

**JOHN
MCCELROY**

THE RED
ACORN

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John McElroy

The Red Acorn

Preface

The name given this story is that made glorious by the valor and achievements of the splendid First Division of the Fourteenth Army Corps, the cognizance of which was a crimson acorn, worn on the breasts of its gallant soldiers, and borne upon their battle flags. There are few gatherings of men into which one can go to-day without finding some one wearing, as his most cherished ornament, a red acorn, frequently wrought in gold and studded with precious stones, and which tells that its wearer is a veteran of Mill Springs, Perryville, Shiloh, Corinth, Stone River, Chickamauga, Mission Ridge, Atlanta, Jonesville, March to the Sea, and Bentonville.

The Fourteenth Corps was the heart of the grand old Army of the Cumberland—an army that never knew defeat. Its nucleus was a few scattered regiments in Eastern Kentucky, in 1861, which had the good fortune to be commanded by Gen. George H. Thomas. With them he won the first real victory that blessed our arms. It grew as he grew, and under his superb leadership it was shaped and welded and tempered into one of the mightiest military weapons the world ever saw. With it Thomas wrung victory from defeat on the bloody fields of Stone River and Chickamauga; with it he dealt the final crushing blow of the Atlanta campaign, and with it defeat was again turned to victory at Bentonville.

The characters introduced into the story all belonged to or co-operated with the First Division of the Fourteenth Corps. The Corps' badge was the Acorn. As was the custom in the army, the divisions in each Corps were distinguished by the color of the badges—the First's being red, the Second's white, and the Third's blue. There was a time when this explanation was hardly necessary, but now eighteen years have elapsed since the Acorn flags fluttered victoriously over the last field of battle, and a generation has grown up to which they are but a tradition.

J. M.

Chapter I. A Declaration

“O, what is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days;
Then Heaven tries the Earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays.”

—*Lowell.*

Of all human teachers they were the grandest who gave us the New Testament, and made it a textbook for Man in every age. Transcendent benefactors of the race, they opened in it a never-failing well-spring of the sweet waters of Consolation and Hope, which have flowed over, fertilized, and made blossom as a rose the twenty-century wide desert of the ills of human existence.

But they were not poets, as most of the authors of the Old Testament were.

They were too much in earnest in their great work of carrying the glad evangel of Redemption to all the earth—they so burned with eagerness to pour their joyful tidings into every ear, that they recked little of the FORM in which the saving intelligence was conveyed.

Had they been poets would they have conceived Heaven as a place with foundations of jasper, sapphires and emeralds, gates of pearl, and streets of burnished gold that shone like glass? Never.

That showed them to be practical men, of a Semitic cast of mind, who addressed hearers that agreed with them in regarding gold and precious stones as the finest things of which the heart could dream.

Had they been such lovers of God’s handiwork in Nature as the Greek religious teachers—who were also poets—they would have painted us a Heaven vaulted by the breath of opening flowers, and made musical by the sweet songs of birds in the first rapture of finding their young mates.

In other words they would have given us a picture of earth on a perfect June day.

On the afternoon of such a day as this Rachel Bond sat beneath an apple-tree at the crest of a moderate hill, and looked dreamily away to where, beyond the village of Sardis at the foot of the hill, the Miami River marked the beautiful valley like a silver ribbon carelessly flung upon a web of green velvet. Rather she seemed to be looking there, for the light that usually shown outward in those luminous eyes was turned inward. The little volume of poems had dropped unheeded from the white hand. It had done its office: the passion of its lines had keyed her thoughts to a harmony that suffused her whole being, until all seemed as naturally a part of the glorious day as the fleecy clouds in the sapphire sky, the cheerful hum of the bees, and the apple-blossoms’ luxurious scent.

Her love—and, quite as much, her girlish ambition—had been crowned with violets and bays some weeks before, when the fever-heat of patriotism seemed to bring another passion in Harry Glen’s bosom to the eruptive point, and there came the long-awaited-for avowal of his love, which was made on the evening before his company departed to respond to the call for troops which followed the fall of Fort Sumter.

Does it seem harsh to say that she had sought to bring about this *DENOUEMENT*? Rather, it seems that her efforts were commendable. She was a young woman of marriageable age. She believed her mission in life was marriage to some man who would make her a good husband, and whom she would in turn love, honor, and strive to make happy. Harry Glen’s family was the equal of her’s in social station, and a little above it in wealth to this he added educational and personal advantages that made him the most desirable match in Sardis. Starting with the premises given above, her first conclusion was the natural one that she should marry the best man available, and the next that that man was Harry Glen.

Her efforts had been bounded by the strictest code of maidenly ethics, and so artistically developed that the only persons who penetrated their skillful veiling, and detected her as a “designing creature,” were two or three maiden friends, whose maneuvers toward the same objective were brought to naught by her success.

It must be admitted that refining causists may find room for censure in this making Ambition the advance guard to spy out the ground that Love is to occupy. But, after all, is there not a great deal of mistake about the way that true love begins? If we had the data before us we should be pained by the enlightenment that, in the vast majority of cases the regard of young people for each other is fixed in the first instance by motives that will bear quite as little scrutiny as Miss Rachel Bond’s.

We can afford to be careless how the germ of love is planted. The main thing is how it is watered and tended, and brought to a lasting and beautiful growth. Rachel’s ambition gratified, there had been a steady rise toward flood in the tide of her affections. She was not long in growing to love Harry with all the intensity of a really ardent nature.

After the meeting at which Harry had signed the recruiting roll, he had taken her home up the long, sloping hill, through moonlight as soft, as inspiring, as glorifying as that which had melted even the frosty Goddess of Maidenhood, so that she stooped from her heavenly unapproachableness, and kissed the handsome Endymion as he slept.

Though little and that commonplace was said as they walked, subtle womanly instinct prepared Rachel’s mind for what was coming, and her grasp upon Harry’s arm assumed a new feeling that hurried him on to the crisis.

They stopped beneath the old apple-tree, at the crest of the hill, and in front of the house. Its gnarled and twisted limbs had been but freshly clothed in a suit of fragrant green leaves.

The ruddy bonfires, lighted for the war-meeting, still burned in the village below. The hum of supplementary speeches to the excited crowds that still lingered about came to their ears, mingled with cheers from throat rapidly growing hoarse, and the throb and wail of fife and drum. Then, uplifted on the voices of hundreds who sang it as only men, and men swayed by powerful emotions can, rose the ever-glorious “Star-Spangled Banner,” loftiest and most inspiring of national hymns. Through its long, forceful measures, which have the sweep and ring of marching battalions, swung the singers, with a passionate earnestness that made every note and word glow with meaning. The swelling paean told of the heroism and sacrifice with which the foundations of the Nation were laid, of the glory to which the land had risen, and then its mood changing to one of direness and wrath, it foretold the just punishment of those who broke the peace of a happy land.

The mood of the Sardis people was that patriotic exaltation which reigned in every city and village of the North on that memorable night of April, 1861.

But Rachel and Harry had left far behind them this passion of the multitude, which had set their own to throbbing, even as the roar of a cannon will waken the vibrations of harp-strings. Around where they stood was the peace of the night and sleep. The perfume of violets and hyacinths, and of myriads of opening buds seemed shed by the moon with her silvery rays through the soft, dewy air; a few nocturnal insects droned hither and thither, and “drowsy tinklings lulled the distant folds.”

As their steps were arrested Rachel released her grasp from Harry’s arm, but he caught her hand before it fell to her side, and held it fast. She turned her face frankly toward him, and he looked down with anxious eyes upon the broad white forehead, framed in silken black hair, upon great eyes, flaming with a meaning that he feared to interpret, upon the eloquent lines about the mobile, sensitive mouth, all now lifted into almost supernatural beauty by the moonlight’s spiritualizing magic.

What he said he could never afterward recall. His first memory was that of a pause in his speech, when he saw the ripe, red lips turned toward him with a gesture of the proud head that was both an assent and invitation. The kiss that he pressed there thrilled him with the intoxication of unexpectedly rewarded love, and Rachel with the gladness of triumph.

What they afterward said was as incoherent as the conversations of those rapturous moments ever are.

“You know we leave in the morning?” he said, when at last it became necessary for him to go.

“Yes,” she answered calmly. “And perhaps it is better that it should be so—that we be apart for a little while to consider this new-found happiness and understand it. I shall be sustained with the thought that in giving you to the country I have given more than any one else. I know that you will do something that will make me still prouder of you, and my presentiments, which never fail me, assure me that you will return to me safely.”

His face showed a little disappointment with the answer.

She reached above her head, and breaking off a bud handed it to him, saying in the words of Juliet:

“Sweet, good-night:
This bud of love, by Summer’s ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower, when next we meet.”

He kissed the bud, and put it in his bosom; kissed her again passionately, and descended the hill to prepare for his departure in the morning.

She was with the rest of the village at the depot to bid the company good-bye, and was amazed to find how far the process of developing the bud into the flower had gone in her heart since parting with her lover. Her previous partiality and admiration for him appeared now very tame and colorless, beside the emotions that stirred her at the sight of him marching with erect grace at the head of his company. But while all about her were tears and sobs, and modest girls revealing unsuspecting attachments in the agitation of parting, her eyes were undimmed. She was proud and serene, a heightening of the color in her cheeks being the only sign of unusual feeling. Harry came to her for a moment, held her hand tightly in his, took the bud from his bosom, touched it significantly with his lips, and sprang upon the train which was beginning to move away.

The days that followed were halcyon for her. While the other women of Sardis, whose loved ones were gone, were bewailing the dangers they would encounter, her proud spirit only contemplated the chances that Harry would have for winning fame. Battles meant bright laurels for him in which she would have a rightful share.

Her mental food became the poetry of love, chivalry and glorious war. The lyric had a vivid personal interest. Tales of romantic daring and achievement were suggestions of possibilities in Harry’s career. Her waking hours were mainly spent, book in hand, under the old apple-tree that daily grew dearer to her.

The exalted mood in which we found her was broken in upon by the sound of some one shutting the gate below very emphatically. Looking down she saw her father approaching with such visible signs in face and demeanor of strong excitement that she arose and went to him.

“Why, father, what can be the matter?” she said, stopping in front of him, with the open book pressed to her breast.

“Matter enough, I’m afraid, Rachel. There’s been a battle near a place called Rich Mountain, in Western Virginia, and Harry Glen’s—”

“O, father,” she said, growing very white, “Harry’s killed.”

“No; not killed.” The old man’s lip curled with scorn. “It’s worse. He seems to’ve suddenly discovered he wasn’t prepared to die; he didn’t want to rush all at once into the presence of his Maker. Mebbe he didn’t think it’d be good manners. You know he was always stronger on etikwet than anything else. In short, he’s showed the white feather. A dozen or more letters have come from the boys telling all about it, and the town’s talking of nothing else. There’s one of the letters. It’s from Jake Alspaugh, who quite working for me to enlist. Read it yourself.”

