



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE TREACHEROUS SEIZURE OF COSSIMBAZAR FORT.

'Look now at those Englishmen, who were once so proud that they did not wish to receive me in their houses.'—SIRAJ-UDDAULA.<sup>1</sup>

HAVING determined to 'extirpate' the British from Bengal, Sirāj-uddaula, with the promptitude of his grandfather, sent orders to his officers at Murshidabad to surround the Factory at Cossimbazar, and to Kāsim Alī Khān<sup>2</sup> to march down and occupy the Fort of Muckwa Tanna below Calcutta and on the opposite side of the Hugli, so as to cut off their retreat, and prevent reinforcements coming up the river.<sup>3</sup> Rajmahal was about three days<sup>4</sup> journey from Cossimbazar, and it was not until the 24th May<sup>5</sup> that the Chief, Mr. Watts, was made acquainted with the Nawab's wrath by the sudden appearance of a body of troops under Mirzā Omar Beg, who had been despatched by Rāi Durlabh to invest the Factory. Omar Beg had so far no idea of the reasons for the orders he had received, and as the French and Dutch Factories had also been surrounded, the general supposition was that the Nawab simply intended to extort money from all the Europeans. Accordingly, he had no object in treating the British severely, and allowed Mr. Watts to take in stores and provisions,<sup>6</sup> for which act of courtesy the French tell us<sup>7</sup> Mr. Watts made him a suitable present. The next day, however, the guards were withdrawn from the other Factories and increased upon the British. Mr. Watts accordingly wrote in haste to Calcutta for orders and a reinforcement.<sup>8</sup> In subsequent letters Mr. Watts informed the Council that the guard upon the Factory had been

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 162.<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 1.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>4</sup> Vol. II., p. 8.<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 1.<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.<sup>7</sup> Vol. III., p. 220.<sup>8</sup> Vol. I., pp. 1-3.





WILLIAM WATTS.





increased and the investment had been made more close, and that it was supposed that this attack was entirely due to the malice of Hakim Beg,<sup>1</sup> one of the Nawab's revenue officers, who had had frequent quarrels with the British in connection with the collection of customs. Mr. Watts therefore advised that submissive letters should be written to the Nawab regarding the fortifications, and that counter charges should be brought against Hakim Beg. Council immediately drew up the letters suggested, and forwarded them to Mr. Watts for the Nawab; but the messengers were either frightened or unable to enter the Fort, and so the letters were never delivered. In reference to the question of reinforcement, a Council of the military officers was called. Captain Alexander Grant, who had recently come down from Cossimbazar, reported that the Fort was, in his opinion, sufficiently garrisoned and provided with artillery and ammunition for defence,<sup>2</sup> and the officers agreed that Mr. Watts might easily hold out until the Rains, when soldiers could be sent up by boat, but that it would be impossible to despatch the small force which they had at their disposal by land, and further, that as they had so few troops at Calcutta it would be dangerous to weaken their own garrison. A letter was accordingly written to Mr. Watts to do the best he could for himself,<sup>3</sup> but this, like all the others, did not reach him.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Watts meanwhile was in a most difficult position. He was in a fort<sup>5</sup> commanded on all sides by houses in which the enemy might obtain cover; his guns were old; of a garrison of fifty men less than half were Europeans, and these mostly undisciplined runaways from Dutch ships, the remainder being half-castes or lascars. A prolonged defence was therefore out of the question, and as the servant of a trading Company he knew well that a resort to force could, in the eyes of his masters, be justified only by success. This was impossible, and resistance meant a declaration of war against the Nawab and the certainty that all responsibility for the quarrel would be thrown upon his shoulders. Mr. Watts was not a very young man—he was thirty-eight years old<sup>6</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Tooke (Vol. I., p. 250) says the demand for the surrender of Krishna Dās was despatched by Hakim Beg at the Nawab's order.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., pp. 73, 74.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127, and Vol. II., p. II.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. III., pp. 292, 334.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.





and he had been nearly twenty years in the country, so that he had seen many quarrels with the native authorities, all of which had been settled by money; and he had no reason, not knowing the causes of the Nawab's anger or understanding his real character, to think that this occasion differed from previous ones. Besides, he had his wife with him. She was near her confinement, and in a state of panic at the idea of the Fort being attacked.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, when a chance of compromise offered itself he thought that he could, without exposing himself to any imputation of cowardice, seize upon it to extricate himself from his difficulty. In the meantime he gave strict orders to prevent the Nawab's forces from entering the Fort.

1st June,  
1756.

On the 1st June<sup>2</sup> Sirāj-uddaula reached Murshidabad, and ordered Rāi Durlabh, who had taken command, to seize the Fort immediately. Rāi Durlabh presented himself at the gate and attempted to force his way in, but found himself confronted by the guard with fixed bayonets and the gunners standing to their guns with matches lighted.<sup>3</sup> He retired precipitately, and determined to resort to treachery. Accordingly he wrote to Mr. Watts asking him to come out, and assuring him of safety. Thereupon Mr. Watts sent his surgeon, Mr. Forth, who was well acquainted with the native language, to him, and Rāi Durlabh not only declared that no injury was intended to Mr. Watts, but sent back with him Mīr Husain Alī, son of Hakīm Beg,<sup>4</sup> carrying a *betel*—the native pledge of safe conduct—which he asserted had been sent from the Nawab himself.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Watts now consulted Messrs. Collet and Batson, the other members of the Council of Cossimbazar, and it was decided that he ought to visit the Nawab. Lieutenant Elliot, who commanded the garrison, appears to have opposed this decision;<sup>6</sup> but his opinion was overruled, as there was nothing unusual in the Chief of a Factory paying a complimentary visit to the Nawab when in its neighbourhood.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Watts' entreaties seem

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 6, and Vol. III., p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, p. 499.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., pp. 175, 250.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 252. Mr. Watts says Lieutenant Elliot did not oppose his going to the Nawab's camp (Vol. III., p. 334).

<sup>7</sup> When the Nawab came to Hugli after the capture of Calcutta, Mr. Bisdom actually paid him such a visit (Vol. I., p. 55).





also to have had some influence in overcoming the opposition of the military.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, on the 2nd June Mr. Watts, accompanied by Mr. Forth and a couple of servants, went to make his visit to the Nawab. They were received politely by Rāi Durlabh, but when they approached the Nawab's tent their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were led as prisoners into Sirāj-uddaula's presence.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Watts, speechless with rage and mortification, could say nothing, and the Nawab, after looking at him for a time in silence, ordered him to be detained as a prisoner. He was placed in charge of Hakīm Beg and his son, Mīr Husain Ali.<sup>3</sup> On the 3rd June he was informed that the Nawab was enraged with the British for building a drawbridge at Perrin's Garden and repairing Mr. Kelsall's Octagon, of which I have already spoken.<sup>4</sup> He was required to sign a *muchalka* or engagement that the Council of Calcutta would demolish the new fortifications, would give no protection to servants of the Government, and would recoup the Nawab for any loss which his revenues might have suffered from the abuse of the *dastaks* or trade passes. He explained that he could not sign any such document without his Council, and Mr. Forth was accordingly instructed to go and fetch Messrs. Collet and Batson. Mr. Watts bade him tell them that they were not to come to the Nawab's camp on any condition, but whether Mr. Forth did not deliver this message,<sup>5</sup> or those gentlemen thought it better to disregard it, they went to the camp, and there stated that they had no authority to sign any agreement which would be binding on the Council of Calcutta. They were immediately imprisoned, and nothing more was said about the *muchalka*. The same evening Mr. Collet was sent back to the Fort with orders to deliver up the guns and ammunition. He accordingly went there, and instructed Lieutenant Elliot to make them over to Rāi Durlabh's officers. On the 5th Mr. Collet was ordered to return to camp and Mr. Batson was sent back, and the same day the Nawab's army started for Calcutta, taking Messrs. Watts and Collet along with them. Mr. Forth was advised by his native friends to escape, and went to the Dutch Factory, where he was kindly received.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 322.<sup>2</sup> Vol. III., p. 166.<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 5.<sup>4</sup> Vol. III., p. 334.<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 11, and Vol. II., p. 61.





As soon as the British had given up their arms, the native soldiers began plundering the buildings in the Fort, until by the Nawab's orders the Company's warehouses were closed and sealed.<sup>1</sup> They treated the gentlemen and soldiers with much rudeness and brutality.

'threatening the gentlemen to cut off their ears, slit their noses, and *chabuck*<sup>2</sup> them,'<sup>3</sup>

but, according to the Muhammadan custom, respected the privacy of Mrs. Watts' apartments, to which she and her children had retired.

The ill-treatment of the prisoners continued until the 8th, when Lieutenant Elliot, rather than submit to the insults of the soldiery, shot himself dead with a pistol which he had secreted about his person.<sup>4</sup> This compelled the native officers to interfere, for they did not know what account the Nawab might demand of them if any of the civilians who had been left in their charge were driven to similar acts of desperation.<sup>5</sup> They accordingly imprisoned Messrs. Batson, Sykes, Chambers, and Hugh Watts in their own rooms; but the two former escaped the same night, and were sheltered in the other European Factories, where Messrs. Hastings and Marriott, who had been absent at some of the *aurangs*,<sup>6</sup> also found refuge after being plundered of all they possessed. On the 9th Messrs. Watts and Chambers were sent to the public prisons along with the soldiery, and though the latter were released the next day, these unfortunate gentlemen were detained until the 24th, when the French and Dutch Chiefs obtained their liberty by pledging themselves for their appearance when required by the Nawab. Mrs. Watts and her children were allowed to retire unmolested to the French Factory,<sup>7</sup> where M. Law treated them with the utmost kindness until they could be safely sent down the river.

Mrs. Watts is a celebrated character in the history of Calcutta. She accompanied her husband to England on his retirement, and when he died she returned to Calcutta, and having married a

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> To whip.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. III., p. 335.

<sup>6</sup> Weaving establishments.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., p. 176.

9th June,  
1756.

24th June,  
1756.





MRS. WILLIAM WATTS  
(THE BIGAM JOHNSON)





clergyman of the name of Johnson, whom she sent to England with an allowance, was for many years the acknowledged leader of society under the half-Indian appellation of the Begam Johnson. She was extremely wealthy, and Colonel Sleeman<sup>1</sup> tells us that her house was the resort of all the gentry from the Governor-General downwards. She used to tell her visitors that she had been saved from the Nawab's harem only by the intercession of his mother, Amīna Begam.<sup>2</sup>

The easy capture of the Fort had not been expected by either Europeans or natives,<sup>3</sup> or even by Sirāj-uddaula himself. The French, with the exception of M. Law, who wrote,

'Such was the surrender of this little fort, which many people pretend could have held out long enough to repulse the Nawab and force him to come to terms. I am the less inclined to believe this as I know the weaknesses of the place much better than its strength,'<sup>4</sup>

were loud in their outcries against Mr. Watts' behaviour, though Mr. Young, the Prussian Agent, says that after his arrival at Chandernagore on the 28th June,<sup>5</sup> he had little difficulty in satisfying his friends as to the propriety of his conduct.<sup>6</sup> 28th June, 1756.

Mr. Holwell asserts that a defence of Cossimbazar for only twenty-four hours would probably have enabled the Council to complete the defences of Calcutta, and the coming on of the Rains would have forced the Nawab to retire in confusion.<sup>7</sup> This is one of those hypothetical arguments which does not admit of answer, and is hardly worth discussion.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Watts, however, submitted a description of the Fort and garrison to Colonel Clive and his officers, who gravely certified, what everyone already knew, that the Fort was incapable of prolonged defence.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the question was not a military one at all, but a question as to whether the Company's interests required Mr. Watts to take upon himself the responsibility of a violent breach of relations

<sup>1</sup> 'Rambles of an Indian Official,' vol. ii., pp. 358, 359.

<sup>2</sup> Other accounts (Vol. I., p. 20) say that Amīna Begam tried to persuade Sirāj-uddaula not to go to war with the British, representing to him that it was beneath his dignity to make war upon mere merchants.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 207, and Vol. III., p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. III., p. 335.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. III., p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. II., p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 330.





with the Nawab. If after-events proved that he decided wrongly it was a fault of which M. Law says :

· If he was the dupe of Sirāj-uddaula's bad faith, it must be acknowledged that he knew how to take his revenge.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Watts was no simpleton, and it was as much by his diplomacy at Murshidabad as by the victory of Clive at Plassey that Sirāj-uddaula was driven from his throne.

