

ERANIEL AND COLACHEL

(Contributed)

THE ERANIEL PALACE

A short detour of seven miles from Mulagumood, or Azhakiamandapam at the 30th milestone on the trunk road from Trivandrum to Cape Comorin, leads to the famous port of Colachel *via* Eraniel. The well laid-out road to Colachel port passes through Thiruvithamcode, Neyoor and Eraniel, pretty villages famed in history and folklore, and fraught with rich and romantic tradition. A part of the original principality of Travancore, this region evokes sacred memories.

The village of Eraniel is an ancient one and greatly conspicuous in the annals of Travancore. In ancient days before the Maharajas of Travancore shifted their capital to Padmanabhapuram and their residence to the Padmanabhapuram Palace, they lived in the famous Eraniel Palace. The Palace at Eraniel, a fine example of typical Kerala Style Architecture, with its gabled roofs, exquisite wood carvings and finely sculptured *Mandapams*, is one of the famous architectural entities in the State.

The Sacred Stone Cot

The *Vasantamandapam* in the old Eraniel Palace is the most famous and sacred part of the Palace for here is the stone bedstead from where, according to tradition, Bhaskara Ravi Varma, the last and greatest of the celebrated Cheraman Perumals, Rulers of Kerala, ascended to heaven with his physical body. The stone cot used by Bhaskara Ravi Varma Peru-

mal, is a sacred relic of the past, and in commemoration of his ascent to heaven, a light has been kept burning in front of the cot ever since, throughout day and night. The room in the *Vasantamandapam* of the Palace which contains the stone cot is regarded by Hindus as sacred as the *sanctum sanctorum* of a temple, and lamps are lighted and other acts of traditional worship offered here. The stone cot is a masterpiece of the art and craftsmanship of the sculptor.

The Last of the Great Perumals

Bhaskara Ravi Varma is said to have been born in the year 3444 of the Kali Era, corresponding to 342 A. D. His Kingdom extended over the whole of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. He held the reins of Government for about 44 years. As years advanced, he became more and more an ardent devotee of Siva, receiving initiation into the Saivite mysteries, from Sundaramoorthi Nainar, one of the greatest of Saivite saints. As he wanted to devote the rest of his life wholly to the practice of religion, he divided his Kingdom among the members of his family. Kolathunad (Malabar) was assigned to his son, who founded the family of the Zamorins. The nephew of the Cheraman Perumal was made the ruler of Cochin—Sthanoo Ravi Varma, the brother of the Cheraman Perumal, became the ruler of Venad (Travancore).

After making the necessary arrangements for the administration of his Kingdom, one day he left his Capital with

his Guru. His intentions were closely guarded. There is a legend that when the Cheraman Perumal came to a place called Cherianad in central Travancore, a serpent was noticed coiled up in his head-gear. This was interpreted as an expression of Divine desire for the establishment of a temple at the place. A serpent grove was accordingly consecrated in the neighbourhood. When the King came to a place called Valvachagoshtam (near Padmanabhapuram) where there is a Bhagavathy temple, he deposited his Royal sword, the emblem of his temporal power, before the deity.

