

at Bengal. He regarded our successes in India in the same light that he regarded our successes in the Peninsula, as a series of mistakes, and Hastings and Wellington he considered to be both bunglers. The appointment of Lord Minto to the Governor-Generalship put an end to the dream of his life. He never recovered the disappointment, and the bitter remembrance of failure accompanied him into retirement. On March 25, 1807, he asked a few questions on the affairs of India, including the mutiny of Vellore, and this was the last act of the long and active political career of Philip Francis.'

Such was the man, and such were his qualities. He was fated, by what would seem some irony of fortune, to cross with evil intent the path of a great ruler, whose only thought was the welfare of the mighty destinies entrusted to his care. No one can understand either the character or the services of Warren Hastings, who does not know and estimate the obstacles, the delays, the provocations, raised against him through five weary years by the craft and perversity of Philip Francis. It was well for Great Britain that while the genius of the Governor-General showed itself equal to any emergency of war or diplomacy, he possessed also a tranquillity of patience, marvellous alike in its kind and degree, that was capable of enduring any disappointments and any crosses. It was that gift of calmness which, perhaps more than any other quality, baffled the designs of Francis and saved British India.¹

¹ Macaulay says of him: 'We believe that there never was a public man whose temper was so severely tried; not Marlborough, when thwarted by the Dutch deputies; not Wellington, when he had to deal at once with the Portuguese Regency, the Spanish Juntas, and Mr. Perceval. But the temper of Hastings was equal to almost any trial. It was not sweet; but it was calm.'—*Essay*.

CHAPTER V

HYDER ALI

THE contest, whether military or diplomatic, which had for some time been carried on with the Mahratta confederacy had been most disappointing. Rashly begun by the Bombay Government, to the marked displeasure of the Governor-General; made worse by the hostile majority in the Council who refused the advice of their chief; weakened by the retrocession of an army when victorious in the field; complicated further by an unsatisfactory treaty which proved to be only a hollow truce; and wellnigh ruined by the failure of a weak expedition sent from Bombay after the renewed declaration of war; it had been marked with misfortune from the first, and was still, notwithstanding the brilliant efforts of General Goddard, causing great anxiety to the Bengal Government. Francis continually urged peace at any price, but Warren Hastings, tenacious of his purpose, had devised, with the approval of Goddard, a diversion in the northern part of the Mahratta territory, which might enable that vigorous commander to strike a blow at Poona. Such was the state of things when a terrible disaster and a new combination of foes threatened the British rule in Hindustan with destruction.

It will be remembered that in consequence of the declaration of war by France, the French settlements in India were, by order of the Governor-General, occupied by our troops. Pondicherry, much the most important on the Coromandel coast, had been captured after a brave resistance, and the Madras Government had then proceeded to deal with Mahé.

Now that small seaport was under the immediate protection of Hyder Ali, the powerful ruler of Mysore, who

had expressly warned the Madras authorities that he would not submit to its occupation. They had already given him offence on other grounds, and now fatuously provoked his anger still further, by seizing Mahé. Their whole policy had been rash and blundering in the extreme, and they contrived, by a foolish intrigue with the brother of the Nizam, to add that potentate to the lengthening roll of our enemies.

It was on September 25, 1780, that the Governor-General convened his Council to meet as formidable a crisis as ever befell a State. The accumulated dangers were nothing less than appalling. Thirty thousand Mahratta horse were encamped on the western frontier of Bengal. An invasion of Behar by the same enemy seemed to be imminent. Oude was threatened. The Maharajah Scindia stood ready to fall upon Korah and Allahabad. The whole power of Poona confronted General Goddard. But there was worse news behind. Hyder Ali had descended in force on the Carnatic and was sweeping over it with fire and sword. With the fatuity which marked all the measures of the Madras Government, the British forces, not more than enough to resist if kept well together, had been, in defiance of all rules of sound strategy, divided into two separate bodies. These had been assailed in succession by Hyder, and while one part under Colonel Baillie had been surrounded and annihilated, the other under Sir Hector Munro had been driven back in defeat, and been forced to take refuge under the guns of Fort St. George. Sir Edward Hughes, the Admiral in command on the Indian station, sent tidings of having received undoubted intelligence that seven sail of the line, with a force of seven thousand soldiers, had left France to co-operate with the enemies of England in India. In Madras all was helpless confusion and dismay. In Calcutta many hearts, not without reason, were failing them for fear at the extremity. But there was one man whose heart failed not and whose spirit rose high to the emergency. Chatham, in a moment of national peril,

is said to have exclaimed, 'I can save the country, and nobody else can.' At that memorable September Council, Warren Hastings might, without assumption, have used the same words. Certain it is that if any accident had befallen him at that time, if the bullet of Francis had gone straight, British India would have been lost. But Warren Hastings was there at the helm, and by his capacity and resolution saved the empire committed to his charge.

It is astonishing to read the Minutes of that 25th September and following day, and to see how instantly the Governor-General had grasped the necessities of the crisis, and with what energy he met them. He threw over at once, without a regret, his cherished plans for the Mahratta war; he faced, without a thought of fear, the imminent dangers to Bengal and the adjacent provinces; his whole mind was bent on the one object, that of saving the Carnatic and averting a junction of the French forces with Hyder Ali. For this he was ready to empty his treasury, already depleted; for this to send off his best troops, and, what was much more, his invincible commander; like a true strategist, he risked all to strike hard at the vital point; for this he adjured his Council, and his opening words have a force and dignity that were all his own:—

'This is not a time either for long deliberation at home or the formal and tedious process of negotiation abroad. The calamity which has befallen us upon the Coast, and the alarming superiority which Hyder Ali Khan has acquired in the Carnatic, the despondency of the Government of Fort St. George, the consternation and distrust which seem to have spread themselves among all those who are subject to its authority, the utter want of present means and resources, the diminution of their military strength, and its declared insufficiency for the war which it is to sustain, and above all the authentic informations which we have received of a great naval and military armament prepared by the Court of France and destined beyond all doubt to co-operate with Hyder Ali, demand the most instant,

powerful, and even hazardous exertions of this Government to avert the event portended by so many concurrent difficulties. To this point every other consideration must now give place. Without further preface I propose the following resolutions :

‘ 1st. That the sum of fifteen lacs of rupees be immediately sent to Fort St. George in specie, and laden for that purpose in the *Duke of Kingston*, and the other vessels which are now on the point of sailing for Madras.

‘ 2nd. That the treasure deposited in the new fort, including the moiety lately taken from it, be all replaced in the general treasury, to be applied to the preceding purpose and other exigencies of this Government.

‘ 3rd. That a large detachment of European infantry and artillery be immediately sent to Fort St. George by the *Duke of Kingston* and the other vessels which are now on the point of sailing for Madras.

‘ To this proposition, as a necessary and essential part of it, I must add the following, viz. that the Commander-in-Chief be requested, and I do for my own part make it my most earnest and particular request, that he will proceed himself immediately to the Coast, and take the command of the army on that establishment.

‘ [The Commander-in-Chief will pardon this formal and official solicitation. I know the ardour of his zeal for the public service, and that this principle will of itself impel him wherever it shall most require his presence ; but I think this a case in which it would mark too great an indifference to the public welfare, and too cold a sense of the utility of his services, to leave the offer of them to his unsolicited option. I make no scruple to avow that although I am convinced that the danger impending on our interests in the Carnatic might be easily repelled even with the force which it already possesses for its defence, yet I cannot place any reliance upon it, unless it shall be properly applied and conducted ; that I do not think it has been properly applied, nor expect that it will be properly conducted,

unless Sir Eyre Coote will at this crisis stand forth in his own person and vindicate the rights and honour of the British arms. I mean not to compliment. It is military experience, and above all the high estimation in which his name is held by the world, and especially by that part of it where it was primarily acquired, mark him as the only possible instrument to retrieve our past disgraces, or to preserve the British interests and possessions in the Carnatic from utter ruin. Our armies which have been so long formed to the habits of conquest, will not easily recover from the impression of the dreadful reverse which has lately befallen them, nor be brought to act with their former confidence under unsuccessful commanders. The addition of numbers will not relieve their apprehensions, and will not but contribute to oppress the hands which have been already proved too weak to sustain the weight of an inferior charge] '1.

It is sufficient proof of the urgency which Warren Hastings attached to these three resolutions, that the fourth which he moved commenced as follows :—

'That an immediate offer of peace be made to the Mahratta State in the mode and on the conditions following: That as the Ministers of that State have professed a desire for peace which has been equally the wish of this Government even from the commencement of the war, and as the attainment of it seems to have been hitherto impeded by the difficulty of managing a negotiation between the principals situated at so great a distance from each other, to preclude all further delays we do at the same time offer peace and bind ourselves to the observance of it on their acceptance and ratification of the following conditions.' 2

These conditions, speaking broadly, were that all acquisitions made by our forces should be restored, saving any which had been ceded by treaty to other States: that Raghoba should receive a fitting maintenance for life, but

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. 6, pp. 718-19.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 719-20.

be precluded from advancing any pretension to power save by the universal consent of Mahratta rulers: that the Peishwa should conclude an alliance, offensive and defensive, with the Company, against Hyder Ali and the French: but that if this alliance should not be agreed to, peace should nevertheless be concluded, each party retaining what it had acquired, or that a suspension of hostilities should take place for one year, to give time for a final and perpetual adjustment. The treaty, to be concluded with the mediation of Rajah Moodajee Boosla.¹

To say that the proposal of these terms to the Peishwa's government must have been a sore trial to the pride of Warren Hastings is only to give the highest tribute to his wisdom and patriotism.

The further consideration of the resolutions was adjourned till the following day. Then Francis delivered his opinion. It was characteristic. The same political cowardice which made him advise a purely defensive attitude when the news of Burgoyne's surrender had arrived, again took possession of him, and he had no better counsel to offer than that all the troops should be kept in Bengal to defend that province. The Carnatic was to be abandoned to destruction in order that Bengal might be safe. He was also opposed to the grant of the fifteen lacs of rupees, and entered into a long arithmetical calculation to show that it could not be afforded. He may have been right or may have been wrong in his figures; but what can be said of the statesmanship which at this stupendous crisis dealt with public policy in the spirit of a prudent tradesman casting up his ledger? A mighty dependency was to be lost or saved; the fame of England was at stake; and Philip Francis did a sum.² This was the man whose one ambition was to supersede Warren Hastings as Governor-General; this was the policy he would have chosen to pursue.

¹ A Chief whom Warren Hastings by assiduous, secret negotiation, converted from an enemy to a friend.

² *State Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 721-2.

