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BLUE LIGHTS: HOT WORK IN THE SOUDAN

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Содержание

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Chapter One. Hot Work in the Soudan. The False Step

There is a dividing ridge in the great northern wilderness of America, whereon lies a lakelet of not more than twenty yards in diameter. It is of crystal clearness and profound depth, and on the still evenings of the Indian summer its surface forms a perfect mirror, which might serve as a toilet-glass for a Redskin princess.

We have stood by the side of that lakelet and failed to note the slightest symptom of motion in it, yet somewhere in its centre there was going on a constant and mysterious division of watery particles, and those of them which glided imperceptibly to the right flowed southward to the Atlantic, while those that trembled to the left found a resting-place by the frozen shores of Hudson's Bay.

As it is with the flow and final exit of those waters, so is it, sometimes, if not always, with the spirit and destiny of man.

Miles Milton, our hero, at the age of nineteen, stood at the dividing ridge of his life. If the oscillating spirit, trembling between right and wrong, had decided to lean to the right, what might have been his fate no one can tell. He paused on the balance a short time, then he leaned over to the left, and what his fate was it is the purpose of this volume to disclose. At the outset, we may remark that it was not unmixed good. Neither was it unmitigated evil.

Miles had a strong body, a strong will, and a somewhat passionate temper: a compound which is closely allied to dynamite!

His father, unfortunately, was composed of much the same materials. The consequences were sometimes explosive. It might have profited the son much had he studied the Scripture lesson, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Not less might it have benefited the father to have pondered the words, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath."

Young Milton had set his heart on going into the army. Old Milton had resolved to thwart the desire of his son. The mother Milton, a meek and loving soul, experienced some hard times between the two. Both loved *her* intensely, and each loved himself, not better perhaps, but too much!

It is a sad task to have to recount the disputes between a father and a son. We shrink from it and turn away. Suffice it to say that one day Miles and his father had a Vesuvian meeting on the subject of the army. The son became petulant and unreasonable;

the father fierce and tyrannical. The end was that they parted in anger.

"Go, sir," cried the father sternly; "when you are in a better frame of mind you may return."

"Yes, father, I will go," cried the son, starting up, "and I will *never* return."

Poor youth! He was both right and wrong in this prophetic speech. He did return home, but he did not return to his father.

With fevered pulse and throbbing heart he rushed into a plantation that lay at the back of his father's house. He had no definite intention save to relieve his feelings by violent action. Running at full speed, he came suddenly to a disused quarry that was full of water. It had long been a familiar haunt as a bathing-pool. Many a time in years past had he leaped off its precipitous margin into the deep water, and wantoned there in all the abandonment of exuberant youth. The leap was about thirty feet, the depth of water probably greater. Constant practice had rendered Miles so expert at diving and swimming that he had come to feel as much at home in the water as a New-Zealander.

Casting off his garments, he took the accustomed plunge by way of cooling his heart and brain. He came up from the depths refreshed, but not restored to equanimity. While dressing, the sense of injustice returned as strongly as before, and, with it, the hot indignation, so that on afterwards reaching the highway he paused only for a few moments. This was the critical point. Slowly but decidedly he leaned to the left. He turned his back on

his father's house, and caused the stones to spurt from under his heels as he walked rapidly away.

If Miles Milton had thought of his mother at that time he might have escaped many a day of bitter repentance, for she was as gentle as her husband was harsh; but the angry youth either forgot her at the moment, or, more probably, thrust the thought of her away.

Poor mother! if she had only known what a conflict between good and evil was going on in the breast of her boy, how she would have agonised in prayer for him! But she did not know. There was, however, One who did know, who loved him better even than his mother, and who watched and guarded him throughout all his chequered career.

It is not improbable that in spite of his resolves Miles would have relented before night and returned home had not a very singular incident intervened and closed the door behind him.

That day a notorious swindler had been tracked by a red-haired detective to the manufacturing city to which Miles first directed his steps. The bills describing the swindler set forth that he was quite young, tall, handsome, broad-shouldered, with black curling hair, and a budding moustache; that he was dressed in grey tweeds, and had a prepossessing manner. Now this chanced to be in some respects an exact description of Miles Milton!

The budding moustache, to be sure, was barely discernible, still it was sufficiently so for a detective to found on. His dress, too, was brown tweed, not grey; but of course dresses can be

changed; and as to his manner, there could not be two opinions about that.

Now it chanced to be past one o'clock when Miles entered the town and felt himself impelled by familiar sensations to pause in front of an eating-house. It was a poor eating-house in a low district, but Miles was not particular; still further, it was a temperance coffee-house, but Miles cared nothing for strong drink. Strong health and spirits had served his purpose admirably up to that date.

Inside the eating-house there sat several men of the artisan class, and a few of the nondescript variety. Among the latter was the red-haired detective. He was engaged with a solid beef-steak.

"Oho!" escaped softly from his lips, when his sharp eyes caught sight of our hero. So softly did he utter the exclamation that it might have been a mere remark of appreciation addressed to the steak, from which he did not again raise his eyes for a considerable time.

The place was very full of people—so full that there seemed scarcely room for another guest; but by some almost imperceptible motion the red-haired man made a little space close to himself. The man next to him, with a hook-nose, widened the space by similar action, and Miles, perceiving that there was room, sat down.

"Bread and cheese," he said to the waiter.

"Bread an' cheese, sir? Yessir."

Miles was soon actively engaged in mechanically feeding,

while his mind was busy as to future plans.

Presently he became aware that the men on either side of him were scanning his features and person with peculiar attention.

"Coldish weather," remarked the red-haired man, looking at him in a friendly way.

"It is," replied Miles, civilly enough.

"Rather cold for bathin', ain't it, sir?" continued the detective carelessly, picking his teeth with a quill.

"How did you know that I've been bathing?" demanded Miles in surprise.

"I didn't know it."

"How did you guess it then?"

"Vell, it ain't difficult to guess that a young feller 'as bin 'avin' a swim w'en you see the 'air of 'is 'ead hall vet, an' 'is pocket-'ankercher lookin' as if it 'ad done dooty for a towel, not to mention 'is veskit 'avin' bin putt on in a 'urry, so as the buttons ain't got into the right 'oles, you see!"

Miles laughed, and resumed his bread and cheese.

"You are observant, I perceive," he said.

"Not wery partiklarly so," returned Redhair; "but I do obsarve that your boots tell of country roads. Was it a long way hout of town as you was bathin' this forenoon, now?"

There was a free and easy familiarity about the man's tone which Miles resented, but, not wishing to run the risk of a disagreement in such company, he answered quietly— "Yes, a considerable distance; it was in an old quarry where I often bathe,

close to my father's house."

"Ha! jest so, about 'alf-way to the willage of Ramplin', w'ere you slep' last night, if report speaks true, an' w'ere you left the *grey tweeds*, unless, p'r'aps, you sunk 'em in the old quarry."

"Why, what on earth do you mean?" asked Miles, with a look of such genuine surprise that Redhair was puzzled, and the man with the hooked nose, who had been listening attentively, looked slightly confused.

"Read that, sir," said the detective, extracting a newspaper cutting from his pocket and laying it on the table before Miles.

While he read, the two men watched him with interest, so did some of those who sat near, for they began to perceive that something was "in the wind."

The tell-tale blood sprang to the youth's brow as he read and perceived the meaning of the man's remarks. At this Redhair and Hook-nose nodded to each other significantly.

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Miles, in a tone of grand indignation which confirmed the men in their suspicion, "that you think this description applies to *me*?"

"I wouldn't insinivate too much, sir, though I have got my suspicions," said Redhair blandly; "but of course that's easy settled, for if your father's 'ouse is anyw'ere hereabouts, your father won't object to identify his son."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Miles, rising angrily at this interruption to his plans. The two men rose promptly at the same moment. "Of course my father will prove that you have made a

mistake, but—"

He hesitated in some confusion, for the idea of re-appearing before his father so soon, and in such company, after so stoutly asserting that he would *never* more return, was humiliating. The detective observed the hesitation and became jocose.

"If you'd rather not trouble your parent," said Redhair, "you've got no call to do it. The station ain't far off, and the sooner we get there the better for all parties."

A slight clink of metal at this point made Miles aware of the fact that Hook-nose was drawing a pair of handcuffs from one of his pockets.

The full significance of his position suddenly burst upon him. The thought of being led home a prisoner, or conveyed to the police-station handcuffed, maddened him; and the idea of being thus unjustly checked at the very outset of his independent career made him furious. For a few moments he stood so perfectly still and quiet that the detectives were thrown slightly off their guard. Then there was an explosion of some sort within the breast of Miles Milton. It expended itself in a sudden impulse, which sent Redhead flat on the table among the crockery, and drove Hook-nose into the fireplace among the fire-irons. A fat little man chanced to be standing in the door-way. The same impulse, modified, shot that little man into the street like a cork out of a bottle, and next moment Miles was flying along the pavement at racing speed, horrified at what he had done, but utterly reckless as to what might follow!

Hearing the shouts of pursuers behind him, and being incommoded by passers-by in the crowded thoroughfare, Miles turned sharply into a by-street, and would have easily made his escape—being uncommonly swift of foot—had he not been observed by an active little man of supple frame and presumptuous tendencies. Unlike the mass of mankind around him—who stared and wondered—the active little man took in the situation at a glance, joined in the pursuit, kept well up, thus forming a sort of connecting-link between the fugitive and pursuers, and even took upon himself to shout "Stop thief!" as he ran. Miles endeavoured to throw him off by putting on, as schoolboys have it, "a spurt." But the active little man also spurted and did not fall far behind. Then Miles tried a second double, and got into a narrow street, which a single glance showed him was a blind alley! Disappointment and anger hereupon took possession of him, and he turned at bay with the tiger-like resolve to run a-muck!

Fortunately for himself he observed a pot of whitewash standing near a half-whitened wall, with a dirty canvas frock and a soiled billycock lying beside it. The owner of the property had left it inopportunely, for, quick as thought, Miles wriggled into the frock, flung on the billycock, seized the pot, and walked in a leisurely way to the head of the alley. He reached it just as the active little man turned into it, at the rate of ten miles an hour. A yell of "Stop thief!" issued from the man's presumptuous lips at the moment.

His injunction was obeyed to the letter, for the would-be thief of an honest man's character on insufficient evidence was stopped by Miles's bulky person so violently that the whitewash was scattered all about, and part of it went into the active man's eyes.

To squash the large brush into the little man's face, and thus effectually complete what his own recklessness had begun, was the work of an instant. As he did it, Miles assumed the rôle of the injured party, suiting his language to his condition.

"What d'ee mean by that, you houtrageous willain?" he cried savagely, to the great amusement of the bystanders, who instantly formed a crowd round them. "Look wot a mess you've bin an' made o' my clean frock! Don't you see?"

The poor little man could not see. He could only cough and gasp and wipe his face with his coat-tails.

"I'd give you in charge o' the pleece, I would, if it wasn't that you've pretty well punished yourself a'ready," continued Miles. "Take 'im to a pump some o' you, 'cause I ain't got time. Good-day, spider-legs, an' don't go for to run into a hartist again, with a paint-pot in 'is 'and."

So saying, Miles pushed through the laughing crowd and sauntered away. He turned into the first street he came to, and then went forward as fast as was consistent with the idea of an artisan in a hurry. Being utterly ignorant of the particular locality into which he had penetrated—though well enough acquainted with the main thoroughfares of the city—his only care was to put

as many intricate streets and lanes as possible between himself and the detectives. This was soon done, and thereafter, turning into a darkish passage, he got rid of the paint-pot and borrowed costume.

Fortunately he had thrust his own soft helmet-shaped cap into his breast at the time he put on the billycock, and was thus enabled to issue from the dark passage very much like his former self, with the exception of a few spots of whitewash, which were soon removed.

Feeling now pretty safe, our hero walked a considerable distance through the unknown parts of the city before he ventured to inquire the way to thoroughfares with which he was familiar. Once in these, he proceeded at a smart pace to one of the railway stations, intending to leave town, though as yet he had formed no definite plan of action. In truth, his mind was much troubled and confused by the action of his conscience, for when the thought of leaving home and entering the army as a private soldier, against his father's wishes, crossed his mind, Conscience faithfully shook his head; and when softer feelings prevailed, and the question arose irresistibly, "Shall I return home?" the same faithful friend whispered, "Yes."

In a state of indecision, Miles found himself borne along by a human stream to the booking-office. Immediately in front of him were two soldiers,—one a sergeant, and the other a private of the line.

Both were tall handsome men, straight as arrows, and with

that air of self-sufficient power which is as far removed from arrogance as it is from cowardice, and is by no means an uncommon feature in men of the British army.

