

PEN PICTURE OF A BATTLE

DEATH REAPS A HARVEST IN THE DARKNESS OF NIGHT.

Remarkable Description of a Night Attack, by a War Correspondent—It was a Sermon in Silence.

One of the most graphic writers among the many correspondents in South Africa during the war, has been a representative of the London Daily News. For some time his name was withheld, but lately the articles are signed "Al Hales." A recent letter from his hands under date of Springfontein, gives the following description:

It was dark—dark as the inside of a dog, not the heavy, sullen darkness of a brooding storm, but the black blankness of a night that looked as if it never hoped to have a dawning. Our camp lay in a hollow, like the hollow of a woman's hand half closed; there were no hills around worthy of the name, the veldt simply rose gently upward on all sides of us like the bust of a damsel in her teens. Our tents were pitched in the very centre of the hollow. In the sunlight they had shone white against the brown earth and blue sky, but now they were lost to view, merged in the universal brown which had settled on the face of all God's creation. There were no camps fires to enliven the gloom—not one solitary spark of flame broke with red smile the eternal wilderness of shadows. We knew that the enemy was hovering around us; our scouts had ridden near enough to count the formidable array of their grisly guns, and every movement of the foe betokened an attack during the still watches of the night.

THE SOUND OF STEEL ON STEEL.

The daylight had faded into twilight, and twilight had passed with fleet footsteps into night, and then the order had passed from tent to tent in low-toned whispers that we should stand to arms to give the soldiers of the veldt a welcome worthy of the land whose flag we fought under. There was no sound of throbbing drums to quicken the pulse and warm the blood; no harsh, metallic ring of bugles on the air, no cheery word of high command to tell the soldiers that their trusted leader held their destinies in hand—nothing was heard except the low, sharp sound of feet on the African soil, or the whispering voices of men mingling with the whisperings of the wind.

All else was still. The horses, tired with the journey of the day, stood motionless within their lines. Even the transit mules forbore to break the solemn silence with their devilish cries, which are a mixture of a tearless sob and a joyless laugh.

BACKED BY BRITISH HEARTS.

Then we who listened with our hearts in our ears caught a low command, and men moved past us, treading as lightly as armed men can tread, out on to the open veldt to girdle the camp with rows of steel, backed by British hearts. Then once again the stillness, as of death, fell upon us where we lay, face downwards on the soil, waiting we knew not what, it might be wounds, or that strange passage of the immortal soul which men call death. And in the blackness where no eye but the eye of God could reach, we each man stood face to face with his own soul, and few were there who did not wish some pages of his past had never been written in the book of life.

A SERMON IN SILENCE.

It was a sermon in silence, yet so eloquent that every soul was stirred. Some of us thought of home, of wife and child; others let their fancy rove to her whose girlish lips had clung to theirs when the dear home ties were broken by the rude hand of war. Others in that grim period thought fondly of a large and healthy rock to hide behind, and he whose hand traces these lines owns readily that he was one of them. For it had dawned upon him in that evil hour

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that all the fame and glory in the world would not be big enough to plug a tiny hole a Mauser bullet makes.

And so the time passed on until our nerves were strung to that high pitch which in a woman leads to maniac laughter, half-drowned in tears, and foolish wringing of the hands. Then from the outer circle of the belt of blackness came a sound we knew, a sound that for a space caused each heart to stand on its edge, then leap again until the blood flooded the head and filled the eyes with crimson fire. It was the sound of guns—the deep-mouthed dogs of war baying defiance to the couchant lion on the veldt. The silence fled before the sudden sound like some poor shivering soul towards the Day of Judgment.

THE WAIL OF SHELLS.

Then came the shells, shrieking and wailing through the horrible clouds of night like devils driven for ever in hopeless horror from the gates of the eternal city. We know not whence they came nor whither they were going. We only knew, and cared to know, that they were made of iron while we were made of something not much harder than mud, and a voice within us told us that if there were a collision it would not damage the shells. Yet we the gentlemen of the Fourth Estate, non-combatants and peaceful scribes, stuck to our posts like heroes, partly because we had no time to run, and partly because we did not know which way to run if we had time and to spare. Oh! the sighing and the sobbing of those most damnable shells! They seemed to weep as they sped toward us like women who had been widowed through the deeds of evil men. They lifted up their voices in the night and screamed as if I have heard a horse scream in the quicksands. They laughed as a drunkard laughs when delirium has possession of his brain; they howled as wolves howled through the snow-covered forests of Canada; and we tried to scoop holes in the earth to put our heads in.

BURSTING OF SHELLS.

