FORGOTTEN HEROES OF THE ENGLISH ARMY.

THE military power of the Mysore State was, in the latter half of the last century, perhaps the most formidable opponent to the spread of English sway in India. The great adventurer Hyder Ali, and, after his death, his son Tippoo Sultaun, occupied the musnud, and collected large armies, well trained, and well equipped with all the necessaries of war, commissariat, artillery, and transport. They were aided by French officers, who drilled their forces, and brought to their use all the martial science of Europe. They were on many occasions supported by French troops, and, for a time at least, had all the advantage given by the presence of French sea-power in the Indian Seas.

After a long series of campaigns, fought with varying fortune, Hyder died in December 1782. There was peace for a season with Tippoo Sultaun, but his unprovoked attack on the friendly Rajah of Travancore caused a renewed outbreak of hostilities in 1790, and Lord Cornwallis, who united in himself the offices of Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in India, came to Madras in 1791 to take command of the army in the field, consisting of a regiment of English dragoons, four battalions of English regular infantry, and sixteen regiments of native cavalry and infantry. His first operation was the taking of Bangalore, and, having been joined by about 10,000 of the Nizam's irregulars, he moved on Seringapatam, the enemy's capital. But the supply of provisions for the army failed, the transport cattle were exhausted, and the incessant rains of the advanced season made an attack upon a formidable position impossible. Reluctantly it was resolved to fall back for the time on Bangalore; a retreat harassing to the British force, and full of encouragement to the defenders of Mysore.

But Lord Cornwallis had only retired in order to prepare for renewing the war. Enormous supplies in provisions, transport and artillery were being collected, and meantime he determined to reduce the numerous hill-forts which Tippoo had constructed in his dominions. These strong places not only threatened the line of communications in any future march to Seringapatam, but also cut off the supplies that might be gathered from the north and east of the English headquarters. One of the most formidable in its natural position and the strength given by art was Nundidroog. This stronghold was perched upon the summit of a mass of granite rock rising sheer from the plain seventeen hundred feet. On three sides it was altogether inaccessible, but on the fourth a steeply sloping ascent was guarded by a double line of stone-built fortifications, constructed after the best principles of European science and supported by an outwork which covered the gate with flanking fire. Its batteries were powerfully armed with heavy artillery, and wall-pieces and jingals gave a cross-fire upon all approaches that could be occupied by besiegers. The garrison, nearly three thousand strong, was commanded by Lutf Ali Beg, an officer who had served with the highest distinction under both Hyder and Tippoo, and had only lately been one of the ambassadors sent by the latter to Constantinople. Nundidroog proudly dominated an especially

rich and fertile district, and was considered to be impregnable by any means other than prolonged blockade and consequent starvation; in fact, when the fortress, then without any of its present armament and defences, was formerly taken by Hyder Ali from the Mahrattas, it only yielded after a close investment of more than three years. The men who conquered India recked little of obstacles in their path. These obstacles were there to be removed, and the difficulties of an enterprise were never so great that the word "impossible" was breathed in the British ranks. It is seldom realised nowadays what spirit and endurance characterised the warriors who, clad in the same uniform and head-dress which they would have worn when serving in Northern Europe, toiled in long and weary marches through a land where roads, in the modern sense of the word, were not, and where all the modern appliances for mitigating the rigors of a tropical climate were absent. Never

CAPTAIN ROBERTSON, THE HERO OF NUNDIDROOG.
From an Oil Painting.

were more brilliant feats of arms performed than they accomplished. Never did armies find the powers of nature more closely allied to the efforts of their human enemies.

To reduce Nundidroog, Lord Cornwallis detached the brigade commanded by Major Gowdie, accompanied by a breaching battery. As has been seen, there was only one point of approach by which heavy pieces could be brought against the defences, and in order to reach it a road had to be cut and the guns had to be hauled over rock and crag to batteries formed with infinite labour on the crest of a precipice. During the whole of this long-continued toil the fatigue parties were exposed to unremitting and harassing fire from the wall-pieces and jingals, though, fortunately, the heavy guns of the place could not be sufficiently depressed to be effective. For fourteen days no reply could be made, and the British force gave that highest proof of heroic determination—the stern, unmoved sufferance of scathe without being able to fire a shot or strike a blow in retaliation.

