A YANKEE TRICK.

As a soldier under two governments I have fought Sepoys, Boers, Hottentots, Moors, Indians, Malays and civilized white men, but for real, downright treachery and dogged pertinacity I give the medal to the Afghans. Such a thing as surrender is unknown among them. They are ready for a fight at a moment's notice, and they rise about the cold steel and grape and canister longer than any white troops I was ever opposed to. They are hostile to the last drop of blood, and when an enemy fully believes that death on the battlefield means eternal praise for his name and eternal rest for his soul, he becomes doubly dangerous.

In the march to Cabul, which was buried for the British arms only that they might be covered with the degrees of hard diplomacy, we found the Afghans on his own soil and on battlefields of his own selection, and though we could drive him in every instance, each victory cost us more of the best blood in the English army.

One of our outposts, on the column was encamped in the Cocta valley to recruit its strength and bring up supplies, was nine miles to the north, where it covered a strength point. A detachment of 100 men was kept there for fifteen days, being relieved every five days, and I went out with the last detachment. We were all infantry, and we had 100 rounds of ammunition for our muskets.

The post was not in the valley, but up among the hills, where it covered three different passes, and it was a terribly lonesome spot. It was among the ruins of an old temple, and the first companies holding it had used the great blocks of stone to build a fort. This structure was about 100 feet square, crowning a steep hill, and the walls were about twelve feet high. Two sides of it were the walls of the old temple strengthened a little, and while it was a rude affair as a fort it was a stout and safe retreat in case of a few men being hard pressed.

The blunders made in that historic campaign are too numerous to be recorded. The most impartial historians are agreed that incompetency was the leading feature. We had been at the post two days when the captain in command took fifty of the men for what he called a reconnoissance up one of the passes to the north of us, and at the same time sent twenty-five men on another fool's errand to the east. We had been put there simply and solely to prevent the enemy from coming down the pass right at our door and entering the valley. What was beyond us did not matter. There was mutiny among the men as they were marched out, each carrying twenty-five rounds of ammunition, and they called "farewell" to the twenty-one of us left behind. Half an hour after they had passed out of sight we heard sharp firing to the north and east, and not one single man ever returned to us. They were ambushed in the defiles and slaughtered, just as might have been expected.

On this very same day the main army decided to advance. A courier was dispatched to notify us output, but he never reached us, either turning back through fear or having been picked off by some concealed sikhsian. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon the native appeared in large numbers, both above and below us, and then we knew what had happened; indeed, they taunted us with the annihilation of our comrades, and gave us the news that the main column had moved on and deserted us. An old sergeant, who had passed twenty ten years in the service, was in command of us, and as soon as he fully realized the disaster which had come about he called the men together and said:

"We have no choice in this matter. A thousand men could not push their way down into the valley now to try and overtake the column. We must remain and do what we can."

"But what can we do?" asked a corporal.

"Die!" replied the sergeant. "That's what we were sent out here for, anyhow. We are twenty-two to hundreds and thousands. We must kill as many of the devils as we can and then lie down ourselves."

There wasn't a glimmer of hope. We knew the Afghan. In that long and bloody campaign neither side butchered with prisoners. If we captured one, ten, fifty or a hundred it was pull hang! and they were left lying dead as we marched on. If one of our men fell into their hands his head was lopped off or a spear cut through him before he could think twice. They'd have the life of every man, even if they picked up twenty lives for one. Home would follow on after the column, but bodies would be left behind to harass the camrade left along the line of communication.

It would take long to make good use of the few hours left to us. Afghans were elated and excited, and showed no disposition to attack that evening, but we knew the morrow would open a siege which might last until there was no longer a man to defend the fort. As there were five days' rations for 100 men, the twenty-two of us had close upon a month's provisions. As for water, there was a spring building up within the fort, and all the preparations we could make consisted in strengthening the position. During the night we built a fresh parapet, handed in a large supply of firewood, and not one of us got a wink of sleep. Day had scarcely broken when we found ourselves surrounded by at least a thousand natives. The first move on their part was to demand a surrender. This was promptly refused, and musketry fire was then opened on the fort. We made no return, but soaked the portholes as much as possible, cooked breakfast, and most of the men slept until noon.

I told you our fort was on the crest of a steep hill. The earth slanted away from it in all directions for about forty rods before there was any cover for an enemy. So far as musketry was concerned, they might blaze away for a year and not hurt any one, but we knew they would soon bring up field pieces against us. There was only one spot where they could plant the guns to get the proper elevation on us, and that was just opposite the north corner of the fort, on a little plateau forty feet above the traveled trail. During the day we backed this wall with other blocks of stone, and made it as secure as circumstances would permit, and when night came the enemy had fired a few bullets at us without inflicting the most damage.

