Warrior Gap.

By Capt. Chas. King,

Author of "Fort Frayne," "An Army Wife," "Trumpeter Fred," "A Garrison Tangle" and "The Colonel's Daugh'er."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

Remonstrance on the part of his men would have been a violation of their rules of order. Obedient to the lieutenant's instructions, Sergeant Bruce, with evident reluctance, lowered his hand. Whoever these Indians were they well understood the principles that governed civilized warfare. They well knew that the white soldiers would respect a flag of truce, though in their own vernacular they referred to the sacred emblem only as a "fool flag," and sometimes used it, as did the Modocs five years later, to lure officers into ambush and deliberately murder them. They knew the white soldiers would take no advantage of foremen gathered for a conference or parley, and thus far the Sioux themselves had observed the custom which the Modocs basely violated when in cold blood they slaughtered Gen. Canby and the peace commissioners sent to treat with them. Confidently, therefore, came the two young warriors, but as Dean raised himself from the ground and was about to step forward, the sergeant spoke:

"Beg pardon, sir, but these fellows know all our officers. They would recognize you at once. The word would go to Red Cloud faster than any pony could gallop. Let me meet them, or let one of the men."

The ponies were coming at the lope now, and not an instant was to be lost. The safety of his command might possibly depend on their not being recognized as of the troop before whose carbines Chaska, brother to Lizette, had met his death.

"Perhaps you're right," said Dean. "Halt them again. Conroy, you go with Sergeant Bruce."

Eagerly a young trooper, carbine in hand, sprang up and stood by the sergenat's side as the latter repeated his warning signal. Obediently, yet not too promptly, showing evident desire to get where they could peer over into the ravine and count the number of the white men and horses, the Indians again drew rein, this time barely 100 yards away. Then Bruce and Conroy, holding up their emptied hands, strode forward along the grassy slope, making the further sign, "Dismount."

In those days few of our cavalry wore, when on Indian campaign, the forage-cap with its crossed sabres and distinguished letters. Nothing in the dress or accoutrements of the two men thus advancing to meet the Indian emissaries would give to the latter any clew as to the troop or regiment to which they belonged. Could they see the horses, however, the matter would be settled at once. The U. S. brand, with that of the number of the regiment and letter of the troop showed on every cavalry mount in the service, and the Ogallallas knew the ear-marks of two, at least, of our cavalry regiments in '68 as well as they did the cut of their own hair. But in the modesty of the non-commissioned officer Bruce had underrated his own prominence in Indian eyes. Not only did these keen observers know every officer by sight, and have for him some distinguishing name of their own, but many a trooper, easily singled out from his fellows because of his stature, or the color of his hear, or some other physical peculiarity, and Bruce, ex-trooper of the Scots Greys, and now a model sergeant of Yankee cavalry, was already a marked man in the eyes of the southern Sioux. Brule, Minneconjou and Ogallalla knew him well—his aquiline beak, to which the men would sometimes slyly allude, having won him the Indian appellative of Posh Kopee or Big Nose.

Before the two parties came within fifty yards of each other, therefore, watchers along the ravine saw the quick exchange of significant glances between the young braves. "Twig that?" whispered Trooper Blaine, in low, emphatic tone. "Those fellows know 'Scotty' just as well as we do."

All the same, leaving their trained ponies to nibble at the scanty bunch grass, the two came straight forward with extended hands and cordial "How, colah!" on their lips, one of them adding, in agency English, "Want talk chief. Indian poor. Heap sick." (And here he clasped his stomach with both hands.) "Want coffee, sugar, bread."

"All right," said Bruce promptly, noting the while how the roving black eyes searched the edge of the ravine. "Stay here. Don't come nearer. You got buffalo meat?"

A grunt was the reply of one, a guttural "buffalo, yes," the answer of the other.

"Bring tongues, then," and Bruce touched his own. "Five," and he threw forward the outspread right hand, rapidly touching in succession the thumb and four fingers. "We give both hands full—coffee, sugar, hardtack," and Bruce illustrated as he spoke. "That's all!" he finished abruptly, with the well-known Indian sign that plainly tells "I have spoken—there is nothing more to say," then calmly turned his back and, bidding Conroy follow, started to return to his comrades at the ravine.

But Indian diplomacy was unsatisfied. The Sioux had found "Big Nose" to be one of the soldiers in the field. He, at least, was of the hated troop that fought and chased Burning Star and killed Chaska. The trail told them there were nearly a dozen in the party, all on shod horses, with two in lead—spare mounts or pack-horses, doubtless—so they had extra rations and had come far; but why were they going this way, so far west of the usual road to the Big Horn posts? Why were they so few in number? Where were the rest? Why were they hiding here in the ravine, instead of marching? Answer to this last question was easy enough. It was to keep out of sight of Indian eyes and needed no excuse. There was something behind this mysterious presence of ten or twelve soldiers in the southern foothills, and Machpealoto would expect of his scouts full information, hence the instant movement on the part of one of the two braves to follow.