Sirāj-uddaula took nothing from the Fort except the guns and ammunition<sup>2</sup> which he needed for the attack of Calcutta, his own being worthless,<sup>3</sup> and on the 5th June he began his march.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., pp. 73, 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

5th June  
1756





## CHAPTER V.

THE EXPULSION OF THE BRITISH  
FROM CALCUTTA.

'As fatal and melancholly a catastrophe as ever the annals of any people, or colony of people, suffered since the days of Adam.'—HOLWELL.<sup>1</sup>

As he had been prompt in his attack on Cossimbazar, so Sirāj-uddaula wasted no time in his march upon Calcutta. In the hottest season of the year, in a country with no roads and with a cumbrous train of artillery drawn by elephants and oxen, his army covered a distance of about 160 miles in eleven days. At the same time that he displayed this promptitude he showed that he was doubtful of success by the eagerness with which he sought the aid of the French and Dutch, recklessly promising the town of Calcutta and the British Factories to both if only they would join him.<sup>2</sup> This was, of course, known to his soldiers, as was probably the fact that both French and Dutch had refused him their assistance.<sup>3</sup>

'His army marched unwillingly; his people murmured loudly against him, and said that he was taking them to be butchered, and that they could never capture the place. These just murmurs of the army came to the ears of the Nawab. He paid no attention to them. He even treated very cavalierly a person who spoke to him of them, saying, "I do not doubt that thou art afraid thyself. I am not astonished at it, for thou art a Bengali coward." As a matter of fact, this person was one of his dependent *rajas*.'<sup>4</sup>

The French were convinced that the Nawab himself was afraid when they found that Coja Wājīd had been ordered to open negotiations with the British.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., p. 38. Mr. Holwell of course alludes to the appellation commonly given by the Muhammadans to Bengal, viz., 'The Paradise of India.'

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., pp. 5, 7, 15, and Vol. III., p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.





3rd June,  
1756.

Notwithstanding the absence of good roads, the Indian *kasid*, or postal messenger, manages to travel with great rapidity, and letters from Cossimbazar sometimes arrived at Calcutta in as short a time as twenty-seven hours.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly Mr. Watts' letter of the 2nd June, saying that the Nawab had arrived at Cossimbazar, reached Calcutta next day. It convinced the Council that the Nawab meant war, and that submission was useless.<sup>2</sup> They thought, however, it would be wise to try what influence Coja Wājid could bring to bear, and so they sent him copies of the letters which they had transmitted to Mr. Watts for the Nawab. Coja Wājid unfortunately had left Murshidabad for Hugli, and though he received these letters was unable at first to deliver them. He was in fact too frightened to do so, the Nawab having threatened with punishment anyone who might dare to plead on behalf of the British. This fury of rage seems, however, to have already moderated to some extent, as in his letter to Coja Wājid of the 1st June the Nawab wrote that he would not drive the British out of the country if they would submit to his conditions.<sup>3</sup> This encouraged Coja Wājid to approach him again, and his agent, Siva Bābū, took Drake the copy of a letter which Coja Wājid advised him to write to the Nawab. Drake complied, and Coja Wājid presented the letter to the Nawab when he arrived at Kelsall's Garden on the 15th or 16th June; but by this time hostilities had commenced with the British attack upon Tanna Fort, and the Nawab did not vouchsafe any reply.<sup>4</sup>

3rd June,  
1756.

On the 3rd June the Council sent warning to Dacca and the other up-country Factories to collect the Company's goods, and be prepared to flee if the danger increased.

The next day they wrote to the Council of Fort St. George (Madras), saying they were engaged in a quarrel with the native Government, and that,

'should they be attacked, they are resolved to repel force by force.'<sup>5</sup>

From the 3rd to the 6th June no news arrived at Calcutta. So absolute was the lack of trustworthy intelligence that it was not even known whether the Nawab was with his army or not.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.





The first news of the capture of Cossimbazar came as a rumour from Chandernagore on the evening of the 6th June.<sup>1</sup> It was confirmed the next morning by the arrival of Mr. Collet's letter of the 4th June.<sup>6th June, 1756.</sup>

Before this, about the 20th May, when he received Mr. Watts' letter mentioning the talk in Murshidabad about the ease with which Calcutta might be captured,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Drake gave orders to Captain Minchin to raise as many soldiers as he could, and to Mr. Holwell to enlist *buxerries* or native matchlockmen, and to the *kasids* or messengers to bring all letters received in or despatched from Calcutta to him for examination. The pay of the labourers on the fortifications was increased, a stock of provisions laid in, and, in fact, every preparation was made for a siege, except, apparently, the most essential of all—namely, a plan of defence. When the bad news arrived on the 7th a further request for assistance<sup>7th June, 1756.</sup> was sent to Madras, and letters were written to Messrs. Bisdorn<sup>3</sup> and Renault,<sup>4</sup> the Dutch and French Chiefs, asking them to act in concert with the British against the Nawab. The Dutch, who were determined to maintain their rôle of mere merchants, absolutely refused to meddle in a quarrel not of their own making;<sup>5</sup> the French answered sympathetically, but all they could offer was the refuge of their own Fort if the British thought Fort William indefensible.<sup>6</sup> Both Chinsura and Chandernagore lay in the Nawab's path on his march to Calcutta; neither of them could spare a man or a gun, and it seems certain that the Nawab forcibly took the French boats for the passage of his men across the Ganges, though he refrained, as a matter of courtesy, from actually marching through their town.<sup>7</sup> The Nawab had likewise a body of European and half-caste artillerymen in his service, who were said to be deserters from the French, and were commanded by an ex-French officer, the Marquis de St. Jacques, and the spies employed by the British asserted that the French sent a quantity of powder to the Nawab's army when he was at Bankibazar.<sup>8</sup> This the French stoutly denied, but the accusation was believed

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 128, and Vol. II., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 295.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 295, and Vol. III., p. 293.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., p. 20, and Vol. III., p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. I., p. 143.





by the British to be true, and bore bitter fruit later on. Meanwhile, the Council, though it had plenty of more important business to attend to, entered upon an angry correspondence with Mr. Bisdorn as to his duty to assist them, and finally formally protested, in the name of the Company, against him and his Council for refusing to do so.<sup>1</sup>

On the 7th the British were informed that the Nawab had written to the neighbouring *Zamīndārs*<sup>2</sup> forbidding them to supply the British with provisions, and the same day, early in the morning, Drake called a council to consider the plan of defence. The military officers were summoned to attend, and the council resolved itself into a Council of War. Messrs. Simpson and O'Hara, and a French officer, Lieutenant Melchior Lebeaume, who was in the Company's service, were appointed to form a Committee.<sup>3</sup> The weakness of Fort William has been already mentioned, but the question under discussion was the larger one of the defence of Calcutta.

Two years before this time Colonel Scot<sup>4</sup> had drawn up a plan of defence for the Town, the main points of which were the completion of the Maratha Ditch, the building of redoubts at Perrin's and Surman's Gardens,<sup>5</sup> and the strengthening of the river front of the Fort. After his death the work was handed over to Lieutenant Wells,<sup>6</sup> who prepared the only detailed plan we possess of the Fort and its neighbourhood, and suggested various modifications. On his death Mr. Bartholomew Plaisted was entrusted with this duty, but he was dismissed the Company's service in 1755, and Messrs. O'Hara, a civilian, and Simpson, a subaltern in the military, were appointed engineers. Under their superintendence the redoubt at Perrin's was completed, and something done towards the repair of the Line of guns on the river front of the Fort; but so slowly was the work carried on that Captain Jasper Leigh Jones of the Artillery Company on the 4th August, 1755, submitted a letter to Council calling attention to the defenceless condition of the Town.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Collectors of the Nawab's revenues. Often hereditary.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Died 1754.

<sup>5</sup> The northern and southern limits of the British Settlement.

<sup>6</sup> Died 18 August, 1755 (General Letter to Court of 8th December, 1755, paragraph 108).





The Council, which was composed of Messrs. Drake, Cruttenden, Manningham, Becher, Pearkes, Frankland, Collet, Macket, Eyre, and Holwell, voted his letter 'irregular, improper, and unnecessary'—in fact, they considered that the question of fortifications was not of any urgency, and might well wait for the Court of Directors' reply to Colonel Scot's indent for guns and military. Accordingly, the outermost line of defence suggested by Colonel Scot, not having been completed, could not be maintained, and the only question that remained was how much of the Town could be protected. What the Committee actually recommended is uncertain. Mr. O'Hara, in a letter dated the 17th February, 1757,<sup>1</sup> tells us that he advised that the Fort only should be defended, the European houses around it being pulled down to clear the way for the fire of the guns, but that Mr. Drake and the Council refused to allow the houses to be destroyed, partly on the ground of expense, partly because it would take a long time and more powder than they had to spare in the Fort. Captain Grant afterwards declared that Mr. O'Hara's suggestion was the proper one, but that

'so little credit was then given, and even to the very last day, that the Nabob would venture to attack us, or offer to force our lines, that it occasioned a generall grumbling and discontent to leave any of the European houses without them. Nay, the generallity wanted to include every brick house in the place, Portuguese and Armenian, and thought it hard that any inhabitant should be deprived of protection against such an enemy. And should it be proposed by any person to demolish so many houses as would be necessary to make the fort defensible, his oppinion would have been thought pusilanimous and ridiculous, had there been sufficient time to execute such a work, as there was not, nor would it be possible to destroy half the number in triple the time, especially as we had not sufficient powder to blow them up.'<sup>2</sup>

The question was rendered still more difficult by the sudden discovery of the very small number of troops in garrison, the military officers reporting that 70 of the European soldiers were sick in hospital, 25 more were absent up-country, and that of the remaining 180 the greater part were only Portuguese. It was at last determined to occupy Perrin's redoubt with a small force, but to abandon the Black Town and draw an inner line round the European houses. Outposts were to be established at the three main entrances to the White Town, the lesser streets to be dug across and palisaded, all bridges to be broken down, and a trench

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 76.





dug across the Park to the east of the Fort.<sup>1</sup> M. Jean Law says<sup>2</sup> that the British ought to have limited themselves to the defence of the Fort, but he ignores the considerations mentioned by Captain Grant.

The same day messages were sent to the Company's servants at Dacca, Jagdea, and Balasore to retire to Calcutta,<sup>3</sup> and orders issued to the inhabitants of Calcutta to send into the Fort all the arms and provisions in their possession,<sup>4</sup> whilst no less than five messages were sent via Vizagapatam to Madras for assistance.<sup>5</sup>

8th June,  
1756.

In the evening the militia were under arms, and on the morning of the 8th paraded 250 strong. Of these 100 were Europeans, largely drawn from the shipping, and so liable to be recalled on board; the rest were Portuguese and Armenians. A number of officers were appointed, and Messrs. Manningham and Frankland were made respectively Colonel and Lieutenant-Colonel,<sup>6</sup> thus giving them rank superior to that held by any of the military. This extraordinary arrangement appears quite in keeping with the other ridiculous actions of the Council, and its only possible explanation is that the Council was so certain of repulsing the Nawab that its chief care was, under the pretence of not wishing to supersede senior military officers by their juniors, to make sure that none of the credit of the exploit should fall to the military.<sup>7</sup> It was soon found that the Portuguese and Armenians were extremely awkward in the use of arms, and so they were formed into two separate companies, the Europeans composing a third. This last was further weakened by thirty-four<sup>8</sup> of its members volunteering to serve in the military. They were young men, and behaved extremely well.

Many Company's servants and young gentlemen in the Settlement entered as volunteers in the military, doing duty in every respect as common soldiers, and always expressing forwardness to be sent on command,<sup>9</sup> a spirit never sufficiently to be commended.<sup>10</sup>

Amongst the military Lieutenant Smith was promoted to be Captain-Lieutenant, Captain Alexander Grant was made Adjutant General, Lieutenant Talbot Adjutant, and Mr. O'Hara Lieutenant

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., p. 33.    <sup>2</sup> Vol. III., p. 168. See also Vol. I., p. 178, and Vol. II., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., pp. 69, 254.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from J. Cooke to Council, dated 18th February, 1757, appended to Public Proceedings of 19th February, 1757.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 130.

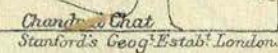
<sup>7</sup> For civilian jealousy of the military see Vol. I., p. c. note, Vol. II., p. 245, and Vol. III., p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> Holwell says sixty-five (Vol. II., p. 28).

