

PAGES OF BRITISH HISTORY.

Historical Battles—Noteworthy Events in the History of the Creation of the British Empire.

(Continued from our last.)

Plassey, 1757.

Many battles on land and by sea in all parts of the world, and particularly on the continent of Europe, followed the events depicted in our last.

The battle of Plassey, where 3,000 men encountered 70,000, is, perhaps, one of the most remarkable in history.

The conquest of Bengal was one of the greatest achievements of Clive. "The Avenger," as he was named—Clive, the daring in war; "he who," says Horace Walpole, "was styled by policy a heaven-born hero."

The British authorities in Bengal had from the beginning been opposed by native viceroys of that province, until the reign of Alivardi Khan, a wise and valiant prince, who had with success protected his dominions from the inroads of the Mahrattas.

Calcutta was speedily retaken by Colonel Clive, the rich city Hooghly, twenty-five miles higher up the river, was captured and plundered, and the rage of Suraja Dowlah on hearing of these successes was unbounded.

The measures taken by Clive to accomplish this desirable revolution did equal honour to his address and sagacity. While conducting an intricate and perilous negotiation with Meer Jaffier, he counterfeited friendship so artfully as not only to lull the suspicions of the nabob, but to induce him to dismiss his army which had been assembled at Plassey, a strong camp to the south of his capital, before the capture of Chandernagore.

"Why do you keep your forces in the field," asked the colonel, "after so many marks of friendship and confidence? They distress all the merchants, and hinder our trade. The British cannot stay in Bengal without freedom of commerce. Do not reduce us to the necessity of suspecting that you intend to destroy us as soon as you have an opportunity."

So the Surajah Dowlah recalled his army from the front, but not without great anxiety and suspicion.

"If," said he, with great emotion, "this colonel should be deceiving me!

The secret departure of Clive's agents from Muxadavad soon convinced him that he was deluded; and, filled with fury, he reassembled his army, and ordered it to occupy its former camp at Plassey, after having made Meer

Jaffier, of whom he had suspicions, re-new solemnly upon the Koran his obligations of allegiance and fidelity.

Clive, who had hoped to possess himself of that important post, was somewhat disconcerted by this movement. The nabob had reached Plassey twelve hours before him, at the head of 60,000 infantry, 20,000 horse, and 50 pieces of cannon, directed chiefly by forty French officers and deserters.

Clive had but 1,000 Europeans, 2,000 sepoy, and 8 field-pieces. Among the former were the king's 39th Regiment, and 1st Bengal Fusiliers and 1st Bombay Fusiliers, now numbered respectively as the 101st and 103rd Regiments of the Line; the three corps being about 300 men each; he had also 150 artillerymen and sailors, and the 1st Bengal Infantry, raised in the same year, 1757, and styled "Ghillis-ka-Pullan."

On the 16th of June this slender force had reached Pattee, a fortified port on the Cossimbazar river. This they promptly reduced, as well as Cutwah, a town with a castle, but the rains setting in with unusual violence, Clive was fain to strike his tents and quarter his men in the huts and houses. Six days he halted there, waiting with intense anxiety for communications which he expected from Meer Jaffier; but the few letters that reached him told only of a complete reconcoiliation between the nabob and his vizier, and promised nothing of that defection in the army of the former which he had been led to hope for, when being lured so far into the enemy's country.

His position now became as perilous as the general of so small an army ever occupied, and he was too clear-sighted not to perceive that it was so. He summoned a council of war, to determine whether the troops should cross the Cossimbazar at once, and put their existence to the doubtful issue of a battle against fearful odds, or halt where they were during the rainy season, and call in the nabob's enemies, the Mahrattas, to their aid.

