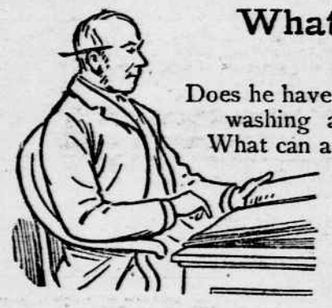

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my28-84d

THE SALVATION OF BARRENALL

BY WILLIAM H. WASSELL.

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Fort Barrenall's mental tension was at its limit. A very slight turn of the screw is sufficient to produce a high tension on army strings, but at this time the screws had been turned until the worn threads of discipline were on the point of slipping back.

Wind and heat were the cause of it all.

Now, wind in general is very fruitless, especially in army circles, where deeds are mightier than words; but this ill-blowing wind was the wind that swept over mile after mile of sage brush prairie, gathering fresh impetus on each mile, until it burst over Fort Barrenall a tornado in its fury. High up in the air it whistled and shrieked like a tormented devil; like a traitorous devil it cut the old flag on the flagstaff so that every one of the thirteen stripes was a streamer by itself.

There were no sighing poems of love in this wind, no soft murmurs that could remind a soldier of his sweetheart's whispers; but there was a demon in it, a high and mighty demon, who shook all the earth with his untiring rage, until puny man put his fingers to his ears to shut out the sound, gnashed his teeth in powerless anger, and then vented his choler on the fellow-man whose nerve strings were just as taut.

And the heat was worse than the wind. But three months had gone by since the garrison was wearing huge buffalo overcoats in a vain attempt to keep a 60 below zero cold from freezing the benumbed blood in their veins, and now, as if to make matters even, the sun scorched down upon the post until, in the coolest place, the thermometer stood at 112. Men soaked their bed sheets in water, and kept buckets by their iron bunks to douse themselves in the middle of the night. If a man could get a lump of ice he wrapped it in a towel and put it on his aching head, but it did not last long, and to get a little piece he had to creep out of barracks at midnight, when the ice house was opened.

So they lay on their bunks, a seething, sweating, sizzling mass of profanity. They swore at the wind, the heat, the mosquitoes, their officers, and finally at each other. All the officers came in for a goodly share, but at some they swore harder than at others, because there were officers at the post who expected a thirteen-dollar-a-month man to possess all the cardinal virtues, to want nothing but work, and to find pleasure only in being nagged at by a never satisfied officer.

Half a dozen times in a night the men would get up and creep out on the porches to smoke and talk disjointedly of far away homes, or perhaps of sweethearts that never could be theirs. The old soldiers smoked in silence, because they had been through the wind and heat before, but the recruits made foolish confidences and talked at random between the puffs of their pipes.

For three weeks the wind had blown its furnace breezes, and so far as signs of abatement went, it might continue to blow for three years. It blew through the log houses; it shook the government plaster from the government lath; it blew on the colonel just as hard and as hot as on the private, and it blew through the burning brains of the garrison until every one was going mad.

All this time the mighty machinery of the War Department was moving with its slow, but steady, grind. There were drills to go to, and officers and men for the one thousandth time formed lines of skirmishers, advanced by rushes, and fired volley after volley in a way to dislodge any enemy except wind or heat. Then there was target practice, and down on the range the men swore at the wind when it blew their well-aimed bullets off the targets, or else when they made a wide "two" instead of the desired bull's-eye—which counts as five—they cursed the heat and said that no man could shoot when his nerves were burned out. Wind and heat are not recognized in the blue book of army regulations, and hence the guard details and the fatigue details and the thousand and one other details that are always a part of garrison life could not be stopped.

One afternoon the long roll was sounded.

"Turn out every man," yelled the first sergeants.