The old gentleman threw the letter upon the grass, and strode on angrily into the house. Rachel smoothed out the crumpled sheet, and read with a growing sickness at heart:

Mr. Bond—Deer Sur:

i taik my pen in hand to lett you no that with the exception of an occashunal tuch of roomaticks, an boonions all over my fete from hard marchin, ime all rite, an i hope you ar injoin the saim blessin. Weve jest had an awful big fite, and the way we warmed it to the secshers jest beat the jews. i doant expect theyve stopt runnin yit. All the Sardis boys done bully except Lieutenant Harry Glen. The smell of burnt powder seamed to onsettle his narves. He tuk powerful sick all at wunst, jest as the trail was gittin rather fresh, and he lay groanin wen the rest of the company marched off into the fite. He doant find the klime-it here as healthy as it is in Sardis. i ‘stinguished myself and have bin promoted, and ive got a Rebel gun for you with a bore big enuff to put a walnut in, and it’ll jest nock your hole darned shoulder off every time you shoot it. No more yours til deth send me some finecut tobacker for heavens sake.

Jacob Alspaugh.

Rachel tore the letter into a thousand fragments, and flung the volume of poems into the ditch below. She hastened to her room, and no one saw her again until the next morning, when she came down dressed in somber black, her face pale, and her colorless lips tightly compressed.

Chapter II. First Shots

“Cowards fear to die; but courage stout,
Rather than live in snuff, will be put out.”

—*Sir Walter Raleigh, on “The Snuff of a Candle.”*

All military courage of any value is the offspring of pride and will. The existence of what is called “natural courage” may well be doubted. What is frequently mistaken for it is either perfect self-command, or a stolid indifference, arising from dull-brained inability to comprehend what really is danger.

The first instincts of man teach him to shun all sources of harm, and if his senses are sufficiently acute to perceive danger, his natural disposition is to avoid encountering it. This disposition can only be overcome by the exercise of the power of pride and will—pride to aspire to the accomplishment of certain things, even though risk attend, and will to carry out those aspirations.

Harry Glen was apparently not deficient in either pride or will. The close observer, however, seemed to see as his mastering sentiment a certain sterile selfishness, not uncommon among the youths of his training and position in the slow-living, hum-drum country towns of Ohio. The only son of a weakly-fondling mother and a father too earnestly treading the narrow path of early diligences and small savings by which a man becomes the richest in his village, to pay any attention to him, Harry grew up a self-indulgent, self-sufficient boy. His course at the seminary and college naturally developed this into a snobbish assumption that he was of finer clay than the commonality, and in some way selected by fortune for her finer displays and luxurious purposes. I have termed this a “sterile selfishness,” to distinguish it from that grand egoism which in large minds is fruitful of high accomplishments and great deeds, and to denote a force which, in the sons of the average “rich” men of the county seats, is apt to expend itself in satisfaction at having finer clothes and faster horses and pleasanter homes, than the average—in a pride of white hands and a scorn of drudgery.

When Harry signed his name upon the recruiting roll—largely impelled thereto by the delicately-flattering suggestion that he should lead off for the youth of Sardis—he had not the slightest misgiving that by so doing he would subject himself to any of the ills and discomforts incidental to carrying out the enterprise upon which they were embarking. He, like every one else, had no very clear idea of what the company would be called upon to do or undergo; but no doubt obtruded itself into his mind that whatever might be disagreeable in it would fall to some one else’s lot, and he continue to have the same pleasant exemption that had been his good fortune so far through life.

And though the company was unexpectedly ordered to the field in the rugged mountains of Western Virginia, instead of to pleasant quarters about Washington, there was nothing to shake this comfortable belief. The slack discipline of the first three months’ service, and the confusion of ideas that prevailed in the beginning of the war as to military duties and responsibilities, enabled him to spend all the time he chose away from his company and with congenial spirits, about headquarters, and to make of the expedition, so far as he was concerned, a pleasant picnic. Occasionally little shadows were thrown by the sight of corpses brought in, with ugly-looking bullet holes in head or breast, but these were always of the class he looked down upon, and he connected their bad luck in some way with their condition in life. Doubtless some one had to go where there was danger of being shot, as some one had to dig ditches and help to pry wagons out of the mud, but there was something rather preposterous in the thought that anything of this kind was incumbent upon him.

The mutterings of the men against an officer, who would not share their hardships and duties, did not reach his ears, nor yet the gibes of the more earnest of the officers at the “young headquarter swells,” whose interest and zeal were nothing to what they would have taken in a fishing excursion.

It came about very naturally and very soon that this continual avoidance of duty in directions where danger might be encountered was stigmatized by the harsher name of cowardice. Neither did this come to his knowledge, and he was consequently ignorant that he had delivered a fatal stab to his reputation one fine morning when, the regiment being ordered out with three days' rations and forty rounds of cartridges, the sergeant who was sent in search of him returned and reported that he was sick in his tent. Jacob Alspaugh expressed the conclusion instantly arrived at by every one in the regiment:

"It's all you could expect of one of them kid-glove fellers, to weaken when it came to serious business."

Harry's self-sufficiency had left so little room for anything that did not directly concern his own comfort, that he could not understand the deadly earnestness of the men he saw file out of camp, or that there was any urgent call for him to join them in their undertaking.

"Bob Bennett's always going where there's no need of it," he said to a companion, as he saw the last of the regiment disappear into the woods on the mountain side. "He could have staid back here with us just as well as not, instead of trudging off through the heat over these devilish roads, and probably get into a scrape for which no one will thank him."

"Yes," said Ned Burnleigh, with his affected drawl, "what the devil's the use, I'd like to know, for a fellah's putting himself out to do things, when there's any quantity of other fellahs, that can't be better employed, ready and even anxious to do them."

"That's so. But it's getting awful hot here. Let's go over to the shade, where we were yesterday, and have Dick bring us a bucket of cold spring water and the bottles and things."

"Abe!" said Jake Alspaugh to his file-leader—a red-headed, pock-marked man, whose normal condition was that of outspoken disgust at every thing—"this means a fight."

"Your news would've been fresh and interesting last night," growled Abe Bolton. "I suppose that's what we brought our guns along for."

"Yes; but somebody's likely to get killed."

"Well, you nor me don't have to pay their life insurance, as I know on."

"But it may be you or me."

"The devil'd be might anxious for green wood before he'd call you in."

"Come, now, don't talk that way. This is a mighty serious time."

"I'll make it a durned sight seriouser for you if you don't keep them splay feet o'your'n offen my heels when we're marching."

"Don't you think we'd better pay, or—something?"

"You might try taking up a collection."

"Try starting a hymn, Jake," said a slender young man at his right elbow, whose face showed a color more intimately connected with the contents of his canteen than the heat of the day. "Line it out, and we'll all join in. Something like this, for example:

'Hark, from the tombs a doleful sound
Mine ears attend the cry.
Ye living men, come view the ground
Where you must shortly lie."

Alspaugh shuddered visibly.

"Come, spunk up, Jake," continued the slender young man. "Think how proud all your relations will be of you, if you die for your country."

"I'm mad at all of my relations, and I don't want to do nothing to please 'em," sighed Jake.

"But I hope you're not so greedy as to want to live always?" said the slender young man, who answered roll-call to Kent Edwards.

“No, but I don’t want to be knocked off like a green apple, before I’m ripe and ready.”

“Better be knocked off green and unripe,” said Kent, his railing mood changing to one of sad introspection, “than to prematurely fall, from a worm gnawing at your heart.”

Jake’s fright was not so great as to make him forego the opportunity for a brutal retort:

“You mean the ‘worm of the still,’ I s’pose. Well, it don’t gnaw at my heart so much as at some other folkses’ that I know’d.”

Kent’s face crimsoned still deeper, and he half raised his musket, as if to strike him, but at that moment came the order to march, and the regiment moved forward.

The enemy was by this time known to be near, and the men marched in that silence that comes from tense expectation.

The day was intensely hot, and the stagnant, sultry air was perfumed with the thousand sweet odors that rise in the West Virginia forests in the first flush of Summer.

The road wound around the steep mountain side, through great thickets of glossy-leaved laurel, by banks of fragrant honeysuckle, by beds of millions of sweet-breathing, velvety pansies, nestling under huge shadowy rocks, by acres of white puccoon flowers, each as lovely as the lily that grows by cool Siloam’s shady rill—all scattered there with Nature’s reckless profusion, where no eye saw them from year to year save those of the infrequent hunter, those of the thousands of gaily-plumaged birds that sang and screamed through the branches of the trees above, and those of the hideous rattlesnakes that crawled and hissed in the crevices of the shelving rocks.

At last the regiment halted under the grateful shadows of the broad-topped oaks and chestnuts. A patriarchal pheasant, drumming on a log near by some uxorious communication to his brooding mate, distended his round eyes in amazement at the strange irruption of men and horses, and then whirled away in a transport of fear. A crimson crested woodpecker ceased his ominous tapping, and flew boldly to a neighboring branch, where he could inspect the new arrival to good advantage and determine his character.

The men threw themselves down for a moment’s rest, on the springing moss that covered the whole mountain side. A hum of comment and conversation arose. Jake Alspaugh began to think that there was not likely to be any fight after all, and his spirits rose proportionately. Abe Bolton growled that the cowardly officers had no doubt deliberately misled the regiment, that a fight might be avoided. Kent Edwards saw a nodding May-apple flower—as fair as a calla and as odorous as a pink—at a little distance, and hastened to pick it. He came back with it in the muzzle of his gun, and his hands full of violets.

A thick-bodied rattlesnake crawled slowly and clumsily out from the shelter of a little ledge, his fearful eyes gleaming with deadly intentions against a ground-squirrel frisking upon the end of a mossy log, near where Captain Bob Bennett was seated, poring over a troublesome detail in the “Tactics.” The snake saw the man, and his awkward movement changed at once into one of electric alertness. He sounded his terrible rattle, and his dull diamonds and stripes lighted up with the glare that shines through an enraged man’s face. The thick body seemed to lengthen out and gain a world of sinuous suppleness. With the quickness of a flash he was coiled, with head erect, forked tongue protruding, and eyes flaming like satanic jewels.

A shout appraised Captain Bennett of his danger. He dropped the book, sprang to his feet with a quickness that matched the snake’s, and instinctively drew his sword. Stepping a little to one side as the reptile launched itself at him, he dexterously cut it in two with a sweeping stroke. A shout of applause rose from the excited boys, who gathered around to inspect the slain serpent and congratulate the Captain upon his skillful disposition of his assailant.

“O, that’s only my old bat-stroke that used to worry the boys in town-hall so much,” said the Captain carelessly. “It’s queer what things turn out useful to a man, and when he least expects them.”

