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George McCall Theal

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HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA SINCE THE BRITISH CONQUEST.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIR PEREGRINE MAITLAND, GOVERNOR—(*Continued*).

THE SEVENTH KAFFIR WAR, CALLED BY THE XOSAS THE WAR OF THE AXE.

ON the 16th of March 1846 a Kaffir who was known by the Dutch name Kleintje, having been detected in the act of stealing an axe at Fort Beaufort, was sent from that place by Mr. Meent Borchers, the resident justice of the peace, to be tried by the magistrate at Grahamstown. Two Hottentot offenders and a dragoon who had committed some crime accompanied him, and for security they were handcuffed in pairs. Four armed Hottentots were sent with them as a guard.

Just after the prisoners left, the chief Tola appeared at Fort Beaufort, and desired the agent-general to have Kleintje brought back and released; but his request was refused. He then sent one of his attendants to the nearest kraal with instructions that his follower was to be rescued.

From Fort Beaufort the road to Grahamstown runs for some distance along the right bank of the Kat river. The prisoners with their guard proceeded on it about seven miles, when they sat down by the river side to rest and eat some food. Suddenly about forty Kaffirs rushed from a thicket close by, and seized two of the guns which were

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lying on the ground before the guard could get hold of them. One of the Hottentots, seeing a companion beneath a Kaffir, fired at the assailant and killed him on the spot. The four men of the guard then sought safety in flight, and by good fortune managed to reach a wayside inn at no great distance. The Kaffirs murdered the Hottentot to whom Kleintje was manacled, and having cut off his hand to release their friend, they started off as quickly as they appeared, taking the two guns belonging to the guard with them. The other prisoners were left unharmed.

Kleintje's crime was committed in the colony, and the murdered Hottentot was a British subject, so the matter could not be overlooked. The lieutenant-governor demanded the surrender of the rescued prisoner and the murderer of the Hottentot. Tola, their immediate head, declined to give them up, though he sent the two guns to Mr. Stretch. The old chief Botumane, of the Imidange clan, to which Tola belonged, also refused to deliver them to justice. He gave as his view of the case that the death of the Hottentot was compensated by the death of Kleintje's brother, the Kaffir who was shot, so that the matter should be allowed to drop. If the governor was grieving for the Hottentot, he said, he was grieving for his man. Sandile, with whose people the criminals were known to be, was also called upon to surrender them, and acted in the same manner as the others.

Colonel Hare was thus obliged to seek redress by force of arms. He directed the colonists near the border to be on their guard, distributed arms to those who needed them, strengthened the garrisons of the forts Peddie and Beaufort, and then prepared to send a body of troops to occupy Sandile's kraal. While these arrangements were being made, the traders and some of the missionaries in Kaffirland were plundered, and therefore considered it advisable to leave the country as fast as they could. Other missionaries placed such confidence in the people with whom they were living that they remained at their stations until an order from Colonel Hare required them to remove to the colony.

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An extraordinary instance of the power of the Kaffirs to deceive was shown in the case of the reverend John Brownlee, of the London society, missionary at Jan Tshatshu's kraal. He was one of the most sensible men in South Africa, yet he actually applied for arms to be served out to Tshatshu's followers, and asserted that those people would be as useful as soldiers to the government. He had not many days to wait before he was of a very different opinion.

On the 31st of March the lieutenant-governor issued a proclamation, calling the burghers of the eastern districts to arms, his object being to establish a line of posts to protect the colony from invasion while the troops were at Sandile's kraal.

When the intelligence reached Capetown Sir Peregrine Maitland recognised at once that the crisis had arrived, for such a condition of things on the frontier could be tolerated no longer. On the 27th of March he sent the war-steamer *Thunderbolt* to Algoa Bay with all the soldiers that could be spared: eighty men of the 27th regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Montague Johnstone, and two field-pieces with Captain Eardley Wilmot, of the royal artillery. On the 31st he published a manifesto, in which he stated the necessity of redressing the wrongs from which the colony was suffering, and on the 1st of April he embarked at Simon's Bay in the ship-of-war *President* to proceed to the frontier.

