

The Roscrea Rajah

This is the true story of Roscrea man George Thomas who was recognised as one of the great military leaders of the 18th century.

George was born in Roscrea in 1756 to Roman Catholic parents. His father was a well-known horseman and when he was killed from a fall from his horse his mother remarried. George didn't get along with his new stepfather so he left Roscrea at the age of 20 in 1776 after his mother died. He travelled to Youghal where he worked on the dock loading and unloading ships. This is where he would have got a love for the sea and adventure as ships from all over the world would have docked there at the time. So by the end of 1778 he sailed off from Ireland in search of a new career.

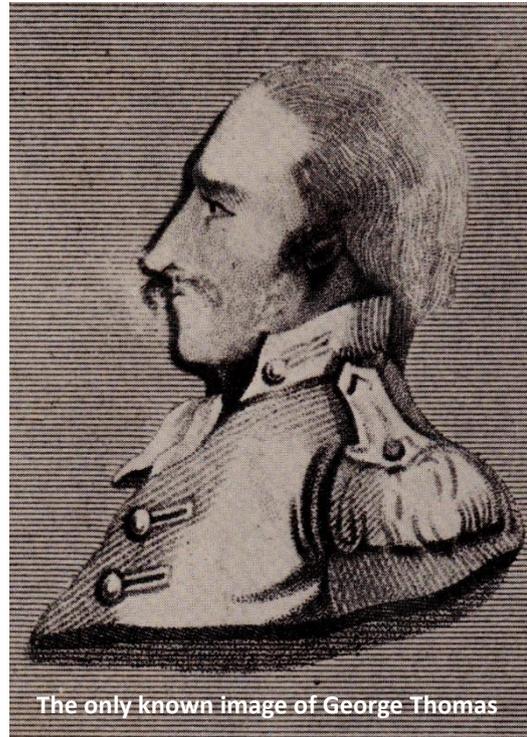
In 1780 he was press-ganged into the British navy and was posted on a man-of-war in the fleet of Admiral Hughes. This would have been a cruel regime where sailors were regularly flogged and beaten; the Irish had a bad reputation so they were treated very badly. In 1781 their ship had set sail for Madras in India and by then George had impressed the captain so much that he had gained the rank of quartermaster and had already taken part in four engagements against the French. After reaching Madras he decided to desert the ship.

At this time Madras was the centre of British rule in India and had a wide mix of cultures and religions. George met a man called Kelly also from Tipperary and they became friends. On Kelly's advice George joined the Pollygars who were a band of mercenaries fighting with the French against the British and so his adventure and amazing life in India began.

Below is a synopsis of his adventures from encyclopaedia Britannica in 1911.

TOWARDS the end of the last century the once mighty empire of the Chaghtai Turks in India had become a complete ruin. The ship of State, whose braveries of silk and gold had shone so fair and far, now lay a wreck upon the water. It is difficult to find a parallel in history for the state of things that existed in 1789. At Delhi, contrary to all traditions, a blind Emperor sat upon the throne of Shahjahan. The Mahratta confederacy held sway from Puna to the walls of the Capital. The Capital itself was under a French Governor. The Savoyard, de Boigne, held his quasi-Court at Aligarh; Begam Sombre had established an oasis of servile peace at Sardhana. Over this chaotic scene the future of the great Moghul still turned; a crowned but sightless presence: " toujours assis sur le trone ; et tout se faisait en son nom " (de Boigne.)

It was in this abnormal condition of public affairs that George Thomas appeared upon the scene where he was soon to play so busy, if so barren, a part. A native of Roscrea in Tipperary, he had



The only known image of George Thomas

come to Madras as Quartermaster of a ship in the fleet commanded by the dilatory Hughes; and he landed in the Presidency town in September 1782, when that Admiral called there after his four inconclusive engagements with the Bailli de Suffrein. Weary of a subordinate career under a commander who could not woo victory, Thomas deserted and passed some years in an obscure life of adventure among the Poligars of the Carnatic. Of these no record remains.

But in 1787 we find him in a post of honour in the small army of Sardhana, whither he had wandered, as it were, by chance. In the spring of the following year he accompanied the Begam in the expedition of the Emperor to the south-west: and took the initiative in the action before Gokulgarh already briefly described in my chapter on Sardhana. This brilliant affair deserves notice as the earliest in which the superiority of European skill and discipline was unmistakably displaced to the people of India.

The following details have been left on record by Colonel James Skinner, C. B., who stated that he derived them from Thomas himself. The Emperor, in this final assertion of authority, had sat down with a large force before the fortified town of Gokulgarh, where he was defied by Najaf Kuli Khan, a converted Rajput, who had gone into rebellion. The officers of the Imperial pickets, having neglected to keep a due look out, had been surprised in the grey of the morning by a sortie of the garrison; and the garrison, profiting by the confusion, had supported their sortie by a general attack, before which the besieging line gave way. The pursued and their pursuers were streaming towards the centre of the camp; already the standard of the Empire and the sacred person before whose tent it floated were in risk of capture. There was not a moment to spare.

As the melee passed the Begam's tents, she came forth in her litter, escorted by Thomas at the head of three battalions and a fieldpiece, manned by Europeans. Rapidly the Infantry were thrown across the way; they deployed into line with the greatest coolness, keeping the gun in the centre, loaded with grape shot. The whole line opened fire, the enemy withered, wavered and hung back.

A Moghul leader-cantered up with a body of cavalry, followed by the Gosains, or fighting Friars, of Himmat Bahadur, and a frantic charge fell upon the late victorious garrison. They fought well, as the bodies of the Moghul leader, with many of his men and two hundred Gosains, remained upon the ground to avouch; but the Emperor was saved, the defence of the place failed; and the entire credit, or by far the greater portion of it, rested with the energetic Begam and her able Irish follower.