A long, ringing yell from a thousand throats cleft the air, and with its last notes came the rattle of musketry from the brow of the hill across the little ravine. The bullets sang viciously overhead.

They cut the leaves and branches with sharp little crashes, and struck men's bodies with a peculiar slap. A score of men in the disordered group fell back dead or dying upon the green moss.

"Of course, we might've knowed them muddle-headed officers 'd run us right slap into a hornets' nest of Rebels before they knowed a thing about it," grumbled Abe Bolton, hastily tearing a cartridge with his teeth, and forcing it into his gun.

"Hold on, my weak-kneed patriot," said Kent Edwards, catching Jake Alspaugh by the collar, and turning him around so that he faced the enemy again. "It's awful bad manners to rush out of a matinee just as the performance begins. You disturb the people who've come to enjoy the show. Keep you seat till the curatin goes down. You'll find enough to interest you."

The same sudden inspiration of common-sense that had flashed upon Captain Bennett, in encountering the snake now raised him to the level of this emergency. He comprehended that the volley they had received had emptied every Rebel gun. The distance was so short that the enemy could be reached before they had time to re-load. But no time must be lost in attempting to form, or in having the order regularly given by the Colonel. He sprang toward the enemy, waving his sword, and shouted in tones that echoed back from the cliffs:

"Attention, BATTALION! Charge bayonets! FORWARD, DOUBLE-QUICK, MARCH!"

A swelling cheer answered him. His own company ran forward to follow his impetuous lead. The others joined in rapidly. Away they dashed down the side of the declivity, and in an instant more were swarming up the opposite side toward the astonished Rebels. Among these divided councils reigned. Some were excited snapping unloaded guns at the oncoming foe; others were fixing bayonets, and sturdily urging their comrades to do likewise, and meet the rushing wave of cold steel with a counter wave. The weaker-hearted ones were already clambering up the mountain-side out of reach of harm.

There was no time for debate. The blue line led by Bennett flung itself upon the dark-brown mass of Rebels like an angry wave dashing over a flimsy bank of sand, and in an instant there was nothing to be done but pursue the disrupted and flying fragments. It was all over.

Chapter III. A Race

“Some have greatness thrust upon them.”

– *Twelfth Night*.

The unexpected volley probably disturbed private Jacob Alsbaugh's mind more than that of any other man in the regiment. It produced there an effect akin to the sensation of nauseous emetic in his stomach.

He had long enjoyed the enviable distinction of being the “best man” among combative youths of Sardis, and his zeal and invariable success in the fistic tournaments which form so large a part of the interest in life of a certain class of young men in villages, had led his townsmen to entertain extravagant hopes as to his achievements in the field.

But, like most of his class, his courage was purely physical, and a low order of that type. He was bold in those encounters where he knew that his superior strength and agility rendered small the chances of his receiving any serious bodily harm, but of that high pride and mounting spirit which lead to soldierly deeds he had none.

The sight of the dying men on each side shriveled his heart with a deadly panic.

“O, Kent,” he groaned, “Lemme go, and let's git out o' here. This's just awful, and it'll be ten times wuss in another minnit. Let's git behind that big rock there, as quick as the Lord'll let us.”

He turned to pull away from Kent's detaining hand, when he heard Captain Bennett's order to the regiment to charge, and the hand relaxed its hold. Jake faced to the front again and saw Kent and Abe Bolton, and the rest of the boys rush forward, leaving him and a score of other weak-kneed irresolute standing alone behind.

Again he thought he would seek the refuge of the rock, but at that moment the Union line swept up to the Rebels, scattering them as a wave does dry sand.

Jake's mental motions were reasonably rapid. Now he was not long in realizing that all the danger was past, and that he had an opportunity of gaining credit cheaply. He acted promptly. Fixing his bayonet, he gave a fearful yell and started forward on a run for the position which the regiment had gained.

He was soon in the lead of the pursuers, and appeared, by his later zeal, to be making amends for his earlier tardiness. As he ran ahead he shouted savagely:

“Run down the hellions! Shoot 'em! Stab 'em! Bay'net 'em! Don't let one of 'em git away.”

There is an excitement in a man-chase that is not even approached by any other kind of hunting, and Jake soon became fairly intoxicated with it.

He quickly overtook one or two of the slower-paced Rebels, who surrendered quietly, and were handed by him over to the other boys as they came up, and conducted by them to the rear.

Becoming more excited he sped on, entirely unmindful of how far he was outstripping his comrades.

A hundred yards ahead of him was a tall, gaunt Virginian, clad in butternut-colored jeans of queer cut and pattern, and a great bell-crowned hat of rough, gray beaver. Though his gait was shambling and his huge splay feet rose and fell in the most awkward way, he went over the ground with a swiftness that made it rather doubtful whether Jake was gaining on him at all. But the latter was encouraged by the sings of his chase's distress. First the bell-crowned hat flew off and rolled behind, and Jake could not resist the temptation to give it a kick which sent it spinning into a clump of honeysuckles. Then the Rebel flung off a haversack, whose flapping interfered with his speed, and this was followed by a clumsily-constructed cedar canteen. The thought flashed into Jake's mind that this was probably filled with the much-vaunted peach-brandy of that section; and as ardent sprits

were one of his weaknesses, the temptation to stop and pick up the canteen was very strong, but he conquered it and hurried on after his prey. Next followed the fugitive's belt, loaded down with an antique cartridge-box, a savage knife made from a rasp and handled with buckhorn, and a fierce-looking horse-pistol with a flint-lock.

"I seemed to be bustin' up a moosyum o' revolutionary relics," said Jake afterward, in describing the incident. "The feller dropped keepsakes from his forefathers like a bird molting its feathers on a windy day. I begun to think that if I kept up the chase purty soon he'd begin to shed Continental money and knee-britches."

The fugitive turned off to the right into a narrow path that wound through the laurel thickets. Jake followed with all the energy that remained in him, confident that a short distance more would bring him so close to his game that he could force his surrender by a threat of bayoneting. He caught up to within a rod of the Rebel, and was already foreshortening his gun for a lunge in case of refusal to surrender on demand, when he was amazed to see the Rebel whirl around, level his gun at him, and order HIS surrender. Jake was so astonished that he stumbled, fell forward and dropped his gun. As he raised his eyes he saw three or four other Rebels step out from behind a rock, and level their guns upon him with an expression of bloodthirstiness that seemed simply fiendish.

Then it flashed upon him how far away he was from all his comrades, and that the labyrinth of laurel made them even more remote. With this realization came the involuntary groan:

"O, Lordy! it's all up with me. I'm a goner, sure!"

His courage did not ooze out of his fingers, like the historic Bob Acres's; it vanished like gas from a rent balloon. He clasped his hands and tried to think of some prayer.

"Now I lay me," he murmured.

"Shan't we shoot the varmint?" said one of the Rebels, with a motion of his gun in harmony with that idea.

"O, mister—mister—GOOD mister, DON'T! PLEASE don't! I swear I didn't mean to do no harm to you."

"Wall, ye acted monty quare fur a man that didn't mean no harm," said the pursued man, regaining his breath with some difficulty. "A-chasin' me down with thet ar prod on yer gun, an' a-threatenin' to stick hit inter me at every jump. Only wanted ter see me run, did yer?"

"O, mister, I only done it because I wuz ordered to. I couldn't help myself; I swear I couldn't."

"Whar's the ossifers thet wuz a-orderin' ye? Whar's the captins that wuz puttin' ye up ter hit? Thar wan't no one in a mile of ye. Guess we'd better shoot ye."

Again Jake raised his voice in abject appeal for mercy. There was nothing he was not willing to promise if only his life were only spared.

"Wouldn't hit be better ter bay'net him?" suggested one of the Rebels, entirely unmoved, as his comrades were, by Jake's piteous pleadings. "Ef we go ter shootin' 'round yere hit'll liekly bring the Yankees right onter us."

"I 'spect hit would be better ter take him back a little ways, any way," said the man whom Jake had pursued. "Pick up his gun thar, Eph. Come along, you, an' be monty peart about hit, fur we're in a powerful bad frame o' mind ter be fooled with. I wouldn't gin a fi'-penny-bit fur all yer blue-bellied life's worth. The boys ar jest pizen mad from seein' so many o' thar kin and folks killed by yer crowd o' thievin' Hessians."

Grateful for even a momentary respite, Jake rose from his knees with alacrity and humbly followed one of the Rebels along the path. The others strode behind, and occasionally spurred him into a more rapid pace with a prick from their bayonets.

"O,—ough, mister, don't do that! Don't, PLEASE! You don't know how it hurts. I ain't got no rhinoceros skin to stand such jabs as that. That came purty nigh goin' clean through to my heart."

"Skeet ahead faster, then, or the next punch'll go righ smack through ye, fur sartin. Ef yer skin's so tender what are ye doin' in the army?"

They climbed the mountain laboriously, and started down on the other side. About midway in the descent they came upon a deserted cabin standing near the side of the road.

"By the Lord Harry," said one of the Rebels, "I'm a'most done clean gin out, so I am. I'm tireder nor a claybank hoss arter a hard day's plowin', an' I'm ez dry ez a lime-kiln. I motion that we stop yere an' take a rest. We kin put our Yank in the house thar, an' keep him. I wonder whar the spring is that the folks thet lived yere got thar water from?"

"Ef I don't disremember," said another, "this is the house where little Pete Higgenbottom lived afore the country got ruther onhelthy fur him on account of his partiality for other people's hosses. I made a little trip up yere the time I loss thet little white-faced bay mar of pap's, an I'm purty sure the spring's over thar in the holler."

"Lordy, how they must 've hankered arter the fun o' totin' water to 've lugged hit clar from over tha. I'd've moved the house nigher the spring afore I'd've stood thet ere a month, so I would."

"The distance to the water ortent to bother a feller thet gets along with usin' ez little ez you do," growled the first speaker.

"A man whose nose looks like a red-pepper pod in August, and his shirt like a section o' rich bottom land, hain't no great reason ter make remarks on other folks's use o' water."

Jake plucked up some courage from the relaxation in the savage grimness of his captors, which seemed implied by this rough pleasantry, and with him such recuperation of spirits naturally took the form of brassy self-assertion.

"Don't you fellers know," he began with a manner and tone intended to be placating, but instead was rasping and irritating, "don't you fellers know that the best thing you can do with me is to take me back to our people, and trade me off for one of your fellers that they've ketched?"

"An' don't ye know thet the best thing ye kin do is to keep thet gapin' mouth o' your'n shet, so thet the flies won't git no chance to blow yer throat?" said the man whose nose had been aptly likened to a ripe red-pepper pod, "an' the next best thing's fur ye to git inter that cabin thar quicker'n blazes 'll scorch a feather, an' stay thar without makin' a motion toward gittin' away. Git!" and he made a bayonet thrust at Jake that tore open his blouse and shirt, and laid a great gaping wound along his breast. Jake leaped into the cabin and threw himself down upon the puncheon floor.