The military force on the border at this time consisted of detachments of two battalions of the 91st and one of the 27th, mustering in all nine hundred and ninety-four effective rank and file, the 7th dragoon guards, three hundred and thirty-seven strong, four hundred Cape mounted riflemen, and a few artillerymen and engineers.

It was necessary to leave the greater number of the infantry to guard the various posts, but fifteen hundred men were got ready to take the field by calling out the Hottentots of Stockenstrom, as the settlement at the Kat river was named by a government notice on the 15th of August 1844.

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Without waiting until the burghers could assemble to prevent the Kaffirs from rushing into the colony, Colonel Hare directed this force to march to Burnshill. He was an upright and amiable man, but he had neither the ability, nor the energy, nor the tact necessary for the post which he then filled. He was in ill health, and was hoping to leave for England in a few days when hostilities were forced upon him. The position of lieutenant-governor irritated him, because there was no real power attached to it, and on many points his views were at variance with those of Sir Peregrine Maitland. On this occasion he made almost incredible blunders. He greatly underrated the power of the Kaffirs, and believed that by taking possession of Sandile's kraal he would at once bring the hostile clans to submission. And so he commenced operations before a sufficient force was assembled to prevent the invasion of the colony, and with less than a month's provisions in his stores.

From Post Victoria to Sandile's kraal at Burnshill is only a good ride on horseback, a Hottentot or a Fingo can march from one place to the other on foot without resting on the way. No necessity therefore existed for encumbering a column with a great quantity of baggage or provisions, when a secure base of supplies was so close at hand. Waggon's were not needed to form a lager, for no one had the slightest fear of Xosas attacking a strong body of troops except in an ambush.

Yet no fewer than one hundred and twenty-five waggon's, conveying baggage of all kinds, provisions, and ammunition, accompanied the force. In place of making a sudden dash, which alone could succeed, notice of what was about to be attempted was given to all Kaffirland by the collection of such a number of vehicles at Post Victoria. One hundred and twenty-five waggon's, each drawn by fourteen oxen, form a line at least three miles in length, for in a broken bushy country, without bridges or proper roads, such as that between Post Victoria and Burnshill in 1846, they could only proceed one after another.

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The force was composed of three divisions, which were to march from different points and unite at Burnshill. Colonel Henry Somerset, of the Cape mounted rifles, was then to assume the chief command. On the 11th of April 1846 Colonel Somerset marched from Post Victoria with his own regiment and four companies of the 91st; Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Richardson marched from Fort Peddie with the 7th dragoon guards, and Captain William Sutton, of the Cape mounted rifles, from Eland's post at the Kat river with the Hottentot levies.

On the 15th the columns united at Burnshill and formed a camp. The country they marched through appeared quite deserted, as was also Sandile's kraal when they reached it, the whole of the Gaika and Imidange clans having retired to the forests of the Amatola. On the 16th Colonel Somerset moved against Sandile, leaving Major John Hope Gibsone, of the 7th dragoons, in charge of the camp. As soon as the troops got into the bushy defiles the Xosas appeared in great numbers. Some sharp skirmishing took place, but one division managed to capture eighteen hundred head of cattle, after which the soldiers and Hottentots kindled huge fires and rested by their arms for the night. Meantime the camp was attacked, but the assailants were beaten off.

At daybreak on the 17th Colonel Somerset, believing that the whole of the hostile Kaffirs were on his front, sent an order to Major Gibsone to break up the camp at Burnshill and join him. At half past ten o'clock the first waggons began to move off. The train was so long that only an advance and rear guard could be provided, and the soldiers employed on this duty were chiefly dragoons, who were almost useless in such a country.

When passing through a narrow gorge one of the central waggons stuck fast, and all behind were brought to a stand. In a moment a horde of Gaikas rushed down from a bushy height and cut the oxen loose, there being no one but the drivers and leaders to resist them. The dragoons in the rear

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were unable even to get near the place, and thus between eight and nine hundred oxen and sixty-one waggons laden with baggage and stores fell into the hands of the Kaffirs. Those laden with ammunition were the last in the train, and they also must have been lost if the drivers and leaders of the others had not hurried back to defend them. While the Kaffirs were engaged in the pillage of the stores Major Gibsone retreated to Burnshill with the ammunition, and was shortly afterwards joined by a company of the 91st under Major Campbell, who had been sent to meet the train, but arrived too late.

