

would be completely at our mercy. Now we must get ready for a rush. I expect they will come all together. There are the six guns, and three pistols each; keep one of the latter in reserve. We ought not to waste a shot; and if they lose ten men I should think they will give up the attack on the door. Stand clear of it, Surajah; they will probably fire into it before they charge—keep down below the level of the loop-holes.”

Presently a volley of musketry was fired, and the door was riddled by bullets; then a number of figures sprang from between the two opposite houses, and rushed at the door. Two of them carried a long, heavy beam. Two shots flashed out in return from the hut. One of the men carrying the beam fell, as did an officer who was leading them, but instantly another caught up the end of the timber, and in a moment a crowd were clustered round the door. Several caught hold of the beam, and swung it as though they meant to use it as a battering-ram. Two more puffs of smoke spurted out from the loop-holes, and again two of the men fell. The others, however, swung it forward with a crash against the door. The end of the beam went right through the rotten woodwork. Dick and Surajah fired their last musket-shots with as deadly effect as before. The next blow dashed the door from its hinges, and, split and shattered by the former shocks, it fell forward into the road, while a yell of triumph broke from the Mysoreans. This died away, however, when they saw the three cross-bars blocking their entrance. Again two pistol-shots carried death among them.

“Load your guns, Surajah.”

But before Surajah had time to do so, the Mysoreans made a rush at the door. The defenders stepped forward and fired between the cross-bars, and then, drawing their tulwars, ran the two men in front through the body. As they dropped, those behind them drew back.

“The last pistols!” Dick shouted, and they fired two shots

into the crowd. This completed the consternation of the enemy. It seemed to them that the defenders possessed an unlimited supply of fire-arms. Already twelve shots had been fired, and not one had failed to take effect. With a cry of consternation they fled down the street, leaving the ground in front of the fatal door strewn with bodies. The defenders instantly set about the work of re-charging their fire-arms. They were not interrupted, but presently an irregular fire opened upon them from the jungle that had taken the place of the garden between the opposite houses.

“We may as well lie down at full length,” Dick said, setting the example; “there is no use in running risks. You keep that side and listen attentively. It is likely enough that they will work round behind next time and try the windows. By the way they are firing I fancy there are not more than five or six of them opposite.”

Another half-hour passed; then Surajah exclaimed, “I can hear them on this side.”

Dick got up and crossed at once. “I will take the loop-hole under this window. You go to the one at the end; I expect they will try both windows at once.”

Dick placed the muzzle of his gun in the loop-hole, and, glancing along, saw that something dark barred his view. He fired at once. There was a loud cry and a fall, then a rush to the window, and a moment later a hole appeared in the thatch. Dick discharged two pistols through it, and as he did so Surajah fired. The thatch was speedily pulled down, as the enemy had learned to avoid the loop-holes. A yell of rage rose as the fallen thatch showed them that the window was defended with cross-bars in the same way as the door. Immediately afterwards Dick had a narrow escape from a shot fired through a loop-hole close to him.

“Stoop down,” he cried, and, crouching below the level of the loop-holes, made his way to the end of the hut. “Re-charge the guns first, Surajah. They may fire away through

the loop-holes as long as they like. It is lucky we made them so high, except the three under the windows; we must be careful in keeping out of the line of those. You sit down where you can command the end window and the one behind—I will watch the front window and door. A bold fellow might put his musket through and pick one of us off, and that is what we have to prevent, so keep your gun in readiness, and if you see a head appear, don't miss it."

The enemy now kept up a constant fire through the loop-holes at the end and back of the house; but as these were shoulder high, and there was no altering the elevation of the guns, the shots flew harmlessly over the heads of the defenders. Several times Dick went to one or other of the loop-holes, pistol in hand, and, standing close beside it, waited until a shot was fired, and then, thrusting the barrel into the loop-hole, fired before another gun could be inserted, the discharge being generally followed by a sharp cry of pain. After this had gone on for nearly an hour, the assailants evidently became discouraged; the shots came from the loop-holes less frequently, and presently ceased altogether.

"I would give a good deal to know what they are up to," Dick said, after a long pause.

"Shall I look through the loop-hole?" Surajah asked.

"Certainly not; there will be a man standing at each of them, waiting in expectation of our taking a look out."

"But there are none in front," Surajah said.

"That is more than we can say. They have not been firing on that side, but they may have men there now. No, we will leave well alone, Surajah; the longer they delay the better for us. Keep your eye on the top of the wall as well as on the window. They may have made some ladders by this time, and may intend to try a shot."

"Perhaps they are gone?" Surajah suggested.

"It is quite possible; they must know that our troop comes up here early, and as they have four miles to walk back

to the fort, and several wounded to carry with them, they certainly won't stay much longer—if, as you say, they have not gone already."