"Thar war none of our crowd taken," said another of the squad, who had looked on approvingly. "They wuz all killed, an' the only way to git even is ter send ye whar they are."

Jake made another earnest effort to recall one of the prayers he had derided in his bad boyhood.

Leaving the red-nosed man to guard the prisoner, the rest of the Rebels started for the hollow, in search of water to cool their burning thirst.

They had gained such a distance from the scene of the fight, and were in such an out-of-the-way place, that the thought of being overtaken did not obtrude itself for an instant, either upon their minds or Jake's.

But as they came back up the hill, with a gourd full of spring water for their companion, they were amazed to see a party of blue-coats appear around the bend of the road at a little distance. They dropped the gourd of water, and yelled to the man on guard:

"Kill the Yank, an' run for yer life!" and disappeared themselves, in the direction of the spring.

The guard comprehended the situation and the order. He fired his gun at Jake, but with such nervous haste as to destroy the aim, and send the charge into the puncheon a foot beyond his intended victim, and then ran off with all speed to join his companions. The Union boys sent a few dropping shots after him, all of which missed their mark.

Jake managed to recover his nerves and wits sufficiently to stagger to the door as his comrades came up, and grasp one of the guns the Rebels had left.

Questions and congratulations were showered upon him, but he replied incoherently, and gasped a request for water, as if he were perishing from thirst. While some hunted for this, others sought for traces of the Rebels; so he gained time to fix up a fairly presentable story of a desperate

and long-continued bayonet struggle in which he was behaving with the greatest gallantry, although nearly hopeless of success, when the arrival of help changed the aspect of matters. He had so many gaping wounds to confirm the truth of this story, that it was implicitly believed, and he was taken back to camp as one of the foremost heroes of that eventful day. The Colonel made him a Sergeant as soon as he heard the tale, and regretted much that he could not imitate the example of the great Napoleon, and raise him to a commission, on the scene of his valiant exploits. His cot at the hospital was daily visited by numbers of admiring comrades, to whom he repeated his glowing account of the fight, with marked improvements in manner and detail accompanying every repetition.

He had no desire to leave the hospital during his term of service, but his hurts were all superficial and healed rapidly, so that in a fortnight's time the Surgeon pronounced him fit to return to duty. He cursed inwardly the officer's zeal in keeping the ranks as full as possible, and went back to his company to find it preparing to go into another fight.

"Hello, Jake," said his comrades, "awful glad to see you back. Now you'll have a chance to get your revenge on those fellows. There'll be enough of us with you to see that you get a fair fight."

"To the devil with their revenge and a fair fight," said Jake to himself. That evening he strolled around to the headquarters tent, and said to the commander of the regiment:

"Colonel, the doctor seems to think that I'm fit to return to duty, but I don't feel all right yet. I've a numbness in my legs, so that I kin hardly walk sometims. It's my old rheumatics, stirred up by sleeping out in the night air. I hear that the man who's been drivin' the headquarters wagin has had to go to the hospital. I want to be at something, even if I can't do duty in the ranks, and I'd like to take his place till him and me gets well."

"All right, Sergeant. You can have the place as long as you wish, or any other that I can give you. I can't do too much for so brave a man."

So it happened that in the next fight the regiment was not gratified by any thrilling episodes of sanguinary, single-handed combats, between the indomitable Jake and bloodthirsty Rebels.

He had deferred his "revenge" indefinitely.

Chapter IV. Disgrace

For of fortune's sharp adversitie
The worst kind of infortune is this:
A man that hath been in prosperitie,
And it remember when it passed is.

— *Chaucer.*

Harry Glen's perfect self-complacency did not molt a feather when the victors returned to camp flushed with their triumph, which, in the eyes of those inexperienced three-months men, had the dimensions of Waterloo. He did not know that in proportion as they magnified their exploit, so was the depth of their contempt felt for those of their comrades who had declined to share the perils and the honors of the expedition with them. He was too thoroughly satisfied with himself and his motives to even imagine that any one could have just cause for complaint at anything he chose to do.

This kept him from understanding or appreciating the force of the biting innuendoes and sarcasms which were made to his very face; and he had stood so aloof from all, that there was nobody who cared to take the friendly trouble of telling him how free the camp conversation was making with his reputation.

He could not help, however, understanding that in some way he had lost caste with the regiment: but he serenely attributed this to mean-spirited jealousy of the superior advantages he was enjoying, and it only made him more anxious for the coming of the time when he could "cut the whole mob of beggars," as Ned Burnleigh phrased it.

A few days more would end the regiment's term of service, and he readily obtained permission to return him in advance.

The first real blow his confidence received was when he walked down the one principal street of Sardis, and was forced to a perception of the fact that there was an absence of that effusive warmth with which the Sardis people had ever before welcomed back their young townsman, of whose good looks and gentlemanliness they had always been proud. Now people looked at him in a curious way. They turned to whisper to each other, with sarcastic smiles and knowing winks, as he came into view, and they did not come forward to offer him their hands as of old. It astonished him that nobody alluded to the company or to anything that had happened to it.

Turning at length from the main street, he entered the lateral one leading to his home. As he did so, he heard one boy call out to another in that piercing treble which boys employ in making their confidential communications to one another, across a street,

"S-a-y-, did you know that Hank Glen 'd got back? and they say he looks pale yet?"

"Has he?" the reply came in high falsetto, palpably tinged with that fine scorn of a healthy boy, for anything which does not exactly square with his young highness's ideas. "Come back to mammy, eh? Well, it's a pity she ever let him go away from her. Hope she'll keep him with her now. He don't seem to do well out of reach of her apron strings."

The whole truth flashed upon him: Envious ones had slandered him at home, as a coward.

He walked onward in a flurry of rage. The thought that he had done anything to deserve criticism could not obtrude itself between the joints of his triple-plated armor of self-esteem.

A swelling contempt for his village critics flushed his heart.

"Spiteful, little-minded country boobies," he said to himself with an impatient shake of his head, as if to adjust his hair, which was his usual sign of excitement, "they've always hated me because I was above them. They take advantage of the least opportunity to show their mean jealousy."

After a moment's pause: "But I don't care. I'd a little rather have their dislike than their goodwill. It'll save me a world of trouble in being polite to a lot of curs that I despise. I'm going to leave this dull little burg anyhow, as soon as I can get away. I'm going to Cincinnati, and be with Ned Burnleigh. There is more life there in a day than here in a year. After all, there's nobody here that I care anything for, except father and mother—and—Rachel."

A new train of thought introduced itself at this tardy remembrance of his betrothed. His heat abated. He stopped, and leaning against a shady silver maple began anew a meditation that had occupied his mind very frequently since that memorable night under the old apple tree on the hill-top.

There had been for him but little of that spiritual exaltation which made that night the one supreme one in Rachel's existence; when the rapture of gratified pride and love blended with the radiant moonlight and the subtle fragrance of the flowers into a sweet symphony that would well chord with the song the stars sang together in the morning.

He was denied the pleasure that comes from success, after harrowing doubts and fears. His unflinching consciousness of his own worth had left him little doubt that a favorable answer would promptly follow when he chose to propose to Rachel Bond, or to any other girl, and when this came with the anticipated readiness, he could not help in the midst of his gratification at her assent the intrusion of the disagreeable suspicion that, peradventure, he had not done the best with his personal wares that he might. Possibly there would appear in time some other girl, whom he might prefer to Rachel, and at all events there was no necessity for his committing himself when he did, for Rachel "would have kept," as Ned Burnleigh coarsely put it, when made the recipient of Harry's confidence.

Three months of companionship with Ned Burnleigh, and daily imbibation of that young man's stories of his wonderful conquests among young women of peerless beauty and exalted social station confirmed this feeling, and led him to wish for at least such slackening of the betrothal tether as would permit excursions into a charmed realm like that where Ned reigned supreme.

For the thousandth time—and in each recurrence becoming a little clearer defined and more urgent—came the question:

"Shall I break with Rachel? How can I? And what possible excuse can I assign for it?"

There came no answer to this save the spurs with which base self-love was pricking the sides of his intent, and he recoiled from it—ashamed of himself, it is true, but less ashamed at each renewed consideration of the query.

He hastened home that he might receive a greeting that would efface the memory of the reception he had met with in the street. There, at least, he would be regarded as a hero, returning laurel-crowned from the conflict.

As he entered the door his father, tall, spare and iron-gray, laid down the paper he was reading, and with a noticeable lowering of the temperature of his wonted calm but earnest cordiality, said simply:

"How do you do? When did you get in?"

"Very well, and on the 10:30 train."

"Did all your company come?"

Harry winced, for there was something in his father's manner, more than his words, expressive of strong disapproval. He answered:

"No; I was unwell. The water and the exposure disagreed with me, and I was allowed to come on in advance."

Mr. Glen, the elder, carefully folded the paper he was reading and laid it on the stand, as if its presence would embarrass him in what he was about to say. He took off his eye-glasses, wiped them deliberately, closed them up and hesitated for a moment, holding them between the thumb and fore finger of one hand, before placing them in their case, which he had taken from his pocket with the other.

These were all gestures with which experience had made Harry painfully familiar. He used to describe them to his boy intimates as “the Governor clearing for action.” There was something very disagreeable coming, and he awaited it apprehensively.

“Were you”—the father’s cold, searching eyes rested for an instant on the glasses in his hand, and then were fixed on his son’s face—“were you too ill the day of the fight to accompany your command?”

Harry’s glance quailed under the penetrating scrutiny, as was his custom when his father subjected him to a relentless catechism; then he summoned assurance and assumed anger.

“Father,” he said, “I certainly did not expect that you would join these mean-spirited curs in their abuse of me, but now I see that—”

“Henry, you evade the question.” The calm eyes took on a steely hardness. “You certainly know by this time that I always require direct answers to my questions. Now the point is this: You entered this company to be its leader, and to share all its duties with it. It went into a fight while you remained back in camp. Why was this so? Were you too sick to accompany it?”

“I certainly was not feeling well.”

“Were you too ill to go along with your company?”

“—and—there—was—some—work—in—camp that—needed—to—be—done—and there was enough without me, and—I—I—”

“That is sufficient,” said the elder man with a look of scorn that presently changed into one of deeply wounded pride. “Henry, I know too well your disposition to shirk the unpleasant duties of life, to be much surprised that, when tried by this test, you were found wanting. But this wounds me deeply. People in Sardis think my disposition hard and exacting; they think I care for little except to get all that is due me. But no man here can say that in all his long life Robert Glen shirked or evaded a single duty that he owed to the community or his fellow-men, no matter how dangerous or disagreeable that duty might be. To have you fail in this respect and to take and maintain your place in the front rank with other men is a terrible blow to my pride.”

