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northern possessions. Friends and allies veered round; and when in the following year Bruce surprised Sindhia's camp in a night attack, and the Maratha fled, losing tents, elephants, horses, and baggage, it was evident that war with the English was no longer profitable.

In October, Gwalior, Ujjain, and all his previous possessions south and west of the Jumna were restored to Sindhia, on the sole condition that he should persuade the Poona Regency to make peace.

By his means a treaty was now arranged. The English were to restore all territory gained subsequent to the Treaty of Purandhar, and Raghonath was to be pensioned and live where he chose. Haidar Ali, who had joined the Maratha Confederacy, was to release all English prisoners and relinquish all his conquests.

At first sight this seems a poor return for so much trouble. But it was through this Treaty of Salbai that, "without annexing a square mile of British territory, the British power became virtually paramount in the greater part of the Indian peninsula, every province of which, with the one exception of Mysore, acknowledged that power as the great universal peacemaker. Indirectly, it was the corner-stone of the British Indian Empire."¹

¹ H. G. Keene.



CSE

IX.

WHERE THE CARCASE IS—1782-1802

“Or puoi, figliuol, veder la corta buffa
De' ben che son commessi alla Fortuna,
Per che l'umana gente si rabbuffa.”



IX.

WHERE THE CARCASE IS—1782-1802.

HAVING come to an understanding, the two wisest men in India went each his own way—Warren Hastings to found an empire for his country, and Madhaji Sindhia to make a kingdom for himself.

There is no need to tell here the familiar story of Warren Hastings. "Truth, the daughter of Time," has vindicated him; and for all who are desirous or capable of forming a fair judgment, his reputation has been cleared of the mud flung by Irish political adversaries and Whig pamphleteers. "We know now, as they might have known then, that the account given by the Whigs of the Rohilla War was false from end to end; that Nuncomar was justly tried, and as justly punished; that Cheyte Sing was not unfairly treated; that the Begums of Oudh had appropriated money that was not theirs."¹

¹ 'Blackwood's Magazine,' April 1913.



Sindhia had learned his lesson. So long as he lived there was peace between him and the English, and his kingdom was to be built with their help, not in their despite.

In Delhi all was misery and confusion. The spirit of Shah Alam's young days, when he led his army into Bengal, had withered away under the weight of the crown. Bullied by his ministers, plundered by his councillors, his dominions raided by Jats, Sikhs, and Rohillas, he was borne helplessly along the tide of events without attempting to struggle against it. When Sindhia presented himself before him at Delhi, the Emperor made no difficulty in granting two patents—one declaring the Peshwa Vicegerent of the Empire, the other giving command of the army to Sindhia as the Peshwa's deputy.

Having, as he hoped, thus secured peace for himself, the Emperor retired once more behind the marble screens of his palace to study the Koran.

But peace was the last thing desired by the princes of Rajputana, who were infuriated at this arrangement. Were they, the children of the sun and the moon and the flame, who had defied the great Akbar, to submit themselves and pay tribute to the Peshwa and to his slipper-bearer's bastard? The Muslim nobles, learning of Sindhia's



purpose to investigate the titles by which they held their lands, joined cause with the Rajputs. After three days' fighting near Jaipur, Sindhia was defeated, fourteen thousand of his infantry deserting him.

Driven back upon Gwalior, he was saved from ruin by a loan from Ahalya Bai, who had not forgotten the time when Sindhia had stood between her and the Regent of Poona. Neither dreamed how in after years the loan was to bring trouble upon the whole Maratha Confederacy.

Meanwhile Shah Alam, forgetting his obligations to Sindhia, had chosen new friends, and showed his usual unwisdom in the choice. The Rajputs might again be the allies of Delhi as in the time of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, but there could be no alliance between the Emperor and Ghulam Kadir the Rohilla. Ghulam's father was son of that Afghan governor whom Ahmad Shah had left in Delhi, and it was said that after Shah Alam's restoration, Ghulam, then only a boy, made prisoner and taken into the royal household, had there received such treatment as no man could forgive.

Sindhia was beginning once more to hold his own, but he made no move when Ghulam, having allied himself with Ismail Beg, a Persian leader of cavalry, entered the imperial city, nominally as



the friend of Shah Alam, in July 1788. Perhaps he thought well that the faithless Emperor should taste the fruit of his own devices.

Bitter fruit did it prove. While Ismail Beg encamped on the outskirts of Delhi, and took toll from the citizens, Ghulam insisted upon replacing the palace guards by his own men; it was useless to resist, but the Emperor thought to secure himself by making the bandit swear fidelity upon the Koran. Then Ghulam began his search for hidden treasure; he tore up the floors and stripped the royal apartments, regardless of the protestations of the Emperor, who wailed, "If there is any more money, you are welcome to it. I came out with a shirt and an old pair of trousers which I still have, but you know all about it." The princes were stripped and exposed to the sun, the princesses were scourged, the harem slaves were tortured, but former spoilers, Persian, Rohilla, Afghan, and Maratha, had done their work too well, and only a little gold and silver could be produced. In a fury of disappointment Ghulam flung himself upon the Emperor and blinded him with his dagger, kicking away the royal ladies who came from behind their curtains to beg for mercy. "Do you see anything?" he asked derisively; and the Emperor answered, "Nothing but the holy Koran between me and you."



Then followed weeks of horror. The ladies of the harem were stripped naked in the search for jewels, and exposed without their veils to the gaze of the Rohilla and his drunken fellow-ruffians; the princes were made to sing and dance before their enemy, as if they had been hired players. The Emperor and his household were left without food, so that several of the children died of hunger and thirst. His own associates sickened with horror, and warned Ghulam that a day of retribution was coming, but he mocked, and answered with threats too foul to be written here.

By the beginning of September the reckoning was at hand; Ismail Beg had decamped, and the Maratha forces were approaching. As a last effort, Ghulam set the Palace on fire and then hurried across the river.

Rana Khan, the water-carrier who had saved Sindhia after the battle of Panipat, now promoted by Sindhia's gratitude to be a general in his army, arrived in time to put out the flames before they had done much damage, and then joined with Ahalya Bai's army in pursuit of Ghulam. For nine weeks Ghulam defended himself in the fort at Meerut, then escaped with a few trusted followers under cover of night. In the darkness he was separated from his companions; his horse put its foot into a hole and fell with him; "the



way bristled with thorny acacias, so that he knew not which way to turn." He went to the house of a Brahman, whom he would have bribed with a diamond ring to shelter him. But the Brahman's village had been ravaged by Ghulam in former days, and he handed the fugitive over to Rana Khan, who sent him on to Sindhia.