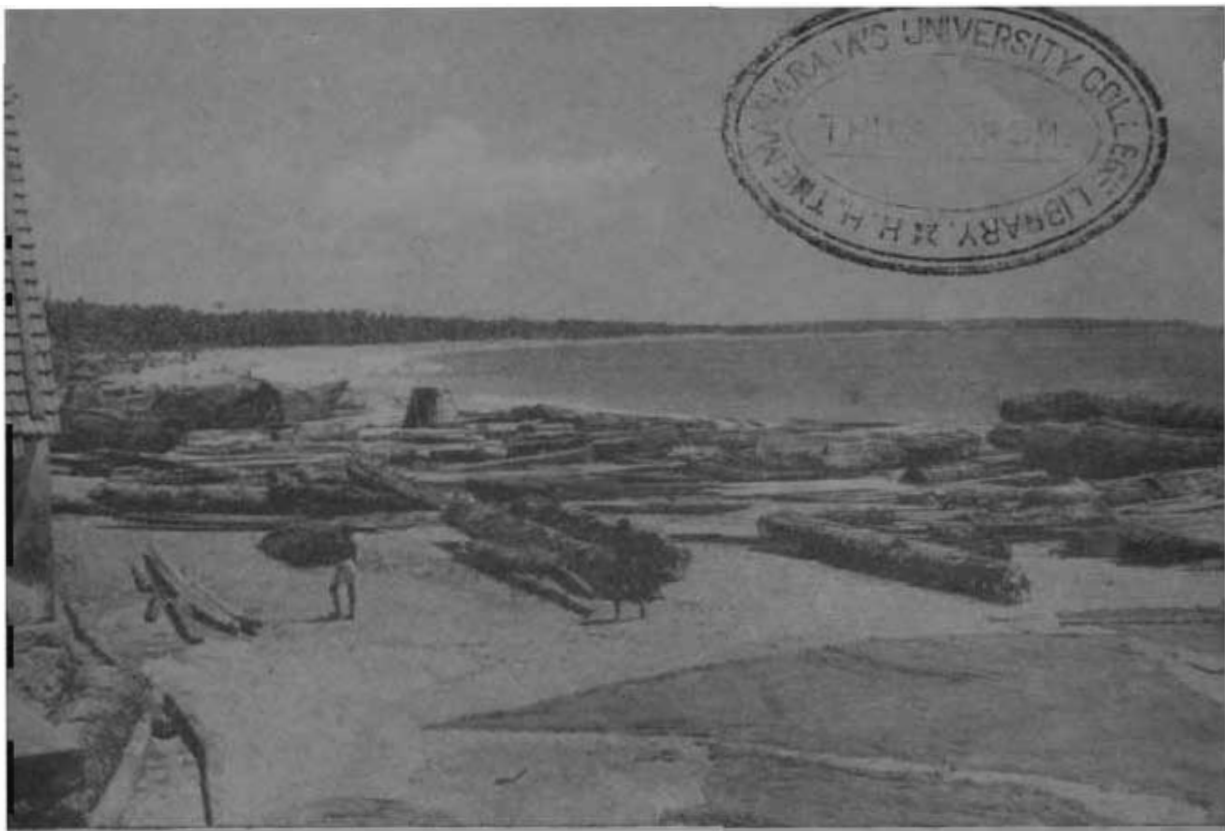
While the King was staying in the Eraniel Palace he suddenly disappeared with his Guru. It is possible that the legend about his being taken to Heaven in his physical body is traceable to his sudden disappearance from the Eraniel Palace. Bhaskara Ravi Varma's death or self appointed liberation from his physical frame is said to have occurred on the *Swathi* day in the month of *Ashada* in the year 8528 of the *Kali* Era corresponding to 426 A. D. The bedstead in the *Vasantamandapam* is said to be the one used by the great Cheraman Perumal on the day he left the Eraniel Palace.

Tradition has it that his Guru the great Sundaramoorthi Siva Yogi chose to close his sojourn in this earth on the very same day. This day is still celebrated in the great Siva temples on the east coast. There is also a celebration in the Suchindram temple on that day, in the course of which Sundaramoorthi Nainar and Cheraman Perumal are taken in procession from the Perambalam Devaswom to the Kailasanatha shrine within the Suchindram temple. This is something like a pictorial representation of the story of the illustrious couple attaining *Moksha* on the same day.

COLACHEL PORT

ABOUT three miles beyond Eraniel, is the well-known port town of Colachel, one of the ancient and most southern of sea ports in Travancore, used by the earliest traders who visited India in the early centuries of the Christian Era. The name of Colachel recalls the great Battle of Colachel in 1741. Although divested of its former glory, Colachel continues to be the principal outlet for palmyrah fibre and mineral sands. Shipping from this port is rendered easier by a group of picturesque outlying rocks in the sea forming a partial backwater. Steamers anchor about 3110 of a mile off the shore and small vessels anchor less than a quarter of a mile off. On the seacoast near Colachel are two large ilmenite factories. Colachel is the centre of a thriving fish industry. Famous for its Salt Pans, Colachel has some of the best *Alloms* (salt factories) in the State.

In the early years of the 18th Century, the Danes had a small factory at Colachel, but later on they left the place. The Dutch who at the time traded with Travancore made a valiant but unsuccessful attempt to interfere into the internal affairs of Travancore, with sinister motives, by establishing their headquarters at Colachel. The armies of Maharaja Marthanda Varma inflicted a crushing defeat on the Naval forces of the Dutch at the famous Battle of Colachel on the 31st July 1741. At this battle rang the death knell of Dutch ambitions in Travancore. It was at this battle that Eustachio De Lannoy, a Dutch Captain, was taken prisoner. In commemoration of Travancore's great victory over the Dutch a Pillar has been erected at Colachel.



COLACHEL was a great port of call for ships from various nations of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. Here are two views of the port.





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Colachel witnessed a great battle between the armies of Maharaja Marthanda Varma and the Naval Forces of the Dutch, in 1741 A. D. in which the foreign power was completely defeated, and many of its officers taken prisoner.

This tower of victory marks the site of the great battle of Colachel and the surrender of the Dutch to Maharaja Marthanda Varma.

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IN COMMEMORATION OF TRAVANCORE'S VICTORY OVER THE DUTCH.



This fine Roman Catholic Church stands near the site of the battle of Colachel.

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The Battle of Colachel and De Lannoy.

