

## SPIKING THE GUNS.

"The regiment will be annihilated," observed the adjutant, coolly. And then in the same impassive tones, he asked some one to pass him a biscuit.

"Do you think I don't know that? Do you imagine I fear getting killed to-morrow? Do you suppose I want to live on a'fter what has happened? It's the eternal disgrace of the thing that's cutting me," shouted the Colonel.

"Once comfortably shot," remarked the senior major in easy philosophy, "it doesn't matter to me personally where, or for why, I go down. Not a soul will be left behind to care."

This last remark added tinder to the blaze. The major was the peasant's son who had hacked and thrust his way from the ranks by sheer and hard fighting. His commanding officer was a noble of the old regime. He had hoped and reasonably expected, that the previous day's engagement would give him a brigade; and so the fiasco had fallen all the more bitterly.

It seemed as though the very stars in their courses had been battling against us. Everything had gone wrong. The blame was not ours; but this in an army where want of luck was the greatest crime, told nothing in our favor. Many men had fallen, and panic had seized the heels of the rest. Which of us initiated the run cannot be said, but in the rush of some all had been carried along, few (except, perhaps, one or two of the older officers) resisting very strenuously. The Colonel, burning with shame, had gone in to report. What precisely had been said to him we did not know; but we guessed with some accuracy, although he did not repeat the detail. The gist of his interview was that the regiment was to attack again on the morrow; and, if unsuccessful then, once more on the day after; and so on till the bridge was taken.

Yesterday the thing had been barely possible. Yet to-day it was far different. During the night the defenses had been more than trebled. The Austrians swarmed. Enough artillery was mounted there now to have demolished an entire army corps advancing against it from the open.

The deduction was clear. The bravest men will turn tail sometimes; and in our army, which was the bravest in the world, there had, during the latter part of the campaign, been more than one case of wavering. An example accordingly was to be made. Our corps had been singled out for the condign punishment. We were doomed to march on the morrow to our annihilation.

Of course, the matter had not been put so at headquarters. There the words ran: "Most important strategic point. Must be taken at whatever cost. Your regiment will again have the honor, Colonel," and so on. But, summed up bluntly, it was neither more nor less than I have said. We all understood the order of the letter, and there was not a man in the regiment who would hesitate a moment in carrying out his share. Each private soldier, each officer would march with firm determination to march then his last. That gives the case in a nut-shell.

But the secure knowledge that there would be no skulkers along this road to execution did not pacify the Colonel. If anything, it increased his bitterness. It would make his ungrateful memory last the longer. He sat at the table end of that inn room where he had messed, with folded arms and nervous fingers kneading at his muscles. By a singular irony we were lodged in comfort there—we, who had got to go out and die on the morrow—and he must needs taunt us with it, as though it were shame for such as we to live so tolerable a billet.

Myself, I was stretched out on a sofa away by the far wall and lay there mutely, having but little taste for the worldly savageries which were being so freely dealt about. And the night grew older without my being disturbed. But the angry man at the end of the table singled me out at last, perhaps because my outward calm and listlessness jarred upon him.

"Tired Eugene?" he asked.

"A little, sir."

"Ah, I can understand it. I noted your activity to-day. You have mistaken your vocation, mon cher. You should not have come into the army. You should have been a professional runner."

An answer burned on my tongue. But I kept it there, gave a shrug and said nothing. What use could further wrangling be. But the silence was an ill move. It only angered him further, and he threw at me an insult which was more than human man could endure.

"Do you think you will again feel inclined to use those powers of yours to-morrow, Eugene? Or had I better have you handcuffed to some steady old soldier?"

A dozen of the other officers sprang to their feet at this ghastly taunt, for when such a thing as this was said to one of their number it touched all. The old major was their spokesman.

"Colonel, we make all allowances, but you are going too far with the youngster."

The Colonel scowled round tight-lipped for a minute, and then he said:

"I am quite capable of commanding this regiment of lost sheep, without unasked-for advice from subordinates, major. Lieut. Ramard, you heard my question, I presume? Please have the civility to answer."

During the minute's respite I had been thinking and acting—that is, writing. I got up and handed the Colonel a slip of paper. On it were the words:

"I acknowledge that I, E. Ramard, lieutenant of the twenty-second —, am a coward. EUGENE RAMARD."