Clouds again fall upon the scene. Whether or not Thomas attained to any closer and dearer relations with the then beautiful Chatelaine of Sardhana, can only be guessed; he was young, tall, handsome, and spirited; and there was nothing in the lady's antecedents to forbid such a conjecture. At all events, from the date of the action of Gokulgarh (5th April 1788) to the latter part of the year 1792, we hear no more mention of George Thomas, except that he continued in the Sardhana service.

At the latter period the Begam had completely transferred her favour to a French officer, named Levassault; and Thomas retired in disappointment and something like despair, proceeding to Anupshahr on the Ganges, where he became the guest of the officers of the British Frontier Force which was then maintained there in pursuance of a treaty of alliance with the Nawab of Oudh and which was commanded at that time by Brigadier MacGowan. The Begam shortly after married her new Commandant.

During his stay at Anupshahr, Mr. Thomas presented himself to the nobility and gentry of the Upper Provinces as prepared to execute orders for reducing, forts, cutting throats, or otherwise smoothing over administrative difficulties and his services were, no long time after, accepted by a Mahratta adventurer, named Appu Khandi Rao, who had been dismissed by Sindhia from the charge of the Gwalior country and was now turning, his attention to the establishment of power on his own account.

This Gentleman Thomas agreed to join, with his khas resala (a small body of cavalry, which men in his position always retained about their persons), and received instructions to raise one hundred more horse and one thousand foot, for whose maintenance he was to receive three parganas (Ang. "hundreds") in the neighbourhood of Alwar.

It does not appear that these tracts belonged to the donor by whom they were so lavishly bestowed (or, indeed, were they ever thoroughly appropriated by the done). But it was probably enough, in the conventional morality of such times, to say to Z- "Go and get me the property of A, and you may take that of B for your pains." The country belonged, in one sense, to the Emperor, by whom it had been overrun (or to his representative the Minister, Mahdaji Sindhia); in another sense, it belonged to the Rao of Machari, to whom it had been assigned by the Imperial Government; finally, it might have been remembered that it was actually occupied by the Mewatis, a race of whom the memoirs of Thomas only condescend to take notice by saying that "when a large force was sent against them they usually took shelter in the mountains, but when the force was inferior in numbers, by uniting, they proved victorious."

By this contumacious course of conduct the Mewatis of these parts had "naturally" incurred the resentment of Khandi Rao, who availed himself of the resources of the Irishman to bringing them to reason. Agreeing to "balance accounts every six months" and endowed with two bullock-guns and a stock of ammunition, George departed to kill the bear whose skin had been thus made over to him. On his way he received news of the death of Mahdaji Sindhia, and accompanied his employer to Delhi, where they appear to have passed some time in political intrigues.

By the time that all was ready for a fresh start, the year 1791, was far advanced; and the rains of the monsoon had set in with some severity. The Mewatis resented Thomas' visit, and plundered his camp in the dark, wet nights; but the new-comer was not a man to be trifled with. Regardless of the weather and of the obstinate valour of the Mewatis, which at one time left him with no more than a dozen followers, he extorted from them an agreement to pay up one year's land revenue and obtained, for the time, possession of Jhajhar and Tijara, two important towns in their country. He was making active preparations to attack the neighbouring fort of Bahadurgarh when he was suddenly recalled by news of an attack upon his rear by his old mistress, Begam Sombre.

Not willing, to risk his half-trained levies and ill-consolidated power in a present conflict with Levaissoult and his organised force, Thomas now retired on Tijara, a town fifty-five miles SW of Delhi, where he remained till summoned by Khandi Rao, who was in danger from a mutiny of his troops. Profiting, by the darkness of a rainy night, Thomas succeeded in withdrawing his master from this disagreeable position, and escorted him safely to Kanaund, a place of strength in the neighbourhood. On this occasion the Mahratta Chief adopted the Irish sailor as his son, augmenting his force, and endowing him with lands (always belonging to others) estimated to yield one hundred and fifty thousand Rupees a year.

These lands, and others in the neighbourhood, were in no long time wrested from the usurping Appu and his follower by Sindhia; and Thomas underwent the additional mortification of having to expose his life in realising the revenue for the new masters. In all things, however, he displayed unshaken fidelity to his immediate employer- the virtue of a Xenophon and a Hawkwood – without which no soldier of fortune can ever win more respect than is due to a successful buccaneer.

He was ill-rewarded by the half-crazy and wholly unprincipled Mahratta, who first of all tried to discharge his faithful servant on the false pretence of being desired to do so by Sindhia's general. On being applied to for an explanation, that officer, replied that it was false that he had ever expressed such a desire to Appu Khandi, but at the same time the would be very glad to see Mr. Thomas enter the regular service, in which he offered him a high command, Thomas, however, thinking that he could do more by remaining where he was, declined the offer; and both his subsequent success and his ultimate fall will be seen to be traceable to this, which forms therefore the crisis of his life, and which must be placed about the beginning of 1795.

During that year another and a more romantic episode took place, which, however, proved to have little or no influence upon the fortunes of Thomas; and which need therefore be but briefly referred to here. It has, moreover, been already described elsewhere.*

It will be remembered that Thomas' successful rival at Sardhana (whose name from the epitaph we have written Levassoult) had disturbed Thomas by a demonstration during the preceding autumn. He now made a direct attack upon Jhajhar, with a force consisting of four battalions of well-trained infantry with twenty pieces of artillery, supported by a strong, body of cavalry and led by officers of European extraction. To meet this storm Thomas mustered his best following but it amounted to, little more than half the number in foot and artillery; and we do not hear of his having at that time any Christian Subalterns.

But the cloud vanished with even more rapidity than it had taken to form. Led by a discontented Belgian officer, nicknamed Liegeois from his birth-place, the Sardhana troops mutinied and Levassoult had to hurry home and concert measures for his own safety and that of the Begam. How the British Government offered them an asylum; how the mutineers foolishly, and from a blind lust of lucre, impeded their departure; how Levassoult gallantly tried to bear off his wife and benefactress, and, failing in that attempt, sacrificed himself under a mistaken belief that she was dead; all this has been already told. Thomas heard of the revolution by letter. The chivalrous nature of the British Tar was deeply roused by the troubles of his ungrateful mistress.