“O, Harry, is that you?” said his mother, coming into the room at that moment and throwing herself into her son’s arms. “I was lying down when I heard your voice, and I dressed and hurried down as quickly as possible. I am so glad that you have come home all safe and well. I know that you’ll contradict, for your poor mother’s sake, all these horrible stories that are worrying her almost to death.”

“Unfortunately he has just admitted that those stories are substantially true,” said the father curtly.

“I won’t believe it,” sobbed his mother, “until he tells me so himself. You didn’t, did you, back out of a fight, and let that Bob Bennett, whose mother used to be my sewing girl, and whom I supported for months after he was born, and his father died with the cholera and left her nothing, by giving her work and paying her cash, and who is now putting on all sorts of airs because everybody’s congratulating her on having such a wonderful son, and nobody’s congratulating me at all, and sometimes I almost wish I was dead.”

Clearness of statement was never one of Mrs. Glen’s salient characteristics. Nor did deep emotion help her in this regard. Still it was only too evident that the fountains of her being were moved by having another woman’s son exalted over her own. Her maternal pride and social prestige were both quivering under the blow.

Harry met this with a flank movement.

“You both seem decidedly disappointed that I did not get myself wounded or killed,” he said.

“That’s an unmanly whimper,” said his father contemptuously.

“Why, Harry, Bob Bennett didn’t get either killed or wounded,” said his mother with that defective ratiocination which it is a pretty woman’s privilege to indulge in at her own sweet will.

Harry withdrew from the mortifying conference under the plea of the necessity of going to his room to remove the grime of travel.

He was smarting with rage and humiliation. His panoply of conceit was pierced for the first time since the completion of his collegiate course sent him forth into the world a being superior, in his own esteem, to the accidents and conditions that the mass of inferior mortals are subject to. Yet he found reasons to account for his parent's defection to the ranks of his enemies.

"It's no new thing," he said, while carefully dressing for a call upon Rachel in the evening, "for father to be harsh and unjust to me, and mother has one of her nervous spells, when everything goes wrong with her."

"Anyhow," he continued, "there's Ned Burnleigh, who understands me and will do me justice, and he amounts to more than all of Sardis—except Rachel, who loves me and will always believe that what I do is right."

He sat down at his desk and wrote a long letter to Ned, inveighing bitterly against the stupidity and malice of people living in small villages, and informing him of his intention to remove to Cincinnati as soon as an opening could be found for him there, which he begged Ned to busy himself in discovering.

Attired in his most becoming garb, and neglecting nothing that could enhance his personal appearance, he walked slowly up the hill in the evening to Rachel Bond's house. The shrinkage which his self-sufficiency had suffered had left room for a wonderful expansion of his affection for Rachel, whose love and loyalty were now essential to him, to compensate for the falling away of others. The question of whether he should break with her was now one the answering of which could be postponed indefinitely. There was no reason why he should not enjoy the sweet privileges of an affianced lover during his stay in Sardis. What would happen afterward would depend upon the shape that things took in his new home.

He found Rachel sitting on the piazza. Though dressed in the deepest and plainest black she had never looked so surpassingly beautiful. As is usually the case with young women of her type of beauty, grief had toned down the rich coloring that had at times seemed almost too exuberant into that delicate shell-like tint which is the perfection of nature's painting. Her round white arms shone like Juno's, as the outlines were revealed by the graceful motions which threw back the wide sleeves. Her wealth of silken black hair was drawn smoothly back from her white forehead, over her shapely head, and gathered into a simple knot behind. Save a black brooch at her throat, she wore no ornaments—not even a plain ring.

She rose as Harry came upon the piazza, and for a moment her face was rigid with intensity of feeling. This evidence of emotion went as quickly as it came, however, and she extended her hand with calm dignity, saying simply:

"You have returned, Mr. Glen."

In his anxiety to so play the impassioned lover as to conceal the recreancy he had fostered in his own heart, Harry did not notice the coolness of this greeting. Then, too, his self-satisfaction had always done him the invaluable service of preventing a ready perception of the repellant attitudes of others.

He came forward eagerly to press a kiss upon her lips, but she checked him with uplifted hand.

"O, the family's in there, are they?" said he, looking toward the open windows of the parlor. "Well, what matter? Isn't it expected that a fellow will kiss his affianced wife on his return, and not care who knows it?"

He pointed to the old apple-tree where they had plighted their troth that happy night, with a gesture and a look that was a reminder of their former meeting and an invitation to go thither again. She comprehended, but refused with a shudder, and, turning, motioned him to the farther end of the piazza, to which she led the way, moving with a sweeping gracefulness of carriage that Harry thought had wonderfully ripened and perfected in the three months that had elapsed since their parting.

“Fore gad,” he said to himself. (This was a new addition to his expletory vocabulary, which had accrued from Ned Burnleigh’s companionship.) “I’d like to put her alongside of one of the girls that Ned’s always talking about. I don’t believe she’s got her equal anywhere.”

Arriving at the end of the piazza he impetuously renewed his attempt at an embrace, but her repulse was now unmistakable.

“Sit down,” she said, pointing to a chair; “I have something to say to you.”

Harry’s first thought was a rush of jealousy. “Some rascal has supplanted me,” he said bitterly, but under his breath.

She took a chair near by, put away the arm he would have placed about her waist, drew from her pocket a dainty handkerchief bordered with black, and opened it deliberately. It shed a delicate odor of violets.

Harry waited anxiously for her to speak.

“This mourning which I wear,” she began gently, “I put on when I received the news of your downfall.”

“My downfall?” broke in Harry hotly. “Great heavens, you don’t say that you, too, have been carried away by this wretched village slander?”

“I put it on,” she continued, unmindful of the interruption, “because I suffered a loss which was greater than any merely physical death could have occasioned.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“My faith in you as a man superior to your fellows died then. This was a much more cruel blow than your bodily death would have been.”

“Fore gad, you take a pleasant view of my decease—a much cooler one, I must confess, than I am able to take of that interesting event in my history.”

Her great eyes blazed, and she seemed about to reply hotly, but she restrained herself and went on with measured calmness:

“The reason I selected you from among all other men, and loved you, and joyfully accepted as my lot in life to be your devoted wife and helpmate, was that I believed you superior in all manly things to other men. Without such a belief I could love no man.”

She paused for an instant, and Harry managed to stammer:

“But what have I done to deserve being thrown over in this unexpected way?”

“You have not done anything. That is the trouble. You have failed to do that which was rightfully expected of you. You have allowed others, who had no better opportunities, to surpass you in doing your manly duty. Whatever else my husband may not be he must not fail in this.”

“Rachel, you are hard and cruel.”

“No, I am only kind to you and to myself. I know myself too well to make a mistake in this respect. I have seen too many women who have been compelled to defend, apologize, or blush for their husband’s acts, and have felt too keenly the abject misery of their lives to take the least chance of adding myself to their sorrowful number. If I were married to you I could endure to be beaten by you and perhaps love you still, but the moment I was compelled to confess your inferiority to some other woman’s husband I should hate you, and in the end drag both of us down to miserable graves.”

“But let me explain this.”

“It would be a waste of time,” she answered coldly. “It is sufficient for me to know that you are convicted by general opinion of having failed where a number of commonplace fellows succeeded. You, yourself, admit the justice of this verdict by tame submission to it, making no effort to retrieve your reputation. I can not understand how this could be so if you had any of the qualities that I fondly imagined you possessed in a high degree. But this interview is being protracted to a painful extent. Let us say good night and part.”

“Forever?” he stammered.

“Yes.”

She held out her hand for farewell. Harry caught it and would have carried it to his lips, but she drew it away.

“No; all that must be ended now,” she said, with the first touch of gentleness that had shaded her sad, serious eyes.

“Will you give me no hope?” said Harry, pleadingly.

“When you can make people forget the past—if ever—” she said, “then I will change this dress and you can come back to me.”

She bowed and entered the house.

Chapter V. The Lint-scraping and Bandage-making Union

At length I have acted my severest part:
I feel the woman breaking in upon me,
And melt about my heart: My tears will flow.

— *Addison.*

Rachel Bond's will had carried her triumphantly through a terrible ordeal—how terrible no one could guess, unless he followed her to her room after the interview and saw her alone with her agony. She did not weep. Tears did not lie near the surface with her. The lachrymal glands had none of that ready sensitiveness which gives many superficial women the credit of deep feeling. But when she did weep it was not an April shower, but a midsummer tempest.

Now it was as if her intense grief were a powerful cautery which seared and sealed every duct of the fountain of tears and left her eyes hot and dry as her heart was ashes.

With pallid face and lips set until the blood was forced from them, and they made a thin purplish line in the pale flesh, she walked the floor back and forth, ever back and forth, until a half-stumble, as she was turning in a dreary round, revealed to her that she was almost dropping from exhaustion.

She had thought her love for Harry had received its death-blow when her pride in him had been so rudely shattered. But this meeting, in which she played the part set for herself with a brave perfection that she had hardly deemed possible, had resurrected every dear memory, and her passion sprung into life again to mock and jeer at her efforts to throttle it out of existence. With him toppling from the pedestal on which her husband must stand, she had told herself that there was naught left but to roll a great stone against the sepulcher in which her love must henceforth lie buried, hopeless of the coming of any bright angle to unseal the gloomy vault. Yet, despite the entire approval given this by her judgment, her woman's heart cried bitterly for a return of the joys out of which the beauty had fled forever.

Hours passed in this wrestle with pain. How many she did not know, but when she came forth it was with the composure of one who had fought the fight and won the victory, but at a cost that forbade exultation.

There was one ordeal that thus far she had not been called upon to endure. From the day on which she had donned her sable robes to that of Harry's return no one had ventured to speak his name in her presence. Even her father and mother, after the first burst of indignation, had kept silence in pity for her suffering, and there was that in her bearing that forbade others touching upon a subject in her hearing that elsewhere was discussed with the hungry avidity of village gossips masticating a fresh scandal.

But she could not be always spared thus. She had not been so careful of the feelings of less favored women and girls, inferior to her in brightness, as to gain any claim for clement treatment now, when the displacement of a portion of her armor of superiority gave those who envied or disliked her an unprotected spot upon which to launch their irritating little darts.

All the sewing, dornas and mite societies of the several churches in Sardis had been merged into one consolidated Lint-Scraping and Bandage-Making Union, in whose enlarged confines the waves of gossip flowed with as much more force and volume as other waves gain when the floods unite a number of small pools into one great lake.

In other days a sensational ripple starting, say in the Episcopalian "Dornas," was stilled into calmness ere it passed the calm and stately church boundaries. It would not do to let its existence be even suspected by the keen eyes of the freely-censorious Presbyterian dames, or the sharp-witted, agile-tongued Methodist ladies.

