

DEATH OF SERGT.-MAJOR BARKER.

ONE OF THE SIX HUNDRED.

Leighton Buzzard this week mourns the loss of Sergeant-Major Barker, one of its most worthy and respected residents, who could lay claim to the proud distinction of having taken part in the memorable charge of the Light Brigade at Balacava in October, 1854. Mr. Barker has long lived among us in his native town, not only honoured for his participation in that glorious but terrible charge, but most highly esteemed for his uprightness and sterling worth of personal character. He was as true as the steel he has so often drawn in his country's service; courteous, kind hearted, and rigidly conscientious in all his acts and deeds, he was one of Nature's gentlemen of whom his townsmen might well be proud. As an index to his character it may be mentioned that when considerably beyond the allotted span of three score years and ten he received the rite of Confirmation in All Saints' Church at the hands of the Bishop of Ely, in order that he might enter into the membership of the Church of England. Mr. Barker was a kind and indulgent parent, notwithstanding a characteristic ruggedness of manner, and he has placed out in the world a large family of daughters in most respectable positions in life. He was a good neighbour and a true and staunch friend, no one ever having been able to lay to his charge a mean or shabby action. Such was the private character of the man whose loss we now mourn and whose heroism, under the most trying ordeal brave soldiers have perhaps ever known, won for him and his colleagues the admiration of the world and the immortalisation of the soul-stirring poem of the late Poet Laureate, Lord Tennyson—

"When can their glory fade?
O, the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made,
Honour the Light Brigade—
Noble six hundred!"

At Balacava his horse was shot under him, falling upon his left leg; he secured another horse and rode out of the charge, but although he did not feel the effects of the injury seriously at the time, later in life rheumatism settled in the limb and caused him a great amount of suffering, which he bore with that fortitude which might be expected from one of Balacava's heroes. A few weeks ago this affliction became accentuated, and worn out with suffering and the weight of years, on Tuesday, at the age of eighty-two, he died as he has lived, honoured and respected by his fellow townsmen, and sincerely beloved by his family. He leaves a widow and six daughters, two of whom are Mrs. Kendrick, of Capetown, and Mrs. Skipper, Philadelphia, U.S.A. So recently as a few weeks back Mr. Barker has been able to take air in his invalid chair, and to return the hearty greetings of his friends, but his last public appearance was appropriately at the Carnival, to celebrate the deeds of our troops in South



Africa, when the Crimean veteran took part in the procession, although at that time showing no indication of the near approach of the end to which he was hastening. We give above a portrait of Mr. Barker, sketched upon the occasion referred to, and upon another sheet, a copy of an oil-painting, in which he appears wearing the uniform of the 17th Lancers; beneath this is an etching of all the survivors of the charge, who were known to be living in the year 1891.

THE CHARGE OF BALACAVA.

Those of our readers, who have reached middle life, will have a vivid recollection of the intense excitement with which the scanty news from the Crimea was received during those critical times in the history of our country, and will have, strongly impressed upon their minds, all the leading events of that disastrous war, but to most of the younger people the glorious deeds of our soldiers at that time are only matter of history. It may not be out of place, therefore, to recall here a few of the leading events of the memorable day at Balacava, and then to reproduce some personal reminiscences of the fight furnished us some years ago by Mr. Barker himself.

"The thin red line" of Sir Colin Campbell held their position, meeting the Russian squadrons with a scorching storm of fire that sent them flying in confusion from the field. A still more formidable body of Russian horse, however, had swooped down on our heavy cavalry. The Scots Greys and Inniskilling Dragoons sprang forward to meet them, tore through the first and second lines of the enemy, and supported by the Dragoon Guards, broke up their heavy masses in utter rout. At this moment Lord Raglan ordered Lord Lucan, who was in command of the cavalry, to advance his Light Brigade, and prevent the Russians from carrying away some of the guns which the Turks had abandoned in the redoubts. When the order was carried to Lucan by Captain Nolan, Raglan's aide-de-camp, the Russians had recovered from their reverses, and had completely re-formed on their own ground. Raglan's order therefore had come to mean that Lucan was to hurl his slender Light Cavalry Brigade, utterly devoid of supports, against a great army, holding a strong position, flanked and covered on all sides by murderous artillery. For a moment he hesitated appalled by the hideous madness of the order, but it is said a taunt from Nolan stung him to the quick, and he spoke the word that sent Cardigan into "the valley of death" with the far-famed Six Hundred.

