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ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF MEANEE.¹

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(From a manuscript in the Royal United Service Institution.)

IN the afternoon of February 16th, 1843, after a fatiguing march of twenty-one miles from Halla, the British force about 3,000 strong, under Major-General Sir C. T. Napier, K.C.B., encamped near the village of Muttara, seventeen miles north of Hyderabad.²

Muttara lies within a mile or two of the Indus, and Major Outram, who had been ineffectually negotiating with the Scinde Ameers, now landed here from the "Planet" steamer, accompanied by his escort, the Light Company of Her Majesty's 22nd Regiment.³ He confirmed the report, already received by the General at Halla, of his having been attacked on the preceding morning at Hyderabad. It appeared that the Residency, which lies on the left bank of the Indus, three miles S.W. of the city, had been surrounded by a large body of cavalry and infantry headed by one of the Ameers, Meer Shadad Khan. A gallant defence had been made by his escort during four hours, when, ammunition failing, they had been compelled to retreat to the river. Here they were received on board the two steamers "Planet" and "Satellite," which conveyed them to Muttara, as above stated.

Major Outram brought with him the intelligence that the Belooches had assembled in great force and posted themselves in the shikargahs which intervene between Muttara and Hyderabad.⁴ It was thought that by setting fire to these woods the enemy would be driven to the plain: and a party of 200 Sipahs was embarked the same evening with Major Outram and other officers on the two steamers to co-operate with the sailors in carrying this scheme into effect. The design, however, failed, for, though the woods were partially fired, the scene of action on the 17th was too far distant to be affected by this stratagem. The Belooches, it was said, had shifted their ground during the night, but it is more probable that we were mistaken as to the position of the shikargahs which they occupied.

¹ Meanee is the name of the district between the Indus and Foolailee Rivers.

² This force was about 3,000 strong, comprising 1,100 cavalry and 12 field pieces, viz., 9th Regiment Bengal Light Cavalry, detachment Poona Irregular Horse, Scinde Irregular Horse, Bombay Camel Battery (9-pounders), Bombay Horse and Mule Battery (6-pounders), detachment Madras Sappers, Her Majesty's 22nd Regiment of Foot, 1st Grenadiers Bombay N.I., 12th Bombay N.I., 25th Bombay N.I.

³ Commanded by Captain Conolly.

⁴ The shikargahs are forests enclosed for the preservation of game.

At 4 o'clock on the following morning, February 17th, the troops again marched, the Scinde Horse, under Captain Jacob, leading. They were followed by the sappers under Captain Henderson, with a working party of one hundred Sipahs to prepare passage for the guns. The numerous canals, which intersect the country had made the arrangements for crossing them a nightly work of great labour, and much impeded the progress of the artillery. We usually cut down the banks of the canals, and threw the earth into the middle: but as camels cannot pull up hill, it was necessary to make the ascent very gentle. On this morning a delay of more than an hour occurred in forming the road over two large canals not far from Muttara. Beyond these, however, it was found that the Ameers had anticipated our labour, the roads being already prepared for the passage of their own artillery.

A march of seven miles brought the advanced guard to the Foolailee, which is a small branch of the Indus, filled during the inundations of that river, but at this time of the year dry. Along its eastern bank the road continued for a couple of miles, passing in quick succession several small villages interspersed with groves of trees. Near the second of these the silence of the march was first broken by the sound of a distant cannon. Sir Charles instantly formed up the infantry of his advanced guard behind a small canal, disposing the Scinde Horse in the bed of the Foolailee and unlimbering the two 9-pounders which accompanied him. Shortly afterwards a squadron of the Scinde Horse was despatched across the Foolailee to skirt round a shikargah on the opposite bank, while the remainder was sent to the front to reconnoitre. It was soon ascertained that the enemy was certainly in the latter direction, and the General again moved on, till he arrived at a village where the road to Hyderabad leaves the bank of the river.¹

Close on the General's right at this time was the dry bed of the Foolailee, having its course nearly south: and as far as the sight could reach in that direction, its further bank was enclosed by a mud wall which bounded a dense shikargah: Directly to his front rose the last of the string of small villages before mentioned, Zahir Bahirchy Ka Gote. Half a mile again beyond that another vast enclosed shikargah extended at a right angle, from the near bank of the Foolailee about a mile, and overlapped his left flank, though somewhat reaching from it.