We knew the lumber to build platforms around the walls, but we had sufficient to build three lookout stations at three corners, and these made look their stations when daylight fell. What we feared was a night attack with scaling ladders, and that was exactly what they were planning for. Instead of taking time to make ladders, however, they made a rush on us about 1 o'clock in the morning with a detail of men, carrying large poles to rest against the walls. The sentinels gave us timely notice, and standing on blocks of stone so as to bring us nearer the enemy as he showed up on top of the wall, we tumbled him off with bullet and bayonet so rapidly that he threw off in great confusion.

That attack was a good thing for us. The enemy gave us credit for three times our actual strength, and therefore decided to move with more caution in the future, and it gave us the idea that our position could be defended against big odds. During the next day the Afghans kept up a slow and irregular fire against us, simply wasting their lead, and all the men, except those on necessary duty, were permitted to sleep. When night came again we discovered the cause of their apathy. We plainly heard them cleaning away the small trees on the plateau and using the spade, and knew that they were going to plant artillery to use against us. The artillery branch of the Ameer's service was very weak, the guns being of light caliber and the ammunition generally poor, but no one could doubt that if a gun or two was got to bear on us and the enemy would keep pegging away, the shot and shell would in time effect a breach.

We had above 6,000 rounds of cartridges, as our slaughtered comrades had left three-quarters of their store behind them, and the sergeant ordered us to man the ten portholes on that side and keep up a steady fire on the plateau. It was firing at random in the darkness, but we doubtless knocked some of them over, and quite certainly delayed the work. When morning came we could see that they had cleared the ground and begun to throw up a small fort to hold the guns. Our fire had driven them off. During the day they made bullet proof screens of boughs and mats and paid us but little attention. When night fell they set up their screens and worked behind them, and though our fire might have killed a score night fire, it did not prevent them from getting two guns in position. They had an earthwork six feet high to protect the gunners, and as the sergeant looked out and saw what had been done he grimly said:

"Well, we shall have a few days less to live."

While we were at breakfast the guns opened fire with solid shot. They were only forty rods away, and yet the gunnery was so poor that the first nine shots were things away. When they began to strike, however, we realized the damage they might inflict. The stones were but little harder than sandstone, and white too heavy to be buried down they flaked and crumbled under the impact. We manned the portholes and fired at the embrasures, and in this way we checked though we could not silence the fire. They got the guns trained on one particular spot, and before night came we knew they would breach us in two days more. As darkness closed in the fire was suspended. They could see the progress they had made, and there was no need of hurry.

We had with us a native born Yankee who had fought under almost every flag and taken the oath of allegiance to four or five governments, and early in the evening we noticed him overhauling the pile of poles we had dragged in for firewood. He at length selected out four or five which had all the spring of American hickory, and then unbolted his idea to the sergeant. It was shrewd enough, but no one but a Yankee would have ever thought of it. We first laid five short poles on the ground and pinned them fast. Then three feet in rear of them we elevated five other short poles almost two feet from the ground on crotches. When the end of a long pole was put over one of these and rested against the one on the ground we had what would have been a spring board, if there had been any board about it. We then nailed ten rowers to the other ends of the poles, made ropes fast to heel them down, and we had a principle made use of in war 1,500 years ago.

Now, then, pull down the end of the pole, place a stone on the run and let go, and the spring sends the stone flying sky high, to come down with a crash on somebody's head. In an hour we had the five ready and playing away, there being plenty of broken stone in the fort for ammunition. There was spring enough to the poles to throw a five pound stone sixty rods, and we heard sounds to prove that we drove the enemy from a dozen different positions during the night.

The guns opened on us early in the morning, and then a funny thing took place. It may seem almost absurd to you, but I'm giving you only what was officially reported when I say that with our five spring guns, as you might call 'em, we actually drove the gunners out of that redoubt and silenced their fire. After a little practice we could get just the right spring to send the stone soaring away like a bomb, to fall upon their uncovered heads. A jagged stone, weighing from one to five pounds, and falling from a height of fifty or sixty feet, is not to be despised. They tried to get a shelter over them, but with our musketry fire at the embrasures, and our rocks dropping from above, they had to desert the redoubt. Wherever we found a body of the enemy sheltered by rock or thicket to fire on us we trained our Yankee inventions on them, and they had to withdraw.