For several days, by Sindhia's orders, the Maratha forces were entertained with the sight of Ghulam Kadir being gradually cut to pieces. What was left of him after death was hung from a tree, some choice portions being sent as a present to the Emperor. "A trustworthy person relates that a black dog, white round the eyes, came and sat under the tree, and licked up the blood as it dripped," says a chronicler. "The spectators threw stones and clods at it, but still it kept there. On the third day the corpse disappeared, and the dog also vanished."

The crown jewels of Delhi were hidden in the lining of the saddle upon which Ghulam rode in his flight. They were never seen again; but a French officer in Sindhia's army having suddenly returned to his native land about this time, evidently with a large fortune, it was always believed that he had had the luck to capture Ghulam's horse.

The poor blind Emperor was replaced upon the



throne with due ceremony, and a revenue of about £90,000 a year allotted for his support. Court gossip declared that Sindhia's representative took such good toll of this that the imperial family seldom received more than £5000, irregularly paid, and that had it not been for a compassionate allowance made monthly by the English Government, his Majesty and his thirty children would have fared very ill. Nevertheless, one of the Persian poems with which Shah Alam beguiled his long hours speaks of "Madhaji Sindhia who is as a son to me," and by comparison with what had gone before, the years of Sindhia's administration were peaceful and prosperous for the dwellers in the Emperor's territory. Even if they were heavily taxed, it is a gain to have one spoiler in the place of many, and Sindhia allowed no one else to reap in his furrows.

The Rajputs also had met their master. Among the adventurers who came to seek fortune in India was a certain Savoyard, Benoît Boigne. He had served in the French and the Russian army, he had even served for a brief space in the Company's army in Madras, and narrowly escaped being made the prisoner of Tipu Sahib. Through the good offices of Warren Hastings he was introduced to Sindhia, and beginning as commander of two battalions of infantry, he became head of an



army which he drilled and disciplined upon European lines.

In the spring of 1790 this army was to be tested. Ahmad Shah's son, Timur, was known to be meditating a descent upon the Punjab, and this was an irresistible temptation to Ismail Beg, Ghulam's former confederate, who raised a standard of rebellion, and was joined by the Raja of Jodhpur and the Maharaja of Jaipur. Ismail was at Patan, between Gwalior and Ujjain, where Boigne had blockaded him for several weeks, when the Kachwaha Rajputs of Jaipur arrived upon the scene. If they had fallen upon Boigne in the rear, they might have disposed of him once for all; but the Kachwahas are lightly esteemed as fighting men by other Rajput clans, and that day they deserved their reputation. Some say that the Rathors of Jodhpur had mocked them with a taunting song of a time when "the Rathors guarded the petticoats of Jaipur," and Sindhia's emissaries had no difficulty in bribing them to stand aloof from the fight. Ismail Beg made a sortie, and was heavily defeated. Boigne advanced to Ajmir, the key of Rajputana, captured the town, and invested the fortress of Taragarh, which crowns the sharp-pointed hill above it.

The Maharaja of Jodhpur tried diplomacy; let the General forsake Sindhia and join the Rajputs,



and he should be invested with the fief of Ajmir. "My master has already given me Jodhpur and Jaipur," answered Boigne. "Why should I content myself with nothing but Ajmir?" Then the Maharaja led his Rathors to the relief of Taragarh, and Boigne met them under the walls of Mairta, eighty miles away. The Maratha general would have fallen upon them at once, but Boigne shook his head. "The hour is late, the men are tired; let them have a good meal, and then sleep; there will be time enough in the morning."

The Rathors passed the first half of the night in festivity, and were asleep when a French colonel led three battalions to the attack in the mists of dawn. But the alarm was given, the Rathors armed, and sprang to horse. "Where can we fly, brothers?" cried the chief of Ahwa. "If there be one of us who prefers wife and children to honour, let him retire." None spoke in answer; each warrior raised his hand to his brow, and the chief gave the word "Forward." With the cry of "Remember Patan!" they cut their way past Boigne's brigade, up to the mouth of his eighty pieces of cannon. The grape showered around them, but they stayed not for it, galloping faster and faster, driving the Maratha squadrons before them in the headlong Rajput charge in which their forefathers had ridden since the beginning of history.



The Marathas scattered, the Rathors drew rein in triumph—and rode back through “a valley of death.” Boigne had formed his infantry in the hollow square that is said to have been his own invention, and had wheeled his guns round. The Rathors had no reserve to support them, but the Savoyard General was gradually bringing up his battalions, under cover of the storm of grape. Out of four thousand Rathors who charged with the Ahwa chief, scarcely one was left in the saddle.

The modern and scientific method of fighting had demonstrated its superiority over the hand-to-hand struggle in which the best man had the best chance of winning. The Rajputs were left to mourn the last day of chivalry in India, as Bayard had mourned it, two hundred and fifty years previously, in Europe. Udaipur, Jodhpur, and Jaipur perforce humbled themselves before the Peshwa's slipper-bearer. Timur Shah postponed the invasion of India for a more convenient opportunity.

For the next few years Sindhia was the greatest man in India, although he affected to call himself no more than the Peshwa's servant, and when he paid a state visit to Poona, insisted upon carrying his slippers in full durbar, with the words: “This was my father's occupation, and it must also be mine.”



Long after his death, it was a common saying in India that "Madhaji Sindhia made himself the sovereign of an empire by calling himself the headman of a village."

The young Peshwa showed him marked favour, thereby exciting the jealousy of his minister Nana Farnavis, "the Machiavel of India," who was known to be the lover of the Peshwa's mother, and suspected of being actually the Peshwa's father. He had been heard to remonstrate with the Peshwa, and to threaten to resign his office, if so much were made of this base-born adventurer who despised Brahmans, and preferred Rajput, Muslim, or even European to his own countrymen. When the news passed from mouth to mouth, in the February of 1794, that Madhaji Sindhia had suddenly died of fever near Poona, not many could be found to believe it. There were whispers of assassins sent by Nana Farnavis, who dogged the old chief's steps as he went home at night, and though beaten off by his attendants, contrived to deal him several mortal wounds. The one man who could keep order in Hindustan was dead, and the Maratha wolf-pack was left without a leader, just at the time when in France another wolf-pack, having pulled down all their foes, were beginning to fly each at the other's throat.



II.