Two squadrons of the Scinde Horse, under Captain Jacob and Lieutenant Russell, meanwhile continued their advance, turning off obliquely to the left, till they found themselves within half a mile or less of the enemy's guns. Here they drew up in line and were afterwards joined by the squadron which had been detached to examine the shikargah, on the other bank of the Foolailee. In this position the whole of this gallant corps remained, observing the enemy's movements and exposed to his fire till the final advance of the British line.

¹ These roads are merely beaten tracks, and the bed of the river is as much used as any other.

The General again moved forward for a thousand yards or so along a beaten track which appeared to lead round the left skirt of the shikargah in his front. Here, finding himself in sight of the enemy and within long range of his artillery, he decided on waiting for the main column of his force. This column was far behind, as the guns had been much impeded in their progress by accidents arising from the badness of the road.¹ The delay thus caused was considerable, and gave time to examine attentively the enemy's position.

Immediately in our front the top of the shikargah's wall was thickly studded with matchlock men, more particularly at its eastern or receding end. Extending from this to the enemy's right was seen a dense mass of infantry surrounding two conspicuous flags and supported by large bodies of horse in its rear, while in front of it were posted numerous pieces of cannon. Some of these, more advanced than the rest, had been firing on the Scinde Horse, and now directed their shots,² though from a great distance, on the General and his advanced guard. The right of the enemy's infantry rested on groves of trees, which concealed a village, and the whole of this chosen ground was occupied in great strength.

Such was the formidable position taken up by our yet untried adversary, and which the slow approach of the British column allowed ample time to observe and discuss. It was generally thought that about 8,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry were at this time visible from the General's station, as yet distant nearly a mile from the eventual scene of action. But the full strength of the Belooches was not manifest from this place of observation, for it could neither be seen from thence that he held on his right a village strongly protected by trees and canals and walled enclosures, nor that along and behind the whole of his line ran the bed of the Foolailee River, at right angles to its former course.

At length the arrival of the main column enabled the General to advance. The same order of march was preserved, and, following the direction of the beaten road which edged off to the left, the column was not halted till within three hundred yards of the shikargah wall. This wall, as before mentioned, had been studded with Belooches, but was deserted on our approach after some distant discharges of matchlocks; and as it was eight feet high without loopholes or banquettes, it afforded, in fact, no advantage of offence to the enemy, though it secured him from our fire.

The head of the column which arrived left in front was directed on the first distant tree standing to that flank, nearly at right angles with the road, and as soon as it had taken up sufficient ground the column was again halted and wheeled to the right into line. The whole of the guns under Major Lloyd: four 9- and two 6-pounders, two 24- and two 12-pounder howitzers, with the sappers, were placed

¹ The store carts of both batteries had had pintle-eyes broken this morning, and a waggon of the Camel Battery had been upset.

² These balls were of beaten iron and weighed five or six pounds each. The Ameer's artillery was under the direction of an Englishman.

on the right of the infantry, towards the shikargah. Behind the right the 9th Bengal Cavalry, 350 strong, was in reserve. The Scinde Horse, about 500 sabres, were in the position which they had occupied for the last hour, 300 yards in advance of the left of the infantry line. They now formed column near the shallow green bed of a dry watercourse, bordered by scattered trees, and leading directly forward to the village of *Synd Sootlam Shah Ki Wustee* or Katree¹ which flanked the enemy's right. From right to left the order of the infantry regiments was as follows: first Her Majesty's 22nd Regiment, next the 25th and 12th Regiments N.I., and last the 1st Grenadiers N.I., mustering altogether, when joined by their details from the advanced guards, 1,350 bayonets. The Poona Horse under Captain Tait, with 200 of the Grenadiers and two 6-pounders, had been left as a rear-guard and did not come into action.

