

## Multan: from early riches to the fall

LAST week, I gave you an account of Multan city from Mooltan, During and After the Siege. The year given was 'MDCLCXLIX'. That should make it 1849. The small book, as I told you, has now been translated by Zubair Shaft Ghauri of the Railways.

Today, I propose to give you excerpts from two more chapters, The Inhabitants of Mooltan and South View of the Eedgah, Where Vans Agnew and Anderson were Murdered.

About the inhabitants of the ancient city, the book says: The inhabitants of Mooltan numbered before the siege, it is said, about 80,000. One-third of them were Hindoos, the rest either Mahomedans, or Sikhs, following the peculiar creed — a dissent from Hindooism effected in the fifteenth century — professed by that people.

The two former castes are chiefly engaged in commerce, and there are many rich men among them. Fifteen Mooltan merchants were computed, a short time since, to possess, collectively, a million and a half of rupees. Being the entrepot of a vast transit trade carried on through the Punjaub and the adjoining territories, Mooltan lately acquired a large banking business, in which it supplanted Shikarpore. Up to the recent capture, the commercial prosperity of the city was rapidly increasing.

Our business is, however, less with the trading Hindoo and Mahomedan, than with the warlike Sikh inhabitants of Mooltan, which recent events made usually numerous. They showed themselves more brave and skillful in war than we had previously given them credit for. Though subject to panics when in masses, and, consequently, not so firm before an enemy as the natives in our own service, yet their individual courage is remarkable. "The bold indifference to danger," says the Author of Three Months in the Marches of Mooltan, "with which they advance almost to the muzzles of our guns, and fire into our very embrasures, indicates a degree of personal courage surpassed by none. A recent case is much in point:- Hearing an outcry that a party of the enemy (four in number, and all on foot) were robbing the neighbouring village, an aide-de-camp, who was at hand, galloped with half a dozen local horse to the rescue; two of the thieves beat a hasty retreat with their booty, a third threw down his sword, but the fourth first levelled and fired at the approaching party, then throwing away his matchlock, drew his tulwar, and bravely, and for some time successfully, defended himself against the gentleman, wounding and unhorsing one of his followers, until he was almost hacked to pieces by the party."

The military skill which the Sikh army has acquired is of recent date, and is chiefly owing to the genius of Runjeet Singh, but partly to the drilling of French officers. In 1822, Generals Allard and Ventura, who had belonged to the army of Napoleon, presented themselves at the court of Lahore, and after some hesitation were engaged to complete the organization of the Sikh army, which Runjeet Singh had begun. They were fortunate in having excellent material to work with, and like skillful officers made good use of their means and opportunities. "They gave a moderate degree of precision and completeness to a system already introduced; but their labours were more conspicuous in the French mode of command, and treble ranks, and in squares salient with guns, than in the ardent courage, the alert obedience, and the long endurance of fatigue, which distinguished the Sikh horsemen sixty years ago, and which preeminently characterize the Sikh footmen of the present day among the other troops of India." (Cunningham's History of the Sikhs).

And of the Eedgah, we have the following account

The principality of Mooltan has for a long time been ruled by a viceroy who pays tribute to Lahore. The late ruler, the Dewan Moolraj, was, when Dhuleep Singh was fixed on the throne in February 1846, called on to pay up the arrears of tribute then due by him. He did not hesitate, went to Lahore under British safeguard, and made an arrangement considered satisfactory to all parties. It is said, indeed, that he was tired of his office, and, that the whole state should be subject to one system of administration, he was induced to retire in favour of Khan Singh.

To transfer the viceroyalty in due form, it was arranged that this should be done at Mooltan by Mr Vans

Agnew, of the Bengal Civil Service, and Lieutenant Anderson, of the Bombay European Fusiliers, who proceeded thither, as Commissioners, with an escort of 500 Sikh soldiers. They left Lahore on the 5th, and arrived at Mooltan on the 16th of April last year. They were well received on their arrival, and everything promised to terminate amicably. Moolraj showed the commissioners every attention, assigned Eedgah, a village and fort outside the city walls, as their residence, and forwarded the balance of the tribute for 1847 to Lahore. It is said that for all this his family — especially his brothers — were excessively angry, and pointed out how easy it would be for him to retain his viceroyalty with the present year's tribute, were he to "sauf-ker", or kill, the politicals. It is believed that Moolraj was not desirous of taking this villainous advice, for, besides wishing to retire, he had 70,000 deposited in the treasury of Amritser, besides a large balance at his banker's at Benares; all of which would, in the event of such treachery, be confiscated.

On the 19th of April, he went through the ceremony of handing the citadel over to Khan Singh, in the presence of Vans Agnew and Anderson. The latter mounted his horse at the gate, and rode forward with Moolraj; while Vans Agnew remained behind with Khan Singh to place guards at this, as he had previously done at the other entrances of the fortress. While in the act of getting on horseback a couple of Suwars rushed forward and cut him down with their swords, Khan Singh instantly dismounted, beat off the assailants, and succeeded in protecting his companion from further injury. He then caused his wounded friend to be placed on an elephant, and conveyed towards Eedgah.

During this time they had lost sight of Anderson, and naturally dreaded that the worst had befallen him. On getting outside the walls of the town, they found him lying by the road-side, so severely wounded that he was nearly dead from loss of blood. They saw no more of Moolraj, and lifting Anderson upon a litter, arrived in safety within the mud-fort. Here they determined to defend themselves to the last. Vans Agnew, exhausted as he was, addressed his Sikh escort, and entreated them to be firm; and they all promised fidelity. Could they have held out all would have been well, for a messenger was immediately despatched to Lieutenant Edwardes, who was at no great distance, with a small force, collecting the revenues for the Dewan. Scarcely had the wounded men, with the zealous assistance of Khan Singh, disposed of the small force for defence, when the guns from Mooltan opened upon the Eedgah. Happily, they were at too great a distance to do any injury.

The sequel of this painful affair is thus graphically related by a correspondent of the Bombay Times:-

"During the night, there was great commotion in the city, and it was reported to the wounded refugees that a large undisciplined rabble was approaching the Eedgah. Even then they were confident of being able to defend themselves; but at this crisis Khan Singh, the governor elect, rushed into the apartment where the two British officers were, and announced to them that the whole of his men — the 500 Sikhs — had gone over to the Mooltanees. 'Now, Sahibs', he said, 'we have nothing for it but to die, but I will die with you.' Agnew expostulated with him, saying, 'Khan Singh, once already you have saved my life; now leave us to our fate and save your own.' Anderson (who was already on the eve of expiring from his wounds) and Agnew then shook hands, and bade each other an eternal adieu.

"Anderson soon after died; but Agnew, though severely wounded, was still capable of defending himself, and soon came the time for doing so. The Mooltanees rushed into the buildings in numbers. They approached the small party. Agnew sprang up and sapped his pistol. It missed fire; he then threw himself upon the men most in advance, wounded several with his sword, and received a gun-shot wound which proved instantly fatal. Khan Singh was either cut down or wounded when poor Agnew fell, but he still survives."

Some of the Sikh artillerymen had remained staunch to their murdered masters, but when they found there was nothing left them but flight, they made their escape from Eedgah, and reached Lahore in five days, having ridden at the rate of nearly forty miles a day. They, together with Mr Wilkinson, the apothecary to the mission — who, luckily for himself, was left behind, and heard of the disaster in time to turn back before entering Mooltan — were treated with every kindness by the people