“They were continually levying a tax from the towns, and when the wretched townsfolk had no more to give, then burned they all the towns, so that well mightest thou walk a whole day’s journey or ever thou shouldst see a man settled in a town, or its lands tilled. . . . Wretched men starved with hunger. . . . Every man plundered his neighbour as much as he could. . . . The earth bare no corn; you might as well have tilled the sea; for all the land was ruined by such deeds.”

The lament of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 1137 might have been written of Central India during what its historians call “The Time of Troubles”—from 1798 to 1818.

Had Sindhia lived out his threescore years and ten, or had he left a worthy successor, the time of troubles might have been less grievous. Despised by Brahmans and men of his own race, on account of the stain on his birth, he had given his favour to aliens and foreigners, and opposed the growing ascendancy of the Brahmans with all his might, regarding himself rather as the lord of Hindustan than as the leading member of the Maratha Confederacy. Now that he was dead, the influence of the Brahman ministers in the



Confederacy was supreme, and they, in the words of a Muslim historian, "converted the peaceful cord of their order into a bowstring."

There was none to check them; Madhaji Sindia left no son, and Daulat Rao, the fifteen-year-old great-nephew who succeeded him, was cruel and treacherous as any of his race, but lacked the ability to make his treasons profitable. Ahalya Bai died in the following year, and her successor, Takuji Holkar, was rapidly becoming imbecile.

In the year of Ahalya's death, weary of the tutelage of Nana Farnavis, the young Peshwa threw himself from a balcony in his palace, and was dashed to pieces. He left no heir. Raghonath, whose claims to the succession had caused the first Maratha War, was dead, but unhappily he had a son, Baji Rao—a worthy child of the murderess whose name was accursed even among her own people.

No sooner was he established on the throne than he stirred up the young Sindhia to imprison the Nana, who had come to return a formal visit of ceremony. To prevent trouble with Sindhia, he then arranged for his assassination during a conference at the palace, but his heart failed him at the critical moment, and he did not give the signal.

Then the Raja of Satara, for many years a



negligible quantity, having been allowed to join in the conspiracy against the Nana, lost his head at finding himself of importance, and rebelled against the Peshwa, as did the Raja of Kolhapur, who, incited by Nana Farnavis, "was spreading fire and sword over the whole of the southern Maratha country." There was grave scandal about Sindhia's treatment of two of his great-uncle's widows, commonly known as "the Bais," who fled to the camp of the Peshwa's brother, and stirred up revolt. To crown the confusion, Takuji Holkar died, leaving two legitimate sons. It was arranged that the weakly elder son should administer the home government, while the younger led the army to battle. This suited neither party. The younger appealed to the Nana, the elder to Sindhia. A reconciliation was arranged under Sindhia's auspices, and both brothers swore upon the leaves of the sacred *bel*-tree,¹ the tree of Mahadeo, to lay aside their quarrel. That night, the younger brother's camp was surrounded by Sindhia's troops, and as he mounted his horse at dawn, he fell dead, with a ball through his forehead. Every man has his price, and Sindhia's price had been the restoration of the bonds given by his great-uncle to Abalya Bai.

From the welter of confusion there emerged

¹ *Ægle* Marmelos.



Jeswant Rao, the unlawful son of Takuji. Left at his half-brother's death with a few horse and some of the family jewels, he fought and plundered his way upwards, until he was able to pose as Regent of Indore for its lawful heir, the dead man's posthumous son. Up and down Malwa he went, spoiling, burning, levying contributions from the wretched inhabitants, and the horrors of that war cannot be told. Either side outdid the other in atrocities. Jeswant's horde was the scum of the earth; though Boigne's stern discipline had done much to check the wanton greed and cruelty of Sindhia's army, the Savoyard general had left India soon after Madhaji's death, and Perron, his successor, was not concerned about the behaviour of his men except when they were in action. It is said that the wells round Indore were choked with the bodies of women, who had flung themselves down to escape torture and shame.

At that time the Governor-General was Lord Wellesley—"a nobleman resembling Joseph in beauty and Zohrab in the field of battle, lord of the country of generosity, and master of liberality and benevolence," as a Muslim historian describes him. Since his coming to India in 1798, he had effected many changes. He had delivered Mysore from its tyrant, and set the rightful heir upon the throne; he had assumed control of the Carnatic,



after discovering that its worthless ruler had been in secret correspondence with Tipu. The south was at peace, recovering from the wastings of fire and sword; there remained to pacify Hindustan, now rapidly becoming a desert, between Marathas and Pindaris.

It casts a light upon Maratha usage to find Ahalya Bai eulogised by her subjects for allowing merchants and bankers to grow rich in her territories, without mulcting them of their gains. Her successors were Marathas of the old type, and if any man had scraped together a few coins during the "time of troubles," he hid them in the ground, and was careful to seem as near starvation as his neighbours. Commerce was at a standstill, whole tracts of country were falling into wildernesses. The wild beasts of the jungle walked boldly upon the highway, and a single tiger would often cut off all communication between the few villages still inhabited.

Wellesley's first efforts at mediation were not successful; Jeswant Rao Holkar had a blood feud with the Peshwa, who had not only ordered his brother to be trampled to death by an elephant, but had superintended the execution in person. The fact that the brother was a ruffianly free-booter and deserved his fate, naturally did not weigh with Holkar, though, thinking something



might be gained by a momentary reconciliation, he appealed to the Peshwa to constitute him Regent of Indore. But the Peshwa went in fear of Sindhia's army, whose general Perron was the terror of every raja and chief from the Nerbudda to the Sutlej, and would not commit himself.

So the armies of Sindhia and Holkar, both officered by Europeans, fought out the quarrel, about ten miles from Poona; Holkar gained a victory, and the Peshwa threw himself upon English protection. On the last day of the year 1802, he signed the Treaty of Basain, whereby he agreed to maintain the British troops sent for his support, and to acknowledge the English as the supreme power. This, the third great treaty in the history of British India, gave to the English the Presidency of Bombay, as the fall of Tipu Sultan had given them the Madras Presidency, and the Treaty of Buxar, the Presidency of Bengal.



CSL

X.

A FREE LANCE FROM TIPPERARY—

1778-1802

"The spider hath woven his web in the regal palace of the Caesars,
The owl standeth sentinel on the watch-towers of Afrasiab."

—SAADI.



X.

A FREE LANCE FROM TIPPERARY—
1778-1802.

ONCE upon a time there was a very beautiful woman, who was master of men.

