

CAPTIVES OF TIPU

Survivors' Narratives

EDITED BY

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CAPTIVES OF TIPU

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INTRODUCTION

THE names of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan, Mohammedan usurpers of the Hindu state of Mysore from 1761-99, were rendered world-famous by their struggle with the English, which, from the repeated disasters sustained by either side, the bravery of the combatants, the number and sufferings of English prisoners in the capital at Seringapatam and, above all, perhaps, the fantastic character of Tipu himself, was followed with interested horror by contemporaries and is still remembered as one of the more romantic stages in the history of British India. A canvas, 2250 square feet in area, of the last storming of Seringapatam in 1799 - on the day on which Tipu 'left his palace in the morning a powerful and imperious Sultan, full of vast ambitious projects,' and, 'was brought back a lump of clay' - was painted by Robert Ker Porter, and admired by hundreds. Journals and accounts of prisoners were published both during and after the wars.

Most of the prisoners were taken in the war of 1780-84, and the three narratives reprinted here with more or less abbreviation are selected for the diversity of their interest, being by persons who suffered diversely, since one was a private, the second an officer, and the third a seaman. James Bristow's book, as he himself was unlettered, was compiled by some well-wisher and published by the Company's press in Calcutta, under the title, *A Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow*, and was reprinted in London in 1794 by John Murray, while in 1874 a French translation was published. The *Journal of an Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment* was published in 1788 by John Murray, in the *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*, of which a later and shorter edition also exists; the author of the *Memoirs*, reputed to be either a certain William Thomson or Lieut. Alexander Read, A.D.C. to Colonel Baillie, is not the author of the Journal, since he states definitely that he received the Journal from the officer who wrote it, who gives no trace of his identity; nor does the diary of his fellow-prisoner, Lieut. Lindsay (*Lives of the Lindsays*, Vol. III), offer any clue. Scurry's book was published in 1824, two years after his death. The books of both Bristow and Scurry are now almost unobtainable.

INTRODUCTION

A short historical account of Southern India should, for the sake of clarity, precede a detailed description of the narratives. Early in the fourteenth century was founded the last great Hindu power of the South, with its capital at Vijayanagar on the Tungabhadra River, but the contemporaneous rise of a Mohammedan dynasty north of that river prevented the kings of Vijayanagar from extending their dominions to the north. In the following century the Mohammedan kingdom dissolved into several states of which Bijapur was the greatest; in 1565 their rulers united to inflict a crushing defeat upon their Hindu neighbours at Talikota. The Raja of Vijayanagar moved his capital further south and endeavoured to restore his power; but the whole kingdom was moribund in the seventeenth century when the feudatory chieftains gradually threw off the yoke of the royal officer in Seringapatam; more significant still was the growing independence of the Wodeyar Rajas of Mysore (Wodeyar=Lord and Master) and their persistent extension of their dominions; in 1610 they acquired Seringapatam itself, an island in the Cavery River some ten miles north-east of Mysore, and in 1687 Bangalore. Meanwhile the Moghuls attacked the Mohammedan principalities of the Deccan; Bijapur became their tributary in 1637, yet was still able to ravage the south, meeting with successful resistance from the Rajas of Mysore alone. In 1687, however, a new province was formed in the Moghul empire with its capital at Sira, which included both Bijapur on the Deccan and most of the district on the east coast known as the Carnatic; it remained a Moghul possession until 1757. Mysore now was made tributary to Delhi.

The seventeenth century was marked, too, by the rise of the Mahrattas, a race of yeomen, trained to arms in the service of the Sultans of the Deccan, although their proper country lay on the western Ghats: the famous Sivaji, educated a fervent Hindu by his mother, united the tribes, and assumed the royal title in 1674.

Towards the close of the century the Nizam-ul-Mulk (the Pillar of the State), the Moghul viceroy of the Deccan, became

INTRODUCTION

practically independent in Haiderabad, which is still known as the Nizam's dominions.