No sooner did he hear of the death of her husband and her own captivity than he wrote to Liegeois remonstrating strongly on the folly and villainy that had been displayed, and followed up his letter by appearing at Sardhana at the head of his bodyguard. The mutineers were at first inclined to punish the rash appearance of so small a force of intruders, but the heroism of the adventure was not unsupported by prudence. While the parley was taking place and there were signs of its assuming a menacing turn, a body of infantry, which had followed Thomas at top-speed, drew near; and the ringleader of the mutineers, not knowing how many more might be at hand, or how far their own officers and comrades might be secret sympathisers with the strangers, hastened to restore the Begam to freedom and authority.

Few details of this counter-revolution are available; but it is, probable that the councils of the Sardhana force had been weakened by Thomas' letter, and by more solid arguments yet; for he used to say that he had spent two lakhs of Rupees in the negotiations that were found necessary.

Meanwhile, Appu Khandi continued in a series of intrigues against his employer which were as unsuccessful as they were unprovoked, and which, ending, as they did, in the suicide of the Mahratta, may be taken to indicate that his intellect was disordered. Sometimes it was an attempt to arrest Thomas in Durbar, frustrated by the presence of mind of the victim, and perhaps by unwillingness on the part of intended agents who sympathised with their gallant comrade and against their suspicious Chief.

At other times Thomas found himself attacked by enemies whom he had not provoked and whom he had to chastise in open warfare. Before the end of the year 1795, Appu Khandi made complete apologies and persuaded Thomas to cross the Jumna northward and attack the Sikhs, against which warlike people he was successful and cured them for some time of their propensity to invade the upper Duab of Hindustan.

Englishmen of the present day know the fighting value of Sikhs, both as enemies and friends. But in Thomas' day, before they had been organised by Ranjit Singh and taught infantry drill by the veterans of Buonaparte, they do not seem to have been considered more formidable than any other collection of armed peasants. But ever since the days of Aurangzeb's successor, the mild Bahadur Shah, they had been in the habit of invading the country between the capital and what are now called "The Hills north of Dehra." This tract, the upper portion of which was known as the Baoni, or "Fifty-two pergunnahs", had been the fief of Najib-ud-Dowlah when that adventurer ruled the affairs of the dwindled Empire; and, after his death, had been occupied by his son and grandson. After the horrible crime, and equally horrible punishment, of the latter (Gholam Quadir Khan)* these lands had been held by the Mahrattas, but had been sorely wasted by the followers of the Guru from the Punjab.

On the occasion of the present invasion of the Baoni by the Sikhs, Appu thought proper to send a force against them under Thomas. The intruders had reached Saharanpur, and had already cut to pieces the local troops, when it struck the Mahratta Ucalegon that his own possessions might be the next to suffer. Thomas accordingly marched straight upon Saharanpur. But the Sikhs, who had formerly seen (to use the adventurer's own words) "a sample of my method of fighting", did not wait to be attacked, but took temporary refuge in the fortified town of Jelalabad, in what is now the District of Muzafarnagar.

Thomas was now a marked man; and the Mahratta leader in those parts, the well-known Lakwa Dada, obtained Appu's permission to employ him to raise and train a considerable body of horse and foot, assigning him the District of Panipat as a fund for their support. Thus strengthened, Thomas took Shamli and Lakhnaoti, and drove the Sikhs back to their own country, expressing the opinion (which time, we must admit, has not confirmed) that they would never unite, or again become formidable to their neighbours. Thomas was not aware of the abilities of him who was then but a minor chief of unripe years; but the facts of the subsequent progress of the Sikh nation under Ranjit Singh may help to illustrate the difficulty of making accurate forecasts as to the future of any Asiatic community.

Two days before the reduction of Shamli, Thomas received a letter from his employer, in which he was informed that Appu Khandi, weary of an incurable disorder from which he had for some time been suffering, was about to commit suicide by plunging into the sacramental waters of the Holy Ganges. If the son wished to see the father again he must hasten to headquarters. So wrote Appu; but Thomas was too busy to attend; and when leisure came, the moment had passed. Thomas got to camp to find that all was over; the grim purpose had been effected and one Wavan Rao, nephew of the deceased, had assumed the state and power that should, by Hindu Law, have been Thomas', if only Thomas had been a Hindu! This second critical event in our hero's fortunes seems to have occurred somewhere in 1797, and proved the starting, point of a new, a brief, but by no means an inglorious, career.

Up to this time Thomas had not suffered much molestation from what was then the paramount Power, viz., the Delhi Empire, swayed by Sindhia-old Mahdaji had been generally employed in other directions; and his Lieutenant in Upper India-General de Boigne-was a wise and accomplished statesman, not jealous of the British, nor prone to useless interference with unoffending, persons. But the new Sindhia-Daulat Rao-was a far less competent ruler, and in 1796 he lost the services of de Boigne who retired from his service and was succeeded by a Frenchman, named Perron, a man of humble origin* and defective education.

Not only was Perron by birth and character disposed to jealousy, but there is reason to believe that he was already entangling himself in the far spreading meshes of the Napoleonic scheme. So far back as 1791 Tippu, the Sultan of Seringapatam, had sent an embassy to France, inviting the king of that country to join him in an attack upon British India. Poor Louis XVI., then in the last throes of his vain struggle with the Revolution, rejected the proposal with scorn, saying; "This is the American affair over again. I was young, then and easily deceived, my present sufferings are the result of that error". The Nizam had a large force under French officers, and their regimental button, at the time we have reached, bore the device of the Cap of Liberty. Buonaparte was already aspiring to power and had sailed for Egypt in 1798.

In the same year Malartic, the Governor of Mauritius, issued a proclamation calling, for volunteers for India ; and he followed up this measure by sending off a frigate to that country, on board of which were about a hundred Frenchmen, who landed at Mangalore. Proceeding, to Seringapatam they proclaimed the Republic, and constituted a Jacobin Club, of which they made the Sultan a member, under the style of "Citizen Tippu". In July of the same year the French occupied Alexandria.