To this day no one knows whence she came. Some said that she was the daughter of a Sayyad, or of an impoverished Moghul noble; others believed that her great dark eyes and fair skin were derived from Kashmiri parentage; others again, that Arab blood was shown in the small feet and perfectly moulded hands and arms. Whatever her birth, she was trained as a dancing-girl at Delhi, in the middle of the eighteenth century, when adventurers by the score came from overseas to seek their fortunes in Hindustan, and the destinies of some of these men were entwined with hers.

The first of these to cross her path was the gloomy "Somru Sahib," who had kept his gang of ruffians together by means of what he had



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taken from his old master, Mir Kasim. With them he had gone from one place to another, now sent away because his temporary employer feared the English, and now because his villainies were too horrible for ordinary human beings to stomach.

At last he came to Delhi, and entered the service of the Emperor, receiving in fief the jaghir of Sardhana, about forty miles to the north. At Delhi he saw the dancing-girl, and he bought her, and took her to Sardhana. With her he passed the last miserable years of his life.

On every side he saw nothing but deadly peril. He knew that the English made continual applications for his surrender, and though they were refused once or twice, at any time the Emperor's ministers might find it expedient to grant them. His brigades were continually in revolt, beating and ill-using their officers, whom they stripped and grilled upon guns, if their pay were longer in arrears than usual. He could trust no human being save the dancing-girl, and at his death she succeeded to his jaghir, and to the command of his troops.

It seemed preposterous that a woman should be set over mercenaries, who had the reputation of being "the most mutinous troops in India." In a little while they learned that the "Begam



Somru," as they called her, a woman still young and beautiful, so small in stature as to be almost a dwarf, was more to be feared than Somru himself, with the blood of the murdered English upon his hand.

It happened one day that she was with the greater part of her troops in camp at some distance from Agra, having left a detachment to guard certain houses in the city where she kept her valuables, and lodged the widows, wives, and families of the chief officers in her service. News was brought to her that two of the slave girls left in charge during her absence had set fire to the houses, as a prelude to running away with two soldiers of the guard. The roofs, being thatched, blazed merrily, and the lodgers beneath them had a narrow escape of losing their lives, many of them being purdah women, who would have burned to death rather than expose themselves to the stare of the crowds gathered to see the fire. Before the flames could be extinguished much damage was done to property, although no lives were lost.

After this escapade the two slave girls were so incredibly foolish as to remain in the bazaar at Agra, where they were soon discovered and haled forth to the Begam's camp. "Had she faltered on that occasion," said an eye-witness who told his



story, many years afterwards, to an English officer, "she must have lost the command. She would have lost that respect without which it would have been impossible for her to retain it a month." She did not falter; there and then she held an inquiry, and the slaves' guilt being proved, she had them flogged till they were senseless, and then buried alive in a hole dug in front of her tent. "For some years after," we are told, "her orders were implicitly obeyed."

The story was handed down from one to another, gathering horror on its way, until some forty years after the event, good Bishop Heber shuddered to hear that the "very little queer-looking old woman, with brilliant but wicked eyes, and the remains of beauty in her features," had watched an erring nautch-girl bricked up in a vault beneath the hall where she was about to give a splendid entertainment. The exact date of the execution is nowhere given, but it is to be hoped that it took place before the Jesuit fathers at Agra had received the Begam into the Church, some three years after Somru's death.

The next European who was to cross the dancing-girl's path was a man of a different type from Somru.

The Begam's troops being notoriously some of



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the worst ruffians in the country, the command of a battalion was the last resort of the European adventurers who abounded in India at the close of the eighteenth century. Destiny for a time gave to the Begam the services of one of these men, whose story, sad and strange as any in Indian history, might be called "The Man who would be King."

It is a far cry from a Tipperary bog to an Eastern palace, but an Irishman once travelled all the way there, and some little part of the way back again. His name was George Thomas, and he was a sailor on board a British man-of-war, from which he deserted when it lay at Madras. After spending a few years among the lawless Polygars of the Carnatic, he was for a little while in the army of the Nizam of the Deccan. Tiring of this, he set out to walk from Haiderabad to Delhi.

A madder venture was never tried, not even by an Irishman. All Hindustan was the prey of contending factions; the roads were infested by armed bands who robbed and murdered at will, whether in time of war or of nominal peace. There was no attempt, scarcely a thought, of establishing order. In the universal chaos, it seemed to those who had any power to think that the end of all things was at hand. "All



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the world is waiting in anxious expectation of the appearance of Imam Mahdi, who is to come in the latter days," writes a contemporary Muslim historian. "Shah Alam sits in the palace of Delhi, and has no thought beyond the gratification of his own pleasure, while his people are deeply sorrowful and grievously oppressed, even unto death." To walk from the Deccan to Delhi would be a hazardous experiment in these days, when the traveller would not be likely to meet a worse enemy than sun and chill; George Thomas must have been in mortal peril every hour in the twenty-four. Unhappily, when he told his story at the close of his life, he never told how he succeeded in reaching Delhi unhurt; perhaps it was because he was taken to be a madman, and therefore under the special protection of Heaven.

On reaching Delhi, he volunteered for service with the Begam Somru's force. Above six feet in height, so strong that he could cut off a bullock's head with a single stroke of his sword, he was a recruit worth having. His manners are said to have been pleasing, and the "coarseness" which some English contemporaries noted in him is not likely to have shocked the woman who for several years had been at the head of a force recruited from the scum of the earth. Ere long Thomas was married to a girl named Marie, who



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had been adopted by the Begam, and set in command of a battalion.

Soon after this the Begam's troops were called to the help of the Emperor Shah Alam, who was trying to reduce a rebellious subject to order. The rebel's forces, however, were far better disciplined than the imperial army, and Shah Alam was in peril of his life during a night attack, until rescued by a hundred men under the command of Thomas, directed by the Begam herself, who was on the field of battle in her palki. In a durbar held in the afternoon of that day, the Begam was publicly thanked by the Emperor, who called her his "most beloved daughter," and gave her the name of Zeb-i-Nisa—"Glory of Womankind"—and Thomas received a valuable present.

For some years the Irishman continued to rise in the Begam's service, but he could not keep on terms with the other officers, most of whom were Frenchmen. They persuaded her that Thomas was plotting against her authority; Thomas was goaded into rebellion and defeated. His life was spared, and he was allowed to depart unmolested, to begin the world again—this time with fifty pounds in his pocket.