But the power for evil had departed from his hands. For some little time the Minutes of Council had recorded the entry, 'Lieutenant-General Sir Eyre Coote absent on a visit to the different stations of the Army.' It was during these absences that Francis had seized the opportunity to obstruct the war policy of the Governor-General. Sir Eyre Coote was now present; a veteran of Indian war, he did not hesitate as to the course he should follow; he gave his voice with that of the Governor-General in support of the resolutions. Francis and Wheeler stood together in opposition. Warren Hastings gave his casting vote in favour, and that vote preserved India to the British Crown. It may be doubtful whether in the long course of English history any public step of more enduring moment was ever taken. What is not doubtful is that no public service was ever worse requited.

On the 10th of October the Governor-General struck another memorable blow; he superseded the incapable Governor at Madras. Macaulay, who, to do him justice, fully admits the value of Warren Hastings' services at this critical time, speaks of the transaction as if it had been a mere exertion of arbitrary power on the part of the Governor-General.¹ That indeed might have been morally permissible under such grave circumstances; but it was not the course pursued. There can be no doubt that Warren Hastings regarded the conduct of the Madras Governor with indignation and scorn, and was resolved to be well quit of him. But as usual he gave no rein to his passions; he acted with coolness and legality. It had happened fortunately that the Madras authorities had, by their own imprudence and misconduct, brought themselves into peril of the law. By a section of the Regulating Act the Councils at Madras and Bombay were precluded from entering upon wars or making treaties without the sanction

¹ 'It was no time for trifling. Hastings determined to resort to an extreme exercise of power, to suspend the incapable Governor of Fort St. George.'—*Essay*.

of the supreme authority at Calcutta. Now the President at Madras, in flagrant violation of this provision, had entered into secret negotiations with one Bazalet Jung, a brother of the Nizam, for the cession to the Company of a territory (Gantoor) in one of the Circars. This intrigue was the more reprehensible inasmuch as the Governor-General had specially cautioned the Madras Council against any proceeding which might give umbrage to the Nizam, with whom, as he pointed out, we were under treaty obligations. Not only did Mr. Whitehill persist, against express orders, in this objectionable course, but he added to his misdeeds by concealing all information of what was taking place, for no less than nine months, from the superior authority at Calcutta. Moreover, he had disregarded the express injunctions of the Governor-General to withdraw the troops, as well as the rent collectors, which had been sent into the coveted district of Gantoor, and both were there still, in open defiance of the Nizam's rights.

Warren Hastings was the last man to suffer such encroachment on his statutory powers. He had sternly rebuked the Bombay Council for entering into a treaty with Raghoba without his sanction; and he now resolved to avail himself, against the Madras authorities, of their contumacious infraction of the Act. Doubtless the indignation which he felt at their incompetence in public business and their mismanagement of the war moved him strongly; but he acted nevertheless on strict legal grounds, and confined his indictment to the offences committed. After quoting to his Council the exact words of the Section in the Regulating Act which applied to the case, and detailing at length the misdemeanours at Madras, he moved:—

‘For an attempt in the Select Committee of Fort St. George to make a treaty with Bazalet Jung in direct violation of a former treaty then subsisting between the Company and the Nizam.

‘For presuming to hold the Circar of Gantoor, at all events in defiance of a requisition from the Governor-

General and Council peremptorily made to restore it, and for refusing to withdraw their troops therefrom, and to remove their Agents and Collectors from it,—knowing as they did that we had formally pledged the faith of the Company to the Nizam for both these points, thereby degrading the authority, weakening the energy, and preventing the efficacy of the powers of this Government.

‘For the contemptuous indifference shown to this Board, and the want of even common respect in suffering so long a time to elapse before they replied to orders of such importance, or allowed them any consideration, and even when they did, for eluding the effect of those orders.

‘And lastly, for the insult offered to the high commission which we bear in permitting any other claims to stand in competition with the deliberate resolves of the Government.

‘Under circumstances of such aggravation, so unpardonable in their very nature, and so dangerous in their consequences that nothing short of instant example can preserve the supremacy of the responsible Government and give credit to its acts, I now move that John Whitehill Esq. be suspended from his office of President and Governor of Fort St. George by order of the Governor-General and Council of this Presidency, according to the Regulating Act of Parliament of the 13th of George III, delegating powers to them for that purpose.’¹

All the members of Council present voted for the motion. As it was considered that a measure of such importance should not be carried finally without the concurrence of every member, the Minutes were sent to Sir Eyre Coote, who was absent on service, and he returned them with the following entry: ‘I agree to the suspension of Mr. Whitehill, upon the grounds of the Governor-General’s declarations as a measure to preserve and support the authority of the Supreme Government. We must, from the powers vested in us, be held responsible for the consequences of those acts of disobedience which we suffer to pass unnoticed or un-

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. II, p. 727.

corrected.' This concise and sensible deliverance made the unanimity of the Council complete.

That the measure thus recorded was a strong, though most salutary, exercise of power goes without saying ; but it was something quite different from the despotic proceeding suggested by the words of Macaulay. It is one of, at least, a score of passages in his *Essay* which are in direct variance from the actual facts.

Sir Eyre Coote landed at Madras on November 5, with a small but efficient force of infantry and artillery. He at once took steps to remedy the existing misgovernment and to meet impending dangers. He carried out, with tact and coolness, the delicate task of suspending the Governor from office.* Mr. Whitehill having intimated resistance to the order of deposition, Coote quietly asked the Members present whether they admitted the authority of the Supreme Council. They could not directly dispute it, and he then moved that the second Member of Council, Mr. Charles Smith, should take the Chair, which was carried. On this, Mr. Whitehill left the room, with a threat of legal proceedings against the Governor-General.¹ Of these proceedings nothing more was heard, and it may be added that when a full report of the facts reached the Directors of the Company they summarily dismissed Whitehill from their service.

The military affairs presented much greater difficulties. The first news which Sir Eyre Coote received on his arrival was that Arcot, the capital of the Carnatic, had fallen. Hyder Ali had taken up his residence in that city and openly claimed the sovereignty of the country. In his letter to the Governor-General, dated the 10th November, Coote mentioned, as one of the alarming features of the situation, what skill and resource had been exhibited by Hyder's army during the siege. Our own forces were dispirited, there was a great want both of food and of transport, and Coote pointed out the urgent necessity of supplying him

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. II, p. 746.

with an Adjutant-General on whom he could rely. The concluding passage of the letter shows the straits he was in: 'I went yesterday to review the army encamped five miles from hence; appearances not in their favour, but what is worse, I found from the officers in command of the sepoy's that the capture of Arcot, from whence they must come, has, from the circumstance of their wives and other near relations being there, not only dispirited them, but created in them that kind of aversion to the service which has already produced many desertions. Judge from this, how anxious I must be for a recruit of sepoy's from Bengal, even if the detachment, which is to come by land, has set out, as it is impossible for it to reach me for these four months to come, long before which time I conceive everything will be settled one way or the other. . . . When at camp I was surprised to regard their supply of provisions, which I found to come in so scanty as to be scarcely sufficient for one day's expense. The town of Madras now lives on the supply lately come from your quarter, of which there is not enough in store for one month's expenditure. The country around affords us no assistance. They promise us a supply of grain from the north, but none is likely to arrive soon, in short, we have no certain dependence but from Bengal.'¹ Such was the position, bordering on the desperate, in which this great Commander was placed.

But he showed himself equal to the occasion, rose superior to all obstacles, and on the 1st of January took the field. Twenty days after he was able to write to Madras that 'to the utter honour of the officers and men composing this detachment, the Fort of Carangoly was taken, and in a manner which redounds much to the credit of their bravery.' It was indeed a signal achievement. The troops reached the Fort at early morning, and without waiting for any siege operations, and with no artillery but a single twelve-pounder gun dragged by Lascars, they forced the outer gate, and then, by aid of the gun, two inner gates in succession, and carried

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 747-8.

the Fort with a rush, the bulk of the garrison making their escape over the wall on the opposite side.¹ It was a portent of future victory. Hyder Ali was at that time investing five fortresses commanded by English officers,—Ambur, Vellore, Wandewash, Permaçoil, and Chingleput. The first was forced to surrender before help could reach it. But Coote relieved Chingleput and marched on the 24th to Wandewash, where he found that the siege had been raised. He marched on to Permaçoil with the same result, the enemy falling back at each place before the terror of his name. But when he had marched only three miles further, he heard that the French fleet of seven sail of the line and three frigates had appeared before Madras. 'As I had every reason to apprehend they must have brought troops, and that they would land them and would, with the forces of Hyder, have laid siege to Madras, the security of which being the grand national object, I resolved to move towards its protection.' On further intelligence that the French fleet had sailed to Pondicherry, the aged but unwearied Commander resolved at all risks to move there, and within a few days his army was encamped on the Red Hills of Pondicherry with its front towards Arcot. He occupied the town with a detachment, destroyed the boats which supplied the French fleet with provisions and water, and spiked the guns of the place. But not a grain of rice or any other provision could be procured. 'In the hope that by my personal presence something effectual might be done towards obtaining supplies, I set out for Pondicherry on the 7th on horseback, and had just entered the bound hedge when I received a note express from camp informing me that Hyder with his whole army was in sight; instantly I sent orders to the detachment in Pondicherry to join the main body with all expedition, and returned myself to camp.' Perceiving that Hyder was moving in great force to the southward, with the intention of attacking Cuddalore, Coote struck his camp and marched to the relief of that

Fort. The army of Hyder rapidly followed and, overtaking our force, opened a heavy fire upon its ranks. But Coote had only one aim in view, to reach Cuddalore before the enemy, and disregarding their fire, which does not seem to have been particularly effective, he pushed on and secured his object. Cuddalore was saved; but the situation was most critical. 'There was only rice enough for one day's subsistence for the fighting men of the army. The alarming prospect which this presented me with, produced feelings which are much easier to be imagined than described. I saw in the fall of this handful of men the destruction of the English interest in India. . . . What to determine in a situation so critical, so difficult, and in its consequences so important, I confess was a question of which I dreaded the decision.' But the decision which he took was worthy of Sir Eyre Coote and worthy of the English name.¹ He drew out his small army on a wide plain, and offered battle. Hyder, notwithstanding his great superiority in numbers, declined the challenge, and all attempts to bring on a decisive action having proved fruitless, Coote, who had effected his main object, returned to his encampment. On the very day of his arrival the French fleet weighed anchor and left the bay, and shortly after the rice vessels came in from Madras, when all fear of famine was at an end. But it may be well to quote what Sir Eyre Coote wrote at the time, for it puts in a vivid light the enormous difficulties he had had to encounter and the terrible risks he had run.

