

**SERINGAPATAM;
PAST AND PRESENT;
A MONOGRAPH**

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Seringapatam; past and present; A monograph by G. B. Malleson

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G. B. MALLESON

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SERINGAPATAM;

PAST AND PRESENT.

A MONOGRAPH

BY
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THE HISTORY OF THE PRESS IN INDIA, &c.

"I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
"I would have made them skip. I am old now."

KING LEAR.

MADRAS:
HIGGINBOTHAM AND CO.
1876.

SERINGAPATAM.

PREFACE.

A RESIDENCE of some years in close vicinity to Seringapatam, and the duty often devolving upon me of acting as *cicerone* to the friends and acquaintances who visited Mysore, had naturally made me familiar with the outline of the details of the two sieges of this famous fortress. It was not, however, until Captain Malet of the 18th Hussars came to stay with me in October 1874, that, urged on by his inquiring mind, I made of those details a study. With the books of reference in our hands, he and I used to spend hours in examining each particular point of interest on the spot, and before he left he had extorted from me a promise that I would take an early opportunity to work up the subject for publication.

Other studies, to which I was then committed, chained my attention for some months; and I had postponed Seringapatam to an indefinite period when the intelligence that H. R. H. the Prince of Wales would pass through the Mysore country stirred me to renewed action. I had scarcely, however, written half a dozen pages when I was called upon to prepare for the journey to Bombay of His Highness the Máharájá. Before I returned to Mysore the visit of His Royal Highness to that city had been virtually abandoned, and with it also the visit to Seringapatam.

Again the subject dropped. It was revived a few months later by two things: The first was the intelligence which reached me that in renouncing his visit to Mysore, His Royal Highness had expressed the deep regret with which he had

given up his long-cherished desire to visit a fortress so renowned, and testifying so much to the prowess of the British soldier, as Seringapatam: the second,—the enthusiasm displayed, and the encouragement given to me, by some valued friends who accompanied me over the fortress in December 1875 and in January 1876. On the first of these two occasions I renewed the promise given to Captain Malet in October 1874;—and I now fulfil it.

True, though it doubtless is, as M. Viollet-le-duc has shewn to the world, that “ Vauban’s fortresses have had their day,” the great results they have accomplished in their time will not the less continue to be regarded with reverence and admiration by the descendants of those who defended or stormed them. Especially will this be the case, when, as with Seringapatam, the breach has remained unrepaired, the position of the besieging army can still easily be traced, and the traveller, viewing the difficulties so daringly conquered, can understand, as by a touch of the magician’s wand, how it was that the great soldier, who made his first successful débüt as a stormer at the head of the supports at Seringapatam, was able subsequently to make of the materials similar to those he then commanded, an army which beat the soldiers of Napoléon, and of which he could proudly affirm that with it “ he could go anywhere and do anything.” If that result was the goal of the great military career of the Duke of Wellington, the real starting point was Seringapatam.

MYSORE, 1st March 1876.

G. B. M.

SERINGAPATAM.

Just seventy-eight miles from the British cantonment of Bangalore, and nine from the Hindú capital of Mysore, on an island formed by the winding of the river Káveri, may be yet seen and visited the once famous fortress of Seringapatam. To the man who gazes at this fortress from the outside its battlements still present the appearance they offered to the besieging army of General Harris on the morning of the 4th May 1799. The breach through which his troops effected an entrance on that memorable day is preserved, unrepaired, a monument of British prowess ; the ramparts remain now as they were then, the only exception being that the embrasures are empty of guns. The fortress resembles, in fact, a disarmed and blinded giant, in his youth and middle age the terror of the southern peninsula, but who now lies, the helpless and powerless slave of his conqueror, testifying to the living generation that neither strong walls, powerful artillery, nor that courage which is the offspring of love of supremacy and hate to the foe, can withstand the assault of the daring children of the islands of the West.

Thus lies this fortress, still an object of deep, even of passionate, interest to the numbers who flock to visit it. It has known strange vicissitudes. In a cer-

tain point of view its history presents a nearly accurate type of the history of Hindostan. Originally Hindú, threatened then by the Mahomedans, then by the Márhátás, converted subsequently into the Mahomedan capital of Southern India, the strong fortress finally succumbed to the power which had subdued all three. The history of each period is full of interest ; of that relating to British occupation particularly so, for not a century has elapsed since the leader who ruled the country of which it was the representative capital dictated peace to the English under the walls of Madras, and seventy-seven years ago its final subjugation was regarded by the greatest of Indian Governors-General as the crowning act which settled for ever the question of British supremacy in Southern India.

The island on which Seringapatam stands is formed by the divergence of two arms of the river Káveri. It is about three and a half miles in length, and one mile and a half in breadth across its centre, which is its broadest part. The natural lay of the land on the island falls and narrows from its centre towards its extremities. But at its lowest point it is still considerably above the river level at its greatest height. The west end of the island, on which the fortress is built, slopes more especially towards the north, in such a way that the rising ground on the opposite side of the river commands a distinct view of the interior.*

The fortress covers a space of about two thousand square yards. Its northern and western fronts are covered by the river, which thus forms an enormous

* Dirom's Narrative.

wet ditch, neither fordable nor navigable between the months of June and November.

Prior to the year 1792 the great strength of Seringapatam lay, indeed, in the development of the natural strength of the soil. Thus, excepting the northwest bastion, the entire revetment was formed of natural blocks of granite of an enormous size. The ditches were excavated from the rock itself; whilst, on the northern side, a glacis had been cut in the living rock, though, from the fact of the counterscarp having been left incomplete in two places, a continuous covering was not afforded to the rampart. On the eastern and western sides it was surrounded by double walls, each wall covered by a double ditch; the gates were covered by exterior works; the northwest angle,—that assaulted in 1799,—was defended by a strong interior work; whilst, in the centre of the fortress and on the southern rampart were strong cavaliers.

But in 1792 it was greatly strengthened. On the east of the place a covered way was built *en crémaillère* in order to defend that face from an enfilading fire from the northern bank of the river. Works of a similar character were added to the parapet of the northern rampart, where also cavaliers and traverses *en gazon* were built. To the north eastern angle of the fortress a bastion on the latest European system was then added; whilst, just before the siege of 1799 a second interior rampart, covered by a deep ditch, was hastily erected along the whole length of the northern face.

About this period, likewise several sluices were constructed for the purpose of admitting and retaining