The money was spent in enlisting a number of "masterless men," like himself, ready for any



desperate venture. With their help he plundered a large village near Delhi, and lived upon the proceeds for some little time, under the protection of the British Frontier Force at Anupshahr. "He took measures to acquaint the neighbouring nobility and gentry that he was prepared to execute orders for rapine and slaughter,"¹ and was engaged, accordingly, by a Maratha chieftain, Appa Khandi Rao, to collect his revenues. Of course there was no money to pay Thomas and his men, but certain districts were assigned for their support—a piece of great generosity on the part of Appa Khandi, who had never been able to collect a single anna from the population, who fled to the hills whenever his bands appeared in their territory. On his way to take possession Thomas had to pass through a jaghir belonging to the Begam Somru, and plundered it heavily, in order to keep in his hand, and to avenge his dismissal from her service.

For some years Thomas collected his new master's revenue with great success, sometimes rewarded by fresh grants of land belonging to other people, sometimes in difficulties, as when Appa fell into disgrace with Sindhia, and was deprived of some of his territory including districts bestowed upon Thomas, or when the mer-

¹ H. G. Keene.



cenaries refused to fight until they were paid, and had to be appeased by the sale of some of their leader's property. Appa himself alternately appealed to Thomas to get him out of danger, and planned to destroy him lest he should grow too powerful. Once, Thomas having refused to deliver up a Brahman prisoner who had surrendered upon conditions, Appa, who knew the man to be wealthy and intended to extort a heavy ransom, summoned the Irishman to his presence, and on a pretext of being confined to bed, induced him to come upstairs, leaving his escort below. Again Thomas was urged to give up his prisoner, and again he refused. Appa then left the room, which suddenly was filled with armed men.

Thomas sat and gazed upon them, silent and impassive, until one of them presented him with a paper demanding surrender of the Brahman at once. Then the Irish temper broke loose. Springing to his feet, he refused to give up his prisoner, and demanded to be taken at once before Appa Khandi. Hand on sword, he strode from the room, and none dared to stop him. He stalked into Appa's presence, made his salaam, and uttered the conventional phrases with which an inferior in the East takes farewell, and the terrified Maratha gave him leave to depart.



Once back in his own camp, Thomas sent an intimation that he and his men would no longer serve under Appa. The Maratha, who had need of his services, contrived to soothe him down for the moment; but a little later, when master and man quarrelled over the right of ownership in certain captured guns, Appa engaged a band of Hindu pilgrims to murder Thomas, who killed most of them in fair fight.

In the meanwhile the Begam Somru was in evil case. Among those who had driven Thomas from her service was a Frenchman, Le Vassoult, who gained great ascendancy over her, and is said to have married her. The other European officers were malcontent, especially when he refused to receive them at his table, saying that nothing should induce him to eat with men of such habits. Whereupon they stirred the rank and file to unbearable insolence, and the Begam, who had in vain urged Le Vassoult to civility, determined to seek the protection of the English, with her husband, leaving her troops to whatever fate their lawlessness might bring upon them. The battalions stationed at Delhi learned that Le Vassoult had been in correspondence with Sindhia, and with the Governor-General. They broke into mutiny, elected as their leader Aloysius Balthazar Reinhard, the half-imbecile son of Somru by an



insane Muslim wife, and marched upon Sardhana. Word of their approach was brought to Le Vassoult, who roused his wife at midnight and implored her to fly with him. He would rather die, he said, than fall into the hands of the mutineers. The Begam vowed, if need were, to die with him. They fled at the dawn, Le Vassoult riding beside her palki. But with them, in heavy-laden carts, they dragged their money, jewels, and portable property, and the force at Sardhana, discovering their flight, rode after them to take the spoil. The fugitives had gone scarcely three miles along the road to Meerut, when they saw clouds of dust rising behind them. Le Vassoult, who might have saved himself by riding hard, asked the Begam whether she still preferred death to what awaited them at the hands of the soldiery, and she answered "Yes," showing him the dagger in her right hand. He drew a pistol from his holsters. The foremost of the pursuers came up with them, there were screams from the palki, a slave girl rushed along the road shrieking that her mistress was dead, and Le Vassoult, looking between the curtains, saw blood overspread the white handkerchief upon his wife's breast. He set the pistol to his temple, fired, and dropped from his horse.



All the indignities that the mutineers could devise were heaped upon his corpse, while the Begam, who was suffering from nothing more than a slight flesh wound, was taken back to Sardhana. Some say that she was weary of Le Vassoult, and deliberately feigned to kill herself, in order to get rid of him and regain her authority over her troops. If so, she suffered some retribution in the next few days: Aloysius and his crew of ruffians held indescribable orgy in her palace for a week, while she lay chained to a gun in the courtyard. Had it not been for a faithful ayah who sometimes stole out with food, the Begam of Sardhana would have starved to death.

In her dire extremity she remembered George Thomas, and contrived to send a letter imploring his help, and promising to pay any sum he might require if she were once more mistress of Sardhana. One of the French officers, who had no hand in the recent mutiny, made appeal to Thomas, who immediately sent 20,000 rupees to a Maratha commander, to induce him to move certain of his troops towards Sardhana. He then rode to the town with his mounted body-guard, having sent a message in advance that, acting by authority of Sindhia, he would show no mercy to the rebels unless the Begam were reinstated at once.

By this time the effects of the debauch were



beginning to tell, and the mutineers had discovered the worthlessness of their lately elected chief. They submitted, and before sunset the Begam was set at liberty, and Aloysius Balthazar Reinhard on his way to Delhi as a prisoner. Thomas went back to camp without the 20,000 rupees, which were never repaid to him.

Never again was the thread of the Begam's story to become entangled with that of the Irishman. For the remainder of her life all prospered with "the Witch of Sardhana," as the country people called her. It is true that she sent five battalions to fight upon the losing side at the battle of Assaye, but as the greater part were set to guard the camp, four of them escaped, none the worse, and she atoned for her error in judgment by repairing at once to Lord Lake's camp to make submission.

Lord Lake, who, we are told, had just finished dinner when the Begam arrived, hurried to the reception tent, where, to the amazement of all the spectators, he took her in his arms and embraced her, as if she had been one of the male chieftains who visited his camp now that the star of the Company was in the ascendant. The English spectators were agape with consternation, the Begam's retinue were horrified, but the lady's presence of mind was unfailing as in the day when she had ordered the execution



of her slave girls. "Receiving courteously the proffered attention, she turned calmly round to her astonished attendants. 'It is,' said she, 'the salute of a *padre* to his daughter,'"¹ and the excuse passed muster with the majority, who knew little of Christian usage, and were aware that the Begam had made profession of Christianity.