It was indeed well that Surajah had not attempted to look out at one of the loop-holes, for at the time he asked the question a dark figure was standing at each, looking along the barrel of his gun, in readiness to fire the moment the light was obscured. A few minutes later Dick exclaimed,—

"How stupid! We can easily test whether there is any one there, Surajah;" and taking up a piece of thatch he pushed it suddenly across one of the loop-holes. No shot followed the action, and he went round the hut and repeated the experiment at each of them.

"They have all gone," he said confidently; "had they been outside, they would certainly have fired directly the light was obscured."

Standing a short distance back from the end window, he looked out between the cross-beams.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "There they go up the road; they are a quarter of a mile away; they are not more than half as strong as they were when they came down; they are carrying eight or ten figures on their shoulders, on litters, or doors."

"I don't see the cavalry," Surajah said, as he joined him.

"No; it is likely enough that they may be in hiding among the huts opposite, and are waiting, in hopes that we may be foolish enough to take it for granted that they are all gone, and pull down the bars of the door. I expect they will stay until they see our troop coming up the valley."

They continued to look out from the window, from which they had now removed the bars. Half-an-hour later Dick exclaimed,—

"There they go, up that side of the valley. I have no doubt they see our troop, and that in a few minutes we shall hear them coming."

It was not long before they heard the trampling of horses,

and a moment later the Rajah's voice exclaimed, "Why, what is this? Here are a dozen dead bodies; they are Mysoreans, by their dress."

"All right, uncle," Dick shouted, "we will be out as soon as we get these bars down. We have been standing a siege."

It did not take long to remove the bars. The Rajah and his men had dismounted, as soon as some of the latter had gone round the hut and had brought back the report that there were five more dead on that side. As Dick and his companion stepped out, the Rajah exclaimed,—

"What, are you alone?"

"Yes; there is no one with us, uncle."

"Do you mean to say that you two have defended this place alone, and killed sixteen of the enemy, besides some I see lying farther up the road?"

"Yes, uncle. You see, it was a pretty strong position, and we had time to block up the doors and windows, and to make loop-holes to fire through."

"What think you of that, Anwar?" the Rajah exclaimed to the captain of the troop. "My nephew and Rajbullub's son have shown themselves brave fighters, have they not?"

"It is wonderful," the captain said; and exclamations of admiration broke from the men standing-round.

"Tell us all about it, Dick," the Rajah went on.

"It is a long story, uncle; but the real news is that Tippoo, with his army, has left the head of the western passes, and has gone to Seringapatam. He is going to march down one of the passes this side at once. Provisions have been collected for his army to consume on the march. No one knows yet which pass he will come down by; but it will not be far from here, for they are buying up cattle in the villages at the top of the ghauts."

"That is important, indeed, Dick, and we must ride off without delay; but first I must have a look at this fortress of yours."

He entered the hut, the soldiers crowding in after him, and examined the defences at the windows, and the loop-holes; while Dick explained how the bars had been arranged to defend the door.

"We began on the other side, uncle. We had a fight with four men who came up with us there, only one of them got away—and he left his gun behind. It was lucky, for their guns and pistols were of immense use to us; we could not have held out with only our own weapons. About twenty of their cavalry came up a few minutes afterwards. We beat them off, and then they sent up to the fort for infantry, and about fifty men came down and attacked us just at sunrise. They kept it up to within half-an-hour ago; then the infantry marched back, knowing, of course, that your troop generally got here about seven. The horsemen stayed here till within a few minutes of your arrival. No doubt they thought that we should suppose they had all gone, and might venture out and let them get a shot at us."

"Why, it must have been a veritable battle, Dick."

"There was a good deal of noise, uncle, though not much danger. So long as we kept below the level of the loop-holes and windows, and out of the line of the door, there was no chance of our being hit."

"They must have made a strong attack on the door," the Rajah said. "I see that the two lying next to it were both killed by sword-thrusts."

"Yes, that was the most critical moment, uncle. We had emptied nearly all our barrels, and if they could have broken down the bars, which I have no doubt they could have done if they had stuck to it, they would have made very short work of us."

"Now let us be going," the Rajah said. "You can tell me the whole story as we go along."

Two of the sowars were ordered to give up their horses to Dick and Surajah, and to mount behind comrades. Then they

started down the valley, Dick riding between his uncle and the captain, while Surajah took his place with the two other officers of the troop. They rode so rapidly that Dick's story was scarcely concluded by the time they reached the village where the troops were quartered.

"Well, you have done marvellously well, Dick," his uncle said. "Surajah deserves the highest praise too. Now I will write a note to the British officer with the Nabob, giving the news of Tippoo's movements, and will send it off by two of the troopers at once. Where Colonel Maxwell's force is I have no idea; it marched to join General Meadows on the day we came up here. In the meantime you can have a wash, while breakfast is being cooked. I have no doubt that you are ready for it."

"I am indeed, uncle. We had nothing yesterday but a few cakes made of flour and water, and have had nothing at all since."

"All right, lad. I will be ready almost as soon as breakfast is."

