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Colonel G. J. Harcourt
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A FORGOTTEN HERO

By Colonel G. J. HARCOURT (late 102nd Foot).

THE British Empire has been so long accustomed to consider itself as the only European nation in India that the predominance of the French in that country in the middle of the eighteenth century, and England's long struggle for supremacy is unknown to the great majority, even of the educated public. Nor is it realised that but for that struggle, carried out to a successful issue by the valour of her sons, France, and not Britain, would at this moment be the ruler in that great Dependency.

The historian, Orme, has chronicled the deeds of many gallant heroes who took part in our early contests with the French in the East, prior to the days of "Plassey," and the subsequent exploits of Clive, Cornwallis, Warren Hastings, and Wellesley, against native potentates; but Orme has never been read except by an insignificant minority, and without some personal knowledge of India he cannot be read by any to much advantage.

From the year 1644 to 1746 the English East India Company possessed a few factories on both the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, guarded by a few European troops. Bengal did not exist as a Presidency until 1707, and Bombay, with a small garrison, was subordinate to Madras, which then, and for long subsequently was the chief seat of the Indian Government. The troops in the premier Presidency from 1644 consisted of seven independent companies of seventy English soldiers each, commanded by ensigns, and were employed to garrison the various factories in Southern India and in Bantam, Java, Priamam, and Formosa.

The French East India Company had possessed Pondicherry by a grant from the Nawab of the Carnatic since the year 1674; they wielded immense resources, and their troops were more numerous and better equipped than the English, when, in 1746, their Governor-General, the Marquis Dupleix, the ablest statesman France ever sent to India, resolved to destroy the English and drive them out of the country.

With this object, he gave directions to General La-Bourdonnais, a man of great energy and ability, and the founder of Mauritius, to proceed with a powerful fleet and army and lay siege to and capture Fort St. George, the chief town and fortress of the English on the Coromandel coast, and the residence of the British Governor. La-Bourdonnais appeared off Madras in September, 1746; no resistance was possible, and Fort St. George fell after two days' bombardment.

The commander of the Fort St. George garrison had died in May, 1743, and it was to succeed him that the Court of Directors, after much delay, fixed on a remarkable man, and one whose subsequent exploits in India were of such a nature as to draw from the British Empire a debt of the deepest gratitude. Their choice fell on Captain Stringer Lawrence, of His Majesty's 14th Regiment of Foot.

Lawrence was born on the 24th February, 1698. In December, 1727, at the age of 29, he obtained a commission as ensign in the 14th Foot, and saw much service in Spain and Flanders, as well as during the Highland rebellion in 1745, when he acted as adjutant to Lord Tyrawley.

According to the record of the Directors' Proceedings for 17th December, 1746, "It was resolved that the garrison of Fort St. George be strengthened with a number of recruits, sergeants and ensigns, and that an able officer be sent from hence as major thereof; and Captain Lawrence, being recommended as a person qualified for the post, resolved by the ballot that the said Captain Lawrence be appointed major of the garrison with a salary of £250 per annum."

On the 18th February following, when he was forty-nine years of age, Lawrence took the usual oath and sailed in the *Winchelsea*, one hundred and fifty men (recruits) embarking at the same time.

Lawrence's voyage lasted nearly eleven months, and as on arrival off the coast the French flag was seen flying from the ramparts of Fort St. George, the vessel headed for Fort St. David, lower down and south of Pondicherry, where the English maintained a small garrison. Very little was then wanting to deprive Britain of her last foothold in Southern India. Two attacks since the fall of Madras had been foiled rather than defeated. Lawrence's first care was to form a camp outside the walls, and the presence of the English fleet on the coast prevented any French movement against the place for a time. He next proceeded to reorganise the companies of English soldiers and to introduce a system of military law. The reorganised companies were seven in number; these he formed into a regiment, distinguished for a century afterwards as the Madras European Regiment, of which he became the first colonel. This regiment is now known as the 1st Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, of which H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught is Colonel-in-Chief.

