

THE COURTING OF DINAH

All day I had followed at the heels of a pursuing army engaged on one of the finest battles that ever came of exercise beheld. Thirty thousand troops had by the wisdom of the government of India been turned loose over a few thousand square miles of country to practise in peace what they would never attempt in war.

Unluckily he did not observe that three miles to his right flank a flying column of Northern horse with a detachment of Ghorkhas and British troops had been pushed round, as fast as the falling light allowed, to cut across the entire rear of the Southern Army, to break, as it were, all the ribs of the fan where they converged by striking at the transport, reserve ammunition, and artillery supplies.

Speaking for the second division of the Southern Army, our first intimation of the attack was at twilight when the artillery were laboring in deep sand, most of the escort were trying to help them out, and the main body of the infantry had gone on. A Noah's Ark of elephants, camels, and the mixed menagerie of an Indian transport-train bubbled and squealed behind the guns, when there appeared from nowhere in particular British infantry to the extent of three companies, who sprang to the heads of the gun-horses and brought all to a stand-still amid oaths and cheers.

"How's that, umpire?" said the major commanding the attack, and with one voice the drivers and limber gunners answered "Hout!" while the colonel of artillery sputtered.

"All your scouts are charging our main body," said the major. "Your flanks are unprotected for two miles. I think we've broken the back of this division. And listen,—there go the Ghorkhas!"

A weak fire broke from the rear-guard more than a mile away, and was answered by cheerful howlings. The Ghorkhas, who should have swung clear of the second division, had dived on it in the dark, but drawing off hastened to reach the next line of attack which lay almost parallel to us five or six miles away.

Our column swayed and surged irresolutely,—three batteries, the divisional ammunition reserve, the baggage, and a section of the hospital and bearer corps. The commandant ruefully promised to report himself "cut up" to the nearest umpire, and commending his cavalry and all other cavalry to the special care of Eblis, toiled on to resume touch with the rest of the division.

"We'll bivouac here to-night," said the major; "I have a notion that the Ghorkhas will get caught. They may want us to reform on. Stand easy till the transport gets away."

A hand caught my best's bridle led him out of the choking dust; a larger hand deftly canted me out of the saddle; and two of the hugest hands in the world received me sliding. Pleasant is the lot of the special correspondent who falls into such hands as those of Privates Mulvaney, Othris, and Leary.

"An' that's all right," said the Irishman calmly. "We thought we'd find you somewhere here by. Is there anything ay yours in the transport? Othris'll fetch ut out."

Othris did 'fetch ut out,' from under the trunk of an elephant, in the shape of a servant and an animal both laden with medical comforts. The little man's eyes sparkled.

"If the brutal an' licentious soldiery at these parts gets sight ay the thrack," said Mulvaney, making practised investigation, "they'll loo ev'rything. They're bein' fed on iron-film's an' dog-biscuit these day, but glory's no compensation for a belly-ache. Praise be we're here to protect you, sorr. Beer, sausage, bread (soft an' that's a cur'osity), soup in a tin, whiskey by the smell ay ut, an' fowls! Mother ay Moses, but ye take the field like a confectioner! 'Tis scandalous."

"Ere's a officer," said Othris significantly. "When the sergeant's done lushtin' the privit may clean the pot."

water-proof sheet spread on the ground. The flying column had taken three days' ration with it, and there be few things nastier than government rations especially when government is experimenting with German toys. Erbswurst, tinned beef of surpassing tinniness compressed vegetables and meat-biscuits may be nourishing, but what Thomas Atkins wants is bulk in his inside. The major, assisted by his brother officers, purchased goats for the camp, and so made the experiment of no effect. Long before the fatigue party sent to collect brushwood had returned, the men were settled down by their values, kettles and pots had appeared from the surrounding country and were dangling over fires as the kid and the compressed vegetable bubbled together; there rose a cheerful clinking of mess-tins; outrageous demands for "a little more stuffin' with that there liver-wing;" and gust on gust of cash as pointed as a bayonet and as delicate as a gun-butt.

"The boys are in a good temper," said the major. "They'll be singing presently. Well, a night like this is enough to make them happy."