Instead of requiring, in the usual manner, the opinions of the junior members of the Council, Clive took the initiative by giving his own, and gave it in favour of a suspension of hostilities. Majors Kilpatrick and Grant, the next in point of seniority, followed the same course; while Coote, afterwards so distinguished in the wars of the Carnatic, protested against such policy as most unwise. He urged that nothing could be won by delay; that the confidence of their men would evaporate; that the junction of M. Bussey's French corps, an event by no means improbable, would give the nabob a superiority of force that would be irresistible.

Clive saw the force of these arguments; and after spending some hours in solitary thought, amid the recesses of a neighbouring grove, he issued orders for the troops to march before break of day on the following morning.

Just as the sun was rising on the 22nd of June, the troops began to pass the river; and by four in the afternoon the whole were on the hostile side, where a messenger from Meer Jaffier met them with intelligence that the nabob had halted at a village six miles distant, and there Clive was advised to fall upon him by surprise. The colonel replied that he should bivouac that night at Plassey, "and advanced next day as far as Daudpore, where, if Meer Jaffier failed to join him, he would make peace with the nabob."

The march was resumed before sunset; and having by dint of great exertion dragged the boats and conveyed their stores a distance of fifteen miles, they halted in the grove of Plassey at one in the morning. There they lay under arms, being startled by the sound of gongs, ghurrils, drums, and cymbals, which, as they marked the vicinity of Indian guards, convinced them that they were within a mile of the nabob's camp; yet the men, "after the sentinels were duly planted, slept as soundly as soldiers are apt to do even on the eve of a battle."

The grove of Plassey, in which the soldiers lay, was 800 yards long by 300 broad, and consisted entirely of mango trees planted in regular rows.

"It was surrounded by a slight embankment and a ditch choked up with weeds, and approached at its north-western angle within fifty yards of the river. A hunting-seat belonging to the nabob, which stood upon the bank of the stream, afforded, with its walled garden and enclosures, an excellent point of defence for one of Clive's flanks, as well as a convenient station for his hospital. In the meantime the enemy occupied an entrenched camp about a mile or a mile and a half in his front, which, commencing at the neck of a peninsula formed by a curvature of the stream, ran directly inland for 200 yards, after which it formed an obtuse angle, and bore away nearly three miles to the north-east."

In this acute angle stood a redoubt on which cannon were mounted; there was also an eminence covered with timber 300 yards beyond; while a couple of water-tanks, girt by earthen mounds, offered peculiar advantages, either in advancing or retreating, to the force which should first seize them. All these features of the position became visible to Clive when the brightening dawn enabled him to reconnoitre, and the sun arose on that day which was to decide for ever the fate of Bengal.

Colonel Clive mounted to the roof of the hunting-seat, and with his telescope was examining the nabob's camp, when he suddenly beheld a general stir within it. Ere long the heads of glittering columns, all turbaned and attired in many brilliant colours, began to move into the green plain, and in a few minutes the whole imposing array advanced, but slowly.

There came 50,000 infantry, armed with match-locks, spears, swords, daggers, and rockets; and 20,000 cavalry, all well mounted, and armed with tul-war, lance, and shield. There, too, were their fifty pieces of cannon, and planted in the openings between the columns. All came on in the form of a semicircle, as if for the purpose of hemming in and completely surrounding the little force that lay in the mango grove.

The mode in which the cannon were moved was not the least remarkable feature in this Oriental warlike show. The guns, chiefly twenty-four and thirty-two pounders, were each placed on a huge wooden stage, raised six feet above the level of the ground; and these cumbersome platforms, supporting guns, gunners, and ammunition, were each dragged forward by forty or fifty bullocks, assisted by an elephant, which pushed in the rear. Four light field-guns acted apart from the rest, and were worked by the French, who took post in one of the tanks near the edge of the grove.

Clive's artillery consisted of eight six-pounders and two howitzers.