Miles felt a strong, unaccountable attraction towards the young private. He had not yet heard his voice nor encountered his eye; indeed, being behind him, he had only seen his side-face, and as the expression on it was that of stern gravity, the attractive power could not have lain in that. It might have lain in the youthful look of the lad, for albeit a goodly man in person, he was almost a boy in countenance, being apparently not yet twenty years of age.

Miles was at last roused to the necessity for prompt and decisive action by the voice of the sergeant saying in tones of authority—

"Portsmouth—third—two—single."

"That's the way to go it, lobster!" remarked a shabby man, next in the line behind Miles.

The grave sergeant paid no more regard to this remark than if it had been the squeak of a mouse.

"Now, then, sir, your carridge stops the way. 'Eave a'ead. Shall I 'elp you?" said the shabby man.

Thus admonished, Miles, scarce knowing what he said, repeated the sergeant's words—

"Portsmouth—third—two—single."

"Vy, you ain't agoin' to pay for *me*, are you?" exclaimed the shabby man in smiling surprise.

"Oh! beg pardon. I mean *one*," said Miles to the clerk, quickly.

The clerk retracted the second ticket with stolid indifference, and Miles, hastening to the platform, sat down on a seat, deeply and uncomfortably impressed with the fact that he possessed little or no money! This unsatisfactory state of things had suddenly burst upon him while in the act of paying for his ticket. He now made a careful examination of his purse, and found its contents to be exactly seven shillings and sixpence, besides a few coppers in his trousers-pocket.

Again indecision assailed him. Should he return? It was not too late. "Yes," said Conscience, with emphasis. "No," said Shame. False pride echoed the word, and Self-will re-echoed it. Still our hero hesitated, and there is no saying what the upshot might have been if the bell had not rung at the moment, and, "Now, then, take your seats!" put an end to the controversy.

Another minute, and Miles Milton was seated opposite the two soldiers, rushing towards our great southern seaport at the rate of forty miles an hour.

Chapter Two.
Shows some of the Consequences of the False Step, and introduces the Reader to Peculiar Company

Our hero soon discovered that the sergeant was an old campaigner, having been out in Egypt at the beginning of the war, and fought at the famous battle of Tel-el-Kebir.

In his grave and undemonstrative way and quiet voice, this man related some of his experiences, so as not only to gain the attention of his companion in arms, but to fascinate all who chanced to be within earshot of him—not the least interested among whom, of course, was our friend Miles.

As the sergeant continued to expatiate on those incidents of the war which had come under his own observation, three points impressed themselves on our hero: first, that the sergeant was evidently a man of serious, if not religious, spirit; second, that while he gave all due credit to his comrades for their bravery in action, he dwelt chiefly on those incidents which brought out the higher qualities of the men, such as uncomplaining endurance, forbearance, etcetera, and he never boasted of having given "a thorough licking" to the Egyptians, nor spoke disparagingly of the native troops; lastly, that he seemed to lay himself out with

a special view to the unflagging entertainment of his young comrade.

The reason for this last purpose he learned during a short halt at one of the stations. Seeing the sergeant standing alone there, Miles, after accosting him with the inevitable references to the state of the weather, remarked that his comrade seemed to be almost too young for the rough work of soldiering.

"Yes, he is young enough, but older than he looks," answered the sergeant. "Poor lad! I'm sorry for him."

"Indeed! He does not seem to me a fit subject for pity. Young, strong, handsome, intelligent, he seems pretty well furnished to begin the battle of life—especially in the army."

"'Things are not what they seem,'" returned the soldier, regarding his young questioner with something between a compassionate and an amused look. "'All is not gold that glitters.' Soldiering is not made up of brass bands, swords, and red coats!"

"Having read a good deal of history I am well aware of that," retorted Miles, who was somewhat offended by the implication contained in the sergeant's remarks.

"Well, then, you see," continued the sergeant, "all the advantages that you have mentioned, and which my comrade certainly possesses, weigh nothing with him at all just now, because this sudden call to the wars separates him from his poor young wife."

"Wife!" exclaimed Miles; "why, he seems to me little more than a boy—except in size, and perhaps in gravity."

"He is over twenty, and, as to gravity—well, most young fellows would be grave enough if they had to leave a pretty young wife after six months of wedded life. You see, he married without leave, and so, even if it were a time of peace, his wife would not be recognised by the service. In wartime he must of course leave her behind him. It has been a hard job to prevent him from deserting, and now it's all I can do to divert his attention from his sorrow by stirring him up with tales of the recent wars."

At this point the inexorable bell rang, doors were banged, whistles sounded, and the journey was resumed.

Arrived at Portsmouth, Miles was quickly involved in the bustle of the platform. He had made up his mind to have some private conversation with the sergeant as to the possibility of entering her Majesty's service as a private soldier, and was on the point of accompanying his military travelling companions into the comparative quiet of the street when a porter touched his cap —

"Any luggage, sir?"

"Luggage?—a—no—no luggage!"

It was the first moment since leaving home that the thought of luggage had entered into his brain! That thought naturally aroused other thoughts, such as lodgings, food, friends, funds, and the like. On turning to the spot where his military companions had stood, he discovered that they were gone. Running to the nearest door-way he found it to be the wrong one, and before he found the right one and reached the street the two

soldiers had vanished from the scene.

"You seem to be a stranger here, sir. Can I direct you?" said an insinuating voice at his elbow.

The speaker was an elderly man of shabby-genteel appearance and polite address. Miles did not quite like the look of him. In the circumstances, however, and with a strangely desolate feeling of loneliness creeping over him, he did not see his way to reject a civil offer.

"Thank you. I am indeed a stranger, and happen to have neither friend nor acquaintance in the town, so if you can put me in the way of finding a respectable lodging—a—a *cheap* one, you will greatly oblige me."

"With pleasure," said the man, "if you will accompany—"

"Stay, don't trouble yourself to show me the way," interrupted Miles; "just name a house and the street, that will—"

"No trouble at all, sir," said the man. "I happen to be going in the direction of the docks, and know of excellent as well as cheap lodgings there."

Making no further objection, Miles followed his new friend into the street. For some time, the crowd being considerable and noisy, they walked in silence.

At the time we write of, Portsmouth was ringing with martial music and preparations for war.

At all times the red-coats and the blue-jackets are prominent in the streets of that seaport; for almost the whole of our army passes through it at one period or another, either in going to or

returning from "foreign parts." But at this time there was the additional bustle resulting from the Egyptian war. Exceptional activity prevailed in its yards, and hurry in its streets. Recruits, recently enlisted, flocked into it from all quarters, while on its jetties were frequently landed the sad fruits of war in the form of wounded men.

"Have you ever been in Portsmouth before?" asked the shabby-genteel man, on reaching a part of the town which was more open and less crowded.

"Never. I had no idea it was so large and bustling," said Miles.

"The crowding and bustling is largely increased just now, of course, in consequence of the war in Egypt," returned the man. "Troops are constantly embarking, and others returning. It is a noble service! Men start in thousands from this port young, hearty, healthy, and full of spirit; they return—those of them who return at all—sickly, broken-down, and with no spirit at all except what they soon get poured into them by the publicans. Yes; commend me to the service of my Queen and country!"

There was a sneering tone in the man's voice which fired his companion's easily roused indignation.

"Mind what you say about our Queen while in *my* company," said Miles sternly, stopping short and looking the man full in the face. "I am a loyal subject, and will listen to nothing said in disparagement of the Queen or of her Majesty's forces."

"Bless you, sir," said the man quickly, "I'm a loyal subject myself, and wouldn't for the world say a word against her

Majesty. No more would I disparage her troops; but, after all, the army ain't perfect, you know. Even *you* must admit that, sir. With all its noble qualities there's room for improvement."

There was such an air of sincerity—or at least of assumed humility—in the man's tone and manner that Miles felt it unjustifiable to retain his indignation. At the same time, he could not all at once repress it, and was hesitating whether to fling off from the man or to forgive him, when the sound of many voices, and of feet tramping in regular time, struck his ear and diverted his attention. Next moment the head of a regiment, accompanied by a crowd of juvenile admirers, swept round the corner of the street. At the same instant a forest of bayonets gleamed upon the youth's vision, and a brass band burst with crashing grandeur upon his ear, sending a quiver of enthusiasm into the deepest recesses of his soul, and stirring the very marrow in his bones!

Miles stood entranced until the regiment had passed, and the martial strains were softened by distance; then he looked up and perceived that his shabby companion was regarding him with a peculiar smile.

"I think you've a notion of being a soldier," he said, with a smile.

"Where is that regiment going?" asked Miles, instead of answering the question.

"To barracks at present; to Egypt in a few days. There'll be more followin' it before long."

It was a distracting as well as an exciting walk that Miles had

through the town, for at every turn he passed couples or groups of soldiers, or sailors, or marines, and innumerable questions sprang into and jostled each other in his mind, while, at the same moment, his thoughts and feelings were busy with his present circumstances and future prospects. The distraction was increased by the remarks and comments of his guide, and he would fain have got rid of him; but good-feeling, as well as common-sense, forbade his casting him off without sufficient reason.

Presently he stopped, without very well knowing why, in front of a large imposing edifice. Looking up, he observed the words ***Soldiers' Institute*** in large letters on the front of it.

"What sort of an Institute is that?" he asked.

"Oh! it's a miserable affair, where soldiers are taken in cheap, as they say, an' done for," returned the shabby man hurriedly, as if the subject were distasteful to him. "Come along with me and I'll show you places where soldiers—ay, and civilians too—can enjoy themselves like gentlemen, an' get value for their money."

As he spoke, two fine-looking men issued from a small street close to them, and crossed the road—one a soldier of the line, the other a marine.

"Here it is, Jack," exclaimed the soldier to his friend; "Miss Sarah Robinson's Institoot, that you've heard so much about. Come an' I'll show you where you can write your letter in peace —"

Thus much was overheard by Miles as they turned into a side-

street, and entered what was obviously one of the poorer districts of the town.

"Evidently that soldier's opinion does not agree with yours," remarked Miles, as they walked along.

"More's the pity!" returned the shabby man, whose name he had informed his companion was Sloper. "Now we are getting among places, you see, where there's a good deal of drinking going on."

"I scarcely require to be told that," returned Miles, curtly; for he was beginning to feel his original dislike to Mister Sloper intensified.

It did not indeed require any better instructor than eyes and ears to inform our hero that the grog-shops around him were full, and that a large proportion of the shouting and swearing revellers inside were soldiers and seamen.

By this time it was growing dark, and most of the gin-palaces were beginning to send forth that glare of intense and warm light with which they so knowingly attract the human moths that constitute their prey.

"Here we are," said Sloper, stopping in front of a public-house in a narrow street. "This is one o' the *respectable* lodgin's. Most o' the others are disreputable. It's not much of a neighbourhood, I admit."

"It certainly is not very attractive," said Miles, hesitating.

"You said you wanted a cheap one," returned Sloper, "and you can't expect to have it cheap and fashionable, you know. You've

no occasion to be afraid. Come in."

The arguments of Mr Sloper might have failed to move Miles, but the idea of his being *afraid* to go anywhere was too much for him.

"Go in, then," he said, firmly, and followed.

The room into which he was ushered was a moderately large public-house, with a bar and a number of tables round the room, at which many men and a few women were seated; some gambling, others singing or disputing, and all drinking and smoking. It is only right to say that Miles was shocked. Hitherto he had lived a quiet and comparatively innocent country life. He knew of such places chiefly from books or hearsay, or had gathered merely the superficial knowledge that comes through the opening of a swing-door. For the first time in his life he stood inside a low drinking-shop, breathing its polluted atmosphere and listening to its foul language. His first impulse was to retreat, but false shame, the knowledge that he had no friend in Portsmouth, or place to go to, that the state of his purse forbade his indulging in more suitable accommodation, and a certain pride of character which made him always determine to carry out what he had resolved to do—all these considerations and facts combined to prevent his acting on the better impulse. He doggedly followed his guide to a small round table and sat down.

Prudence, however, began to operate within him. He felt that he had done wrong; but it was too late now, he thought, to retrace his steps. He would, however, be on his guard; would not

encourage the slightest familiarity on the part of any one, and would keep his eyes open. For a youth who had seen nothing of the world this was a highly commendable resolve.

"What'll you drink?" asked Mr Sloper.

Miles was on the point of saying "Coffee," but, reflecting that the beverage might not be readily obtainable in such a place, he substituted "Beer."

Instead of calling the waiter, Mr Sloper went himself to the bar to fetch the liquor. While he was thus engaged, Miles glanced round the room, and was particularly struck with the appearance of a large, fine-looking sailor who sat at the small table next to him, with hands thrust deep into his trousers-pockets, his chin resting on his broad chest, and a solemn, owlish stare in his semi-drunken yet manly countenance. He sat alone, and was obviously in a very sulky frame of mind—a condition which he occasionally indicated through a growl of dissatisfaction.