Before the men knew where they were the startled companies were rushed down to the quartermaster's store house, armed with gunny sacks, and raced out a mile from the post to fight prairie fires that had been started fifteen miles north of Barrenall by the scorching sun. And it is not an easy matter to head off a prairie fire. In the emergency, they lighted wisps of hay and started the prairie grass to burning, they tried to confine the fire to a swath encircling the post and only fifty feet in width. The sun was as hot as the fire and the devil wind stifled half the men with smoke, but still they had to beat out the flames with their gunny sacks when the fire made too great headway. * * * The post was saved, but officers and men had to work all night to do it.

By the contrariety of nature, which subsides the storm when a safeguard is erected, the wind should have shown its fury spent by the next morning. But there was no such luck for poor Barrenall. The high wind blew worse than ever on the shattered nerves, and the hot sun seemed angry because the ravage of its prarie fires had been stopped.

The colonel sat in his office and mentally threw up his hands. For two weeks he had systematically jumped every officer and soldier who had come before him, all because the wind and heat made him ill tempered. But at last, he realized that they were all in the same boat, officers and men, and then he, the big colonel, became mild as a little child. He could not tell his adjutant to publish an order abating the wind or moderating the heat, but it was his duty to devise salvation for his half-maddened command.

Early in the morning, there had been a shooting scrape in F company, and he had just sent his orderly to summon Capt. Knight.

"What was the cause of the shooting in your company this morning, captain?" he asked, as the company commander entered the office.

"I don't know, sir," replied the captain. "I am told that the two men are the best of friends, but this morning Wilson said he was going to kill some one, and then picked up his rifle and shot the man in the next bunk. I sent Wilson to the guard house, but I couldn't get a word out of him. I think he is crazy, sir," concluded the captain.

The colonel rose from his chair and began to pace the floor.

"How are the other men of the company?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," answered the captain, "but I have given orders to my sergeants and corporals to keep their rifles handy and beat out the first signs of insubordination they see. I can answer for them, sir."

"Flesh and bone can stand only so much," said the colonel, "and between wind and heat the men are on the verge of insanity. I dislike to drill them in such weather, but if I let them stay in barracks, they will drink until their brains are gone completely, and then every man will want to kill some one. The savage part of them has now got the upper hand; their nerves are shattered, and nothing but the most deadly excitement will quiet them."

"An Indian outbreak would be a blessing, sir," said Capt. Knight.

"Yes, yes, yes," assented the colonel, as through his brain flashed the memories of many thousands of miles marched in pursuit of the wily savage. "I don't want an Indian outbreak, but it would be salvation for our men. They have reached the point where nothing will detract them from their sufferings, except a game in which the stakes are human lives. The brute is uppermost, and they want to see blood. Yet, God save the poor settler from an Indian outbreak."

There was a knock at the door, and when the colonel said "come," the Indian agent of the adjoining reservation entered.

"Colonel," said the agent, "two Indians killed a cowboy yesterday, and I am afraid I shall have to ask your assistance in capturing the murderers."

The agent was a man who knew no such word as fear, and it was only his modesty that made him say "afraid." He had toughened steel wires where other people have nerves, and if necessary, he would have gone out single-handed and brought in both criminals.

"I don't know the causes leading to the murder, but my policemen went out to the Yanktonai village to arrest the murderers and came back to tell me that the Indians are greatly excited, and refuse to give up the men. Old Sunka Wicasi, the Yanktonai chief, is here—he wants to talk to you, and I think he is very anxious to give the men up if his followers will let him."

The colonel sent for the post interpreter, and then called the chief to his office.

"How?" grunted the old brave, as he extended a dirty hand.

"Ask him what he has to say," said the colonel to the interpreter.

The Indian was wrinkled and bent with years, but he had been a great chief in his day. More than any other man in his tribe he had stolen ponies, and lifted scalps. At the colonel's words, the skulking figure stood erect, his dim eyes flashed with the fire of old-time vigor. His speech bristled with the eloquence of the plains, the hard gutteral tones flowing from his ready tongue with all the force of savage oratory. His withered arms and bony fingers fairly flew from one gesture to another, as in pantomime and Indian sign he acted the oral speech. In him was represented all the wrongs of his race, and all the counterbalancing outrages upon the white settler, but wise and crafty in his old age, he forgot his trespasses and even those who had trespassed against him; in his hard-earned wisdom he sought to save the remnant of his people from further trouble.