He read it.

"There, sir," I said, "kindly add the date, as I have forgotten what it is, and please leave that behind with the baggage when we march to-morrow. If I do not do better work for France than any man in the regiment, it is my wish that this paper be published." The Colonel nodded grimly, and then frowned.

"Have I your permission now, sir, to withdraw from the room?"

A refusal was framing itself—I could see it; but the lowering faces around made him curb his passion, and he nodded again, but reluctantly.

In the dark, wet air outside, and not before, did I realize fully what I had done. The screen on the slip of paper had been the pass of the instant. It seemed to me now the outcome of a moment's insanity. I had had no plan, no trace of scheme in my head whilst I was scribbling. The words and

the pledge were an empty boast, made in the wild hope that I could hold them good. But how could such a thing be done? The most furious, desperate courage, by itself, would avail nothing. There would be a thousand men around, each to the full as brave as I—for no one can march farther than death—and to do "better work for France" than any of them! Ah, no, the thing was impossible. With them I should fall, and among all of them I alone would be branded infamous! The paper would be brought to light; the curt, bald confession would be read, with no explanation of how or why it was written; and men would form their own opinions—all hostile, all against me.

To leave behind nothing but the name of a self-avowed coward! Oh, agony! bitter agony!

I wandered wherever my blind feet led me, wrenched by torments that God alone knew the strength of, and from which there seemed no human means of escape. The heavy rain-squalls moaned down the village streets. The place, with its armed tenantry, slept. Only the dripping sentries were open-eyed. These, taking me for an officer on ordinary rounds, saluted with silent respect. No soul interfered with me. Not even a dog barked.

The thought came: You die only to gain a wreath of craven plumes. Why not pass away from here—escape—desert—vanish—be known no more—and yet live? No one withholds from you new life and new country. France alone, of all the world, is utterly hopeless for you.

The thought gained. I say it freely now, for the dead, dull blackness of my prospect then showed no spot of relief. In my walkings to and fro I gradually verged nearer and nearer to the outer cordon. As an officer I knew the words for the night, sign and countersign both. I could pass the pickets.

Farther and farther toward the scattered outskirts of the hamlet did my doubting feet lead me. In one more patrol up and down I think my mind would be made up, and after that, whatever deluge the Fates desired. But a sound fell on my ears, faint and not unmusical. I was duly conscious of some new scheme beginning to frame itself. I changed my path and walked faster.

Presently the cause of the sound disclosed itself. A field force, an anvil, and couple of grimy farriers, and a half-a-dozen troopers with horses. The cavalrymen were resting on the ground, watering their horses, awaiting their turns. The smiths were slaving, sweating, swearing, doing the work of thrice their number. It was a queer enough group, and I gazed at it for many minutes, still unable to frame the gauzy idea that had reanimated me. Then one of the farriers who had been fitting a hissing shoe on to a hind hoof, chilled the hot iron in a rain puddle, and humped up the horse's fetlock on to his apron again.

I started.

The fellow picked up a hammer, took a nail from his mouth, and drove the nail first gently, and then smartly home.

"There vicious one," swore he. "I put that spike through the vent in a matter of seconds, but with these four others beside it, thou'lt not rid thyself of it in as many weeks."

I strode forward.

"Five louis for that hammer and a score of nails!"

The military smith dropped the hoof from his lap, came to attention, and saluted. But he looked at me queerly, and answered nothing. I could see he thought me mad. Very likely excitement had made me look so.

"Ten louis. There is the money, in gold."

"My officer, the things are yours."

Steel spikes, brittle rods that would snap off short, would have been better. But time was growing narrow, and I must take what offered. These soft bent nails would serve my purpose. And now for the river. The current was swift, and I could not swim a stroke. I must go up-stream, and trust to find some tree trunk or wooden balk that would aid me in floating down.

Of the matters that happened after this I cannot speak with any minuteness. To think back at the whole time seems like a blurred dream, broken by snatches of dead sleep. I know I gained my point on the river bank, some miles above the village, and entered the water there, finding it chill as ice. I think it was a small fence gate that aided my chocking passage. I can only recollect clearly that the thing I clung to was terribly unstable, and that on being landed on a chance eddy on a strip of shoal, I lay there for fully half an hour, listening to a sentry treading past and past through the mud ten yards away, unable to move a limb. Then I gathered strength and crawling, not only from caution, but through sheer helplessness, made my stealthy way still further along the shore.