After the failure of the artillery to breach the walls, the Afghans set about to starve us out. The idea was to wear us out as well, and a fire of musketry was maintained day and night. They probably didn't expect to do any great harm by this fire, but they knew it would keep us on the alert and annoy and irritate. It did have that effect, and they harrassed us further by threats of assault. We on our part kept them dodging with our missiles, and I have no doubt we wounded a good many of them in this way. They couldn't make out what sort of guns we had which fired without noise and threw rocks instead of iron or lead, and this puzzle was what prevented them from carrying our walls by assault.

For thirty-six long days and nights we were cooped up in that fort, and suffering for food or drink, but a prey to constant anxiety, and then the second main volcano came up from the east and sent us relief. In the fight in the pass below the fort over 300 natives were killed, and we had done captured alive every man of them, expressed a desire to see our strange guns before being disposed of as prisoners were. They were brought inside and permitted to inspect them, and their curiosity was unbounded. Poor devils! They were hurled against the wall, not twenty feet away, and shot to death even as their faces still expressed wonder and astonishment.—New York Sun.

Rural Argentina.

All the country traversed by the railroad lines is devoted to pastoral and agricultural industries, and the landscape, with the exception of the hilly district of the Sierra de Tandil and the Sierra de la Ventana, is always the same—bare pampas, with stretches of marshes and small lakes abounding in wild fowl. As for the estancias, towns, villages and colonies, when you have seen one you have seen all, and all are equally unpicturesque.

The life, too, has become less fertile in picturesque incidents since the inclosure of the land with wire fences, which makes the management of the herds much simpler, and enables the estancieros to dispense with the guard of mounted gauchos, who are now to be seen only in the very distant interior. At present the majority of the population has no particular character, being composed of Italian and French immigrants, of Basques with red or blue cloth caps, and a few native gauchos with broad belts constellated with silver coins, long ponchos and wide oriental trousers, like petticoats, generally black, but sometimes striped with brilliant colors.

Nowadays, however, the gaucho is losing his individuality, abandoning his peculiar costume, and becoming assimilated in dress and habits with the swarms of miscellaneous Europeans who have peopled the modern Argentine, and made the hundreds of colonies and towns that have sprung into existence within the past ten years. To visit these young centres of so-called civilization is no pleasant task.—Theodore Child in Harper's.

Ways of the Badger.

Of the few animals which now inhabit the woods and the hillsides, perhaps the badger is the least known to the general public. He is nocturnal, in the first place, and his coloring, being in broken tones, does not readily arrest the eye. His head, chin and nose are white, with brownish black bands running on either side from the nose over the eyes and ears. His upper parts are light gray sprinkled with black; the lower parts brownish black; his ears are long and stout, his limbs muscular, his jaw powerful, and his teeth sharp; in fact, he is well set up as far as these formidable weapons are concerned.

The usual length of the animal is a little over three feet, but in his family, as well as in the human race, there are large and small individuals. Take his general appearance as he jogs along, and a small bear is at once suggested to your mind. Many of his ways, too, are bearlike; he will lie up in the winter, and eat vegetable as well as animal food. Some other creatures that are supposed to be strictly carnivorous will eat fruit when they can get it.—Popular Science Monthly.

Too Much Apathy.

Cooldeck's company was once burn storming through Virginia. It was at Petersburg, and the play was "The Chimney Corner." All through the audience sat in distressing silence, neither laughing nor shedding a tear, although "The Chimney Corner" abounds with humor and pathos, and the company then producing it was of great merit for these times. Cooldeck appeared to pay no attention to the apathy of his audience until just at the close of the performance. The concluding lines of the play are somewhat in this effect: "You, John, are happy, and so are you, Ellen; so am I, and so are we all. Let us hope that our friends the public share our happiness."

But to the surprise of everybody Cooldeck fell into a towering passion when he reached these lines, and in thundering tones he said, "You, John, are happy, and so are you, Ellen; so am I, and so are we all except the fools that have been sitting like stoughton bottles in front of the footlights to-night!"—San Francisco Argonaut.

An engineer on a Texas railroad found a big flock of sheep huddled together in a cut to get out of the storm, and in driving through them killed seventy-eight. Pieces of mutton were found on the platforms of the last car.

In London there are not less than forty institutions for the benefit of the blind, some giving employment to over a hundred hands. In Paris there are some eighty establishments, which employ two or three thousand people.

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