As Miles sat wondering what could have upset the temper of a tar whose visage was marked by the unmistakable lines and dimples of good-humour, he overheard part of the conversation that passed between the barman and Mr Sloper.

"What! have they got hold o' Rattling Bill?" asked the former, as he drew the beer.

"Ay, worse luck," returned Sloper. "I saw the sergeant as I came along lead him over to Miss Robinson's trap—confound her!"

"Don't you go fur to say anything agin Miss Robinson, old

man," suddenly growled the big sailor, in a voice so deep and strong that it silenced for a moment the rest of the company. "Leastways, you may if you like, but if you do, I'll knock in your daylights, an' polish up your figur'-head so as your own mother would mistake you fur a battered saucepan!"

The seaman did not move from his semi-recumbent position as he uttered this alarming threat, but he accompanied it with a portentous frown and an owlish wink of both eyes.

"What! have *you* joined the Blue Lights?" asked Sloper, with a smile, referring to the name by which the religious and temperance men of the army were known.

"No, I ha'n't. Better for me, p'r'aps, if I had. Here, waiter, fetch me another gin-an'-warer. An' more o' the gin than the warer, mind. Heave ahead or I'll sink you!"

Having been supplied with a fresh dose of gin and water, the seaman appeared to go to sleep, and Miles, for want of anything better to do, accepted Sloper's invitation to play a game of dominoes.

"Are the beds here pretty good?" he asked, as they were about to begin.

"Yes, first-rate—for the money," answered Sloper.

"That's a lie!" growled the big sailor. "They're bad at any price —stuffed wi' cocoa-nuts and marline-spikes."

Mr Sloper received this observation with the smiling urbanity of a man who eschews war at all costs.

"You don't drink," he said after a time, referring to Miles's

pot of beer, which he had not yet touched.

Miles made no reply, but by way of answer took up the pot and put it to his lips.

He had not drunk much of it when the big seaman rose hurriedly and staggered between the two tables. In doing so, he accidentally knocked the pot out of the youth's hand, and sent the contents into Mr Sloper's face and down into his bosom, to the immense amusement of the company.

That man of peace accepted the baptism meekly, but Miles sprang up in sudden anger.

The seaman turned to him, however, with a benignantly apologetic smile.

"Hallo! messmate. I ax your parding. They don't leave room even for a scarecrow to go about in this here cabin. I'll stand you another glass. Give us your flipper!"

There was no resisting this, it was said so heartily. Miles grasped the huge hand that was extended and shook it warmly.

"All right," he said, laughing. "I don't mind the beer, and there's plenty more where that came from, but I fear you have done some damage to my fr—"

"Your *friend*. Out with it, sir. Never be ashamed to acknowledge your friends," exclaimed the shabby man, as he wiped his face. "Hold on a bit," he added, rising; "I'll have to change my shirt. Won't keep you waitin' long."

"Another pot o' beer for this 'ere gen'lem'n," said the sailor to the barman as Sloper left the room.

Paying for the drink, he returned and put the pot on the table. Then, turning to Miles, he said in a low voice and with an intelligent look—

"Come outside for a bit, messmate. I wants to speak to 'ee."

Miles rose and followed the man in much surprise.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he said, when a few yards away from the door; "but I see that you're green, an' don't know what a rascally place you've got into. I've been fleeced there myself, and yet I'm fool enough to go back! Most o' the parties there—except the sailors an' sodgers—are thieves an' blackguards. They've drugged your beer, I know; that's why I capsized it for you, and the feller that has got hold o' you is a well-known decoy-duck. I don't know how much of the ready you may have about you, but this I does know, whether it be much or little, you wouldn't have a rap of it in the mornin' if you stayed the night in this here house."

"Are you sure of this, friend?" asked Miles, eyeing his companion doubtfully.

"Ay, as sure as I am that my name's Jack Molloy."

"But you've been shamming drunk all this time. How am I to know that you are not shamming friendship now?"

"No, young man," returned the seaman with blinking solemnity. "I'm not shammin' drunk. I on'y wish I was, for I'm three sheets in the wind at this minute, an' I've a splittin' headache due i' the mornin'. The way as you've got to find out whether I'm fair an' above-board is to look me straight in the face an' don't

wink. If that don't settle the question, p'r'aps it'll convince you w'en I tells you that I don't care a rap whether you go back to that there grog-shop or not. Only I'll clear my conscience—leastways, wot's left of it—by tellin' ye that if you do—you—you'll wish as how you hadn't—supposin' they leave you the power to wish anything at all."

"Well, I believe you are a true man, Mister Molloy—"

"Don't Mister me, mate," interrupted the seaman.

"My name's Jack Molloy, at your service, an' that name don't require no handle—either Mister or Esquire—to prop it up."

The way in which the sailor squared his broad shoulders when he said this rendered it necessary to prop himself up. Seeing which, Miles afforded the needful aid by taking his arm in a friendly way.

"But come, let us go back," he said. "I must pay for my beer, you know."

"Your beer is paid for, young man," said Molloy, stopping and refusing to move. "*I* paid for it, so you've on'y got to settle with *me*. Besides, if you go back you're done for. And you've no call to go back to say farewell to your dear friend Sloper, for he'll on'y grieve over the loss of your tin. As to the unpurliteness o' the partin'—he won't break his heart over that. No—you'll come wi' me down to the *Sailors' Welcome* near the dock-gates, where you can get a good bed for sixpence a night, a heavy blow-out for tenpence, with a splendid readin'-room, full o' rockin' chairs, an' all the rest of it for nothin'. An there's a lavatory—that's the name

that they give to a place for cleanin' of yourself up—a lavatory —where you can wash yourself, if you like, till your skin comes off! W'en I first putt up at the *Welcome*, the messmate as took me there said to me, says he, 'Jack,' says he, 'you was always fond o' water.' 'Right you are,' says I. 'Well,' says he, 'there's a place in the *Sailors' Welcome* where you can wash yourself all day, if you like, for nothing!'

"I do b'lieve it was that as indooced me to give in. I went an' saw this lavatory, an' I was so took up with it that I washed my hands in every bason in the place—one arter the other—an' used up ever so much soap, an'—would you believe it?—my hands wasn't clean after all! Yes, it's one the wery best things in Portsm'uth, is Miss Robinson's Welcome—"

"Miss Robinson again!" exclaimed Miles.

"Ay—wot have you got to find fault wi' Miss Robinson?" demanded the sailor sternly.

"No fault to find at all," replied Miles, suffering himself to be hurried away by his new friend; "but wherever I have gone since arriving in Portsmouth her name has cropped up!"

"In Portsmouth!" echoed the sailor. "Let me tell you, young man, that wherever you go all over the world, if there's a British soldier there, Miss Sarah Robinson's name will be sure to crop up. Why, don't you know that she's 'The Soldiers' Friend'?"

"I'm afraid I must confess to ignorance on the point—yet, stay, now you couple her name with 'The Soldier's Friend,' I have got a faint remembrance of having heard it before. Have I not heard

of a Miss Weston, too, in connection with a work of some sort among sailors?"

"Ay, no doubt ye have. She has a grand Institoot in Portsm'uth too, but she goes in for sailors *only*—all over the kingdom—w'ereas Miss Robinson goes in for soldiers an' sailors both, though mainly for the soldiers. She set agoin' the *Sailors' Welcome* before Miss Weston began in Portsm'uth, an' so she keeps it up, but there ain't no opposition or rivalry. Their aims is pretty much alike, an' so they keep stroke together wi' the oars. But I'll tell you more about that when you get inside. Here we are! There's the dock-gates, you see, and that's Queen Street, an' the *Welcome's* close at hand. It's a teetotal house, you know. All Miss Robinson's Institoots is that."

"Indeed! How comes it, then, that a man—excuse me—'three sheets in the wind,' can gain admittance?"

"Oh! as to that, any sailor or soldier may get admittance, even if he's as drunk as a fiddler, if he on'y behaves his-self. But they won't supply drink on the premises, or allow it to be brought in—'cept inside o' you, of coorse. Cause why? you can't help that—leastwise not without the help of a stomach-pump. Plenty o' men who ain't abstainers go to sleep every night at the *Welcome*, 'cause they find the beds and other things so comfortable. In fact, some hard topers have been indooced to take the pledge in consekince o' what they've heard an' seen in this *Welcome*, though they came at first only for the readin'-room an' beds. Here, let me look at you under this here lamp. Yes. You'll do. You're something like

a sea-dog already. You won't object to change hats wi' me?"

"Why?" asked Miles, somewhat amused.

"Never you mind that, mate. You just putt yourself under my orders if you'd sail comfortably before the wind. I'll arrange matters, an' you can square up in the morning."

As Miles saw no particular reason for objecting to this fancy of his eccentric friend, he exchanged his soft cap for the sailor's straw hat, and they entered the *Welcome* together.

Chapter Three. The "Sailors' Welcome"—Miles has a Night of it and Enlists—His Friend Armstrong has an Agreeable Surprise at the Soldiers' Institute

It was not long before our hero discovered the reason of Jack Molloy's solicitude about his appearance. It was that he, Miles, should pass for a sailor, and thus be in a position to claim the hospitality of the *Sailors' Welcome*,—to the inner life of which civilians were not admitted, though they were privileged, with the public in general, to the use of the outer refreshment-room.

"Come here, Jack Molloy," he said, leading his friend aside, when he made this discovery. "You pride yourself on being a true-blue British tar, don't you?"

"I does," said Jack, with a profound solemnity of decision that comported well with his character and condition.

"And you would scorn to serve under the French flag, or the Turkish flag, or the Black flag, or any flag but the Union Jack, wouldn't you?"

"Right you are, mate; them's my sentiments to a tee!"

"Well, then, you can't expect *me* to sail under false colours any more than yourself," continued Miles. "I scorn to sail into

this port under your straw hat, so I'll strike these colours, bid you good-bye, and make sail for another port where a civilian will be welcome."

Molloy frowned at the floor for some moments in stern perplexity.

"You've took the wind out o' my sails entirely, you have," he replied at last; "an' you're right, young man, but I'm troubled about you. If you don't run into this here port you'll have to beat about in the offing all night, or cast anchor in the streets, for I don't know of another lodgin' in Portsm'uth w'ere you could hang out except them disrepitible grog-shops. In coorse, there's the big hotels; but I heerd you say to Sloper that you was bound to do things cheap, bein' hard up."

"Never mind, my friend," said Miles quickly. "I will manage somehow; so good-night, and many thanks to you for the interest you have taken in—"

"Avast, mate! there's no call to go into action in sitch a hurry. This here *Sailors' Welcome* opens the doors of its bar an' refreshment-room, an' spreads its purvisions before all an' sundry as can afford to pay its moderate demands. It's on'y the after-cabin you're not free to. So you'll have a bit supper wi' me before you set sail on your night cruise."

Being by that time rather hungry as well as fatigued, Miles agreed to remain for supper. While they were engaged with it, he was greatly impressed with the number of sailors and marines who passed into the reading-room beyond the bar, or who sat

down at the numerous tables around to have a hearty supper, which they washed down with tea and coffee instead of beer or gin—apparently with tremendous appetite and much satisfaction.

"Look ye here," said Jack Molloy, rising when their "feed" was about concluded, "I've no doubt they won't object to your taking a squint at the readin'-room, though they won't let you use it." Following his companion, Miles passed by a glass double door into an enormous well-lighted, warm room, seventy feet long, and of proportionate width and height, in which a goodly number of men of the sea were busy as bees—some of them reading books or turning over illustrated papers and magazines, others smoking their pipes, and enjoying themselves in rocking-chairs in front of the glowing fire, chatting, laughing, and yarning as free-and-easily as if in their native fo'c's'ls, while a few were examining the pictures on the walls, or the large models of ships which stood at one side of the room. At the upper end a full-sized billiard-table afforded amusement to several players, and profound interest to a number of spectators, who passed their comments on the play with that off-hand freedom which seems to be a product of fresh gales and salt-water. A door standing partly open at the upper end of this apartment revealed a large hall, from which issued faintly the sound of soft music.

"Ain't it snug? and there's no gamblin' agoin' on there," remarked Molloy, as they returned to their table; "that's not allowed—nor drinkin', nor card-playin', but that's all they putt a stop to. She's a wise woman is Miss Robinson. She don't hamper

us wi' no rules. Why, bless you, Jack ashore would never submit to rules! He gits more than enough o' them afloat. No; it's liberty hall here. We may come an' go as we like, at all hours o' the day and night, an' do exactly as we please, so long as we don't smash up the furnitur', or feed without payin', or make ourselves a gineral noosance. They don't even forbid swearin'. They say they leave the matter o' lingo to our own good taste and good sense. An' d'you know, it's wonderful what an' amount o' both we've got w'en we ain't worried about it! You'll scarce hear an oath in this house from mornin' to evenin', though you'll hear a deal o' snorin' doorin' the night! That's how the place takes so well, d'ee see?"