Four batteries commanded the approaches to the bridge. Two were on either flank, to deliver a converging fire; two, one above the other, were in a direct line with it, so that the causeway could be swept from end to end.

It was in the lower of these last that I found myself—by what route come I cannot say. Only then my senses seemed to return to me. I was lying in an embrasure. Overhead was the round black chace of a sixty-pounder. I crawled farther and looked down the line. Six more guns loomed through the night, making seven in all.

The rain was coming down in torrents, sending up spurts of mud. There were men within a dozen yards, wakeful men, and then, and not before, did it flash upon me that my farrier's hammer was a useless weapon. Fool that I was to bring it. Idiot I must have been to forget that the first clink would awaken the redoubt. My life? No, pah! I didn't count that. But it would mean only one gun spiked effectually, if so much. I drew back into the embrasure and knitted my forehead afresh. The right thought was tardy, but it came. I drew off my boot. It was new and it was heavy—badinage had been poured out by my comrades over its heaviness. The strong sewn heel would drive like a calker's mallet.

Then I got to work. The guns were loaded and primed. The locks were covered with leather aprons. I used infinite caution; crawling like a cat, crouching in deepest shadows, stopping, making detours not for mere life's sake, be it understood, but because life was wanted for work yet undone.

The seven guns were out of action, and still the night was dark and the Austrians were ignorant behind the curtain of rain.

\* \* \* And then on to the upper battery.

\* \* \* Two, four, eight guns!

Three I spiked, and the night began to gray. Three more, and men were stirring. I got reckless and sprang openly at another. The air was filled with shouts, and stinking powder smoke, and crashes and the red flash of cannon.

The French were advancing to the storm in the wet, gray dawn. Both flanking batteries, fully manned, had opened upon them; but of the guns which had direct command of the bridge, only one spoke.

Into the roar of artillery, the wind brought yells, and oaths and bubbling shrieks. And then the eagles came through the smoke. There was no stopping that rush.

Somehow I found myself among comrades, fighting with a claw-backed farrier's hammer knowing nothing of order or reason, or how these things came to pass; but heated only by an insane desire to kill, and kill, and kill! And then I grappled with a man who was struggling off with a flag, and wrestled with him in a crimson slough, and choked him down into it, whilst heavily shod feet trampled madly on both of us. And afterward there was more shouting and cheering, and mighty hand clasps between my shoulder blades, and the old major, who gave me cognac out of a silver flask—cognac which seemed to have been sadly overwatered.

And that is all I remembered till I woke up in the afternoon from the sofa in that village inn. Ravellie had sounded. We mustered under arms, and the roll was called. Many did not answer.

And then: "Stand out, Lieut. Ramard!" said the Colonel.

I advanced and saluted.

"You will consider yourself under arrest, sir, for desertion before the enemy. Presently, you will surrender your sword, and report yourself at headquarters. The Colonel turned and exchanged some words with a little, pale man near him, who sat awkwardly on a white stallion. He resumed: "The emperor has considered your case, sir, confirms the arrest, and orders you to be reduced to the ranks." The Colonel paused and continued:

"But as a reward for your gallantry, your commission of captain will be made out with promotion to the first vacant majority, and you will also receive a decoration." And then I was ordered to advance again and the emperor transferred a Cross of the Legion from his own breast to mine.

"Captain of the twenty-second," he said, "thou art my brother."

I never asked for the Colonel's apology.

## BRUTAL PARENTS.

The Phelans Make Their Children's Lives a Round of Misery.