Six months after Lawrence's arrival Dupleix took advantage of the absence of the British squadron to make another attempt against Cuddalore, a fortress about a mile inland from Fort St. David. By a sudden march a force of eight hundred Frenchmen and one thousand sepoys from Pondicherry appeared within three miles of Cuddalore on the morning of 17th June, 1748. Lawrence ostentatiously withdrew the guns and garrison to Fort St. David, giving out that he did not consider Cuddalore tenable. Directly night fell he marched back the garrison and guns.

At midnight the French advanced, and were received with such a fire of grape and musketry that they flung down their arms and fled back to Pondicherry.

Four months after Lawrence sailed from England, the news of the loss of Madras reached the Court of Directors in London, and they were at once roused to action; they applied to the Crown for assistance, which met with a ready response. An expedition against Pondicherry was fitted out under Admiral Boscawen and sailed from England in November, 1747.

For the purposes of the expedition twelve independent companies, each of one hundred men, were formed by drafts from different regiments, a force of artillery was added, the whole consisting of about 1,400 men. On the 29th July, 1748, the squadron arrived off Fort St. David, the troops were landed, and on 8th August began their march north to Pondicherry. The force, all told, including Lawrence's regiment, with Marines, sailors, and a Dutch contingent from Negapatam, amounted to 3,700 Europeans, rank and file. The whole of the operations were in Boscawen's hands, and the subsequent miscarriage of affairs was ascribed to his ignorance of land warfare. Lawrence's authority only extended to the Company's troops, which formed a fifth of the force. After losing 150 men killed and wounded, at a small outpost, where Lawrence himself was made a prisoner, Boscawen broke ground before Pondicherry; blunder was heaped upon blunder, till at the end of a month the siege was abandoned with the loss of one thousand and sixty-five soldier and sailors, and an enormous quantity of ammunition. In November news came of the cessation of arms in Europe, and Lawrence was released and permitted to return to Fort St. David pending ratification of the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which restored Madras to the English.

Disgusted with the way matters were being conducted in India, and, completely broken down in health, Lawrence on the 25th September, 1751, resigned the Company's service and sailed for England. But the Directors, with a sagacity they did not always show, sent him back to India before he had been two months at home, with the appointment of Commander-in-Chief of all the Company's military forces in the East Indies, and a salary of £750 a year. The most stirring part of Lawrence's career was about to commence.

On the 14th March, 1752, Lawrence again landed in Madras, and at once took command of the army about to march for the relief of Trichinopoly, where a small portion of the European regiment, under Captains De Gingens and Dalton, aiding Mahomed Ali, the English claimant to the Nawabship of the Carnatic, had been besieged for seven months by a French force under General Law, and a large native force under Chunda Sahib, the French claimant to the Nawabship. On the 26th March, Lawrence arrived within twenty miles of Trichinopoly, when he was attacked by the enemy from a battery on the line of march, losing 20 English soldiers, killed, and experiencing

much confusion amongst his baggage before he could extricate himself. Continuing his march without further interruption, he halted that night about ten miles from the fortress.

The next morning, having resumed his march, and having been joined by 100 men of his regiment, from the garrison, and fifty dragoons, he pushed forward Clive (afterwards Lord Clive of Plassey), with a small detachment and some guns, to occupy a building which Law had neglected to secure, while he, himself, moved up, in order, to his support. A fierce cannonade ensued from nine guns on the English side against twenty-two on the French. In half-an-hour the French wavered and gave ground, withdrawing their guns, when Lawrence, with a loss of twenty-one of his men, continued his march and entered Trichinopoly the same evening.