The intrusion of the Europeans can no longer be neglected. The Portuguese, foremost in the discovery of the long sea route to the Far East, were the first to establish themselves in the country, early in the sixteenth century; but their power endured only while they had no European rivals. In 1600 and 1602 were founded the English and Dutch Companies and the latter, strongly supported by the State, ousted the Portuguese from their possessions, although Goa remains to them to this day. In 1611 and 1612 the English established factories at Masulipatam and Surat, while in 1640 they received Madras from the moribund kingdom of Vijayanagar; Bombay was handed over by the Portuguese as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza. The English Company was a private venture and their early policy of peaceful trade was formulated by Sir Thomas Roe, Ambassador at the Moghul Court from 1612-15, who endeavoured also to secure a regular commercial treaty. But the failing Moghul empire, of which Aurangzib (1685-1707) was the last great ruler, could not extend its protection over all India, and in a country lacking a sufficient central authority peaceful trading was impossible.

The eighteenth century was marked by dismemberment of the native powers, which condition, added to the hostility of the French, who had arrived late in the seventeenth century, forced the English to abandon their pacific doctrines.

In 1704 the Moghul province of Sira was divided into the Nawabships of Sira and Arcot, the latter the capital of the Carnatic. The Nawab of Arcot, Dost Ali Khan, jealous of the right of Sira to the tribute of the rich state of Mysore, invaded that state with intent to raise an unwontedly large tribute; he was repulsed, and the ruler of Mysore soon afterwards agreed to pay a levy to the Nizam. In 1749 Haidar Ali made his appearance as an obscure volunteer in the army of Mysore, then besieging the fortress of Devanhalli, near Kolar, where he distinguished himself sufficiently to make the first rise in his successful career, which culminated in the expulsion of the

INTRODUCTION

Regent from Seringapatam in 1761. When he gained possession of the minister, he fulfilled his promise to cherish the unhappy man 'as affectionately as a parrot' by keeping him in a cage upon a diet of milk and rice. This Haidar was the great-grandson of a poor emigrant from the Punjab, whose sons worked as peons in the Customs at Sira: Haidar's own father, having died when Haidar was seven, his mother repaired to Bangalore, where her brother was a commander of peons under the local *Killadar*.

The doings of the Europeans now became more effective. The French had acquired Pondicherry in 1674, of which the two greatest governors, Dumas (1735-41) and Dupleix (1741-54), were frank in their aims, interfering freely in native politics, with the hope of founding an empire. Their first quarrel with the English, in 1745-49, was merely an extension of the War of the Austrian Succession: in this contest Dupleix had the advantage. Hostilities broke out again immediately after the peace, this time through the unauthorized intervention of both Companies, on opposite sides, in the dispute over the Nawabship of Arcot; it was during this war that Clive performed his famous siege of Arcot in 1751. But Dupleix was recalled in 1754, and by a treaty of 1755 both Companies were directed to abjure native titles and to ignore native politics. Such instructions were useless. The third war between the English and French broke out in 1757, to end in the permanent crippling of the latter's power in India, although Pondicherry remained a French possession.

The aggression of Haidar Ali increased to the extent of rousing the fear of the Nizam and the hatred of the Mahrattas: an alliance was therefore formed between the British, the Nizam and the Mahrattas, but the war which followed terminated with the appearance of Haidar before Madras and an ignominious defensive alliance between him and the Company.

Haidar had now such evident designs upon the Carnatic that the Nawab of Arcot, Mohammed Ali, feared for the safety of his capital: but the immediate cause of the outbreak of hostilities

INTRODUCTION

in 1780 arose from the European situation, which encouraged the English to take Pondicherry and Mahe, although they were aware that Haidar, regarding the French as prospective allies, would not suffer Mahe – a port on the west coast through which he hoped to receive his reinforcements – to be closed to him. In July 1780 Haidar and Tipu, therefore, invaded the Carnatic with a large army disciplined by French officers. The Government at Madras was in a precarious condition; the previous governor had gone home with a large fortune, leaving an empty treasury; in no part of the country were more than three thousand men collected together (Colonel Baillie was in Circar, Colonel Braithwaite in Pondicherry, while the main body, under Sir Hector Munro, lay 15 miles from Madras, including a regiment under Macleod in which was Lieutenant Lindsay). In order to repair more speedily to the relief of Arcot, Munro foolishly commanded Colonel Baillie to meet him on his way to Arcot, at Conjeveram, an open town in a country already infested with the enemy. Consequently Baillie was surrounded, while Munro dared not leave his powder magazine insufficiently protected to go to his aid: Baillie at last formed a square upon a slight eminence and only surrendered after desperate resistance. The writer of the Journal was captured among many other officers, and Arcot fell into the hands of Haidar.