Impressively, Bruce turned again and waved him back. "Go, get buffalo tongue," said he, "or no trade. Keep away from our tepees," and he drew with his spurred boot-heel a jagged line across the turf. "Your side," said he, indicating the slope of the southeast of the line. "This—ours. That's all!" And this time the Indian knew he must come no nearer.

"I've got 'em talking trade, lieutenant," reported Bruce, the instant he reached Dean's side. "We don't need the tongues, but we've got more coffee and sugar than we are apt to want, and at least we can keep them interested until dark, then we can slip away. Of course, they've sent word to their main body that we're over here, but I believe they can't come in force before night."

"They knew you, sergeant, and they know it is probably our troop," said he. "There must be only a small party near us. Make your trade, but while you're doing it we'll saddle. I mean to get out of this and into the thick of the timber before they can surround us. Stand 'em off, now, while we get ready."

Promises must be kept when made to an Indian, even if they are otherwise sometimes broken. In ten minutes, with coffee, sugar and hardtack in their hands, the sergeant and his comrades were back at the front. One brave was still there, the other had vanished. Five minutes, neither party saying a word, the troopers waited; they had nothing to trade. Take this sack with you and fall back. Tell our then Bruce turned to Conroy. "I knew fellows to keep me well covered till I follow." The instant the soldier started with the sack swung over his sholder, the Indian, who had been squatted on the turf, sprang up and began rapid expostulation in fluent Ogallalla. "It's no use, young man," interposed Bruce. "Your chum there has no buffalo tongues, and he knew it. Here's some hardtack for you," and he spread one liberally with sugar and handed it to the ever-receptive paw, outstretched to grasp it. A glance over the shoulder showed that Conroy was nearly at the edge. Then, quietly, Bruce, too, began to retire. He had not got ten paces, still facing his unwelcome visitor, when the Indian gave a shrill, sudden cry and tossed up his hands. Not a second too soon Bruce turned and darted for cover. The Inian flung himself flat on the turf and rolled away into a depression where he could find partial shelter from bullets from the ravine, whence he evidently looked for them, and out from behind the knoll, bridles held high, "quirts" lashing at their ponies' flanks, darted half a dozen painted savages, tearing down upon the spot at the top speed of their agile mounts. Only two men remained on watch at the moment, Dean and one trooper. Most of the others, already in saddle, were filing away up the game trail that threaded the windings of the ravine, the two led horses with them, while a few yards behind the young officer and his comrade, halfway down the reverse slope, two others, afoot, handled the reins of their own horses and those of the lieutenant and men still held at the edge. It was an exciting moment. Bruce had only a hundred yards to run before he could get under cover and there was no chance of their hitting him at that range, yet a puff of smoke rose from the knoll, and a bullet, nearly spent, came tumbling and singing up the turf, and the dashing warriors, yelping wildly, applauded the shot. Bruce took matters coolly. Leaping behind the shelter of the ledge, he reached for his carbine, and in a moment more, as the pursuing Indians came lashing within long range, four seasoned cavalry carbines, each with a keen eye at the sight and a steady finger at the trip, were leveled on the coming foe. Dean's young heart beat hard, it must be owned, for hitherto the Indians had been fighting in retreat or on the defensive, while now they came as though confident of success; but there was soldier exultation and something like savage joy mingling with the thrill of excitement.

"There's more behind those beggars, sir," growled Conroy, a veteran at Indian work, "but they'll sheer off when they get within 300 yards." On they came, shields and lances dangling, ponies on the keen jump, feathers and pennons streaming on the wind. But, just as Conroy said, no sooner was Bruce safely under cover and they felt themselves drawing within dangerous range, than, fan-like, they opened out to right and left, and, yelling still like fiends, veered in wide circle from their line of attack, and ducking over their ponies' shoulders, clinging with one leg to the upright part of the cantle, they seemd to invite the fire of their white foe—and got it. A daring fellow in the lead came streaking slantwise across the front, as though aiming to pick up the comrade lurking in the dip of the prairie-like slope, and Conroy's carbine was the first to bark, followed almost instantly by Dean's. The scurrying pony threw up his wall-eyed head and lashed with his feathered tail, evidently hit, but not checked, for under the whip he rushed gamely on until another bullet, whistling within a foot of his neck, warned the red rider that he was far too close for safety, for with halting gait the pony turned and labored off the field, and presently was seen to be staggering. "Score one for our side," laughed the Irishman, in glee. "Now's your time, sergeant."

But Bruce, reloading, was gazing sternly at the distant knoll. The other warriors, riding right and left, were now chasing crosswise over the billowy slopes, keeping up a fire of taunt and chaff and shrill war cries, but never again venturing within 300 yards—never wasting a shot.

"I thought so," suddenly cried the sergeant. "They're signalling from the knoll. They never would have attacked with so few, unless there were dozens more within sight. Now's our time, lieutenant. We can mount and ride like hell to the timber—I beg your pardon, sir," he broke off suddenly. "I didn't mean to say what the lieutenant should do."

"No apologies," laughed Dean, his eyes snapping with the vim of the fight. "Glad you see the truth of what I said. Come on. Mount quickly, men."