A London special says:—The case of Mrs. Montague, sister-in-law of Lord Mandeville, who was sent to gaol for cruelty to her children, is well remembered in Canada. This was recalled by a brief statement in the London papers a few days ago of the arrest on the same charge of a rich couple residing at Sunnyside, Chester. The examining trial was held at Chester on Saturday, and a correspondent went down to report it. The developments were much more shocking even than those in the Montague case. The defendants are wealthy residents of Chester, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Phelan. The wife is of French descent. They have two boys, aged three years and twenty months respectively. Three months ago they were

TRIED FOR CRUELTY, but the prosecution failed through lack of evidence. They were again arrested this week. Phelan is a stout, gray-haired man of fifty with a military beard. The wife is stout and handsome. Both were elegantly dressed in court. A witness testified that both children were kicked, cuffed and beaten perpetually; that the younger was given a dose of castor oil every day and the elder was dosed every other day; that the younger was strapped to a chair and placed in the lawn in the broiling sun eight hours at a time, then taken into the house and kept strapped to a chair till bedtime, then laid in bed, with its feet tied, flat on its back and a night-gown pinned over it to the bedclothes on either side; that the father often beats the younger child with a belt having a heavy buckle; that the mother broke a wire hairbrush over its head by repeated thumps; that she washed both children by placing them in a bathtub and drenching them with buckets of water; that she once picked up the younger by an arm and leg and threw it ten feet out of the bedroom, the child landing on the bridge of its nose, cutting it deeply; that the child once ran to its mother and touched her dress, whereupon she seized it by the ear and threw it the length of the room, tearing the ear.

## THE MYSTERY

of the case is increased by the fact that the woman gave birth to a fine baby on September 4; that when the mid-wife left on September 18 the baby was in fine health, but its death was announced on September 25. The autopsy shows that death was due to inflammation of the lungs. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children desired to prosecute the parents for murder, believing that death was caused by wilful exposure, but had no evidence. The society's agent declares that the death of both of the remaining children is certain unless means are found to take them from their parents. The case was adjourned for a month.

## "Bobby" and the Nurse.

Mr. James Payne relates the following incident to the credit of the London police, whose general sagacity, he thinks, is underrated. The other day a friend of his was called up by a policeman ringing his front-door bell at 2 a.m. "Do you know where your nurse is?" was his unexpected inquiry. "She is, I suppose, in the nursery." "No, she is not; she went to a dancing room in King Street (close by) at 12 o'clock, and has not yet come back." "But that is impossible," said the householder, "because she has the baby in charge." "She has taken the baby with her." Mr. Payne's friend was incredulous, but on going to the nursery found it empty. Then he went to the dancing room and was admitted by a dreadful-looking old hag, with his baby in her arms. It had been given, it appeared, into this lady's charge while the nurse was dancing. This story may be used as an offset the next time "Bobby" is accused of making "cupboard love" to the cook.

The least movement is of importance to all nature. The entire ocean is affected by a pebble.

## ZULU WAR AGAIN.

The British High Commissioner Fears it will be a Bloody one.

A cable letter says: This morning's despatches from Sir Henry Loch, the British High Commissioner for South Africa, are unanimously accepted by the English press as presaging another war with the Zulus, and the fear is freely expressed that it may be as bloody and as costly as that other war in which the French Prince Imperial was one of the victims. Lobenguela, the king of the Matabele Zulus, however, is not believed to be anything like such a war chief as old Osetwayo, while the Zulus of the Zambesi country are neither so powerful in physique nor indomitable in courage as their fellow-tribesmen along the coast.

Nevertheless, this is all conjecture, for there has never been a serious encounter between Lobenguela and the whites. Lobenguela has an army of from 25,000 to 30,000 men. The utmost armed white force that now could be arrayed against him would probably not muster over 2,500, these troops are well armed, excellent shots and well mounted. On the other hand, Lobenguela certainly has 1,000 Martini rifles because that amount of arms was furnished him by Mr. Cecil Rhodes as part out of the purchase price of the Chartered Company's present possessions.

The situation is peculiar, and in view of the bloody result a brief statement covering it will be of interest to American readers.

## PARTITION OF AFRICA.

When the arbitrary and wholesale partition of Africa was agreed upon between Germany, England, Portugal, Belgium and France, the great tract ruled over by Lobenguela was assigned to England. His capital, Buluwayo, is 1,200 or more miles north of Cape Town.

Matabeleland is about as large as Germany and contains a population of some 200,000. Between it and Cape Colony is Bechuanaland, which is under the protection of the British Government and is garrisoned by some 800 mounted police, paid by the Imperial Government.