"It is night with my heart," said he through the interpreter, "and the blanket of darkness is folded about me. You are the great chief of all the soldiers, but I, too, am a chief. I have seen many fights between the white soldiers and the Indians, and sometimes the soldiers have whipped, and sometimes the women of my tribe have sung the songs of a good fight when their husbands and their brothers and their sons have returned from a victory. But now the weight of many winters is on my back. The peace pipe is better than the medicine arrow. For many years I have been the friend of the white soldier, and I have tried to make my people live as the whites live. When the great father has wanted us to do anything, I have always talked to my people and told them that the great father's heart was good.

"When he wanted Indians as soldiers I talked to my young men and twenty of them came to the white chief and said they would be soldiers. And now I am in trouble and I ask the great white chief of all the soldiers to help me. For the hearts of my people are not all good, and they follow a bad leader as the young sungmanitu follow the mother. Yesterday when the sun was high two young men killed a white man. They had nothing to eat, their hearts were heavy, they went to a scalp dance and there they heard old Indians counting their coups.

"Then the hearts of the young men got bad, they gave away their ponies, they painted their faces and made war medicine and went out to kill. Over by Skull butte they saw a white man with many cattle. They went up to him, and, while one young man asked him for tobacco, the other young man shot him in the back. Then they stabbed him and took his scalp, and the blood put their brains in a whirl. They came back to the camp and gave a dance and sang bad war songs, and tried to get their friends to go out with them on a war party. The blood stirred up the hearts of many of the young men, and they joined in the war songs, because the blood and the heat have made them crazy. The Agent Itancan sent his policemen to arrest the two bad Indians, but their friends drove the policemen away. I want to tell the Agent Itancan that it was not my fault."

The Indian agent nodded his head.

"He says," continued the interpreter, "that he wants the great soldier Itancan to send out all his soldiers, and then the people will see the white soldiers with all their strong guns, and they will know that they cannot whip the white soldiers, and their hearts will be good, and they will give up the two bad Indians. He says he has spoken," concluded the interpreter.

"Tell him," said the colonel to the interpreter, "that he has spoken well, and that he is a good Indian. Tell him I will send out my soldiers and capture the two bad Indians, and also any other Indians whose hearts are bad. Tell him that is all."

"Wasti," grunted the chief, "wasti," which means "good."

Once more the long roll was sounded at Barrenall, but this time it was to fight a craftier foe than the prairie fire. The men fell in under arms, and, wondering greatly, they were put in march along the road leading to the Yanktonai village, the colonel on his white horse at the head of the column.

From Barrenall to the Indian village the distance is two miles. The country is a great basin for a little creek that, with western exaggeration, is termed a river. The Indian village is but a stone's throw from the main road, and north, and east, and west of the village are the low hills that surround the creek basin.

As the little column of soldiers neared the village, the Indians were seen scampering to the western hills. Young men with their long bows, old men tottering under the heaviness of many years, squaws with whole flocks of dirty children clamoring at their skirts—all fled except old Sunka Wicasi, who stood his ground and gravely waited for the colonel.

"The sun ro longer shines upon my heart," he said, as the colonel approached. "When the white soldiers were coming I thought the blanket of darkness would be lifted from me. I thought the two bad young men would go back, bound at their wrists with ropes; but, see—they have borrowed ponies from their friends, and they have gone on a journey to kill—kill—kill—and many winters are added to my age because of my sorrows."

But as he spoke there was a sudden commotion in the ranks of the soldiers.

Away to the north, on the low hills, appeared the two Indians, chanting a war song, that was borne by the wind to the distant soldiers. In the middle of the song they stopped, and shook their guns at the white men, and roared out a mighty challenge.

"They say they want to fight all the soldiers," said the interpreter.