Two minutes more and the entire party of bluecoats were spurring swiftly northward up the winding gorge,the pack-horses lumbering alongside. Eagerly Dean and Bruce in the lead looked right and left for a game trail leading up the slope, for well they knew that the moment their reinforcements came the warriors would dash into the ravine, and, finding their antagonists fled, would pursue along the banks. It would never do to be caught in such a trap. A galop of a quarter of a mile and, off to the right, a branch ravine opened out to higher ground, and into this the leaders dove and, crecking speed, rode at the trot until the ascent grew steep. Five minutes more, and they were well up toward the head of the gulch and presently found themselves nearly on a level with the hilsides about them. Here, too, were scattered pine trees and a few scrub oaks. The timber, then, was close at hand. Signaling halt to the climbing column, Dean and Bruce, springing from saddle, scrambled up the bank to their right and peered cautiously back down over the tumbling waves of the foothills, and what they saw was enough to blanch the cheek of even veteran Indian fighters.

Far over to the east, beyond an intervening ridge and under the dun cloud of ust, the earth was black for miles with herds of running buffalo. Far down to the southeast, here, there and everywhere over the land, the slopes were dotted with little knots of Indian braves—they could be nothing else—all riding like mad, coming straight toward them. Machpealota probably had launched his whole force on the trail of the luckless troopers.

CHAPTER XIX.

That night there was rejoicing at the new stockade. For over a week not a courier had managed to slip through in either direction. Alarmed for the safety of the little garrison, the commanding officer of the post away up at the gorge of the Big Horn river had sent two troops of cavalry to scout the slopes of the mountains and look into the state of affairs at Warrior Gap. They found countless fresh pony tracks all along the foothills east of the Greasy Grass and in the valleys of the many forks of the Deje Agie—the Crow name for Tongue river—but not an Indian did they see. They marched in among he welcoming officers and men at the bustling post to find themselves hailed as heroes. "We've been cut off from the world for at least ten days," said the commandant. "Our couriers have been killed, captured or driven back. Even our half-breed scouts refuse to make further trial. They say Red Cloud's people cover the land in every direction. Our woodchoppers only work under heavy guard. The contractors, freighters and workmen threaten to strike unless they get their money. The sutler refuses them further credit. The quartermaster has paid out every cent, and says his requisition for $10,000 was ordered filled, and the money ought to have been here a week ago. All will have to stop if the money doesn't come. We're safe enough. The Sioux don't dare come within range of our breechloaders. But we can't finish the barracks in time for winter at this rate."

A stout hearted soldier was the commanding officer at Warrior Gap. He had with him now four strong companies of infantry and a troop of horse. He had, he said, but one anxiety, so far as holding the fort was concerned—some few of the officers and quite a number of the soldiers, as has been told, were burdened with their wives and children. If these could only be moved under strong guard to Frayne, on the Platte, he could snap his fingers in the face of Red Cloud and his whole gang until they, too, got breechloaders. "It's only a question of time!" said he. "Sooner or later the interior department will be fool enough to arm the redskins all over the land with magazine rifles, and then there will be lively work for the war office. Any day," said he, further, "we may expect the coming of a whole regiment from the Platte posts, and then Mr. Lo will have to light out. Meantime, if we hadn't this trouble about the workmen and could get rid of the women and children, we'd be all right."

So back to the Big Horn rode the squadron to report all safe at Warrior Gap, barring the blockade, and almost on the same date out there started from Laramie, on the long march up the Platte and over across the sage-covered deserts, a strong force of foot and dragoons; and up from the Sweetwater, far to the southwest, came this venturesome little party of ten, bringing the much-demanded money, and all the while, with his far-riding, far-seeing scouts in every direction, Machpealota, perched in the mountains back of the post, warily watched the dispositions and daily work, and laid his plans accordingly. Not a warrior was permitted to show himself near the stockade, but in a sleepless cordon, five miles out, they surrounded the Gap. Not a messenger had managed to elude their vigilance by day, not one had succeeded in slipping into the little camp by night. Yet, with every succeeding morn the choppers and fatigue parties pushed further out from the stockade, in growing sense of security, and the Indians let them come.

Full a week before the Laramie column could possibly reach the mountains, however, Red Cloud was warned of their coming, their numbers, and composition—so many horse soldiers, so many "heap walks." Unmolested the squadron from Fort C. F. Smith, the Big Horn river post, was permitted to retrace its steps. In fancied safety, born of confidence in that wonderful new breechloader, the little command at the Gap was lulled into indifference to their surroundings. Then, sending large numbers of his young men to round up the buffalo toward the Platte, but keeping still his stern and vengeful eye upon the prey almost at his feet, the red chief made his final and fatal plans.