Some years ago, Mr. Cecil Rhodes, the Premier of Cape Colony, secured the concession from Lobenguela of a considerable part of his territory and got charters from the Imperial Government. There are believed to be valuable gold mines in this territory, and the Company has sold a considerable part of its shares in the English market. Probably there are 8,000 shareholders in the British dominions alone, and among these are some of the most influential capitalists in London.

The Chartered Company has also a mounted police force, paid by itself, and it guarantees to protect its possessions from invasion or internal disturbances without recourse to the Imperial Government. Under its charter it has the right to resist aggression, but may not itself take aggressive steps without the consent of the Colonial Office through its high Commissioner.

Lobenguela has so far quite rigidly respected the property and other rights of the white residents, but he claims absolute jurisdiction and power over the Mashanas, a mid-mannered tribe of negroes, who seem to be indigenous natives of the Chartered Company's lands. He has made frequent incursions into its possessions, killing without mercy these natives and carrying away their women and cattle. This the Chartered Company has resisted, and there has been one slight affray in which the Matabele were driven off with the loss of some thirty warriors.

## TREAD ON BRITAIN'S TOES.

Had the Matabele contented themselves with attacking the Chartered Company alone its police technically would have been left to themselves to fight it out with the Matabele chief. But fortunately for the Chartered Company the Matabele have now attacked the police of Bechuanaland and therefore the Imperial Government's English troops may, and probably will, be called in to support the Bechuanaland police. In that event Great Britain, and not the Chartered Company, will have to foot the bill. There is only a small garrison force of British soldiers in Cape Colony, and unless the Bechuanaland and the Chartered Company's police together can whip Lobenguela there must be a draft from the home army.

## A LOFTY SUGAR TREE.

A Wonderful Species of Palm That Gives Sweet Sap.

The sugar maple of Canada has a rival. It grows in the Andes of Chili at a height of from 3,000 to 4,500 feet above the sea. It is a curious variety of that most useful, wonderful tree, the palm, whose varieties also give us dates and coconuts, and cocoanuts and fans.

This palm is not slim and graceful like most kinds we see in tropical pictures. It is about 50 feet tall, with a very thick trunk, enlarging in diameter from the ground up to about half its height, and then tapering again to the top, where its long leaves spread out.

These sugar palms produce great quantities of sweet sap, which, when boiled down, makes both molasses and sugar of a peculiar, but delicious flavor.

On one estate the trees grow in such numbers that once it was determined to count them. After counting several hundred thousand, more than half remained uncounted, so the task was given up.

What "larks" it must be for the children when "snapping time" and "sugaring off" come round! But the Chilians do not collect the sap in the way the Canadian farmers collect sap from the maple tree. No; instead of boring small holes in the trunk, the palm is cut down and beheaded of its crown of beautiful leaves, and then the sap begins to flow from the upper end and keeps on flowing for months. Every morning a thin slice is cut off to prevent the wood from hardening and forming a crust through which the sap could not flow.

A good tree will yield nearly a hundred gallons of sap. A queer thing is the fact that the sap will not run if the tree lies with its head downward. It will only run upward.

## Knew From Experience.

Wife: "Oh George, the water pipe is leaking, and the water is spoiling the carpet. Go and get a plumber, quick."

Husband: "That's all right, my dear, let it go; it's cheaper to get a new carpet."

## SIGHTS IN THE BANK OF ENGLAND.

Marvelously Delicate Instruments for Weighing Coin—Printing of Currency.

One of the first objects of interest upon entering the Bank of England building is the bullion office, where all the gold and silver that enters or leaves the bank passes through to be checked. On the right is the gold; on the left the silver. The prominent feature of the room is the "grand balance," or scales, constructed by the Messrs. Napier. This marvelous instrument is a ponderous and peculiar built weighing machine, standing nearly seven feet high and weighing about two tons. The whole is under a huge glass case, access being gained thereto by a sliding panel. The scale is worked by hydraulic power, and is the most sensitive weighing machine in existence. On each side the scales are fitted with weights amounting to 400 ounces. The gold is made up in 400 ounce bars, and the difference of one-thousandth part of an ounce can be detected. By a manipulation of the machine, so tiny a thing as a postage stamp can be weighed, for on the same being placed upon the scale the index will jump a distance of no less than six inches. It is the only balance of its kind in the world, and cost about \$10,000. The silver scale is not so finely balanced, and the two are respectively christened "The Lord Chief Justice" and the "Lord High Chancellor." In another room are several