The French Army and their allies occupied the Island of Seringham, formed by two branches of the Cauvery, north of Trichinopoly, and the position was an extremely strong one. Lawrence, therefore, determined to cut off their communications with Pondicherry, and for this purpose he divided his forces, and sent Clive, in command, to the north of the river, with four hundred of the European regiment, seven hundred sepoys, four thousand native horse, and eight guns, with directions to occupy a place called Samiaveram, where they entrenched themselves. Lawrence then crossed over to the island with his troops, ordered Captain Dalton, with 150 English, 500 sepoys, 500 Mahratta Horse, and four guns, to cross the river, and directed Clive to attack Pitchanda, the only post north of the Cauvery retained by General Law. Clive's guns first broke up Law's camp on the island, forcing him and his allies to take refuge in a temple, and Pitchanda fell after two days' bombardment. The investment of the island was now complete, and on the 3rd June, 1752, General Law surrendered with 35 officers, 785 French soldiers, 2,000 sepoys, and 45 pieces of artillery. Chunda Sahib, the French claimant, was taken prisoner by the Tanjore General, and put to death the same day. On the previous 27th May, Clive had encountered the French General d'Auteuil at a place called Volcondah, which he carried by assault, when the General and the whole French force, consisting of 100 French soldiers, 400 sepoys, 340 horse, 3 guns, and a great quantity of stores (including 800 barrels of powder and 3,000 muskets), surrendered.

Lawrence having left a sufficient garrison in Trichinopoly, proceeded to Fort St. George; but he was soon again in the field. In August, 1752, Dupleix sent General De Kerjean to blockade Fort St. David. His force amounted to 450 French European Infantry, 1,500 sepoys, 14 guns, and 500 native horse. Lawrence at once embarked for Fort St. David. His force consisted of 400 men of his regiment, 1,700 sepoys, and 9 field guns, together with 3,000 worthless rabble representing the Nawab's troops. General De Kerjean, finding he was about to be attacked, broke up his camp and retreated to Bahoor, followed by Law-

rence. The next day De Kerjean moved back within the boundary hedge marking the limits of Pondicherry. According to the curious ethics of the time, France and England being nominally at peace, Lawrence's instructions forbade his violating French territory; so he contented himself with driving in the French outposts, outside the boundary edge, in the hope of bringing on a general action. Seeing that De Kerjean had no intention of leaving his position, he formed the project of luring him out of it. Affecting an unwillingness to engage, he fell back precipitately to Bahoor. De Kerjean, against his better judgment, allowed himself to be coerced by Dupleix, under threats of supercession, into following Lawrence, and encamped two miles from Bahoor.

Before daylight, on the 26th August, 1752, Lawrence moved out to attack. In every action at that time, the decisive blows were struck by the European troops, and it was essential to ascertain where the French battalion was posted, before the English battalion was too deeply engaged. At the first challenge, the English Sepoys opened fire, but the European regiment continued its advance with shouldered arms. As daylight appeared, the French battalion (known as "The Regiment of India") was discovered drawn up, with their right resting on a high bank, and their left covered by a small piece of water. The Madras European regiment formed up opposite to them, and advanced under a heavy fire of cannon and small arms. The records of war show that, under such circumstances, one line or the other usually gives way before actual contact; but at Bahoor, an incident rare in war occurred. The French stood the shock, and the two lines crossed bayonets without flinching. A few minutes of hand to hand fighting ensued, and then the English Grenadier Company and the two platoons next to them broke through the French centre. The whole French line gave way, and fled in confusion. General De Kerjean, with 15 officers and 100 Frenchmen, were made prisoners, a greater number were killed (upwards of 100 by the bayonet), while eight guns, with all the French ammunition and stores, were captured. Of the Madras European Regiment, 4 officers and 78 men were killed and wounded, mostly by the bayonet, so close and determined was the fighting.

In spite of his victory Lawrence was, for a time, reduced to inaction by the doubtful attitude of the Mysore Durbar and the Mahrattas, under the influence of Dupleix's intrigues. After much marching and some fighting, sickness amongst his troops forced him to return to Cuddalore.