"They are crazy," wailed the old chief.

It was a new phase of Indian warfare to the experienced colonel, but he realized that prompt action alone could prevent the escape of the daring braves. Let them get away, and they would be joined by their friends—an Indian war would result. Besides, the haggard faces of his soldiers now lit up with a light he had not seen for many weeks; in the face of action the soldierly habits came back to them. A fight like this would tide them over until the cold weather came.

"Forward, column right," he commanded, and at the sight of the flank march toward the hills on the east the Indians redoubled their taunts. The faces of the soldiers grew dark and gloomy. Why did not the colonel give them a fight? They would have no advantage in numbers; for all the Indians of the village would join in at the first shot. But the old soldiers presently told the recruits to wait, and they would see that the colonel was not going to allow the two murderers to escape.

Half-way to the hills the command was marched, and then the colonel ordered a halt.

"Capt. Knight," said he so that every one heard, "send two volunteers from your company to bring in those two Indians."

Two men—only two—why, every man in the company wanted to go.

"Detail the two best shots, sergeant," said the captain, for he knew how the Indians would be "brought in." Then the two privates were ordered to fall out, and the rest of the command was marched to the hills, out of rifle range.

The Indians to the north saw the men fall out of ranks, and again sang their challenging war song.

"Let's answer them, Murphy," said one of the soldiers, and they waved their guns in the air and broke into a run toward the braves, ki-yi-ing all the time in the best Indian at their command.

On the western hills squatted the Indians of the village, their old man making medicine for their two warriors, the squaws singing shrill songs that urged the fighters on to victory. On the eastern hills sat the soldiers, gazing spellbound, with bloodshot eyes that had not known sleep for three weeks. And overall, high above them all, the devil wind whistled and the scorching sun poured down his heat.

Straight for the two soldiers charged the braves. Once they leaned far down on their ponies' necks and sent the bullets from their Winchesters toward the soldiers, but the wind threw their aim off the mark.

"Take your pick, Williams," said Murphy, "but if it's all the same to you, I'll take the fellow with the eagle feathers."

"All right," answered Williams, "here goes for a shot at my man."

He dropped on one knee and glanced along his Springfield, but the bullet raised a little cloud of dust to the right of his moving target.

"Not enough windage," counseled his companion, just as though they were on the target range.

The Indians were now circling their ponies at full speed, throwing away shot after shot at the unconcerned soldiers. All at once, Murphy gave a grunt, and a little stream of blood trickled down his right leg.

"Just for that," he said, grimly, "you are going to get off that pony, Mister Indian."

He felt the force of the wind with his hand, and then took a careful aim. As his gun flashed, one of the ponies gave a great lurch and fell over in a heap. The rider fell heavily to the ground, and a dismal wail went up from the western hill, but a second later, the Indian rose from the ground and took hasty shelter behind his dead pony.

"Drop your man's pony," yelled the wounded soldier, "and then we'll cut off all chances of their escape."

But both Indians were pouring in a fusillade of shot, and Williams' aim was unsteady in consequence. Again and again he tried it, but it was not until his ninth shot that horse and rider rolled over on the ground.

"Keep a sharp lookout," called out Murphy. "I'm going to get where I can shoot my man without filling his dead pony full of lead."

Close to the ground he dragged himself, making a blood-stained path well out to the Indians' flank. The sage bush covered his advance, but when he had crawled 300 yards, he raised himself steadily on one arm only to find that the Indians, too, had shifted their positions.

"Look out, Williams," he cried, "they're creeping up on you."

As he spoke a gun flashed not fifty yards to his front, but the bullet whistled over his head. He caught a brief glimpse of a brown form, prone on the ground, and his rifle spoke three times in rapid succession. At the third shot the brown form leaped high from the ground, clutched wildly at the air, and then fell back, a huddled mass.