The veteran Eyre Coote hurried from Bengal with reinforcements. In 1781 he won two pitched battles, at Porto Novo and Pulicat, while early in 1782 Warren Hastings achieved as signal a success by his wise diplomacy; he made peace with the Mahrattas, with whom the Company were then at war, and soothed the Nizam by renouncing a district foolishly claimed by the Madras Government. Thus he removed the danger of the triple alliance between the Nizam, the Mahrattas, and Mysore. Against these successes were balanced the capture of Colonel Braithwaite's army in Tanjore by Tipu and the arrival of the French at Cuddalore.

In December 1782 Haidar Ali died of an ulcer in the back, but his death was kept secret until Tipu could join the main

INTRODUCTION

army at Arcot to take unrivalled possession of the throne. On the other side Eyre Coote died about the same time.

The French alliance was of short duration, for in 1783, with the close of the Seven Years' War in Europe, the French troops were withdrawn. That year Tipu was occupied in the west, where an expeditionary force under General Matthews was capturing many places, including Bednur, which Haidar had captured in 1763, renaming it Haidar Nagar, for he hoped to make it his capital. Matthews, a weak, cruel man, foolishly scattered his forces so that he was unable to hold Bednur; he fell into Tipu's hands and was sent to Seringapatam, to die by poison.

Finally, in 1784, overtures for peace were made, but Tipu prolonged the negotiations until he had taken Mangalore. By the treaty all prisoners were to be restored and all captured places to revert to their previous owners. To the shame of the Council of Madras, Bristow and Scurry with many others were abandoned, and only a few escaped from time to time, at great peril.

Tipu continued to worry both the Nizam and the Mahrattas and in 1790 roused the English by his attack upon the Raja of Travancore, then under the protection of the Company. The Governor-General himself took command; Tipu was surrounded by enemies, by an alliance between his two northern neighbours and the English, and he only saved Seringapatam by a timely capitulation. During this war Bristow and Scurry both made their escape to the Nizam's dominions.

Between 1792 and 1798 Tipu occupied himself with more fantastic schemes.

Making Tipu's dealing with the French, and in particular his embassy to Mauritius, a pretext for war, Lord Mornington stormed and captured Seringapatam in 1799, after which Tipu's body was discovered, stripped of his jewels, under a heap of slain. The narrow gateway in which he fell was destroyed soon afterwards, when the second and inner ditch of the fort was filled up and planted as a garden; in spite of contemporary evidence to the previous existence of this inner

INTRODUCTION

ditch, with which the historic gateway must have been destroyed, a tablet has been placed on the existing Water Gate, marking that as the spot where Tipu met his death.

The characters of Haidar Ali and his son were divergent; yet frequently a direct, unsophisticated soldier of fortune, cruel and sensual from a vigorous body rather than a perverted mind, who wins a throne or a fortune, produces such an heir, possessing the imaginative qualities lacking in himself. Haidar spent his life in warfare, kept a large harem, the charms of which were never allowed to sap his energy, and ignored religion. He never learnt to write more than the initial letter of his name, but conversed fluently in several languages: on the other hand, he possessed a shrewdness missing in his better-educated son. Of life under his rule a Persian, Mirza Ikbal, writes: 'By his power mankind were held in fear and trembling; and from his severity God's creatures day and night were thrown into apprehension and terror. Cutting off the nose and ears of any person in his territories was the commonest thing imaginable, and of the killing of a man there was thought no more than of the treading on an ant. No person of respectability ever left his house with the expectation of a safe return to it.'