And, much as these latter were disposed to talk over the weaknesses and foibles of their absent sisters in the confidential environments of the Mite Society or the Sewing Circle, they were as reluctant to expose these to the invidious criticisms of the women of the other churches as if the discussed ones had been their sisters in fact, and not simply through sectarian affiliation. Church pride, if nothing else, contributed to the bridling of their tongues, and checking the free circulation of gossip.

“Them stuck-up Presbyterian and Episcopalian women think little enough on us now, the land knows,” Mrs. Deborah Pancake explained to a newly-received sister, whom she was instructing in elementary duties. “There’s no use giving ‘em more reason for looking down upon us. We may talk over each other’s short-comings among ourselves, private like, because the Bible tells us to admonish and watch over each other. But it don’t say that we’re to give outsiders any chance to speak ill of our sisters-in-Christ.”

And Mrs. Euphrosyne Pursifer remarked to the latest agreeable accession to the parish of St. Marks, with that graceful indirection that gave her the reputation in Sardis of being a feminine Talleyrand:

“Undoubtedly the ladies in these outside denominations are very worthy women, dear, but a certain circumspection seems advisable in conversing with them on subjects that we may speak of rather freely among ourselves.”

The rising fervor of the war spirit melted away most of these barriers to a free interchange of gossip. With the first thrill of pleasure at finding that patriotism had drawn together those whom the churches had long held aloof came to all the gushing impulse to cement the newly-formed relationship by confiding to each other secrets heretofore jealously guarded. Nor should be forgotten the “narrative stimulus” every one feels on gaining new listeners to old stories.

It was so graciously condescending in Mrs. Euphrosyne Pursifer to communicate to Mrs. Elizabeth Baker some few particulars in which her aristocratic associates of St. Marks had grieved her by not rising to her standard of womanly dignity and Christian duty, that Mrs. Baker in turn was only too happy to reciprocate with a similar confidence in regard to her intimate friends of Wesley Chapel.

It was this sudden lapsing of all restraint that made the waves of gossip surge like sweeping billows.

And the flotsam that appeared most frequently of late on their crests, and that was tossed most relentlessly hither and thither, was Rachel Bond’s and Harry Glen’s conduct and relations to each other.

The Consolidated Lint-scraping and Bandage-making Union was holding a regular session, and gossip was at spring-tide.

“It is certainly queer,” said Mrs. Tufis, one of her regulation smiles illuminating her very artificial countenance; “it is singular to the last degree that we don’t have Miss Rachel Bond among us. She is such a LOVELY girl. I am very, very fond of her, and her heart is thoroughly in unison with our objects. It would seem impossible for her to keep away.”

All this with the acrid sub-flavor of irony and insincerity with which an insincere woman can not help tainting even her most sincere words.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Tabitha Grimes, with a premeditated acerbity apparent even in the threading of her needle, into the eye of which she thrust the thread as if piercing the flesh of an enemy with a barb; “yes,” she pulled the thread through with a motion as if she enjoyed its rasping against the steel. “Rachel Bond started into this work quite as brash as Harry Glen started into the war. Her enthusiasm died out about as quickly as his courage, when it came to the actual business, and she found there was nobody to admire her industry, or the way she got herself up, except a parcel of married women.”

The milk of human kindness had begun to curdle in Mrs. Grimes’s bosom, at an early and now rather remote age. Years of unavailing struggle to convince Mr. Jason Grimes that more of his valuable time should be devoted to providing for the wants of his family, and less to leading the

discussion on the condition of the country in the free parliament that met around the stove in the corner grocery, had carried forward this lacteal fermentation until it had converted the milky fluid into a vinegarish whey.

“Well, why not?” asked Elmira Spelter, the main grief of whose life was time’s cruel inflexibility in scoring upon her face unconcealable tallies of every one of his yearly flights over her head, “why shouldn’t she enjoy these golden days? Youth is passing, to her and to all of us, like an arrow from the bow. It’d be absurd for her to waste her time in this stuffy old place, when there are so many more attractive ones. It ought to be enough that those of us who have only a few remnants of beauty left, should devote them to this work.”

“Well,” snapped Mrs. Grimes, “your donation of good looks to the cause—even if you give all you got—will be quite modest, something on the widow’s mite order. You might easily obey the scriptural injunction, and give them with your right hand without your left knowing what was being done.”

Elmira winced under this spiteful bludgeoning, but she rallied and came back at her antagonist.

“Well, my dear,” she said quietly, “the thought often occurs to me, that one great reason why we both have been able to keep in the straight and narrow path, is the entire lack of that beauty which so often proves a snare to the feet of even the best-intentioned women.”

It was Mrs. Grimes’s turn to wince.

“A hit! a palpable hit!” laughed pretty Anna Bayne, who studied and quoted Shakespeare.

“The mention of snares reminds me,” said Mrs. Grimes, “that I, at least, did not have to spread any to catch a husband.”

“No,” returned Elmira, with irritating composure, “the poorer kinds of game are caught without taking that trouble.”

“Well”—Mrs. Grimes’s temper was rising so rapidly that she was losing her usual skill in this verbal fence—“Jason Grimes, no doubt, has his faults, as all men have; but he is certainly better than no husband at all.”

“That’s the way for you to think,” said Elmira, composedly, disregarding the thrust at her own celibacy. “It’s very nice in you to take so cheerful a view of it. **SOMEBODY** had to marry him, doubtless, and it’s real gratifying to see one accepting the visitations of Providence in so commendable a spirit.”

To use the language of diplomacy, the relations between these ladies had now become so strained that a rupture seemed unavoidable.

“Heavens, will this quarrel ne’er be mended?” quoted Anna Bayne, not all sorry that these veteran word-swordsmen, dreaded by everybody, were for once turning their weapons on each other.

Peace-making was one of the prerogatives assumed by Mrs. Tufis, as belonging to the social leadership to which she had elected herself. She now hastened to check the rapidly-opening breach.

“Ladies,” she said blandly, “the discussion has wandered. Our first remarks were, I believe about Miss Bond, and there was a surmise as to her reasons for discontinuing attendance upon our meetings.”

The diversion had the anticipated effect. The two disputants gladly quit each other, to turn upon and rend the object flung in between them.

“Why Rachel Bond don’t come here any more?” said Mrs. Grimes, with a sniff that was one of the keenest-edged weapons in her controversial armory. “When you know how little likely she is to do anything that’s not going to be for her benefit in some way. She’s mighty particular in everything, but more particular in that than in anything else.”

“I’ll admit that there is reason to suspect a strain of selfishness in Rachel’s nature,” said Anna Bayne; “but it’s the only blemish among her many good qualities. Still, I think you do her an injustice in attributing her absence from our meetings to purely selfish motives.”

“Of course, we all know what you mean,” said Elmira. “She set her cap for Harry Glen, and played her cards so openly and boldly—”

“I should say ‘shamelessly,’” interrupted Mrs. Grimes.

“Shamelessly, my dear?” This from Mrs. Tufis, as if in mild expostulation.

“Shamelessly,” repeated Mrs. Grimes, firmly.

“Well, so shamelessly, if you choose,” continued Elmira, “as to incur the ill-will of all the rest of the girls—”

“Whom she beat at a game in which they all played their best,” interrupted Anna.

“That’s an unworthy insinuation,” said Elmira, getting very red. “At least, no one can say I played any cards for that stake.”

“Wasn’t it because all your trumps and suit had been played out in previous games?” This from Mrs. Grimes, whose smarting wounds still called for vengeance.

For an instant a resumption of hostilities was threatened. Mrs. Tufis hastened to interpose:

“There’s no doubt in my mind that the poor, dear girl really took very deeply to heart the stories that have been circulated about Harry Glen’s conduct, though there are people ready to say that she was quite willing to play the role of the stricken one. It really makes her look very interesting. Mourning and the plain style of wearing her hair suit her very, VERY well. I do not think I ever saw her looking so lovely as she has lately, and I have heard quite a number of GENTLEMEN say the same thing.

“If she’d had real spirit,” said Mrs. Grimes, “she’d have dropped Harry Glen without all this heroine-of-a-yellow-covered-novel demonstration, and showed her contempt of the fellow by going ahead just as usual, pretending that his conduct was nothing to her; but she’s a deep one. I’ll venture anything she’s got a well-laid scheme, that none of us dream of.”

“Mrs. Tufis,”—it was the calm, even tones of Rachel Bond’s voice that fell upon the startled ears of the little coterie of gossipers. She had glided in unobserved by them in the earnestness of their debate. “How long has she been here and what has she heard?” was the thrilling question that each addressed to herself. When they summoned courage to look up at her, they saw her standing with perfectly composed mien, her pale face bearing the pensive expression it had worn for weeks. With subdued and kindly manner she returned the affectionate greetings that each bestowed on her, in imitation of Mrs. Tufis, who was the first to recover her wits and then continued:

“Mrs. Tufis, I come to you, as president of this society, to apologize for my absence from so many of your meetings, and to excuse myself on the ground of indisposition.” (Mrs. Grimes darted a significant look at Elmira.) “I also want to announce that, as I have determined to join the corps of nurses for the field hospitals, which Miss Dix, of New York, is organizing, and as I will start for the front soon, I shall have to ask you to excuse me from any farther attendance upon your meetings, and drop my name from your roll.”

She replied pleasantly to a flood of questions and expostulations, which the crowd that gathered around poured upon her, and turning, walked quietly away to her home.

Chapter VI. The Awakening

The nobler nature within him stirred
To life, at that woman's deed and word.

– *Whittier.*

Deeper emotions than he had felt before in all his life of shallow aimlessness stirred Harry Glen's bosom as he turned away from the door which Rachel Bond closed behind her with a decisive promptness that chorded well with her resolute composure during the interview.

This blow fell much more heavily than any that had preceded it, because it descended from the towering height to which he had raised his expectations of an ardent greeting from a loving girl, eagerly watching for his return.

As was to be expected from one of his nature, he forgot entirely his ruminations upon the advisability of discarding her, and the difficulty he experienced in devising a plan whereby this could be done easily and gracefully. He only thought of himself as the blameless victim of a woman's fickleness. The bitter things he had read and heard of the sex's inconstancy rose in his mind, as acrid bile sometimes ascends in one's throat.

"Here," he said to himself, "is an instance of feminine perfidy equal to anything that Byron ever sneered at. This girl, who was so proud to receive my attentions a little while ago, and who so gladly accepted me for her promised husband, now turns away at the slightest cloud of disapproval falling upon me. And to think, too, how I have given her all my heart, and lavished upon her a love as deep and true as ever a man gave a woman."

He was sure that he had been so badly used as to have sufficient grounds for turning misanthrope and woman-hater. Thin natures are like light wines and weak syrups in the readiness with which they sour.