<sup>9</sup> *i.e.*, on particular duty.

<sup>10</sup> Vol. I., p. 131.









of the Train or Artillery Company. These arrangements were to some extent due to the unsatisfactory character of the commanding officer, Captain Minchin. According to Captain Grant and Mr. Holwell, neither he nor Captain Clayton, the second in command, was fit for his post,<sup>1</sup> and Captain Witherington, who was in charge of the ammunition, was both incapable and insubordinate; but instead of superseding them by capable military officers, Messrs. Manningham and Frankland were given superior rank. Captain Grant as Adjutant did his utmost to obtain the usual returns of stores, but could obtain none till a much later and, as it proved, fatal moment, for

‘such was the levity of the times that severe measures were not esteemed necessary.’<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of the 7th Coja Wājīd’s *diwān*, Siva Bābū, brought to Calcutta the three letters<sup>3</sup> which the Nawab had written to his master. He informed the Council that it was Omichand who had instigated the Nawab to attack the British, and that Coja Wājīd thought the Nawab would not be satisfied with a payment of money, and advised the British to prepare to resist him by force.<sup>4</sup> Siva Bābū was sent back to Coja Wājīd with a submissive letter from Mr. Drake to the Nawab, as has been already mentioned.

On the 10th Siva Bābū returned to Calcutta with another letter from his master saying that he proposed to meet the Nawab at Krishnagar, but advising the British to continue their preparations for defence. The Council thought this letter implied that Coja Wājīd expected to be able to accommodate matters, and approved his proposal, but they decided that it would be as well to assist his diplomacy by terrifying the enemy. Accordingly they sent a party of fifteen soldiers—volunteers—at night by boat to Sukhsagar, halfway to Hugli, with orders to make as much noise as possible. The country people were very much frightened, supposing that the British intended to attack Hugli, but the only solid result of this fantastical expedition was that 2,000 of the Nawab’s cavalry hastened their march and occupied that town.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile spies came in every moment, some reporting that the enemy were dispirited and

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 77, and Vol. II., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., pp. 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. II., p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 136.





11th June,  
1756.

disinclined to advance, others that they were already exulting in the prospect of sacking Calcutta. All agreed that the neighbouring *Zamindars* had received orders to refuse provisions to the British.

Next day Mr. Drake reviewed his forces, and found he had at his disposal 180 soldiers (of whom only 45 were Europeans), 50 European volunteers, 60 European militia, 150 Armenian and Portuguese militia, 35 European artillerymen, 40 volunteers from the shipping—in all 515 men to defend a Fort of which Colonel Scot had written to Mr. Orme :

‘It has been universally asserted by the gentlemen of the sword that 1,000 effective men is the least number necessary for the defence of the place, even as it is fortified, if we may be allowed the expression.’

These were now disposed as follows: 98 men under Captains Clayton and Holwell with three subalterns<sup>1</sup> at the Court House or Eastern Battery,<sup>2</sup> the same number under Captains Buchanan and Macket with three subalterns<sup>3</sup> at the Southern Battery, 68 men under Captain-Lieutenants Smith and Mapletoft with three subalterns<sup>4</sup> at the Northern Battery, and the remainder of the military and artillery with the Armenian and Portuguese militia under Captain Minchin, Lieutenant Bellamy, and the other subalterns in the Fort. Ensign Piccard with 25 men was ordered to occupy the Redoubt at Perrin's. Three ships, the *Prince George* (Captain Hague), the *Fortune* (Captain Campbell),<sup>5</sup> and the *Chance*<sup>6</sup> (Captain Champion), were sent up to cover the Redoubt, and 20 artillerymen and the volunteers, apparently under the command of Lieutenant Blagg, were ordered to hold themselves in readiness to support the point first attacked. Additional pay was offered to the *lascars* to work the guns, and the pay of the *coolies* employed on the fortifications was increased to induce them not to desert.<sup>7</sup>

One of the chief deficiencies in Calcutta was the want of guns and powder. The guns they had were old and neglected, and

<sup>1</sup> Apparently Lieutenants Bishop, Lebeaume, Wedderburn, and Douglas, and also Ensign Carstairs was at this post (Vol. I., pp. 147, 258, 259, and Vol. II., pp. 34, 35).

<sup>2</sup> See plan of ‘The Environs of Fort William.’

<sup>3</sup> I can identify only Lieutenant Blagg and Ensign Scott.

<sup>4</sup> I can identify only Lieutenant Sumner and Ensign Walcot.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256. Drake (Vol. I., p. 135) names the ships as the *Dadley*, *Prince George*, and *Lively* grabb.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.





very few of them mounted. Every carpenter who could be found was set to work, and as many guns as could be mounted on the shaky walls were got ready. Of powder they had more than had ever been in stock in previous years,<sup>1</sup> but most of it had become damp, and was useless, for powder could not be kept good through the rainy season. There was no time to make more, nor any place in the crowded Fort where the damp powder could be dried. From what was good, cartridges were prepared for the guns, the English women assisting in loading them.<sup>2</sup>

Though it was decided not to defend the Black or native Town, instructions were given to the native inhabitants to protect themselves as well as possible, and to obstruct the roads and passages. Many of them had lived for several generations under the British flag, and it was supposed that they would stand by the British; but the majority thought of nothing except how to secure their families by sending them out of the town. One or two, however, like Govind Rām Mitra, showed more public spirit, and did all they could to protect the quarters in which they lived.<sup>3</sup> This gentleman, on the capture of Calcutta, was imprisoned by the Nawab's Governor, Mānik Chand. In the month of December he managed to communicate with the British at Fulta, and sent them information regarding the distribution of the native troops. In reply the Council allowed him to enter the service of the Nawab so as to regain his liberty.<sup>4</sup>

A letter was received on the 12th June from Messrs. Watts and Collet, who were with the Nawab's army on the river opposite Hugli,<sup>5</sup> saying that if the Council would send a proper person to the Nawab's camp they thought the quarrel might yet be settled for a sum of money. They based this belief on the fact that the Nawab had not touched anything at Cossimbazar, except the guns and ammunition, whereas if he had intended to expel the British from Bengal he would have seized everything; but the probability is that the Nawab had simply left the Company's goods there until he had time to decide how he should dispose of them. This letter came through Mr. Bisdorn, who was informed—

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> Orme MSS., India V., pp. 1159, 1160.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., pp. 103, 140.





'that after the disgrace the Company had suffered at Cossimbuzar by the taking of their Factory and imprisoning of their servants, they were resolved not to come to any agreement.'<sup>1</sup>

Drake does not mention this reply, but says Mr. Watts' letter also contained a warning against Coja Wājid, whom Mr. Watts, even before the capture of Cossimbazar, had suspected of instigating the Nawab against the British.<sup>2</sup> The important point to notice is Mr. Bisdorn's evidence that Mr. Drake and the Council were quite ready to fight. In fact, they thought that the mere appearance of resistance would frighten the Nawab, and the military were ordered to be on their guard so as to cut up any small raiding parties that might approach the Town.

The part of the Nawab's forces which the British considered most likely to be dangerous was the artillery—*i.e.*, the French and Portuguese, who were in charge of the Cossimbazar cannon. These men being all Christians, the Catholic priests in Calcutta were instructed to write and remonstrate with them on the wickedness of fighting for a Muhammadan Prince against Christians. They replied that they had now no means of escaping from the Nawab's service, but they proved of little use to him in the end.<sup>3</sup>

13th June,  
1756.

The approach of the Nawab's army rendered it probable that spies would try to enter the Town, and strict orders were issued on the 13th June to arrest all suspicious characters. A boat was seized this day, the people of which

'denied they had any letters for any person; but, after having received punishment, they confessed there were two letters hid in the boat directed to Omichund from Rogeram, the *Phousdar* of Midnapore and principal spy to the Nabob.'<sup>4</sup>

These letters did not appear to contain anything beyond a warning to Omichand to look after his own property, and a request to send Rājārām's property out of the city; but they were written in some strange, up-country dialect, which only Omichand's servants could understand, and Drake was therefore convinced there must be some treason in them; accordingly on his own authority he ordered Omichand to be imprisoned in the Fort. Omichand surrendered

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140; Vol. II., p. 63; Vol. III., p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141, and Vol. II., p. 149.





without making any resistance, but his brother-in-law, Hazāri Mal, ordered his servants to fire upon the soldiers sent to arrest him, and had his left hand cut off before he was captured.<sup>1</sup> Omichand's *Jamadar*,<sup>2</sup> when the soldiers forced the house, killed with his own hands thirteen women and three children, fired the house, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide. Captain-Lieutenant Smith, who was in charge of the party, found the house full of weapons. As the inhabitants of Calcutta had been ordered to send all the arms in their possession into the Fort, this fact was taken as further proof of Omichand's guilt. About the same time Mr. Holwell being informed that Krishna Dās intended to escape from Calcutta, and it being important for the British to have him in their hands in case the Nawab should demand his surrender, he was also made prisoner on the 14th after a vigorous defence.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Tooke adduces this fact as a proof that Krishna Dās' visit to Calcutta was a device of the Nawab to involve the British, but it is quite possible that he really wanted to escape from the British when he feared they might be forced to surrender him to the Nawab.

Spies now reported that the Nawab's army, which consisted of from 30,000 to 50,000 men, with 150 elephants and camels, the cannon taken at Cossimbazar, and 25 European and 200 Portuguese gunners,<sup>4</sup> had arrived at Baraset, and that a small party had been seen at Dum Dum, and a letter was received from the French renegade, the Marquis de St. Jacques, who commanded the Nawab's Europeans, offering to mediate between the British and the Nawab. A reference to M. Renault at Chandernagore made it clear that St. Jacques was not to be trusted, and accordingly the Council confined their reply to an offer of reward if he would come over to the British with his men. Whether he received this letter or not is uncertain, but a spy declared that St. Jacques had been sent to the French and Dutch Factories to demand assistance in the name of the Nawab, and that the French had landed a quantity of powder for him at Bankibazar.<sup>5</sup>

At this critical moment Coja Wājid, upon whom the Council relied for mediation with the Nawab in spite of his suspected

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Chief of the *peons*, or footmen.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., pp. 142, 258, 280.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 135, 264.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.





collusion with Omichand,<sup>1</sup> on the pretence that he had heard that the British had seized and imprisoned his *diwān*, Siva Bābū,<sup>2</sup> wrote them that they might send Omichand, or anyone else they pleased, to negotiate with the Nawab. This was supposed to be a device to have Omichand set free, so the Council replied that they had entrusted the negotiations to him alone, and still trusted to his endeavours on their behalf.

The Governor being extremely busy with many matters, Messrs. Manningham, Frankland, and Minchin were appointed Field Officers to visit the out-batteries in daily rotation, and Mr. Manningham was authorized by Council to relieve Mr. Drake of the charge of the Marine. To clear the Town as much as possible, the straw houses within the Lines of defence were set on fire. The fire spread and did much damage, and, terrified by this evidence of approaching war, many of the *coolies*, *lascars*, and servants fled from the Town, whilst the Armenians and Portuguese, with their women and children, crowded into the houses surrounding the Fort.<sup>3</sup>

For some time the more thoughtful members of the Council had been considering the wisdom of occupying Tanna<sup>4</sup> Fort as a possible place of retreat in case of necessity, and also to prevent the natives from blocking the river and cutting off the approach of reinforcements. This ought to have been done several days earlier, and though, when the ships *Dodaly*, *Prince George*, *Lively*, and *Neptune* reached the Fort, they were able to drive out the garrison,<sup>5</sup> they found they could not hold the place, and on the arrival of a large body of native troops on the 14th they were forced to evacuate it after throwing some of the guns into the river and burning the houses. The walls of the Fort were too strong to be easily destroyed, and on the 15th Captain Rannie, having been sent down with a further reinforcement of thirty men under Lieutenant Bishop, found that with the poor powder supplied him he could produce no impression. The ships were recalled on the 16th.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. II., p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> One of the Nawab's first orders on the outbreak of the quarrel was for the occupation of this fort (Vol. I., p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 256.

13th-16th  
June, 1756.





The only fruit of this expedition was the capture of two Moor ships, which were brought up to Calcutta.<sup>1</sup>

On the 15th the Nawab arrived at Chinsura, and the French and Dutch Agents were sent to present the compliments of their Chiefs. The Frenchman was received with great courtesy, the Dutchman with contempt and insult.<sup>2</sup> 15th June, 1756.