There is no reason to doubt that Perron, if not actually encouraged, watched these events with eager sympathy; and he must have found any stimulus that was needed for his jealousy of Thomas in the thought that the bold adventurer had been a British sailor and might be a pioneer of British conquest.

This is Skinner's report; and Skinner was in Perron's corps d'armee at the time.

"General Perron had now succeeded in bringing all Hindustan under subjection; and every Raja and Suba, from the Nabada to the Sutlaj, regarded him as lord and master. He had now under his command four regular brigades of 8,000 effective men each, and 10,000 regular Hindustani horse, besides the command of all the troops of every raja and chief in that wide territory. Upon the lowest calculation, he drew about Rs. 60,000 per month ; and so puffed up was he with his titles and

power that he allowed himself to be persuaded to send an ambassador to Buonaparte. M. Descartes was the person despatched."

Thomas at first co-operated with this mighty French potentate ; and, after expelling the Sikhs from the Doab, attacked them on the other side of the Jumna, apparently in concert with Perron's forces, who were completing the pacification of Saharanpur and that neighbourhood on the side of Hindustan.

But this appearance of union only lasted while the Afgahns were menacing, Lahore under Zamin Shah, the grandson of the famous Abdali. And when the common peril disappeared towards the end of 1798, Sindhia's troops began to threaten Thomas with serious attacks. Defeating them in several encounters, but unable, in the face of their opposition, to raise sufficient revenue to pay his men, Thomas now found himself compelled to take to open plunder as a means of maintenance for his troops and himself. Fixing his head-quarters at Hhajhar once more, he broke new ground by attacking the territories of the Maharajah of Jaipur, with whom he had not the slightest pretence of quarrel.

Sitting down before a fortified town near Kanaund, called Haricho, he demanded of the Governor a ransom of a lakh of rupees; and, when this was refused, took the town by assault and prepared to storm the fort, which thereupon capitulated, and half the sum demanded at first was accepted. Unfortunately while these negotiations were going on, the town had been accidentally set on fire, and a great deal of property was consumed. After some further depredations in the Jaipur territory, Thomas returned to Hhajhar and began seriously to consider his plans for the future.

He had now been sixteen years in India, and the goal seemed no nearer. Indeed, since he had entered Begam Samru's service his position had begun to deteriorate. Then he had been a respectable military adventurer of the type (in a humble way) of Marshal Keith in Prussia. Now he was little more than a glorified gang-robber; and might look to be treated as one if he should ever be forced to succumb to Perron's hostility. Turning such considerations over in his mind, Thomas formed the bold and original project of establishing himself as an independent ruler in an adjacent country which lay unclaimed at his very door, and which possessed a variety of resources to tempt the ambition of a needy soldier.

Haryana ("Greenland") on the NW. of what was then Thomas' country, was a tract of over three thousand square miles, separating the Cis-Sutlaj seats of the Sikhs from the Great Bikaner desert. A compact district, containing many towns and villages, abounding in wells, and permeated by two ancient canals, it had once been rich and fertile, and had obtained its name from the residents of the more arid tracts by which it was surrounded. To the North, moreover, the Cagar, a branch of the once famous Saraswati, deposited alluvial soil yearly.

So that throughout Haryana the pasturage was good ; while the cattle were famous, and the habits of the people hardy, though not without some of the lawlessness which (except in poetry) too often characterises pastoral races.

Midmost in Haryana stands a small eminence on which in the middle ages one of the Pathan Emperors had built a hunting lodge. The hill had since been occupied by a walled town, with a citadel. From the evidence of the Jesuit traveller, Father Tiefenthaler, it seems to have gone to

decay in the last century. The water-supply had failed, so that only a rain-crop could be raised year by year, the fort was in ruins, and the town was a collection of mud huts.

But the situation of the place pleased Thomas; and he resolved to make it his capital and place of arms. "Here," he told Francklin, "I established my capital, rebuilt the walls long since decayed, and repaired the fortifications. As it had been long deserted, at first I found difficulty in providing inhabitants but by degrees I selected between five and six thousand persons to whom I allowed every lawful indulgence. I established a mint and coined my own rupees, which I made current in my army and country; as from the commencement of my career at Jhajhar I had resolved to establish an independency, I employed, Workmen and artificers of all kinds; I cast my own artillery, commenced Making muskets, matchlocks and powder, and in short, made the best preparations for carrying on an offensive and defensive war."

His ambition combined with his prudence to turn his attention from Hindustan towards the Punjab, then occupied by discordant clans of Sikhs. "I wished to put myself in a capacity of attempting the conquest of the Punjab, and aspired to the honour of planting the British standard on the banks of the Attock". The completion of this design by other hands took place 50 years later, and cost much valiant blood. Thomas was not only a good but a considerate organiser of human affairs. He paid his men well; and he set apart out of his yearly revenues a fund yielding Rs. 40,000 per annum for pensions to the families of men killed in his service ; each family received half the pay, whatever it was, that had been drawn by the deceased ; and payments were made with punctuality.

His first operations on his intended principality, however, were unpropitious; for he was met at Kanhori by such a spirited resistance from the inhabitants that he had to retreat with the loss of three hundred men; with his usual tenacity, however, he resumed the attack when the monsoon was over, and was just ready to take it by storm when the garrison, following the common Eastern policy on such occasions, slipped out in the darkness of the night. The fall of Kanhori had the effect of preventing all further resistance, and by the beginning of 1799 the sailor Raja had established his authority through a great part of Haryana.

Nothing presents the contrast of West and East in more startling opposition. Here was a vagrant who, in the dominions of his native sovereign, would have sat in the stocks or been glad to earn an occasional half-crown, but bearing rule in the land of Mahratta and contemplating a conquest from which Alexander the Great had shrunk. Thomas indeed, held a considerable position. Besides his former acquisitions, the revenues of which sufficed for the maintenance of his military establishments and workshops, he derived from his new possessions the revenues of two hundred and fifty townships, formerly rated at nearly one-sixth of a million sterling, though at that time much decayed.