The common testimony of English prisoners proves that Tipu restrained himself during Haidar's lifetime - to such an extent that his treatment of his victims was always favourably compared with that of his father; but after succeeding easily to the throne his capricious imagination gradually developed to the very limits of sanity. He had been carefully instructed in letters as well as in warfare, reading and writing the languages which Haidar could merely speak; indeed he is said to have scarcely ever been without a pen in his hand. His education served only to aid him in his caprices; innovations were made in every department of the administration, and his changing of the names of streets and days of the month, and his revision of the system of weights and measures, were comparable to the changes he admired in revolutionary France. In 1798 a Jacobin club in Seringapatam planted a Tree of Liberty; and the

INTRODUCTION

autocrat, wearing a red cap, was evoked as *Citizen Tipu Sultan*. Worst of all was his increasing religious fanaticism, which led to hateful persecution; indeed he never lost an opportunity to insult the Hindu religion. Such were the qualities of that remarkable man who died an obscure death in a narrow gateway, probably at the hands of some common soldier who rifled his body for its jewels.

James Bristow, a private in the Bengal Artillery, came to the south with the reinforcements under Eyre Coote; and while endeavouring to prevent the French from landing supplies for Haidar Ali near Pondicherry, he was cut off from the English camp by a party of hostile cavalry and taken prisoner early in 1781. His editor is needlessly apologetic in his dedicatory letter to the Commanding Officer of the Bengal Artillery, and in his Preface. His intention, he states, was to aid the children of Bristow, hoping that 'the compassion for the unfortunate, which has so eminently distinguished his countrymen, will operate sufficiently to induce them to overlook the unimportance of a narrative which claims no other merit than strict adherence to truth.' With juster appreciation, however, of the matter of the book, he remarks that an obscure private, placed in one of Tipu's *Chelâ* or slave battalions, would become better acquainted with the true state of affairs 'than gentlemen who were never suffered to peep beyond the walls of their prisons.' From the caprice with which the slave battalions, the voluntary deserters and indeed all the inhabitants of Mysore were treated one gathers Tipu's feeling of insecurity. To a simple, straightforward soul like Bristow such uncertainty must have been especially painful. It may be assumed that the diversions with which the prisoners relieved themselves were not invented by him, but rather by some companion of the cast of Scurry. One trick apparently never failed to enrage the Moslems; the prisoners would circumcise dogs and run them through the streets of Seringapatam – the deed was the more offensive since to the Moslem the dog is a peculiarly foul animal. Yet his native caution and common sense, together with the opportunities which he gained of discovering the way, made Bristow

INTRODUCTION

the principal deviser of the plan to escape from the hill fortress of Outradroog, to which he and his companions were dispatched towards the end of their captivity – probably that they might be quietly put to death like so many others who had reached such fortresses.

He lost his companions almost at the start, and his solitary journey to the Nizam's dominions, which he reached early in 1791, was a feat of heroic endurance for a man in his semi-starved and fever-stricken condition. He had narrow escapes, as when he was passed by two sentries as a woman because his leg-irons jingled like bracelets; indeed, without the assistance of aged Hindu women who gave him such poor food as they were able he would never have reached his destination. Fortunately for him, the nature of his mind seems to have preserved him from all the terrors to which a more irraginative man, travelling through the jungle at night, would have been subject. At least he gives no hint of such, but then his tale is set down simply, without any straining after effect.