Over our heads burned the wonderful Indian stars, which are not all pricked in on one plane but preserving an orderly perspective draw the eye through the velvet darkness of the void up to the barred doors of heaven itself. The earth was a grey shadow more unreal than the sky. We could hear her breathing lightly in the pauses between the howling of the jackals, the movement of the wind in the tamarisks, and the fitful mutter of musketry-fire leagues away to the left. A native woman from some unseen hut began to sing, the mail-train thundered past on its way to Delhi, and a roosting crow cawed drowsily. Then there was a belt-loosening silence about the fires, and the even breathing of the crowded earth took up the story.

The men, full fed, turned to tobacco and song,—their officers with them. Happy is the subaltern who can win the approval of the musical critics in his regiment, and is honored among the more intricate step-dancers. By him, as by him who plays cricket craftily, will Thomas Atkins stand in time of need, when he will let a better officer go on alone. The ruined tombs of forgotten Mussulman saints heard the ballad of Agra Town, "The Buffalo Battery," "Marching to Kabul," "The long Indian Day," "The Place where the Pankah-coolie died," and that crashing chorus which announces Youth's daring spirit, manhood's fire, Firm hand and eagle eye, Mostest man he squire, who would aspire To see the grey boar die.

To-day, of all those jovial thieves who appropriated my commissariat and lay and laughed round that waterproof sheet not one remains. They went to camps that were not of exercise and blades without umpires. Burmah, the Soudan, and the frontier,—fever and fight—took them in their time.

I drifted across to the men's fires in search of Mulvaney whom I found strategically greasing his feet by the blaze. There is nothing particularly lovely in the sight of a private thus engaged after a long day's march, but when you reflect on the exact proportion of the "might, majesty and power" of the British Empire which stands on those feet you take an interest in the proceedings.

"There's a blister, bad luck to ut, on the heel," said Mulvaney. "I can't touch ut. Prick ut out, little man."

Othris produced his housewife, eased the trouble with a needle, stabbed Mulvaney in the calf with the same weapon, and was incontinently kicked into the fire.

"I've bruk the best av my toes over you, ye grinnin' child av disruption," said Mulvaney, sitting cross-legged, and nursing his feet; then seeing me: "Oh, ut's you, sorr! Be welkin, an' take that maraudin' scutt's place. Jock, hold him down on the cinders for a bit."

But Othris escaped and went elsewhere, as I took possession of the hollow he had scraped for himself and lined with his great-coat. Learyod to the other side of the fire grinned affably and in a minute fell fast asleep.

"There's the height ay politeness for you," said Mulvaney, lighting his pipe with a flaming branch. "But Jock's eaten half a box av your sardines at wan gulp, an' I think the tin too. What's the best wid you, sorr, an' how did ut happen to be on the loasin' sid this day when we captured you?"

"The Army of the South is winning all along the line," I said.

"Then that line's the hangman's rope, savin' your presence. You'll learn to-morrow how we retreated to Chraw them on before we made them trouble, an' that's what a woman does. By the same token, we'll be attacked before the dawnin' an' ut would be better not to slip your boots. How do I know that? By the light av pure reason. Here are three companies av us ever so far inside av the enemy's flank an' a crowd av roarin', tarin', squealin' cavalry gone on just to turn companies was collapsible at the last minut'. Then the boys wud clamor to take a part an' off as not old Silver made them pay for the fun. Faith, I've seen Hamlet played wid a new black eye an' the queen as full as a cornucopia. I remember wanst Hogin that 'listened in the Black Tyrone an' was shot in South Africa, he sejuiced old Silver into givin' him Hamlet's part intid av me that had a fine fancy for rhetoric in those days. Av course I wint into the gallery an' began to fill the pit wid other people's hats, an' I passed the time ay day to Hogin, walkin' through Denmark like a hamstrung male wid a pall on his back. 'Hamlet,' sez I, 'there's a hole in your heel. Pull up your shoothicks, Hamlet, sez I. 'Hamlet, Hamlet, for the love av decency drop that skull an' pull up ut the whole hornet's nest av them. Av course the enemy will pursue, by brigades like as not, an' thin we'll have to run out for ut. Mark my words. I am av the opinion av Polonius which he said: 'Don't fight wid ivry scut for the pure joy av fightin', but if you do, knock the nose av him first an' frequent.' We ought to ha' gone on 'helped the Goorkhas."