His military force at the outset consisted of three battalions of foot, each commanded by a European (or Eurasian) officer, with fourteen guns and a small body of Rohilla horse. With this contingent he joined Wavan Rao nephew and successor to his former employer, Appu Khandi, in a fresh attack upon the territories of Jaipur ; acting, however, rather as an ally than as a dependent, and stipulating for a handsome retainer in hard cash.

After some temporary successes the invaders were startled by news that the Maharaja was marching to chastise them, at the head of forty thousand Rajput troops, the pusillanimous Mahratta

was for an immediate retreat; but Thomas by spirited remonstrances persuaded him to remain, and they encamped before the walled town of Fatihpur, on the western side of the Jaipur country. Here they demand a ransom of ten lakhs, which being refused, the town was stormed, and Thomas, unable to entrench by reason of the sandy soil, made a camp, protected in rear by the town walls and in front by strong abattis, produced by interlacing the boughs of thorny acacia trees felled for the purpose. Scarcely had this camp been provisioned and the batteries mounted when the heads of the enemy's columns appeared in sight. On the third day Thomas was completely successful in a sortie. In this, with two of his battalions, and a small force of cavalry, supported by eight guns, he repulsed 7,000 of the Rajputs, who were endeavouring to seize the wells, always an object of anxiety in those thirsty tracts.

Undeterred by this omen, and confident in their numbers, the main body of the enemy advanced early next morning; and Thomas, leaving a detail to guard his camp, moved out the rest of his small force, -almost without support from the disheartened Mahrattas. The result is an encouragement, for all time, to good soldiers that they should never despair because outnumbered in oriental warfare. The enemy advanced in three divisions, one to attack the camp, one to occupy the city, and the third to deal, as they thought, with Thomas. This last party consisted of ten regular battalions, with twenty-two field-pieces and the musketeers, or matchlockmen of the Rajah's bodyguard, the whole under the command of the General-in-Chief. To oppose this large force, Thomas had at first nearly two thousand men, but was obliged to diminish still more that small force by the exigencies of the day.

With his remaining men he took post on a sand-hill, where he was vigorously attacked by a strong body of cavalry, at the same time that the city was attacked by another column and six guns. After dispersing, the assault upon himself, Thomas briskly charmed the enormous body who were threatening the city, the small garrison there placed put the enemy between two fires; his vast multitude was thrown into confusion, broke and fled. After some delay Thomas succeeded in persuading the horsemen of his Mahratta ally to pursue the fugitive Rajputs, and then applied himself to the removal of two twenty-four-pounder guns which had been in position on the sand-hill and which the retreating, enemy had left there.

But such were the overwhelming numbers of the Rajputs that, even after this defeat as above described, enough force was left to form a cavalry charge for the purpose of rescuing the guns. And this they did, although Thomas succeeded in bringing off his men, with some loss, and without the twenty-four-pounders. In this action Thomas lost 300 men and a European officer; having, with less than two thousand troops beaten off above 30,000 of the enemy, and inflicted on them a loss of 2,000 men. Excepting in a feeble pursuit his Mahratta, allies had rendered no assistance; and one can hardly wonder at their supineness, when we think of the odds, and the influence such things have with Asiatics.

This was the most important action of the brief campaign, from which Wavan Rao and his follower retired, after undergoing, great suffering from the heat and the scarcity of water. Soon after his return, however, instead of going, into cantonments to recruit, the indefatigable Thomas set off on a fresh expedition, and into a still more arid region. The Rajah of Bikaner, a sandy tract to the West of Hariana, had co-operated-however feebly with his brother of Jaipur during the late hostilities; and our adventurer judged it prudent to make an example of Bikaner without delay. It was now near

midsummer of 1799; the monsoon was at hand, when the periodical rains would soon favour campaigning, in the desert; but Thomas resolved to leave nothing to chance. Warned by the distress on account of water which had lately befallen his men, he resolved to carry with him a large store of that indispensable article, carried in goat-skins; and, thus provided he attacked the first of the Rajah's towns that he came upon, and soon extracted from his neighbour an indemnity with which he was content to retire.

But not to repose. His next operations were against the Cis-Sutlaj Sikhs; and, after striking them several heavy blows, he found himself invited by Ambaji Ainglia, one of Sindhia's Lieutenants, to join him in an attack on the Rajah of Udaipur, who had espoused the cause of a refractory Mahratta General, the celebrated Lakwa Dada, this campaign, which was attended by the success that usually marked our adventurer's proceedings, is chiefly to be noticed for two threatening symptoms.

Thomas' men for the first time displayed insubordination, and the Mahratta government at headquarters showed symptoms of increasing desire to control his actions. Equally prompt in asserting his own authority and in submitting to that of the Chief whom he might, for the time be serving, Thomas suppressed the mutiny of his men by active, finally, indeed severe, proceedings; and when Sindhia (moved probably by Perron), ordered him to leave Ambaji and make peace with Lakwa, he replied that he could take orders from Ambaji alone. Whatever he thought of the prudence of all this, it is impossible not to admire the moral qualities displayed by this solitary European on that occasion. But it is probable, that the circumstances combined to prepare a catastrophe of which as yet there were but few premonitory

At the end of 1799, Thomas retired to Hansi; but, before the winter was over, set off Northward for a fresh campaign, which lasted seven months, and in which, says Thomas, "I had been more successful than I could possibly expect when I first took the field with a force of 5,000 men and thirty-six pieces of cannon. I, lost in killed, wounded and disabled, nearly one-third of my men, but the enemy lost 5,000 of all descriptions. I realised nearly 200,000-rupees (two lakhs) exclusive of the pay of my army, and was to receive an additional lakh for the hostages which were given up, these successes were obtained, chiefly, at the expense of the Sikhs of Patiala and the neighbourhood; and they left Thomas, as he says, "Dictator in all the countries** south of the river Sutlaj."