Before the British line there now lay a narrow plain, dotted with two sandy hillocks and camel bushes, and extending in front to the Foolailee, a distance of 1,100 yards. Bounded on the east by the shallow green Nullah, the trees and the village before described, and beyond these by an impassable canal²: it was shut in on the west by a continuation of the shikargah wall, which, taking an abrupt line from its N.E. corner, ran thence for a distance of 600 yards to the Foolailee, in a S. by E. direction. The front of this contracted space measured, in a straight line, only 700 yards from the shikargah wall to the village, and this was to be the field of battle. The enemy had selected it with judgment, for, while the abrupt banks of the Foolailee afforded him a strong entrenchment, the British cavalry and artillery were greatly embarrassed by want of room, as will appear in the sequel of this account.

As soon as our line had been carefully dressed, and skirmishers thrown out, the guns moved forwards 200 yards, and our first fire (of round shot) opened on the enemy's batteries at a little before eleven o'clock. Her Majesty's 22nd formed upon the left of the artillery, and the remaining regiments were placed in echelon to the rear at twenty paces distance. Our guns, being found too distant to silence the enemy's batteries, were again advanced about 250 yards, and the enemy's fire, which, though briskly kept up, had not been very destructive, now evidently slackened under the rapid and well-directed discharges of the British artillery. At this time an opening was seen in the shikargah wall close to our right flank, and the Grenadier Company of the 22nd Regiment under Captain Tew was detached to clear the wall. This was done by entering the shikargah, the jungle for some distance from the wall being thin and open. Captain Tew was almost immediately shot dead and the company otherwise suffered, but the skirt of the shikargah was cleared for the time by these brave men.

A third halt was made at 300 yards from the Foolailee, and while some of the British cannon swept the outside of the shikargah wall

¹ Katree is more properly the name of the district.

² This canal was dry: but the sides had been recently scarped, probably in the progress of clearing it.

with grape shot, and others kept down the enemy's fire and at last silenced it, the infantry line, still formed in close echelon of regiments, was dressed in preparation for its final advance.

The word to advance was given. Her Majesty's 22nd, our only European regiment, led the echelon, and, as the bugles sounded, moved on in the most perfect order. A galling fire from numerous matchlocks was received with firmness, and in due time returned, though at first without much effect. Sheltered by the steep bank of the Foolailee the Belooches rested their matchlocks and took deliberate aim. In its turn the 25th Regiment N.I. became engaged, and then the 12th and Grenadiers. On this flank the enemy was even more strongly posted than on our right, for the water-cuts and walls of the village protected him. His guns meanwhile had been abandoned when the British troops advanced, and were most of them already in our possession. But as the distance lessened the more daring of the Belooches, fresh and impatient for the fight, put aside their matchlocks. With sword and shield in hand they rose from their hiding-places, and, in more than one impetuous onset, shook and forced back the British line.¹ Twice or three times were the 12th N.I. beaten back, and as often were they nobly rallied by their officers. Brevet Major Jackson of that regiment, dismounting from his horse, thus sacrificed his life. Advancing to the front, followed by only two havildars, this lamented officer, after a short combat, fell beneath the sabres of the enemy. The 1st Grenadier Regiment,² driven back with the 12th, fell into some confusion, and appears to have taken but little share in the action. Major Teasdale, commanding the 25th, was killed while animating his Sipahes, who gave ground in an alarming manner before their fierce opponents.³ Lieut.-Colonel Pennefather, commanding Her Majesty's 22nd, was shot through the body, and Major Poole succeeded to that command. Even his stout Europeans could not keep their ranks unmoved under the furious attacks of the Belooches. Defending themselves more skilfully with their bayonets than the Sipahes, they yet swerved back from the sharp sabres of their desperate foes, many of whom were excited with bhang,⁴ or opium. Lieutenant McMurdo, Assistant Quartermaster-General, his horse having been shot under him, killed a Belooch chief, hand to hand, and made prize of his gold-handled sword. Still our brave officers and soldiers continued to fall,⁵ and now Sir Charles Napier,

¹ Commanded by Major Reid

² The 1st Grenadier Regiment mustered less than 200 bayonets with its Colours.

