cover an area of 18 square miles when on the march.

On the 22nd February 1799 General Harris was invested not only with unrestricted military powers but also with all the civil authority of the Governor-General in the new circumstances in which he was placed. At the same time he was provided with the help of a political and diplomatic commission consisting of five members, one of whom was Colonel Arthur Wellesley. Morning-

ton's instructions impressed upon Harris and the members of the commission the advisability of availing themselves of the discontent and disaffection which, it was believed, prevailed among the tributaries and the principal officers of Tippu Sultan. One of the papers sent by Mornington was a memorandum of a most secret and delicate nature relating to the old Hindu Royal family of Mysore. In this connection, the commissioners were required to acquaint themselves with the feelings of the people in Mysore in general with a view to the practicability of restoring that family. He impressed upon the minds of the members of the commission the need of particular discretion and secrecy in this matter for the sake of the personal safety of the surviving adherents of the ancient family of the Rajas of Mysore and even of the Rani herself, as otherwise the most dreadful scene of vengeance and slaughter would be the probable consequence of Tippu's receiving the slightest intimation of the contents of the memorandum which he impressed should be destroyed immediately after perusal.

Lord Mornington was intimately acquainted with the inner workings of human nature and a private letter he wrote to Lord Harris on the 23rd February 1799 bears ample testimony to this trait of his character. In this letter Mornington said that Harris possessed every advantage which the most sanguine mind could expect or the most anxious could desire in the strength of his own army, in the cordiality of the allies, in the comparative weakness and dejection of their enemy, in the support of the Government under which he acted, in the ability of the counsels which he could command and in the unity and simplicity of the object which he was directed to pursue and concluded the letter with these words:—
 “My dear General,—I take my leave of you (I trust for a very short period of time) in the firm conviction that within a few weeks I shall have the satisfaction of congratulating you on the prosperous issue of a service combining more solid advantages and more brilliant distinctions than the favour of fortune, season and circumstances ever placed within the reach of any British subject in India from the earliest success of our arms up to the present day.”

Tippu on learning that the British army had been put in motion towards the Mysore territory and not having received any

reply from Lord Mornington to his last letter seems to have concluded that it was no longer safe for him to rely on negotiations for the settlement of their differences and accordingly leaving the whole of the Silledar and three thousand of the State horse with some infantry under Syed Sahib and Purnaiya to watch the movements of General Harris, he proceeded with the remainder of his army by forced marches by the route of Kannambadi towards Periapatna, where the Bombay army was expected. This army under the command of General Stuart leaving Cannanore on the 21st February 1799 reached the Mysore frontier about the 2nd March and took up its position in three divisions. The advance division taking its position at Siddeswar 7 miles distant from Periapatna, the remaining two divisions at distances of eight and twelve miles respectively from the advance post. On the morning of the 5th March a British reconnoitering party observed from the top of the Siddeswar hill an extensive encampment being formed on the Coorg side of the fort of Periapatna which assumed a very formidable appearance and covered a great extent of ground before the close of the evening numbering from three to four hundred tents including a tent of green colour indicating the presence of Tippu. On the morning of the 6th March, an attack was launched by the Mysore army against the British force at Siddeswar, but by the timely arrival of General Stuart it was saved from destruction. Muhammad Raza, commonly known as Benki Nawab, which name one of the streets in the Mysore town even now bears was killed in this battle. Tippu was however unable to achieve his object of driving back the enemy and soon after as he received news of the nearer approach of General Harris' army, he struck his tents and reached Seringapatam on the 14th of March. At the battle of Siddeswar the Mysore troops are stated to have been clad in a purple woollen stuff with white squares called a tiger-jacket, a red turban, a waist cloth, sandal slippers and leather crossbelts. They had also French firelocks.

By this time General Harris was almost within sight of Bangalore. On the 17th February five days after the British army began its march from Vellore, a large body of the Nizam's troops,