The moon had risen as it did on that eventful betrothal-night. Again the stars had sunk from sight in the sea of silver splendor rolling from the round, full orb. Again the roadway down the hill lay like a web of fine linen, bleaching upon an emerald meadow. Again the clear waters of the Miami rippled in softly merry music over the white limestone of their shallow bed. Again the river, winding through the pleasant valley, framed in gently rising hill-sides, appeared as great silver ribbon, decorating a mass of heavily-embroidered green velvet. Again Sardis lay at the foot of the hills, its coarse and common place outlines softened into glorious symmetry by the moonlight's wondrous witchery.

He stopped for a moment and glanced at the old apple-tree, under which they had stood when

"Their spirits rushed together at the meeting of their lips."

But its raiment of odorous blossoms was gone. Instead, it bore a load of shapeless, sour, unripened fruit. Instead of the freshling springing grass, at its foot was now a coarse stubble. Instead of the delicately sweet breath of violets and fruit blooms scenting the evening air came the heavy, persistent perfume of tuberose, and the mawkish scent of gaudy poppies.

"Bah, it smells like a funeral," he said, and he turned away and walked slowly down the hill. "And it is one. My heart and all my hopes lie buried at the foot of that old apple-tree."

It had been suggested that much of the sympathy we lavish upon martyrs is wanton waste, because to many minds, if not in fact to all, there is a positive pleasure in considering oneself a martyr. More absolute truth is contained in this than appears at the first blush. There are very few who do not roll under their tongues as a sweet morsel the belief that their superior goodness or generosity has brought them trouble and affliction from envious and wicked inferiors.

So the honey that mingled with the gall and hysop of Harry Glen's humiliation was the martyr feeling that his holiest affections had been ruthlessly trampled upon by a cold-hearted woman. His desultory readings of Byron furnished his imagination with all the woful suits and trappings necessary to trick himself out as a melancholy hero.

On his way home he had to pass the principal hotel in the place, the front of which on Summer evenings was the Sardis forum for the discussion of national politics and local gossip. As he approached quietly along the grassy walk he overheard his own name used. He stepped back into the shadow of a large maple and listened:

"Yes, I seen him as he got off the train," said Nels Hathaway, big, fat, lazy, and the most inveterate male gossip in the village. "And he is looking mighty well—yes, MIGHTY well. I said to Tom Botkins, here, 'what a wonderful constitution Harry Glen has, to be sure, to stand the hardships of the field so well.'"

The sarcasm was so evident that Harry's blood seethed. The Tim Botkins alluded to had been dubbed by Basil Wurmset, the cynic and wit of the village, "apt appreciation's artful aid." Red-haired, soft eyed, moon-faced, round of belly and lymphatic of temperament, his principal occupation in life was to play fiddle in the Sardis string-band, and in the intervals of professional engagements at dances and picnics, to fill one of the large splint-bottomed chairs in front of the hotel with his pulpy form, and receive the smart or bitter sayings of the loungers there with a laugh that began before any one else's, and lasted after the others had gotten through. His laugh alone was as good as that of all the rest of the crowd. It was not a hearty, resonant laugh, like that from the mouth of a strong-lunged, wholesome-natured man, which has the mellow roundness of a solo on a French horn. It was a slovenly, greasy, convictionless laugh, with uncertain tones and ill-defined edges. Its effect was due to its volume, readiness, and long continuance. Swelling up of the puffy form, and reddening ripples of the broad face heralded it, it began with a contagious cackle, it deepened into a flabby guffaw, and after all the others roundabout had finished their cachinnatory tribute it wound up with what was between a roar and the lazy drone of a bagpipe.

It now rewarded Nels Hathaway's irony, and the rest of the loungers joined in. Encouraged, Nels continued, as its last echoes died away:

"Yes, he's just as spry and pert as anybody. He seems to have recovered entirely from all his wounds; none of 'em have disfiggered him any, and his nerves have got over their terrible strain."

Tim ran promptly through all the notes in his diapason, and the rest joined in on the middle register.

"Well, I'm not at all surprised," said Mr. Oldunker, a bitter States' Rights Democrat, and the oracle of his party. "I told you how it'd be from the first. Harry Glen was one of them Wide-Awakes that marched around on pleasant evenings last Fall with oil-cloth capes and kerosene lamps. I told you that those fellows'd be no where when the war they were trying to bring on came. I'm not at all astonished that he showed himself lily-livered when he found the people that he was willing to rob of their property standing ready to fight for their homes and their slaves."

"Ready to shoot into a crowd of unsuspecting men, you mean," sneered Basil Wurmset, "and then break their own cursed necks when they saw a little cold steel coming their way."

Tim came in promptly with his risible symphony.

"Well, they didn't run away from any cold steel that Harry Glen displayed," sneered Oldunker. Tim's laugh was allegro and crescendo at the first, and staccato at the close.

"You seem to forget that Capt. Bob Bennett was a Wide-Awake, too," retorted Wurmset, "though you might have remembered it from his having threatened to lick you for encouraging the boys to stone the lamps in the procession."

Tim cackled, gurgled and roared.

Nels Hathaway had kept silent as long as he could. He must put his oar into the conversational tide.

"I'd give six bits," he said, "to know how the meeting between him and Rachel Bond passes off. He's gone up to the house. The boys seen him, all dressed up his best. But his finery and his perfumed handkerchiefs won't count anything with her, I can tell YOU. She comes of fighting stock, if ever a woman did. The Bonds and Harringtons—her mother's people—are game breeds, both of 'em, and stand right on their record, every time. She'll have precious little traffic with a white-feathered fellow. I think she's been preparing for him the coldest shoulder any young feller in Sardis's got for many a long day."

There was nothing very funny in this speech, but a good deal of risible matter had accumulated in Tim's diaphragm during its delivery which he had to get rid of, and he did.

Harry had heard enough. While Tim's laugh yet resounded he walked away unnoticed, and taking a roundabout course gained his room. There he remained a week, hardly coming down to his meals. It was a terrible week for him, for every waking hour of it he walked through the valley of humiliation, and drank the bitter waters of shame. The joints of his hitherto impenetrable armor of self-conceit had been so pierced by the fine rapier thrusts of Rachel's scorn that it fell from him under the coarse pounding of the village loungers and left him naked and defenseless to their blows. Every nerve and sense ached with acute pain. He now felt all of his father's humiliation, all his mother's querulous sorrow, all his betrothed's anguish and abasement.

Thoughts of suicide, and of flying to some part of the country where he was entirely unknown, crowded upon him incessantly. But with that perversity that nature seemingly delights in, there had arisen in his heart since he had lost her, such a love for Rachel Bond as made life without her, or without her esteem even, seem valueless. To go into a strange part of the country and begin life anew would be to give her up forever, and this he could not do. It would be much preferable to die demonstrating that he was in some degree worthy of her. And a latent manly pride awakened and came to his assistance. He could not be the son of his proud, iron-willed father without some transmission of that sire's courageous qualities. He formed his resolution: He would stay in Sardis, and recover his honor where he had lost it.

At the end of the week he heard the drums beat, the cannon fire, and the people cheer. The company had come home, and was marching proudly down the street to a welcome as enthusiastic as if its members were bronzed veterans returning victoriously from a campaign that had lasted for years.

His mother told him the next day that the company had decided to re-enlist for three years or duration of the war, and that a meeting would be held that evening to carry the intention into execution. When the evening came Harry walked into the town hall, dressed as carefully as he had prepared himself for his visit with Rachel. He found the whole company assembled there, the members smoking, chatting with their friends, and recounting to admiring hearers the wonderful experiences they had gone through. The enlistment papers were being prepared, and some of the boys who had not been examined during the day were undergoing the surgeon's inspection in an adjoining room.

Harry was coldly received by everybody, and winced a little under this contrast with the attentions that all the others were given.

At last all the papers and rolls seemed to be signed, and there was a lull in the proceedings. Harry rose from his seat, as if to address the meeting. Instantly all was silence and attention.

"Comrades," he said, in a firm, even voice, "I have come to say to you that I feel that I made a mistake during our term of service, and I want to apologize to you for my conduct then. More than this, I want to redeem myself. I want to go with you again, and have another chance to—"

He was interrupted by an enthusiastic shout from them all.

"Hurrah! Bully for Lieutenant Glen! Of course we'll give you another show. Come right along in your old place, and welcome."

There was but one dissenting voice. It was that of Jake Alsbaugh:

“No, I’ll be durned if we want ye along any more. We’ve no place for sich fellers with us. We only want them as has sand in their craws.”

But the protest was overslaughed by the multitude of assents. At the first interval of silence Harry said:

“No, comrades, I’ll not accept a commission again until I’m sure I can do it credit. I’ll enlist in the company on the same footing as the rest of the boys, and share everything with you. Give the lieutenancy to our gallant comrade Alspaugh, who has richly earned it.”

The suggestion was accepted with more enthusiastic cheering, and Harry, going up to the desk, filled out an enlistment blank, signed it and the company roll, and retired with the surgeon for the physical examination. This finished, he slipped out unnoticed and went to his home. On his way thither he saw Rachel as she passed a brilliantly lighted show-window. She was in traveling costume, and seemed to be going to the depot. She turned her head slightly and bowed a formal recognition.

As their eyes met he saw enough to make him believe that what he had done met her approval.

Chapter VII. Pomp and Circumstances of Glorious War

But man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
Heaven As make the angels weep, who, with our spleens, Would all
themselves laugh mortal.

—*Measure for Measure*

"Abe, you remember how that man who made the speech when our colors were presented to us talked of 'the swelling hearts of our volunteers,' don't you?" said Kent Edwards, as he and Abe Bolton lounged near the parade-ground one fine afternoon, shortly after the arrival of the regiment in camp of instruction. "You remember that that was his favorite figure of rhetoric, and he repeated it several times?"

"Don't know anything about figger of retterick," growled Abe, who, his comrades said, had the evenest temper in the regiment, "for he was always mad. But I do remember that he said that over several times, with a lot o' other things without much pint to 'em, until I thought I'd drop, I was so thirsty and tired."

"Yes? Well, now if you want to get a good idea of what that expression meant, look over there. Not only his heart swells, but he swells all over."

"I should think he did," replied Abe, after a moment's inspection. "Unless his hat has an Injy-rubber band, he'll have to git it cut offen his head, which ought to be hooped, for it can't swell no more without busting."