After the meal was over the Rajah lit his hookah, and said,—

"You must go through the story again this evening, Dick. You cut short some of the details as you told it to me on the road, and I want to understand it all thoroughly. You had better turn in now for a long sleep; you must want it badly enough, lad, after the work of the last two nights."

Dick slept until his uncle roused him at six o'clock.

"Dinner will be ready in ten minutes. It is just as well that you should get up for two or three hours. After that you will be good for another sleep till morning. We shall have to look out sharp now, and keep a couple of vedettes always at that village, as, for all we know, this may be the pass by which Tippoo is coming down."

Dick got up rather reluctantly, but he was not long in shaking off his drowsiness, and after dinner was able to go through the story again, with full details of his adventures.

"I don't know what I should have done without Surajah, uncle. He is a capital fellow, and if ever I go up by myself into Mysore to look for my father, I hope that you will let me take him."

"That I will certainly do, Dick. Ever since I first heard of your plans, I have quite decided that you ought not to go alone. I daresay I should have chosen an older man to accompany you, but after what you and the lad have done together, I don't think you could do better than take him. Of course, such an affair would demand infinitely greater care and caution, though not greater courage, than you had occasion to use on this excursion. It is one thing to enter a village, to ask a few questions, make a purchase or two, and be off again; but it is a very different thing to be among people for weeks, or perhaps months, and to live as one of themselves. However, we may hope that this war will end in our army marching to Seringapatam, when we shall recover many of the prisoners in Tippoo's hands. I do not say all. We know how many hundreds remained in his power last time, in spite of his promise to deliver them all up, and maybe something of the same sort will occur next time. Numbers may be sent away by him to the hill-fortresses dotted all over the country, and we should never be able to obtain news of them. However, we must hope for the best."

The next morning the troopers arrived with a letter from the English resident at Arcot. The Rajah glanced through it, and handed it to Dick, with the remark, "You will not get the honour you deserve, Dick."

The letter ran,—

"DEAR RAJAH,—Your news would be extremely valuable were it correct; but unfortunately it is not so, and doubtless the reports brought down by your nephew were spread by Tippoo for the purpose of deceiving us, or possibly he may have intended to have come that way, but afterwards changed his mind. We have news that just after Colonel Maxwell ef-

fecting his junction with General Meadows near Caveripatam, and was about to ascend the ghauts by the Tapour pass, Tippoo came down by that very route, slipped past them, and is marching on to Trichinopoly. That being the case, I see no further utility in your remaining with your troop in the passes, but think it were best that you should re-assemble them at once and march here. There is no chance of Tippoo capturing Trichinopoly before Meadows, who is following him, can come up and force on a battle; so it is likely that the Mysore army may continue their march in this direction, in which case every fighting man will be of use to defend this place until it is relieved by the general."

Dick uttered an exclamation of disgust as he laid the letter down.

"It does not matter about my news turning out wrong," he said, "but it is very bad that General Meadows should have allowed Tippoo to pass him, as he may do frightful damage to the country before he can be overtaken."

"He never can be overtaken as long as he chooses to keep ahead. He is hampered with no baggage train; he lives on the plunder of the country he passes through; and the British army, with all its baggage and provision train, has no more chance of overtaking him than it has of flying."

Messengers were at once sent off to call in the scattered portions of the troop. These were assembled in twenty-four hours, and at once started for Arcot, where they arrived after a two days' march. They there learned that Tippoo had appeared before Trichinopoly, and after pillaging and laying waste the sacred island of Seringham, had marched north. Day after day news arrived of the devastation he was committing on his march. At Thiagur, however, he met with a serious repulse. Great numbers of the inhabitants from the surrounding country had crowded into the town with their valuables, and Tippoo, expecting a rich booty, attacked the town; but although its fortifications were insignificant, the

little garrison was commanded by Captain Flint, the officer who had so bravely defended Wandiwash in the previous war, and two assaults were repulsed with serious loss. At Trinalee, thirty-five miles farther north, he was more successful, capturing the town, and putting the inhabitants to the sword. Here Tippoo changed his course, and marched for Pondicherry, capturing Permacoil by the way. The news that Tippoo had changed his course to the southeast was received with great joy at Arcot. Although confident that this capital would be able to resist any sudden attack, the belief had been general that the whole territory would be laid waste, as it had been by Hyder, and hopes were now entertained that the British army would arrive in time to bar Tippoo's further progress.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INVASION OF MYSORE

FOR some time there was a pause in the hostilities. Tippoo remained with his army near Pondicherry, carrying on negotiations with the French governor, and arranging for the despatch of an envoy to France, with a request that the Republic would furnish him with six thousand French troops. While he was thus wasting his time, General Meadows was slowly moving with the army towards an encampment formed at Vellout, some eighteen miles west of Madras. On the 14th of December a messenger arrived with the news that Lord Cornwallis had arrived from Calcutta two days before with considerable reinforcements, and that he was about to assume the supreme command of the army. The news caused unbounded satisfaction. By the extreme dilatoriness of his movements, and especially by the manner in which he had allowed