'By this time the inhabitants of the town were next to starving, some absolutely had died from want, and two days more would have completed the melancholy scene, as the troops also must have been without a grain to eat. I had by the aid of Mr. Daniel made a small provision to have enabled me to act in this last extremity, and that was about three days' rice I had with inconceivable labour got together. And with which at a hazard dictated by

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 764.

a regard for the public, an unwillingness to subject the credit of the British arms to a disgrace which from their situation appeared to be inevitable, and a desire, if possible, to extricate our affairs from the distress in which they are involved, I determined to force my way at all risks into the Tanjore country, as the only place with three days' provisions I had the least chance of attaining and subsisting the army in. The same motives which dictated this daring undertaking—now our distress for provisions is greatly removed—induce me to continue in my station here, until I can reinforce the army by drafts from the southward. . . . My army, originally small, stands greatly in need of an augmentation, having been considerably weakened by the respectable garrison left in Carangoly, and by deaths, desertions, and the other casualties incident to the military services.'¹ Such was the end of a short but memorable campaign, in which Sir Eyre Coote showed, to the confusion of future detractors, that age and ill-health had not impaired his mental faculties nor quenched the fire of his dauntless courage.

After some months of inaction necessitated by the want of transport and provisions, which was largely owing to the neglect of the Madras Government,² Coote on the 18th of June again took the field. He failed in an attack on the fortified temple of Chillumbrum, and marched on to Porto

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 764-5.

² Extract from a letter from Lieutenant-General Sir Eyre Coote, March 16, 1781: 'I am now most cruelly situated, the enemy marching before me, and for want of carriage for provisions unable to follow them. I stated this to you fully in my letter of the 14th, by which you will learn that I can hardly carry one day's provisions for the army. The uninformed world will be apt to condemn the tardiness of my motions, and which, I am sorry to observe, knowing what I could do were I provided as I ought to have been, I feel as a severe blow to my honour and military character. However, I comfort myself in the reflection, that when the real state of things comes to be more generally known, I shall no longer be exposed to the unmerited blame, either from the public, or from individuals.'

Novo, situated on the river Vellaar close to the sea. On the 24th Admiral Sir Edward Hughes, a commander as vigorous and daring by sea as Coote was by land, arrived from Madras. The two conferred, and at first resolved to unite their forces for the reduction of Chillumbrum. For this purpose the battering train was ordered to be landed. But no sooner had Eyre Coote returned to camp than tidings reached him of the presence of Hyder's whole army within a few miles. 'The grounds they occupied, naturally strong and commanding,' wrote Coote, 'were rendered much more formidable by most of the spots that would admit of it to advantage being strengthened with front and flanking batteries. Large bodies of cavalry, who had from our arrival at Porto Novo hovered round our camp, rendered it impracticable for even a single hircarra to return with any intelligence to be depended on of either the strength or position of the enemy's batteries. Our grand guard and other outposts were absolutely the boundary and united extent of our knowledge respecting the enemy.'¹ Coote had now to choose between marching to seek a fight and remaining to depend for supplies upon the sea. He called a council of war. It was determined thereat to embark the battering train, to give the soldiers four days' provision of rice to be carried on their backs, and then to strike for victory. The Admiral undertook to remain off the coast to aid in case of disaster. Bad weather detained the army for a couple of days, but on the first of July they marched at dawn, gaining the open plain, where they were formed in two lines and advanced in battle array. But it was found that Hyder's batteries directly commanded the line of advance, and Coote, as prudent as he was daring, halted to reconnoitre. He discovered that in the sand-hills on his right there was a narrow passage, made in fact by Hyder for the convenience of carriage, and this was instantly occupied. The first line was passed through the small entry in single file, and was reformed in line

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 790-1.

beyond. By order of the General the second line was moved up to secure the passage and thus protect his rear. Coote with the first line, though exposed to a heavy cannonade, waited with coolness till assured that the second line was in position, and then, advanced as rapidly as good order would permit. Their movement, skilfully directed by Coote, had turned the left flank of the enemy, and after a two hours' stubborn fight Hyder's position was carried, and his whole army, which had swarmed over the plain, was in disorderly retreat. Want of cavalry prevented any effective pursuit (Coote said that with an adequate cavalry he should have driven Hyder back through the Ghauts) but nevertheless the victory was decisive. The siege of Wandewash was raised by Tippoo, while Hyder fell back to Arcot, and abandoned his designs on the southern provinces of the Presidency. More fighting was to come, but the ultimate end of the war began with this triumph. Macaulay, in his somewhat depreciatory remarks on Sir Eyre Coote, says that he was not now the Coote of Wandewash. No, he was not; time and hard service forbade the possibility; but he was the Coote of Porto Novo, a battle fought by a small band against an overwhelming force, fought with consummate skill as well as unsurpassable courage, and won by the hazardous but brilliant manœuvre of changing front in presence of the enemy. Let us hear Sir Eyre Coote himself, as he speaks in his dispatch¹:—

‘Considering the trying situation this army is in, destitute of most of the common resources for carrying on service; weak draft and hardly any carriage cattle (our guns in the face of the enemy's heaviest fire were through deep sand obliged to be drawn a full mile by the soldiers); no provisions but from day to day; pay considerably in arrears; the principal part of the Carnatic and its capital in the possession of the enemy; our armies in different parts of India having unfortunately received checks; an enemy in great force to deal with, whose rapid success has

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 790 et seq.

strengthened his cause with the natives in an alarming degree; no proper force of cavalry on our side, and not half carriage sufficient for our wounded and sick. These things considered, I think I may venture to say that fairly to beat Hyder on his chosen fortified ground was as much as could be expected.'

Shortly after this the brigade sent from Bengal under Colonel Pearce, and skilfully led by him on the long march by the coast,¹ reached Pulicat, an inlet of the sea distant some thirty miles from Madras. Hyder sent his son Tippoo to intercept a junction between the two forces; but Coote, crippled as he was by the want alike of transport and of food, was again successful, marching a hundred and fifty miles and joining the reinforcement. This added to his numbers without, unfortunately, increasing the proportion of his equipment. Hyder marched down his whole army to oppose the return of our forces, but Coote again placed a few days' rice on the backs of his men, and once more moved up to attack Hyder on his own ground. On the 26th of August a fierce encounter took place and both sides claimed the victory. But the substantial advantage rested with Coote, and in the following month the still unwearied commander forced Hyder to another engagement and totally defeated him. This closed the campaign, for the bursting of the monsoon and the want of provisions compelled our army to enter into cantonments near Madras. But the plans of Hyder had been baffled and his wellnigh innumerable host defeated by a small band of veteran soldiers, fired by the spirit and led by the genius of Sir Eyre Coote.

But the efforts of that great commander for his country's interests were at no distant date about to terminate. Having heard that the garrison of Vellore was much distressed, he revolved to march to its relief. On January 2nd, he placed himself once more at the head of his army, but

¹ This march had been rendered practicable by the advance, on his own responsibility, of £30,000 by Warren Hastings.

on the 5th he was stricken with apoplexy and was found unconscious in his tent. Before starting he had written to say that his health had been so impaired by fatigue and anxiety during thirteen months of the severest campaign he had ever encountered that he had little hopes of recovery except in retirement. Nevertheless, his patriotic sense of duty had impelled him to relieve Vellore at all hazards. The news of his illness was received everywhere with profound dismay; but not less was the astonishment when it was found that having somewhat recovered he had pushed on at once in a palanquin. On the 9th he fell in with Hyder, posted on the further side of the river Poonyr. Coote at once crossed the stream with his forces, when the enemy struck their camp and retreated. Next day they attempted an attack on our convoy as it was passing a swamp. Coote wrote:—‘The attacking our baggage and convoy for Vellore was apparently their grand object, and the guarding this, not to be repaired, often required the utmost circumspection. They made their attack supported by a number of heavy guns cannonading at a great distance; just at this time, the first line had crossed a deep morass which impeded both our train, rice carts, and bullocks very much. The different brigades were immediately ordered to be posted so as to keep the enemy in check on all sides while our convoy passed the bad ground. The whole got over safe and was secured at the head of our lines.’ All this done and described by the man who, four days previously, had been stricken senseless with apoplexy and his life despaired of! Next morning our army encamped beneath the walls of Vellore. ‘The provisions and stores to be deposited in the garrison will be lodged there this afternoon, and as the object of our march is now happily completed, I shall set off on my return to-morrow morning. The spirit of the troops in this service does them the greatest honour. This is the day the commanding officer of Vellore acquainted both Government, and me that it was absolutely necessary to be relieved, that he could not hold out an hour

longer.' When on his return march Coote reached the morass he found Hyder again there to dispute the passage.¹ 'His 24 and 18 pounders, commanding a much more considerable distance than our light 6's and 12's, give him an opportunity of attempting these distant cannonades with an idea of some success, and Hyder always takes care to be certain that there is impeding or impassable ground between his army and our's. . . . The instant the rear and baggage had crossed the morass, I posted my baggage and stores close to an adjoining hill, and pushed on the army over high ground by the nearest possible route for the enemy's main body and guns. I moved off from the left lines, in column first, and as the ground opened sufficiently for forming, marched on in line of battle. As soon as our army was near enough to do execution, we opened an advancing fire of artillery from all parts, and had the mortification to see the enemy precipitately draw off. I term it a mortification, for if Hyder would have stood and risked the chance of war for one hour, his army would, in all probability, have been destroyed, such is the ardour and power of the handful of veterans I have the honour of commanding, but truly distressing our situation for the want of proper magazines, means of field subsistence and carriage for it.' On reaching Fort St. George, Coote made a bitter complaint of the negligence of the Madras Government. 'I can have,' he wrote, 'no dependence on the army being found in such a manner as to enable me to conduct it to such operations as would produce the most permanent advantages and do that justice which my zeal for the interests of the Company and honour of the British arms prompts me to. I must resign the task and leave it to the execution of some one whose health and abilities may be better calculated to surmount those difficulties which I can no longer, in a due regard to the cause of the public and my honour and reputation as a soldier, pretend to contend against.'² That is, to put it distinctly, the man

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 841.

² *Ibid.*, p. 842.

who was daily risking his life from exhaustion, through his wonderful exertions in their service, could not obtain the ordinary supplies of war from this execrable Government of the Madras Presidency.

The truth is that Sir Eyre Coote's plans would have altogether failed and the Carnatic would have been lost, but for the energy and persistence with which supplies had been poured in from Bengal under the direction of Warren Hastings. It was his ability which sustained the war. But even he would have been baffled if the command of the sea had been lost. Captain Mahan, in his remarkable work, has shown how often, throughout the history of mankind, the fortune of war has been decided by the effect of sea-power. As early as the contest between Rome and Carthage, the result of the second Punic war (despite the genius of Hannibal) was decided by the preponderance of Roman naval power in the Mediterranean. Nor is it less interesting, at least for Englishmen, to note the decisive influence on the fate of the Carnatic exerted by the conduct of our seamen in Eastern waters. The French Government was fully alive to the situation and sent their very capable Admiral, Suffrein, with twelve sail of the line and a proportionate number of frigates to guard their transports crowded with soldiers, to harry British commerce, and to destroy, as it was hoped, the squadron commanded by Sir Edward Hughes. Had this project succeeded the fate of the Carnatic would have been sealed.