Next day all the British women were brought into the Fort. It was hoped that relief would arrive from Madras by the 20th August, and there were ample provisions of rice, wheat, and biscuit to last that time if the Nawab could not be forced to retire before. The reason for calling in the women was that a portion of the Nawab's troops, numbering 4,000 men, was making an attempt to force the Maratha Ditch by what is now known as the Chitpur Bridge, the approaches to which were covered by the guns of Perrin's Redoubt. 16th June, 1756.

The attack on this little fort began about noon, and Lieutenant Blagg, with a detachment of 50 men and two field-pieces, was sent to Ensign Piccard's assistance. The enemy were easily repulsed, but the British lost a few men on the ships as well as on shore. Amongst them was Mr. Ralph Thoresby, the first of the Company's servants to fall. Lieutenant Blagg was recalled in the evening, but Mr. Piccard made a sally in the night,<sup>3</sup> drove the enemy from their posts, and spiked four of their guns. They lost, it is said, 800 men.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding this repulse of the regular attack, the Ditch being fordable all through its course,<sup>5</sup> the Nawab's troops and camp followers—7,000 plunderers followed him from Murshidabad<sup>6</sup>—began to flock into the town. The Nawab himself seems to have crossed by a bridge which he caused to be made at Cow Cross,<sup>7</sup> on the Dum Dum road, and took up his quarters in Omichand's garden. The spies sent by the British found his army, therefore, already partly in the Town and occupying the quarter called Similia. A few prisoners were made, who reported that the Nawab intended to make his great attack on Friday, the 18th, which was held to be a lucky day in the Muhammadan Calendar.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., pp. 111, 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 164.

<sup>8</sup> The 18th June, 1756, corresponds to the 19th Ramazān, one of the fortunate days of that great Muhammadan fast.





Meanwhile he had to find some means of bringing his elephants and artillery across the Ditch, and so thought of renewing the attack on Perrin's; but during the night Jagannāth Singh, Omichand's *Jamadār*, who had somewhat recovered from his self-inflicted wounds, had himself placed on a horse, and with Omrao, another of Omichand's servants, brought a letter from their master to the Nawab, informing him that the Maratha Ditch did not encircle the whole Town, and that he could easily bring in his army by the Avenue which leads directly eastward from old Fort William to the Lakes.<sup>1</sup> The same night the British set fire to part of the Town in order to drive out the Nawab's men, but the lack of wind prevented much damage being done. On the other hand, the native plunderers pillaged the native Town, burning and murdering wherever they went.<sup>2</sup>

17th June,  
1756.

The 17th June was spent by the Nawab in bringing his army into the Town. The British destroyed all the native houses to the eastward and the southward, and the Nawab's plunderers set fire to the Great Bazar which lay to the north of the Fort, and the adjacent places and other parts of the Black Town,

\* which burnt till morning, and, being so very extensive and near, formed a scene too horrible for language to describe.<sup>3</sup>

The same night all the remaining *peons* and servants who could escape abandoned the British. Over 1,000 of the bearers or coolies deserted when they were required to carry powder into the Fort from the Magazine, which lay to the south.<sup>4</sup> At the same time the Portuguese and Armenian women and children crowded into the Fort, the militia declaring they would not fight unless their families were admitted.<sup>5</sup> About 500 were got safely on board ship, but enough remained—about 2,000—to throw everything into confusion.

18th June,  
1756.

The enemy were now (18th June) close to the Line of defence formed by the three outposts or batteries and the intervening European houses, and, immediate fighting being expected, orders were issued by Council to give no quarter, as the Fort prison was already crowded.<sup>6</sup> The attack opened

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 146; Vol. II., p. 22; Vol. III., p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 165.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., pp. 145, 257.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.





against the Northern Battery, but this was only a feint, and Ensign Walcot, who was ordered to make a sally, easily drove off the enemy. The real attack was against the Eastern Battery. An advance post at the Jail was occupied by a small detachment under Lieutenant Lebeaume, who, after a time, was reinforced by Ensign Carstairs. The fighting at the Jail was very fierce, and about 3 o'clock Captain Clayton ordered Lebeaume and Carstairs, both of whom had been wounded, to retire on his battery. A glance at the plan will show that between the Eastern and Southern Battery the only defences were the European houses on the East and South of the Great and Little Tanks. All these had been occupied by small detachments, but it is evident that as soon as the enemy effected an entry at any one point, they were in a position to take the East and South Batteries in the rear.<sup>1</sup> They made their first entry at Mr. Nixon's house at the south-east corner of the Little Tank, and almost immediately all the European houses were occupied by crowds of musketeers, who could not be dislodged by the British guns owing to the strength of the *pucca*<sup>2</sup> walls. Captain Buchanan was now ordered to withdraw his men from the Southern Battery to the Reserve Battery between the Tank and the Company's house, and there seemed to be no great danger as long as the Eastern Battery could be maintained; but the parties in the European houses on the south of the Tank had some difficulty in making their retreat, especially one composed of ten young gentlemen<sup>3</sup> under Lieutenant Blagg in Captain Minchin's house. Finding themselves cut off, they retired fighting to the roof, where they defended themselves until their ammunition was exhausted, and then sallying forth forced their way with the bayonet across the Park until they reached the shelter of the Fort. Two of them, Messrs. Charles Smith and Wilkinson, were killed, and the rest all wounded, but they slew 173 of the enemy.<sup>4</sup> So far the

<sup>1</sup> The East battery was, however, covered by the wall of the Park.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, masonry.

<sup>3</sup> Eight of them were Company's servants. Their names were Law, Ellis, Tooke, N. Drake, C. Smith, Wilkinson, Dodd, and Knapton. The other two, William Parker and Macpherson, were, I believe, seafaring men. Law, Drake, Dodd, Knapton, Parker, and Macpherson died in the Black Hole. Ellis lost his leg in the battle of the 5th February, and was killed in the troubles of 1763. Tooke was killed in 1757 in the attack on Chandernagore.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 261.





enemy had lost heavily, and it was even thought that the Nawab would give up the attempt in despair, and retreat in the night.<sup>1</sup> But Captain Clayton now considered it impossible to hold his battery any longer, and Mr. Holwell, his second in command, was sent to the Fort to ask for reinforcements or permission to retire. Knowing how fatal this step would be, the Adjutant, Captain Grant, persuaded Drake to promise reinforcements; but before Holwell and Grant could get back to that post Captain Clayton had abandoned it, leaving his guns behind him so carelessly spiked that the enemy were able to rebore and use them again the next day.<sup>2</sup> It was now necessary to recall Captain Buchanan from the Reserve Battery, and Captain-Lieutenant Smith from the North Battery, and to retreat upon the inner Line of defence—namely, the great houses which surrounded the Fort.

The same evening Ensign Piccard and his party at Perrin's were brought back to the Fort by boat, and the ships fell down the river below the Fort.

The position now was this: instead of having terrified the Nawab by the vigour of their resistance, the British had been beaten back in a few hours' fighting from a line which they had hoped to be able to defend for some days. The first thing then to be done was to secure the next line of defence—viz., the houses round the Fort, so Captain Clayton was ordered to occupy the Church, Lieutenant Bishop Mr. Eyre's house, Captain-Lieutenant Smith Mr. Cruttenden's, and Lieutenant Blagg the Company's house. Two experienced sea-captains were placed in charge of the guns of each bastion of the Fort.<sup>3</sup> The remaining *lascars* and *coolies* fled, and everyone who could pressed into the Fort.

Having provided for their immediate defence, a Council was called between 7 and 8 p.m.<sup>4</sup> to consider the state of affairs. Messrs. Manningham and Frankland had even during the day advised that the women should be sent on board. Council now accepted their offer to see them embarked, and ordered a detachment of thirty men to accompany them. It was not intended

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., pp. 34, 154.

<sup>2</sup> These being heavy guns did the British more damage than any of the others (Vol. II., p. 32; see also Vol. I., pp. 82, 114, 149, 259).

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 150.





that these gentlemen should go on board themselves, but apparently owing to the confusion and the impossibility of getting the guard together, they found it necessary to do so. Even then the crowding was so great that many of the ladies, including Mrs. Drake, Mrs. Mapletoft, Mrs. Coles, and Mrs. Wedderburn, were left behind. Some of these ladies were sent by Mr. Holwell on board the *Diligence*,<sup>1</sup> of which he was part owner, under the care of Lieutenant Lebeaume, who had been wounded in the fighting at the Jail; others were embarked by Mr. Baillie on the morning of the 19th.<sup>2</sup> Messrs. Manningham and Frankland were on board the *Dodalay* (of which they were also part owners), and remained there under pretence of waiting for the promised guard of thirty men—in fact, they actually caused the *Dodalay* to be moved a little way down the river clear of the other vessels.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile on shore the Council broke up about 8.30 p.m., after ordering the Company's treasure and books to be taken on board; but the Sub-Treasurer and Company's *Banyan*, who had the Treasury keys, were not to be found, and no one seemed to consider it his special duty to see to the matter,<sup>4</sup> so both the treasure and the books were left where they were. The French heard from native reports that Drake had embarked on the ships not only the Company's treasure, but the goods placed by the European and native inhabitants of Calcutta for safe custody in the Fort, and upon this rumour built up a romantic plot on the part of Drake, Manningham, and Frankland to ruin Calcutta simply with the object of enriching themselves. This they refer to melodramatically as the 'Mystery of Iniquity,'<sup>5</sup> though they could not understand why, if Drake and his fellow conspirators had determined to carry off the wealth of Calcutta, they made no preparations to have any ships manned and ready for their escape.<sup>6</sup> With Manningham and Frankland there

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 245.    <sup>2</sup> Vol. III., p. 297.    <sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 167, and Vol. II., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Messrs. Manningham and Frankland, who were the Treasurers, were on board (Vol. II., p. 141). Whether any of the books were put on board is unknown. It is said some were, and that they were destroyed by Drake and his friends, who asserted they had been lost. Some were found in the Fort after its recapture (Vol. II., p. 340), but whether these were all the books that were not destroyed in the siege is uncertain. The General Journals and a few other books are still in the office of the Comptroller-General of Indian Treasuries at Calcutta.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., pp. 23, 38, 49, 179, 208.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.





were on board a number of the militia officers—viz., Messrs. Mapletoft, Holmes, Wedderburn, Douglas, and Sumner<sup>1</sup>—who naturally took their orders from those two gentlemen. Captain Wedderburn and Mr. Holmes had been sent on board to ask them to return, but the only reply they could obtain was that they were waiting for the guard, with which message Captain Wedderburn<sup>2</sup> returned to the Fort.

The defenders of the Fort were now wearied out. The desertion of their servants left them without anyone to attend upon them, and there were no cooks left to prepare provisions, so that, though there was plenty of food, the men at the outposts were left to

'starve in the midst of plenty.'<sup>3</sup>

The fire from the houses on the south was so fierce that Lieutenant Blagg had to withdraw from the Company's house, and about 11 p.m. the Moors were heard under the walls. It was supposed they were preparing bamboo ladders to storm the Fort, but a few cannon shot put them to flight.

Two alarms were given in the course of the night; fortunately, they were false, for so tired out were the men that none of those off duty responded to the call to arms.<sup>4</sup>

19th June,  
1756.

Between 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning of the 19th June Mr. Drake and a number of other gentlemen held an informal Council.<sup>5</sup> Captain Witherington reported that the supply of ammunition had run short.<sup>6</sup> Other officers declared that the men were no longer under control, many of the militia were drunk, and some had even drawn their bayonets on the officers who called them to their duty. It was determined to abandon the Fort, but how or when to make the retreat could not be decided upon. Mr. Lindsay, who was lame,<sup>7</sup> was permitted to go on board, and was asked to order Messrs. Manningham and Frankland to come ashore with the other gentlemen; but as they saw no advantage in coming ashore simply to go on board again, they stayed where they were.<sup>8</sup> The Council was broken up suddenly by a

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> For Captain Wedderburn's subsequent career, see 'Bengal Obituary,' p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 153.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 167.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.





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cannon-ball coming into the Consultation Room.<sup>1</sup> It had been held in no sort of privacy; everyone knew there was to be a retreat, and no one knew how it was to be carried out, for some wished it to be at once, and others the next evening.

Mr. Holwell now begged Omichand, who had been all the time a prisoner, to go to the Nawab and ask for terms; but, enraged at the treatment he had received, or else perfectly certain that the Nawab was implacable, he refused to give any assistance, and was left to nurse his wrath in prison.

