

WILL BOERS FIGHT?

WARRING ZULUS AS WELL AS BRITONS HAVE FOUND OUT.

Remarkable Victory Over Savages Fifty Years Ago—The Lexington and Yorktown of Their Revolution in 1881—Some British Defeats.

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ENGLAND'S wary foe in South Africa has a past which augurs well for latter day styles of fighting. The Boers won their homes and won peace and defended them, too, from the warlike savage tribes around them, and these savage enemies were not alone warlike; they were trained and disciplined warriors.

All the world knows how ill it has fared with the English again and again when a handful of soldiers got caught in a tight place by swarms of Zulus. Our own soldiers on the plains have met with disasters of the kind without number. In view of the fates of white expeditions so often chronicled, it is marvelous to read how less than 500 Boers not only resisted, but defeated and routed, 10,000 or 12,000 Zulus under the great chieftain Dingaan. This war, in 1838, began with the usual good promises on the part of the savages, followed by treachery and slaughter. A party of Boers who went into the Zulu camp to deliver the price of a negotiation for territory in the Transvaal were massacred, and then the Zulus raided the country they had sold.

After slaughtering hundreds of lonely immigrants the Zulus attacked the wagon laager of the Boers in which were 460 fighting men. As usual, the Zulus were without fear and dashed up to the wagons, trying to pierce the oxide covers with their spears. With rifles loaded during the battle by women and children the Boers stood off the savages for hours. Finally 200 Boers on horseback slipped out of the laager and circled around the enemy somewhat in the savage fashion, but more swiftly. The result was a complete rout of Dingaan's hordes, with a loss of 8,000 dead on the field. Then there was peace from the Zulus in the Transvaal, and "Dingaan's daag" is the Boer Thanksgiving.

It is true that the British helped the Boers not a little by smashing the Zulu power, but following that the evil of unjust taxation led the liberty loving Dutchmen to rise and start a republic. The Lexington of the hilliputian revolution was fought Jan. 28 at Laingsnek. Political preliminaries were very brief. A mass meeting had been called to consider the question in dispute, but before the day arrived the tax collector oppressed a Boer in a matter of £18, and the burghers in convention assembled decided to flout diplomacy and take to fighting. An ultimatum was sent to the British secretary, the wires were cut and 7,000 armed Boers stood ready to defend their rights.

Fate had touched the button, and an impetuous British leader did the rest. Sir George Colley, commander in Cape Colony, was in the field in person and, fearing that the revolution would collapse under the stress of diplomacy, determined to fight anyway. The Boers quickly cut off all the garrisons in the Transvaal and prepared to dispute the passes from their coveted realm into the loyal domain of Natal. The Boer army under Piet Joubert, the present commander, was stretched across the highway running from Natal north upon a series of hills forming an amphitheater.

So certain of speedy victory was General Colley that he didn't take the trouble to operate under cover of darkness. He had 900 infantry and 150 mounted men. A tableland 2,000 feet in length and known as Laingsnek connected the flanks of the Boer army which rested its right on Majuba Hill. General Colley sent half the infantry against the elevated ground whereon the Boer left rested, while the mounted men attacked the ridge adjoining it. The plan was to divide the Boer strength, yet keep the assaulting parties in close touch. The move was made in broad daylight. Like some of the bloodthirsty warriors of 1861, the British cavalry feared that the war would end before they got in a blow and gave rein to their steeds, far outstripping their infantry supports. What should have been expected happened. The Boer riflemen stood off the cavalry with ease and in continuous line let themselves loose upon the British infantry. Colonel Deane and his staff rode at the front of the infantry and rushed ahead with the column just as though the cavalry supports were intact on his flank. In spite of the galling fire from the hill the troops gained the crest, and it became a battle with man against man. The British used their bayonets, but the Boers didn't shrink from cold steel. They actually rushed into the British mass as did Lord Scarlett's heavies among the Russians at Balaklava, and 40 of the stalwart fellows—they were all six footers—were killed within the lines. A party of them charged forward and captured the British flag, killing every one of the guard with their rifle bayonets.

Colonel Deane was killed on the crest, and several other officers, with about 200 men, fell. This ended the battle of Laingsnek for the British retreated to their old position.

