

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Prize-money and its distribution.

By the unrestricted plunder of the town of Seringapatam and its neighbourhood, several of the men of the army became, it is stated, rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Colonel Arthur Wellesley in a letter to his brother Lord Mornington informed him that nothing exceeded what was done on the night of the 4th May, that scarcely a house in the town was left unplundered and that in the camp bazaars jewels of the greatest value, bars of gold and numerous other articles of value were offered for sale by soldires, sepoy and followers of the army at indiscriminate prices or exchanged for articles of nominal value. Single pearls of great value are said to have been offered in exchange for a bottle of liquor. An army doctor was able to purchase from a soldier two bracelets set with diamonds and the less costly one is said to have been valued by a Hyderabad jeweller at £30,000 sterling. The other bracelet the jeweller is said to have declared, was of such superlative value that he could not fix a price. In spite of these enormous gains, the officers and men were further eager for a distribution among them of all the properties captured in the palace and Arthur Wellesley warned his brother that every one in the army beginning from General Harris himself was eager for an immediate distribution of these spoils and that none were so inflammable as a successful army which had no work to busy itself with.

Under the notion that all the captured properties belonged to the army General Harris appointed a prize committee with General Floyd as president. In the meanwhile, Colonel Wellesley had presented Tippu's State sword found in his bedroom to General Baird with a graceful note accompanying the gift. General Floyd after his appointment took objection to this action of Colonel Wellesley inasmuch as the sword, in his opinion, belonged to the prize committee and that the latter wished the presentation to be made on their behalf by the commander-in-chief at an open meeting to General Baird and this was accordingly done, no doubt causing

some mortification to Colonel Wellesley. These prize agents behaved, in Colonel Wellesley's eyes, as veritable sharks and went so far as even to sell the ornamental doors of the palace and Tippu's clothing. "The prize agents," wrote Colonel Wellesley in a letter to his brother, "have got a large quantity of clothes belonging to and worn by the late Sultan, which unless prevented they will sell at public auction and these will be bought as relics by the discontented Mussalmans of this place. This will not only be disgraceful but unpleasant; and I therefore recommend that the whole may be bought by the Government and either given to the princes, or anything done with them that you may think fit." The prize committee also went to the length of searching the apartments of the zenana lest there should be any property concealed in them. But Lord Mornington on hearing of this action took strong objection to the course adopted by them and the prize commissioners were obliged to justify themselves by explaining that before the zenana was searched for treasure, separate apartments were assigned for the ladies and that no precaution was omitted to secure them from the possibility of being exposed to any inconvenience.

Another incident in connection with these prize properties is not without some humour. After the capture of Seringapatam and before any portion of the country was assigned to the old Hindu royal family, some brass idols of Hindu gods and goddesses which were in Tippu's Tosheekhane were distributed among a number of temples by order of General Harris. The prize agents subsequently required payment for them and said that if they were not paid for, the committee would charge the value of 500 pagodas against the temples. As this claim was put forward after the reconstitution of the Mysore State, Butché Rao, Purnaiya's deputy, in the absence of his chief at the time stated that as the idols were given to the temples by the order of General Harris before the country was given to the Raja, it was not proper that any payment should be made for them. Colonel Wellesley to whom the prize committee had sent their demand advised Butché Rao to send a receipt for the idols and leave it to the Resident Colonel Close to settle as to who was to make the payment—the Raja, the Company, or General Harris.

The prize committee also found in the palace an enormous and astonishing mass of wealth consisting of lakhs of specie, gold and silver plate, jewels, rich and valuable stuffs and various other articles of great price and rarity. All the numerous and extensive buildings except the zenana and the State Durbar hall had been appropriated for depositing them. The jewels were found kept in large dark rooms strongly secured and were deposited in boxes closed under the seal of Tippu or that of Haidar Ali. In the same manner were stored the greater part of the gold plate, both solid and in filigree, of which last manufacture there was almost an endless variety of beautiful articles. The jewellery set in gold was in the form of bracelets, rings, necklaces, plumes and other articles. An upper and very long apartment contained the silver plate, solid and filigree, of all dimensions and fashions and in one of the galleries were two elephant howdahs entirely of this metal. Many massive pieces of silver plate were richly inlaid with gold and jewels. It was believed at the time that these treasures must have belonged to the Hindu Royal House as well as to several of the minor Rajas and pategars subjugated by Haidar or Tippu. The repositories of fire arms and swords were most magnificently adorned with gold and jewels. Among the State palanquins were found those which had been presented by Marquis Cornwallis to the two hostage princes. There were also a number of ornamental heavy articles, particularly several door-posts of ivory of exquisite workmanship. In addition to this accumulation of treasure, there were also in various and extensive apartments rich furniture, costly carpets, cloths and other stuffs. The bales of the finest muslins, cambricks, long cloths, silks and shawls were reckoned at the enormous quantity of five hundred camel-loads. There were also telescopes and optical glasses of every size and sight, with looking-glasses and pictures in unbounded profusion, while of china and glassware there was sufficient, it is said, to form a large mercantile warehouse. In a room was found a curious piece of mechanism made of wood representing a royal tiger in life in the act of devouring a prostrate man and within the body of the animal was a row of keys of natural notes acted upon by the rotation of certain barrels in the manner of a hand-organ and which produced

sounds intended to resemble the cries of a person in distress, intermixed with the roar of the tiger. A large library in excellent preservation also existed, the volumes being kept in chests and each book having a separate wrapper. Many of the books were richly adorned and beautifully illuminated.