"But what do you know about Polonius?" I demanded. This was a new

side of Mulvaney's character. "All that Shakespeare ivor wrote an' a dale more that the gallery shouted," said the man of war carefully facing his boots. "Did I not tell you av Silver's theatre in Dublin, whin I was younger than I am now an' a patron av the drama? Ould Silver wud never pay actor man or woman their just dues, an' by consequence his gun shoothicks." The whole house began to tell him that. He stopped his soliloquish mid-between. "My shoothicks may be comin' down or they may not, sez he, screwin' his eye into the gallery, for well he knew who I was. 'But after this performance is over mo an' the Ghost'll knock the head off av you, Terence, wid your ass's bray!' An' that's how I come to know about Hamlet. Eyah! Those days, those days! Did you iver have oned-in' devilmint an' nothin' to pay for it in your life, sorr?"

"Never, without having to pay," I said.

"That's thrue! 'Tis mane whin you consider on ut; but ut's the same wid horse or fut. H headachs if you eat thirik, an' a belly-ache if you eat too much, an' a heart-ache to kape adown. Faith the best: only gets the collic, an' he's the lucky man."

He dropped his head and stared into the fire, fingering his moustache the while. From the far side of the bivouac the voice of Corbet-Nolan, senior subaltern of B Company uplifted itself in an ancient and much appreciated song of sentiment, the men moaning melodiously behind him.

The north wind blew coldly, she dropped from that hour, My own little Kathleen, my sweet little Kathleen, Kathleen, Kathleen O' Moore!

With forty-five O's in the last word; even at that distance you might have ut the soft South Irish accent with a shovel.

"For all we take we must pay, but the price is cruel high," murmured Mulvaney when the chorus had ceased.

"What's the trouble?" I said gently, for I knew he was a man of inextinguishable sorrow.

"Hear now," said he. "Ye know what I am now. I know what I must to be at the beginnin' av my service. I've tould you time an' again, an' what I have an' I, Dinah Shudh has an' what am I? Oh, Mary Mocher av Hiven, an' ould drivin', untrustable baste av a privit that has seen the regiment change out from colonel to drummer-boy, not wanst or twice, but scores av times! Ay, scores! An' me not to near gettin' promotion as in the first! I am livin' on an' kapin' clear av clin, not by my own good conduct, but the kindness av some ort'er-bhooy young enough to be son to me! Da I not know ut! Can I not tell whin I'm passed over at 'rade, tho' I'm rockin' full av liquor an' ready to fall all in wan piece, such as even a suckin' child might see, I take, 'Oo, 'tis only ould Mulvaney!' An' whin I'm left in ord'ly-room through some trick of the tongue an' a ready answer an' the ould man's mercy, is 't smilin' I feel whin I fall away an' go back to Dinah Shudh, thyrin' to carry ut off as a joke! Not I! 'Tis hell to me, dumb bell through ut all; an' next time whin the fit comes I will be as bad again. Good cause the reg'ment has to know me for the best soldier in ut. Better cause have I to know meself for the worst man. I'm only fit to teche the new drafts what I'll never learn myself; an' I'm sure, as tho' I heard ut, that the minut av av these pink-eyed recruits gets away from my 'Mind ye now, an' 'Listen to this, Jim, boy.'—sure I am that the sergent holds me up to him for a warnin'. So I teache, as they say at musketry-instruction, by direct an' ricochet fire Lord be good to me, for I have stud some trouble!"

"Lie down and go to sleep," said I not being able to comfort or advise. "You're the best man in the regiment, and next to Othris, the biggest fool. Lie down and wait till we're attacked. What force will they turn out? Guns, think you?"

"Try that wid your lord's an' ladies, twistin' an' turnin' the talk, tho' you mint ut well. Ye eud say nothin' to help me, an' yet ye never knew what cause I had to be what I am."

[To be Continued.]

NOTICE. Queen Insurance Company CAPITAL \$10,000,000.

Mr. Warren C. Winslow, Barrister, has been appointed agent at Chatham, N. B., for the above named Company and is authorized to accept premiums and

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