In her old age the Begam led a blameless life, respected by natives and English. She entertained governors-general and commanders-in-chief. Bishop Heber visited her, and Mrs Sherwood presented her with a Bible. Lord William Bentinck, on the eve of embarkation for England, wrote to assure her that her benevolence of disposition and extensive charity had excited in his mind sentiments of the warmest admiration, and that his prayers and best wishes would attend her. In the Roman Catholic Cathedral which she built at Sardhana, her white marble effigy sits upon a platform surrounded by allegorical figures, sculptured by a Roman artist. A folk-tale, still current in the Simla district, tells of the Begam Somru as a rich lady who laid up treasure in heaven by giving alms to the poor. A tradition of the Deccan speaks of the Witch of Sardhana who could destroy her enemies by throwing her veil at them.

¹ Colonel Skinner.



II.

Shortly after his rescue of the Begam Somru George Thomas was again thrown upon the world. Appa Khandi Rao, stricken with a horrible disease, had committed suicide by drowning himself in the Jumna, and the Irishman was free to seek another master. Had he chosen, he might have obtained permanent employment under Sindhia; he preferred to roam the country as a free lance. When his men clamoured for their pay, he extorted it from the luckless towns and villages around him. In after years he confessed, without any apparent shame, how he had demanded a lakh of rupees from the governor of a town belonging to the Raja of Jaipur, and how, when it was refused, he stormed the town. The commandant of the fort, which still held out, offered him 52,000 rupees to go away, and he accepted the bribe, but in the meantime, "unfortunately," the town had been set on fire, "and burnt so fiercely that goods to the amount of several lakhs of rupees were totally consumed."

After several months of foray and pillage in this manner, Thomas was emboldened to play for higher stakes. "In every corner of the kingdom people aspired to exercise independence," says a native



historian, and he who had seen one petty Maratha chieftain after another rise by murder and robbery to be the ruler of a state, aspired to carve out a principality for himself from the ruins of the Moghul Empire.

In the border country, between the Delhi territory and the sand wastes of Bikanir, where the wells are "four hundred feet deep and lined throughout with camel bone," lay a tract of over three thousand square miles, Hariana (Green Land), the history of which is not unlike that of the Debateable Ground along the Scotch and English border. Lying on the road from the gates of the north to the fertile central plains of India, its chief town, Hansi, had been sacked by many a conqueror's army since the days of Mahmud of Ghazni, and its soil had been watered by the blood of many battles. Now that the Moghul Empire had fallen into decay, no one had thought it worth while to lay claim to Hariana. A terrible famine had desolated the country, some twelve years before Thomas's arrival, the water-supply had failed, and—so it is said—only a faquir and two lions were left within the ruined walls of Hansi.

Hearing that a ruler capable of defending his own was flying his standard upon the old citadel on the summit of the great mound at Hansi,



inhabitants gathered once more in the deserted streets, and rebuilt the mud dwellings that had cracked to pieces under the fierce desert sun. "By degrees," Thomas told his biographer, "I selected between five and six thousand persons, to whom I allowed every lawful indulgence." He set up a mint, and coined his own rupees, one of which sometimes falls into the hands of the collector—small thick coins, with the title of Shah Alam in Persian characters, and an English capital T. He cast his own artillery, and made muskets, matchlocks, and powder. "I wished," he says, "to put myself in a capacity of attempting the conquest of the Punjab, and aspired to the honour of planting the British standard on the banks of the Attock."

But, meantime, his men must be paid, and Thomas's only resource was in "excursions," as he calls them, into the territories of his neighbours—especially into that of the Raja of Jaipur, "which place had hitherto afforded a never-failing supply to his necessities." In one year he harried Jaipur and Bikanir, took part in a Maratha expedition against Udaipur, and chastised the Sikh Raja of Patiala, who had taken advantage of his absence to raid into Haryana.

"I explored the country," he said, "formed alliances, and, in short, was Dictator in all the countries belonging to the Sikhs south of Sutlej."



The "Sahib Bahadur" was beloved by his men, to whom he was generous at his neighbours' expense when he paid them at all, and feared by the whole countryside, who told tales of *Jowruj*¹ *Jung* long after he had ceased to lead his wild chase through their villages. A little discretion, a little common honesty, and he might have ruled in Hariana for many years to come. But it never occurred to him to fill his treasury in any other fashion than by taking it from his neighbours—any more than it would have occurred to a moss-trooping Scott or Elliot to fill his larder from any source than the byres across the Border.

The Sikhs to the south of the Sutlej, who, next to the Raja of Jaipur, were his chief victims, made appeal to General Perron, the commander of Sindhia's army, —originally Pierre Cuillier, a deserter from a French frigate. Though the Maràthas were ready to murder, pillage, torture, and outrage, whenever it suited them, they would not brook that any other should dare to reap their harvest. In this they were not remarkable; Thomas himself animadverted severely upon the "thievish depredations" of the men of a certain district in Hariana.

Perron began diplomatically by inviting Thomas to a conference. Thomas went, but with a

¹ "George."



previous determination against any proposals that might be made to him. It was impossible, he said, that he and a Frenchman could ever act in concert or with cordiality. Invited to surrender his land in return for a monthly payment, and to take service with Sindhia, he replied that principles of honour forbade him from acting under the command of a Frenchman. If his head had ever been capable of connected and logical reasoning, it was now too confused with strong drink for him to realise that he could not retain Haryana in the face of all his enemies. Sindhia, the enemy of the English, could not allow an independent state, professing loyalty to King George, to exist anywhere within his sphere of action. Not one of the neighbouring states whom Thomas had raided but would rejoice at the downfall of the adventurer, and the English Government would not raise a finger to help him. As Sindhia's vassal, he had a chance of ruling Haryana; as an independent and irresponsible chieftain, he was certain to be crushed.

So when Thomas indignantly flung away from the conference, war was declared, and Perron called up his allies. Even then, Thomas's case was not hopeless, though the Sikhs were preparing to invade the north of Haryana, and the Begam Somru had sent a detachment to join Sindhia's force. Holkar, who had quarrelled with Sindhia, might



come to the help of Sindhia's enemy, and Bourquin, whom Perron sent in command of the expedition against Hariana, was not only a coward but a fool.

Bourquin marched to the fort of Georgegarh, one of Thomas's chief strongholds, and learned that Thomas himself had gone towards the Sikh country. Leaving three battalions to besiege Georgegarh, the expedition went on in pursuit, while Thomas doubled back to his fort, marching seventy miles in two days, and cut up one battalion, leading his men to the attack, sword in hand, as in his prime.