It has been already said that Messrs. Manningham and Frankland had ordered the *Dodalay* to drop down the river. This was because the cannon shot and fire-arrows passing over the Fort seemed likely to damage the ships, which were already crowded with women and children. Manningham and Frankland had assured Mr. Holwell they would not move out of range of the Fort, but in spite of this promise, about 9 a.m., the *Dodalay* began to move from opposite Mr. Margas' house towards Govindpur or Surman's Gardens.

On shore every effort had been made to bring the men to their duty, but the Armenians and Portuguese were too terrified to be of any use, and it was only by the personal efforts of Drake, Holwell, and Baillie that even the Europeans could be persuaded to resume their arms. To the surprise of the British, the natives had not seized the Company's house when Lieutenant Blagg had abandoned it, and now Ensign Piccard volunteered to reoccupy it with a small party of twenty-five men. About 9.30 a.m. he was brought back wounded. At the same time the enemy's shot began to fly about the Fort, the ships in the river weighed anchor and dropped down, and the boats, on which there was no guard, left the bank, and put off into the river or towards the other side. At this moment Captain Witherington came and whispered to the Governor that all the powder, except that which had been issued, was damp and useless. He was overheard by some of the Portuguese women, and a stampede ensued for the remaining boats, in which, it is said, some 200 women and children were drowned.<sup>2</sup>

Shouts now arose that the enemy were forcing the barriers which ran from the Fort to the waterside, and the capture of which would have cut off all retreat to the river. Drake ordered

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50, and Vol. III., p. 169.





the Factory gate leading to the water to be closed, and field-pieces to be brought up to defend the barriers; but no one paid any attention to his orders, and he saw crowds of gentlemen going down to the boats, amongst them Commandant Minchin and Mr. Macket.<sup>1</sup> Hitherto he had shown no want of courage,<sup>2</sup> however much he had been deficient in other qualities; but now, worn out with want of sleep<sup>3</sup> and distracted by the confusion around him, he thought that everyone was escaping from the Fort, and that he would be left alone to face the anger of the Nawab, who, he knew, was particularly incensed against him personally. He ran down to one of the last boats remaining at the Ghat,<sup>4</sup> and despite the remonstrances of the Adjutant, Captain Grant,<sup>5</sup> had himself rowed on board the *Dodalay*, being fired on from the shore until the last houses in the Settlement were passed.<sup>6</sup>

Captain Grant, who had accompanied Drake, immediately represented the necessity of the ships returning to the Fort to rescue the garrison,<sup>7</sup> but the Captain (Andrew Young) declared the attempt too dangerous;<sup>8</sup> and efforts to persuade other of the ships to put back were altogether unavailing, except in the case of the *Hunter* schooner. Its commander, Captain Nicholson, had to give up the attempt in despair as his *lascars* threatened to jump overboard as soon as his ship got up to the Dockhead.<sup>9</sup> Orme<sup>10</sup> expresses an opinion that the result would have been very different if Drake or some other man of rank had offered to lead the way; but as most of the ships belonged to private owners, who would not obey the Governor's commands, it was thought useless to issue any general

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Macket's wife was very ill, and this was his reason for going aboard (Vol. II., p. 39).

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III., p. 389.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. II., p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> Holwell asserts that, even if there were no more boats at the Crane or Fort Ghat, there were numbers of them along the shore, and that these did not put off until they saw the Governor make his escape (Vol. II., p. 46).

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Pearkes declared 'Captain Minchin's going occasioned not the least concern to anyone, but it was with great difficulty we could persuade ourselves Captain Grant had left us' (Vol. I., p. 201).

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 158. The French (Vol. I., p. 50) and Mr. Tooke (Vol. I., p. 263) say he was fired on by his own men.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I., pp. 87, 94.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. II., p. 45. On the 20th August Captain Young had the audacity to put in a claim for damages sustained by his ship during the siege.

<sup>9</sup> Vol. I., p. 159, and Vol. II., p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Orme MSS., O.V., 66, p. 147.





order to the ships to move up to the Fort. Some of the gentlemen on board tried to get ashore, but even Mr. Macket's offer of 1,000 rupees for a boat met with no response.<sup>1</sup> Thus many gallant men,<sup>2</sup> who had gone on board with full leave from their superiors, who had no intention of deserting their comrades, and who had stayed on board only under the impression that a general retreat was being made, were involved in the shameful action of their commanders. All that the latter did was to send up orders to the *Prince George*, which was still above the Fort, to drop down and take off the remainder of the garrison. The same evening the ships fell down below the Town to Govindpur,<sup>3</sup> at the extremity of the British territory.

At 3 p.m. Drake and his companions saw that the *Prince George* had run aground<sup>4</sup> opposite Omichand's house.<sup>5</sup> This was due to the pilot (Francis Morris), a Dutchman,<sup>6</sup> having lost his presence of mind. It appears that she might have been got off if Drake had only sent up a spare anchor; but this he or Captain Young refused to do, on the pretext that they could not spare any,<sup>7</sup> so she was left to her fate and burnt by the natives.<sup>8</sup> The Captain (Thomas Hague) and Messrs. Pearkes and Lewis, who had been sent up from the Fort, escaped to the Dutch, who surrendered them to the Nawab's officers.<sup>9</sup> They were soon after set free.

As evening drew in, the Dockhead, the Company's house, and Mr. Cruttenden's appeared in flames, and the fire and smoke hid the Fort from the sight of the fugitives.

On the morning of the 20th, the smoke having cleared away, Sunday, the Fort was distinctly visible, and the enemy appeared to be close under the walls. Signals were seen flying, but it was supposed that these were hung out by the natives to lure the ships back, and no notice was taken of them.<sup>10</sup> In the afternoon it was evident that the Fort had surrendered, and the ships fell down a little lower to Surman's Garden,<sup>11</sup> where they

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Holwell mentions especially Messrs. Mapletoft, Wedderburn, Douglas, and Sumner (Vol. I., p. 189; see also Vol. III., p. 389).

<sup>3</sup> The site of the present Fort William.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 159. Holwell says she ran aground at 11 a.m. (Vol. II., p. 44).

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25, note.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Vol. II., p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Watts says to Jungaraul (Vol. III., p. 335).





were joined by Messrs. Cooke and Lushington, and a few other fugitives.

Here the following ships were collected: the *Dodalay*, *Fame*, *Lively*, *Diligence*, *Ann*, *Fortune*, *London*, *Neptune*, *Calcutta*, *Hunter*, and four or five other small vessels.

21st June,  
1756.

On the morning of the 21st, as no prospect appeared of anyone else being able to join them, and there being some danger of pursuit, an attempt was made to pass below Tanna Fort; but the *Neptune* and the *Calcutta* ran aground, were captured by the natives, and plundered.<sup>1</sup> Apparently a number of the ladies fell into the hands of the Nawab's soldiers, but were well treated and immediately released, probably on the payment of a ransom.<sup>2</sup>

24th June,  
1756.

The evening of the same day they were joined by the ships *Speedwell* and *Bombay*,<sup>3</sup> which had forced the passage. Encouraged by this reinforcement, and having a favourable wind, the fleet, which had returned to Surman's, again attempted to pass Tanna, and was this time successful. On the 24th they passed Budge Budge, and were joined by the *Success* galley from Madras; but the same day the *Diligence* went ashore, and was plundered.<sup>4</sup>

It was now ascertained that the Nawab was fortifying Budge Budge, and had given orders to the country people not to supply the British with provisions,

'of which we were very short, not having a week's sustenance in the fleet of either food, wood, or water, every vessel being crowded with men, women, and children, country-born Portuguese.'<sup>5</sup>

25th June,  
1756.  
26th June,  
1756.

This forced them to set ashore all those who 'had no connection with the Europeans.' They then proceeded to Fulta, where, after writing to the Dutch for assistance on the 25th,<sup>6</sup> they arrived on the 26th June, and were secretly provided by the Dutch, who had

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Tooke says these ships could have been easily rescued (Vol. I., p. 296). These two ships and the *Diligence* were the richest in the fleet (Vol. II., p. 30).

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., pp. 52, 183.

<sup>3</sup> Holwell says these ships joined the fleet before the fall of the Fort (Vol. II., p. 13).

<sup>4</sup> The Captains and officers of the *Diligence* and ships wrecked at Tanna arrived at Chandernagore on the 2nd July (Vol. I., p. 53).

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.





a small Settlement there, with provisions, anchors, and other necessary stores.

Thus was successfully made, with comparatively little loss, a retreat which, from the circumstances attending it, seemed certain to be disastrous, for on the fleet there was no order and no discipline. The half-caste women were so little sensible of their danger that it was with the utmost difficulty that they could be persuaded to go below decks when the ships were under fire whilst passing Tanna Fort,<sup>1</sup> and a French account asserts that had the natives had a few gunners who knew their business not a ship would have escaped.<sup>2</sup> Whilst passing down they met a French ship, *Le Silhouette*, and forced the commander to give them some provisions.<sup>3</sup> So desperate was their condition that the French wrote to their captains to be on their guard lest the British should resort to violence in order to obtain supplies, and so possibly involve them in trouble with the Nawab.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.





## CHAPTER VI. THE BLACK HOLE.

‘There are some scenes in real life so full of misery and horror that the boldest imagination would not dare to feign them for fear of shocking credibility.’  
—HOLWELL.<sup>1</sup>

19th June,  
1756.

As soon as the desertion of Drake and Minchin was known to the remnant of the inmates in the Fort, there followed an outburst of rage and horror, which was only quieted by the necessities of their position. Without counting the Armenians and Portuguese, they found that they numbered 170 men<sup>2</sup> capable of defence.<sup>3</sup> A council was hurriedly called. Drake and the other fugitive members of Council were suspended,<sup>4</sup> and it was decided to supersede Mr. Pearkes, the senior member of Council present, and to call upon Mr. Holwell to take the command. The exact reasons for this choice are unknown.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Holwell was the oldest of the members of Council, having entered the Company's service at a later age than most, but he was not popular, and afterwards attempts were made to prove that he himself had contemplated flight, and was only prevented by others having run off with his boat.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, his position as *Zamindar* or Magistrate of Calcutta must have brought him into contact with all classes of the community, and so, whether he was popular or not, must have acquainted people with his capacity for command. Mr. Pearkes offered to give place to him in military matters, but wished to keep the post of Civil Governor. Mr. Holwell refused

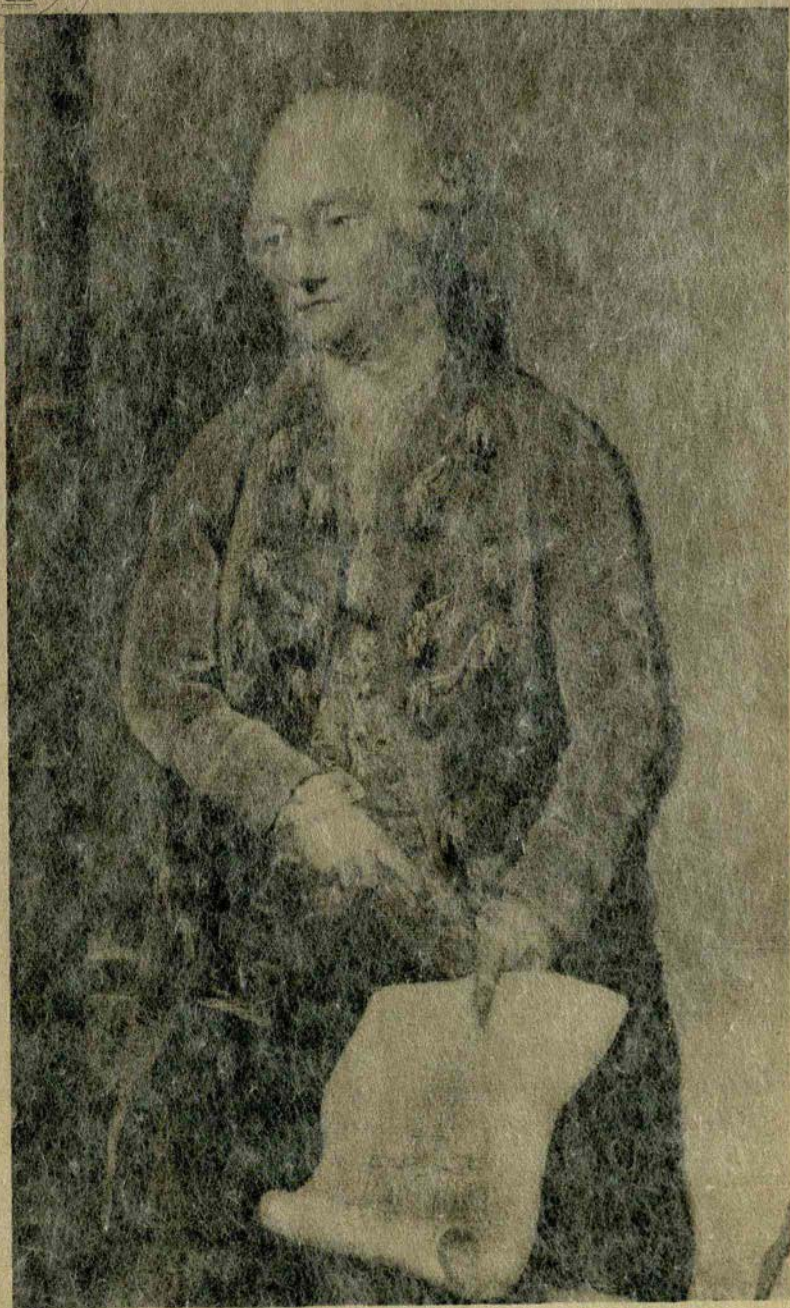
<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> ‘More than 200 men’ (Law, Vol. III., p. 169). This is more likely the correct figure.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. II., p. 29. <sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 113, and Vol. III., p. 341. <sup>5</sup> Vol. III. 341, 342.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 168. For his reply, see Vol. II., p. 47.