horse and foot, under Meer Alum joined the main British army at Gudiatham. On the 20th February General Harris and Meer Alum had a meeting in the forenoon in a tent pitched half-way between the two camps at which many of the principal officers of the British army and of the Nizam's cavalry attended. On the 21st February Meer Alum paid General Harris a visit of ceremony in the morning, which the General returned in the afternoon, the Nizam's infantry being drawn out in the form of a street leading to Meer Alum's tent. On the 1st March when the army was halting at Coramangalam, a review was held to give an opportunity to Meer Alum to see the British troops under arms. On the morning of the 5th March a body of troops was sent from Rayakota to take possession of two hill-forts Neeladoorg and an other just within the Mysore boundary at that time. On the 6th March the Mysore frontier was crossed by the allied army and General Harris published a proclamation of the Governor-General entrusted to his hands in which all the reasons justifying the hostile operations against Tippu were found enumerated. The letter of the Governor-General addressed to Tippu was also despatched to him on the same day by the commander-in-chief. General Harris also published a proclamation on his own account as well as that of the allies assuring the inhabitants of the country that they had come not to make war on them, defenceless as they were, but only to frustrate the ambitious designs of Tippu. From Neeladoorg onwards Mysore horsemen destroyed all forage and crop in front as the British army advanced. While the army was on the move to the next camp on the 10th March, several of the Mysore horsemen were very daring, some of them coming within pistol-shot of the head of the advance guard but content only with burning the dry forage in the neighbourhood of the route of the army and the camp. Here an incident is stated to have occurred which exposed to imminent danger Colonel Close who later became British Resident in Mysore and whose name the town of Closepet situated on the Bangalore-Mysore railway line even now bears. Colonel Close having rode up to a village about a mile in front of the army line where there was some forage saw a few horsemen whom he mistook for the Nizam's men and therefore paid no attention to them.

They allowed him to cross them at the distance of a few yards. When however he had turned a corner of the village and they had got between him and the British army, they charged him. Colonel Close clapped spurs to his horse and though for some time his enemies kept close to him, his horse an Arabian getting heated and animated on coming to some rough ground carried him clear off after a pursuit of about a mile. On the 14th March, General Harris' army encamped within sight of Bangalore. On the 21st the army reached Kankanhalli halting on the way at Kaglipura, Harohalli and a few other places. On the morning of the 27th Harris reached Malavalli overcoming all harassments on the way by the Mysore troops.

By this time Tippu leaving Seringapatam had taken up a position about three miles to the west of the fort of Malavalli with the main body of his troops and with his preparations complete to offer battle. Among the officers present with him were Kamruddin, Purnaiya and Syed Sahib. While the ground for the encampment of the English troops was being marked at about 10 o'clock in the morning, a few shots fired by the Mysore troops fell in the lines marked and the measures adopted to ward off these shots soon led to a general action which continued till about 2 o'clock and then ceased by the retreat of the Mysore army towards Bannur, 12 miles to the west. A condensed description of this battle may be of some interest. The attacking body of the Mysore horse of about 1,500 was formed in a compact, wedge-like shape, with the front angle headed by two enormous elephants bearing howdahs filled with distinguished officers. Each of these elephants held in its proboscis a huge iron chain, which it whirled about with great rapidity causing much damage. A vigorous conflict ensued by a discharge on the part of the Mysoreans of their pistols and carbines which was met by the troops on the side of the British by a volley followed by a rapid firing and on the smoke clearing away, a literal rampart of men and horses was seen encumbering the earth, many of them rolling about in agony, while the elephants maddened by their many bullet wounds retreated frantically to the rear treading the dead and the dying under foot and swinging their chains right and left among the fleeing cavalry. The howdahs from

which the leading chiefs had directed the charge were dashed to atoms and several of these brave men's heads hung from the backs of the enraged animals and the scene was terrific with horses rearing and crushing their riders to death, other loose and wounded horses scouring the plain on all sides. A column of the Mysoreans in another part of the field 2,000 strong hurled themselves against a British regiment. But Arthur Wellesley, the future hero of a hundred battles, poured a deadly volley with terrible effect and drove back the Mysoreans. Even Kirmani has admitted in his "Life of Tippu" that "as good fortune and prosperity had turned their backs on the Sultan's army and as the signs of mischance and bad fortune every day manifested themselves more and more, many of the unfortunate soldiers gave up their lives gratuitously and the rest regularly and with slow steps retired from the field. This undoubtedly was all predestined and under the power and control of no one. The English army therefore gained the victory and were much elated."

In contrast to these gloomy observations of Kirmani may be given those of Arthur Wellesley contained in a letter written to his brother Lord Mornington on the day the British army reached Seringapatam—"In the action of the 27th March at Malavalli, Tippu's troops behaved better than they were ever known to behave. His infantry advanced and almost stood the charge of bayonets of the 33rd regiment and his cavalry rode at General Baird's European brigade. He did not support them as he ought having drawn off his guns at the moment we made our attack and even pushed forward these troops to cover the retreat of our guns. This is the cause of the total destruction of the troops he left behind him without loss to us and the panic with which, we have reason to believe, his troops are now affected. His light cavalry and others are the best of the kind in the world. They have hung upon us night and day from the moment we entered his country to this. Some of them have always had sight of us and have been prepared to cut off any persons venturing out of the reach of our camp-guards. We came by a road so unfrequented that it was not possible to destroy all the forage, which would have distressed us much even in that way as would be expected from them. If Tippu

had had sense and spirit sufficient to use his cavalry and infantry as he might have done, I have no hesitation in saying that we should not now be here and probably should not be out of the jungles near Bangalore."