There came a cloudless morning when the cavalry troop escorted a young officer up the rocky heights to the west, finding everywhere indications of recent Indian occupancy, but not a redskin barred their way. Without opposition of any kind, without so much as a glimpse of the foe, were they permitted to climb to Signal Rock, and from that point, with powerful glasses, the officers swept the glorious range of foothills, the deep valley of the Tongue, the banks of the Piney and the Crazy Woman, the far-spreading upland prairie rolling away like some heaving ocean suddenly turned to earth, ■st and southeast to the dim horizon, and there they saw, or thought they saw, full explanation of their recent freedom from alarm of any kind. There to the south, full thirty miles away, the land was overlaid by a dull, heavy, dun-colored cloud, and traversed by black streaks or blotches that were recognized at once as running buffalo. Red Cloud and his braves then were drawn away in search of other game, and, light of heart and foot, the troopers trotted back to the waiting stockade, to meet there late that evening, as the weird tattoo of the drums and fifes was echoing back from the rocky heights, the first messenger through in nearly fifteen days—a half-breed Sioux from the distant posts along the Platte, bearing a written message from the commanding officer at Frayne, which the veteran commandant at Warrior Gap read with infinite comfort:

"Seven companies of infantry and three more troops of cavalry are on the way and should reach you by Saturday week. The general seems thoroughly alive to the situation, and we, too, are hoping for orders to move out and help you give that infernal old scoundrel the thrashing he deserves. All has been quiet hereabouts since that one party made its dash on Hal Folsom's ranch. Of course you know the story of Lizette, and of course Red Cloud must have known that Burning Star was head devil in the enterprise, though Chaska was the victim. I take much comfort in the fact that it was I who sent young Dean and his troop round by way of the Laramie. Folsom and his people would have been murdered to a man if I hadn't, and yet I hear that absurd old ass at Emory put Dean in arrest for not coming directly home. Pecksniff should have been retired ten years ago—for imbecility.

"We had a tremendous storm in the mountains to the south two days ago and a courier has just galloped out from Emory, inquiring for news of Dean. It seems he was sent with a big sum in currency for your quartermaster, and ordered to slip through by way of the Sweetwater, as Red Cloud was known to be covering the direct road. Somehow it leaked out before he started, and a gang of desperadoes gathered to jump him at Canon Springs. The storm jumped them, for two of their dead and a dozen horses were rolled out on the flats. Dean must have got through all right, for Bat saw their trail fifteen miles above us. Of course, he'll have to make night marches, but, unless Red Cloud gets wind of his coming and corrals him, he should reach you almost as soon as this. Michel, the bearer, has your dispatches and orders. Retained copies are here. Good luck, old man, and may we meet within the fortnight and wind up Red Cloud once and for all time."

This was all, but more than enough. Riding night and day in wide detour, Michel had made his way to the lately beleaguered spot, and what he brought was joyous news, indeed. Within the coming week the post would have no more to fear. Within a day or two the contractors, then, would have their money, and that would tap the sutler's stores and joy would reign supreme. Enviously the soldiers eyed the artisans. Not for weeks could their paymaster be looked for, while the funds for the civilians might reach them on the morrow, provided Red Cloud did not interfere. He couldn't and wouldn't, said the commander, because he and his braves were all off to the southeast, hunting buffalo. He could and might, said Michel that night at 10 o'clock, after taps had sent the garrison to bed, for by the time he left Frayne there were other riders up from Gate City and all that garrison had learned that Lieut. Dean was taking something like fifty thousand dollars in greenbacks up to the Gap, with only ten men to guard it, and Maj. Burleigh was wild with anxiety lest he shouldn't get through, and had been nearly crazy since he heard of Dean's narrow escape at Canon Springs. The officer of the day who heard this story took it, with the teller, to the post commander, and that veteran sat up late and cross-questioned long. Michel's English might be broken, but not his statement. The last arrival at Frayne before he left was one of Maj. Burleigh's own men from Gate City. He said the general and his staff were expected at Emory the next day, investigating matters, for old Stevens had got stampeded because his sergeant-major was assaulted and old Mr. Folsom knocked out and a drunken captain by the name of Newhall had been making trouble, and it had all told on Maj. Burleigh, who had taken to his bed with nervous prostration.

So, while the garrison went to rest happy, the commanding officer waked long, and finally slept soundly and might have slept late, but that just at dawn, full half an hour before the time for reveille, there came a sharp knocking at the door of his log hut, and the imperative voice of the officer of the day.

"Colonel! colonel, I say! There's sharp firing out here in the hills to the south!"

The peaks to the west were just tinging with purple and red, reflected from the eastward sky, and a faint light was beginning to steal down into the deep valley in which the cantonment lay sleeping, when the veteran commander came hurrying out, half-dressed, and hied him, with his attendant officer, to the southern angle of the stockade. There on the narrow ledge or platform built under the sharp tops of the upright logs, were grouped the silent, grave-faced guard, a dozen men intently listening. Thither presently came running others of the officers or men, suddenly awakened by sense of something unusual going on. Far away among the wooded heights to the south, echoing from the rocky palisades to the west, could be heard the pop, pop of distant musketry, punctuated sometimes with louder bang as of large caliber rifles closer at hand. Little time was there in which to hazard opinion as to the cause. One or two men, faint-hearted at the thought of the peril of Indian battle and hopeful of influencing the judgment of their superiors, began the murmur of "Big hunt," "Buffalo drive," etc., glancing furtively at the colonel the while as though to observe the effect. But an imperative "Silence, you idiots!" from the officer of the day put sudden end to their conjectures. Only a moment did the commander listen. Then, quick and startling, came the order, "Sound to arms!" and within the minute the stirring peal of the cavalry trumpet was answered by the hoarse thunder of the snare-drum, beating the long roll. Out from their "dog tents" and half-finished log huts came the bewildered men. Often as the alarm had sounded on the frontier there was a thrill and ring about it this time that told of action close at hand.

