

THE LAST GREAT INDIAN BATTLE ON THE AMERICAN CONTINENT.

IN WHICH GENERAL CUSTER LOST HIS LIFE AND
SITTING BULL BECAME THE VICTORIOUS CON-
QUEROR.

“ Ye’ve trailed me through the forests,
Ye’ve tracked me o’er the plain,
But with your bristling bayonets,
Ye ne’er shall track again.”

THE reader who has perused the pages of this book, treating of the lives of General Custer and Sitting Bull, must now be pretty well prepared to learn of the final conflict between two of the most noted warriors of modern times—the one the representative of civilization, the other the representative of barbarism.

As has already been narrated, General Terry sought to mass three columns of troops upon the savages, from three different points, for two reasons: First, to prevent the Indians from escaping; and second to force them to surrender or annihilate them. To this end 2,700 men, divided into three columns of 1,300, 400 and 1,000 each, started out in the year 1876, in pursuit of the savages under Sitting Bull, then supposed to be somewhere in the Yellowstone valley, and numbering about 3,000 warriors. These columns of troops were to gradually encircle the Indians, and to pounce down upon them with such irresistible force as to completely overpower them, General Gibbons coming in from one

direction, General Terry from another, and Custer from another. The latter officer was to be at the head of his favorite regiment, the seventh cavalry, consisting of 28 officers and 747 men, then pronounced in splendid condition; and when, therefore, Major Reno came in from his scouting expedition, reporting a heavy Indian trail, ten days old, General Terry decided upon his mode of attack and the disposition of his forces. Custer was to ascend the valley of the Rosebud, turn toward the Little Big Horn river, keeping well to the south, while Gibbons was to cross the Yellowstone at the mouth of Big Horn river, and march up the Big Horn to its junction with the Little Big Horn, to co-operate with Custer.

The general's Indian fighting qualities were so well known to Terry, that in giving his orders to him, he distinctly stated—"that he would not impose upon him precise orders which might hamper his actions when nearly in contact with the enemy;" and hence I think herein was the great mistake of the expedition, for, had Terry given *positive* instructions to Custer, first to hunt out the Indians, then to inform him where they were, then to come to a halt and await support, there is no doubt but Custer would be alive to-day, and Sitting Bull would be dwelling in his happy hunting ground, beyond the reach of the white man's bullets. But these orders were not given, for reasons best known to General Terry, and Custer, acting out the impetuous impulsiveness of his nature, after discovering the Indians, ordered Major Reno, with three companies, to cross the Rosebud river on the left, attack the enemy in the rear, while he, with five companies, numbering upwards of three hundred men, would move forward on the right and make an attack in front. Two other

companies were ordered to make a detour south of Reno. In the meantime General Terry, with his cavalry and the battery, had pushed on with the hope of opening up communication with Custer, as Terry no doubt fully believed that Custer would refrain from making an attack on the Indians village until he (Terry) was within supporting distance, and he was hurrying forward to effect this result, when three Crow Indians, who started out with Custer's regiment, came into camp and reported that a battle had been fought and the Indians were killing white men in great numbers.

It seems that Major Reno entered the woods on the left of the Rosebud and made the attack as ordered, but he was overpowered by great numbers of Indians, and finally retreated across the river under a galling fire, and gained a rise of ground, where he rapidly threw up retrenchments and put himself on the defensive. The other two companies from the south soon joined him, and here a desperate effort was made by the enemy to dislodge him, but without success. While this was going on, General Custer had passed down the north banks of the river, and had made two unsuccessful attempts to cross it, but was repulsed by the Indians, who outnumbered him some fifteen to one, and after stubbornly contesting this point, he fell back to a small eminence, and there the battle raged most terrifically. Soldiers and horses fell from the unerring bullets of the Indians like wheat under the stroke of the scythe. The brave men, led by their brave but deceived leader, continued to close up the gaps made by the enemy, until not a living soul was left upon the field! All was still! All was gone! Three hundred men! hundreds of horses! the most gallant cavalry

officer America ever produced, had passed out of life, out of activity, out of reality, down into the shadow of death!

Sitting Bull and his chiefs, satiated with the copious blood of the pale faces, and fearful of the advancing troops, called off their men from any further attack on Reno; gathered up their scattered village and moved outside of the limits of harm, while Terry, coming up with his reserved forces, found only a besieged camp (Reno's), a silent battle field, mutilated bodies, an Indian victory, a triumphant chief moving securely outside of the range of civilized guns, and gloating over the ruin he had made!