"Long shall the tale be told
Yea when our babes grow old,"

how they rode onward—through the smoke and fire that belched forth from the iron throats of the Russian cannon—how they clave their way through the Russian masses and cut down the gunners at their guns—as the scene given in miniature with the portrait of Sergeant-Major Barker depicts—how they cut their way back, "stormed at with shot and shell," a broken remnant of wounded and dismounted troopers who had to report that they had failed to do that which even the demigods of ancient legend would not have been reckless enough to attempt. Nolan was killed at the very first onset—whilst riding far in advance, cheering on the brigade. "It was magnificent, but it was not war," was the comment of the French General Bosquet on this horrible sacrifice—a sacrifice so horrible that, when it was over, even the Russians ceased firing, and stood motionless and awe-stricken, gazing on the sickening scene. They claim Balacava as a victory. Certainly they took more than half the field from us, but, on the other hand, the British soldier proved the truth of the familiar adage that he "never knows when he is beaten."

SERGEANT-MAJOR BARKER'S PERSONAL REMINISCENCES.

A few years ago Mr. Barker furnished a representative of the OBSERVER with the following facts concerning his early life, and personal reminiscences of the Crimean Campaign:—

"I was born at Leighton Buzzard on the 6th of July, 1819. My father was the eldest son of Mr. Edward Barker, of the Old Red Lion, Hockliffe, in the coaching days of England; and my mother was the second daughter of Mr. John Bedford, master tailor, of Canal Street, Leighton Buzzard. I enlisted in the 13th Light Dragoons, in London, on the 24th of August, 1837, at the age of eighteen years. After serving three years, I exchanged into the 17th Lancers. I served altogether in different parts of the world for twenty-four years.

In 1854 England and France declared war against Russia, which Power, having destroyed the Turkish fleet, manifested her intention of dismembering Turkey altogether. Detachments of the British Army, including the 17th Lancers, were therefore ordered out to Turkey to the aid of the Turks. The four troops of the 17th Lancers were conveyed from Portsmouth to Constantinople in four very inferior sailing vessels. The ship which carried our troop sailed out of Portsmouth Docks on Sunday morning, the 23rd of April, 1854, when the bells were chiming for church. Owing to the inferiority of our craft, we were thirty-two days on the passage out, having been obliged to throw overboard seven horses, on account of their crowded state below decks.

Each regiment of the Light Brigade which charged at Balacava was formed into four troops of two squadrons each, and always worked in squadrons when in action. The first line of attack was formed by the 13th Light Dragoons on the right, and the 17th Lancers on the left. The first squadron of the 17th Lancers—the squadron of direction—was commanded by Captain Robert White—now General—with Captain Sir Godfrey Morgan—now Lord Tedegar—in command of the right troop, and Lieutenant Henry Thompson with the left.

I belonged to Captain White's troop, and started in the charge as right squadron seriffite, with orders to succeed either of the above-named officers in command, in case any accident should befall them. The courage and steadiness displayed by those officers and men under such a destructive cannonade was beyond all praise. The enemy seemed to understand that we were the squadron of direction, for as soon as we began to move towards them, they commenced to make a target of us, the first to fall being the gallant Nolan. Just before we had finished the halt league we received a tremendous volley from the enemy's twelve-gun battery in front, which emptied many saddles, and laid prostrate numbers of gallant fellows who never rose again. Although I had escaped myself unhurt from the most terrible discharge of missiles, I felt at once that my horse had been hit, and expected every

minute to come to the ground, but by mere strength of leg I kept her on her feet until I reached the battery, when she fell on her near side, crushing my left leg and ankle in the fall. After I had extricated myself from my horse, I had the good fortune to catch another of my own troop close at hand, which I mounted without delay, and proceeded to assume the command of Lieut. Thompson's troop, whom I had seen but a few minutes before shot dead, and falling from his horse.

As soon as I had taken the command, I saw at once that a squadron of the enemy's cavalry were encircling us, and I gave the rallying signal for my men to join me. But, unfortunately, only seven were able to respond; with those we made one desperate plunge through their ranks, and freed ourselves without a scratch. The charge lasted but twenty minutes, and in that short space of time 409 men were slain; the following being the roll call:—

Regiments.	Number in the charge.	Killed and missing.	Roll call after the charge.
4th Light Dragoons.....	118.....	79.....	39
8th Hussars	104.....	68.....	38
12th Hussars	110.....	85.....	25
13th Light Dragoons.....	130.....	69.....	61
17th Lancers	145.....	110.....	35
	607	409	198

After the casualties had been clearly ascertained, and reported to the Earl of Cardigan, his lordship addressed the following words to the remnant of the Brigade: "Men, you have done a glorious deed. England will be proud of you, and grateful to you. If you live to get home, be sure you will be all provided for."

Owing to the heavy losses sustained by our regiment in the Balacava Charge, we were only able to muster fifty men and horses for the battle of Inkerman, with Captain Sir Godfrey Morgan in command. We were placed in the brush-wood, in a hollow, on the heights of Inkerman, ready for any emergency in case the Guards were broken. It was here that Cornet Cleveland and six or seven other brave young men fell, by the explosion of a very heavy shell from the Russian shipping in the harbour. I saw it take the ground at about thirty yards in front of the troop, when it exploded directly underneath where I was sitting.