Out from their little huts, hurrying into their frock coats and belting on their swords as they glared about them for the cause of the uproar, came the officers, old and young, most of them veterans of many hard-fought fields of the war days—one or two, only, youngsters fresh from the Point. At many a doorway and unglazed window appeared the pallid faces of women and children, some of them weeping in mingled fright and distress. In front of the log guardhouse the sergeant quickly formed the two reliefs not on post. On their designated parades the companies rapidly fell in, while stern-voiced non-commissioned officers rebuked the laggards and aided them into their belts, and each first sergeant took rapid note of his men. No need to call the roll, a skulker would have been detected and kicked into the ranks at the instant. Over under the rough board shelter of the quartermaster's employes the workmen came tumbling out in shirt sleeves, many of them running to the nearest officer and begging for a gun and a place in the fight, for now the firing was loud and lively. Down by the swift-flowing stream the tethered horses of the cavalry plunged and neighed in excitement, and the mules in the quartermaster's corral set up their irrepressible bray. For five minutes there was clamor, but no confusion. Then disciplined silence reigned again, all but the nearing volleying at the south. Presently at a rapid trot the cavalry, some fifty strong, came clattering up the stony trail from the stream, and with carbines advanced, disappeared through the main gateway in a cloud of dust. Two companies were told off to man the loopholes of the stockade. Two others under the command of a senior captain faced by the right flank, and in double quick time danced away in the wake of the cavalry. Eagerly the watchers climbed the wooden walls or to the tower of the half-finished guardhouse, and, as the red light strengthened in the east and the mountain sides became revealed, studied with their glasses or with straining eyes the southward vista through the hills. They saw the troop form line to the front at the gallop as it swept out over the open ground 400 yards away, saw its flankers scurry to the nearest shoulder of bluff, saw their excited signals and gesticulations, and presently a sheaf of skirmishers shot forward from the advancing line and breasted the low ridge 800 yards out from the fort, and then there came floating back the sound of ringing, tumultuous cheer as the skirmishers reached the crest and darted headlong at some unseen object beyond, and after them went the reserve, cheering, too. And now the sound of firing became fierce and incessant, and messengers came galloping back to the commander of the steadily advancing infantry, and they, too, were seen to throw forward heavy skirmish lines and then resume the march. And then, down over the ridge came a little knot of horsemen, made up of three men riding close together, the outer ones supporting between them the comrade in the center. Before they were within 400 yards the young adjutant, gazing through his glasses at the colonel's side, exclaimed: "It's Dean—dead or wounded!" and one of the surgeons rushed forward to meet the party. "He's weak, sir, almost gone from loss of blood," exclaimed Trooper Conroy, himself bleeding from a gash along the cheek. A faint smile drifted over the young fellow's pallid face, as the adjutant, too, galloped up. A feeble hand indicated the bulging saddle pocket. A faint voice faltered: "There's $10,000 in that packet. We had fight our way through," and then the brave blue eyes closed, and strong arms lifted the almost lifeless form from the saddle as Marshall swooned away.

CHAPTER XX.

A day had dawned on the Big Horn never to be forgotten by those who watched the conflict from the stockade, never to be recalled by those who went forth to fight. Broad daylight had come and the sun was peeping over the far horizon as strong arms bore the unconscious officer within the post, and the commander eagerly questioned the men who came with him. Their story was quickly told. They had fled before overpowering numbers of the Sioux the night before, had made their way through the timber in the darkness and come ahead all night, groping their way from ridge to ridge, until at the peep of day they found themselves in sight of familiar landmarks, and could see the gleam of the waters of the Forks dancing away under the dawn. And then, as they essayed to ride on they found the Indians all around them. Whichever way they turned the foe appeared, but only in scattered parties and small numbers. Not once did more than a dozen appear in sight, and then, confident of speedy succor from the fort, they had decided to make a dash for it, and so rode boldly out into the open. But now a score of warriors popped up and barred the way, while others far out at flank or rear kept up long range fire. One man was shot through the body and fainted, and had to be borne along. Then the lieutenant was shot in the leg, but no one knew it until they saw his boot was running over with blood, and he was growing ghastly white, even though he kept encouraging and directing. But when at last the cavalry met them and brushed the Indians away from the front, Capt. Drum, who rode at their head, ordered Mr. Dean taken right into the post while he dashed on to punish the Sioux, "and he is giving them hell, too," said the excited trooper, "for there couldn't have been more than 100 Indians, all told."