"Then the *Welcome* is well patronised, I suppose?"

"Patronised!" exclaimed the seaman; "that's so, an' no mistake. Why, mate—But what's your name? I've forgot to ax you that all this time!"

"Call me Miles," said our hero, with some hesitation.

"*Call* you Miles! *Ain't* you Miles?"

"Well, yes, I am; only there's more of my name than that, but that's enough for your purpose, I daresay."

"All right. Well, Miles, you was askin' how the house is patronised. I'll tell 'ee. They make up about two hundred an' twenty beds in it altogether, an' these are chock-full a'most every night. One way or another they had forty-four thousand men, more or less, as slep' under this roof last year—so I've bin told. That's patronisin', ain't it? To say nothin' o' the fellers as comes

for—grub, which, as you've found, is good for the money, and the attendants is civil. You see, they're always kind an' attentive here, 'cause they professes to think more of our souls than our bodies—which we've no objection to, d'ee see, for the lookin' arter our souls includes the lookin' arter our bodies! An' they don't bother us in no way to attend their Bible-readin's an' sitchlike. There they are in separate rooms; if you want 'em you may go; if you don't, you can let 'em alone. No compulsion, which comes quite handy to some on us, for I don't myself care much about sitchlike things. So long's my body's all right, I leaves my soul to look arter itself."

As the seaman said this with a good-natured smile of indifference, there sprang to the mind of his young companion words that had often been impressed on him by his mother: "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" but he made no reference to this at the time.

"Hows'ever," continued Molloy, "as they don't worrit us about religion, except to give us a good word an' a blessin' now an' again, and may-hap a little book to read, we all patronises the house; an it's my opinion if it was twice as big as it is we'd fill it chock-full. I would board as well as sleep in it myself—for it's full o' conveniences, sitch as lockers to putt our things in, an' baths, and what not, besides all the other things I've mentioned—but the want o' drink staggers me. I can't git along without a drop o' drink."

Miles thought that his nautical friend appeared to be unable

to get along without a good many drops of drink, but he was too polite to say so.

"Man alive!" continued Jack Molloy, striking his huge fist on his thigh with emphasis; "it's a wonderful place is this *Welcome*! An' it's a lively place too. Why, a fellow hanged his-self in one o' the bunks overhead not long ago."

"You don't mean that?" exclaimed Miles, rather shocked.

"In course I does. But they heard 'im gaspin', an cut him down in time to save him. It was drink they say as made him do it, and they got him to sign the pledge arterwards. I believe he's kep' it too. Leastwise I know many a hard drinker as have bin indooced to give it up and stuck to it—all through comin' here to have a snooze in a comfortable hunk. They give the bunks names—cubicles they calls 'em in the lump. Separately, there's the 'Commodore Goodenough Cot,' an' the 'Little Nellie Cot,' an' the 'Sunshine Cot'—so called 'cause it hain't got a port-hole to let in the daylight at all; and the 'Billy Rough 'un'—"

"The what?"

"'The Billy Rough 'un'—arter the ship o' that name, you know—"

"Oh! you mean the *Bellerophon*."

"Well, young man, an' didn't I *say* the 'Billy Rough 'un'? Then there's the— But what's your hurry?" said the seaman, as Miles rose.

"It's getting late now, friend. If I'm to find another lodging I must be off. Doubtless, I'll find some respectable house to take

me in for the night." Miles suppressed a yawn as he put on his cap.

"I don't believe you will," returned Molloy, also rising, and giving full vent to a sympathetic and vociferous yawn. "Hows'ever, w'en a young feller insists on havin' his way, it's best to give him plenty of cable and let him swing. He's sure to find out his mistake by experience. But look ye here, Miles, I've took a fancy to you, an' I'd be sorry to think you was in difficulties. If," he continued, thrusting a hand into his breeches-pocket, and bringing up therefrom a mass of mixed gold, silver, and copper —"if you don't objec' to accep' of a loan of—"

"Thank you—no, my friend. It is very kind of you," said Miles quickly; "but I have quite enough for present necessities. So good-night."

"All right," returned the sailor, thrusting the money back into his pocket. "But if you should ever want a jaw with Jack Molloy while you're in this here port you've only got to hail him at the *Sailors' Welcome*, an' if he should happen to be out, they always can tell you where he's cruisin'. Good-night, an' luck go wi' ye!"

Another tremendous yawn finished the speech, and next moment Miles found himself in the street, oppressed with a strange and miserable sensation which he had never before experienced. Indeed, he had to lean against the house for a few minutes after coming out into the fresh air, and felt as if the power of connected thought was leaving him.

He was aroused from this condition by the flashing of a light

in his eyes. Opening them wide, he beheld a policeman looking at him earnestly.

"Now, then, young fellow," said the guardian of the night; "d'you think you can take care of yourself?"

"Oh! yes, quite well. It's only a giddy feeling that came over me. I'm all right," said Miles, rousing himself and passing on.

He staggered slightly, however, and a short "Humph!" from the policeman showed that he believed the youth to be something more than giddy.

Ashamed to be even unjustly supposed to be intoxicated, Miles hurried away, wondering very much what could be the matter with him, for he had not tasted a drop of strong drink, except the half-glass of beer he had swallowed before Molloy chanced to knock it out of his hand. Suddenly he remembered that the sailor had said the beer was drugged. If he could have asked the barman who had served him, that worthy could have told him that this was true; that the whole glassful, if swallowed, would, ere long, have rendered him insensible, and that what he had already taken was enough to do him considerable damage.

As he walked onward, he became rapidly worse; the people and the streets seemed to swim before him; an intense desire to sleep overpowered every other feeling, and at last, turning into a dark entry, he lay down and pillowed his head on a door-step. Here he was found by a policeman; a stretcher was fetched, and he was conveyed to the station as "drunk and incapable!"

When brought before the Inspector the following morning,

shame and reckless despair were the tenants of his breast. Those tenants were not expelled, but rather confirmed in possession, when the Inspector—after numerous questions, to which Miles returned vague unsatisfactory replies—adopted the rôle of the faithful friend, and gave him a great deal of paternal advice, especially with reference to the avoidance of strong drink and bad companions.

Miles had the wisdom, however, to conceal his feelings, and to take the reproof and advice in good part. Afterwards, on being set free, he met a recruiting sergeant, who, regarding him as a suitable subject for the service of her Majesty, immediately laid siege to him. In his then state of mind the siege was an easy one. In short, he capitulated at once and entered the Queen's service, under the name of John Miles.

We need scarcely say that his heart misgave him, that his conscience condemned him, and that, do what he would, he could not shut out the fact that his taking so hasty and irrevocable a step was a poor return for all the care and anxiety of his parents in years gone by. But, as we have said, or hinted, Miles was one of those youths who, when they have once made up their minds to a certain course of action, fancy that they are bound to pursue it to the end. Hence it was that he gave his name as John Miles instead of Miles Milton, so that he might baffle any inquiries as to what had become of him.

Once enlisted, he soon began to realise the fact that he was no longer a free agent—at least not in the sense in which he had been

so up to that period of his life. Constant drill was the order of the day for some weeks; for there was a demand for more troops for Egypt at the time, and regiments were being made up to their full strength as fast as possible.

During this period Miles saw little of his companions in arms personally, save that group of recruits who were being "licked into shape" along with him. At first he was disappointed with these, for most of them were shy, unlettered men; some, raw lads from the country; and others, men who seemed to have been loafers before joining, and were by no means attractive.

The drill-sergeant, however, was a good, though stern man, and soon recognised the differences in character, aptitude, and willingness among his raw recruits. This man, whose name was Hardy, made a powerful impression on our hero from the first; there was something so quiet and even gentle about him, in spite of his firm and inflexible demands in regard to the matters of drill and duty. To please this man, Miles gave himself heart and soul to his work, and was soon so efficient as to be allowed to join the regiment.

And here he found, to his surprise and satisfaction, that the sergeant and young soldier with whom he had travelled to Portsmouth were members of the company to which he was attached. As we have said, Miles had taken a great fancy at first sight to the young private, whose name was William Armstrong. Our hero was of an affectionate disposition, and would have allowed his warm feelings to expend themselves on a dog rather

than have denied them free play. No wonder, then, that he was attracted by the handsome manly countenance and deferential manner of Armstrong, who, although an uneducated youth, and reared in the lower ranks of life, was gifted with those qualities of the true gentleman which mere social position can neither bestow nor take away. His intellect also was of that active and vigorous fibre which cannot be entirely repressed by the want of scholastic training.

The affection was mutual, for the contrasts and similarities of the two men were alike calculated to draw them together. Both were tall, broad, square-shouldered, erect, and soldierly, yet, withal, modest as well in demeanour as in feeling, and so exactly like to each other in size and figure, and in the quiet gravity of their expressions, that they might well have been taken for twin brothers. When, in uniform, the two strode along the streets of Portsmouth, people were apt to turn and look at them, and think, no doubt, that with many such men in the British army it would go hard with the foes of Old England!

The bond of union was still further strengthened by the fact that while the comparatively learned Miles was enthusiastic and communicative, the unlettered Armstrong was inquisitive and receptive, fond of prying into the nature of things, and always ready as well as competent to discuss—not merely to *argue*. Observe the distinction, good reader. Discussion means the shaking of any subject into its component parts with a desire to understand it. Argument has come very much to signify the

enravelment of any subject with a view to the confusion and conquest of an opponent. Both young men abhorred the latter and liked the former. Hence much of their harmony and friendship.

"Will you come with me up town?" said Armstrong to Miles one day, as he was about to quit the barrack-room. "I'm going to see if there's any news of my Emmy."

"I did not know you expected her," said Miles. "Come along, I'm ready."

"I don't expect her yet," returned Armstrong, as they left the barracks; "I only look for a letter, because it was on Wednesday that I wrote telling her of my going to Egypt, and she can scarce have had time to get ready to come down, poor girl! In fact I am going to engage a room for her. By the way, I heard this morning that there's to be another draft for Egypt, so you'll have a chance to go."

"I'm rejoiced to hear it," returned Miles; "for, to say the truth, I had been growing envious of your good fortune in being ordered on active service."

"Hooroo, Armstrong, where away now?" cried an unmistakably Irish voice, as a smart little soldier crossed the street to them, and was introduced to Miles as Corporal Flynn, belonging to another company in his own regiment.

"My blissin' on ye, Miles. John, is it?"

"Yes, John," replied our hero, much amused at the free-and-easy address of the little corporal.

"Well, John Miles," he said, "I don't know whether ye'll laugh

or cry whin I tell ye that you'll likely be warned this evenin' for the draft that's goin' to Aigypt."

"I certainly won't cry," returned Miles, with a laugh. Yet the news brought a sudden feeling into his breast which was strongly allied to the opposite of laughter, for the thought of parting from father and mother without bidding them farewell fell upon his spirit with crushing weight; but, like too many men who know they are about to do wrong, Miles hardened his heart with the delusive argument that, having fairly taken the step, it was impossible for him now to retrace it. He knew—at least he thought—that there was still the possibility of being bought off, and that his stern father would only be too glad to help him. He also knew that at least he had time to write and let them know his circumstances, so that they might run down to Portsmouth and bid him good-bye; but he had taken the bit in his teeth, and now he resolved to abide the consequences.

Turning from his companions while they conversed, he looked into a shop-window.

"Your chum's in the blues," said the lively corporal, in a lower voice.

"Young fellows are often in that state after joining, ain't they?" returned Armstrong.

"True for ye—an' more shame to them, whin they ought to be as proud as paycocks at wearin' her gracious Majesty's uniform. But good luck to 'ee! I must be off, for I'm bound for Aigypt mesilf."

"I am glad that I shall have the chance of seeing your wife, for I've been much interested in her since your friend Sergeant Gilroy told me about her," said Miles, as they resumed their walk. "Surely it is hard of them to refuse to let her go with the regiment."

"Well, it *is* hard," returned the young soldier; "but after all I cannot find fault with the powers that be, for I married with my eyes open. I knew the rule that those who marry without leave must leave their wives at home, for only a certain number of families can go abroad with a regiment—and that only in peace-time."