JOHN ZEPHANIAH HOLWELL.



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a divided responsibility, and Mr. Pearkes gave in, so Mr. Holwell was appointed Governor and Administrator of the Company's affairs during the troubles.<sup>1</sup> Captain Lewis was at the same time appointed Master Attendant in place of Captain Graham, who was absent from Calcutta. It was determined to carry out the retreat—previously agreed on in the Council of the 18th—by means of the *Prince George*<sup>2</sup> and one of the Moor ships which had been taken at the beginning of the siege.<sup>3</sup> To effect this it was necessary to send messengers to Captain Hague. Messrs. Pearkes and Lewis volunteered, and what happened to them has been already narrated. The small number of men remaining on shore made it not only impossible to hold the surrounding houses, but very unlikely that the defenders would be able to hold the Fort itself. Mr. Holwell therefore recalled the parties in the Church and the houses belonging to Messrs. Cruttenden and Eyre, and with the other gentlemen went round the walls, declaring his 'abhorrence' of Drake's cowardly action, and swearing to defend the place to the last, whilst to encourage the men he promised that three chests of treasure which were in the Fort should be distributed amongst them if they would hold out until a retreat could be effected. Signals were at the same time hoisted to induce the fleet to return.<sup>4</sup>

Thus encouraged, the garrison stood gallantly to their defence, but though the enemy's big guns were perhaps purposely too badly served by the French and Portuguese gunners to produce any great effect,<sup>5</sup> the musketry from the houses was so deadly that many men were killed, and it was almost impossible to stand upon the ramparts. Nothing was known of the *Prince George* being aground, but everyone was convinced that after their panic was over the men on board would bring up the fleet again. In this vain hope they passed a terrible night, the darkness of which was lit up by the flames of the houses burning all round them. The soldiers now refused obedience to their officers, broke open the rooms of the gentlemen and officers who had deserted the Fort, and made themselves drunk with the liquor they found there and

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II., p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Holwell always calls this ship the *Saint George*, but the Log of the *Prince George* shows that she was the ship present.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 185.    <sup>4</sup> Vol. III., p. 298.    <sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 114, and Vol. III., p. 73.





in the warehouses. In the night a corporal and fifty-six soldiers, chiefly Dutch, deserted to the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

With break of day on the 20th June—the most fatal Sunday ever known in Calcutta—the enemy assailed the Fort on every side, but in spite of their immense superiority in numbers and the demoralization of the British, they were repulsed with loss. On the other hand the defenders had lost heavily, forty men being killed and wounded on a single bastion.<sup>2</sup> The ammunition was almost entirely expended, and Captain Witherington and Mr. Baillie urged upon Holwell the necessity of asking for a truce. This he refused to do until the enemy had been convinced of the ability of the garrison to repulse them, as that would give a much better prospect of success;<sup>3</sup> so the fighting went on till noon, when there was a general cessation.<sup>4</sup> The British had now lost 25 men killed and 70 wounded, and all but 14 of the artillery were killed.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that when Drake left the Fort the fact that Omichand was imprisoned was generally forgotten; but on Sunday morning Holwell recalled the matter to mind, and persuaded him to write a letter to Raja Mānik Chand, one of the Nawab's favourites, asking his intercession. This was despatched, and about 2 o'clock Holwell was notified that a man had appeared in the street opposite the Fort gate making signs to the defenders to stop firing. Holwell accordingly hailed him from the ramparts, and was told that if fighting ceased an accommodation might be come to. Thinking this was the result of Omichand's letter, and hoping to amuse the enemy till nightfall, when a retreat might be effected, either on the *Prince George* or by land, to the ships, Holwell hoisted a flag of truce and told the men to rest and refresh themselves; but about 4 o'clock, when they had laid down their arms, word was brought to him that the Moors were crowding close up to the walls, and at the same moment that the little gate leading from the Fort to the river had been burst open by a Dutch sergeant named Hedleburgh<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., pp. 42, 102, 108, 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> This cessation of fighting for rest and refreshment at mid-day seems to have been usual in Indian armies—e.g., the 'Seir Mutaqherin' (vol. ii., p. 353) tells us that Captain Knox took advantage of it to surprise the camp of Kāmgār Khān. The natives thought that the British habit of effecting surprises of this kind and of making night attacks was contrary to the etiquette of war

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 114, and Vol. II., p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 185.





and delivered to the enemy, possibly in collusion with the Dutch soldiers who had deserted the night before.<sup>1</sup> Immediately after the natives scaled the walls on all sides by means of bamboos, which they used as ladders,

\* with precipitation scarce credible to Europeans,<sup>2</sup>

and cut to pieces all who resisted, especially all those who wore red coats,<sup>3</sup> amongst them Lieutenant Blagg, who refused to lay down his sword. Mr. Holwell and the other gentlemen, who expected no mercy from the Nawab, now prepared to die fighting, but a native officer approaching and offering them quarter, they surrendered their arms. Mr. Holwell was taken to a part of the ramparts from which he could see the Nawab, to whom he made his *salaam*. This was courteously returned. Immediately all fighting ceased, and the common people, who had run out of the Fort and were trying to escape by the river, in which effort many were drowned, were induced to deliver themselves up. The Nawab was carried round to the riverside in his litter with his younger brother, and then entered the Fort. He had that evening three interviews with Mr. Holwell. To the first Mr. Holwell had been brought with his hands bound. The Nawab released him from his bonds, and promised him on the word of a soldier that no harm should befall him.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, he expressed great anger at the presumption of the British in resisting him, and much displeasure against Mr. Drake,<sup>5</sup> ordering the Government or Factory House, which he supposed to belong to him, to be burnt down. He admired the European houses, and said the British were fools to force him to destroy so fine a town. After a time he left the Fort, and took up his abode in Mr. Wedderburn's house.<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese and Armenians were allowed to go free and disappeared,<sup>7</sup> and several of the Europeans simply walked out of the Fort, making their escape to Hugli or the ships at Surman's.<sup>8</sup> About this time a certain Leech, the Company's carpenter, came to inform Mr. Holwell that he could carry him out of the Fort by a secret passage, and that he had a boat ready in which they

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., pp. 155, 300.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. II., p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., pp. 60, 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. II., p. 182, and Vol. III., p. 301.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. I., p. 43.





might escape. Mr. Holwell, however, refused to leave the other gentlemen, and Leech gallantly resolved to stay with him and share his fortunes. So far everything seemed to be going well. The native soldiers had plundered the Europeans of their valuables, but did not ill-treat them, and the Muhammadan priests were occupied in singing a song of thanksgiving.<sup>1</sup> Suddenly the scene changed. Some European soldiers<sup>2</sup> had made themselves drunk and assaulted the natives. The latter complained to the Nawab, who asked where the Europeans were accustomed to confine soldiers who had misbehaved in any way. He was told in the Black Hole, and, as some of his officers suggested it would be dangerous to leave so many prisoners at large during the night, ordered that they should all be confined in it. The native officers, who were enraged at the great losses inflicted on them by the defenders, for it is said 7,000 perished in the siege,<sup>3</sup> applied this order to all the prisoners without distinction, and to the number of 146 they were crowded into a little chamber intended to hold only one or two private soldiers, and only about 18 feet square,<sup>4</sup> and this upon one of the hottest nights of the year. The dreadful suffering that followed, the madness which drove the prisoners to trample each other down and to fight for the water which only added to their torture, the insults they poured upon their jailors in order to induce them to fire on them and so end their misery,<sup>5</sup> and the brutal delight of the native soldiers at a sight which they looked upon as a *tamāshā*, are all told in Mr. Holwell's narrative,<sup>6</sup> than which nothing more pathetic is to be found in the annals of the British in India. From 7 o'clock in the evening to 6 o'clock in the morning this agony lasted, for even the native officers who pitied them dared not disturb the Nawab before he awoke from his slumbers,

21st June,  
1756.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 160. Some accounts say it was the Dutch who deserted on the night of the 19th (Vol. III., p. 155).

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., pp. 115, 171, 186. Other accounts say 12,000 to 15,000 (Vol. III., p. 79). The French and Dutch reported 2,000 wounded in the hospital at Hugli.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. C. R. Wilson has ascertained that the exact dimensions were 18 feet by 14 feet 10 inches (*Indian Church Review*).

<sup>5</sup> Vol. III., p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-152.





when only twenty-three of one hundred and forty-six who went in came out alive, the ghastlyest forms that were ever seen alive, from this infernal scene of horror.<sup>1</sup>

The survivors included the one woman who is known to have gone into the Black Hole with her husband.

The Nawab had sent for Mr. Holwell to know what had become of the money which his officers told him must have been hidden in the Fort, for his men had found in the Treasury of the richest of the European Settlements only the miserable amount of 50,000 rupees, or about £6,250. Holwell vainly protested his ignorance, and reproached the Nawab with his breach of faith. The Nawab would listen to nothing, and Holwell and three others of the survivors—viz., Messrs. Court and Burdet and Ensign Walcot—were handed over to Mir Madan as prisoners.<sup>2</sup> All of them had offended Omichand, and he was now in high favour with the Nawab, as was also Krishna Dās, both of whom he had released, and who had received from him dresses of honour. It was supposed that to gratify their revenge these two men invented the tale of the hidden treasure.

Mir Madan took his prisoners in a common bullock-cart to 22nd June. Omichand's garden. On the 22nd they were marched in a <sup>1756.</sup> hot sun to the Dockhead, and lodged in an open verandah facing the river. Here their bodies burst out into terrible boils, caused, as they supposed, by the excessive perspiration during their confinement in the Black Hole. On the 24th—apparently with- <sup>24th June</sup> out the Nawab's orders—they were embarked on a boat and sent <sup>1756.</sup> to Murshidabad, enduring hardships on the way which make it wonderful that in their weak state they were able to survive at all. From everyone but their guards—from the French, Dutch, and Armenians, and even from poor natives who had served the British in happier days—they met with acts of pity and kindness.

<sup>1</sup> Orme MSS., O.V., 66, p. 145. Holwell afterwards erected a monument to his fellow-sufferers, on or near the spot where their bodies were buried, just outside of the east gate of the Fort. This was probably some time in 1758-1759, when he was Governor of Bengal. The monument, which was of brick, fell into disrepair, and was further damaged by lightning, and finally, in 1821, the then Governor-General, the Marquis of Hastings, ordered it to be pulled down. Lord Curzon has recently replaced it by a marble replica.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II., p. 52, and Vol. III., pp. 145, 303.





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The Nawab had sent for Mr. Holwell to know what had become of the money which his officers told him must have been hidden in the Fort, for his men had found in the Treasury of the richest of the European Settlements only the miserable amount of 50,000 rupees, or about £6,250. Holwell vainly protested his ignorance, and reproached the Nawab with his breach of faith. The Nawab would listen to nothing, and Holwell and three others of the survivors—viz., Messrs. Court and Burdet and Ensign Walcot—were handed over to Mir Madan as prisoners.<sup>2</sup> All of them had offended Omichand, and he was now in high favour with the Nawab, as was also Krishna Dās, both of whom he had released, and who had received from him dresses of honour. It was supposed that to gratify their revenge these two men invented the tale of the hidden treasure.