At last the six battering pieces were in position, and were able to throw their massive shot on the walls of Nundidroog. After three days of firing these did their work. The outer wall began to crumble away and two breaches were formed, but the second or inner wall could not be touched, and remained strong and defiant as ever. The only course open was to deliver an assault, and, securing the full possession of the outer rampart, to make there a lodgment from which the inner defences might be attacked. Lord Cornwallis had moved the greater part of his army to the neighbourhood of the fortress to support and cover the operations of Major Gowdie's brigade, and in order to be able to furnish the forlorn hope from the British regular regiments. He carefully examined the work that had been done, and gave orders for a final bombardment, to continue till night-fall of Oct. 18, after which the rising of the moon was to be the signal for the rush upon the breaches. Among the regular regiments in camp were the 71st Highlanders, who had only been raised fourteen years previously by Lord Macleod, and had since 1780 been serving in India, creating for themselves a glorious reputation in all the campaigns of a period of incessant war. To Captain Robertson of this corps was assigned the duty of leading the stormers in the forthcoming onfall. Young in years, this gallant Scotsman was old in war; for he had taken his part in nine battles, besides many minor affairs, and that part had not been one of an onlooker in the reserve, but had ever led him into the foremost crash of contest, where bullets were flying thickest and swords bit most deeply. The man who could recall leading his company at the storming of the French lines at Cuddalore, where were slain by his side his two subalterns and twenty-six men out of a strength of fifty-two who had followed him into action, might, after that trial alone, be deemed a seasoned soldier. The son of Dr. Robertson, Principal of Edinburgh University, whose name still lives as a great historian, Captain Robertson might, too, have been equally famous as a soldier, if his exploits had not been performed on a distant stage, in a day when great events and great deeds were convulsing the European world, blurring by their vast immediate interest the importance of achievements far across the seas, which soon fell into oblivion.

In making the assault on the breaches of Nundidroog, it was determined that the assailants should press forward with the defenders when these were driven back, and should either pass the second wall with them or carry it by escalade in the confusion. If the second wall could not be thus carried, it was at least hoped that a lodgment might be made behind a cavalier between the walls, from which a regular attack on the inner defence could be carried out. The head of the forlorn hope was divided into two parts, each of which was to rush on one of the breaches. On the right were twenty Grenadiers taken from the 36th and 71st, under Lieutenant Mackenzie, and on the left twenty of the 71st Light Company under Lieutenant Moore. These parties were to be closely followed by the two flank companies of

the Highlanders, and Captain Robertson commanded the whole. The flank companies of the 36th formed the immediate support, and the gallant General Medows, waiving his rank, volunteered to superintend the whole operation.

The heavy cannonade from the batteries ceased with the daylight of Oct. 18, and about midnight the stormers moved silently into the advanced parallel, a hundred yards from the breaches. There they rested upon their arms till the rising moon should give them light enough for their hardy enterprise. In the moment of suspense before action, the minds of men are highly strung, and a little thing may influence them, either stimulating a warlike spirit or casting a fatal chill upon their courage. They are in a state of nervous excitement which is probably as nearly akin to fear as it is to valour. While the stormers were waiting for the orders to move, someone whispered that there might be a mine. General Medows heard the ill-omened foreboding and said quietly, "To be sure there is, but it is a mine of gold." A smothered laugh from the men showed that his ready words had averted the possible panic.

At length the moon rose in all her tropic radiance. The time had come, and General Medows gave to Captain Robertson the signal to act. Sword in hand he bounded out of the parallel, followed by the forlorn hope, and rushed up the steep and rocky ascent. Silently as the British troops had prepared, the enemy were on the alert to receive them. A sustained fire of cannon, musketry, and rockets was opened from the works, and, still more formidable, huge stones rolled on the attackers came hurtling down the roadway with crushing impetus. The whole scene of conflict was illuminated by blue lights, flaming on the battlements and searching the corners shaded from the beams of the moon. Death took a heavy toll from the eager stormers, but there was no pause or stay. The breaches were reached and surmounted. The fighting within the first wall was at close quarters, and the British sword and bayonet encountered the spear and tulwar of Asia. Cheers and shouts mingled with the quick panting of men engaged in mortal strife, and the groans of those who had been hurled to the ground sorely wounded and helpless. But the Highland charge was irresistible, and the Mysoreans, perforce giving way, fled to the shelter of the second wall. It was not to prove another post of vantage. Robertson, with his foremost men, was hard in pursuit of the fliers, and forced the gate before it could be closed and fastened. The supporting companies came up, following quick on the forlorn hope, and the body of the place was entered.

The fate of a fortress taken by storm is always a hard one. The passions of the conquerors are roused to madness; the discipline of the soldiery is for the time being dissolved, and little ruth is shown in the moment of victory. Captain Robertson had shown the most daring courage in the attack, and he now equally displayed cool-headed self-restraint and humanity in his exertions to save the lives of the conquered. Seeing that the fortress was taken and that its garrison had now no thought of further resistance, he applied himself to preventing bloodshed. To his efforts Lutf Ali Beg and the greater number of his men owed their lives, and they learned that the British warriors were as merciful as they were brave. They were taken as prisoners to Vellore, while all the women and children were escorted in safety and honour beyond the pickets and allowed to join their countrymen.

Such services as those of Captain Robertson would, in our time, bring high reward and public commendation. Medals, stars, and crosses would commemorate their performance. *He* never wore any decoration; *he* gained no rank but that which must follow long and strenuous service. A few words of cordial approval in general orders were all the acknowledgment that he received. Shattered and disabled by the severity of his toils, he lingered in bodily helplessness through the evening of his days as a retired Lieutenant-General. He gave much to his country, and with coldness his country meagrely requited his patriotic devotion to her interests.