WHILE THE RAIN CAME DOWN.

While the rain came down they stayed
In the maples' kindly shade.
Leaning from the ferny shore,
Watched the dappled river-floor,
Where the raindrops gayly played

Every leafy mountain glade
Felt the raindrops' rushing raid;
Lowering storm-clouds hovered o'er
While the rain came down.

Laughing, careless, man and maid,
With the wide umbrella's aid,
Sheltered from the drops that pour,
Love and youth their happy lore,
Naught cared they, though long delayed,
While the rain came down.

—The Boston Transcript.

THOMPSON OF OURS.

THE CONFIDENTIAL REPORT.

Up there between Quetta and Candahar it gets very cold in January—a nasty, biting, blustering cold that nips the liver and shortens the temper; that comes whistling round your mud-hut with a northeast wind from off the snows, and cracks the shrivelled skin off you like old parchment.

The Colonel blew on his fingers, howled for fresh wood to be piled upon the fire, and fell to the contemplation of his thumb, which was frost-bitten.

Before him upon the table lay the loathsome sheets of foolscap known as the "Annual Confidential Reports. Some of these were already filled in, some blank as yet. Each was headed by the name of an officer, and fringed by the impertinent personal riddles set yearly for commandants to answer.

Now, even when forced to look from the point of view of disapproval upon any one of his "Boys," this honorable, kindly English gentleman held the system of confidential disparagement in horror. But really this morning, what with the cold and the maggots in the rice which had put him off his breakfast, and the extraordinary delay in the mail letters, he felt inclined to damn every man-jack of them, himself included. With a roaring blizzard searching your bones, and a suspicion of fever in your blood, and nothing decent to eat, you don't feel like certifying that every soul under your command is remarkable for all qualities that go to make saints upon earth.

Anyhow, the Colonel did not feel like it. He began turning over the sheets with that sickly, languid feeling of revolt with which monotony in its unpleasant forms is apt to inspire one after long years of patient grind. He hated these grim skeleton sketches in black and white. It was always the same thing—the same weary struggle to combine strict truth with fair words; to put "Yes" where it ought to be "No," and "No" where it ought to be "Yes." For were they indeed—all these youths—zealous in well-doing, all talented, all factful, all of equable temper? Had they every one of them been endowed from their cradles with unnatural sagacity and aptitude for command? Were they; in short, ready-made generals from the moment they entered the service? Alas, no! The Colonel's eye wandered to his crippled thumb again and then back to the sheets under his other hand, and presently fell upon a certain name heading one of them. Whereupon he cursed the authorities in his heart for a pack of fools and sighed. It was Thompson—Lieutenant William Thompson—known by the name of "Billy."

The Colonel took it in his hand and sighed again. There was not one, or hardly one, of those cut-and-dried questions that could be answered gracefully, yet conscientiously, as regarded this young man. "I could describe him in three words," groaned the Colonel; "harum-scarum young devil."

Then, for he liked the lad, he began to wonder how on earth he was to fill up that Report. He was a keen soldier himself, and, if truth be told, had a partiality for the type so pithily described in those three words. He would rather have such with him in the field than some others for whom perchance more could be said on paper. Of such he knew was the kingdom of heroes.

The ghosts of many haunting tragedies came crowding into the old soldier's mind as he sat fingering that infernal paper. Did any of these harsh moral photographs of them, with "Yeses" and "Noes" in the most unbecoming places, lie rotting still perhaps in the Adjutant-General's offices?

He got up shivering and kicked the logs into a blaze, then returned with stern determination to the study of the vexing questions in hand. What could he say for Billy Thompson? The lad had the temper of a game bull-terrier, the tact and judgment of a Newfoundland puppy, and about as much ability and acquirement as the average English schoolboy. The thought of Billy Thompson as ornamented with the complete list of "Confidential Report" virtues was nothing less than grotesque.

He glanced down the list. Why, that very morning he had spent a bad half hour in wigging the youngster for shortcomings in almost every item. Late again for parade. Violent with a Sepoy. Hadn't the faintest notion of his drill, and so on.

"What on earth am I to say for you, sir?" he had asked, angrily, tapping the bundle of uncompromising papers, at which Billy glanced with rueful despair in his honest eyes. "You are distinctly careless, wanting in tact, useless at office work—what's the use of complaining of your writers, sir?—inattentive and argumentative. Ride? Of course; and that's about all youre're fit for. That and tennis; but unluckily these won't advance you in your profession, nor gain your respect nor fit you for a command."

Then the Colonel had stolen a look at the frank, bright face, and thought for the millionth time how ridiculous it all was. The lad was honorable and brave. Why not trust to time and training to do the rest? He wanted a tight hand over him of course; but why be forced to send up a nasty, disparaging report of him to headquarters?