But England's star prevailed. On March 15, 1782, Admiral Suffrein arrived with his formidable force off the roads of Madras. He had expected to find there six sail of the line, but on the evening before our squadron had happily received a reinforcement from England of three sail of the line. The behaviour of the two Admirals under these circumstances was instructive. The French Admiral, finding that he would have to fight nine sail of the line instead of six, though his own pennant flew over a force of twelve, hauled his wind and sailed away to the south-

ward.¹ The English Admiral, disregarding his inferiority in numbers, immediately made the signal to weigh anchor, and pursued the French fleet through the night. On the following day he came up with them, struck in between the fighting ships and the transports, captured the *Lauriston* and rescued six valuable prizes from their captors under the eyes of the hostile fleet. Want of wind on the following morning prevented Sir Edward Hughes from coming to close quarters with his foe, but in the afternoon some fresh gusts brought him the opportunity and he forced Suffrein to action. After some hours' conflict during which the flagship and some others of our squadron (being engaged five against eight) suffered severely from the superior fire of the enemy, the French Admiral apparently despairing of success hauled his wind and drew off. The *Superb* and *Exeter* were in almost sinking condition, but the whole squadron was brought safe into Trincomalee.² Sir Edward Hughes who, if he had lived later would have been a colleague after Nelson's own heart, patched up his ships in mast and hull, making them tolerably fit for service, and set sail again to seek Suffrein and to guard the coasts of Coromandel.

The news of this gallant action was received with much relief and satisfaction in Calcutta. The Governor-General, after reading the dispatch, ordered a general salute to be fired from Fort William in token of victory, and wrote a warm letter of congratulation to Sir Edward Hughes. 'We know not whether most to admire or applaud that gallant spirit and zeal for the service of your country which prompted you to pursue an enemy so superior in numbers

¹ Sir Eyre Coote, in his dispatch of March 1, 1781, thus wrote: 'I need not take up your time with commenting on the conduct of the French Admiral, or describing the injuries we must have suffered, and the risk we must have run, if he had acted with common spirit. I may with safety advance, that we are entirely indebted to his irresolute behaviour for the little security we now enjoy on this coast.'

² *State Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 851-2.

and resolutely to force him into action under the additional disadvantages created by the circumstances which you have described. . . . In a word we regard your action with the French fleet as the crisis of our fate in the Carnatic, and in the result of it we see that province relieved and preserved, and the permanency of the British power in India firmly established. For such important services to the nation and to the Company we, as their representatives, offer you our warmest acknowledgments, and our sincerest congratulations on your success and the glory you have acquired in obtaining it.¹ It will be observed that Warren Hastings, with his unfailing prescience, saw at once that the superiority obtained at sea had settled the event of the war.

• Sir Edward Hughes had been able to refit his battered ships in Trincomalee, because that port and also Negapatam had been captured by a naval and military force sent out by Lord Macartney, recently made Governor of Madras. This expedition was disapproved by Sir Eyre Coote, whose advice in the matter was disregarded, and although it was successful at first his opinion as to its imprudence was only too soon justified. When Colonel Braithwaite, who was in command of the force employed by land, led it back to Tanjore, he suffered himself to be surprised by Tippoo and surrounded by overwhelming numbers. After a most gallant resistance, continued for more than twenty-four hours, our commander had to surrender at discretion. This was followed by the capture of Cuddalore, and the landing of two thousand French soldiers. Sir Eyre Coote once more took the field. He wrote to the Government at Madras: 'I have a weight upon my shoulders that almost bears me down. Worn out in constitution, I feel myself unequal to the constant fatigues and anxieties attending my situation. I shall, however, endeavour as far as lays in my power to stem the torrent that seems almost ready to overwhelm us, not doubting of your exertions to assist my

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 893-4.

labours.'¹ He marched to Wandewash where twenty years before he had defeated Lally. On the refusal of Hyder to fight Coote pushed on towards Pondicherry and found the enemy, with their French allies, strongly posted. A move was then made in the direction of Arni, where Hyder's principal magazine was situated. This drew him from his strong position, and in the morning of the 2nd of June the two armies were in close proximity. Coote, after providing for his baggage, moved in two lines against the rising ground on which the enemy appeared in greatest force. His rear was threatened by the numbers of the foe, but as at Porto Novo, so here, he changed front in presence of the enemy with celerity and success. When our army again advanced, Hyder's forces retreated in confusion.² Coote came up with them about sunset, when they were engaged in crossing a river, and captured a gun and ammunition. Want of cavalry and want of provisions prevented him from taking the greatest advantage of his victory. He wrote: 'It has been my misfortune ever since I took the field on the event of every success, to have cause to lament my inability to pursue the advantages open from victory for want of a sufficiency of provisions. On the present occasion, had I possessed the means of subsistence, I could not only have driven Hyder up the Ghauts, but most probably have got hold of his grand magazine of Arni, which would most assuredly have so far ended the war as to have checked his immediately returning in force to the Carnatic, whilst it would have given to this army that very support which at this moment maintains his.'² This was the last of Sir Eyre Coote's victories.

On the same day that the intelligence of it arrived came the news of another sea-fight. At the end of March the French Admiral left Porto Novo to attack a fleet of our Indiamen which had appeared off the coast. Sir Edward Hughes at once went in pursuit, and fell in with the *Sultan*

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 863.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 871, 872, 873.

and *Magnanime* and their convoy of seven of the Company's ships. He acted with his usual decision. 'The convoy I immediately despatched to Madras roads, and took with me the *Sultan* and *Magnanime*, steering a direct course for Trincomalee, in order to land the military stores and reinforcements of troops for this garrison, determined not to seek the enemy's squadron till that service was first performed, nor to shun them if they fell in my way.' Hughes succeeded in reaching the island of Ceylon about fifteen miles south of Trincomalee, and bore away for that place, followed by the French fleet of eighteen sail. 'On the twelfth (of April) at daybreak, having altered the position of the enemy's squadron and given them the wind by bearing away, I saw them crowding all the sail they could after us, and their copper-bottomed ships coming fast up with our rear, on which I immediately determined to engage them. At 9 in the forenoon I made the signal for the line of battle ahead on the starboard tack at two cables' length distance, the enemy's squadron then bearing north by east, distant about six miles, and the wind at north by east, they continued manœuvring their ships and changing their position in their line till 15 minutes past noon, when they bore down to engage His Majesty's squadron; one sail of them stretching along to engage our ships in the van, and the other seven sails steering direct by on our centre, the *Superb*, with the *Monmouth* her second ahead, and the *Monarca* her second astern; at half past one the engagement began in the van of both squadrons, and at three minutes after, I made the signal for a general engagement; the French Admiral and his second astern bore down on the *Superb* within pistol shot, where he continued giving and receiving a severe fire for nine minutes, and then stood on, greatly damaged, to attack the *Monmouth*, at that time engaged with another of the enemy's ships, and made room for the ships in his rear to draw up to the attack of our centre, where the engagement was warmest. At 3, the *Monmouth* lost her main and mizzen masts, and drew

out of the line to the leeward of our squadron. At 40 minutes past 3, being near the shore, I made the signal for the squadron to wear and haul their wind in a line of battle ahead on the larboard tack still engaging the enemy. At 40 minutes past 5, being in shoal water and fearing the *Monmouth* might drift too near shore, I made the signal for the squadron to prepare to anchor and hauled down the signal for the line of battle. At 40 minutes past 6 the enemy's squadron in great disorder drew off to the eastward, and the engagement ceased, at which time I anchored with His Majesty's squadron in order to repair our damages, which on board the *Superb* and *Monmouth* were very great indeed, both in their hulls, masts, sails and rigging, nor had any one ship of the squadron escaped without great injury in her hull and masts, and all were much torn in their sails and rigging.¹

For seven days the two fleets lay within shot of each other too disabled to fight or to sail. Then the English squadron returned to Trincomalee and the French to a Dutch port. After having 'refitted the several ships of the squadron, and taken on board such of our recovered men as could be serviceable, the English fleet returned at the end of June, to Negapatam to watch the enemy's squadron.'² On the 5th of July the two fleets again came in sight, and another desperate conflict took place. It ended in serious loss on both sides, without the capture of any ships. The French were, however, compelled to abandon all idea of capturing Negapatam.³

These naval operations, and their effect on the war were, as already observed, a striking example of the results of sea-power but they were something more; they were a proof that sea-power is not necessarily associated with numerical superiority. Throughout the naval struggle for victory in the Indian Ocean the odds, as far as numbers

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 864.

² *Ibid.*, p. 876.

³ *Ibid.*, *Intro.*, p. lxxiv.

were concerned, were never less than four to three in favour of France. In the fight when Hughes first fell in with Suffrein, those odds were as heavy as eight to five among the ships engaged. Yet, at the end of that fierce encounter, when the English flagship had been riddled with shot, and two of her consorts were in a sinking condition, it was not the English admiral, but the French, who hauled his wind and declined further combat. It was not the greater number, it was 'the man behind the gun', who carried the day. To the honour of our Navy it should be remembered that Warren Hastings declared the event of the war had been decided by Sir Edward Hughes and his seamen; it was their 'sea-power' which preserved the Carnatic; but that power lay not in the number of their ships or the weight of their guns; it lay in the unconquerable resolution of the crews who sailed the one and served the other.

Peace with the Mahrattas had now been secured. Warren Hastings had, originally, been driven into the war, and through the whole contest had earnestly desired some pacific settlement, though he firmly refused to make peace at any price, and always maintained that it would be best brought about by a vigorous prosecution of hostilities. The Governor-General had been for some time indefatigable in his efforts to conciliate Scindia, the most powerful and the most statesmanlike of the Mahratta Chiefs. At length after long and intricate negotiations and a succession of disappointments, the treaty of Salbai was, on May 17, 1782, concluded with Scindia. All the territories conquered from the Peishwa, subsequent to the treaty of Purundbar, were to be restored, the Nizam and Hyder Ali were also to restore the territories they had taken from the English, and all Europeans, except the English and the Portuguese, were to be excluded from the Mahratta dominion. A small increase of territory was given to Scindia in acknowledgement of his humanity to some of our countrymen, and he became guarantee for the due fulfilment of the treaty

between the contracting parties.¹ Sir Eyre Coote wrote to Hyder Ali, informing him of what had taken place, but the old warrior only replied: 'I have received your obliging letter, wherein you observe that the news of the treaty of alliance and friendship which has taken place between the Peishwa and the English must have been known to me, because my name is included therein, all of which I perfectly comprehend. Without giving me notice how is it possible that my name can be included?' He, however, asked for an envoy to be sent to him with a copy of the treaty. This was done, and it is impossible not to admire the traits of character shown by Hyder in his conference with the vakeel. He passed high and generous praise on Sir Eyre Coote as a great commander and an excellent man. He declared that he had never desired war with the English, but had been driven into it by their bad faith; dwelling on the seizure of Mahé and on the failure of the Madras authorities to fulfil their treaty stipulations with him. He had not the worst of the argument, and the interviews came to nothing. But Hyder was now approaching eighty years of age, with a fatal disease upon him, and he died soon after, leaving an injunction to his son, Tippoo, to make peace on any terms with the English.²

Previous to this Sir Eyre Coote, worn out with fatigue and sickness, had returned to Bengal. The general officer on whom the charge of the operations then devolved was not equal to the situation. Tippoo, disregarding his father's wise advice, continued the contest, though with less ability, and the war dragged on without any decisive result. Under these circumstances Warren Hastings made a second appeal to the veteran commander, who possessed the confidence of the army and could strike terror into his opponents. Eyre Coote, though not yet recovered from his illness, once more, with signal patriotism, consented to place himself at the head of the army in the Carnatic. He sailed from Calcutta

¹ *State Papers*, Introd., p. lxxxv.