We were not afraid, but no man who knows anything concerning shells wants to stop one with his head—you wouldn't get a medal if you tried to do so. You would not even get a funeral, because there would not be enough of you left to make any sort of decent funeral, and people are too busy war time to go round a battlefield with a broom looking for odds and ends of war correspondents to make a burying. Then the shells burst, and it seemed to me that some wanton devil in Sheol had lifted the lid and dropped something dreadful out of torment. For a moment our ears seemed bursting with sounds like the riving of timbers when some storm-tossed "trader," driven in the teeth of a gale, strikes the rock-ribbed coast-line. Then a glare of yellow light, with a white and crimson heart, then darkness, a shriek, a moan, a gurgling cry, a hurried rush of stretcher-bearers; a pause. The bearers return and lay something down beside me, something that a few minutes before had been a man I hear a sound such as a man makes when trying to drink water in a western desert. I reach out my hand in the blackness, and draw it away again as if I had touched fire.

THE MEMORY OF A PRAYER.

What is it I have touched—something broken, crushed, mangled, warm and wet, wet with the thick, sticky moisture I have felt at times on the haft of my hunting knife? I don't need to be told; I know. That is why I crawl away and bow my head, and try to remember the words of prayer taught me years ago at a mother's knee. Once again the hellish music of the guns commences, and our guns join in the devil's orchestra, and then, rattle, roll and rattle, the rifles on the veldt keep time, and the death angels with all-seeing eyes watch the fateful bullets, and on wings of the wind follow them home to the hearts of Boer and Briton, whilst we with shrivelled souls lie on the grimy earth and pray for the dawning which seems to us to have departed from the world for ever.

But it comes at last, and as it comes slowly, as if reluctant to open its eyes on such a scene, we catch sight of the old flag, the Empire's flag, floating, where our soldiers placed it just before sundown, whilst far off, on the very lips of the veldt, we can just descry the last remnants of the enemy's rear-guard as they move off defeated and undone.

HE EXPLAINS THE PICTURE.

This, said the artist, is a battle scene—time, say the year 2000 A. D. The defending force is on the extreme right of the canvas—

I can't see them, observed his friend. Certainly not; they are strongly entrenched—

Can't see any entrenchment. Of course you can't. The entrenchments are skillfully concealed from view.

I should think you'd show some big guns or something.

Nonsense! The guns are disappearing guns and they have disappeared.

Well, how about the attacking force?

Over here on the left—all under cover. You can't expect them to expose themselves to the spectators any more than the enemy.

Well, your picture is a mere landscape.

Yes; but I take it that's how a battle will look in the year 2000.

SOME NATURAL GIFTS.

To his accomplishments as a soldier Col. Baden-Powell adds a remarkable number of natural gifts. He is a good artist, chiefly in black and white, and has the rare ability of drawing with either hand. He is an excellent amateur actor, an adept stage manager, a keen sportsman, a yachtsman when he has time, and withal an author of several books, which reflect in their vigorous language, the healthy pulsating activity of his mind.

With his bold, adventurous spirit, his strong self-reliance, his alertness and careful watching of the enemy, his cheeriness and never-say-die confidence in victory, his absolute fearlessness and devotion, to his men, his versatility in the arts of war, Colonel Baden-Powell is an example not more to younger officers than to older ones.

WHAT OF THE OTHERS?

Temperance Lecturer—Who was the gentleman just here?

Resident—Ah, that was Dr. Skidds. He is one of our most liberal contributors to the cause.

Temperance Lecturer—He only gave a quarter.

Resident—I know it.

LOGIC.

Mother—Didn't I tell you not to touch the preserves without my permission?

Son—Yes, mother.

Then why didn't you come to me and ask me?

Because I wanted some.

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APPARENTLY LUCID INTERVAL.

This, said the man who was driving the visitors through the grounds of the lunatic asylum, is an inmate who is incurable, but perfectly harmless. He is permitted to wander anywhere he chooses inside the inclosure.

At this the harmless lunatic, sitting on the grass under a tree, with a book in his hand, looked up and saw them.

Three big men, he called out, and one poor horse to pull them! And it's Sunday, too! Gentlemen, I'd rather be your prayer book than your horse. It isn't worked as hard!

And as the party drove on he resumed his book and his ordinary condition of incurability.

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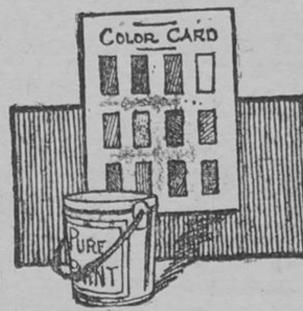
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How so?

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THERE ARE OTHERS.

Weary Watkins—I see by the papers that the Prince of Wales is looked after by the police all the time.

Hungry Higgins—Yes, an' he never works, neither. I guess we ain't the only ones.

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A QUESTION OF HEIGHT.

Then you don't love me any longer? she moaned.

No, he coldly replied, I think you are quite long enough.

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Daughter—Shall we invite Dr. Bigfee to the reception?

Mother—I think we'd better not; he's so absent-minded. He might charge it in the bill.

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