The waggons that were in front of the one which stuck in the gorge reached their destination in safety, and by making a detour Major Gibsone was able to join the main party some hours later with what was left of the camp. Colonel Somerset now resolved to retreat, as he felt certain that the Kaffirs, elated with their success, would pour into the defenceless colony. The column was followed closely by the exulting Xosas, but on the next day succeeded in reaching Blockdrift on the Tyumie without further disaster. A large stone building belonging to the Lovedale mission was taken possession of there, and was converted into a temporary barrack and fort.

In this disastrous expedition Captain Bambrick, of the 7th dragoon guards, a young colonist named M'Cormick, ten men of the 91st, one Hottentot from the Kat river, and four Cape mounted riflemen were killed, fourteen soldiers were severely wounded, and a number of others were more or less hurt. The eighteen hundred captured cattle were brought out, but their value was a trifle compared with what was lost.

The Gaikas and their allies now rushed into the colony, and commenced to drive off the cattle and to burn the buildings and cornstacks. The country people had assembled in little parties for mutual protection, and were not taken by surprise as in the last war, so that very few were murdered. Nearly all the camps were attacked, but none were

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overpowered, though several—including the village of Riebeeck East—were afterwards abandoned. From the pastures close to the military posts the raiders drove off the commissariat cattle, and taunted the soldiers with challenges to come out.

The colonists who lost their lives in this raid were twelve in number: Messrs. Joshua Norden, Christiaan Nel, Elias Nel, J. Murray, R. Webb, C. Brass, P. van der Westhuizen, Towell, Clark, Kromhout, Middleton, and Skirrow. Mr. Norden, a leading member of the Jewish congregation, was captain of the Grahamstown yeomanry corps, and was killed while leading a patrol. A young man named Pike, who was in charge of some transport waggons, and who was murdered by Kaffirs near Botha's Hill, is included in the list of victims of the raid by several writers of the time, but he lost his life on the 11th of April, some days before the great body of the Kaffirs entered the colony. Captain Sandes, of the Cape mounted riflemen, and five or six soldiers were also killed. The bodies of all those who fell into the hands of the Kaffirs were horribly mutilated.

The loss of property was immense, and the government, in addition to a war, now had to provide for several thousand destitute people.

For either contingency the authorities were utterly unprepared. The country was parched by a long drought, so that transport was exceedingly difficult, and there were no supplies of food either for men or horses in the frontier posts. Those posts, situated along the Fish river, proved—as Sir Peregrine Maitland wrote—of no more use to prevent an invasion of the colony than the piers of a bridge to prevent the rush of a swollen torrent through its arches.

It was supposed at first that only the Imidange and Gaika clans were hostile, but very shortly nearly the whole Xosa tribe was in arms against the Europeans. On the 1st of April 1846 the old chief Eno, of the Amambala clan, died, after enjoining his sons Stokwe and Sonto on his deathbed not to go to war with the white people. They

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pledged their word to Captain Maclean that they would observe their father's last wishes, and within six weeks sent their followers into the colony to plunder and lay waste. Umhala made a promise to keep the peace, and observed it in the same way as Stokwe and Sonto. Pato, Kobe, Siwani, Siyolo, and Nonibe acted in like manner. The Galekas of Kreli as in the preceding war professed to be neutral, but really aided the Rarabe clans to the full extent of their power.

The only Xosas who took no part against the colony were a few families from mission stations, the small clan under the captain Kama, the captain Umkayi and his family, and the followers of a man named Hermanus, who had been some years in the service of the government as an interpreter and who had recently collected some people together on a tract of land close to Fort Brown. One name more must be added, that of a youth who accompanied the reverend William Govan to Scotland after the Tyumie mission station was destroyed by his countrymen, and who in later years returned to South Africa as the reverend Tiyo Soga, an earnest, enlightened, zealous, and self-denying Christian missionary, such a man as any nation in the world might be proud of. Kama had embraced Christianity, and he and his followers fought on the colonial side, not indeed against their tribesmen, but against the emigrant Tembus. Umkayi's followers were among the most active enemies of the colony, but the captain himself and his family, thirty-one individuals in all, claimed the protection of the troops at Fort Peddie. In July these persons were sent to Grahamstown, where they were afterwards maintained at the expense of the government. Umkayi's character was utterly worthless. He was strongly suspected of being a spy, but if he really tried to act as one his abilities were not equal to the task.

