

SIR HARRY SMITH.

An Autobiography. Showing Him to Have Seen Warfare in Four Continents.*



AS the fighting legions of Rome held, good fortune is the first qualification of a soldier. To proclaim good fortune, therefore, as one of the most salient features in the life of Sir Harry Smith is not in any way to discount the military ability of the man, the untiring energy which, as it were, seized on success and held it fast; it is simply to show that Sir Harry read his title clear. One does not have to pass three pages of his autobiography, indeed, to find an example of this soldierly luck. At the age of seventeen the youth was gazetted Second Lieutenant in the Ninety-fifth Regiment Riflemen, (as a child he had determined to cast his lot with Temmy Atkins and to be an officer over him.) and, a vacancy of Lieutenant occurring for purchase a few months later, his father advanced the money. This purchase occurred when the Second Battalion of the corps was raising, and the officers had not been appointed; by which good luck twenty-seven steps were obtained by £100! And almost at the close of the second volume there appears this paragraph in a letter addressed to Sir Harry's sister, Alice:

I suppose you started like a half-broken horse when I told you I was driving four-in-hand. You will start again when I say that, after having had the use of it since I have been in India, having driven it from point to point 702 miles of good road and bad, I have sold it for £700. It is gone as a present to Shere Singh, King of the Punjab, at Lahore. There's a bit of luck for you!

In between these two examples, taken at hazard, the air of good fortune blows bravely through the chapters, and the personal adventures go with a swing. As an autobiography, then, Sir Harry's book is a wholesome tonic; he seems to have borne a charmed life in the deadliest of campaigns—he refused even to take the smallpox from which many of his fellows died. As an accountant at first hand of the methods of English warfare on four continents, it has a more serious side, however. The first volume extends to the year 1829. Europe and America (the Spanish Peninsular, France, the Netherlands, Monte Video, Buenos Ayres, Washington, New Orleans) are the scenes of the young officer's active service. The second volume has to do with his vastly more responsible service in Asia and Africa, and carries one to the year 1846. At that date the autobiography was abruptly broken off in the middle of the Battle of Sobraon, and was never finished. The editor, however, has illustrated the remainder of Sir Harry's years—he died in 1860—having drawn from letters, histories, blue books and newspapers.

Since space has its economies of demand, and since the history of English warfare, both in India and in South Africa, has been so conspicuous and so prolific of late, perhaps it might be just as refreshing to hark back to Sir Harry's account in the first volume of his experiences in the United states. Here is an extract taken from the year 1814, after General Ross's troops had landed and "whipped the Yankees at Bladensburg":

We entered Washington for the barbarous purpose of destroying the city. Admiral Cockburn would have burnt the whole, but Ross would only consent to the burning of the public buildings. I had no objection to burn arsenals, dockyards, stores, barracks, but well do I recall that, fresh from the Duke's humane warfare in the South of France, we were horrified at the order to burn the elegant houses of Parliament and the President's house. In the latter, however, we found a supper all ready, which was sufficiently cooked without more fire, and which many of us speedily consumed, and drank some very good wine, also.

Although Sir Harry likened the burning of the Capitol and other public buildings to the work of "red savages of the woods," neither the English Admirals nor the London Government were satisfied that the destruction had not been permitted to progress. The entire annihilation of Washington, it was thought, would have removed the seat of government to New York. It will be remembered that the Northern and Federal States were adverse to the war with England. Later, however, when Harry Smith of the Light Division sits with the Prince Regent in Carlton House, the Prince opens a plan of Washington which Smith has brought home, the public buildings of the city that had been burned being marked in red. He asked the name of each, "and in his heart," comments the young captain, "I fancied I saw he thought it a barbarous act."

In January of the following year Major Smith fought under Sir Edward Pakenham in the battle of New Orleans. After the disastrous defeat of the British Army he was sent to the enemy with a flag of truce and a letter to Gen. Jackson with a request to be allowed to bury the dead and bring in the wounded lying between the respective positions. Just here there are some paragraphs which tend to make one blush a bit, showing that as a parvenu people we had a close relationship to a parvenu individual:

The Americans were not accustomed to the civilities of war like our old associates the French. They fired on me with cannon and musketry, which excited my

choler somewhat, for a round shot tore away the ground under my right foot, [luck again!] which it would have been a bore indeed to have lost under such circumstances. However, they did receive me at last, and the reply from Gen. Jackson was a very courteous one. * * * I was later sent out with a fatigue party with intrenching tools to bury the dead, and some surgeons to examine the wounded. I was received by a rough fellow—a Col. Butler, Jackson's Adjutant General. He had a drawn sword and no scabbard. I soon saw the man I had to deal with. I outrode the surgeons, and apologized for keeping him waiting; so he said, "Why, now, I calculate as your doctors are tired; they have plenty to do to-day." There was an awful spectacle of dead, dying, and wounded around us. "Do?" says I; "why, this is nothing to us Wellington fellows!" The young Major spoke lightly enough; but he assured us that his heart was heavy, and that the effort he made was a violent one. When he asked Col. Butler why he carried a drawn sword he received the comforting reply: "Because I reckon a scabbard of no use so long as one of you Britishers is on our soil."

Sir Harry's comment on the loss of the battle of New Orleans to England is worth while:

Poor, dear Sir Edward Pakenham, a soldier, a hero, a man of ability in every sense of the word, had to contend with all imaginable difficulties, starting with the most unwise and difficult position in which he found the army. By perseverance, determination, and that gallant bearing which so insured confidence, he overcame all but one, which he never anticipated, a check to the advance of British soldiers when they ought to have rushed forward. There was no want of example on the part of officers. The fire, I admit, was the most murderous I ever beheld; still two companies were successful in the assault, and had our heaviest column rushed forward in place of halting to fire under a fire fifty times superior, our national honor would not have been tarnished, and one of the ablest Generals England ever produced would have been saved to his country and his friends.

The chapters dealing with Sir Harry's command at Cape Colony (1847-52) will be found to contain interesting data. The narrative has been constructed by the editor and forms no part of the autobiography, however. The operations of the Kafir war and Sir Harry's recall from the Cape are merely touched upon. The general judgment of the colony upon their Governor is expressed in the words of Chase, who called him "the eagle-eyed and ubiquitous, a better General than statesman."

Four towns in South Africa keep alive the memory of Sir Harry Smith's administration—Whittlesea, named for his birthplace in Cambridgeshire; Aliwal North, named in honor of his connection with the battle of Aliwal and the Suttelj campaign; Harri-smith, over the Orange River, and Ladysmith, in Natal. It may be added that this autobiography now sees the light in print chiefly on account of the reawakening of interest in the writer and his wife during those long weeks of 1900 when the fate of Ladysmith held the entire British race in suspense.

*AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR HARRY SMITH, Baronet of Aliwal on the Suttelj, G. C. B. Edited with the addition of some supplementary chapters, by G. C. Moore Smith, M. A. With portraits and illustrations. In two volumes. Volume I. Pp. 382. Volume II. Pp. 434. Svo. Cloth. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Per volume, \$4.