## MACHINES FOR WEIGHING

sovereigns and half sovereigns. Each machine consists of a complicated system of counter weights, and it is not unlike a sewing machine as to its lower half, the whole being completely enclosed in glass. A long feeder, like a tube cut in half down its length, and made of brass, is set at an angle of forty-five degrees, and is filled with a long roll of sovereigns. These turn as they slip down on the circular movable plate, slightly larger than a sovereign. If the coin is of the right weight it slips down a metal tube into a till below. Should, however, it prove to be lighter than the standard the delicate machine turns to the left and condemns it to the guillotine. These machines weigh coins at the rate of twenty-six per minute, and a day's weighing at the bank amounts to about \$500,000. Another interesting feature is to be found in the vaults containing the defunct paper circulation of the bank. Some idea can be gained of the quantity when we say that they are over 77,000,000 in number and that they fill 1400 boxes, which if placed side by side would reach two and a half miles. If the notes were placed in a pile they would reach a height of five and a half miles; or if joined end to end, would form a ribbon 12,455 miles long. Their superficial extent is little less than Hyde Park; their original value was over £1,750,000,000 and their weight exceeds ninety and a half tons. Amongst them is a note for £1,000,000, also the first bank note ever issued (one for £500), and another for £250 left at the bank for 111 years, whose accumulated interest raised its value to £63,000. The printing of

## THE EXISTING PAPER CURRENCY

is an interesting process. The notes are struck off two at a time on hand-made paper, which, upon being cut, gives three rough edges and one smooth edge to each piece of paper—a distinguished feature of a bank of England note. The paper is manufactured at the bank's own mill, and the production of it is entrusted entirely to the members of one family. The ink used in printing the notes is made from the charred stem of the Rhenish vine, which is believed to produce the richest black of any ink in the world. Each strip of paper has to be strictly accounted for, the whole process being under effective supervision. The bank can boast of possessing the wealthiest room in the world, in the shape of a kind of vault surrounded from floor to ceiling by iron safes containing rows upon rows of gold coin in bags of \$10,000 each and pile upon pile of bank notes. The amount of specie contained is not less than \$30,000,000 sterling. Not the least interesting feature in connection with the bank is the fact that the whole system from beginning to end is under constant police espionage, in addition to military protection, and the electric arrangements are so complete that communication with all parts of the building can be affected at a moment's notice.

## WAR WITH THE MATABELE.

The British Hastening Preparations to Take the Field Against Lo Bengula.

A despatch from London says:—The Marquis of Ripon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, consulted several South African experts yesterday in relation to the Matabele troubles. The celebrated Col. Carrington of Carrington's Horse, who has held many commands in South Africa since 1877, has offered to take command of the Mashona expedition. The Marquis of Ripon has sent a telegram to Sir Henry Loch, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Cape Colony and High Commissioner for South Africa, giving him discretionary power in the matter. Col. Carrington's offer will probably be accepted. The War Office is preparing to send a regiment to Cape Colony to replace the regiment sent up into the country. Theodore Bent, in an interview yesterday expressed the opinion that Lo Bengula would be defeated. "But," he added, "the Government must act with energy. If the Matabele are not subdued before the rainy season the British will have to face a harassing guerrilla warfare and will have to take the field again in the spring."

## Thinking for His Master.

An old gentleman who was very absent-minded, often had tiring for his servant and say: "Thomas I am looking for something, and now I can't remember what it is."

And then Thomas would suggest, "Your purse, sir? or spectacles? or cheque-book?" and so on, until the old gentleman would say at last: "Of course, that's it. Thank you, Thomas."

One night the old gentleman had gone to his room and all were in bed when Thomas was startled by hearing his master's bedroom bell.

He rushed upstairs and threw open the door.

"Thomas," said the old gentleman, "I came up here for something and now I can't remember what it was."

"Wasn't it to go to bed, sir?"

"Of course," said the old gentleman; "so it was. Thank you, Thomas."