He drew up his whole force in one line, with the three slender European regiments in the centre, and just beyond the skirts of the grove. He did this under the impression that if he kept his men in cover, the nabob, mistaking prudence for fear, would acquire additional confidence; besides this, he felt that a corps so pliable might at any moment be thrown back, long ere the unwieldy masses of the enemy could interfere with his alignment. He posted three cannon on each flank, and the remaining two, with the howitzers, under cover of a couple of brick-kilns, so as to protect his left; and having ordered his slender force "to keep steady, and neither advance nor retire without orders," he betook himself again to his station on the house-top.

About eight o'clock in the morning a shot from the French artillery at the tank gave the signal for a general discharge of all their artillery, and a shower of bullets from fifty pieces, of cannon tore through the mango trees. The guns of Clive returned this promptly; and for some time a fire was kept up which made terrible havoc in the ranks of the nabob, but from his cannon being placed on platforms, or not properly depressed, it proved harmless to the other party.

By nine o'clock, Clive, finding that several of his men were beginning to fall, directed the whole line to withdraw into the shelter of the grove. Upon this the enemy mistaking the change of ground for a sudden flight, with yells and tumultuous cries, pushed their artillery farther to the front, and fired with increased ardour; but as the Europeans and sepoy crouched behind the trees, they sustained little or no damage, while the shot from their light field-guns plunged through the dense masses of horse and foot that were exposed on the open plain, and piled the corpses over each other in ghastly heaps.

So passed the day till noon; Clive, after duly consulting with his officers, having determined to act on the defensive throughout the action; but a heavy shower of rain having fallen, the ammunition of the enemy became damaged, and their fire began to slacken.

Still, however, they kept their ground, but in about two hours after the bullocks were seen to be driven to their stations beside the platforms, and the whole, covered by the horse and foot, moved slowly to the rear, to the astonishment and joy of Clive and his army. The truth was that the imperious nabob had suddenly lost heart on hearing of the fall of one of his most trusted chiefs, Meer Murdeen, whom a ball had mortally wounded.

Overwhelmed by a misfortune so great, he summoned the vizier Meer Jaffier, and throwing his turban on the ground, exclaimed—

"Jaffier, that turban you must defend!"

The traitor bowed, and quitted the presence of the nabob, to dispatch in all haste a letter to Colonel Clive, acquainting him with what had passed, and requesting him "either instantly to push on to victory, or to storm the nabob's camp during the following night."

But the letter was not delivered until the fortune of the day was decided; so that Clive was still in considerable suspense with respect to the ultimate intentions of his secret ally, Jaffier. While the rest of the vast Indian army fell back, the little party of Frenchmen at the tank, under an officer named Sinfray, kept its ground manfully, and galled the British both with cannon and musketry. Clive at this moment was sound asleep, excessive fatigue having fairly overcome him; but Major Kilpatrick, placing himself at the head of two companies of Europeans, with a couple of field-pieces, made ready to dislodge the party at the tank, and occupy the latter as a position whence to gall the retreating enemy.

Prior to moving, a correct sense of military discipline induced him first to refer to Colonel Clive, who sharply reproved him for attempting to take such a step on his own responsibility. However, he warmly praised the idea of the proposed movement, and sending Kilpatrick to the rear to bring up the rest of the troops, he took command of the storming party, and captured the tank without the loss of a single life.

Put in the motion by the major, the whole line quitted the grove and advanced. A considerable column was now observed to be extending itself from the right of the enemy, towards the north-east angle of the grove. This was the corps of Meer Jaffier, but being unknown to the British leaders, their guns opened on its ranks at once. The corps halted irresolutely, paused, then broke, and fled with the crowd. On this the detachment under Clive rejoined their comrades, and with loud cheers pushed on for the redoubt, which, as well as the wooded eminence, was stormed and taken. The guns were then run up, loaded with round shot and grape, and a destructive fire was opened on the camp, where a scene of confusion baffling all description soon prevailed.

One corps of the nabob's army alone held together, and was soon recognised by its standards to be that of the traitor Jaffier; so the fact of his adherence to the original secret agreement became proven to Clive and his officers.