² *Ibid.*, p. lxxxvii.

for that purpose, but it chanced that the vessel conveying him was chased on the voyage by French cruisers, and the anxiety that he felt during many hours, aggravated by the fact that he had his family with him on board, produced a fatal effect. On reaching Madras, before landing, he was smitten with paralysis, and died two days after being carried ashore, a victim to his sense of public duty. England lost in him a great military commander and a devoted servant to the State. He was adored by his soldiers, Native as well as European, and under his leadership they could and did achieve marvels. It is painful to read the expressions which Macaulay, in his Essay on Warren Hastings, thinks fit to use of so distinguished a soldier. Not content with saying of him that he was no longer the Coote of Wandewash (the scene of his famous victory over the French general, Lally) and thus belittling his success at Porto Novo and Arni, he speaks of him in these words: 'Coote had no longer the bodily activity which he had shown in earlier days; nor was the vigour of his mind wholly unimpaired. He was capricious and fretful, and required much coaxing to keep him in good-humour. It must, we fear, be added that the love of money had grown upon him and that he thought more about his allowances, and less about his duties, than might have been expected from so eminent a member of so noble a profession.' And a little further on he contrived to aim a common stroke against both Commander-in-Chief and Governor-General, by saying that Coote 'on most questions concurred with Hastings, who did his best by assiduous courtship, and by readily granting the most exorbitant allowances, to gratify the strongest passions of the old soldier.' This, remember, of the two men who, the one by his statesmanship and moral courage, the other by his high qualities in the field, saved the Carnatic, and with it British India! Verily it might be supposed that the profession of an essayist is to defame his fellow-men. The imperfect account in the preceding pages of the struggle with Hyder Ali has been given in the greater

detail in order that some idea may be conveyed to the reader of the unsurpassable courage, self-sacrifice, and devotion, whether in Council, in administration, or in operations by land and sea, which were exhibited by Hastings, by Coote, and by Hughes. Compare their deeds, as narrated, with the imputations of baseness made by Macaulay! Was Warren Hastings bent only on wheedling and bribing when, in impassioned terms, he adjured the veteran Commander-in-Chief to leave his comparatively easy post at Calcutta, and to stand forth in his own person as the vindicator of the rights and honour of the British arms? Was Coote swayed only by love of money, was he thinking only of allowances, when in response to the Governor-General's appeal, he sailed at once for Madras to face a campaign of exceptional fatigue, waged against almost desperate odds? Was he so failing in bodily activity when he marched a hundred and fifty miles under an Indian sun to effect a junction with Pearce's column, and thus baffle the movements of Tippoo? Or was he wanting in endurance when, not many hours after he had fallen unconscious in his tent, he pushed on in a palanquin to relieve Vellore? Was the mind impaired which planned and executed the brilliant tactics of Porto Novo and Arni, which snatched victory from the extreme of peril and drove a host of men before a handful? Does he stand before us at any moment throughout that terrible conflict as other than the intrepid and sagacious commander, ready to risk life and reputation if only he can serve his country's interests, and maintain his army's fame? But it seems that a soldier may be all this and may finally give up his last breath on behalf of the State, with the reward of being described by a popular writer as a failure in mind and body, and anxious only for exorbitant allowances. May not the words quoted above be justly held up as a sample of the want of fairness, as well as want of accuracy, with which this essay was penned? But another was at least equally slandered. Eyre Coote's services must ever rank among the greatest rendered

to our country by any military man. Yet in doing justice to his exploits it must not be forgotten that to the Governor-General the conduct of the war, so difficult and so glorious, was due. It was his genius which irradiated and his tenacity which maintained the conflict. But for the Bengal Government, Coote might well have said, we could not go on for a week. And the Bengal Government was Warren Hastings.

CHAPTER VI

CHEIT SING

CHEIT SING, Rajah of Benares, figured conspicuously in Burke's rhetoric on the impeachment of Warren Hastings, and to this day his supposed wrongs loom large, it is believed, in the minds of all readers of Macaulay. To those, comparatively few at the present time, who study Burke's speeches, and to the much smaller number who chance to dip into the Articles of Impeachment, it must appear that in the descriptions of wrong and spoliation laid so vividly before them there is portrayed as an object for their sympathy one of the old hereditary princes of India, whose position was hallowed by antiquity. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of English readers have approached the subject in this belief, and have felt that they had good authority for so believing. Yet there is something that borders on the grotesque in such an illusion. Lest there should be any suggestion of exaggeration or unfairness in these words we venture to borrow from the statement, as clear as it is authoritative, of Sir Alfred Lyall in his *Warren Hastings*.

The grandfather of Cheit Sing, with whom Hastings had to deal, was a small landholder who acquired some wealth and local influence during the troubled period of the Mogul Empire's dissolution, and who obtained the title of Rajah for his son Bulwunt Sing. When the Vizier of Oude took possession of the country, Rajah Bulwunt Sing held under him the lucrative office of farmer and collector of the revenue in Benares and Ghazipur; and when those districts were about to be transferred by the Vizier to the English, the Rajah wrote offering to hold them from the Calcutta Government

on the same terms. Such independence as Bulwunt Sing managed to obtain he derived from the protection of the English, who were interested in strengthening and supporting the possessor of lands which ran along their north-western frontier, and interposed between their districts and very turbulent neighbours. Accordingly Cheit Sing, who succeeded his father, had received from the Vizier of Oude, through the intervention of Hastings himself, a formal grant confirming his tenure as zemindar or landholder of the estate which had thus come into the hands of the family. The Benares Rajah was undoubtedly holding his lands on a mere zemindaree grant from the Vizier of Oude, who levied heavy fines upon him, when the territory was ceded by the Vizier to the Company under a treaty which transferred, as between the two contracting parties, the sovereignty over the Benares district to the Company. The English Government settled the amount of the annual revenue, or share of the rent, to be paid upon the whole estate, and continued the grant to Cheit Sing upon this and other stipulated conditions, with a guarantee that the annual demand should not be increased.¹ So far Sir Alfred Lyall. But it was the annual demand, and not the occasional contribution, to which the guarantee applied; and this difference of permanent and temporary liability on the part of Cheit Sing was the rock on which so many disputants, at the time of the impeachment and thereafter, have constantly split. The ordinary payment of the zemindar was not to be altered, but just as in our own feudal system in mediæval times, so in the customary relations between all Indian sovereigns and their tributaries, there was inherent in the nature of the tenure an obligation to aid the suzerain on occasions of exceptional danger and difficulty. This was the position always openly avowed by Warren Hastings, and consistently upheld by him; this was the ground on which he defended his action in calling upon Cheit Sing, a vassal of the Company, to furnish additional men and money for the Mahratta war;

¹ Lyall, pp. 118, 119, 120.

and this, it should be added, was the contention supported by Pitt in the House of Commons, when he said that the right (i. e. of levying a fine on the Rajah) had been exercised and acquiesced in, and was indisputably transferred, with the territory, to the Company.

But, it may be said, did not Pitt vote for impeachment on the Benares charge? Yes, he did so. to his great discredit with his own party at the time and to his condemnation, not unmixed with suspicion as to his motive, by an impartial posterity.¹ He excused his vote on the ground that though the right to fine could not be disputed, the amount levied was (as he thought fit to describe it) so unprecedented and oppressive that he could not defend it. A pretence more elusive and inconsistent on the part of the speaker, and more irreconcilable with the facts, was never made by any orator or statesman. Cheit Sing, before the transfer of the territory, had been fined more than once by the Vizier of Oude, and on one occasion the fine levied and paid exceeded the amount of the sum demanded by the Governor-General. Nor can it be doubted that the whole of the requisitions might have been met by the Rajah, had he so chosen, without oppression or any real impoverishment. The statement of Warren Hastings at the Bar of the Commons, the speech of Thurlow in the Upper House, and the unanswerable array of facts proved at the trial, secured a ready verdict of acquittal from the Lords on this unfounded Article of Impeachment.

But let us, as the Scotch lawyers are accustomed to say, condescend to particulars in this matter. The details are instructive. Macaulay, in his account of the Benares incident, is just as inaccurate as he shows himself in his narrative of the Rohilla war and his story of Nuncoomar's arrest and trial. He starts with the assumption, of course unproved, that Warren Hastings was on the search for some one to despoil, and that he fixed on Cheit Sing as his immediate object. Macaulay states, quite truly, that the Rajah had

¹ In confirmation of this, see the note at the end of the chapter.

already been required to pay five lacs of rupees and had done so ; and had been further requisitioned for another similar sum, in regard to which he was extremely tardy. But he then abandons fact for fiction, and asserts that 'Hastings was determined to plunder Cheit Sing, and for that end to fasten a quarrel upon him. Accordingly the Rajah was now required to keep a body of cavalry for the service of the Government.' The statement, as it stands, with its innuendo, is absolutely unfounded. What happened about the cavalry was this. At a consultation held on September 26, 1780, Sir Eyre Coote, as Commander in Chief, presented a plan for the defence of Bengal and Oude which he had sketched at the desire of the Board. As an invasion of Behar was expected, Sir Eyre Coote proposed to station a large body of infantry in that province, together with two regiments of horse and one thousand or as many of Cheit Sing's cavalry as they could procure. The object of the plan suggested was to protect both the English provinces and the adjacent tributary and allied states from Mahratta spoliation, and it was only just that those states should aid in the defence. This was the origin of the demand made on Cheit Sing for cavalry. It was not suggested by Warren Hastings, but by Eyre Coote, yet Macaulay fathers it on the Governor-General, with the addition that he asked for the cavalry in order to pick a quarrel and extort money. On the 2nd November following, the attention of the Board was again called to the want of cavalry, and the Governor-General was requested to write to Cheit Sing for such as he could spare. In December, the Resident of Benares wrote to Warren Hastings that he had repeatedly pressed the Rajah on the subject of the cavalry, but could obtain no answer. The next month he wrote that the Rajah said he had only thirteen hundred in his service, and that all but two hundred and fifty were absolutely necessary for collecting the revenue.