In January, 1753, Lawrence was again in the field, engaged in harassing operations near Cuddalore against the French under General Maissin, owing to Dupleix's design to detain Lawrence and the English force on the coast, while his schemes were working at Trichinopoly. Unable to bring matters to a decisive issue, Lawrence was relieved from his dilemma by

urgent news from Trichinopoly, which caused him to transfer his operations to that neighbourhood.

Mahommed Ali's affairs had been going badly from the time of Law's surrender, his allies of Tanjore and Mysore had deserted him; he was without money or supplies, and found his only support in Captain Dalton, who had been left in Trichinopoly with 200 men of the Madras Europeans and 1,500 Sepoys after Law's surrender. The Mysoreans now began to intercept the entry of provisions into Trichinopoly, and open hostilities were inevitable. The Mysore army was encamped on the Island of Seringham, the scene of Law's surrender. Dalton resolved to attack them. At 10 o'clock at night on the 23rd December, 1752, he crossed the river and fell on the Mysore Camp. The attack was completely successful, and he regained the city after killing a great number of the enemy, with a loss to himself of only 20 killed and wounded; but on the following day, when attempting to drive the enemy off the island altogether, a regrettable incident occurred, owing to an officer leaving the force to communicate with Dalton, the Mahratta horsemen dashed in, and the English lost 2 officers, 70 English soldiers, and 300 of the best Sepoys, all killed; Dalton's force was thus seriously crippled.

From this date Trichinopoly was closely invested; the Mysore General, with 8,000 men, took up a position at the Fakir's Tope, south of the city and fortress, and Dalton was forced to send an express to Lawrence, asking for assistance. The intelligence of Trichinopoly's straitened circumstances reached Lawrence at Trivadi, near Cuddalore. Leaving 650 men at Trivadi, 150 of whom were English, he, without orders from the Government, marched at six hours' notice to Fort St. David to collect supplies. Marching next day he entered Trichinopoly, without fighting, on the 6th May, 1753; his whole force, including the original garrison, consisting only of 500 of the European Regiment, 2,000 Sepoys, and 3,000 of the Nawab's Horse. His artillery consisted of ten field pieces, and one of the eighteen pounders.

Directly Lawrence's withdrawal from Trivadi was known to Dupleix, he despatched General Astruc, with 200 Frenchmen, 500 Sepoys, and 4 guns, to Trichinopoly. All his plans depended on gaining possession of that fortress. Astruc was a General of considerable ability, and with so great a superiority in numbers, his success seemed assured; moreover, he shortly was reinforced by Dupleix, with 300 more Frenchmen and 1,000 Sepoys. On receipt of these reinforcements he quitted Seringham and encamped on the plain to the west of the city, near the village of Weycondah. His force consisted of 450 Europeans, 1,500 well-trained Sepoys, 11,500 Mysore and Mahratta Horse, two companies of Topasses (half-castes), and 1,200 Sepoys in the Mysore service, and a badly-armed rabble of 15,000 footmen. Lawrence had at his disposal 500 men of his European regiment, 2,000 Sepoys, of whom 700 were de-

tached, engaged in collecting and sending in supplies, and 100 of the Nawab's Horse; his position was full of peril; the enemy's position and numbers rendered it impossible to attack them with any prospect of success. Astruc was evidently determined to run no risks, and Lawrence's surrender for want of supplies seemed inevitable.

Half a mile from Lawrence's camp, and nearly a mile from Astruc's, was the Golden Rock, where Lawrence maintained a guard of 200 Sepoys. On the 26th June, 1753, at daybreak, Astruc attacked this post with a mixed force of Europeans and Sepoys, and, in spite of a gallant resistance, overwhelmed it, killing or taking prisoners all the defenders, before assistance could reach them. The French battalion was then brought up behind the rock, the French guns were posted at the base, and opened fire; the whole Mysore army was drawn up some distance in the rear, while the Mahrattas dashed about in small detachments threatening the flanks and rear of the small English force. Lawrence's position was truly desperate: a number of his Sepoys were absent in the city, buying rice; 200 more had just been destroyed; so that, after providing for the safety of his camp, he could only muster 300 of the European regiment, 80 artillerymen, and 500 Sepoys. With this force he had advanced to within a short distance of the Golden Rock, before the outpost was overwhelmed. To retreat in face of the numerous horsemen, and pressed by Astruc's Frenchmen, meant probable destruction; yet to attack a strong position, held by such an overwhelming force, seemed nothing but sheer madness. Lawrence chose the heroic part; in a few words he explained the situation to those about him, his officers agreed in the wisdom of attacking, while the men expressed their delight at the opportunity of having "a knock at the Frenchmen," who had kept so long out of reach.