³ Captain Jackson, brother of Major Jackson of the 12th, took command of the 25th on Major Teasdale's death.

⁴ Bhang is a decoction of hemp seed.

⁵ Killed: Captain Keade, 12th N.I., Lieutenant Wood, 12th N.I. Wounded: Major Wythie, Assistant Adjutant-General, Captain Conway, H.M. 22nd, Lieutenant Hardinge, H.M. 22nd, Ensign Pennefather, H.M. 22nd, Ensign Bowden, H.M. 22nd, Ensign Holbron, 12th N.I., Lieutenant Phayre, 25th N.I., Quartermaster, Lieutenant Bourdillon, 25th N.I.

seeing the obstinacy of the fight, and doubtful of its issue, pushed his horse through the ranks of Her Majesty's 22nd, and, waving his cap, cheered on that gallant regiment. In the same manner, regardless himself of danger, he encouraged the 25th N.I. to advance. At this time it was no doubt the General's wish to drive the enemy from the bed of the river by a vigorous charge, but his intention was not carried into effect. The bayonet was but little used except in defence, and it shortly became evident that the fire of the matchlocks and the glancing of the keen sabres were less and less frequent, while the continued and destructive roll of musketry, delivered from the edge nearly of the river bank, levelled every living being before it.¹ For upwards of an hour did this mortal struggle endure, and when at last the British line descended into the river, it was but over crowded heaps of dead and dying. The pouches and cotton clothes of nearly all these men had taken fire, probably from their lighted matches, and their scorched and writhing bodies presented a shocking spectacle. Many Belooch corpses, too, lay on the bank above mingled with those of their enemies, mute witnesses of their desperate valour. Quarter was not asked or given. The wounded were shot or bayoneted by our exasperated soldiers, disdaining to yield and striking at our men with their sabres to the last.

Meanwhile neither artillery nor cavalry were idle, nor was their aid unimportant in deciding the fate of the day. So contracted was the last position of the guns that only four of them could be brought into action.² One of Captain Hutt's guns, with the assistance of the sappers, who also broke down part of the wall, was brought round to bear on the shikargah, and did great execution there, while the remaining three swept the Foolailee to the right and front with a continued deadly discharge of grape shot and spherical case.

During the heat of the fight orders were sent to the cavalry to force the enemy's right. The 9th Bengal Cavalry had been previously crossed in support of the left of our line and formed immediately in rear of the 1st Grenadiers. By some misconception of an order the men of the latter regiment faced to the right about and retreated some distance before their officers could rally them. The Belooches showed themselves at the same time in numbers from the village enclosures and ravines. Lieut.-Colonel Pattle, of the 9th Cavalry, second in command, had not yet received the General's order to advance, but seeing the necessity of checking the enemy's movements, and partly, as I am informed, on the urgent representation of Captain Tucker, he after some hesitation permitted the cavalry to act. The moment certainly appears to have been critical, when the 3rd squadron of the 9th Cavalry, led by that gallant officer, advanced at a

¹ The bed of the Foolailee is an excavation produced by the current of a river in an alluvial soil, the bank here spoken of being simply the edge of that excavation. The elevated bank alluded to in the official despatch was confined to a small portion of our front. Below the edge of the bank was a double step or ledge which was heaped with the bodies of the slain.

² Captains Whittie and Hutt commanded the Camel and Horse Batteries.