Thomas was now at the zenith of his glory; and it is possible that, had his prudence and diplomatic ability equalled his other gifts, he might have altered the whole current of subsequent Indian History. At the beginning, of 1800 Perron was in disfavour, and Sindhia was being pressed by English influences; while Holkar was threatening him with a serious rivalry, and his own attention was being greatly distressed by Deccan politics. If Thomas could have cemented effectual alliances with Holkar, with Lakwa Dada, and with Begam Sombre, and if the British authorities could have seen their way a little clearer, there seems reason to suppose that he might have obtained possession of the capital and the Emperor's person; and, having done so, he might have subverted Perron; and the whole of Upper India, brought thus under indirect British influence, might have remained independent for another generation, perhaps, ultimately, to give the British as much trouble as has since been caused by Cabul.

But it was not so to be. Holkar and the Begam proved useless. Lakwa retreated-to die at Jaudhpore-the British hung back. At the time of which we are now speaking, the timid policy of Sir John Shore was being pretty generally reversed by Lord Mornington, afterwards Marquis Wellesley. But for, the

present active operations were chiefly confined to the Deccan. Thomas opened a correspondence, through a Captain E. V. White, in which he offered his services in any measures which the Calcutta government might purpose ; he would advance, he said, if desired ; occupy the Punjab, and place himself and his forces under the control of the British Commander-in-Chief. By this plan, he wrote, "I have nothing in view but the welfare of my King, and country. I shall be sorry to see my conquests fall to the Mahrattas. I wish to give them to my King and to serve him for the remainder of my days, and this I can only do so as a soldier in this part of the world."

But the plans of the Calcutta government were not ripe and their rejection of Thomas prepared for them the deaths of many brave soldiers and officers, and laborious campaigns that lasted nearly five years. The best evidence that Thomas had it in his power to do what he proposed, is to be found, not alone in his own undertakings, but in the testimony of an intelligent European contemporary. It was the opinion of Major Lewis Ferdinand Smith, an English officer, then serving, under Perron, that Thomas might at this period have done all that has been above sketched as possible; for the substitution of Thomas for Perron as Generalissimo of the Mahrattas (which Smith declares was then possible) would have rallied to the British side all those officers, -British, or of British extraction, who were, on the subsequent breaking out of war, either dismissed or massacred.

Buonaparte had left Egypt in the pursuit of his personal aims ; Abercromby and Hutchinson were beginning their victorious operations in that country; the invasion of India by the Russians had collapsed, and their crazy originator, the Czar Paul, was on the eve of his own fatal crisis. For the present, however, French influence was still paramount in Upper India. Early in 1801, Thomas augmented his forces, which now consisted of ten battalions of disciplined infantry, 1,000 cavalry and sixty pieces of artillery. With this force* he made a fresh start for the northward, crossing the Sutlaj in the face of the Sikh army, and advancing rapidly upon Lahore.

When he had arrived within four marches of that city, he was startled by intelligence that Perron had invaded Haryana, and he felt it necessary to return with all speed for the protection of his own more ancient possessions. By marches of thirty and forty miles, beating off the Sikh horse who menaced his retreat he reached Hansi. The swiftness of this movement disappointed Perron, who retired upon Delhi, only to advance once more with augmented strength. This was in August 1801, and the rival Europeans approached each other at Bahadurgarh, about fifteen miles west of Dehli.

It was determined to try negotiation : and L. F. Smith was deputed to wait upon Thomas in his own camp and conduct him to the Mahratta lines for the purpose of a personal interview with General Perron. We have no details of the meeting; but in Thomas' memoirs we find a record of the feelings which inspired one, at least, of the rivals. Thomas says plainly that "Mr. Perron and himself being subjects of two nations in a state of hostility against each other, it was-impossible that they should act in concert --- he was convinced, moreover, that as a Frenchman, Mr. Perron would always be prepared to misrepresent his actions. He was willing, he told Sindhia about this time, to take part in the management of operations anywhere ; under the control of any native General, when he at length agreed to go to Perron's camp, he went escorted by a strong force, prepared "to observe the greatest circumspection in the interview."

The first meeting was probably formal and not unfriendly. Next day they met a second time ; and an immediate rupture apparently took place. Perron's terms were these: Thomas was required to surrender at once the lands of Jhajhar, to enter the service as a general officer on a fixed monthly

salary, and to detach immediately four battalions to assist Sindhia against Holkar, who had just driven the army of Sindhia before him and taken his city of Ujain. The spirit of Thomas would not brook these terms, specious as they appeared; he was in friendly communication with Holkar; he suspected Sindhia of treachery; he was determined not to serve under Perron.

He accordingly, to use the language of the Memoirs, "without further discussion abruptly broke up the conference and marched away in disgust." He retired to Hansi, while Perron returned to his own headquarters at Aligarh, leaving the campaign to be conducted by an officer of his own nation, Major Louis Bernard Bourquien, the same who, a little more than a year and a half later, came to utter grief against Lake on the plain before Dehli. Thomas had thrown a garrison into his fort of Georgegarh (near Jhajhar which Perron had occupied) and the Fort was commanded by one of Thomas' officers, named Shatab Kahn. This gentleman's family being at Aligarh, Perron was able to put considerable pressure on him, and he was gradually brought over to betray his master. Another diplomatic move was made by raising the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs who had, it must be confessed, serious scores to settle with Thomas.

Begam Sombre was called upon for the aid of a contingent, which she sent; reinforcements were also ordered up from Colonel Hessing, the Governor of Agra. Surrounded by this ring of fire, our adventurer was being brought to bay. Like Napoleon I. in 1813, he found in the desperate situation a scene for the display of useless vigour and the acquirement of barren honour at the expense of his men; like the same mighty warrior, he ultimately succumbed, rather to the weariness and faithlessness of his own people than to the skill of his numerous enemies.

