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THE REVOLT

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CHAPTER LI.

WHILE this success had been achieved in the West Indies the credit and reputation of Great Britain were ably supported in the East by the celebrated Warren Hastings, Governor General of Bengal, aided by Sir Eyre Coote and Admiral Sir E. Hughes. On the 5th of January, 1782, a party of seamen and marines belonging to the squadron of Vice Admiral Sir E. Hughes landed on the Island of Ceylon, and being supported by a detachment of troops and Sepoys, moved so rapidly on the Fort of Trincomalee, that the garrison, taken by surprise, surrendered prisoners of war without making any opposition. A detachment of Dutch troops had retreated to Fort Ostenburgh, which it was at once determined to attack. On the morning of the 11th four hundred and fifty seamen and marines assaulted the works, and after some fighting carried the fort, with a loss of 21 men killed and 42 wounded. In the harbor was found two richly laden Dutch ships; 67 pieces of artillery were captured.

On the 8th of February the Vice Admiral with his squadron arrived in Madras Roads, where he received intelligence that a French fleet had arrived off the coast. At this time the British squadron was so numerically inferior to the French that they dared not risk an action, but on the following day it was reinforced by three ships, and on the 16th sailed with two ships of 74, five of 64, one of 68, and one of 50 guns. Commodore Suffrien, who commanded the French fleet of four 74, five 64, and two of 50 guns, and six frigates of 40 guns each, arrived in sight of the Madras Roads, with the intention of attacking the English squadron at anchor, but seeing nine two-decked ships under sail he made preparations for his own defence. During the night Sir E. Hughes re-captured several British merchant ships and took one large French ship laden with military stores.

At daybreak on the 17th the French squadron came in sight, bearing north by east, distant about three leagues. The weather being hazy with light winds and occasional squalls from north-north-east. At 4 o'clock p.m. the two squadrons were within gun shot,—the British being formed in line ahead on the larboard tack. The French, who had bore down before the wind in a double line abreast with very little order, began the attack at once upon the centre and rear divisions of the British, in which the Exeter, 64 guns, being the rearmost, suffered severely, having to bear the fire of four vessels at once for nearly an hour. The van, in which were the heaviest of the British ships, was unable to tack in support of the rear owing to the light wind, but the steady bravery and good gun practice of the vessels attacked enabled them to hold their own till at 6 o'clock, p.m., a squall from the south east, took the British abreast of the French and they paid off with their heads to the north-east, and as the van bore up to assist the centre the French Commodore made the signal to cease firing, and hauled off to the northward, leaving the majority of the British in no condition for pursuit. Their loss was 22 killed and 83 wounded, besides two ships almost completely disabled.

Sir Edward Hughes, finding that the French fleet was not in sight on the morning of the 18th, bore away for Trincomalee to refit.

On the 30th of March he was reinforced by one 74 and one 64-gun ship, and on the 8th of April again got sight of the French fleet a few miles to the northward of Trincomalee. After a variety of manœuvres for the weather gauge on the morning of the 12th the French having succeeded in getting to the windward, bore down on the British at daylight. At 9 a.m. Sir Edward Hughes made the signal for the line ahead on the larboard tack at two cables length. The enemy then being north-by-east, distant six miles, the wind being about north—the French squadron having 12 sail of the line and the English eleven. Commodore Suffrien ordered five ships to attack the British van, and with the other seven bore down

upon the centre. The attack commenced at 1.30 p.m. and raged with great fury till 6.40 p.m., when the British fleet having anchored in consequence of drifting in shore, the French hauled their wind to the eastward in great confusion, leaving their opponents severely damaged in masts and rigging and having suffered as much themselves. The loss of the British was 137 men killed and 480 wounded; the French owned to a loss of 139 men killed and 264 wounded.

Having refitted his fleet at Trincomalee, Sir E. Hughes sailed on the 23rd of June to watch the French squadron on the Coromandel coast, and on the following day arrived at Negapatam. On the 5th of July at noon, while lying in that roadstead, the enemy appeared in the offing, upon which all dispatch was used, and the British, at 3 o'clock p.m. weighed anchor and stood under all sail to the southward. At daylight on the 6th the French fleet was seen at anchor, bearing north-west, distant seven or eight miles; and at 5.30, a.m., the British with the wind at south-west bore away in line abreast for the enemy. At 6 o'clock the enemy was observed getting under weigh and standing out to the eastward, upon which Sir E. Hughes made the signal for a line ahead on the starboard tack, and at 7 o'clock bore up for the enemy—each for her proper opponent in the line. The firing commenced at 10.40, a.m., and from ten minutes past eleven the action became general from van to rear at a distance of about 200 yards. At 1 o'clock, p.m., two of the French ships had been so injured that they were beaten out of the line, and the whole squadron was in confusion, but the sea breeze set in strong from south-south-east, taking most of the British ships aback, on which the French hauled to the wind, and at 1.30 the action ceased. Sir Edward Hughes made the signal to wear round on the starboard tack, intending a general chase, but most of the ships were unable to carry sail in the fresh breeze that had now set in, owing to the severe injuries in masts and rigging. Towards evening the squadron anchored between Negapatam and Nazore, Commodore Suffrien anchored three leagues