Ordering the Grenadier Company to assault the rock, Lawrence moved with the rest of his little force round the base of it, to attack the French battalion.

Seldom in war has such a sight been seen as this little band of British soldiers moving to the attack, surrounded by many thousands of enemies. Scrambling up the rock, with fixed bayonets, and without pulling a trigger, cheering as they moved, the unexpected assault of the Grenadiers, led by Captains Kirk and Kilpatrick, struck the French defenders with panic.

Not daring to stand the shock, they fled headlong down the reverse side. Meanwhile, Astruc, behind the rock, not seeing what was happening, had wheeled up his battalion to meet Lawrence, exposing its right flank to the fire of the English Grenadiers from the rock, which fire was increased by some Sepoys who had followed the Grenadiers. At this moment Lawrence drew up his men directly opposite the French front, at twenty yards distance. In spite of General Astruc's efforts, his men were struck with consternation at seeing themselves attacked by the foe that a few moments before had seemed in

their power. Smitten by musketry fire in front and flank, they fell into disorder, which a bayonet charge, preceded by a volley, converted into a panic, and they fled from the field, leaving three guns in Lawrence's hands. The French rallied on the Mysore army, and contented themselves with keeping up an ineffective cannonade. For three hours Lawrence remained at the foot of the rock in the expectation that they would renew the combat. Finding the French would not advance, he formed his little army into a hollow square, and with the captured guns and about seventy prisoners in the centre, deliberately marched back towards his camp. Hardly had he got clear of the rock, when the whole of the enemy's cavalry, upwards of 10,000 in number, charged furiously down; but the Madras European regiment and Sepoys stood firm; not a trigger was pulled. The square was halted, and the guns rapidly served, pouring in grape shot into the dense masses, till, after losing some 500 of their number, they broke up and forsook the field, leaving the little band of heroes to march unmolested back to camp, bearing the trophies of their victory. No finer feat of arms was ever performed.

The battles of Bahoor and the Golden Rock are only typical of many an encounter that took place against French armies in the neighbourhood of Trichinopoly until October, 1754, when news was received of a truce, preparation to a definite peace, between the French and English Companies, and of the recall of Dupleix. At the same time Lawrence received notice of the grant to him of a sword of honour worth £750 by the Court of Directors.

The services Lawrence rendered to his country between 1748 and 1754 cannot be over-estimated. In 1751 the French power in India was at its zenith. From the Nerbudda to Cape Comorin the whole country was under the French domination. Had Dupleix triumphed at Trichinopoly, the expulsion of the English from Madras and Fort St. David would have quickly followed. Lawrence's victories turned the scale, and brought about the withdrawal of Dupleix, in whom France lost the services of the ablest statesman she ever sent to India.

Towards the end of 1754 Lawrence received notice that the King (George II.) had bestowed on him the commission of a lieut.-colonel in the East Indies. When the news came in 1756 of the capture of Calcutta by Sooraj-ud-Dowla, and preparations for its recapture were made, ill-health prevented Lawrence from taking command, and Clive was selected, on his recommendation, for the post.