Mir Madan took his prisoners in a common bullock-cart to 22nd June, 1756. Omichand's garden. On the 22nd they were marched in a hot sun to the Dockhead, and lodged in an open verandah facing the river. Here their bodies burst out into terrible boils, caused, as they supposed, by the excessive perspiration during their confinement in the Black Hole. On the 24th—apparently with- 24th June 1756. out the Nawab's orders—they were embarked on a boat and sent to Murshidabad, enduring hardships on the way which make it wonderful that in their weak state they were able to survive at all. From everyone but their guards—from the French, Dutch, and Armenians, and even from poor natives who had served the British in happier days—they met with acts of pity and kindness.

<sup>1</sup> Orme MSS., O.V., 66, p. 145. Holwell afterwards erected a monument to his fellow-sufferers, on or near the spot where their bodies were buried, just outside of the east gate of the Fort. This was probably some time in 1758-1759, when he was Governor of Bengal. The monument, which was of brick, fell into disrepair, and was further damaged by lightning, and finally, in 1821, the then Governor-General, the Marquis of Hastings, ordered it to be pulled down. Lord Curzon has recently replaced it by a marble replica.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II., p. 52, and Vol. III., pp. 145, 303.





7th July,  
1756.

On the 7th July they arrived at Murshidabad,<sup>1</sup> where they were again imprisoned. The Nawab arrived on the 11th July, but he did not see them until the 16th.

16th July,  
1756.

'The wretched spectacle we made must, I think, have made an impression on a breast the most brutal, and if he is capable of pity or contrition his heart felt it then. I think it appeared, in spite of him, in his countenance. He gave me no reply, but ordered a *sootapurdar* and *chubdar* immediately to see our irons cut off, and to conduct us wherever we chose to go, and to take care we received no trouble nor insult; and having repeated this order distinctly, directed his retinue to go on.'<sup>2</sup>

It appears that the Nawab's grandmother, the widow of Alivirdi, and probably also his mother, Amīna Begam,<sup>3</sup> had interceded for the prisoners. On the other hand, there were not wanting persons to advise that so bold a man as Holwell should not be allowed to go free, and that he should be sent down to Calcutta, where the native Governor, Mānik Chand, would know how to make him give up the secret of the hidden treasure, or at any rate to exact a ransom from him. Sirāj-uddaula replied with unexpected generosity:

'It may be. If he has anything left, let him keep it. His sufferings have been great. He shall have his liberty.'<sup>4</sup>

12th-13th  
August, 1756.

The released prisoners repaired joyfully to the Dutch Mint,<sup>5</sup> where they were kindly treated. Towards the end of the month they made their way down to Hugli, and a little later rejoined the rest of the British at Fulta on the 12th or 13th August. Here Ensign Walcot, who had been wounded during the siege, died of the hardships he had subsequently undergone.<sup>6</sup>

We must now return to the Fort. Besides Holwell and his three companions, the following persons survived the Black Hole: Messrs. Cooke, Lushington, Captains Mills and Dickson; fourteen seamen and soldiers, viz., Patrick Moran, John and Thomas

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sykes says they passed Cossimbazar on the 8th July (Vol. I., p. 61).

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III., p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> The interest of these ladies in the English merchants may have been partly due to the fact that they also were accustomed to speculate in commerce. Mr. Forth mentions (Vol. II., p. 63) how very angry Amīna Begam was with Omichand for getting the better of them in the sale of some opium and saltpetre at Calcutta.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. III., p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 115, and Vol. III., p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> On the 12th September, 1756 (Vol. III., p. 21).





Meadows, John Angel, John Burgaft, John Arndt, John Jones, Philip Cosall, Peter Thomas, John Gatliff, John Boirs, Barnard Clelling, Richard Aillery,<sup>1</sup> and John Roop,<sup>2</sup> and one woman, Mrs. Carey. Mr. Drake<sup>3</sup> says there were twenty-five survivors. He probably includes Captain Purnell and Lieutenant Talbot, who died after being let out.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Scrafton says<sup>5</sup> that many others showed signs of life, and might have been revived with a little care and attention. One of these, according to a French account, was Mr. Eyre, a member of Council.<sup>6</sup>

The same day, the 21st, the Nawab ordered all Europeans to <sup>21st June, 1756.</sup> quit the Town under penalty of losing their nose and ears, and renamed the place Alinagar—that is, city of Alī.<sup>7</sup> He also gave orders to build a mosque in the Fort. This was done, and a part of the east curtain pulled down to make room for it.

Those of the survivors who were able to walk now left the Town. Messrs. Cooke and Lushington joined the ships at Surman's Garden.<sup>8</sup>

‘Their appearance, and the dreadful tale they had to tell, were the severest of reproaches to those on board, who, intent only on their own preservation, had made no effort to facilitate the escape of the rest of the garrison.’<sup>9</sup>

Captains Mills<sup>10</sup> and Dickson, Mr. Patrick Moran, and a fourth man whose name is lost, reached Surman's after the ships had started. There one of the Nawab's officers advised them to return for fear of insult and possible ill-treatment, so they came back to Govindpur, where they were secretly fed by natives who had lived under the British flag in Calcutta. The Nawab now permitting the inhabitants to return to Calcutta, they joined Messrs. John Knox<sup>11</sup> and George Gray, and took up their abode in the house of the former, where they were assisted by Omichand; but on

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> ‘East Indian Chronologist.’

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> I think that probably Ensign Carstairs also went through the ordeal of the Black Hole (Vol. I., p. 189, and Vol. II., p. 27).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Reflections,’ p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264. Probably after his grandfather, Alivirdi Khān.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. I., pp. 43, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Orme MSS., O.V., 66, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Vol. I., p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. John Knox, senior, was one of the Company's surgeons. John Knox, junior, had also been trained as a surgeon (*Ives' Journal*, p. 189), but made his living as a supercargo. I mention this because Captain Mills' notes (Vol. I., pp. 40-45) are so rough that one might suspect the accuracy of such details as ‘two Doctors Noxes’; yet, wherever I have been able to find further information, he proves to be always correct.





1st July,  
1756.

10th August,  
1756.

the 30th June a drunken soldier killed a Muhammadan, and the Europeans were again expelled on the following day.<sup>1</sup> They then retreated to the French Gardens and so to Hugli and Chandernagore, whence they were enabled to get down to Fulta on the 10th August. At Chandernagore there were no less than 110 sick and wounded British soldiers in the French hospital.<sup>2</sup> Many of these were really French or Dutch, and some of them, it appears, enlisted either now or later on under the French flag.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to estimate the actual loss of the British. In the Black Hole 123 perished, of whom we can trace the names of only 56;<sup>4</sup> between 50 and 100 must have perished in the fighting or died of their sufferings during the siege or at Fulta,<sup>5</sup> and, if general rumour can be trusted, many whites and half-castes were drowned in the effort to escape.<sup>6</sup>

I have mentioned that before the siege Council sent word to the up-country Factories to take precautions. Messrs. Amyatt and Boddam, the Chiefs of Luckipur (or Jagdea) and Balasore, managed to escape with much of the Company's property, but at Dacca there was no possibility of doing so. The Chief, Mr. Becher, was forced to surrender his Factory to the *Naib* or Deputy Nawab,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I., pp. 45, 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. III., p. 226.

<sup>4</sup> These were the Rev. Gervas Bellamy; Messrs. Jenks, Reveley, Law, Coles or Cotes, Valicourt, Jebb, Torriano, Edward and Stephen Page, Grub, Street, Harrod, Patrick Johnstone, Ballard, Nathan Drake, Carse, Knaption, Gosling, Byng, Dodd, Dalrymple; Captains Clayton, Buchanan, Witherington; Lieutenants Hays, Simson, Bellamy; Ensigns Scot, Hastings, Wedderburn; and Messrs. Dumbleton, Abraham, Cartwright, Bleau, Hunt, Osborne, Leach, Porter, Henry and William Stopford, Robert Carey, Caulker, Bendall, Atkinson, Jennings, Meadows, Reid or Read, Barnett, Frere, Wilson, Burton, Tilley, Lyon, Alsop, Hillier. Lord Curzon adds to this list the name of Eleanor Weston, and a few of the names of those I have given as being killed during the fighting.

<sup>5</sup> The only names I can trace are Messrs. Thomas Bellamy, Thoresby, Charles Smith, Wilkinson; Captain-Lieutenant Smith, Messrs. Collins, Tidecombe, Pickering, Whitby, Baillie; Lieutenants Bishop and Blagg; Ensign Piccard; Messrs. Peter Carey, Stevenson, Guy, Parker, Eyre, Purnell; Lieutenant Talbot; the Rev. Mr. Mapletoft; Messrs. Hyndman, Vasmer, Lindsay; Drs. Inglis and Wilson; Lieutenant Keene; Ensign Walcot; Messrs. Daniel and James Macpherson, Derrickson, Margas, Graham, Best, Baldwin, Surman, Bruce, Coverley, Osborne, Montrong, Coquelin, Janniko, Johnson, Laing, Nicholson, Maria Cornelius, Mrs. Cruttenden, Mrs. Gooding, Mrs. Bellamy, and Charlotte Becher.

<sup>6</sup> M. Renault (Vol. I., p. 208) probably underestimates the loss when he puts it at only 200. He adds that 3,000 refugees—*i.e.*, half-castes, Armenians, and Portuguese—came to Chandernagore.





Dasarath Khān, but was allowed to take shelter with his subordinates and the English ladies in the French Factory, where he was very kindly received by the Chief, M. Courtin. The influence of M. Courtin, supported by that of M. Law at Murshidabad, obtained their ultimate release, though M. Law says :

'Siraj-uddāula, being informed that there were two or three very charming English ladies there, was strongly tempted to adorn his harem with them.'<sup>1</sup>

This is probably a libel. It was not the custom of the Muhammadans to ill-treat ladies, and Sirāj-uddaula had had in his grandfather a good example of chivalry to the women-folk of his enemies,<sup>2</sup> and as a matter of fact the whole of the party escaped safely to Fulta, where they arrived on the 26th August in a sloop lent them by M. Courtin.<sup>3</sup> M. Renault tells us that Dasarath Khān found in the Dacca Factory merchandise and silver worth ₹4,00,000 rupees,<sup>4</sup> which will give the reader some idea of the value of the British up-country trade.

The only Factory in Bengal that remained in the possession of the British was the little out-station of Bulramgurry at the mouth of the Balasore River, which,

'by its situation, having escaped the Government's notice, and by the prudent conduct of Mr. John Bristow<sup>5</sup> (left resident at Ballasore by Mr. Boddam), is still retained.'<sup>6</sup>

We shall hear of this little place again.

The loss of its Factories in Bengal was a very serious one, and the damage done to the Company was calculated as being at least 95 *lakhs* of rupees, exclusive of the interruption of trade.<sup>7</sup> Clive wrote home that the losses of private persons exceeded ₹2,000,000,<sup>8</sup> and the Nawab's revenues were diminished by the ruin of trade throughout the province, for everyone was now afraid to have any dealings with the Europeans. And after having effected all this damage, the Nawab had found in the Fort the trifling sum of some 50,000 rupees.

Before leaving the subject a few words may be added in reference to the behaviour of the Europeans generally. As regards the servants of the Company in civil employ, no less than twenty-five out of

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. II., p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> 'Seir Mutaqherin,' vol. i., p. 340, and vol. ii., p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. I., p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> Vol. I., p. 293.

<sup>7</sup> A surgeon.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. II., p. 210.





the fifty-three present in Calcutta perished in the fighting or in the Black Hole; five survived the Black Hole and many others were wounded; of the two clergymen, one died in the Black Hole; of the military, all the officers, except the Commandant and Captain Grant, did their duty to the end of the siege, and, with the exception of Ensigns Walcot and Carstairs, perished in the fighting or the Black Hole. In the medical profession we find the Company's surgeons, Drs. Inglis and Fullerton, and the private practitioners, Drs. Gray, Taylor, and John Knox, senior. All of them stayed in Calcutta up to the fall of the Fort, except, perhaps, Dr. Fullerton, a man of known courage, who, if he was on board Drake's fleet, must have been there in his professional capacity. In the sea-faring profession there were a number of Europeans who served ashore until ordered on board their ships. Many of these were killed or wounded, and it is difficult to believe that their failure to relieve the remnant of the garrison was due to any cause but the unwillingness of the shipowners to risk their overcrowded and undermanned vessels or the difficulty of moving them up in the two tides which intervened between Drake's desertion and the capture of the Fort.