trot, passing between the infantry and the village and driving the enemy into and along the bed of the Foolailee. A body of Belooches, drawn up in rear of the village, made a stout resistance from which this brave squadron suffered severely. Captain Tucker received six shots and fell,¹ but Captain Bagett succeeding him completed the dispersion of the enemy in that direction. The 3rd squadron, followed by the 2nd under Captain Garrett, which supported Lieut.-Colonel Pattle in an attack on the village, while the 1st, under Captain Wemyss, filing between the Grenadiers and 12th Native Infantry, crossed the Foolailee, dispersing the enemy on the opposite bank. Brevet Captain Cookson, the Adjutant, was at this time killed, and three other officers were wounded.² Lieut.-Colonel Pattle, with a few men of the 3rd squadron, had gallantly attacked the enclosures of the village, and, being afterwards supported by the 2nd squadron, succeeded in partially clearing them. It was the fire from these and the neighbouring canals and gardens which caused the heavy loss of the 9th Cavalry. The Scinde Horse, after an ineffectual attempt to get round the outside of the village, in which they were stopped by a deep canal occupied by the enemy, also descended into the river between our infantry and the village and rode direct to the enemy's camp.

The Ameers had already abandoned it and fled to Hyderabad, but many brave men were still found there who defended themselves obstinately, and were not cut down without loss to their pursuers. Captain Jacob had his horse killed under him and deputed Lieutenant Fitzgerald to continue the pursuit, which he did for some distance, till, coming on a large body of horse which had not been engaged, that officer was obliged to retire. The Scinde Horse were about the same time recalled to defend our baggage, and a detachment of the Bengal Cavalry held possession of the camp, which was afterwards burnt and evacuated by order of the General.³

When the British troops crossed the river, about half-past one p.m., the battle may be said to have ended, but firing did not altogether cease, and multitudes of the enemy still hovered about; nor was it till our guns had been crossed and opened both up the Foolailee and on the village and neighbouring enclosures that the insurgents gradually dispersed. The General formed his camp on the field of battle with the baggage in the centre of a hollow square, and the troops slept on their arms.

Thus closed the eventful day. Seldom, perhaps, has the determined valour of the Belooches on that occasion been surpassed. The Europeans behaved steadily and bravely, and were no doubt much inspired by Sir Charles's brilliant example. The Sipahes were sustained and rallied by their officers, whose conduct was marked by a noble self-devotion: without them they could hardly have recovered

¹ It is gratifying to record that this gallant officer recovered from his wounds.

² Wounded: Brevet Captain Smith, 9th Bengal Cavalry, Lieutenant Plowden, 9th Bengal Cavalry, Ensign Frith, Quartermaster, 9th Bengal Cavalry.

³ 30,000 or 40,000 rupees were found in the camp: the Ameers were said to have brought some lacs of rupees with them.

themselves as they did, after being more than once driven back. The artillery and cavalry did their duty well, but their actions were in a great degree paralysed by the confined field to which they were chiefly restricted. It must be admitted, however, that the advance of our cavalry on the enemy's right had probably an important effect in deciding the battle.

Our loss in the engagement was severe, considering the small number of our troops engaged, 62 killed and 194 wounded, of whom 19 were officers (6 killed and 13 wounded).¹ The enemy left upwards of 400 dead in the bed of the Foolailee, and there were probably as many more in different parts of the field and the shikargah killed by the artillery and cavalry. As quarter,² with a few exceptions, was not given, it may be doubted whether the number of wounded who escaped much exceeded the number of the killed. The statements of the Belooches make their loss much greater, but are probably exaggerated. At the lowest computation, however, the loss of the Belooches must have been six times that of the British, a surprising disproportion when we consider their advantage of position, and a plain proof of the superiority gained by discipline, and especially by one of its results, a rapid and well-sustained fire.

The whole of the enemy's guns, ten in number, the standards, ammunition, baggage, tents and some treasure fell into our hands, and the immediate results of this battle were most important. On the two following mornings six of the Ameers surrendered themselves prisoners, and shortly afterwards Hyderabad³ was taken possession of, and Lower Scinde declared a province of the British Empire.

¹ The number of horses killed on both sides was considerable. The enemy's cavalry was not much engaged, but many of the Belooches dismounted to fight, picketing their horses in the bed of the river.

² It must be noted that the Belooches, not expecting quarter, defended themselves to the last, making it nearly impossible to spare them.

³ Hyderabad was not taken possession of till the 21st, after Major Outram's departure. It was said that there were two millions sterling of public treasure in the fort. If so a great part of it must have been removed during this delay. The prize money found was about one quarter of that sum.