Ah, not in sight, perhaps, poor lads—not in sight of horse, foot or fort; for if there were only one hundred, how came it that the fire grew fiercer still, and that presently every musket in the infantry skirmish line, too, was blazing on the foe. By this time cavalry and infantry both had disappeared over the curtaining ridge, and the colonel's face grew grave and haggard as he listened. Three-fifths of his little garrison were out there battling against unknown numbers. They had gone to rescue the detatchment and bring it in safely. That rescue was accomplished. The precious package for which so much had been risked was here—but what detained the command? Why did they not return? Beyond doubt far more Indians were out there now than when first the firing began. "Gallop on, Mr. Adjutant, and tell the major to withdraw his line and fall back on the stockade," was the order—and with a lump in his throat the young officer mounted again and started. He was a pet in the garrison, only in his second year of commission. They saw him gallop through the gate, saw him ride gallantly straight for the curtaining ridge beyond which the smoke was rising heavily now, saw him breasting the slope, his orderly following, saw him almost reach it, and then suddenly the prairie seemed to jet fire. The foremost horse reared, plunged and went rolling over and over. They saw—plainly saw through their glasses, and a shriek of agony and horror went up from among the women at the sight—half a dozen painted savages spring out from behind the ledge, some on pony back, some afoot, and bear down on the stricken form of the slender young rider now feebly striving to rise from the turf; saw the empty hand outstretched, imploring mercy; saw jabbing lances and brandished war clubs pinning the helpless boy to earth and beating in the bared, defenseless head; saw the orderly dragged from under his struggling horse and butchered by his leader's side; saw the bloody knives at work tearing away the hot red scalps, then ripping off the blood-soaked clothing, and to the music of savage shouts of glee and triumph, hacking, hewing, mutilating the poor remains, reckless of the bullets that came buzzing along the turf from the score of Springfields turned loose at the instant among the loopholes of the stockade. It was 800 yards away in the dazzling light of the rising sun. Old Springfields did not carry as do the modern arms. Soldiers of those days were not taught accurate shooting as they are now. It was too far for anything but chance, and all within a minute or two the direful tragedy was over, and the red warriors had darted back behind the ridge from which they came.

"My God! sir," gasped the officer who stood at the side of the awe-stricken post commander, "I believe it's Red Cloud's entire band, and they're got our poor boys surrounded! Can't we send help?"

"Send help! Merciful heaven, man, who's to help us? Who's to protect these poor women and children if we go? I have but two companies left. It's what those fiends are hoping—have been planning—that I'll send out my last man to the aid of those already gone, and then they'll dart in on the fort, and what will become of these?"

Great drops of sweat were pouring down the colonel's face as he turned and pointed to the huts, where now, clinging to one another in terror, many poor wives and children were gathered, and the air was filled with the sobbing of the little ones. Up from the stockade came two young officers, their faces set and rigid, their eyes blazing. "In God's name, colonel," cried the foremost, "let me take my men and clear that ridge so that our people can get back. One charge will do it, sir."

But solemnly the commander uplifted his hand. "Listen," said he, "the battle is receding. They are driving our poor fellows southward, away from us. They are massed between them and us. It would only be playing into their hands, my boy. It's too late to help. Our duty now is here."

"But good God, sir! I can't stay without raising a hand to help. I beg—I implore!"

"Go back to your post at once, sir. You may be needed any minute. Look there! Now!"

And as he spoke the colonel pointed to the southeast. Over the scene beyond the divide to the south hung the bank of pale-blue smoke. Out on the slope lay the ghastly remains of the young adjutant and his faithful comrade who, not ten minutes before, had galloped forth in obedience to their orders and met their soldier fate. Out to the southeast the ridge fell gradually away into the general level of the rolling prairie, and there, full a thousand yards distant, there suddenly darted into view three horsemen, troopers evidently, spurring madly for home.

"They've cut their way through! Thank God!" almost screamed the spectators at the parapet. But their exultation died an instant later. Over the ridge, in swift pursuit came a dozen painted, feathered braves, their ponies racing at lightning speed, their arrows and bullets whizzing along the line of flight. The horse of the foremost trooper was staggering, and suddenly went plunging headlong, sending his rider sprawling far out on the turf. He was up in a second, dire peril nerving him to desperate effort. His comrades veered at his cry for help and glanced back over their shoulders. One, unnerved at sight of the dashing foeman in pursuit, clapped spurs again, and, bending low, rode madly on. The other, gallant fellow! reined about in wide, sweeping circle, and turned back to meet his running comrade. They saw him bend to lend a helping hand, saw him bend still lower as three of the Indians leaped from their ponies, and, kneeling, loosed their rifles all at once; saw him topple out of saddle, and his stricken horse, with flapping rein, trot aimlessly about a moment before he, too, went floundering in his tracks; saw the other soldier turn to face his fate by his dying comrade's side, fighting to the last, overwhelmed and borne down by the rush of red warriors. Strong men turned aside in agony, unable to look on and see the rest—the brutal, pitiless clubbing and stabbing, the fearful hacking of lance and knife—but others still, in the fascination of horror, gazed helplessly through the smoke drifting upward from the blazing loopholes, and once a feeble cheer broke forth as one shot took effect and a yelling Indian stretched out dead upon the sward. Then for a brief moment all eyes centered on the sole survivor who came sweeping down the slope, straight for the stockade. Almost it seemed as though he might yet escape, despite the fact that his horse, too, was lurching and stumbling and his pursuers were gaining rapidly, defiant of the fire of the little fort. Reckless of order and discipline, a dozen soldiers nearest the gate rushed out upon the open bench, shouting encouragement and sending long range, chance shots. But with every stride the fleeing steed grew weaker, stumbled painfully and slackened speed, and soon they saw him slowing down, despite the frantic jabbing of the spurs, and with drooped head and bleeding nostrils giving up the fight. And then, at sound of the triumphant yells and jeers of his pursuers, the poor wretch in saddle threw one fearful glance behind him, one despairing look toward the comrades and the refuge still a quarter of a mile away, and with shaking hand he turned the brown revolver on his own temple and pulled trigger, and then went tumbling earthward, a corpse. There at least was one scalp the Sioux could covet in vain, for, with shouts of vengeance, the little squad of infantry, deaf to all orders of the clamor of the bugle recall, dashed out over the level bench, firing furiously as they ran, and, whether from the superstitious awe with which the Indians view the suicide, or the dread of close combat with the gallant band of blue-coats, the mounted warriors turned and scurried away across the prairie, and were presently out of range beyond the ridge again. Then, and not till they had reached and lifted and borne the lifeless form of the trooper, did the little party condescend to answer the repeated summons from the fort. Then at last they slowly returned, unrebuked, for no man had the heart to chide their daring.