The truth is that Cheit Sing at this critical period, like many other vassals at divers times and places, had begun to

calculate on the chances of a change of masters. He knew the embarrassments of the English Government in the south of India ; he knew that the French were at hand with ships and men ; he knew that the Nizam was hostile to us and the Mahrattas in arms on our confines. The events of 1857 have read us a lesson for ever on the effect which any threatened lapse of English rule may have on the Native mind. Cheit Sing might have been expected to be faithful. He owed his original advancement to the personal influence of Warren Hastings ; he had been 'protected by the Calcutta Government, and had received much, perhaps too much, consideration. All this was forgotten when the chance presented itself that the English might be driven out, and that provinces might be won in the general scramble. He was intriguing with the Mahrattas, a covert traitor to his allegiance, ready to side with the winning party'. For this he had raised troops, and had accumulated treasure. But it was a dangerous game to play with a ruler so resolute and so able as Warren Hastings, who knew everything through his secret service, and understood every shift and turn of the Rajah's subterfuge. Before leaving Calcutta the Governor-General obtained credentials from the Council which, besides granting to him power to make treaties with any of the Chiefs or Powers of Hindustan, also invested him 'with full power and authority to form such arrangements with the Rajah of Benares for the better government of the zemindary, and to perform such acts for the improvement of the interest which the Honorable Company possesses in it, as he shall think fit and consonant to the mutual relation and actual engagement subsisting between the Company and the Rajah'. It is clear enough that the days when the Governor-General was tied down and limited in his policy at every turn were now past.

Warren Hastings had placed Wheler who, now that the evil influence of Francis had been withdrawn, showed himself a loyal and capable colleague, at the head of the administration during his own absence, and invested him

with full powers. He confided to Wheler that he had determined to fine Cheit Sing fifty lacs of rupees, as a just punishment for his contumacy. In this determination Wheler fully concurred. When the Governor-General arrived at Benares he transmitted to the Rajah a statement of his offences. He reminded him that the danger to which the Malwa column¹ had been exposed on its march had been due to his failure in paying the war subsidy of 1780 which he had covenanted to meet: 'Relying on this agreement and promise I gave orders to Mr. Fowke, who was then resident at this place, to receive money and to remit to Colonel Carnac for the pay of the army which had been ordered to march towards the Province of Malwa, and I made no other provision for it, such was my confidence in your faith; but you deceived me, and after having made the first payment of a few rupees, either consulting the temper of the times, or conforming to a premeditated design, you by shifts and prettexts withheld the remainder until the army for whose use it was intended was reduced to the last state of distress. Many hundreds deserted, and had an enemy at that time appeared against them their total destruction had been inevitable. In all this daily applications were made to you by the Resident, and I wrote repeated letters to you, but you paid no regard to either. . . . Besides this, I required, in the name of the Governor-General and Council by letter, and ordered Mr. Fowke to repeat the requisition in person, that you should furnish a body of horse to assist and act with the armies of the Company, and when Mr. Markham succeeded Mr. Fowke I gave him orders to repeat the demand, which he did accordingly with frequent and almost *daily* importunity, limiting the number to 1,500 and afterwards to 1,000. To this demand you returned evasive answers, nor to this hour have you contributed a single horseman.' And the letter closes with an intimation that the Governor-General well knew there

¹ This force had been sent by the Governor-General to effect a diversion, and thus relieve General Goddard.

were other matters behind: 'I pass over the instances of your conduct in which, through the means of your secret agents, you have endeavoured to excite disorder in the Government on which you depend, and your neglect of the duty which you owe to it, and to the subjects of this zemindary by suffering the daily perpetration of robberies and murders, even in the streets of the city of Benares itself, to the great and public scandal of the English name, and in violation of one of the conditions on which you received the confirmation of this zemindary. But as the two foregoing instances amount to a direct charge of disaffection and infidelity to the Government on which you depend, and happened at a time in which it was your duty most especially to have exerted yourself in the support of its interests, I have therefore judged it proper to state them to you thus fully in writing, and to require your answer to them, and this I expect immediately.' ¹

To these charges the Rajah replied that he obeyed the orders 'with the utmost readiness. . . . I sent first one lac of rupees with an answer to your letter. Afterwards, having paid to Mr. Fowke the sum of one lac and seventy thousand rupees, I sent a letter requesting a further allowance of time to make some preparations. To this I received no reply. It being no time to delay, notwithstanding this I was not a moment inattentive to this concern, and as soon as my Buxey arrived I paid immediately the remaining part of the sum. The remitting of this to the army did not depend upon me; if any delay happened on this head I could not help it. If, besides the payment of the money, the remittance of it to the army had rested with me, a delay of this kind should not have happened.' ² The answer, says Mr. Forrest, was false in all its parts. He did not pay the first lac until August 5, 1780, though the demand was made in the end of June, and then he refused to pay any further sum until he had got an answer to a letter he had written to

¹ For this letter, see *State Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 782-3.

² *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 785.

Hastings requiring further time to dispose of his effects. To this representation the Rajah said he received no reply, though a reply was immediately sent strongly expressive of the Board's displeasure at his excuses, which they said they knew to be futile. This expression of displeasure did not hasten the payment, which was not finally made until October 18, 1780, although the Rajah promised it in the month of July. As to the cavalry, Cheit Sing affirmed that he collected five hundred horses, but that he received no information as to where they should be sent. 'I remained astonished.' This answer was justly described by Warren Hastings as not only unsatisfactory in substance, but offensive in style. It was an indication of the spirit of revolt which Cheit Sing had for some time cherished. 'Under these alarming appearances of the Rajah's conduct and disposition,' wrote the Governor-General to the Council, 'I conceived myself indispensably obliged to form some immediate and decisive plan for obviating their consequences, and for the preservation of the Company's rights and interests in this zemindary. To have left him in the full exercise of powers which he had notoriously abused, and which it was to be apprehended he would employ to the most dangerous purposes, was totally inconsistent with the maxims of justice and prudence. To divest him entirely of the zemindary, though justifiable on the grounds stated above, would be attended with an appearance of severity, and might have furnished grounds for construction unfavourable to the credit of our Government and to my own reputation.' After weighing the whole case, the Governor-General ordered the Resident to put Cheit Sing under arrest in his palace, and he sent two companies of the sepoy he had brought with him to Benares to mount guard on that building. Unfortunately they were sent without ammunition. A large body of armed men from the fortress of Ramnagar crossed the river suddenly and massacred the whole party. Cheit Sing escaped to his fortress of Luteefgarh, and never again entered Benares. Warren Hastings for a short time was in imminent peril, but several

battalions marched up to his relief, and he was safely conveyed to Chunar,¹ where he carried on the business of Government, and negotiated treaties with the Mahrattas, in unruffled serenity.

But he had been none the less impressed by the scenes he had gone through, and he wrote to his colleagues: 'My regrets for the past are personal. I shall ever retain the painful remembrance of that scene of blood of which I have been too near a spectator, and which no future return of prosperity can ever efface from my mind, but in the prospect before me I think that I have every reason to expect the happiest termination of it in the extension of the power and influence of the Company, and that the past example may contribute to the permanency of both by prompting us to guard against the secret growth of the like evil which has produced it.'² On August 27, 1781, he had written, *inter alia*: 'The Rajah's forces are divided between Ramnagar and Luteefgarh. His fixed establishment exceeds 10,000 men, and all his recruits bear arms. Major Popham is encamped on the plain east of the fort. I expect to be joined by a regiment from Cawnpore which are ordered for my guard at Lucknow. Lieutenant Polhill, with six companies of the Nabob's guard, are at hand, and Major Moses Crawford's battalions. My only distress is the want of money, and is great.'³ The Governor-General was delivered from all difficulties by the victorious advance of his officers. Captain Blair totally defeated a force of some 4,000 of the Rajah's best men, capturing guns and tumbrils; and Major Popham carried the two fortresses of Lutteefpoor and Pateeta by some brilliant operations. The whole zemindary fell into our hands, and Cheit Sing, who might have retained the estate and the rule if he had submitted quietly, found himself a fugitive and exile, with no one to thank but himself for the falsehood and contumacy which had caused his ruin.

¹ A fort situated on a high rock above the Ganges.

² *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 798.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 784.

On September 25, 1781, Warren Hastings returned to Benares, where he found the city restored to a state of order and tranquillity.¹ He issued proclamations offering pardon to all except Cheit Sing and his brother, 'whom their late rebellious conduct and their rancour manifested to our nation in the deliberate murder of many of our soldiers, and even unarmed passengers who had the misfortune to fall into their hands, precluded from every title of mercy.'² A grandson of Rajah Bulwunt Sing by a daughter was proclaimed Rajah with great form and solemnity. The Governor-General also took steps for the protection of the persons and property of the inhabitants of the sacred city. When the sovereignty of Benares was ceded to the Company the superintendence of the police was formally made over by the English to Cheit Sing, but the arrangement had proved a disastrous failure. 'From this period,' wrote Warren Hastings, 'the appearance of public justice was gradually effaced till at last, without any system of police, any courts of judicature, or any awe of the sovereign power, the inhabitants of Benares were guilty of enormities and crimes which reflected the greatest disgrace on the Government to which they were subjects. The relations and dependants of the Rajah, or the merchants whose credit was useful in the payment of his revenue, might violate the rights of their fellow-citizens with impunity, and the sacred character of a Brahmin or the high rank of the offender were considerations which stamped a pardon on the most flagitious crimes.'³

To remedy this scandalous state of things, Warren Hastings established distinct departments for the police and for the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the city, and placed them under the regulation and control of a chief magistrate who was subject to the immediate orders of the Governor-General and Council. The person chosen by him to fill this office was a Mahomedan, Ali Ibrahim Khan, 'a man

¹ *State Papers*, Introd., p. lxvi.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 806.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

who has long been personally known to myself and, I believe, to many individuals of our Government, and whose character for moderation, disinterestedness, and good sense will bear the tests of the strictest enquiry.'¹ Regarding the measures which the Governor-General had taken for the better administration of the city of Benares, his colleagues expressed their warmest approval in the following terms: 'Your guarded attention to the security and convenience of the pilgrims, and your abolition of those taxes and embarrassments which have grown against them from the rapacity of a corrupt Government, are peculiarly to your credit.' They added: 'Even in a political view your arrangements upon the subject are interesting, and may lead to the most important consequences. All Hindustan, from the sources of the Ganges to Cape Comorin, is interested in the happy regulation of the police of Benares, and the unpolluted tranquillity of its colleges. The leading Mah-rattas with whom we are at war are strongly attached to this supposed residence of the purity of their religion. From these considerations we beg leave to suggest to you whether it would not be proper to publish in the different languages of India the regulations you have adopted. A very short time will spread them all over Hindustan, which, with the reports of the pilgrims upon their return, cannot but impress the natives with the mild liberality and attention of our Government. Even among the different nations of Europe whose learned enquiries have been of late particularly directed to the religious antiquities and early knowledge of the sciences in this country, it will be matter of satisfaction and admiration and of consequent credit to our Government that Benares, in which you were so dangerously exposed, should remain so deeply indebted to your careful regulation and protection.'²

It might be curious, and perhaps instructive, if any who read what was thus said in appreciation of the deeds of Warren Hastings at Benares by the men who were on the

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 816.