"It might have been well," continued Armstrong, slowly, while a sad expression clouded his face for a few moments, "if I had waited, and many a time has my conscience smitten me for my haste. But what could I do? Emmy most unaccountably fell in love wi' me—*thank God*! for I do think that the greatest earthly blessing that can be given to mortal man is the love of a gentle, true-hearted girl. The wealth of the Indies cannot purchase that, and nothing else in life can supply the want of it. Can you wonder that I grasped the treasure when within my reach?"

"I certainly cannot; and as certainly I do not blame you," returned the sympathetic Miles.

"Of course I fell in love with Emmy," continued the soldier, with a slightly confused look. "I could no more help that than I could help growing up. Could I?"

"Certainly not," said Miles.

"Well, you see," continued his friend, "as the affair was arranged in heaven, according to general belief, what was I that I should resist? You see, Emmy's father, who's a well-to-do farmer, was willing, and we never gave a thought to Egypt or the war at the time. She will be well looked after while I'm away, and I'll send her every penny of my pay that I can spare, but—"

He stopped abruptly, and Miles, respecting his feelings, remarked, by way of changing the subject, that the pay of a private soldier being so small very little could be saved out of that.

"Not much," assented his comrade; "but, little as it is, we can increase it in various ways. For one thing, I have given up smoking. That will save a little; though, to say truth, I have never expended much on baccy. Then I have joined Miss Robinson's Temperance Band—"

"Strange how often that lady's name has been in my ears since I came to Portsmouth!" said Miles.

"Not so strange after all," returned Armstrong, "when one reflects that she has been the means of almost changing the character of the town within the last few years—as far at least as concerns the condition of soldiers, as well as many of the poorer classes among its inhabitants—so Sergeant Gilroy tells me."

As some of the information given by Sergeant Gilroy to the young soldier may be interesting to many readers, we quote a few of his own words.

"Why, some years ago," he said, "the soldiers' wives, mothers,

and sisters who came down here to see the poor fellows set sail for foreign parts found it almost impossible to obtain lodgings, except in drinking-houses which no respectable woman could enter. Some poor women even preferred to spend a winter night under railway arches, or some such shelter, rather than enter these places. And soldiers out of barracks had nowhere else to go to for amusement, while sailors on leave had to spend their nights in them or walk the streets. Now all that is changed. The Soldiers' Institute supplies 140 beds, and furnishes board and lodging to our sisters and wives at the lowest possible rates, besides reception-rooms where we can meet our friends; a splendid reading-room, where we find newspapers and magazines, and can write our letters, if we like, in peace and quiet; a bar where tea and coffee, bread and butter, buns, etcetera, can be had at all reasonable hours for a mere trifle; a coffee and smoking room, opening out of which are two billiard-rooms, and beyond these a garden, where we can get on the flat roof of a house and watch the arrival and departure of shipping. There is a small charge to billiard-players, which pays all expenses of the tables, so that not a penny of the Institute funds is spent on the games. Of course no gambling is allowed in any of Miss Robinson's Institutes. Then there are Bible-class rooms, and women's work-rooms, and a lending library, and bathrooms, and a great hall, big enough to hold a thousand people, where there are held temperance meetings, lectures with dissolving views, entertainments, and 'tea-fights,' and Sunday services. No wonder

that, with such an agency at work for the glory of God and the good of men, Portsmouth is almost a new place. Indeed, although Miss Robinson met with powerful opposition at first from the powers that be, her Institute is now heartily recognised and encouraged in every way at the Horse Guards. Indeed, it has recently been visited by the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge, and highly approved of by these and other grandees."

While the two soldiers were chatting about the past and present of the Institute they arrived at its door.

"Here we are. Come into the reception-room, Miles, while I make inquiry about my letters."

They entered the house as he spoke. The reception-room is on the right of the passage. Armstrong opened the door and looked in, but, instead of advancing, he stood transfixed, gazing before him open-mouthed as though he had seen a spectre, for there, in front of the fire, sat a beautiful, refined-looking girl, with golden hair and blue eyes, gazing pensively at the flickering flames.

Miles was not kept long in suspense as to who she was.

"Emmy!"

"Oh, Willie!"

These were exclamations which would have revealed all in a moment, even though Emmy had not sprung up and rushed into Willie's open arms. How she ever emerged from the embrace of those arms with unbroken bones is a mystery which cannot be solved, but she did emerge in safety, and with some confusion on observing that Miles had witnessed the incident with admiring

gaze!

"Never mind him, Emmy," said the young soldier, laughing; "he's a good friend, a comrade. Shake hands with him."

The action, and the ease of manner with which Emmy obeyed, proved that grace and small hands are not altogether dependent on rank or station.

"Excuse me," said Miles, after a few words of salutation; "I'll go and have a look at the library."

So saying he quitted the room, leaving the young couple alone; for there chanced to be no other visitors to the reception-room at the time. In the lobby he found several soldiers and a couple of sailors enjoying coffee at the bar, and was about to join them when a man came forward whose dress was that of a civilian, though his bearing proclaimed him a soldier.

"Hallo, Brown," exclaimed one of the soldiers, "d'ye know that a troop-ship has just come in!"

"Know it? of course I do; you may trust the people of this house to be first in hearing such news."

"Mr Tufnell told me of it. I'm just going down to the jetty to boil the kettle for them."

As he spoke, two ladies of the Institute descended the broad staircase, each with a basket on her arm.

They entered into conversation for a few minutes with the soldiers at the bar, and it was abundantly evident to Miles, from the kindly tone of the former and the respectful air of the latter, that they were familiar acquaintances, and on the best of terms.

"Are you all ready, Brown?" asked one of the ladies of the soldier-like civilian, whom we have already mentioned.

"All ready, Miss; a man has already gone to order the bread and butter and light the fire. I hear the vessel is crowded, so we may expect a full house to-night."

Miles pricked up his ears on hearing this, and when Brown went out, leaving the two ladies to finish their conversation with the soldiers, he followed him.

"Pardon me," he said, on overtaking the man. "Did I understand correctly that a troop-ship has just arrived?"

"Right," said Brown. "I am just going down to the embarkation jetty to get coffee ready for the men. You seem to have joined but a short time, apparently, for though I am familiar with your uniform I have not seen yourself before."

"True, it is not long since I joined, and this is my first visit to the Institute."

"I hope it won't be the last, friend," returned Brown heartily. "Every soldier is welcome there, and, for the matter of that, so is every sailor and marine."

"I have heard as much. May I accompany you to this jetty to see the troops arrive, and this coffee business that you speak of?"

"You may, and welcome," said Brown, leading his companion through the town in the direction of the docks, and chatting, as they walked along, about the army and navy; about his own experiences in the former; and about the condition of soldiers at the present time as contrasted with that of the days gone by.

Chapter Four.
The Embarkation Jetty —And Nipped in the Bud

Bronzed faces under white helmets crowded the ports and bulwarks of the great white leviathan of the deep—the troop-ship *Orontes*—as she steamed slowly and cautiously up to the embarkation jetty in Portsmouth harbour.

On the jetty itself a few anxious wives, mothers, and sisters stood eagerly scanning the sea of faces in the almost hopeless endeavour to distinguish those for which they sought. Yet ever and anon an exclamation on the jetty, and an answering wave of an arm on the troop-ship, told that some at least of the anxious ones had been successful in the search.

"Don't they look weather-beaten?" remarked Miles to his companion.

"Sure it's more like sun-dried they are," answered a voice at his side. Brown had gone to the shed to prepare his coffee and bread against the landing of the troops, and a stout Irishwoman had taken his place. Close to her stood the two ladies from the Institute with baskets on their arms.

"You are right," returned Miles, with a smile; "they look like men who have seen service. Is your husband among them?"

"Faix, I'd be sorprised if he *was*," returned the woman; "for

I left him in owld Ireland, in the only landed property he iver held in this world—six futt by two, an' five deep. He's been in possession six years now, an' it wouldn't be aisy to drive him out o' that, anyhow. No, it's my son Terence I've come to look afther. Och! there he is! Look, look, that's him close by the funnel! Don't ye see 'im? Blissins on his good-lookin' face! Hooroo! Terence —Terence Flynn, don't ye recognise yer owld mother? Sure an' he does, though we haven't met for tin year. My! hasn't he got the hair on his lips too—an' his cheeks are like shoe-leather—my darlint!"

As the enthusiastic mother spoke in the tones of a public orator, there was a general laugh among those who were nearest to her; but she was forgotten immediately, for all were too deeply intent on their own interests to pay much regard to each other just then.

The great vessel was slow in getting alongside and making fast to the jetty—slow at least in the estimation of the impatient —for although she might leap and career grandly in wanton playfulness while on her native billows, in port a careless touch from her ponderous sides would have crushed part of the jetty into fragments. Miles therefore had ample time to look about him at the various groups around.

One young woman specially attracted his attention, for she stood apart from every one, and seemed scarcely able to stand because of weakness. She was young and good-looking. Her face, which was deadly pale, contrasted strongly with her glossy

raven-black hair, and the character of her dress denoted extreme poverty.

The ladies from the Institute had also observed this poor girl, and one of them, going to her side, quietly addressed her. Miles, from the position in which he stood, could not avoid overhearing what was said.

"Yes, Miss, I expect my husband," said the woman in answer to a question. "He's coming home on sick-leave. I had a letter from him a good while ago saying he was coming home in the *Orontes*."

"I hope you will find that the sea air has done him good," said the lady, in that tone of unobtrusive sympathy which is so powerfully attractive,—especially to those who are in trouble. "A sea voyage frequently has a wonderful effect in restoring invalids. What is his name?"

"Martin—Fred Martin. He's a corporal now."

"You have not recognised him yet, I suppose?"

"Not yet, Miss," answered Mrs Martin, with an anxious look, and shivering slightly as she drew a thin worn shawl of many patches closer round her shoulders. "But he wouldn't expect me to meet him, you see, knowing that I'm so poor, and live far from Portsmouth. But I was so anxious, you see, Miss, that our kind Vicar gave me enough money to come down."

"Where did you spend the night?" asked the lady, quickly.

The poor woman hesitated, and at last said she had spent the night walking about the streets.

"You see, Miss," she explained apologetically, "I didn't know a soul in the town, and I couldn't a-bear to go into any o' the public-houses; besides, I had no money, for the journey down took nearly all of it."

"Oh, I am so sorry that you didn't know of our Institute," said the lady, with much sympathy in voice and look; "for we provide accommodation for soldiers' wives who come, like you, to meet their husbands returning from abroad, and we charge little, or even nothing, if they are too poor to pay."

"Indeed, Miss! I wish I had known of it. But in the morning I had the luck to meet a policeman who directed me to a coffee-tavern in a place called Nobbs Lane—you'll not know it, Miss, for it's in a very poor part o' the town—where I got a breakfast of as much hot pea-soup and bread as I could eat for three-ha'pence, an' had a good rest beside the fire too. They told me it was kept by a Miss Robinson. God bless her whoever she is! for I do believe I should have been dead by now if I hadn't got the rest and the breakfast."

The woman shivered again as she spoke, and drew the thin shawl still closer, for a sharp east wind was blowing over the jetty at the time.

"Come with me; you are cold. I know Nobbs Lane well. We have a shed and fire here on the jetty to shelter people while waiting. There, you need not fear to miss your husband, for the men won't land for a long time yet."

"May I follow you, madam?" said Miles, stepping forward

and touching his cap in what he supposed to be the deferential manner of a private soldier. “I am interested in your work, and would like to see the shed you speak of.”

The lady looked up quickly at the tall young soldier who thus addressed her.

“I saw you in the lobby of the Institute this morning, did I not?”

“You did, madam. I was waiting for a friend who is a frequenter of the Institute. One of your own people brought me down here to see the arrival of the *Orontes*, and the coffee-shed; but I have lost him in the crowd, and know not where the shed is.”

“Here it is,” returned the lady, pointing to an iron structure just behind them. “You will find Mr Brown there busy with the coffee, and that small shed beside it is the shelter-room. You are welcome to inspect all our buildings at any time.”

So saying, the lady led Mrs Martin into the shed last referred to, and Miles followed her.

There was a small stove, in the solitary iron room of which the shed consisted, which diffused a genial warmth around. Several soldiers’ wives and female relatives were seated beside it, engaged in quieting refractory infants, or fitting a few woollen garments on children of various ages. These garments had been brought from the Institute, chiefly for the purpose of supplying the wives and children returning from warmer climes to England; and one of them, a thick knitted shawl, was immediately presented to Mrs Martin as a gift, and placed round her shoulders

by the lady's own hands.

"You are *very* kind, Miss," she said, an unbidden tear rolling down her cheek as she surveyed the garment and folded it over her breast.

"Have you any children?" asked the lady.

"None. We had one—a dear baby boy," answered the young wife sadly, "born after his father left England. God took him home when he was two years old. His father never saw him; but we shall all meet again," she added, brightly, "in the better land."