Only once more was there further sight of the one-sided battle. Half a mile or more beyond the bare divide there arose against the southern sky a bold, oblong height or butte,studded with bowlders and stunted pine, and watchers at the fort became aware, as the sun climbed higher, that the smoke cloud, thinning gradually but perceptibly, was slowly drifting thither. The fire, too, grew faint and scattering. The war whoops rang and re-echoed among the rocks, but all sound of cheering had long since died away. At last, an hour after the fury of the fight began, the colonel, gazing in speechless grief, through his field glass, muttered to the officer at his side:

"Some of them are still left. They are fighting for their lives along that butte."

Only a few, though. One by one the dark dots among the bowlders ceased to stir and move about. Little by little the fire slackened, and all but occasional scattered shots died utterly away. Then other forms, feathered and bedizzened, were seen rushing in numbers up the distant hillside, and that meant that all was over, and the brutal knives were busily at work. Little by little all sound of conflict, all sight of combattants disappeared entirely, and the unclouded sunshine streamed down upon a scene upon which the silence of death indeed had fallen. When at last, late that afternoon, the watchers had reported a vast body of Indians drifting away eastward toward the distant Powder river, and venturesome scouts stole out to reconnoiter, backed by skirmish lines from the stricken post, they found the grassy slopes beyond that curtaining ridge one broad field of death, strewn with the stripped and hacked and mangled forms of those who had so gallantly dashed forth to the aid of comrade soldierly at the break of day, so torn and mutilated and disfigured that only a limited few were ever identified. Officers and men, one after another, had died in their tracks, victims of Red Cloud and the Ogallalla Sioux.

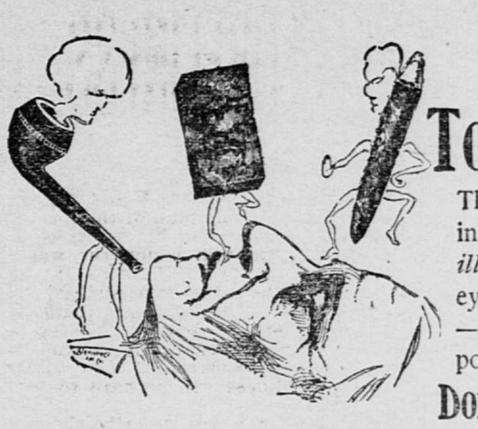
And all for what? Late that night the quartermaster in wild agitation sought his colonel's door, a package in his hands. "For God's sake, sir, look at this!" he cried.

The cords had just been cut, the seals broken, the stout paper carefully opened and the contents of the precious packet exposed to view. It held no money at all, nothing but a layer of worthless paper.

(To be continued next Sunday.)

THE KING OF THE FOREST—Albert Bierstadt.

Tobacco Tormentors



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LOOKING BACK OVER 1897

A FAMOUS YEAR FOR RECORD-BREAKING IN EVERY DEPARTMENT OF LIFE.

GREAT STRIDES OF SCIENCE.

FLEETER STEAMSHIPS, FASTER TRAINS AND ELECTRIC ROADS THAT SURPASS STEAM.

YEAR'S MANY NOTABLE EVENTS.

War and Peace Have Contributed Their Share to the History of the Past Year.

From the beginning to the end of 1897 progress has been the watchword, and on the banners of men of science, men of business, professional men, leaders in art and literature, church prelates and merchant princes there has been written in robust characters the motto "Excelsior." Looking down from the heights to which the world has climbed during the past twelve months one sees that giant strides have been made in every direction.