The first thing, apparently, that he did, after sending word to Holkar to beg him to come to his aid, was to march northward, as a feint to draw off the attention of the enemy from his magazines at Hansi. This is not referred to in the memoirs, but Skinner says that, after leaving, Smith's brother with a detachment to watch Georgegarh, he (Skinner) marched with the bulk of the army "towards Jhind in pursuit of Thomas". Successful in this first move, the adventurer now doubled back with incredible rapidity, shot past the enemy unperceived, reached Georgegarh by marching seventy miles in two days, and forced Smith to fly with a loss of seven hundred men, and a quantity of arms, baggage and ammunition.

This was about the 25th of September; on the 20th Bourquien's cavalry reached Biri, a village near Georgegarh, and at once made a reconnaissance of Thomas' camp. They found it skilfully pitched, with a village on the left, the Fort on the right, and the front defended by a line of sand-heaps, probably artificial. The rear was also partly protected by another village. On the afternoon of the 29th Bourquien came up with his infantry, and, without affording them time to rest, immediately ordered an attack, supported by the fire of thirty-five guns. But the shot fell into the sand; the wearied infantry could make but little impression on Thomas; twenty-five of Bourquien's tumbrils were exploded by shot from Thomas' batteries. Then two battalions under Hopkins came out of the lines, delivered a volley "as if they had been at a review" and charged Bourquien's left with such vigour that this part of the army gave way in utter confusion.

Night separated the combatants; in the morning, a truce was made, and it was found that, out of 8,000 men, the assailants had lost half in killed and wounded, together with four European officers. Thomas' losses were much less, seven hundred men, according to his own account; but he had twenty guns dismounted by the breaking of their carriages owing to the recoil in the sand, where

they stood half-buried. His greatest loss was that of Captain Hopkins, one of his very small staff of Europeans, whose leg was broken by a round shot during the last charge, and who died of his hurt a few days later. This "gallant youth," as Thomas calls him, was the son of a British officer, who had left him to make his way in the world, encumbered with the charge of an unmarried sister. Thomas, in this hour of his own distress, found means to send Miss Hopkins two thousand Rupees for her present necessities, with a promise of more if more should be required.

Thomas was now failing fast. Shatib Kahn, the traitorous commandant of the Fort, fired all the fodder. Base enemies gathered round, like vultures about a dying tiger. Skinner thinks that his mind also gave way, and that he took to drinking and left all the work to be done by Hearsey, one of his lieutenants. However this maybe, he lay here inactive, for a month, hoping, it is thought, it might come from Holkar and from his old foe, Lakwa Dada, with whom he had opened a correspondence. But men, like Heaven in the French proverb, help those only who can help themselves; and from neither quarter was help forthcoming. At last, having neither forage for the cattle nor food with treachery undermining his resources, deserting ranks, the whole country side against him, and overwhelming numbers hemming him in, Thomas conceived the enterprise of cutting his way through his enemies and throwing himself into Hansi, there to make a final stand.

Accordingly, at 9 o'clock on the evening of the 10th November, accompanied by his two remaining Christian officers, Hearsey and Birch, and escorted by his body-guard. Thomas left his lines, mounted upon a fine Persian horse. Soon after leaving camp the fugitives were attacked by a party of the enemy; but they beat them off and making a considerable circuit reached Hansi next day. It is pleasant to know that the noble animal who carried his master 120 miles in 22 hours, was ultimately provided for, and ended his days in the stable of Sir F. Hamilton, Bart., at that time resident at Benares. The soldiers left in camp, laid down their arms with loud lamentations; and, refusing to serve another leader, dispersed to their own homes by permission of the victors.

Arriving at his capital, Thomas prepared for its defence; and during, the next ten days cast guns and improved his fortifications. On the 21st the siege began, during which many Conflicts took place under the walls and in the streets. In these operations, the enemy suffered severe loss. Among the slain was Captain Bernier* of the Sardhana service, who had been one of the witnesses to the Begam's, marriage with Levaissoult a few years before. The town having been taken, Thomas was left, in an imperfectly victualled fort, with only 1,700 men and of these some had been corrupted by Bourquien, who shot into their lines arrows to which were attached written promises of reward if they would deliver up their master.

At day-break on 3rd of December a general attack was delivered by three strong columns. Thomas issued from the fort, clothed in chain armour, and repulsed the enemy with a loss of 600 men, during, which, says Skinner, "We had come several times to hand-to-hand encounters". Hearsey fired twice at Skinner, but missed him at point-blank distance; Skinner's brother got a cut at Thomas, but his coat of mail turned the sword. Next morning the Homeric conflict was renewed and trenches were begun within two hundred yards of the fort. But in vain the cannonballs buried themselves harmlessly in the earthen ramparts; Thomas again drove out the besiegers sword-in-band.

Recourse was now had to mining, and Bourquien openly talked of the treachery that he was practising and of the severe treatment that awaited Thomas when he fell into his hands. But this was too much for the English and East-Indian officers. One day, after a copious lunch, when the

claret had brought about the *mollia tempora fandi*, a general attempt was made to disarm the wrath of Bourquien and, after resisting for some time, he yielded at last to the arguments of his subordinates. Notwithstanding the loss of his brother, who had fallen before Georgegarh, L. F. Smith continued to feel a strong admiration for Thomas, and was allowed to visit him once more and urge upon him the cruel folly of sacrificing his men and protracting what was evidently a vain resistance. Thomas shall tell us the result in his own words.

Considering," he says, "That I had entirely lost my party and, with it, the hopes of at present subduing the Sikhs and powers in the French interest; that I had no expectation of succour from any quarter (Lakwa having gone to Jaudpur) in this situation I agreed to evacuate the Fort". This was accordingly done on the 1st January 1802, honourable terms being given to the garrison, and Thomas be invited to camp, with his family, his arms, and his private property, amounting to three lakhs of rupees in cash, shawls and jewels. This was all the visible fruit of twenty years of adventure.