Curley, a Crow Indian, who was with Custer, two other scouts, and "Comanche," one of the officers' horses, were the only living beings and creatures that escaped from that doomed battle field. Curley gives his story as follows:

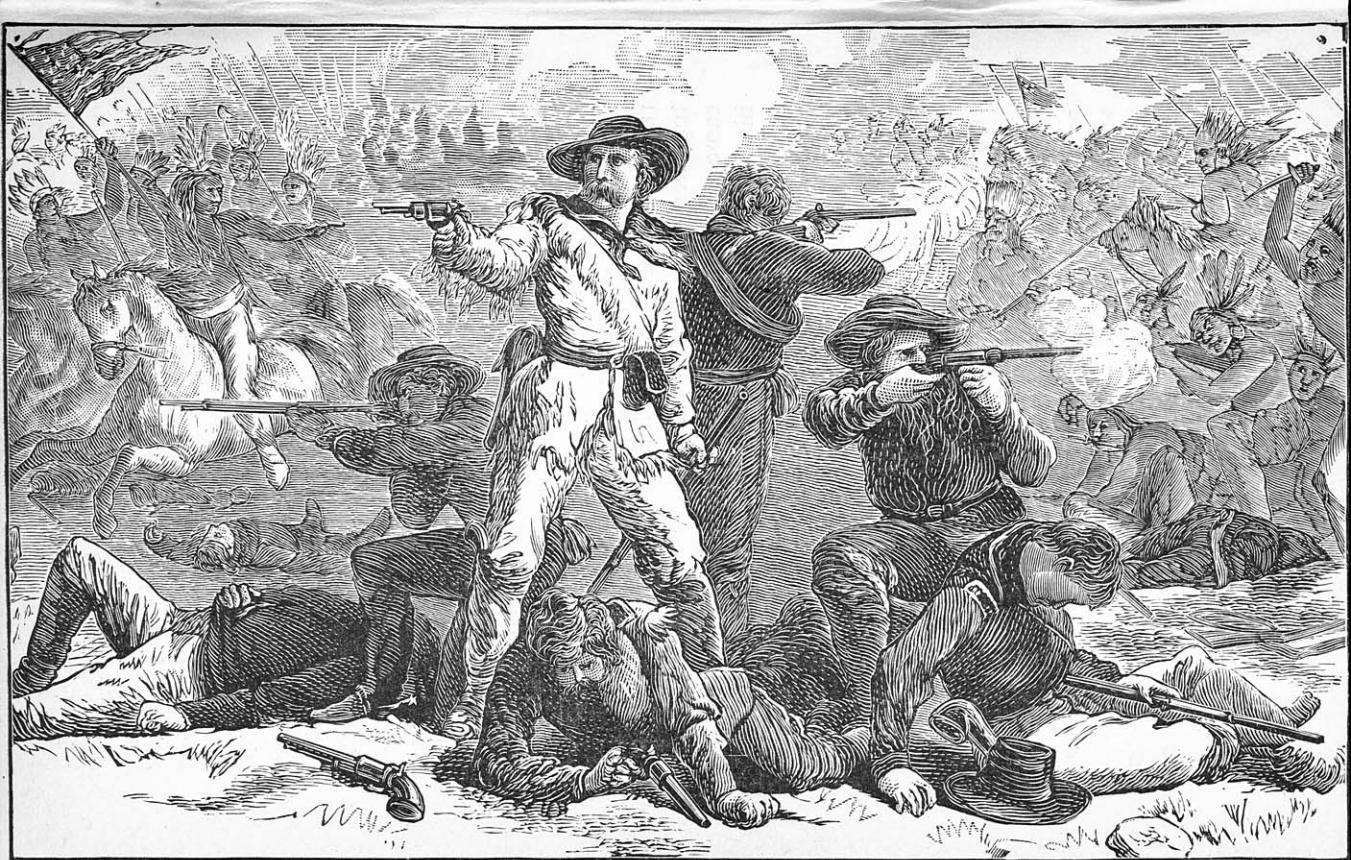
"Custer kept down the river on the north bank four miles, after Reno had crossed to the south side above. Thought Reno would drive down the valley to attack the village at the upper end, while he (Custer), would go in at the lower end. Custer had to advance further down the river and further away from Reno than he wished, on account of the steep bank along the north side; but at last he found a ford and dashed for it. The Indians met him and poured in a heavy fire from across the narrow river. Custer dismounted to fight on foot, but could not get his skirmishers over the stream. Meantime hundreds of Indians on foot and on ponies, rushed over the river, which was only about three feet deep, and filled the ravine on each side of Custer's men. Custer then fell back to some high ground behind him

and seized the ravines in his immediate vicinity. The Indians completely surrounded Custer, and poured in a terrible fire on all sides. They charged Custer on foot in vast numbers, but were again and again driven back.

“The fight began about two o’clock and lasted almost until the sun went down over the hills. The men fought desperately, and after the ammunition in their belts was exhausted, went to their saddle-bags, got more, and continued the fight. Custer lived until nearly all his men had been killed or wounded, and went about encouraging his soldiers to fight on. He got a shot in the left side and sat down with his pistol in his hand. Another shot struck Custer in the breast, and he fell over. The last officer killed was a man who rode a white horse.