Somehow the Colonel could not find it in his heart to do it, and was still worrying over it, when a telegram was brought in addressed "To the Official Commanding." This was followed shortly by a knock at the rough door opening outward on to the cold, wind-swept inclosure, a struggle to shut the same, and a tall, smart-looking officer entered, helmet in hand.

"Oh, that's you Hamerton! I was just going to send for you. There's a row up Khunaz way. James of the police wounded. Ghazis again killed a lot of people. I'm ordered to send an intelligent officer to investigate the thing and report. You'll have a ticklish job but I can rely upon you. I've been thinking whom you had better take. You see, I can spare only one or two, either Bates or Thompson. Bates has the longest head, and yet Thompson—well, if it came to blows, somehow I should prefer Thompson. But as you like."

As he said this the Colonel instinctively glanced at the pile of papers beside him. Bates's name happened to lie uppermost, with its every question snugly and neatly answered. Thompson's had frisked off gayly in the draught of the open door, and was just saved from being chewed under the table by Hamerton's puppy, who had followed his master in.

"It shall be little Billy," Major Hamerton said to himself; and proceeded to the discussion of further details concerning escort and commissariat arrangements for the small expedition.

A little before nightfall they started, a party of fifteen in all: the two English officers—Billy in a state of the wildest joy, and bursting with importance—a duffedar; and twelve Sewars of the Khunaz Horse. A second telegram had been received soon after the first saying that the Ghazis, who were few in number, had taken themselves off; that a native hospital assistant was in charge of James the wounded police officer; that he was to be brought back here, because there was no other European doctor nearer than Quetta.

"Hope we come across the beggars," Billy said, gleefully.

But the Colonel, who had ridden out a little way with the party, and had wished them "good luck," found himself saying something like a prayer in his heart for the safe return of the two men, who were, in his opinion, the very pick of the regiment.

In times of peace these inglorious little brushes with sneaking Ghazis are not among the pleasantest features of service in Afghanistan. To an old soldier they savor too much of that potting from behind hedges with which the Irish peasantry have familiarized us, and to which no military glory is attached. He does not care about sending out good men to furnish targets for skulking devils who have no ground of quarrel, but are merely possessed of a fanatical desire to spill Ferringhee blood. Wherefore the Commanding Officer was ill at ease, and for the next two days there fell a dullness and malaise upon everybody in camp. Like the influenza, it attacked them all, from the Colonel downward, only as Kipling says that is another story.

It was in the spring of 1890 that the influenza came sweeping over Afghanistan, death-laden from European cities. It was when April had cast its brief ethereal spell upon this baren spot, and had woven a fairy carpet of flowers all over the plain, teaching the grim landscape the meaning of a smile. Only for a few beautiful days in all the year is the ground moist and fragrant, and covered with delicate short-lived blossoms. Like lovely ghosts they come and go—the white wild hyacinth bells, the small red tulip, the exquisite purple iris. It was with these sweet visitors that the influenza came, dealing suffering and death among the lonely scattered outposts, where comforts are few and luxuries for the sick unprocurable.

But in this January, the plain was baren of any verdure or vegetation, save for a leafless scrub that grows low upon the earth and gives out a fragrance resembling that of wild thyme. And you could see right away to the horizon in one direction, and as far as a chain of low rocky hills in the other.

Upon the third day after the departure of the expedition the Colonel rode out to reconnoitre along with the doctor, who was always game for a ride. The Commanding Officer was more anxions than he allowed to appear. Somehow a two years' sojourn in those dreary wilds draws men very close together when they are made of good stuff. The party ought to have returned ere this, and the Colonel's heart was disquieted within him. He was scanning the horizon carefully, when suddenly he pulled up and shaded his eyes.

"What's that little cloud of dust, doctor? Is it a 'devil' or a couple of horsemen?"

The doctor, whose eyes were younger, answered that it was no "devil," but horsemen, and that they were making for camp.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Colonel with his field-glasses up, "it is—it's Thompson and a Sowar!"

In another moment they were cutting across to meet them.

Billy was riding a length or two in front, and his jaded horse pulled up of its own accord as he neared the approaching riders. The Sowar saluted, and remained stolidly immovable in the background. Both men and horses were caked with dust, and wore a weary, dejected air.

"We're bringing in James all right, sir," answered Billy in response to the Colonel's questioning gesture. "But we had a fight—Ghazis, this side Khunaz. Hamerton's badly wounded. I've come on for the doctor; his only chance. The black fellow bolted who was looking after James. Can the doctor go at once, sir? This Sowar wants a fresh horse, that's all."

After a word or two with the Commandant, the doctor sped toward camp with the Sowar at his heels. He paused for a moment by the side of Billy, and looked him in the face.

"I shall be under way in ten minutes," he said. "Look here, old fellow, you've had about enough; go home and turn in." He was struck by the look of agony and mental strain on the boy's face.

After that the Colonel got very few words out of him. He saw that the young fellow was done up, and questioned him little. His mouth was parched, so that he could with difficulty articulate. His strong young figure was bowed over the horse's neck. As they were nearing camp the doctor with his escort rode out, and called back some cheering words to him. Five minutes later they were out of sight.