The unknown officer, who was taken at Conjeveram with Colonel Baillie, offers in his Journal an entirely different set of pictures, of the dismal and narrow life permitted to the officers in Seringapatam. His book opens with the ghastly battlefield, on which Haidar sat at the door of his tent to receive the heads of Europeans, before the eyes of Baillie and his officers, and describes the miseries of the wounded who were kept at Arcot until they had recovered sufficiently for the march to Seringapatam. Once in the capital, however, he remained in the same prison until his release in 1784, its only view of the outer world being through a small hole in the wall, made and carefully concealed by the prisoners themselves. Much of their time was spent in devising means of communication with officers and men confined elsewhere, especially with the prison of Baillie himself, which they described as headquarters. With a skill at variance with the haughty answer given to one of Tipu's requests for carpenters or armourers, and quoted by Lindsay, to the effect that they were all gentlemen, they turned to manual labours to preserve their minds from madness. Their

INTRODUCTION

improvised implements they concealed from their guards in a hole in the floor. Lindsay gives as well a list of their odd collection of books, which were removed at sunset, for their captors believed that much of the evil done by the English arose from their habit of reading books at night: they had odd volumes of Smollett's *History of England* and of Pope, half of Johnson's Dictionary, a Prayer Book, and 'Mrs. Glass upon the Art of Cookery.'

The Journal itself was written 'within a very small compass, on a slip of Indian paper, in such a hand as that in which innocent idlers write out the Lord's Prayer within the circumference of the halfpenny.'

To be set against the stories of ingenuity in carpentry or the revels which were held on occasions like the King's birthday, when they prepared a special dinner and drank His Majesty's health in a *Chatty* of sherbet, are the tales of refusal of the least comforts or even necessities to the sick, causing the death of Baillie and many others, the depression brought on by ill news or deferred hopes; but they were spared the final bitterness of being abandoned by their own countrymen, like Bristow and Scurry, and left to die or escape at their peril from their imprisonment.

James Scurry, handed over to Haidar in 1782 by a French admiral, at the age of fifteen, was a man of more adventurous and varied character, inherited no doubt from a father who roved the world and fought at Bunker Hill. According to his widow, Scurry went to sea at the early age of seven; he spent some years off the coast of America and among the West Indies, employed in carrying powder in times of action and in amusing his companions by playing the fife in times of quiet. At what stage in his career he learnt to read or write his widow is ignorant.

His editor considered, in the mood of the early nineteenth century, that he promoted the cause of humanity 'by giving publicity to the unvarnished narrative,' intending that peaceful readers should contrast their own civilization with the barbarity of Haidar and Tipu. Scurry, too, was forcibly circumcised

INTRODUCTION

and placed in a slave battalion: further, he was ordered one day, with several others, to turn round and take what was before him, which proved to be a Carnatic girl, to whom he became greatly attached and by whom he had two children. But his affections could not keep him among the derelict Europeans found by the English after the final storming of Seringapatam.

At first Scurry was treated with kindness, being told that he was to be considered the adopted child of Tipu, but later he was subjected to the same vicissitudes as Bristow, although probably his more resilient temperament suffered less. Towards the end of his captivity he was sent to the hill fortress of Chittledroog, where he spent three tedious years, of which he writes: 'The melancholy hours we passed here would take a more able pen than mine to describe - I have observed before that we were all young, yet none of us dared sing "Rule Britannia," or even hum it with impunity. We prohibited it between ourselves under the impression of bitterness, and the idea of every hope being marred of ever seeing our country or friends.' Not to sing 'Rule Britannia,' then a comparatively new song, seems to have been a severe privation.

After a sorrowful parting from his wife Scurry escaped, with four companions, from his battalion near Chittledroog, and took the same direction as Bristow. They all reached safety, and then Scurry took ship to England. He never lost the influence of the years spent in India; his sunburnt face 'only a few shades removed from black,' and his awkwardness in wearing European clothes, made him the butt of little boys; while his dislike of sitting at a table for his meals, and his careless means of ridding himself of bones and unwanted pieces of food by throwing them upon the floor, made him unpopular at the inns which he visited to an extent which his lavish expenditure could not entirely banish. His style of approaching his mother's house at Porlock is typical of the man, for he hired a chaise and four and drove up with a flourish, which was temporarily checked by his mother's refusal to believe that he was truly her son, so long was it since she had heard of him and so changed

INTRODUCTION

was he from the boy who had been transferred by the French admiral to Tipu's hands.

Scurry's style is amusingly matter of fact, as in this sentence describing a serious storm which overtook his ship on its voyage to Madras: 'The storm ceased, the waves subsided, and we proceeded on our voyage'; but his vocabulary is varied.