² *Ibid.*, p. 820.

spot, by those who knew the persons involved in the transactions, and the facts as they occurred at the time, would place the above testimony side by side with the furious rhetoric which was poured out by Burke on the Impeachment. The fundamental error of the orator, which vitiated the whole of his argument, was that he treated Cheit Sing as an independent prince, who had been unjustly compelled to pay five lacs of rupees for three years consecutively, to raise and equip troops for a war in which he had no concern, and who had been finally put under arrest and fined fifty lacs of rupees for contumacy, because he did not at once comply with these exactions. Now the simple answer to all Burke's elaboration of statement is that the facts of the case are the other way. So far from being an independent prince, Cheit Sing had been a vassal of the Vizier of Oude, liable to requisition and fine, in addition to his annual rent, and when the Vizier transferred Benares by treaty to the English rule, the Rajah, with all his dues and liabilities, was transferred with it. But more than that: the Bengal Government proceeded, after the transfer, to renew the grant of the zemindary to the Rajah, and the deeds of grant are in existence and tell their own tale. They are in the ordinary form of zemindary grants, and do not in any sentence suggest so much as a hint of any independence on the part of the Rajah. He was simply a zemindar of the Company, and liable to contribute to its necessities in times of urgent need. There never was a time of more urgent need than that when troops and money were requisitioned from Cheit Sing.¹ No doubt the fine was heavy, but the treasure found in his fortresses, and the amount of gold and silver which he was known to have carried off with him, proved that he could have paid the amount demanded and have still been a wealthy man. In enforcing these demands, says Mr. Forrest, Hastings was actuated by no personal or malicious motives, but was compelled by the pressing exigencies of the hour and the desire

¹ *State Papers*, Introd., p. lxxvii.

to save India to Great Britain. 'I had no other view in it,' he said, 'than that of relieving the necessities of the Company by an act which I considered to be strictly just.'¹

The 'happiest termination', which he himself had foreseen, undoubtedly came to pass. Law and order were established, and justice was permanently organized, in the city of Benares. The sanctity of the Hindoo religion, in its ancient seat, was secured. It was in return for these benefits that the inhabitants erected a temple in honour of Warren Hastings, as their protector and benefactor. When this fact was mentioned during the proceedings in support of the impeachment, Burke replied that he believed the Hindoos built temples to the deities of smallpox and murder, and that he would not dispute the claim of Mr Hastings to be admitted to such a pantheon. Macaulay speaks of this utterance as a surprisingly fine example of parliamentary oratory. It is possible that a more impartial taste may differ from such a conclusion.

It was on May 21, 1781, that the Governor-General proposed to the Council that he should visit Oude in order to have an interview with the Nawab, whose province had fallen into a state of great disorder and confusion. He also stated that he hoped to take advantage of his visit to Oude to conclude negotiations with the Rajah of Benares. The statement that he then made to the Council does not suggest that he in any way anticipated the disturbances that arose at Benares, and it was probably believed that all would pass off quietly. Sir Alfred Lyall seems to throw the whole blame of the disaster on Warren Hastings, and if it is meant that it would have been more prudent to take greater precautions, such as securing the presence of a much more powerful force before proceeding to place the Rajah under arrest, few readers (having of course the advantage of forming an opinion after the event) will be found to differ. But if more is meant, if it is proposed to infer that a rebel-

¹ *State Papers*, Intro., p. lxix.

lious outbreak, largely supported from outside, was due to the action of the Governor-General, a great mistake is made. It must be obvious to all who look closely into the matter that Cheit Sing had a plot against the English rule ready to his hand, that he was counting on help in his design, and that the bomb would have burst sooner or later, at the more or less favourable opportunity. It burst prematurely on the arrest of the Rajah, but for that it is unfair to blame Warren Hastings, and it is not only unfair but unhistorical. The outside help came from the Begums of Oude and their creatures, and it is to them that attention must now be turned.¹

Macaulay strongly censures the conduct of Pitt in dealing with the Benares charge. He narrates how Pitt maintained in his speech on Fox's motion that the Governor-General was justified in calling on the Rajah for pecuniary assistance, and in imposing a fine when that assistance was contumaciously withheld. He also thought that the conduct of the Governor-General during the insurrection had been distinguished by ability and presence of mind. He censured, with great bitterness, the conduct of Francis, both in India and in Parliament, as most dishonest and malignant. The necessary inference from Pitt's arguments seemed to be that Hastings ought to be honourably acquitted, and both the friends and opponents of the Minister expected from him a declaration to that effect. To the astonishment of all parties, he concluded by saying that, though he thought it right in Hastings to fine Cheit Sing for contumacy, yet the amount of the fine was too great for the occasion. On this ground, and on this ground alone, did Mr. Pitt, applauding every other part of the conduct of Hastings with regard to Benares, declare that he should vote for Mr. Fox's motion.

The House was thunderstruck; and it well might be so. If Mr. Pitt's view of the case of Cheit Sing were correct, there was no ground for an impeachment, or even for a vote of censure. We can see, we think, in what way a man of sense and honour might have been induced to take any course respecting Hastings, except the course which Mr. Pitt took. With great diffidence, we give it as our opinion that the most correct course would have been to impeach on the Rohilla charge, and to acquit on the Benares charge. Had the Benares charge appeared to us in the same light in which it appeared to Mr. Pitt, we should, without hesitation, have voted for acquittal on that charge. The one course which it is inconceivable that any man of a tenth part of Mr. Pitt's abilities can have honestly

taken was the course which he took. He acquitted Hastings on the Rohilla charge. He softened down the Benares charge till it became no charge at all; and then he pronounced that it contained matter of impeachment.

The general astonishment was the greater, because, only twenty-four hours before, the members on whom the Minister could depend had received the usual notes from the Treasury, begging them to be in their places and to vote against Mr. Fox's motion. It was asserted by Mr. Hastings that, early on the morning of the very day on which the debate took place, Dundas called on Pitt, woke him, and was closeted with him many hours. The result of this conference was a determination to give up the late Governor-General to the vengeance of the Opposition. It was impossible even for the most powerful Minister to carry all his followers with him in so strange a course. Several persons high in office, the Attorney-General, Mr. Grenville, and Lord Mulgrave, divided against Mr. Pitt. But the devoted adherents who stood by the head of the Government without asking questions, were sufficiently numerous to turn the scale. That good and great man, Mr. Wilberforce, often related the events of this remarkable night. He described the amazement of the House, and the bitter reflections which were muttered against the Prime Minister by some of the habitual supporters of the Government. Mr. Wilberforce, we are bound to add, fully believed that his friend was sincere, and that the suspicions to which this mysterious affair gave rise were altogether unfounded.

Those suspicions, indeed, were such as it is painful to mention. The friends of Hastings, most of whom, it is to be observed, generally supported the administration, affirmed that the motive of Pitt and Dundas was jealousy. Hastings was personally a favourite with the King. He was the idol of the East India Company and of its servants. If he were absolved by the Commons, seated among the Lords, admitted to the Board of Control, closely allied with the strong-minded and imperious Thurlow, was it not almost certain that he would soon draw to himself the entire management of Eastern affairs? Was it not possible that he might become a formidable rival in the Cabinet? If the Commons impeached Hastings all danger was at an end. The proceedings, however they might terminate, would probably last some years. Such were the motives attributed by a great part of the public to the young Minister, whose ruling passion was generally believed to be avarice of power.—See *Essay*.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGUMS

WHEN the former Vizier of Oude, Sujah-ul-Dowla, so prominent in the story of the Rohilla War, came to die, he left behind him treasure, as was believed, to the amount of £2,000,000. But he also left heavy debts, including his obligations to the Government at Calcutta, and also a large amount of pay due to his army. The treasure which, according to one account afterwards given, had been accumulated by the late Vizier for use in some possible emergency, had been deposited in the vaults of the zenana at Fyzabad. It is clear that this money really belonged to the State, and even supposing that there were other claims that might be advanced, it is certain that the first use to which it should have been applied was to discharge public obligations. But here the Begums came in. They were residents in and mistresses of the zenana, and were in practical possession of the treasure. These two princesses, one the mother, the other the widow, of the late Vizier, asserted that he had made a will in their favour and that the whole of the large sum in question was their exclusive property. It must be observed that never, at any stage of a dispute that was prolonged for years, and that led to much violent contention, was this will produced. Neither of these ladies, it may be safely asserted, had any legal ground for their claim. By the Mahomedan law the widow would have been entitled to one-eighth of the residue after the debts had been paid, and the grandmother (at any rate during the life of the widow) had no claim to inheritance. But the Begums had on their side the fact of possession, made all the stronger by the immemorial custom of the East, which regards a forcible invasion

of the zenana as an act not to be contemplated. Asaph-ul-Dowla, the new Vizier, a weak, irresolute man under any circumstances, was mortally afraid of his mother; she, on her part, is reported to have said to the English Resident on one occasion, that she would throw the whole treasure into the river rather than allow her son to share it; and on another that if he (the Resident) would only stand on one side quietly, she would soon drive the Nawab (her son) with his ministers and troops into the stream. Nor was the boast altogether empty, for the Begums maintained an armed force of several thousand men, commanded by their two chief eunuchs, and they governed extensive fiefs, independent of their sovereign. This was the amiable and helpless lady whom Sheridan, in his famous speech, described pathetically as an outraged parent, declaring that Warren Hastings had placed a dagger in the hands of her son, and made him point it against the bosom of his own mother!