Once within camp limits the Colonel dismounted, and, giving his horse over to a syce, walked beside the young officer's horse with his hand on its neck. Several fellows came up with greetings and congratulations.

"Come straight to mess and have something to drink before you tell us anything," said the Colonel, taking hold of the horse's bridle as he spoke. At the same moment he felt it slacken within his grasp, and looking up he saw that Billy was reeling in his saddle, and that his lips were bloodless.

"I—I think I'm done," he muttered feebly and fell sideways off his horse into the Colonel's arms.

They carried him over to the mess and began to take off his military great-coat. Then something made him open his eyes, and his face took a little brave distorted smile.

"Hold hard! he gasped; "I think I've got a bullet somewhere, and—and—my arm's smashed."

"Why, damn it!" groaned the Colonel, laying him gently down, and looking round upon the circle of horror-striken faces, "he knew this, and he has sent away the doctor!"

It was some weeks before Major Hamerton was able to tell the story of Lieutenant Thompson's heroic conduct—how when he himself was wounded and at the mercy of the murderers, the young officer defended him single-handed; how afterward he pushed on into Khunaz and brought out James of the Police more dead than alive, and how finally, while concealing the fact that he had been shot in the right arm, he rode forty miles in to get the doctor and thus for the second time saved the Major's life.

It was longer still though before Billy was out of danger. The wound had set up inflammation and fever from over-exertion and the long time that had of necessity elapsed before skilled care could be bestowed upon it, and for weeks it was feared it would go hard with Billy.

But in the end the "harum-scarum young devil" got well, and the Colonel had the pleasure of sending up a "Confidental Report" of a very superior kind, together with a brilliant pendant, which has resulted in the bestowal of the much-coveted Victoria Cross upon Lieutenant William Thompson, of Ours.—Vanity Fair.

A DEADLY PILGRIMAGE.

Heartrending Accounts of a Pilgrimage to Mecca.

An Indian journal says that of all the pilgrims leaving Bombay for Mecca and Medina more than a third never return. Out of 64,638 pilgrims who left in the six years ending 1890, 22,449 were missing. In 1888, of 13,970 who started, 7,365 did not return. The vast proportion of those missing owe their deaths to epidemics, starvation and, it is said, murder, between Jeddah and Mecca. "It is said, we know not with what truth, that gangs of budmashes travel regularly by the pilgrim steamers so as to select as their victims such pilgrims as betray the possession of means while on the voyage." On the return voyage the deaths range from 200 to nearly 400 per 1000 per annum. This is due to privation before leaving Jeddah, to overcrowding and sickness on board, to insanitary ships and want of supervision, and to the age and infirmity of many of the pilgrims. The voyage to Jeddah is long, and the allowance of space between decks is 9 superfical feet per adult, or 6 feet by 1½ feet, so that if each pilgrim lay down, and the deck were free from baggage, their would be just room, and no more, for the passengers. The health officer of Bombay, in his report for 1890, describes the voyage of the pilgrim ship Deccan, on which cholera appeared on the eighth day out from Bombay. Disease and starvation decimated the passengers—113 perished in eighty-five days; and of 1246 passengers who set out on the voyage only 1113 returned. "The appearance of the survivors when the vessel arrived at Bombay was heartrending. The physically strong had become feeble and the passengers were, with comparatively few exceptions, emaciated, fever-stricken, scorbutic, and dropsical; and the sufferings they had undergone at Camaran were clearly and unmistakably depicited on their bodies."—From the Toronto Globe.

A Past Captain's Eight.

For a week or two after the boat races the humorous incidents of the occasion came to the surface. Here is one by Capt. Allen, of the Yale' varsity eight of 1890. A former captain of a Yale crew, for fun and to while away the time, started out to find an eight that could be relied upon to look like the genuine thing. There is a cut about a rowing man, and more especially one who has been in 'varsity eights, that cannot be imitated. So that the seeker after brawn and muscle found his work no light task; and when he had succeeded in finding matera the prospective crew was found to be composed of past captains of Yale exclusively. So there could be no mistaking either of them for a captain of a "barge" in the wilds of Coventry or Phenix Centre.

After borrowing clothes, so as to look as much like a Yale crew so as possible, the past-captain crew shot up the river, the stroke calling each man in the boat by the name of the real Yale crew. When near the Harvards' quarter glasses were suddenly found to be levelled at the disturbers of the river's placidity, and in wondering tones those on the bank inquired of each other if that could possibly be the real 'varsity eight. But the game was soon up as the Harvards were on to the herculean form of the coxswain.—New London Day.

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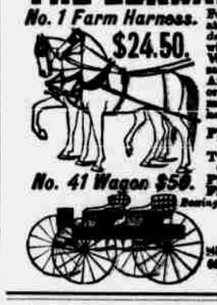

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