Of the Tembu tribe, that section which was under the chief Umtirara professed to be neutral, but some of them aided Mapasa's people in ravaging the districts of Somerset and Cradock, and the chief himself was strongly suspected

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of acting deceitfully. Owing to the extent to which he had been plundered by the Pondos and the Bacas, he had long since abandoned the lower part of the territory between the Bashee and the Umtata, and was now living on the Zwart Kei, though some of his people were still to be found as far east as Clarkebury. The feud between this chief and Kreli was so strong that their followers could not act together, and Umtirara, though very willing to secrete cattle driven from the colony, was ready at any moment to join a European force against his neighbour. The clans known as the emigrant Tembus were all in arms against the white people. Umtirara was only in name their paramount chief, for they were quite independent of his authority.

The Fingos were bitter enemies of the Xosas, and consequently fought on the side of the Europeans. A few of their old men, women, and children who fell into Pato's hands at the beginning of the war were burned to death, and thereafter neither Fingo nor Xosa showed mercy to an opponent.

The strongest garrison on the frontier was that of Fort Peddie, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Lindsay, of the first battalion of the 91st. This officer was not held in much esteem either in military circles or by the colonists, and he certainly did nothing that would entitle him to regard. Great herds of cattle driven from the colony passed almost in sight of Fort Peddie towards Kreli's country, without any effort on his part to save them.

On the 30th of April about a thousand Kaffir warriors attacked the Fingos at the Beka mission station, about four miles from Fort Peddie. At twelve o'clock the request of the Fingos for aid reached Colonel Lindsay, and two hours later Lieutenant-Colonel Richardson, with a squadron of dragoons, some Cape mounted riflemen, fifty men of the 91st, and two guns, went to their assistance. On arriving in sight of the Beka station, it was observed that the Fingos were still holding their own. Yet, after firing a few shots from his field-pieces without the slightest effect, Colonel Richardson returned to the fort. The mission station was

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set on fire under his eyes, and with two hundred British soldiers he abandoned the field, leaving the Fingos to their fate. He afterwards gave as reasons that it was late in the afternoon, that his horses were jaded, that the ground was not adapted for a charge of the dragoons, and that his retreat was only a feint to draw the Kaffirs after him.

The Fingos succeeded in beating the enemy back, but the bad effect of the military movement of that day was greater even than that of the loss of the waggons at Burnshill. It inspired the Kaffirs with confidence in their strength, and diminished their fear of the soldiers, so that those who were wavering before now joined the war party.

On the 16th of April Sir Peregrine Maitland arrived at Post Victoria, and two days later heard of the disaster at Burnshill. Then came tidings of the destructive rush of the Kaffirs over the border. On the 22nd he proclaimed the whole colony under martial law, and called out the entire burgher force. Still he did not interfere with Colonel Hare's control of field operations until the 1st of May, when a rumour of what had occurred at Peddie reached him. He then assumed the chief command.

Before leaving Capetown he gave instructions that if any troops should happen to call they were to be detained and sent to the frontier with all possible speed. On the 3rd of April the transport *Mariner*, from Colombo bound to Portsmouth, put into Simon's Bay for refreshment. She had on board nine officers and two hundred and eighty-three rank and file of the 90th regiment, who were immediately forwarded to the front. Every effective soldier was sent up from Capetown, a volunteer guard taking their place at the castle and forts.

On the 2nd of May, at the request of a number of colonists, the governor appointed Sir Andries Stockenström commandant-general of the burgher forces of the eastern districts, with the rank of a colonel on the staff. The colonists desired that the entire burgher force of the country should be placed under his command, but the governor