Asaph-ul-Dowla was the more pressed for money because the settlement made with him at the death of his father, made by the hostile majority of the Council in the teeth of strong protests by the Governor-General, had largely added to his liabilities. Francis and his abettors had increased the hire of the English troops, and at the same time had deprived the Vizier of the means of paying for them. This was one of the inconceivably rash steps which the triumvirate took soon after their arrival from England. In October, 1775, Asaph-ul-Dowla, hard pressed at once both by the Company and by his army, commenced a negotiation with the Begums through Mr. Bristow, then the Resident in place of Mr. Middleton. Mr. Bristow, after informing the Board that neither the zemindars nor the ryots would pay their rents, wrote as follows: 'To add to this unfortunate circumstance, the Nawab has not yet been able to obtain any money from the Begum. Immediately on his return from Fyzabad he stated his distresses to me, and begged of me to use my endeavours to persuade the

Begum to assist him. I wished to have declined complying with his Excellency's request, especially after he had indirectly objected to my having any correspondence with her, but being sensible of his necessities I consented upon the condition of his not expecting of me to use any violent means. I accordingly went to Fyzabad and explained particularly in writing to the Begum how impossible it was for the Nawab to conduct his Government without her assistance, and likewise insinuated to her that she could not complain of him, for he had granted her an additional jagir of four lacs a year for the sums he had already borrowed of her, and treated her with great respect. I further insinuated to her that the treasures she possessed were the treasures of the State, as she had not succeeded to them by any legal right, and they had been hoarded up to provide against an emergency. That that emergency was arrived, and I recommended it to her to spare his Excellency the sum of fifty lacs as a donation. If this did not please her, to let the treasure be divided according to the laws of the Koran, or else grant him a loan, and that I could engage for the repayment of it.' ¹

It may be observed here, parenthetically, that the communication quoted from above was made, not by any trusted adherent of the Governor-General, but by the chosen agent of that majority in the Council who had superseded Mr. Middleton because he had been nominated by Warren Hastings and was known to enjoy his confidence. The whole proceedings were at this time under the direction of the triumvirate who must be held responsible for them, and it was their man, Mr. Bristow, nominated to carry out their policy, who stated that the treasure was a State treasure, laid up for an emergency, and demandable by the State authority. But when, a few years after, Mr. Middleton, then restored to the Residency, under the direction of the Governor-General, demanded that the Begums should hand over, not the whole of the treasure, but so

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. II, p. 439. •

much thereof as would defray the debt due to the Calcutta Government, the charge is made that it is a criminal spoliation, a robbery of two helpless women.

‘After much persuasion,’ says Mr. Bristow, ‘the Begum agreed to pay the Nawab twelve lacs of rupees on condition that the Company secured to her the possession of her jagirs for life, and that the Nawab did not interfere with her on any account. I excused myself because of the insufficiency of the sum, but offered to comply with her terms in case of her granting fifty lacs. This I had authority for from the Nawab, who, on desiring me to undertake the negotiation, repeatedly and earnestly expressed his desire not to use any violence. And in order to prove it, he said he would submit to the Company’s being mediator of all differences between him and the Begum; but it was hard, when reduced to such distress, that his mother should uselessly keep up immense treasuries.’ It was finally agreed between the Nawab and the Begum that in consideration of his receiving thirty lacs (in addition to the sum he had already received) on account of his patrimony he gave the Begum a full acquittal as to the rest, and secured her jagirs to her without interference for life. Bristow was guarantee to this treaty on the part of the Company. The impolicy of the agreement, says Mr. Forrest, was apparent, but the Governor-General and Council sanctioned it because, as they informed the Directors, the urgency of the case required it.¹

But the Begum, as might have been expected, was soon dissatisfied. She wrote in the following December complaining that whereas it had been agreed that she should liquidate eleven lacs of the amount by giving goods, elephants and camels, and had trusted to Mr. Bristow, as a party to the agreement, to see that it was carried out in a proper manner, the goods nevertheless had been valued at one fourth of their intrinsic worth, and how was she to make up the difference? She appealed to Warren

¹ *State Papers*, Introd., p. lxx; *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 439.

Hastings to help her, and he, who has been perpetually painted as the robber and oppressor of these ladies, wrote, in a Minute he prepared upon this letter, as follows: 'All my present wish is that the orders of the Board may be such as may obviate or remove the discredit which the English name may suffer by the exercise or even the appearance of oppression on a person of the Begum's rank, character, and sex. Had the Nawab chosen to make use of the means with which his own power alone supplied him to exact money from the Begum, his mother, this Government would have wanted a pretext to interfere in her behalf. But as the representative of our Government has become an agent in this business, and has pledged the honour and faith of the Company for the punctual observance of the conditions under which it was concluded, we have a right to interfere, and justice demands it, if it shall appear that those engagements have been violated, and an injury offered to the Begum under the cover of the authority by which they were contracted. I am therefore of opinion and recommend that a letter be written by the Board to Mr. Bristow commanding him to remonstrate with the Nawab against the seizure of the goods as his own original property, which he received from his mother in payment of the eleven lacs stipulated to be so made, to insist on the Nawab's receiving them in payment, and that he either admit of the valuation which she put upon them, or that he allow them to be approved by persons appointed for that purpose by both parties.'¹ But the majority of the Council, then responsible for all public acts, either did not take so favourable a view of the Begum's cause, or else were resolved to oppose everything recommended by the Governor-General, and ordered that the letter should be sent to the Resident and an explanation demanded. Monson observed, truly enough: 'She should be informed of the sums of money the late Nawab owed this Government by treaty for services performed,

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. II, p. 471.

and which were not liquidated at his death; that she received the advantages of the Rohilla conquest, the plunder of those countries being deposited with her; as she succeeded therefore to all the Nawab's wealth, it is just that she should discharge the demands due for those services by which she is the principal gainer. The Vizier's estate has not been divided according to the usual custom of Mahomedan princes.'¹ Just so. But why, when Warren Hastings subsequently demanded from the treasure in the Begum's hands payment of the money due to the English Government, was it called spoliation and robbery? In January, 1776, Mr. Bristow wrote to the Board that the complaints of the Begum were unfounded. 'According to the Koran and the usages of the country the Nawab could claim an infinitely greater share than he has got.' He added: 'The Begum had great influence in the late Vizier's time. On the Nawab Asolph's-ul-Dowla's accession he at once placed the whole management in the hands of Murtezah Khan, which disgusted both her and her adherents, particularly her eunuchs who had their views in keeping the wealth in the Begum's possession. The principal, Behar Ali Khan, enjoys her entire confidence.'² In order that the Board should have a knowledge of 'the Begum's sentiments at the present juncture and of her temper, he enclosed the last letter he had received from that termagant lady, containing threats against her son and his Minister. This may be taken as ending the first part of the Begum history.

But during the five following years the Governor-General was much disturbed by the worsening condition of the Oude government. He strongly remonstrated with the Nawab on his extravagance, the impolicy of his conduct, and earnestly advised him to dismiss from his presence the worthless favourites with whom he was surrounded. To enforce this advice he plainly told him: 'The English, if you do not follow it must break off their connexion with

¹ *State Papers*, Vol. II, p. 472.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 485-6.

you altogether.' This was the state of affairs in 1781 when the Governor-General announced to the Council his intention to visit Oude, with the view of restoring to that territory a better administration of government and a better state of finance. The outbreak at Benares caused him to be detained at Chunar, and while he was there the Vizier visited him, and a long negotiation took place between them. It was a difficult moment for both. The Indian Government was in great distress for money. There were several armies in the field, and the demands for supply were various and immediate. The entire expense of all military operations fell on the treasury of Bengal, and the treasury of Bengal was empty. Heavy loans had been contracted, the credit of Government was low, and Warren Hastings, as was indeed his imperative duty, looked to the chief debtor of the Company for relief. The Vizier of Oude owed the Company the very large sum of a crore and a half of rupees, and of course the Governor-General pressed for the money. The Vizier on his side protested that his funds were exhausted. The Governor-General knew that this was true; and knew also that it was so owing partly to the unfair treatment the Vizier had received from the triumvirate in preceding years, and partly to the conduct, narrated above, of his mother. Warren Hastings' feelings towards that lady, whom he had formerly endeavoured to befriend, were necessarily changed when he discovered that she, in concert with the older Begum, was actually engaged in stirring up insurrection against him. The knowledge of the Begum's complicity in the Benares outbreak reached the Governor-General, as will presently be conclusively shown, before he settled the terms of a treaty with the Vizier, and of course that knowledge coloured the negotiations.

Let us see what the terms were. As it was absolutely necessary, if any real improvement was to be made in his finances, that the Vizier should be enabled to liquidate his existing debts, the first article of the treaty provided

that the English force in Oude should be reduced to one brigade, and that the English officers who had been appointed to the Vizier's corps should be withdrawn. The Nawab on his part consented to separate his public from his private expenses; to fix the amount of the latter; to reform his army; to entrust the public treasury to his Minister under the inspection of the British Resident. The second article stipulated: 'That as great distress has arisen to the Nawab's Government from the military power and dominion assumed by the jagirdars,¹ he be permitted to resume such as he may find necessary, with a reserve that all such for the amount of whose jagirs the Company are guarantees shall, in case of the resumption of their lands, be paid the amount of their net collections through the Resident in ready money.' The article stated that the resumption of the jagirs should be general and Warren Hastings pressed on the Vizier the necessity of resuming those held by his worthless favourites. The Nawab was only anxious to resume those held by his mother; but this Warren Hastings justly and strenuously opposed, and a vast number of jagirs were resumed. In this the Governor-General followed his usual wise and equitable policy.

But concerning the resumption of the Begum's jagirs (which they had used to levy troops and oppose their Sovereign's rule, as well, of late, as to support rebellion in Benares) Warren Hastings was fiercely attacked on the ground that the Bengal Council had guaranteed the Begum's possession. Two answers were given to this contention; and both seem conclusive. Lord Thurlow said in the House of Lords, when speaking on the matter, 'The subjects of the first country in the world are obliged on all public occasions to dispose of their property for an equivalent when the public good requires such a sacrifice; and in this case the experience of many years has proved the necessity of the measure.' But Warren Hastings gave the

¹ Powerful nobles, with great fiefs, and bands of armed retainers.

more direct reply that when he consented to the resumption of the jagirs he was, from intelligence which had reached him, convinced of the Begum's disaffection. 'It was not my opinion only, but it was the general rumour of the country, that she and her ministers aided and supported Cheit Sing in his rebellion.' He referred to the affidavits which had been put in evidence, as proof of this widespread rumour. It has been objected that these affidavits must have been taken after the resumption had been agreed on; but this does not touch the real point. On the 8th September, Colonel Hannay wrote from Fyzabad to the Governor-General: 'This town has more the appearance of belonging to Cheit Sing than the Vizier. The Begums have placed guards to prevent any of my people going to the bazaar in it. Within these few days Sheik Chaan, with near 1,000 horse and foot, has marched from hence to Benares (they were raised here), and I must confess for my own part I have no doubt but Jowar Ali Khan and Bahar Ali Khan,¹ through their agents, stirred up all the disturbances which extend from hence to Zowey Azimgur.'² This letter was written eleven days before the treaty of Chunar was signed.

In another letter written immediately afterwards, Colonel Hannay says: 'I have before told you how violently the Begum's people inflame the present disturbances, and in addition to this the principal Zemindars and Rajahs have all certificates under the seal of Cheit Sing that he will supply them with whatever money they may require for subsisting all the troops they can raise. In a very short time I apprehend the greatest part of the Nawab's dominions will be in the state we are in here, and it is the general belief of every man in this part of the country that the conduct I have related is a concerted plan for the extirpation of the English. . . . Should the present disturbances proceed from a plan of policy, it will be concealed from you as much as

¹ The two chief eunuchs of the Begums.

² *State Papers*, Vol. III, p. 1004.