In these apartments was also found a most superbly decorated throne of enormous value and a superb howdah and the following description has been given of this throne.—“The seat of the throne was supported on the back of a tiger, the solid parts being made of a heavy black wood entirely covered with a coat of the purest sheet gold about as thick as a guinea, fastened on with silver nails and wrought in tiger stripes curiously indented and most beautifully and highly polished. The floor of the throne about eight feet in length and five in width was raised four feet from the ground, and besides the massy tiger which formed its central support stood upon richly ornamented uprights of the same materials placed at the outer angles. The ascent to it on each side was a ladder in the manner of a coach-step of solid silver gilt, with silver nails and all the other fastenings of the same metal. Intermixed with the ornamental workmanship of the howdah were hundreds of Arabic sentences, chiefly from the Koran, superbly stamped being raised and polished with the most beautiful effect. The canopy was formed of a lighter wood entirely cased with sheet gold in the same manner as the body of the throne and as highly ornamented with a thick fringe all round it, composed entirely of fine pearls strung on threads of gold. The central part of the roof was surmounted by a most curious and costly figure of the Hummah (the fabulous royal bird of the East) formed of solid gold nearly the size of a pigeon and covered over with the most valuable jewellery, its beak being one large and beautiful emerald with another suspended to it, its eyes two brilliant carbuncles, the breast covered with diamonds, and the wings expanded in a hovering position completely lined with diamonds. On the beak were many large jewels variously and fancifully disposed and the tail somewhat resembling that of a peacock was also studded in the same manner, the whole so arranged as to imitate the most dazzling plumage and so closely set that the gold was scarcely visible.”

This superb throne being too unwieldy to be conveyed from the spot without damage and too valuable for any probable purchaser was broken up in the palace and the magnificent bird described was sent to the Queen of England as a present from Lord Mornington.

There were twenty granaries and seven godowns containing immense quantities of paddy, ragi, salt, pepper and horse-gram. The oldest paddy is recorded to have been of 11 years duration and in a good state of preservation. Nearly 1,000 pieces of brass and iron ordnance were found in the fort and island of Seringapatam. The number of iron shots, *viz.*, round, grape and of other descriptions amounted to more than five lakhs, besides about 12,000 shells, grenades and cases filled with grape. About 60,000 stand of small arms were found to be in an effective state. The number and quantity of other descriptions of arms, ammunition and military stores were in proportion and included between four and five thousand draught and carriage bullocks. In the stables were found only a few fine stallions and brood mares, Tippu's cavalry being then in the field. A great number of the iron ordnance and nearly all the brass six pounders numbering 51 were English manufacture and the others were in general cast in Tippu's own foundry where a degree of perfection, it is stated, had been attained in every stage of the process and even what was then the recent invention of boring guns perpendicularly had been introduced, the machinery being kept in motion by water.

The library was at first ordered to be given to the Court of Directors for the foundation of a library of eastern literature, the duplicate copies being sent to the Asiatic Society at Calcutta. But subsequently, except one copy of the Koran, the greater part of the library was transferred to the then newly founded college at Fort William, Calcutta. The copy of the Koran written in beautiful characters with elegant ornamentations is now said to be preserved in the library of the Windsor Castle in England and is said to have formerly belonged to the Emperor Aurangzeb and to have cost Rs. 9,000. The rest of the library contained many curious and interesting manuscripts classified as follows—Koran and

commentaries on the same, Prayers, Traditions, Theology, Sufism, Ethics, Jurisprudence, Arts and Sciences, Philology, Astronomy, Mathematics, Physics, Philosophy, Lexicography, History, Letters, Poetry, Hindi and Dekhani Poetry, Hindi and Dekhani Prose, Turkish Prose and Fables. Some of these manuscripts are said to have belonged to the Kings of Bijapur and Golconda, but the majority were acquired when Chittoor, Savanoor and Kadapa were taken. The total number of volumes was 1,070.

A diamond star, some ornaments, and another sword of Tippu were presented to Lord Mornington on behalf of the British army. Tippu's war turban, one of his swords and a sword of Morari Rao were sent as presents to Marquis Cornwallis. General Harris the commander-in-chief received £ 1,42,902 or one-eighth of the total amount of prize-money. A portion of Tippu's throne which, as already stated, was broken up and sold in separate pieces was purchased by an army officer for £ 2,500 and when he subsequently sold the same is said to have realised for the gold and silver portion alone a very much larger price than he paid.