The vast field of engineering science has seen some sensational developments. Eighteen hundred and ninety-seven has given us the mighty Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse, queen of ocean greyhounds and the fastest, handsomest and the largest passenger steamer afloat; it has given to us the fleetest battleship in the world, in the shape of the Japanese fighting craft Yashima, and the speediest small vessel in existence, in the British torpedo boat Turbina, this last presenting in itself one of the most important advances in steam engineering in that she attains her tremendous rate of speed by means of her steam turbines. Record breaking has been the aim of every naval architect and engineer; the time in which a vessel crosses the Atlantic has been cut down by hours and minutes and seconds, until at last a vessel has done the trip in less than six days. Engineers have hammered away at the record times of railroads, until today the accomplishment of a speed of sixty miles an hour, which a few years ago would have been regarded as visionary and impossible, has become of such common occurrence as to be considered scarcely worthy of more than passing notice. The use of steam as a motive power has been improved upon. Electric railroading has been tried and found to be a distinct advance. It is operating successfully on the New Haven road in Connecticut and on the overhead railroad in Liverpool, England, while in London it is to make bearable the choking atmosphere of that abomination, the underground railroad. Horseless carriages have ceased to be the butt of the cartoonist's pencil and the joke writer's pen. In three great cities of the world—London, Paris and New York—motor carriages have become such a familiar sight as to be an object of curiosity to none but country visitors. The important advancement made by electricity is shown by the fact that in 1887 there were eighty-six miles of electric railway, while 1897 finds us with 14,000 miles of electric railway, and an increase in the number of electric cars operated from 172 to 37,000.

From a business point of view 1897 began in gloom and ends in sunshine. It was a long time coming. The first half of the year passed and the clouds were still there. They rolled away with a rush when the control of the great steel and iron industries of the world passed from Europe to America. The control of this portion of the world's commerce meant a great tidal wave of prosperity at a time when the country most needed it. The value of imports of iron and steel in 1897 was less than half the value of these imports in 1891, while the exports were twice as great. In fact the past year has been far in advance, commercially speaking, of any previous year. It is evident that the returns to be made in the middle of January will show our exports to run many millions above those of 1896, which has been the record year heretofore.

It has been a great year for the advancement of women. Even in the conservative countries of Europe, barriers to the onward and upward progress of woman have been removed. In France this has been especially noticeable, many of the restrictions to the higher education of women having been removed. The attempt to secure for women equal privileges with the male students at the university proved a failure, although the faculty had admitted the women to study with the men, pass the same examinations, and beat them when they could, which occasionally has happened.

In the field of sport, as in the field of science, to break records has been the aim of every contestant. The star of the year on the bicycle track has been little Jimmie Michael, the Welsh wonder. On the turf a new king has arisen—Hamburg—the mighty son of Hanover and Lady Reel, about whose ownership there has been so much secrecy, but of whose right to his crown as turf king there is no question. Football has been fiercer sport than ever, and deaths have occurred on the gridiron with such frequency that in some states the legislature has seriously considered the question of prohibiting the game. Golf has more than maintained its popularity. The indications are that if 1897 may be called a year in which people went daft over the game, 1898 will see the nation golf-mad. It is growing rapidly in popularity, and promises to take the lead among the out-door sports.

Bicycling has not gained anything by the latest event of the year, the six-day bicycle race, and it is to be hoped that these shocking exhibitions have, as some think, seen their last days. If this proves to be so and the prediction is verified that a mere contest of endurance is to be replaced by six day competitions in which the riders will be allowed so many hours sleep in the twenty-four, then 1898 will have one opportunity at least to improve upon the preceding year.

An interesting incident of the last part of 1897 was the great fire of London, which reduced to ashes whole blocks of buildings and awakened the eyes of the Englishmen to the fact that their fire department, of which they had been so proud, was in reality unfitted to cope with any large conflagration. 1898 will see John Bull coming to Cousin Johathan for hints on how to run a fire department, and, after making use of all our best devices, calmly claiming them as his own and accusing us of copying London's pet plans for putting out flames.

Among the great public events that make 1897 a memorable year, were the inauguration of President McKinley, the swift and decisive war between Turkey and Greece, which began and ended with such surprising suddenness and with so little loss of life, that the average man, looking back over 1897 for events of interest, may be forgiven if he fails to recall the Turko-Grecian campaign.

Another great episode that brought together men of war and peace from every part of the country was the dedication of the tomb of Gen. Grant. Who that was privileged to be present on that occasion, when the gay banners of the marching men were blown out straight by the fierce and cutting wind, and the spectators sat and froze in the grand stands and on the sidewalks, chilled to the bone, but determined to do honor to the nation's hero, will ever forget the day? The news of the discovery of gold is entitled to take a prominent place among the events of 1897, for it set the whole world agog, is a popular subject still and is liable to get hotter yet in spite of the chilliness of the Alaskan atmosphere. It is probable that 1898 will be a Klondike year, during which the great ambition of the people of all nations will be to dig and delve in Alaskan soil in search of the elusive yellow metal.

In foreign events the great jubilee of Queen Victoria takes precedence as the most important. In the minds of Britishers, at least, it was an event that stood out among all others as the chief incident of 1897. The sight of representatives of the world-wide empire marching shoulder to shoulder in great parade, acknowledging allegiance to the august lady who had held her place as queen for so many years, was certainly an impressive one, even to the people of this democratic land.

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