After the battle was over, we were encamped near the celebrated windmill, so well known to all Crimean campaigners. It was in this place that both men and horses suffered so much from want of water, and it was here that the Commissariat issued the unroasted coffee and mouldy biscuit, when fuel could not be got at any price. Whilst in this encampment we were visited by a tremendous storm of wind and rain, which blew almost all the tents down, and deprived us of all shelter for two days and nights, besides wrecking seventeen vessels outside the harbour of Balac-lava.

After the battle of Inkerman, and when it had been decided by a Council of War that the whole of the Allied Army was to winter in the Crimea, I was ordered, with one Quartermaster or Troop Sergeant-Major from each cavalry regiment, to proceed to Constantinople, to bring up any superfluous baggage that had been left there, and also to make purchases of anything that the regiments might require for the approaching winter. That duty took me about a month to accomplish, and caused the following incident. My mare, which had been badly wounded at Balac-lava, had been allowed by the veterinary surgeon to roam at large, and forage for herself, on account of her lameness. She managed to stray away inland on the day of my departure for the above-duty, and was never seen by any men of the regiment until I returned myself.

Although nearly forty years have passed, I still remember distinctly a very laughable circumstance that occurred just about ten minutes before the first line of the Light Brigade was ordered to charge the Russian batteries. A man named John Vabey, formerly a butcher, who had been left in camp to assist in slaughtering bullocks, made his appearance in front of the regiment, in a most grotesque equipment, which he had found on the battle-field. He was mounted on a half-starved looking horse, with an old rusty sword and lance; no tunic on his back; but a ragged shirt covered with outward and visible signs of his late employment; no lance-cap on his head; but an old red worsted night cap, and a dirty black pipe in his mouth. On the commanding officer asking him how he dared to appear before him in such a disreputable state, he replied, amidst roars of laughter from the ranks, that as he had lately been employed in slaughtering bullocks he would now like to join his regiment, and try his hand against the Russians. The commanding officer said, though he disliked his appearance, still he admired his spirit, and ordered him to join the ranks of the regiment, which he did, charging with them, and escaping unscathed.

THE FUNERAL.

The funeral took place on Friday afternoon, the remains of the deceased gallant veteran being laid to rest in the grave of his first wife in All Saints' Churchyard, where a considerable number of inhabitants of the town assembled. The hearse containing the corpse was followed by four coaches with the mourning family and relatives, these including Mrs. Barker (the widow), Mr. and Mrs. Moore (son-in-law and daughter), London; Mr. and Mrs. Ashling (son-in-law and daughter), Hornsey; Mr. and Mrs. Clark Warren (son-in-law and daughter), New Cross; Mrs. Broughton (daughter); Mrs. Frater (sister), and Mrs. Holt (niece), Grendon Underwood; and Mrs. Tring (niece), Linslade. Succeeding these were four of deceased's surviving Leightonian comrades in arms, each wearing several medals for distinguished service—namely, Mr. James Sanders, formerly of the Royal Marines, a Crimean Veteran; Mr. William Stonehill, Royal Army Medical Staff; Mr. Thos. Wright, 40th Regt., who also went through the Crimean campaign; and Mr. Geo. Sanders, Sergt.-Instructor of Musketry, Royal Marines. The South African Army was represented by Mr. G. Yirrell, a Leightonian at home on sick leave. Among residents of the town who joined the sad procession or were present at the service were Mr. Geo. Payne, chairman of the Leighton Urban District Council; Messrs. D. T. Willis, E. Glaisyer, E. Brown, J. G. McCubbin, W. Hopkins, H. Jackson, and others. The massive coffin, of polished elm, with brass mountings,

bore on the plate the inscription—"Sergt.-Major Barker, died Sept. 4th, 1900; aged 81 years." Very beautiful floral wreaths were contributed as follows:—"From your sorrowing daughter, Rose and Jem."—"From Mary, Walter, and three grand-daughters. Deeply mourned."—"From Lily and Arthur, and Capetown grand-children. In loving remembrance of dear father."—"With fondest love to our dear uncle. From Mrs. Tring and family."—"In loving memory, from the grand-children."—"A token of regret, and sincere admiration for one of England's heroes. From Mr. and Mrs. Fredk. Bassett, The Knolls, Leighton Buzzard."—"In loving remembrance. From Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Yirrell, 176, Berg Street, Natal" (at present in Leighton). The service in the church was taken by the Rev. Robt. Orr, curate, and at the grave-side by the Rev. T. W. Richards, vicar of Leighton. The funeral arrangements were entrusted to and very carefully carried out by Mr. J. Agutter, of North Street.