In April, 1757, France again declared war, and after further severe fighting round Trichinopoly, Lawrence found himself in Fort St. George, which on the 12th December, 1758, was besieged by General Lally and a powerful French army. Lawrence's garrison comprised 1,600 English soldiers, 64 Topasses, 89 Coffrees, and 2,220 Sepoys; 197 of the European infantry belonged to Colonel Draper's regiment, the 79th Foot, and

1,197 to the Madras European Regiment. There were also about 140 men of the Royal Artillery. The siege lasted until the 16th February, 1759, when Admiral Pocock's fleet sailed into the roadstead with reinforcements, which determined Lally to raise the siege. The English loss amounted to 33 officers, 559 Europeans and 346 Sepoys killed, wounded and prisoners. Thus came to an end the most notable siege that had yet occurred in India, and the last serious bid for an Eastern Empire by the French.

Lawrence's health had now completely broken down, and in April, 1759, he sailed for England with the intention of never returning to India. On his arrival in England, the Directors granted him an annuity of £500 a year. In September, 1760, the Directors voted statues to Lawrence, Clive, and Pocock, "that their eminent services to this Company may be ever held in remembrance."

Yielding to the solicitation of the Directors, Lawrence again returned to India, and on the 3rd October, 1761, took his seat in the Madras Council. He was again made Commander-in-Chief, and received from the King (George III.) the commission of major-general in the East Indies. His salary was fixed at £1,500 a year, and he was granted a personal staff of an aide-de-camp and a brigade-major, with seats on the Councils of Bengal and Bombay, as well as that of Madras. In April, 1766, he bade a final farewell to India. Mahomet-Ali-Khan, whose rule over the Carnatic had been secured by Lawrence's abilities, showed his gratitude by obtaining the Company's permission to grant him an annuity of £1,500.

Lawrence died in London on the 10th January, 1775, and his remains were conveyed to Dunchideock, near Exeter, where a handsome tomb was placed over his grave in the parish church, and a monument erected to his memory on Haldon Hill in the neighbourhood by his friend Sir Robert Palk, a former Governor of Madras.

On his death the Directors of the East India Company voted a sum of £700 for the erection of a monument to his memory in Westminster Abbey, in testimony of their gratitude for his eminent services. It bears the following legend:—

Discipline Established.
Fortresses Protected.
Settlements Extended.
French
And Indian Armies
Defeated
And
Peace Concluded
In the Carnatic,

with a carved representation of the fortified rock of Trichinopoly and of the Golden Rock.

Since Lawrence's day, many illustrious names have been added to the roll of our Indian officers; none among them has a

better claim to be remembered than Stringer Lawrence, the "Father of the Indian Army."

If the best general is the one who makes the fewest mistakes, Lawrence's name should occupy a high position on the list of commanders. d'Auteuil, Law, De-Kerjean, Astruc, Menier, Maissin, Lally—every French leader who crossed swords with him—retired defeated from the combat, or had to yield himself a prisoner. In the field he exhibited all the qualities of a great commander, though opportunity to exercise them on a large scale was denied him. In front of the enemy his self-possession never deserted him at the most trying moments; never forcing a battle without necessity, he struck with all his force and with the greatest daring when the opportunity occurred. In council, his judgment was as sound as it was in the field. Again and again the Civil Government had to repent that they had followed their own devices and neglected Lawrence's suggestions. Among prominent men of the time he stands alone in having left no trace of personal ill-feeling attached to his name.

Yet by some inexplicable mischance, not a single one of his numerous victories gained over a powerful European foe—often with heavy odds against him (victories which won for Britain her Indian Empire)—is recorded in the Military Annals of the nation; nor are any of them emblazoned on the colours of the regiment he so often led to conquest; and to the reproach of England, Lawrence's name and deeds—than which there are no brighter in English history—have been suffered to lapse into oblivion and neglect. But if his country has forgotten him, his name will live for all time in the proud motto of his old regiment—

"Spectamur Agendo."

NOTE.—For full particulars of Lawrence's life, see Malleson's "The French in India," Biddulph's "Stringer Lawrence," J. Murray and Fortescue's "History of the British Army."