Three days later, Bourquin, having discovered his mistake, arrived at Georgegarh, and found Thomas encamped in a strong position between the fort and the village. Bourquin's men were fasting, and weary with a long march, nevertheless their commander insisted upon attacking at once. Musketry and cannon showered upon them like hail when they came within reach of the line of sandbanks that covered Thomas's front, and their left wing was driven back. A few moments more and the victory would have been with the Irishman; but at the turning-point of the fight, Captain Hopkins, his second in command, fell mortally wounded, and Hopkins's battalion ran back, taking their leader with them. Bourquin's left wing then



rallied, but the fire was so murderous that the whole line was ordered to sit down—and they sat till nightfall, unable to attack Thomas's men, who were protected by their sandbanks, and did not venture out.

Had Thomas possessed another officer like Captain Hopkins, he would have gained the day; had he sallied from his entrenchments on the morrow, and fallen upon the exhausted troops of Bourquin before they had recovered from their long march and their desperate fight, he might have destroyed them utterly, and marched upon Delhi before another force could have been mustered against him. There he could have made his own terms with Sindhia, and might have succeeded to Perron's command, for the Maratha was jealous of the Frenchman, and would have seized upon an excuse for getting rid of him.

Over and over again had men seen Thomas "rally panic-stricken battalions by the magic of his presence, and lead them to victory where they had but just fallen back in defeat."¹ They had seen him throw himself upon an enemy twenty times his strength, where a repulse meant ruin, and there was no retreat. They now looked for him to lead his men out from the camp, and drive Bourquin's worn-out force before him.

¹ H. Compton.



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They looked in vain. To the amazement of all, there was no sign of activity in Thomas's camp, save that here and there more fortifications were thrown up. Hopkins was dead, the remaining officers were incompetent—and George Thomas sat drinking within his tent.

Yet before he had drunk away his kingdom and his army and his honour, Thomas wrote to Miss Hopkins, left destitute by her brother's death, sending her Rs. 2000, and promising more should it be needed.

Reinforcements came to Bourquin, and Thomas's camp was completely surrounded. "Skirmishes now took place every day, but he was always thrashed back into his lines. Supplies and forage began to get scarce; his soldiers became dissatisfied and began to desert." Thomas left off drinking and resumed command, but it was too late.

The enemy had captured the tank whence he drew most of his water. Treachery was at work amongst his men; his stacks of hay and stores of grain were set on fire. Then, on a November night, when the Marathas were making preparations for a general assault, Thomas with three hundred horsemen cut his way out of the camp, lighted by the blaze of the last haystack which the traitors within had lit as a signal to the enemy without. Away into the night he rode,



with all the enemy's cavalry at his heels, and his escort dropped from him, until only four remained—two captains and two sergeants, all Europeans. The Persian horse on which he rode had borne him through many a charge, and it now covered a hundred and twenty miles "without halt or stay" till they reached Hansi.

All his baggage and guns at Georgegarh fell into the hands of the enemy. "His soldiers, having laid down their arms, were offered service, but they refused it with contempt. Several native officers who had been a long time in his service rent their clothes and turned beggars, swearing that they would never serve as soldiers again."¹

The end of the story was very nearly reached. Bourquin with infantry, horse, and Sikh cavalry surrounded Hansi, and stormed the town with great loss, although Thomas, clad in a complete suit of chain-armour, led a hand-to-hand fight in the streets against the advancing columns. The citadel still held out, and finding that his guns produced little effect upon the solid mound of earth, Bourquin tried other measures, and shot letters upon arrows to the defenders, promising six months' pay and permanent service if they would surrender Thomas and the fort. Some of the garrison responded to these overtures, and

¹ Skinner.



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Bourquin bragged openly how he would use "that blackguard Englishman" when once he had caught him. Happily for Thomas, Bourquin's European officers were all English, or country-born, and although they had no compunction in putting an end to his depredations, they revolted at the thought of his being imprisoned for life in a Maratha dungeon.

One of these officers was James Skinner, son of a Scotch ensign in the Company's service, and a Rajputni lady taken captive in war. His name will be remembered by all who have stood beneath the cream-coloured dome of St James's Church, built by him at Delhi in observance of a vow made to the God of his father when he lay sorely wounded upon a stricken field. He had run away from the printer to whom he was apprenticed as a boy, because he must needs be a soldier or a sailor, and through an old friend of his father's had obtained a commission in the Maratha army under General Boigne.

There he had soon risen to distinction, and had been joined by his younger brother Robert. The two had been sent to take part in the siege of Hansi, and in conjunction with the other European officers, "knowing Bourquin to be more of a talker than a doer," "managed to persuade him into offering terms, assuring him that he would himself



gain a higher name by inducing Thomas to capitulate than by catching him by treachery."

"It was one day after tiffin, when the wine he had drunk had put him in high spirits and good humour, that we plied him thus, and at last he called out in his broken English, 'Well, gentlemens, you do as you like—I give power; he be one damn Englishman, your countryman, that treat their children very ill.' (He meant that the country-borns were very ill-used in not being admitted into the Company's service.)"

The officers at once sent one of their number to the fort, where he was received with great joy by Thomas, who knew what treachery was at work in his garrison, and was ready to accede to any terms that the English officers might make for him. With some trouble Bourquin was induced to grant that Thomas should be escorted to the Company's territory, with all his ready money, clothes, shawls, jewels, and household stuff, and that his soldiers should be allowed to march out with their private arms.

It was arranged that the fort should be given up in two days. Thomas and Bourquin spent two hours together, "and became great friends," the Frenchman inviting the Irishman to dine in his camp on the following day.

The story of the last pitiable scenes was told by James Skinner :—



"It was about seven in the evening when Thomas arrived with about fifty of his sowars, much affected, as it appeared, by his misfortunes. About eight we sat down; and after dinner did all we could to cheer Thomas, taking great care to avoid all conversation about our attacks or anything that might give him offence. By eleven o'clock all of us had got pretty merry with drinking bumpers to such toasts as 'General Perron,' 'George Thomas,' &c., and Thomas was quite happy; when, all of a sudden, Bourquin called out, 'Let us drink to the success of Perron's arms!'

"At this we all turned up our glasses, and Thomas, on hearing and seeing this, burst into tears, and, putting his hand to his sword, called out to Bourquin that it was not to him but to his own ill fate that his fall was due, and (drawing his sword), 'One Irish sword,' said he, 'is still sufficient for a hundred Frenchmen.'