"Ah! it makes me glad to hear you say that God took him *home*. Only the spirit of Jesus could make you regard heaven as the home where you are all to meet again. Now I would advise you to sit here and keep warm till I go and make inquiry about your husband. It is quite possible, you know, that he may be in the sick bay, and they won't let any one on board till the vessel is made fast. You are quite sure, I suppose, that it was the *Orontes* in which your husband said he was coming?"

"Yes, quite sure."

The lady had asked the question because a vague fear possessed her regarding the cause of the soldier's not having been seen looking eagerly over the side like the other men.

Hurrying from the shed, with her basket on her arm, she made for the gangway, which had just been placed in position. She was accompanied by her companion, also carrying her basket. Miles took the liberty of following them closely, but not obviously, for he formed only one of a stream of men and women who pushed

on board the instant that permission was given.

While one of the ladies went in search of one of the chief officers, the other quietly and unobtrusively advanced among the returning warriors, and, opening her basket, drew therefrom and offered to each soldier an envelope containing one or two booklets and texts, and a hearty invitation to make free use of the Soldiers' Institute during their stay in Portsmouth.

A most bewildering scene was presented on the deck of that great white vessel. There were hundreds of soldiers in her, returning home after longer or shorter absences in China, India, the Cape, and other far-away parts of the earth. Some were stalwart and bronzed by the southern sun; others were gaunt, weak, and cadaverous, from the effect of sickness, exposure, or wounds; but all were more or less excited at having once again set eyes on Old England, and at the near prospect of once more embracing wives, mothers, and sweethearts, and meeting with old friends. The continual noise of manly voices hailing, exclaiming, chaffing, or conversing, and the general babel of sounds is indescribable. To Miles Milton, who had never before even imagined anything of the sort, it seemed more like a vivid dream than a reality. He became so bewildered with trying to attend to everything at once that he lost sight of the shorter of the ladies, whom he was following, but, pushing ahead, soon found her again in the midst of a group of old friends—though still young soldiers—who had known the Institute before leaving for foreign service, and were eagerly inquiring after the health of

Miss Robinson, and Tufnell the manager, and others.

During his progress through this bustling scene, Miles observed that the soldiers invariably received the gifts from the lady with respect, and, many of them, with hearty expressions of thanks, while a few stopped her to speak about the contents of the envelopes. So numerous were the men that the work had to be done with business-like celerity, but the visitor was experienced. While wasting no time in useless delay, she never hurried her movements, or refused to stop and speak, or forced her way through the moving throng. Almost unobserved, save by the men who chanced to be next to her, she glided in and out amongst them like a spirit of light—which, in the highest sense, she was—intent on her beneficent mission. Her sole aim was to save the men from the tremendous dangers that awaited them on landing in Portsmouth, and bring them under Christian influence.

Those dangers may be imagined when it is told that soldiers returning from abroad are often in possession of large sums of money, and that harpies of all kinds are eagerly waiting to plunder them on their arrival. On one occasion a regiment came home, and in a few days squandered three thousand pounds in Portsmouth. Much more might be said on this point, but enough has been indicated to move thoughtful minds—and our story waits.

Suddenly the attention of Miles, and every one near him, was attracted by the loud Hibernian yell of a female voice exclaiming —

"Oh, Terence, me darlin' son, here ye are; an' is it yersilf lookin' purtier a long way than the day ye left me; an' niver so much as a scratch on yer face for all the wars ye've bin in—bad luck to thim!"

Need we say that this was Mrs Flynn? In her anxiety to meet her son she had run against innumerable men and women, who remonstrated with her variously, according to temperament, without, however, the slightest effect. Her wild career was not checked until she had flung herself into the arms of a tall, stalwart trooper with drooping moustache, who would have done credit to any nationality under the sun, and whose enthusiasm at the happy meeting with his mother was almost as demonstrative as her own, but more dignified.

Others there were, however, whose case was very different. One who came there to meet the strong healthy man to whom she had said good-bye at the same spot several years before, received him back a worn and wasted invalid, upright still with the martial air of discipline, but feeble, and with something like the stamp of death upon his brow. Another woman found her son, strong indeed and healthy, as of yore, but with an empty sleeve where his right arm should have been—his days of warfare over before his earthly sun had reached the zenith!

Whilst Miles was taking note of these things, and moralising in spite of his distaste just then to that phase of mental occupation, the other lady of the Institute appeared and spoke hurriedly to her companion.

"Go," she said, "tell Mrs Martin that her husband is *not* on board the *Orontes*. Let Tufnell, if he is at the shed, or our missionary, take her up to the Institute without delay. Let them take this note to Miss Robinson at the same time."

The younger lady looked inquiringly at her companion, but the latter pushed on hurriedly and was soon lost in the crowd, so she went at once on shore to obey her instructions.

Being thus left to look after himself, Miles went about gazing at the varied, interesting, and curious scenes that the vessel presented. No one took any notice of him, for he was only one soldier among hundreds, and so many people from the shore had been admitted by that time that strange faces attracted no attention.

We have referred chiefly to soldiers' friends, but these, after all, formed a small minority of the visitors, many of whom were tradesmen of the town—tailors, shoemakers, and vendors of fancy articles—who had come down with their wares to tempt the returning voyagers to part with their superfluous cash. Even in the midst of all the pushing and confusion, one man was seen trying on a pair of boots; near to him was a sailor, carefully inspecting a tailor's book of patterns with a view to shore-going clothes; while another, more prompt in action, was already being measured for a suit of the same.

Descending to the 'tween-decks, our hero found that the confusion and noise there were naturally greater, the space being more limited and the noise confined. There was the addition

of bad air and disagreeable smells here; and Miles could not help reflecting on the prospect before him of long voyages under cramped circumstances, in the midst of similar surroundings. But, being young and enthusiastic, he whispered to himself that he was not particular, and was ready to "rough it" in his country's cause!

In a remarkably dark region to which he penetrated, he found himself in the women's quarters, the disagreeables of which were increased by the cries of discontented children, and the yells of inconsolable infants—some of whom had first seen the light of this world in the sad twilight of 'tween-decks! Shrinking from that locality, Miles pursued his investigations, and gradually became aware that sundry parrots and other pets which the soldiers and sailors had brought home were adding their notes of discord to the chorus of sounds.

While he was looking at, and attempting to pat, a small monkey, which received his advances with looks of astonished indignation, he became conscious of the fact that a number of eyes were looking down on him through a crevice at the top of a partition close to his side.

"Who are these?" he asked of a sailor, who stood near him.

"Why, them are the long-term men."

"I suppose you mean prisoners?"

"Yes; that's about it," replied the tar. "Soldiers as has committed murder—or suthin' o' that sort—an' got twenty year or more for all I knows. The other fellers further on there, in

chains, is short-term men. Bin an' done suthin' or other not quite so bad, I suppose."

Miles advanced "further on," and found eight men seated on the deck and leaning against the bulkhead. If his attention had not been drawn to them, he might have supposed they were merely resting, but a closer glance showed that they were all chained to an iron bar. They did not seem very different from the other men around them, save that they were, most of them, stern and silent.

A powerful feeling of compassion rose in our hero's breast as he looked at these moral wrecks of humanity; for their characters and prospects were ruined, though their physique was not much impaired. It seemed to him such an awful home-coming, after, perhaps, long years of absence, thus, in the midst of all the bustle and joy of meetings and of pleasant anticipations, to be waiting there for the arrival of the prison-van, and looking forward to years of imprisonment instead of reunion with friends and kindred.

At sight of them a thought sprang irresistibly into our hero's mind, "This is the result of wrong-doing!"

His conscience was uncomfortably active and faithful that morning. Somehow it pointed out to him that wrong-doing was a long ladder; that the chained criminals before him had reached the foot; and that he stood on the topmost rung. That was all the difference between them and himself—a difference of degree, not of principle.

Pushing his way a little closer to these men, he found that his

was not the only heart that pitied them. His friend, the younger lady, was there speaking to them. He could not hear what she said, for the noise drowned her voice; but her earnest, eager look and her gesticulations told well enough that she was pointing them to the Saviour of sinners—with what effect, of course, he could not tell, but it was evident that the prisoners at least gave her their attention.

Leaving her thus engaged, Miles continued for a considerable time his progress through the ship. Afterwards he observed, by a movement among the men, that a detachment was about to land. Indeed he found that some of the soldiers had already landed, and were making their way to the coffee-shed.

Following these quickly to the same place, he found that innumerable cups of hot coffee and solid slices of bread and butter were being served out as fast as they could be filled and cut. A large hole or window opened in the side of the shed, the shutter of which was hinged at the bottom, and when let down formed a convenient counter.

Behind this counter stood the two ubiquitous ladies of the Institute acting the part of barmaids, as if to the manner born, and with the same business-like, active, yet modest, ready-for-anything air which marked all their proceedings.

And truly their post was no sinecure. To supply the demands of hundreds of hungry and thirsty warriors was not child's-play. Inside the shed, Miles found his friend Brown busy with a mighty caldron of hot water, numerous packets of coffee, and immense

quantities of sugar and preserved milk. Brown was the fountain-head. The ladies were the distributing pipes—if we may say so; and although the fountain produced can after can of the coveted liquid with amazing rapidity, and with a prodigality of material that would have made the hair of a private housewife stand on end, it was barely possible to keep pace with the demand.

At a large table one of the missionaries of the Institute cut up and buttered loaves at a rate which gave the impression that he was a conjurer engaged in a species of sleight-of-hand. The butter, however, troubled him, for, the weather being cold, it was hard, and would not spread easily. To overcome this he put a pound or so of it on a plate beside the boiler-fire to soften. Unfortunately, he temporarily forgot it, and on afterwards going for it, found that it had been reduced to a yellow liquid. However, hungry soldiers, rejoicing in the fact of having at last reached home, are not particular. Some of them, unaccustomed, no doubt, to be served by ladies, asked for their supply deferentially, accepted it politely, and drank it with additional appreciation.

"We want more, Brown," said one of the ladies, glancing back over her shoulder as she poured out the last drop from her large jug; "and more buns and bread, please."

"Here you are, Miss," cried Brown, who was warm by that time in spite of the weather, as he bore his brimming and steaming pitcher to the window—or hole in the wall—and replenished the jugs. "The buns are all done, an' the bread won't hold out long, but I've sent for more; it won't be long. I see we

shall need several more brews," he added, as he turned again towards the inexhaustible boiler.

"Shall I assist you?" said Miles, stepping into the shed and seizing a loaf and a knife.

"Thank you. Go ahead," said Brown.

"Put another lump of butter near the fire," said the missionary to our hero; "not too close. I melted the last lump altogether."

"A cup o' coffee for my Terence, an' wan for mesilf, my dear," exclaimed a loud voice outside.

There was no mistaking the speaker. Some of the men who crowded round the counter laughed, others partially choked, when the strapping Terence said in a hoarse whisper, "Whist, mother, be civil; don't ye see that it's ladies, no less, is sarvin' of us?"

"Please, ma'am, can I 'ave some coffee?" asked a modest soldier's wife, who looked pale and weary after the long voyage, with three children to look after.

A cup was promptly supplied, and three of the newly-arrived buns stopped the mouths of her clamorous offspring.

"Can ye give me a cup o' tea?" demanded another soldier's wife, who was neither so polite nor so young as the previous applicant.

It is probable that the ladies did not observe the nature of her demand, else they would doubtless have explained that they had no tea, but a cup of coffee was silently handed to her.

"Ah! this is *real* home-tea, this is," she said, smacking her lips

after the first sip. "A mighty difference 'tween this an' what we've bin used to in the ship."

"Yes, indeed," assented her companion. Whether it was tea she had been accustomed to drink on board the troop-ship we cannot tell, but probably she was correct as to the "mighty difference." It may be that the beverages supplied in foreign lands had somewhat damaged the power of discrimination as to matters of taste in these soldiers' wives. At all events an incident which occurred about the same time justifies this belief.

"Mr Miles," said the missionary, pausing a moment to wipe his brow in the midst of his labours, "will you fetch the butter now?"

Miles turned to obey with alacrity—with too much alacrity, indeed, for in his haste he knocked the plate over, and sent the lump of butter into the last prepared "brew" of coffee!

"Hallo! I say!" exclaimed Brown, in consternation. "More coffee, Brown," demanded the ladies simultaneously, at that inauspicious moment.

"Yes, Miss, I—I'm coming—directly," cried Brown.

"Do be quick, please!"

"What's to be done?" said Brown, making futile endeavours to fish out the slippery mass with the stirring-stick.

"Shove it down and stir it well about," suggested Miles.

Whether conscience was inoperative at that moment we know not, but Brown acted on the suggestion, and briskly amalgamated the butter with the coffee, while the crowd at the port-hole

politely but continuously demanded more.