Eustachio Benedictine De Lannoy was born in far off Holland in January 1715 A. D., and strange enough, fate had ordained him to guide the martial destinies of Travancore. It is an intriguing story how De Lannoy was charged with the task of serving an alien Royal Master many thousands of miles away across the seas.

De Lannoy came to India as a Captain of the Dutch regiments scheduled for duty in the East, at a time when the Dutch held a sort of supremacy in the Malabar Coast, and possessed a number of factories at Cochin. Travancore was then ruled by the warrior Prince Marthanda Varma, the Maker of Modern Travancore, (1729-1758 A. D.) whose prowess and organising capacity brought under one sovereignty the hinterlands of Kerala extending immediately north-west and south-east of his Central State. The State then occupied only a fourth of its present area. The rest of the country comprised of a number of petty principalities ruled over by ambitious and unscrupulous Chiefs who were always warring with one other. The Dutch entered into political alliances and intrigues with these Kingdoms with the secret and diplomatic motives of maintaining balance of power and of perpetuating their own commercial supremacy

In 1734 A. D. when the Rajah of the principality of Quilon died, the Rajah of Kayamcolam the neighbour chieftain, tried to annex Quilon. The Maharajah of Travancore who was a born conqueror demanded Quilon. The Dutch found in Maharaja Marthanda Varma of Travancore a powerful rival and they were alarmed at the might of his arm. The Dutch Governor at Cochin despatched an

envoy to the Maharaja's court to remonstrate with him about the unreasonable aggressions on Kayamcolam and Quilon. The Maharaja, with characteristic courage and precision, asked the Dutch to attend to their own business. Soon, under the lead of Rama Aiyan Dalawa, the Warrior Statesman, the Travancore Army prepared to attack Kayamcolam. The Dutch were alarmed at this and they deputed Van Imhoff, the Dutch Governor at Ceylon, to prevail upon the Maharaja to refrain from launching the proposed attack on Kayamcolam, whose ruler was an ally of the Dutch. Marthanda Varma was not to be won over either by persuasion or intimidation. He made it clear to the Dutch Governor that he was prepared to meet the Dutch in open battle. Van Imhoff grew indignant at this challenge, and he forthwith sent a well-equipped army from Ceylon which landed at Colachel. The Dutch army fortified Colachel and took possession of the country from Kottar to Colachel and planned to attack Padmanabhapuram, the then capital of the State.

Maharaja Marthanda Varma, who was at the time engaged in defeating the army of the Elayadathu Swaroopam, an ally of the Dutch in Central Travancore, hurried to Colachel. He worshipped at the Adi Kesava Temple at Thiruvattar and then advanced upon the Dutch forces. For two months the war was waged, and it was one of the most severe battles recorded in the history of the State. The Dutch ships were watched by Travancore's fleet of boats. In the first encounter not one soldier of the Dutch regiments survived and in the second and decisive battle the Dutch Army retreated to their ships, leaving behind many of their compatriots dead and wounded and twenty-four Europeans as prisoners. The famous Battle of Colachel at which the Dutch

suffered a crushing defeat was fought on the 31st July 1741 A. D. The Travancore army captured from the Dutch 389 muskets, cannons and swords.

Among the twenty-four Dutch prisoners who were captured at the Battle of Colachel were *Eustachio De Lannoy*, a young man of twenty-six who was destined to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of his Royal Captor, and *Donadi* who was also raised to a position of responsibility in the Travancore Forces. The Maharajah, himself a mighty warrior, discovered in De Lannoy and Donadi military geniuses who later on distinguished themselves as the most competent and trusted Captains in the Travancore Army. The kindness and consideration with which the Dutch prisoners were treated by the Maharaja induced them to place their services at his disposal. Maharaja Marthanda Varma forthwith appointed De Lannoy as a Captain and Second in Command under the Soldier—Dewan Rama Aiyen. Donadi was also made a Captain.

De Lannoy served his Royal Master faithfully and fought many a successful battle for the Maharaja which resulted in the wide territorial expansion of the State. He held a succession of important commands and in every major conquest between 1741 and 1777 A. D. he played the leading role. He reorganised the Travancore Army on Western lines and made it efficient and up-to-date.

This foreign-born Commander of the Travancore Army, served Maharaja Marthanda

Varma for seventeen years, and with equal zeal and fidelity served his successor Maharaja Rama Varma for nineteen years. After thirty-seven years of devoted and strenuous service under two of the greatest Rulers of Travancore, De Lannoy or *Valia Kappithan* (Great Commander) as he was affectionately called by the people, took his eternal rest in the year 1777, at the Udayagiri Fort which was built under his personal supervision. With the Battle of Colachel is linked the name of this valiant soldier who though an alien in nationality, fought for Travancore with honour, zeal, fidelity and daring.