"Forward! Push on!" were now the orders, and the camp was entered at the point of the bayonet and almost without any other opposition than that occasioned by abandoned guns and tumbrils, tents half thrown down, and piles of baggage; while thousands of horses and bullocks, with many elephants, overspread the plain, and the broken and discomfited army, which even then might have turned and utterly destroyed its assailants, fled in all directions without firing a shot—fled by tens of thousands. The nabob rode among the foremost of the fugitives, mounted on a swift dromedary, an animal now rarely used or seen in Bengal.

Being liberally promised prize-money, the troops remained steadily in their ranks, though surrounded by the gorgous plunder of an Oriental camp. After a brief halt, which enabled the commissaries to collect as many bullocks and horses as were requisite for the transport of the cannon, the troops advanced in the highest spirits as far as Daudpore, towards which the advance guard had been pushed for the purpose of observing the enemy's rear; and there the lists of the day's losses were made up. They proved to be singularly small.

Not more than sixteen sepoy and eight Europeans lost their lives; while the wounded amounted to forty-eight in all, twelve of these only being English.

Such was the battle of Plassey, "which," says a writer, "belongs to that class of events which defy all calculation previous to their occurrence, and silence all criticism after they have taken place."

The future results of this great victory were not less remarkable than the victory itself. At eight o'clock in the evening Clive halted in Daudpore, and next morning he saluted the traitor Jaffier as Subah or Nabob of Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa.

We are sorry to hear of the illness in the family of Bro. Glayebrook of Albin lodge. We are sure he has the sympathy of all the brethren in Toronto.

Ripans Tabules relieve colic.

THE AIMS, OBJECTS AND BENEFITS OF THE SONS OF ENGLAND BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

Organized in Toronto, December 19th, 1874.

To Englishmen and Sons of Englishmen.

The mission of this Society is to bring into organized union all true and worthy Englishmen; to maintain their national institutions and liberties and the integrity of the British Empire; to foster and keep alive the loving memory of Old England, our native and Mother Land; to elevate the lives of its members in the practice of mutual aid and true charity—

Great Financial Benefits, viz: Sick pay, Doctor's attendance and medicine and Funeral Expenses are accorded. Brothers between the ages of 18 and 50 years are received into membership. Honorary members are also admitted. Roman Catholic Englishmen are not eligible.

Reverence for and adhesion to the teachings of the Holy Bible is insisted on.

Party politics are not allowed to be discussed in the lodge room. The Society is secret in its proceedings to enable members to protect each other and prevent imposition—for which purpose an initiation ritual is provided, imposing obligations of fidelity to the principles of the Society on all who join it.

The Society is making rapid growth and has lodges extending over Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific shores, having a membership upwards of 12,000 at present. The ratio of increase being greater as the Society's influence and usefulness is better known. Lodges have been started in South Africa and will soon probably be started in England, etc.

The Beneficiary (Insurance) Department is providing insurance to the members for \$5,000 of \$1,000 desired, at the minimum cost, under issued by any other fraternal Society in Canada, and is conducted on the assessment system. The assessments are graded. A total disability allowance is also covered by the certificates in class "A." There are no disability claims in class "B." No Englishmen need join other organizations when the inducements of this Department are considered.

Englishmen forming and composing new lodges derive exceptional advantages in the initiation fees, and 12 good men can start a lodge.

The Society is governed by a Grand Lodge with subordinate lodges—the officers of which are elected annually.

In our lodge rooms social distinctions are laid aside and we meet on the common level of fraternal brotherhood, in peaceful association, the united counsel and effort, in maintaining the great principles of our beloved Society. As such we can appeal to the sympathetic support of all true Englishmen—asking them to cast in their lot with us, thereby swelling the grand roll of those bound together in fraternal sympathies and in devotion to England and the grand cause of British freedom.

Any further information will be cheerfully given by the undersigned.

JOHN W. CARTER, Grand Secretary.

Grand Secretary's Office, Shaftesbury Hall, Toronto, April 1st, 1882.

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