"Don't be in a 'urry, Tom," cried a corporal, removing his pith helmet in order to run his fingers through his hair; "it's a 'eavenly state o' things now to what it was a few years ago, w'en we an' our poor wives 'ad to sit 'ere for hours in the heat or cold, wet or dry, without shelter, or a morsel to eat, or a drop to drink, till we got away up town to the grog-shops."

"Well, this *is* civilisation at last!" remarked a handsome and hearty young fellow, who had apparently been ignorant of the treat in store for him, and who sauntered up to the shed just as the butter-brew was beginning to be served out.

"Why, I declare, it's chocolate!" exclaimed one of the women, who had been already served with a cup, and had resolved to "go in," as she said, for another pennyworth.

"So it is. My! ain't it nice?" said her companion, smacking her lips.

Whether the soldiers fell into the same mistake, or were too polite to take notice of it, we cannot tell, for they drank it without comment, and with evident satisfaction, like men of simple tastes and uncritical minds.

We turn now to a very different scene.

In one of the private sitting-rooms of the Institute sat poor young Mrs Martin, the very embodiment of blank despair. The terrible truth that her husband had died, and been buried at sea, had been gently and tenderly broken to her by Miss Robinson.

At first the poor girl could not—would not—believe it. Then,

as the truth gradually forced itself into her brain, she subsided into a tearless, expressionless, state of quiescence that seemed to indicate a mind unhinged. In this state she remained for some time, apparently unconscious of the kind words of Christian love that were addressed to her.

At last she seemed to rouse herself and gazed wildly round the room.

"Let me go," she said. "I will find him somewhere. Don't hinder me, please."

"But you cannot go anywhere till you have had food and rest, dear child," said her sympathetic comforter, laying her hand gently on the girl's arm. "Come with me."

She sought to lead her away, but the girl shook her off.

"No," she exclaimed, starting up hastily, so that the mass of her dark hair fell loose upon her shoulders, contrasting forcibly with the dead whiteness of her face and lips. "No. I cannot go with you. Fred will be getting impatient. D'you think I'll ever believe it? Dead and buried in the sea? Never!"

Even while she spoke, the gasp in her voice, and the pressure of both hands on her poor heart, told very plainly that the young widow did indeed believe it.

"Oh! may God Himself comfort you, dear child," said the lady, taking her softly by the hand. "Come—come with me."

Mrs Martin no longer refused. Her spirit, which had flashed up for a moment, seemed to collapse, and without another word of remonstrance she meekly suffered herself to be guided to a

private room, where she was put to bed.

She never rose from that bed. Friendless, and without means, she would probably have perished in the streets, or in one of the dens of Portsmouth, had she not been led to this refuge. As it was, they nursed her there, and did all that human skill and Christian love could devise; but her heart was broken. Towards the end she told them, in a faint voice, that her Fred had been stationed at Alexandria, and that while there he had been led to put his trust in the Saviour. She knew nothing of the details. All these, and much more, she had expected to hear from his own lips.

"But he will tell me all about it soon, thank God!" were the last words she uttered as she turned her eyes gratefully on the loving strangers who had found and cared for her in the dark day of her calamity.

Chapter Five.
Difficulties met and overcome

Miles and his friend Brown, after their work at the jetty, had chanced to return to the Institute at the moment referred to in the last chapter, when the poor young widow, having become resigned, had been led through the passage to her bedroom. Our hero happened to catch sight of her face, and it made a very powerful impression on him—an impression which was greatly deepened afterwards on hearing of her death.

In the reception-room he found Armstrong still in earnest conversation with his wife.

"Hallo, Armstrong! still here? Have you been sitting there since I left you?" he asked, with a smile and look of surprise.

"Oh no!" answered his friend; "not all the time. We have been out walking about town, and we have had dinner here—an excellent feed, let me tell you, and cheap too. But where did you run off to?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you," said Miles.

Thereupon he related all about his day's experiences. When he had finished, Armstrong told him that his own prospect of testing the merits of a troop-ship were pretty fair, as he was ordered for inspection on the following day.

"So you see," continued the young soldier, "if you are

accepted—as you are sure to be—you and I will go out together in the same vessel."

"I'm glad to hear that, anyhow," returned Miles.

"And *I* am very glad too," said little Emily, with a beaming smile, "for Willie has told me about you, Mr Miles; and how you first met and took a fancy to each other; and it *will* be so nice to think that there's somebody to care about my Willie when he is far away from me."

The little woman blushed and half-laughed, and nearly cried as she said this, for she felt that it was rather a bold thing to say to a stranger, and yet she had such a strong desire to mitigate her husband's desolation when absent from her that she forcibly overcame her modesty. "And I want you to do me a favour, Mr Miles," she added.

"I'll do it with pleasure," returned our gallant hero.

"I want you to call him Willie," said the little woman, blushing and looking down.

"Certainly I will—if your husband permits me."

"You see," she continued, "I want him to keep familiar with the name I've been used to call him—for comrades will call him Armstrong, I suppose, and—"

"Oh! Emmy," interrupted the soldier reproachfully, "do you think I require to be *kept in remembrance* of that name? Won't your voice, repeating it, haunt me day and night till the happy day when I meet you again on the Portsmouth jetty, or may-hap in this very room?"

Miles thought, when he heard this speech, of the hoped-for meeting between poor Mrs Martin and her Fred; and a feeling of profound sadness crept over him as he reflected how many chances there were against their ever again meeting in this world. Naturally these thoughts turned his mind to his own case. His sinful haste in quitting home, and the agony of his mother on finding that he was really gone, were more than ever impressed on him, but again the fatal idea that what was done could not be undone, coupled with pride and false shame, kept him firm to his purpose.

That evening, in barracks, Miles was told by his company sergeant to hold himself in readiness to appear before the doctor next morning for inspection as to his physical fitness for active service in Egypt.

Our hero was by this time beginning to find out that the life of a private soldier, into which he had rushed, was a very different thing indeed from that of an officer—to which he had aspired. Here again pride came to his aid—in a certain sense,—for if it could not reconcile him to his position, it at all events closed his mouth, and made him resolve to bear the consequences of his act like a man.

In the morning he had to turn out before daylight, and with a small band of men similarly situated, to muster in the drill-shed a little after eight. Thence they marched to the doctor's quarters.

It was an anxious ordeal for all of them; for, like most young soldiers, they were enthusiastically anxious to go on active

service, and there was, of course, some uncertainty as to their passing the examination.

The first man called came out of the inspection room with a beaming countenance, saying that he was "all right," which raised the hopes and spirits of the rest; but the second appeared after inspection with a woe-begone countenance which required no interpretation. No reason was given for his rejection; he was simply told that it would be better for him not to go.

Miles was the third called.

As he presented himself, the doctor yawned vociferously, as if he felt that the hour for such work was unreasonably early. Then he looked at his subject with the critical air of a farmer inspecting a prize ox.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Nineteen, sir."

"Are you married?"

Miles smiled.

"Did you hear me?" asked the doctor sharply. "You don't need to smile. Many a boy as long-legged and as young as you is fool enough to marry. Are you married?"

Miles flushed, looked suddenly stern, squared his shoulders, drew himself up with an air that implied, "You won't catch *me* tripping again;" and said firmly, yet quite respectfully—

"No, sir."

The doctor here took another good look at his subject, with a meaning twinkle in his eye, as if he felt that he had touched a

tender point. Then he felt his victim's pulse, sounded his chest, and ordered him to strip. Being apparently satisfied with the result of his examination, he asked him if he "felt all right."

Reflecting that his mother had often told him he was made up of body, soul, and spirit, and that in regard to the latter two he was rather hazy, Miles felt strongly inclined for a moment to say, "Certainly not," but, thinking better of it, he answered, "Yes, sir," with decision.

"Have you anything to complain of?" asked the doctor.

The mind of our hero was what we may style rapidly reflective. In regard to the decrees of Fate, things in general, and his father's conduct in particular, he had a decided wish to complain, but again he laid restraint on himself and said, "No, sir."

"And do you wish to go to Egypt?"

"Yes, sir!" was answered with prompt decision.

"Then you may go," said the doctor, turning away with an air of a man who dismisses a subject from his mind.

When all the men had thus passed the medical examination, those of them who were accepted mustered their bags and kits before Captain Lacey, commander of the company to which they were attached, and those who wanted anything were allowed to draw it from the stores.

Captain Lacey was a fine specimen of a British soldier—grave, but kind in expression and in heart; tall, handsome, powerful, about thirty years of age, with that urbanity of manner

which wins affection at first sight, and that cool, quiet decision of character which inspires unlimited confidence.

As the troop-ship which was to convey them to Egypt was to start sooner than had been intended, there was little time for thought during the few hours in England that remained to the regiment. The men had to draw their pith helmets, and fit the ornaments thereon; then go the quartermaster's stores to be fitted with white clothing, after which they had to parade before the Colonel, fully arrayed in the martial habiliments which were needful in tropical climes. Besides these matters there were friends to be seen, in some cases relatives to be parted from, and letters innumerable to be written. Miles Milton was among those who, on the last day in Portsmouth, attempted to write home. He had been taken by Sergeant Gilroy the previous night to one of the Institute entertainments in the great hall. The Sergeant had tried to induce him to go to the Bible-class with him, but Miles was in no mood for that at the time, and he was greatly relieved to find that neither the Sergeant nor any of the people of the Institute annoyed him by thrusting religious matters on his attention. Food, lodging, games, library, baths, Bible-classes, prayer-meetings, entertainments were all there to be used or let alone as he chose; perfect freedom of action being one of the methods by which it was sought to render the place attractive to the soldiers.

But although Miles at once refused to go to the class, he had no objection to go to the entertainment.

It was a curious mixture of song, recitation, addresses, and readings, in which many noble sentiments were uttered, and not a few humorous anecdotes and incidents related. It was presided over by Tufnell, the manager, a soldierly-looking man, who had himself originally been in the army, and who had, for many years, been Miss Robinson's right-hand man. There could not have been fewer than a thousand people in the hall, a large proportion of whom were red-coats and blue-jackets, the rest being civilians; and the way in which these applauded the sentiments, laughed at the humour, and rejoiced in the music, showed that the provision for their amusement was thoroughly appreciated.

Whether it was the feeling of good-fellowship and sympathy that pervaded the meeting, or some word that was dropped at a venture and found root in his heart, Miles could not tell, but certain it is that at that entertainment he formed the resolution to write home before leaving. Not that he had yet repented of the step he had taken, but he was sorry for the manner in which he had done so, and for allowing so much time to elapse that now the opportunity of seeing his parents before starting was lost.

As it was impossible for him to write his letter in the noise of the barrack-room, he went off next day to the reading-room of the Institute, and there, with no other sounds to disturb him than the deep breathing of some studious red-coats, and the chirping pen of a comrade engaged like himself, he began to write.

But his thoughts somehow would not work. His pen would not write. He even fancied that it had a sort of objection to spell. So

it had, when not properly guided by his hesitating hand. The first part went swimmingly enough:—

"Dearest mother,
I'm so sorry—"

But here he stopped, for the memory of his father's severity re-aroused his indignation, and he felt some doubt as to whether he really was sorry. Then, under the impulse of this doubt, he wrote a long letter, in imagination, in which he defended his conduct pretty warmly, on the ground that he had been driven to it.

"Driven to what?" asked Something within him. "To the course which I have taken and am now defending," replied Something-else within him hotly.

"Then the course was a wrong one, else you wouldn't have to defend it!" rejoined the first Something.

"Well—yes—n–no, it wasn't," returned the second Something doggedly.

Before this internal dispute could be carried further, Miles was aroused by a sudden burst of noisy voices, as if a lunatic asylum had been let loose into the hall below. Rising quickly, he hurried down with his studious comrades to see what it could be all about.

"It's only another troop-ship come in, and they've all come up here without giving us warning to get ready," said Tufnell, as he bustled about, endeavouring to introduce order into what

appeared to Miles to be the reproduction of Babel, *minus* the bricks.

The fact was that a troop-ship having arrived rather suddenly, a sergeant had driven up in hot haste from the docks to make arrangements for the reception of the soldiers' wives and children!

"Look sharp!" he cried, on entering the hall abruptly; "sixteen families are on their way to you."

"All right; we can take 'em in," was the prompt reply; and orders were given to set the food-producing machinery of the establishment instantly in motion. But almost before the preparation had fairly begun, the advance-guard of the army, largely composed of infantry, burst upon them like a thunder-clap, and continued to pour in like a torrent. There were men shouting, women chattering, tired children whining, and excited children laughing; babies yelling or crowing miscellaneously; parrots screaming; people running up and down stairs in search of dormitories; plates and cups clattering at the bar, as the overwhelmed barmaids did their best to appease the impatient and supply the hungry; while the rumbling of control-wagons bringing up the baggage formed a sort of bass accompaniment to the concert.

