

ascendant. In 1612 Captain Best with four ships engaged a Portuguese fleet, and coming off victorious, was in a position to make more advantageous terms than in the past were possible. England's position continued to improve, the chief difficulty now being the senseless opposition of rival companies. These, however, were amalgamated in 1708. By this time, and by this means, the English had many ports and privileges, not the least being the important island of Bombay, which was acquired by the marriage of Charles II. to the Infanta Catherine of Portugal, it being her marriage dower.

The French, however, had made progress and were now practically the only rivals of the English. Between Britain and Gaul, here as elsewhere, the struggle for supremacy seemed destined to come, and when at last, in 1744, hostilities broke out between these powers, it involved these great rival companies.

The interests of the French at this time were under able leaders, and for a time greatly flourished. Labourdonnais, in command of the fleet, was successful in capturing Madras, after a heavy bombardment and a gallant defence. Dupliex, the head of the French Company, though to some extent a rival of Labourdonnais, was also a shrewd though unscrupulous man. After succeeding in having his rival recalled, he made the English situation even more difficult. Taking advantage of native rivalries, he further strengthened his position by war or diplomacy, as occasion required, until he became vested with great authority, and surrounded by much pomp and wealth. We are told he was proclaimed governor of a territory larger than France, and ruled some thirty millions of people. But this glory was not to last; such meteoric splendour

was to pass as quickly as it came, and the instrument and the day were both at hand.

The deepest darkness is said to be "just before the dawn," and so it proved with the interests of England in the East. Mohamet Ali, the friend and hope of the British, had been forced to flee to the city of Trichinopoly, and at the beginning of August, 1751, the place was besieged by a force ten times stronger than the defenders. The case was critical. On this siege depended the whole question of French and English supremacy in that part of the world. But just at a dark and apparently hopeless hour a human saviour appeared in the person of a young officer by the name of Robert Clive. His proposition was to draw the besiegers away from the desperate and apparently devoted town by making a sudden attack on Arcot, the capital of the Carnatic. To the council his plan seemed little short of madness, but the desperate character of the situation and the confidence of Clive inspired confidence, and he was allowed to put his scheme into execution. Marching the sixty-five miles to Arcot through a blinding storm with only five hundred soldiers, the garrison of eleven thousand were seized by a sudden panic at the exhibition of such audacity, and almost instantly abandoned the fort. Clive had nothing to do but to march in and take possession in the midst of wondering thousands. Arcot was taken, and not a shot had been fired.

Arcot now became the storm-centre to the relief of Trichinopoly. Great armies laid siege to the place, but Clive proved equal to the occasion. Storming parties were driven off with tremendous loss, and after fifty days of battle and defence the besiegers, terrified and discouraged, fled. Arcot and the British East India Company were