“When he saw Custer hopelessly surrounded, he watched his opportunity, got a Sioux blanket, put it on and worked up a ravine, and when the Sioux charged, he got among them and they did not know him from one of their own men. There were some mounted Sioux, and seeing one fall, he ran to him, mounted his pony and galloped down as if going toward the white men, but went up a ravine and got away. As he rode off he saw when nearly a mile from the battle field, a dozen or more soldiers in a ravine fighting with Sioux all around them. He thinks all were killed, as they were outnumbered five to one and apparently dismounted. The battle was desperate in the extreme, and more Indians than white men must have been killed.”

Kill Eagle, who was in Sitting Bull’s camp at the time of the battle, describes the village as six miles long and one wide. He then speaks of Custer’s ap-



CUSTER'S LAST RALLY.

proach and fight, with its tragic details as an unwilling spectator rather than as a participant, who, during its progress, remained quietly in his lodge in the center of the Indian village. The fight with Reno commenced about noon, the Indians all rushing to oppose his advance until the approach of Custer toward the end of the village was announced, when the wildest confusion prevailed throughout the camp. Lodges were struck and preparation made for instant fight. Vast numbers of Indians left Reno's front and hastened to the assistance of their red brethren engaged with Custer, who was steadily forced back and surrounded until all were swept from the field by the repeated charges of the Indians.

He describes the firing at this point as simply terrific, and illustrated its force by clapping his hands together with great rapidity and regularity. Then came a lull in the fearful storm of iron and hail, and his hands were still again. The storm beat fast and furious, as the thought of some loved one nerved the arm of each contending trooper. Then the movement of his hands slackened and gradually grew more feeble. A few scattering shakes, like the rain upon a window-pane, and then the movement ceased, as the last of Custer's band of heroes went down with the setting sun.

It was dark when the successful Indians returned to camp, littered with their dead and wounded. "We have killed them all," they said; "put up your lodges where they are." They had just begun to fix their lodges that evening, when a report came that troops were coming from toward the mouth of the creek. When this report came, after dark, the lodges were all

taken down, and the Indians started up the creek. It was not to the Indians a bloodless victory. Fourteen had fallen in front of Reno, thirty-nine went down with Custer, and fourteen were dead in camp. Over one hundred were wounded. There were no white men among the Indian forces, in the fight, or on the field. The bugle calls were sounded by an Indian. No prisoners were taken. The troops were all killed on the east side; none crossed the river.

Little Buck Elk was present at the fight and said: "The Indians were as thick as bees and there were so many of them that they could not all take part. The soldiers were all brave men and fought well; some of them, when they found themselves surrounded and overpowered, broke through the lines and tried to make their escape, but were pursued and killed miles from the battle-field. The Indians captured six battle flags. No soldiers were taken alive, but after the fight the women went among the dead bodies and robbed and mutilated them."

It is a mistaken idea that Indians do not understand the paraphernalia of war. They have out their spies, their scouts and their skirmishers, and are generally well posted on the movements of their enemy. For instance, a spy overlooking the rendezvous of soldiers, conveys the information by running to another Indian stationed a certain distance from him, of how many troops there are, etc., and he, in turn, runs to another, and so on, until the news reaches the camp of the chief, though it may be many miles away. Then they form coalition with the other bands, as in the case of the Custer fight, and on the battle field they have signs by which they move their men, one of which is the "Hi-

yi-yis" of their chiefs which means "follow us." Again they convey significant signs great distances, both by smoke and by the reflection of the looking glass, or by some bright metal.

The great major-general of the Sioux army, Sitting Bull, was well informed as to the action of Terry's soldiers, long before they left for an attack, and as he had been drawing from the agency Indians, not only men but means to prosecute the war, and had made alliances with other bands, he was well prepared to meet the issue; and Custer, instead of confronting 2,000 warriors, as he expected to, fell into the hands of 5,000! If General Terry had not come up just as he did, Reno and his men would have shared the same fate as Custer, because the Indians would have pitched their tepees near the battle-field and in the morning would have renewed the attack and with entire success. Hearing that reinforcements were coming to the whites, they moved away and finally crossed into the British possessions.

Taken all together history will point to this as the greatest Indian battle on American soil, and especially so, as involving the gallant fighting characteristics of two of the greatest warriors of the nineteenth century, the one nobly and heroically meeting his death upon the battle-field, against superior numbers, the other now a captive in the hands of the whites, against whom he had so long and so successfully fought.

Now, after all this, if Major-General Sitting Bull desires civilization for his people—desires education for his children—desires sincerely to adopt the habits of the whites, let us give him the helping hand. He was great in his last battle, and he may yet prove greater still in elevating his own race,