Thomas remained about fortnight in the camp of his late besiegers, during which he lived as an honorary member of the officers' mess. At length he succeeded in so alarming Bourquien during, a post-prandial outbreak that they were glad to part with their dangerous, though distinguished guest. The particulars are given by Skinner. After a late dinner, during which they had drunk one another's health with copious libations, Bourquien had the bad taste to propose the toast of "success to General Perron's arms", he being then about to march against the British forces under Lake. The officers of that race accordingly turned down their glasses; but this was not enough for Thomas. With the glare of a maniac, as he was at such moments, the fallen hero caught up his sword and dashed at Bourquien, who rushed out, calling for his guard. Thomas remained in the mess-tent, saying, in Hindustani, with hoarse peals of laughter, "See how I have made the Frenchman run like a jackal". This was a little too strong for his friends; they got him home in a palanquin and next day he started for the British lines at Anupshahr under the escort of the admiring but regretful Smith. Arriving at Sardbana, he left his family in charge of Begam Sombre with a lakh of rupees for their support. On reaching Anupshahr he expressed his wish to go to Europe via Calcutta, and set off for that journey accompanied by Captain Francklin, who afterwards became his biographer.

They proceeded down country by boat, and seem to have had a voyage of much jollity, though Francklin does not condescend to give particulars which we might perhaps find not devoid of social interest. They appear to have wiled away the intervals between the then few and distant stations with literary work Thomas supplying facts and recollections and Francklin taking notes. At Benares they seem to have made a long halt, during which Thomas probably lived among the officers of the British garrison not wisely but too well. Shortly after re-embarking, his health succumbed to sorrow, indulgence, and inactivity. He died just as they had reached Barhampur, on the 22nd August 1802, being, as was supposed in his forty-sixth year.

The facts that have been brought to a focus in the preceding pages are mostly to be found in the Military memoirs of General George Thomas, by Francklin, Baillie Fraser's *Memoirs of James Skinner*, and the narrative of Major L. F. Smith of the Mahratta army published in Calcutta about 1801.

In referring to Francklin, one has often the advantage of hearing Thomas speak with his own voice and his utterance is always clear, and - so far as can be learned by comparison with Smith and Skinner - truthful and trustworthy. Unfortunately the adventurer's voice is often muffled; he being, so to speak, immured in a structure, mostly of wood and buckram, such as the editor considered

becoming and appropriate to the dignity of History. Yet, although we may execrate Francklin as an author, we cannot but avow our obligations to him as an authority. Sent to Upper India in command of the guard attached to the first British surveying party, he used his opportunities intelligently, and obtained useful information as to the state of what was then an unknown country.

His books on Thomas and on Shah Alam contain almost the only detailed information, by a contemporary European writer, of the events and conditions of life during the last agony of the once great and famous Mughal Empire. The soldiers of fortune above cited confine themselves chiefly to military matters, but they confirm the statements of Francklin and of Thomas himself, so far as they admit of comparison. Thomas' fall was almost the end of the great anarchy; and such a career as his would manifestly have been impossible in quieter times.

It is indeed impossible to exaggerate the evil condition into which Upper India had fallen at the time that we have been reviewing. The paralysis of power which began after the invasion of Nadir Shah and his retreat to Persia in 1738 has been mentioned by the writer elsewhere. Of the continued misery of the people for more than half a century after, we have the contemporary testimony of native historians, quoted in the eighth volume of Dawson's Elliott, Baillie Fraser, too, on the authority of Skinner (at that time serving in Sindhia's army), says:-

"So reduced was the actual number of human beings, and so utterly cowed their spirit, that the few villages that did continue to exist at great intervals had scarcely any communication with each other; and so great was the increase of beasts of prey that the little communication that remained was often actually cut off by a single tiger known to haunt the road" (Memoirs. I. 200).

But such times are favourable to the appearance of great men, Mahdaji Sindhia (who died in 1794.) and General de Boigne, (who retired shortly after) are leading, instances of talents for war and administration developing themselves in powerful minds under the forcing circumstances of such a period. Inferior, in neither respect was the Irish seaman who, unaided by any advantages of birth, education, or patronage, rose by his own intrinsic qualities to the command of armies, and, so far as his leisure allowed, the humane and intelligent exercise of the functions of a sovereign Prince.

Wooden Francklin so far descends from his stilts as to acknowledge that his hero had a share of human weakness. His chief fault seems to have been an impatience of temper, rising into dangerous fury in periods of what Francklin calls "conviviality". The use (or rather abuse) of liquor was the besetting sin of all classes of English, Scots, and Irish, in those days; and we can hardly wonder if it was shared by a lonely adventurer, bred on a man-of-war. The present writer spent a year in Hariana in 1853, when traditions of Thomas were still current, and old men still recollected his personal demeanour. One of his native officers, residing near Hansi in extreme old age, spoke of him with affectionate remembrance as good and brave. He called him "Jahazi Sahib" (the Mariner), and said that he used to be drunk for a month at a time; but was always sober in time of trouble, usually marched on foot with his men, and, when going into action, used to roll his shirt sleeves over his elbows, and lead his men well.

Thomas was tall and of erect and imposing presence, like the late General John Nicholson, but, unlike him, shaving, clean, with the exception of a small moustache. He is said by his contemporaries to have been of grave and gentle manners; and, though deficient in European culture, was a proficient in Urdu and Persian, both of which languages he not only spoke but read

and wrote with fluency and correctness. He undertook, in his last days, to prepare some statistical information for the Governor-General; but apologetically remarked that he had been so long-unused to read and write in the English language, that he hoped to be excused if his notes were recorded in Persian. It is probable, however, that Francklin used the leisure of the voyage down the Ganges, and of the stay at Benares, to reduce most of this information into English, as his book is full of facts and figures about Haryana, Rajputana and the Cis-Sutlej States, with the ethnology and customs of their inhabitants; the greater part of which was evidently derived from Thomas.

Surely this story forms a curious picture of the times, as well as of the man who figured so brightly if briefly in them, by the clearness of his mind, his fidelity to engagements, his self-reliance and his unconquerable courage. This latter quality-which, if not itself a virtue, is the seed-plot of many virtues-never, so we are, assured, deserted him to the last moment of his life.