"You see, it varies with us a good deal," remarked Brown to Miles, during a lucid interval, "Sometimes we are almost empty, a few hours later we are overflowing. It comes hard on the housekeeper, of course. But we lay our account wi' that,

and, do you know, it is wonderful what can be done in trying circumstances, when we lay our account wi' them!—Yes, Miss, it's all ready!" shouted the speaker, in reply to a soft female voice that came down the wide staircase, as it were, over the heads of the turbulent crowd.

In a moment he disappeared, and Tufnell stood, as if by magic, in his place.

"Yes," said the manager, taking up his discourse where the other had left off; "and in a few minutes you'll see that most of these wives and children of the soldiers will be distributed through the house in their bed-rooms, when our ladies will set to work to make acquaintance with them; and then we'll open our stores of warm clothing, of which the poor things, coming as they do from warm climates, are often nearly or quite destitute."

"But where do you get these supplies from?" asked Miles.

"From kind-hearted Christians throughout the country, who send us gifts of old and new garments, boots and shoes, shawls and socks, etcetera, which we have always in readiness to meet sudden demands; and I may add that the demands are pretty constant. Brown told you just now that we have varied experience. I remember once we got a message from the Assistant Quartermaster-General's office to ask how many women and children we could accommodate, as a shipful was expected. We replied that we could take 140, and set to work with preparations. After all, only one woman came! To-day we expected nobody, and—you see what we have got!"

The genial countenance of the manager beamed with satisfaction. It was evident that "what he had got" did not at all discompose him, as he hurried away to look after his flock, while the originator—the heart and soul of all this—although confined to her room at that time with spine complaint, and unable to take part in the active work, as she had been wont to do in years gone by, heard in her chamber the softened sound of the human storm, and was able to thank God that her Soldiers' Institute was fulfilling its destiny.

"Hallo! Miles!" exclaimed Armstrong, over the heads of the crowd; "I've been looking for you everywhere. D'you know we run a chance of being late? Come along, quick!"

Our hero, who, in his interest in the scene, had forgotten the flight of time, hurried out after his comrade as the band struck up "Home, sweet Home," and returned to barracks, utterly oblivious of the fact that he had left the unfinished letter to his mother on the table in the reading-room.

Chapter Six.
The Unfinished Letter—Too Late!

Next morning young Milton—or, as he was called by his comrades, John Miles—rose with the depressing thought that it was to be his last day in England. As he was dressing, it flashed across him that he had left his unfinished letter on the reading-room table, and, concluding that it would be swept away in the rush of people there—at all events that, not having been folded or addressed, it could not be posted—his depression was deepened.

The first thing that roused him to a better frame of mind was the smell of tea!

Most people are more or less familiar with teapots; with the few teaspoonfuls of the precious leaf which thrifty housekeepers put into these pots, and the fragrant liquid that results. But who among civilians, (save the informed), can imagine a barrack-room teapot?

Open your ears, O ye thrifty ones! while we state a few facts, and there will be no need to tell you to open your eyes.

Into the teapot which supplied Miles with his morning cup there was put, for *one* making, eight pounds of tea!—not ounces, observe, but pounds,—twenty-nine pounds of sugar, and six gallons—an absolute cowful—of milk! The pot itself consisted of eight enormous coppers, which were filled with boiling water

to the brim.

"Yes, sir," remarked the military cook, who concocted the beverage, to a speechless visitor one day; "it *is* a pretty extensive brew; but then, you see, we have a large family!"

A considerable portion of this large family was soon actively engaged in preparation for immediate embarkation for Egypt. Then the General made the men a farewell speech. It was a peculiar speech—not altogether suited to cheer timid hearts, had any such been there, but admirably adapted to British soldiers.

"Men," said he, "I am very glad to see you parade looking so well and clean and comfortable and ready for active service. You will be dirty enough, sometimes, where you are going, for the country is hot and unhealthy, and not over clean. You will have hardships, hard times, and plenty of hard work, as well as hard beds now and then, and very likely the most of you will never come back again; but you would be unworthy of the name of British soldiers if you allowed such thoughts to trouble your minds. I sincerely express the hope, however, that you will all come home again safe and sound. I have not the slightest doubt that every man of you will do his duty in the field faithfully and well; but I'm not so sure of your wisdom in camp and barracks, so I will give you a word of advice. There is far more danger in getting drunk in hot countries than in England. Let me advise you, then, not to get drunk; and I would warn you particularly against the vile stuff they will offer for sale in Egypt. It is rank poison. If you had stomachs lined with brass you might perhaps

stand it—not otherwise. Then I would warn you against the sun. In Egypt the sun is sometimes like a fiery furnace. Never expose yourself when you can avoid doing so, and, above all, never go outside your tents without your helmets on. If you do, you'll repent it, and repentance will probably come too late. I wish you all a prosperous voyage, and may God keep you all!"

Delivered in a sharp, stern, unsentimental tone, this brief speech had probably a much more powerful effect on the men than a more elaborate exhortation would have had. The impression was deepened by the remarks of an old officer, who made a very brief, soldierly speech after the General, winding up with the information that he had himself been in Egypt, and assuring them that if they did not take care of themselves there was little chance of a man of them returning alive!

"May you have a pleasant passage out," he said, in conclusion; "and, in the name of the Portsmouth Division, I wish you victory in all your battles, and a hearty good-bye."

The men who were not going away were then called on to give their departing friends three cheers, which they did with right good-will. Captain Lacey, who was in charge of the detachment, stepped to the front, drew his sword, gave the order to shoulder arms, form fours, right turn, quick march, and away they went with the united bands of two regiments playing "The girl I left behind me!"

The girls they were about to leave behind them were awaiting them at the barrack-gates, with a considerable sprinkling of

somewhat older girls to keep them company. Many of the poor creatures were in tears for the men whom they might never see again, and lumps in several manly throats rather interfered with the parting cheer delivered by the detachment at the gate. Most of them accompanied the soldiers as far as the Dockyard gates. Emily Armstrong was not among them. She had parted the previous night from her husband at his earnest request, and returned by rail to her father's house, there to await, as patiently as she might, the return of her "Willie."

"Noble defenders of our country!" observed an enthusiastic citizen, as they passed through the gates.

"Food for powder," remarked a sarcastic publican, as he turned away to resume his special work of robbing powder of its food and his country of its defenders.

Proceeding to the Embarkation Jetty, the detachment was marched on board the troop-ship, where the men were at once told off to their respective messes, and proceeded without delay to make themselves at home by taking possession of their allotted portion of the huge white-painted fabric that was to bear them over the waves to distant lands.

Taking off their belts and stowing them overhead, they got hold of their bags, exchanged their smart uniforms for old suits of clothes, and otherwise prepared themselves for the endurance of life on board a transport.

To his great satisfaction, Miles found that several of the comrades for whom he had by that time acquired a special liking

were appointed to the same mess with himself. Among these were his friend Willie Armstrong, Sergeants Gilroy and Hardy, Corporal Flynn, a private named Gaspard Redgrave, who was a capital musician, and had a magnificent tenor voice, Robert Macleod, a big-boned Scotsman, and Moses Pyne, a long-legged, cadaverous nondescript, who was generally credited with being half-mad, though with a good deal of method in his madness, and who was possessed of gentleness of spirit, and a cheerful readiness to oblige, which seemed a flat contradiction of his personal appearance, and rendered him a general favourite.

While these were busy arranging their quarters a soldier passed with several books in his hand, which he had just received from one of the ladies from the Institute.

"Hallo, Jack!" cried Moses Pyne; "have the ladies been aboard?"

"Of course they have. They've been all over the ship already distributin' books an' good-byes. If you want to see 'em you'll have to look sharp, Moses, for they're just goin' on shore."

"See 'em!" echoed Moses; "of course I wants to see 'em. But for them, I'd be—"

The rest of the sentence was lost in the clatter of Moses' feet as he stumbled up the ladder-way. Remembering his letter at that moment, Miles followed him, and reached the gangway just as the visitors were leaving.

"Excuse me," he said to one of them, stopping her.

"Oh! I'm so glad to have found you," she said.

"I have been looking for you everywhere. Miss Robinson sent you this little parcel of books, with her best wishes, and hopes that you will read them."

"Thanks, very much. I will, with pleasure. And will you do me a favour? I left a letter on the reading-room table—"

A sudden and peremptory order of some sort caused a rush which separated Miles from the visitor and cut short the sentence, and the necessity for the immediate departure of all visitors rendered its being finished impossible.

But Miss Robinson's representative did not require to be told that a forgotten letter could only want posting. On returning, therefore, to the Institute, she went at once to the reading-room, where she found no letter! Making inquiry, she learned from one of the maids that a sheet of paper had been found with nothing on it but the words, "Dearest mother, I'm so sorry"; and that the same had been duly conveyed to Miss Robinson's room. Hasting to the apartment of her friend, she knocked, and was bidden enter.

"You have got an unfinished letter, it seems?" she began.

"Yes; here it is," interrupted Miss Robinson, handing the sheet to her assistant. "What a pity that it gives no clew to the writer —no address!"

"I am pretty sure as to the writer," returned the other. "It must have been that fine-looking young soldier, John Miles, of whom we have seen a little and heard so much from Sergeant Gilroy."

Hereupon an account was given of the hurried and interrupted

meeting on board the troop-ship; and the two ladies came to the conclusion that as nothing was known about the parents or former residence of John Miles no steps of any kind were possible. The letter was therefore carefully put by.

That same evening there alighted at the railway station in Portsmouth an elderly lady with an expression of great anxiety on her countenance, and much perturbation in her manner.

"Any luggage, ma'am?" asked a sympathetic porter—for railway porters are sometimes more sympathetic than might be expected of men so much accustomed to witness abrupt and tender partings.

"No; no luggage. Yes—a small valise—in the carriage. That's it."

"Four-wheeler, ma'am?"

"Eh! no—yes—yes."

"Where to, ma'am?" asked the sympathetic porter, after the lady was seated in the cab.

"Where to?" echoed Mrs Milton, (for it was she), in great distress. "Oh! where—where shall I drive to?"

"Really, ma'am, I couldn't say," answered the porter, with a modest look.

"I've—I—my son! My dear boy! Where shall I go to inquire? Oh! what *shall* I do?"

These would have been perplexing utterances even to an unsympathetic man.

Turning away from the window, and looking up at the driver,

the porter said solemnly—

"To the best 'otel you know of, cabby, that's not too dear. An' if you've bin gifted with compassion, cabby, don't overcharge your fare."

Accepting the direction, and exercising his discretion as well as his compassion, that intelligent cabby drove, strange to say, straight to an hotel styled the "Officers' House," which is an offshoot of Miss Robinson's Institute, and stands close beside it!

"A hofficer's lady," said the inventive cabby to the boy who opened the door. "Wants to putt up in this 'ere 'ouse."

When poor Mrs Milton had calmed her feelings sufficiently to admit of her talking with some degree of coherence, she rang the bell and sent for the landlord.

Mr Tufnell, who was landlord of the Officers' House, as well as manager of the Institute, soon presented himself, and to him the poor lady confided her sorrows.

"You see, landlord," she said, whimpering, "I don't know a soul in Portsmouth; and—and—in fact I don't even know how I came to your hotel, for I never heard of it before; but I think I must have been sent here, for I see from your looks that you will help me."

"You may depend on my helping you to the best of my power, madam. May I ask what you would have me do?"

With much earnestness, and not a few tears, poor Mrs Milton related as much of her son's story as she thought necessary.

"Well, you could not have come to a better place," said

Tufnell, "for Miss Robinson and all her helpers sympathise deeply with soldiers. If any one can find out about your son, *they* can. How were you led to suspect that he had come to Portsmouth?"

"A friend suggested that he might possibly have done so. Indeed, it seems natural, considering my dear boy's desire to enter the army, and the number of soldiers, who are always passing through this town."

"Well, I will go at once and make inquiry. The name Milton is not familiar to me, but so many come and go that we sometimes forget names."

When poor Mrs Milton was afterwards introduced to Miss Robinson, she found her both sympathetic and anxious to do her utmost to gain information about her missing son, but the mother's graphic descriptions of him did not avail much. The fact that he was young, tall, handsome, curly-haired, etcetera, applied to so many of the defenders of the country as to be scarcely distinctive enough; but when she spoke of "My dear Miles," a new light was thrown on the matter. She was told that a young soldier answering to the description of her son had been there recently, but that his surname—not his Christian name—was Miles. Would she recognise his handwriting?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.