Murphy waited several minutes, and then stood erect, and waved his cap at his comrades on the eastern hills. He was perfectly safe, because Williams and his antagonist were firing at each other as rapidly as they could load, but the wind was so strong that none of their shots had taken effect. All at once the Indian jumped up and made a dash for his enemy.

"Now I've got you," said Williams, reaching for a fresh cartridge. But to his horror his cartridge belt was empty!

"All right, my man," said he. "Perhaps you are in the same boat."

With a fierce cry he dashed toward the advancing savage. On they ran, brandishing their empty guns. Half-way they met, and there was a mighty crash as gun shivered against gun. The next moment they were locked in each other's arms, swaying and tugging with all the strength of a struggle that was death to the vanquished. They were well matched, and try as he would, the soldier could gain no advantage over his naked foe.

Twice he bent him backward in a mighty hug, so that the Indian's eyes bulged out and his breath came in grunts, but each time the slippery brave slid from the soldier's grasp. Then the brown fingers closed on the soldier's throat as a vise—he felt himself going—going—going. With one frantic, despairing push he broke the Indian's hold and sent him reeling backward, and as the bulldog foe rushed at him again, the soldier swung his great arm full length with all his strength, and as he struck the painted head the Indian fell in the sand never to rise again. The fight was over, and Williams stepped outside of the cloud of dust that had obscured him from the silent watchers on the eastern hills and waved his hand to them as a sign that all was well.

For the next month the wind increased its whistling, and the sun's heat went a notch higher each successive day. But the soldiers sweltered in the heat and never put their fingers to their ears to shut out the whistling. For in that case they would have shut out the music of the never-ending and never-tiresome talk of the good fight.

Two Hypnotists Meet.

From the Chicago Daily Tribune.

"This thing of hypnotism and mind reading," observed the passenger with the skull cap, knocking the ashes off the end of his cigar, "gives rise to some curious phenomena. I have dabbled in it myself, as an amateur. You have heard, perhaps, of men being blindfolded and driving a team of horses through a crowded street as easily as if they had their eyes open?"

"Oh, yes," replied the passenger in the smoking jacket. "That's a familiar experiment. The man who is blindfolded is able by personal contact to read the mind and see through the eyes of somebody sitting by him. To one familiar with the science there is nothing remarkable about the test."

"No," rejoined the other. "It's a little more difficult to explain, however, when the same thing can be done by a man driving alone, and without any contact with anybody else."

"Have you seen that done?"

"I have performed it myself. On one occasion I drove along through a thronged street for more than a mile with a bandage tied over my eyes and sealed so securely behind my head that I could not have taken it off if I had tried."

"How did you do it, may I ask?"

"By aid of hypnotism. I hypnotized the horses and saw through their eyes."

The man in the smoking jacket regarded him for some moments, but said nothing.

"But that was a mere trifle in comparison with a test I submitted to a few days ago," resumed the man with the skull cap. "I was blindfolded and drove a span of blind horses at the top of their speed a distance of eight or ten blocks down the business street of Atlanta, Ga., alone and without the slightest accident."

There was a long pause.

"How did you do it?" asked the other at last.

"I hypnotized everybody on the street. Saw through a thousand pair of eyes."

"Say," ejaculated the passenger in the smoking jacket in tones of strong disgust, "I have no objection to a bit of artistic romancing now and then, but I'm a professional hypnotist and mind reader, and I don't mind telling you that you are the biggest liar on the continent. I am going back to the dining car. Good day, sir!"

Ancestor of the Modern Horse.

From the Scientific American.