"Bourquin, in terror at this, jumped from his chair and ran out of the tent, calling for his guard. Then Thomas's sowars, hearing the hubbub, also rushed in; and we, apprehensive of a row, called out to them to keep off, as it was only the sahib that was drunk; while Thomas, in the midst of us, kept waving his sword, and calling out in Hindostanee to look how he had made the d—d Frenchman run like a jackal!"



At the imminent peril of "some accident," as Skinner delicately words it, the English officers induced Thomas to sheathe his sword and to sit down at table once more. Then they made apology for Bourquin, urging that if the wine had made him forget himself, it was Thomas's duty to be magnanimous and forgive the slip. Bourquin was brought back, to shake hands and apologise, and in a few minutes Thomas and he were drinking together once more, the best of friends.

"Perceiving that they were getting still more 'jolly,'" with great presence of mind James Skinner rode to the town and instructed the sentries not to challenge Thomas's party on his return, since he would be in no condition to reply. Of course it was in the nature of things that Thomas went to the one gate which Skinner forgot to visit.

To the sentinel's challenge, one of the sowars replied, "Sahib Bahadur," which was Thomas's title among his men.

The sentry returned that he knew of no Sahib Bahadur, and that the party must halt until he had his officer's leave to pass them. Thomas, "much in liquor," turned round to his sowars, and asked, "Could any one have stopped the Sahib Bahadur at this gate but one month ago?"

"No, no!" they replied; whereupon the Irish



sword flashed once more from its sheath and smote off the sentry's right hand.

"Fortunately," says Skinner, "I was only a few yards distant from the gate, and on hearing the noise, ran up. There I found Thomas, walking up and down with his naked sword in his hand, and Hearsey, and several of his sowars, who had dismounted, endeavouring to lay hold of him. At length a rissaldar caught hold of him from behind, when the rest ran in, and taking his sword from him, sent for his palanquin and had him carried into the fort."

Next day, when sufficiently sober to be told of his exploits, Thomas had the grace to send for the man whom he had maimed for life, and give him Rs. 500, and to write an apology to Bourquin.

Little more than a week after, he parted from his benefactor, James Skinner. They were never to meet again. For rather more than a year, Skinner was to remain in Sindhia's army; when the outbreak of the Maratha War of 1803 caused the dismissal of all English and country-born officers from the Maratha service, he and his brother went to Lord Lake's camp at Aligarh, and "met with so much attention as seemed to them perfectly marvellous."

In spite of the prejudice generally felt by both races against half-castes, Skinner was trusted and



respected by the English and the natives of India throughout his life. When a body of Perron's horse transferred their allegiance to the British, and the troops were asked whom they would choose for their commander, one and all declared that if "Secunder Sahib"¹ were there, he was the man. He accepted the command, on condition of never being employed against his old master, Sindhia; and his "Yellow Boys," in their dark-red shawl turbans and yellow tunics, proved one of the most picturesque and efficient corps of irregular horse in the Company's service. He closed his life as a Lieutenant-Colonel in His Majesty's service, and a Companion of the Bath "for the long, faithful, and meritorious services rendered to the Honourable the East India Company." When his body was escorted by his "Yellow Boys," and a great concourse of people, to its last resting-place near the altar of St James's Church, the crowds said that "none of the emperors were ever brought into Delhi in such state as Secunder Sahib."

Long before that day, George Thomas's sand had run out. He had saved from the wreck of his fortunes about a lakh and a half of rupees, and jewels and other property to nearly the same

¹ The natives of India cannot pronounce a double consonant; Skinner's prowess in arms made this version of his name the popular one. (Secunder=Alexander.)



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value, and he meant to go back to the country that he had left as a boy. His eccentricities were somewhat pronounced, even for the Tipperary of the beginning of the last century, and perhaps it was well for all concerned that he was taken ill on the voyage down the Ganges to Calcutta, and died near the military cantonments of Bahrapur in August 1803.

He had sent back his wife and their four children to the Begam Somru, at whose hands he received her, with a lakh of rupees for their expenses. To do the Begam justice, she fulfilled the trust. One of the three sons commanded a regiment in the army of Ranjit Singh, the man who was to fulfil Thomas's dream of a Punjab kingdom.

Among the crowded tombs in the cemeteries at Bahrapur are many from which the name has been lost, and it is possible that one of these may cover the body of George Thomas. No other trace is left in India of "the man who would be king."



CSL

XI.

THE GREAT MARATHA WAR—1802-1803

"The lamp of Delhi has been long since extinguished, and the Marathas have taken possession of most of the cities of Hindustan; and the Rajas of Jodhpur, Udaipur, and other chiefs have become weak and pass their days as if they were nights."—SA'ADAT-I JAWED OF HARNAM SINGH.



XL.

THE GREAT MARATHA WAR—1802-1803.

THE immediate result of the Treaty of Basain was the Second Maratha War. Sindhia, Jaswant Rao Holkar, the Peshwa's brother whom Holkar had set on the throne, and the Bhonsla Raja of Nagpur were all united, for the moment, in their hate of the English. Sindhia undertook the Nizam of Haiderabad, with whom the Marathas were in a chronic state of warfare, while Holkar devoted himself to Benares and Bihar. The Bhonsla would attend to the fertile delta of Bengal, and the Rohillas, who had joined the confederacy, would pay off old scores against the Nawab of Oudh.

Against them were an Irishman, the Governor-General's brother, General Arthur Wellesley, who had taken part in the storming of Seringapatam, and an Essex man, General Gerard Lake, who had seen service in the Low Countries before coming to India.



Lake's first move was to Aligarh, a strong fort near the town of Koil, between Delhi and Agra. Perron was in Koil, with a force stronger than Lake's, but he had no heart for resistance. He knew that he was hated by all Marathas, that Sindhia was jealous of him, and intended to get rid of him at the first opportunity, and that his officers, French and English, were not to be trusted. So, bidding his son-in-law, Colonel Pedron, the commandant at Aligarh, remember that the eyes of millions were upon him, he rode away from Koil, after a brush with Lake's force, and made terms for himself.

Pedron was not unwilling to follow his example, but his garrison contained a large proportion of Rajputs, who, like all their race, knew how to die, and they put him into confinement and elected one of their number as commander. The fort was surrounded by marshes, and the only way into it was a narrow causeway over a deep moat, defended by an outer gateway, behind which were three other gates. Lake believed that Pedron had mined all the approaches, but he knew that every day's delay gave time for the enemy's forces to gather from Central India.

Before dawn on a September morning, a picquet of fifty men on guard with a gun before the fort were surprised by four companies of the 76th