Ever since the story of the Black Hole became generally known there have been vague rumours that several of the sufferers were women, but we know for certain of only one, a Mrs. Carey, the wife of a seafaring man, who himself died in the Black Hole. Later on<sup>1</sup> she said that her mother and young sister were with her, and that they died either there or earlier in the siege. The only accounts which mention women as entering the Black Hole state that there was one woman only,<sup>2</sup> yet the *Calcutta Gazette* for the 19th October, 1815, mentions the death of a Mrs. Knox, who is said to have been the last survivor of the

'horrid scene of the Black Hole in 1756. She was at that time fourteen years of age, and the wife of a Doctor Knox.'<sup>3</sup>

Probably the reference to the Black Hole is an amplification, for in the careless talk of Calcutta the Black Hole and Fort William seem to have been often confounded.

<sup>1</sup> Busteed's 'Old Calcutta,' third edition, 1897, pp. 35-37.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III., pp. 170, 302, and Orme MSS., O.V., 66, p. 146. 'The only one of her sex amongst the sufferers.'

<sup>3</sup> This entry was pointed out to me by Lieutenant-Colonel D. G. Crawford, I.M.S.





As to the sufferings of the women in other ways we have various fragments of information. In the Mayor's Court Proceedings of the 3rd May, 1757, it is stated that one Maria Cornelius was killed during the siege.<sup>1</sup> Hickey's *Bengal Gazette*, March 3rd to 10th, 1781, records the funeral of a Mrs. Bower, who hid herself in one of the warehouses on the capture of the Fort, and then made her escape on board of a small vessel lying in the river. In the church at Bandel there is to be found the tombstone of one Elizabeth de Sylva, who was buried on the 21st November, 1756, having 'died of sufferings caused by the war waged by the Moors against the British.' On page 6 of Buckle's 'Memoir of the Services of the Bengal Artillery' there is given an inscription found written in charcoal on the wall of a small mosque near Chunar saying that one Ann Wood, wife of Lieutenant John Wood, had been kept there as a prisoner by Mir Jafar, and that she had been

'taken out of the house at Calcutta, where so many unhappy gentlemen suffered.'

Possibly this refers to the Black Hole, but more likely to Fort William. This is all that is known positively about the sufferings of the women during the siege, but there can be little doubt that many of the lower classes were killed or drowned or died of the hardships they were exposed to,<sup>2</sup> and that others were carried away by the native soldiers.<sup>3</sup> A French account says that 100 white women and as many white children were carried up country.<sup>4</sup> It is hardly necessary to point out that there were not so many white women or white children in Calcutta, and the lists of the refugees at Fulta show that almost all the white ladies and children were on board the ships that escaped.<sup>5</sup> We have already noticed the kindness of Mir Jafar's officer, Omar Beg, to the British at the attack on Cossimbazar, and Ghulam Husain tells us<sup>6</sup> that this officer restored to their husbands a number of English ladies who had fallen into his hands. How they came into his hands is not known, but it was probably at the time when the *Neptune*, *Calcutta*, and *Diligence* were wrecked.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 50, and Vol. III., p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I., p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. III., p. 76. In Buckle's 'Memoirs of the Bengal Artillery,' p. 6, note, there is a reference to a young boy who was carried up country and made a eunuch by his captors.

<sup>6</sup> 'Seir Mutaqherin,' vol. ii., p. 290.





## CHAPTER VII.

## HOW THE NEWS WAS SENT HOME.

‘All London is in consternation.’—*Courrier d'Avignon*.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the fleet arrived at Fulta, Drake and the Council took measures to inform the Madras authorities of the disaster which had befallen them, but advised that the news should not be sent home until the Council of Fort St. George could also announce at the same time that they had taken steps for the recovery of Calcutta. No formal official account was ever sent. This was promised in Council's letter of the 17th September, 1756,<sup>2</sup> but owing to the impossibility of composing a narrative which all the members of Council would consent to sign, the latter stated in their letter of the 31st January, 1757,<sup>3</sup> that they left the Directors to draw their own conclusions from the several private and official letters already transmitted.

News of the capture of Fort William arrived at Madras on the 16th August, 1756,<sup>4</sup> but did not reach London until the 2nd June, 1757, on which day the *London Chronicle*<sup>5</sup> published a short paragraph from Paris dated the 27th May giving the first intimation of the disaster. On the 4th June this was confirmed by letters brought by the *Portfield*, *Edgecote*, and *Chesterfield*, which arrived on the coast of Ireland on the 28th and 29th May.<sup>6</sup>

How was it the news came first to Paris? It was known there as early as the 21st May, for the *Courrier d'Avignon* of the 27th May gives it as Paris news of the 21st, though the *Gazettes de France* do not mention it until the 18th June, when they publish it as news from

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I., p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. II., p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I., p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> The Scotch papers have the same news as the English, generally about a week later (see Appendix II.).

<sup>6</sup> Vol. III., p. 26.





London of the 7th June. As a matter of fact, it had come overland from the Persian Gulf owing to the enterprise of a French Agent. It had been sent from Madras to Bombay, and thence despatched at the end of October in duplicate by the *Edgecote* direct to England,<sup>1</sup> and by the *Phoenix* to Bussora,<sup>2</sup> to be transmitted thence overland. A letter from Gombroon of the 28th November, 1756, says the *Phoenix* arrived there the preceding day, and a letter from Bussora dated 27th January, 1757, says she was wrecked near Bushire. The *Gazette d'Utrecht* of the 2nd June tells us the remainder of the story.<sup>3</sup> The pilot or supercargo of the *Phoenix* was indiscreet, and by the 26th January the news was known in the town. The French Agent thought the report was confirmed by the appearance and conduct of the British Agent, who appeared very much distressed, and who was at the same time engaged in buying up all the Indian goods he could find in the market. He accordingly sent word via Constantinople to Paris.

As far as can be gathered from the Court Minutes the Directors did their best to minimize the panic which struck London on the arrival of the news, and in doing this they were much assisted by the accompanying information that the Madras authorities were despatching a force for the recovery of Calcutta, and by the arrival on the 22nd July<sup>4</sup> of the despatches by the *Syren* announcing the recovery of Fort William. She had sailed from Calcutta on the 2nd February,<sup>5</sup> and arrived at Plymouth on the 19th July.<sup>6</sup>

The advices which arrived by the India ships contained no authentic details of the loss of life, but this defect was partly supplied in private letters. These were published, but without the writers' names.

As regards the loss of property, the Directors congratulated themselves that the disaster could not have happened at a time less harmful for the Company, for it took place after the despatch of the *Denham* in March, which ship had cleared the warehouses of all the fine goods, and before any others could be brought in from the *aurungs*. Also no ships had landed any treasure or cargo there since the sailing of the *Denham*.

<sup>1</sup> Arrived at Limerick on the 28th May (Court Minutes, 10 June, 1757).

<sup>2</sup> Abstracts of Bombay Letters, 30th October, 1756 (India Office).

<sup>3</sup> Vol. III., p. 117. <sup>4</sup> Vol. II., p. 455. <sup>5</sup> Vol. III., p. 24. <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.





On the 27th July the Court passed an order dismissing Captain Minchin and summoning him home immediately,<sup>1</sup> but refrained from coming to any decision about Mr. Drake, except in so far as they omitted his name from the new Council which they nominated. Curiously enough, Colonel Clive's name was also omitted from this list in the Court's General Letter which was despatched on the 11th November, 1757, and arrived in Calcutta late in 1758. On the 27th January, 1758, the Court resolved—

'That Roger Drake, Esq., late President of Bengal, be continued in the Company's service, and remain as and at the head of the Senior Merchants and with their appointments, without interfering in the Company's affairs.'

This seems to be all that was done by the Court in the way of punishment for the loss of the finest Settlement they possessed in the Indies. It is true that at the end of the year 1759 Dr. Hugh Baillie attempted to induce the Court to open an inquiry into Mr. Drake's behaviour, but as he was not in a position to produce any positive evidence of the Governor's misconduct, the Committee of Correspondence informed Mr. Drake

'that they did not think fit to proceed further in the said matter.'

Such indifference appears somewhat strange, but it must be remembered that the East India Company was a trading company, and the Directors possibly thought it a waste of time to enter into an inquiry which would have necessitated the bringing of witnesses many thousands of miles, and their detention in England for probably many months. Further, the contradictory evidence already given by the chief officials in their private and official letters rendered it extremely doubtful whether any definite conclusion could be come to—*i.e.*, any conclusion which would warrant the punishment of any particular person;<sup>2</sup> and, lastly, though there had been a great loss of property, the treaty with Mir Jafar soon furnished not only the Company, but private

<sup>1</sup> Captain Minchin did not return to England. He died in Calcutta on the 5th January, 1758.

<sup>2</sup> There was even danger of a Court of Inquiry laying the whole blame upon the policy of the Court of Directors, for we find Clive writing: 'I shall only add that there never was that attention paid to the advice of military men at Calcutta as was consistent with the safety of the place when in danger—a total ignorance of which was the real cause of the loss of Fort William' (Vol. II., p. 245).





individuals with ample compensation. It was true that many Europeans had been killed, and that London especially had lost a number of very promising young men

<sup>1</sup> 'belonging to the best families in London,'<sup>1</sup>

but such losses were frequent amongst traders in foreign parts—*e.g.*, the loss of life was even more severe when the *Doddington* was wrecked.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances were doubtless particularly painful, but the Nawab, whom everyone held responsible for the Black Hole tragedy, was dead, and the newspapers published not infrequently accounts of sufferings almost as terrible endured by sailors in time of war.<sup>3</sup> In short, it was one of those unfortunate incidents which good business men would think best forgotten. Accordingly, the Court of Directors limited its action to the recall of Drake and Minchin, the promotion of a few of its servants, the recommendation of certain pilots and merchants to the Council's attention, in case anything should turn up in their line, and to the making of some not over-generous grants of money to the wives of men who had fallen in the Company's service.<sup>4</sup>

After his retirement Drake married a Miss Henrietta Baker, daughter of the Rev. John Baker, D.D.,<sup>5</sup> and died on the 4th August, 1766.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III., p. 170. I have not been able to trace the antecedents of all the Company's servants in Bengal at this time, but of those concerning whom information is available no less than fourteen were born in the County of Middlesex.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Thus Mary, wife of Lieutenant Blagg, was granted £70 'to enable her to get into some way of business for the support of herself and child without making any further applications for relief to the Company.'

<sup>5</sup> Burke's 'Commoners.'

<sup>6</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1766, p. 390.





## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE DEFEAT AND DEATH OF SHAUKAT JANG.

'Two young men, equally proud, equally incapable, equally cruel.'—GHULAM HUSAIN KHAN.<sup>1</sup>

WE left Sirāj-uddaula master of Calcutta and Fort William. He had destroyed Government House to punish Mr. Drake, to whom it did not belong; he had ordered the erection of a mosque, and had renamed the town Alinagar. To the great disgust of his officers, he appointed as Governor one of his favourites named Mānik Chand, a Hindu who had been *Diwān* of the Raja of Burdwan, and who now held the farm of many of the estates upon the Ganges. In the 'Seir Mutaqherin' he is described as

'a man presumptuous, arrogant, destitute of capacity, and wholly without courage.'<sup>2</sup>

As regards the last-mentioned charge, he had shown extraordinary cowardice in Orissa,<sup>3</sup> and his appointment was therefore considered an insult to Sirāj-uddaula's other generals; but it has been already pointed out that the policy of the Bengal Nawabs was to place their own creatures, and especially Hindus, in all positions where a man of capacity might acquire a dangerous independence, as would certainly have been the case in Calcutta if an ambitious military Governor had made a bid for the support of the Europeans. On the other hand, it might have been thought that a strong man was necessary at Calcutta to thwart any attempt of the British to retake the town; but Sirāj-uddaula, owing to his unexpectedly easy success, had passed from fear of the Europeans to an overweening confidence in his own power. Scrafton says:

'It may appear matter of wonder why the *Soubah* permitted us to remain so quietly at Fulta till we were become formidable to him, which I can only account

<sup>1</sup> 'Seir Mutaqherin,' vol. ii., p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*