Twelve days after Laingsnek the British were again whipped in an encounter of a kind likely to be repeated in this war. The British secondary base is in Natal, a long distance from the Transvaal border. Being an alert hardy

race of horsemen, the Boers can be as troublesome in forays as the Cossacks of the Russian steppes, and from the time that the enemy approached their borders his column was harassed by rough riding bands of armed Boers. To guard against this General Colley set out with 600 soldiers to patrol the line back toward his base. The column started in broad daylight and was scarcely in position at the crossing of the Ingogo river when the Boers attacked vigorously on all sides. Darkness ended the battle, and the British retreated, leaving dead and wounded behind to the number of 150. As at Laingsnek, the killed in the British ranks numbered about as many as the wounded, for the Boer rifleman shoots to kill.

Even the British acknowledge in this war that the Boer marksmanship is deadly. The casualties prove it. Even after Laingsnek and Ingogo river there might have been peace in the Transvaal without Boer independence but for the impetuosity and bad faith of General Colley and the inevitable accident which turns the tide in war. General Colley sent word to the Boers that England would appoint a commissioner to redress the grievances complained of, giving 48 hours for the return of an acceptance to his headquarters. President Kruger was not in camp to act upon the message, but the spirit of the people was for peace, and the chief men relaxed their vigilance.

Now, while the Boer right rested theoretically upon Majuba Hill the height was not occupied in force. It commanded the Boer position, and General Colley took advantage of the state of semitruce to throw a column on the hill, for in his hands it would prove another Round Top and decide the military situation at Laingsnek. A force of 600 men were marched up the slope under cover of night, and next morning the Boers saw the royal ensign floating above their heads. They had been out-generaled while trusting to promises of peace and entirely off their guard.

But no time was lost in Joubert's camp in getting down to business. At 5 o'clock in the morning Boer skirmishers were at the base of the hill making the Britons hunt cover from shots pouring upon them at the rate of 50 per minute. Long range fighting was kept up all the forenoon, the British went back from the brink and under the shelter of rocks and ridges having the best of it. In the crisis General Colley was very cool. One of his impetuous subordinates said that the men couldn't stand the fusillade much longer and the best thing for the British would be a charge. "Wait till they come on," said the general. "We will give them a volley and then charge." The Boers did "come on" all right, but their coming had for its prelude a shower of bullets no human line could stand before nor hide from. The British ranks were thrown into confusion, and the officers had to threaten their men to keep them from running away.

The heroes of the hour were there in the shape of some highlanders and a



BOERS CAPTURE THE BRITISH FLAG.

few old soldiers of the Eighty-fifth regiment. With these the general and his officers made a stand at the highest ridge. But every man who showed himself was punctured instantly, and those who tried to run were dogged down the slope by nimble Boers banging or whacking with rifle barrel or breach. Finally the Britons gave it up. General Colley was shot dead in his tracks. A few redcoats were captured, and 228 fell in the slaughter. With the British still on the outside of their Transvaal the Boers insisted upon and secured that independence they now strive to maintain. While in no sense a warring people, the Boers are the best fighters among civilized nations today. They resemble the early borderers of America in their traditions, their simplicity and love of freedom. At a call to arms they strap on their cartridge belts, shoulder their rifles and hurry to the combat. Being bred to outdoor life in all weather, they require no period of discipline to fit them for the hardships of the campaign.

In courage and celerity of movement the Boers rival the Cossacks of Russia and the cowboys of the plains. But, unlike the cowboys and Cossacks, they are serious minded, devoted to home and family, to sternness of principles and to ideal political liberty.

Unless Boer valor has sadly degenerated—and there is no reason to suppose that it has—there is a grim significance in Oom Paul's ultimatum to the civilized world that "we must now make South Africa free or the white man's grave," and "if the republics must belong to England the price will stagger humanity." Since the Jameson raid the Transvaal government has been preparing for battle. The home soil is in a condition of defense, both by provision of nature and the aid of science. While the Boers are undisciplined in a military sense, they are of the stamp of men who obey leaders, recover quickly from surprise and know no defeat.

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