The number and qualities of the European renegades deserve notice. It was an axiom with both Haidar and Tipu that Europeans could only be definitely defeated by Europeans and by their own methods; they were, therefore, at pains, not only to acquire the French as their avowed allies, but also to enlist other nations in their service; and attacks were always made upon the integrity of prisoners, to recruit the armies of Mysore. Bristow writes of one corps: 'This corps consisted of nothing but vagabonds and deserters, chiefly Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Danes.' The officer mentions a Hungarian sergeant, 'as great a rogue as ever lived.' Most conspicuous among the English deserters was Dempster, universally detested by his compatriots. To Scurry and Bristow and their like he never disguised his baseness, although to the officers he fawned. His reply to a request that he would forward a letter from the imprisoned officers 'to the governor or commandant of any British settlement,' is characteristic of his nature:

GENTLEMEN,

Your note of the 15th of December I received; the short but real picture of your very unfortunate situation has made me melt into tears of sympathy that our name and country should thus be the sport of barbarians; and believe me, Gentlemen, that there is nothing within the verge of my power that could alleviate in the smallest degree your present sufferings, in the great anxiety you must be in to hear some solacing account after so long an interval of suspense and confinement, that would not most readily be embraced. . . . I sincerely thank you for your favour, and promise of protection hereafter. I never intend to avail myself of it, as the title of Deserter is almost insupportable to anyone tintured

INTRODUCTION

with the smallest atom of spirit. From the most robust as well as healthy constitution, I am totally changed into a habit that daily tells me my stay shall not be long. Then be expeditious in sending your letter. This revolution [the death of Hyder] offers a field for much news. Tokens as usual. Sorry I am that I can't add anything else. This I have writ only with the light of a fire; otherwise the seeing me occupied with pen and ink would subject me to being examined. . . .

Finally, Dempster was disgraced and perished miserably, for the volatile temperament which caused him twice to change his colours, made him an unsatisfactory servant to any power.

Whiteway, a midshipman on the *Fortitude*, has an amusing story of an individual named White, who had been found plundering the gun-room of his ship, an East Indiaman, when she was taken by the French. That particular ship was recovered by the English and White was disgraced; but later he became captain of a country ship and was again captured by the French. This time he was sent to Seringapatam. Here he announced that he was an adept in the art of casting cannon. The history of his attempts might have been anticipated. 'Captain White had a foundry built, at a considerable expense; and in his first effort, having melted his metal, he unfortunately cast only half a gun. This misfortune was laid upon some enemy who envied his situation. A second attempt was made and this was imperfect at the breech, which caused suspicions and murmurings. A third effort was then made with a gun on a small scale; but this turned out crooked. This crooked gun was chiselled to render it serviceable; but this proved a vain attempt. It still remained crooked; and neither the ingenuity nor the power of White could bring it straight. In this dilemma he had the hardihood to assert that this cannon would be of most essential service to Hyder; and being asked for what purpose? he replied, "To fire round the corners." He was reproved for "vain pretensions" and put to cast cannon shot.

INTRODUCTION

Later he made his way to Madras, and finally was hanged at the Old Bailey for forging seamen's wills.

The practical reasons for publishing these narratives no longer exist, nor will they rouse the sense of moral superiority over the barbarian, which so edified contemporaries; but their intense human interest will always find them readers, and it is time they were made accessible to more than the few Orientalists who both know of their existence and can afford the high prices fetched by the original editions. The officer's Journal has been greatly abridged, and a historical chapter by Scurry's editor has been omitted; but the whole story will be found in this volume, reprinted word for word except for such explanatory passages and notes as readers will no longer require, and for the many duplicate entries in the Journal.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I THE NARRATIVE OF JAMES BRISTOW, PRIVATE IN THE BENGAL ARTILLERY	23
II THE JOURNAL OF AN OFFICER OF COLONEL BAILLIE'S DETACHMENT	99
III THE LIFE OF JAMES SCURRY, SEAMAN	171
GLOSSARY	242