The American Museum of Natural History has recently acquired the famous little four-toed horse from the collection of Prof. Cope of Philadelphia, and it is here publicly exhibited for the first time. This little animal, although fully matured, is only 3½ hands high, and is estimated at 2,000,000 years of age. The skull and limbs, nevertheless, display the most undoubted characteristics of the horse, there being a broad space in the lower jaw corresponding to the space for the bit. The teeth are short and simple; the limbs are scarcely larger in diameter than a good-sized pencil, and there are four toes, all resting upon the ground, in the fore-foot. To those who still doubt whether this little animal is actually the ancestor of the modern horse, a remarkable series of feet is exhibited, giving all the stages between this four-toed and the modern one-toed animal, in which the median toe is seen constantly increasing in size, and the side toes are constantly diminishing until they are reduced to the pair of splints. This evidence is further confirmed by an almost equally complete series of skulls showing every stage in this wonderful development. The two extremes of this wonderful series are shown in the little four-toed animal placed beneath the head of the modern trotting horse skeleton, showing the exact relative size of each. This exhibit, together with botany and anatomy, is placed in the Vanderbilt gallery.

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ABSOLUTELY PURE

What Constitutes a Letter.

From the Paper World.

Most people have supposed that anything sealed against inspection and delivered to the post office constituted in effect a "letter," which at the regulation rate of two cents postage per ounce the mail service would be obliged to forward to its destination. So far as the domestic service is concerned, this supposition may be correct, and would seem to be implied by the wording of official decisions, which declare that "all matter sealed or otherwise closed against inspection is also of the first class." But with the foreign mail service, at least, the condition is different. A provision in the postal treaty specifies that letters "in their usual and ordinary form" are to be forwarded at a given rate. Just what constituted this "usual and ordinary form" has not till now been defined and officially declared, and this is the way in which the definition was brought out:

A Boston architect offered at the post office in that city a sealed roll addressed to the commissioner of patents at Ottawa, Canada, on which the proper amount of postage, at letter rates, had been paid. The clerk in charge of the window declined to receive the roll as a letter, and on the matter being referred to him, Postmaster Coveney decided that the term letter is to be construed to mean and embrace sealed packages consisting of an envelope of any size, but flat, as is the usual letter. The objector did not think that this ruling and definition of a letter was correct, and gave his opinion that a letter "was a package containing personal matter of no salable value." The matter being referred to the authorities at Washington for decision, the superintendent of foreign mails in due time forwarded a decision embodying the joint opinions of Canadian and American postal authorities, to the effect that "the term letter, in its usual and ordinary form, is to be construed to embrace sealed packages consisting of an envelope of any size, but of the usual letter shape, and its contents; but that rolls or a package not inclosed in an 'envelope,' as the word envelope is generally used, cannot be considered to be 'a letter in its usual and ordinary form.' A sealed package in the form of a roll is, therefore, not entitled to transmission in the mails exchanged between the United States and Canada; and your office was correct in declining to receive the sealed roll mentioned." This would seem to settle the matter as to what constitutes a letter within the meaning of our postal treaties.

A New Field for Rarebits.

From Truth.

Van Zile—"I saw two of Reggie's rarebits out bicycling today."

Miss King—"Rarebits on a bicycle? What nonsense!"

Van Zile—"Fact, though. Reggie used them in patching his tire."

The Night Air Bad for His Business.

From the London Globe.

Little Girl—"Please give me a penny, ma'am. Mother is dead, and my father can't go out at night any more, by the doctor's orders, and so can't earn any money."

Benevolent Passerby—"Can't go out at night? Why, what's your father's business?"

Little Girl—"He's a burglar, ma'am, and before he was laid up with bronchitis we used to live beautifully."

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His Tale of Woe.

From Puck.

Mr. Mokeby (hotly)—"I claim I wuz outrageously discrimernated ag'inst an' peculated las' night at de club!"

Mr. Walsingham—"How wuz dat, Mr. Mokeby?"

Mr. Mokeby—"I wuz settin' in a game—I had all de chips, fo' dollahs' wuth—an' jes as I wuz gwine to cash 'em in Mr. Hankinson, de bank, dropped a lighted match on de stack; den dem celluloid chips went 'whoof!' an' he pintedly refuse to cash de ashes."

His Objection.

From Harlem Life.

She—"Even though you do not admire Browning, you must admit he makes one think, Mr. Chapleigh."

He—"Ya-a-a-s; that's precisely why I object to him."

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