It was Jacob Alspaugh crossing the parade ground in more than Solomonic splendor of uniform. His inflated form bore upon it all the blue and tinsel prescribed by the Army Regulations for the raiment and insignia of a First Lieutenant of Infantry, with such additions as had been suggested by his exuberant fancy. His blue broadcloth was the finest and shiniest. Buttons and bugles seemed masses of barbric gold. From broad-brimmed hat floated the longest ostrich feather procurable in the shops. Shining leather boots, field-marshal pattern, came above his knees. Yellow gauntlets covered his massive hands and reached nearly to his elbows, and on his broad shoulders were great glittering epaulets—then seldom worn by anyone, and still more rarely by volunteer officers. He evidently disdained to hide the crimson glories of his sash in the customary modest way, by folding it under his belt, but had made of it a broad bandage for his abdominal regions, which gae him the appearance of some gigantic crimson-breasted blue-bird. Behind him trailing, clanking on the ground as he walked, not the modest little sword of his rank, but a long cavalry saber, with glittering steel scabbard. But the sheen of gold and steel was dimmed beside the glow of intense satisfaction with his make-up that shone in his face. There might be alloy in his gleaming buttons and bullion epaulets; there was none in his happiness.

"I feel sorry for the poor lilies of the field that he comes near," sighed Kent, sympathetically. "He is like them now, in neither toiling nor spinning, and yet how ashamed he must make them of their inferior raiment."

"Faugh! it makes me sick to see a dunghill like that strutting around in feathers that belong to game birds."

"O, no; no game bird ever wore such plumage as that. You must be thinking of a peacock, or a bird-of-paradise."

"Well, then, blast it, I hate to see a peacock hatched all at once out of a slinking, roudy, barnyard rooster."

“O, no; since circuses are out of the question now, we ought to be glad of so good a substitute. It only needs a brass band, with some colored posters, to be a genuine grand entry, with street parade.”

Alspaugh's triumphal march had now brought him within a few feet of them, but they continued to lounge indifferently on the musket box upon which they had been sitting, giving a mere nod as recognition of his presence, and showing no intention of rising to salute.

The glow of satisfaction faded from Alspaugh's horizon, and a cloud overcast it.

“Here, you fellers,” he said angrily, “why don't ye git up an' saloot? Don't ye know your business yit?”

“What business, Jake?” asked Kent Edwards, absently, paying most attention to a toad which had hopped out from the cover of a budock leaf, in search of insects for his supper.

Alspaugh's face grew blacker. “The business of paying proper respect to your officers.”

“It hasn't ocured to me that I am neglecting anything in that line,” said Kent, languidly, shifting over to recline upon his left elbow, and with his right hand gathering up a little gravel to flip at the toad; “but maybe you are better acquainted with our business than we are.”

Abe contributed to the dialogue a scornful laugh, indicative of a most heartless disbelief in his superior officer's superior intellectuality.

The dark cloud burst in storm: “Don't you know,” said Alspaugh, angry in every fiber, “that the reggerlations say that ‘when an enlisted man sees an officer approach, he will rise and saloot, and remain standin' and gazin' in a respectful manner until the officer passes five paces beyond him?’ Say, don't you know that?”

Kent Edwards flipped a bit of gravel with such good aim that it struck the toad fairly on the head, who blinked his bright eyes in surprise, and hopped back to his covert. “I am really glad,” said he, “to know that you have learned SOMETHING of the regulations. Now, don't say another word about it until I run down to the company quarters and catch a fellow for a bet, who wants to put up money that you can never learn a single sentence of them. Don't say another word, and you can stand in with me on the bet.”

“Had your head measured since you got this idea into it?” asked Abe Bolton, with well-assumed interest.

“If he did, he had to use a surveyor's chain,” suggested Kent, flipping another small pebble in the direction of the toad's retreat.

Alspaugh had grown so great upon the liberal feed of the meat of flattery, that he could hardly make himself believe that he had heard aright, and that these men did not care a fig for himself or his authority. Then recovering confidence in the fidelity of their ears, it seemed to him that such conduct was aggravated mutiny, which military discipline demanded should receive condign punishment on the spot. Had he any confidence in his ability to use the doughy weapon at his side, he would not have resisted the strong temptation to draw his sword and make an example then and there of the contemnners of his power and magnificence. But the culprits has shown such an aptitude in the use of arms as to inspire his wholesome respect, and he was very far from sure that they might not make a display of his broadsword an occasion for heaping fresh ridicule upon him. An opportune remembrance came to his aid:

“If it wasn't for the strict orders we officers got yesterday not to allow ourselves to be provoked under any circumstances into striking our men, I'd learn you fellers mighty quick not to insult your superior officers. I'd bring you to time, I can tell you. But I'll settle with you yit. I'll have you in the guard hose on bread and water in short meter, and then I'll learn you to be respectful and obedient.”

“He means ‘teach,’ instead of ‘learn,’” said Kent, apologetically, to Abe. “It's just awful to have a man, wearing shoulder-straps, abuse English grammar in that way. What's grammar done to him to deserve such treatment? He hasn't even a speaking acquaintance with it.”

“I 'spose it's because grammar can't hit back. That's the kind he always picks on,” answered Abe.

“You'll pay for this,” shouted Alspaugh, striding off after the Sargent of the Guard.

At that moment a little drummer appeared by the flagstaff, and beat a lively rataplan.

“That’s for dress-parade,” said Kent Edwards, rising. “We’d better skip right over to quarters and fall in.”

“Wish their dress-parades were in the brimstone flames,” growled Abe Bolton, as he rose to accompany his comrade. “All they’re for is to stand up as a background, to show off a lot of spruce young officers dressed in fancy rigs.”

“Well,” said Kent, lightly, as they walked along, “I kind of like that; don’t you? We make picturesque backgrounds, don’t we? you and I, especially you, the soft, tender, lithe and willowy; and I, the frowning, rugged and adamantine, so to speak. I think the background business is our best hold.”

He laughed heartily at his own sarcasm, but Abe was not to be moved by such frivolity, and answered glumly:

“O, yes; laugh about it, if you choose. That’s your way: giggle over everything. But when I play background, I want it to be with something worth while in the foreground. I don’t hanker after making myself a foil to show off such fellers as our officers are, to good advantage.”

“That don’t bother me any more than it does a mountain to serve as a background for a nanny goat and a pair of sore-eyed mules!”

“Yes, but the mountain sometimes has an opportunity to drop an avalanche on ‘em.”

At this point of the discussion they arrived at the company grounds, and had scarcely time to snatch up their guns and don their belts before the company moved out to take its place in the regimental line.

The occasion of Lieutenant Alspaugh’s elaborate personal ornamentation now manifested itself. By reason of Captain Bennett’s absence, he was in command of the company, and was about to make his first appearance on parade in that capacity. Two or three young women, of the hollyhock order of beauty, whom he was very anxious to impress, had been brought to camp, to witness his apotheosis into a commanding officer.

The moment, however, that he placed himself at the head of the company and drew sword, the chill breath of distrust sent the mercury of his self-confidence down to zero. It looked so easy to command a company when some one else was doing it; it was hard when he tried it himself. All the imps of confusion held high revel in his mind when he attempted to give the orders which he had conned until he supposed he had them “dead-letter perfect.” he felt his usually-unfailing assurance shrivel up under the gaze of hundreds of mercilessly critical eyes. He managed to stammer out:

“ATTENTION, COMPANY! FORWARD, FILE RIGHT, MARCH!”

But as the company began to execute the order, it seemed to be going just the opposite to what he had commanded, and he called out excitedly:

“Not that way! Not that way! I said ‘file right,’ and you’re going left.”

“We are filing right,” answered some in the company. “You’re turned around; that’s what’s the matter with you.”

So it was. He had forgotten that when standing facing the men, he must give them orders in reverse from what the movement appeared to him. This increased his confusion, until all his drill knowledge seemed gone from him. The sight of his young lady friends, clad in masses of primary colors, stimulated him to a strong effort to recover his audacity, and bracing himself up, he began calling out the guide and step, with a noisy confidence that made him heard all over the parade ground:

“Left! left! left! Hep! hep! hep! Cast them head and eyes to the right!”

Trouble loomed up mountainously as he approached the line. Putting a company into its place on parade is one of the crucial tests of tactical proficiency. To march a company to exactly the right spot, with every man keeping his proper distance from his file-leader—“twenty-eight inches from back to breast,” clear down the column, so that when the order “front” was given, every one turns,

as if on pivot, and touches elbows with those on each side of him, in a straight, firm wall of men, without any shambling “closing up,” or “side-stepping” to the right or left,—to do all this at word of command, looks very simple and easy to the non-military spectator, as many other very difficult things look simple and easy to the inexperienced. But really it is only possible to a thoroughly drilled company, held well in hand by a competent commander. It is something that, if done well, is simply done well, but if not done well, is very bad. It is like an egg that is either good or utterly worthless.

Alspaugh seemed fated to exhaust the category of possible mistakes. Coming on the ground late he found that a gap had been left in the line for his company which was only barely sufficient to receive it when it was aligned and compactly “dressed.”

In his nervousness he halted the company before it had reached the right of the gap by ten paces, and so left about one-quarter of the company lapping over on the one to his left. Even this was done with an unsightly jumble. His confusion as to the reversal of right and left still abode with him. He commanded “right face” instead of “front,” and was amazed to see the whole one hundred well-drilled men whirl their backs around to the regiment and the commanding officer. A laugh rippled down the ranks of the other companies; even the spectators smiled, and something sounded like swearing by the Adjutant and Sergeant-Major.

Alspaugh lifted his plumed hat, and wiped the beaded perspiration from his brow with the back of one of the yellow gauntlets.

“Order an ‘about face,’” whispered the Orderly-Sergeant, whose face was burning with shame at the awkward position in which the company found itself.

“ABOUT—FACE!” gasped Alspaugh.

The men turned on their heels.

“Side-step to the right,” whispered the Orderly.

“Side-step to the right,” repeated Alspaugh, mechanically.

The men took short side-steps, and following the orders which Alspaugh repeated from the whispered suggestions of the Orderly, the company came clumsily forward into its place, “dressed,” and “opened ranks to the rear.” When at the command of “parade-rest,” Alspaugh dropped his saber’s point to the ground, he did it with the crushed feeling of a strutting cock which has been flung into the pond and emerges with dripping feathers.

He raised his heart in sincere thanksgiving that he was at last through, for there was nothing more for him to do during the parade, except to stand still, and at its conclusion the Orderly would have to march the company back to its quarters.

But his woes had still another chapter. The Inspector-General had come to camp to inspect the regiment, and he was on the ground.

Forty years of service in the regular army, with promotion averaging one grade every ten years, making him an old man and a grandfather before he was a Lieutenant-Colonel, had so surcharged Col. Murbank’s nature with bitterness as to make even the very air in his vicinity seem roughly astringent. The wicked young Lieutenants who served with him on the Plains used to say that his bark was worse than his bite, because no reasonable bite could ever be so bad as his bark. They even suggested calling him “Peruvian Bark,” because a visit to his quarters was worse than a strong does of quinia.

“Yeth, that’th good,” said the lisping wit of the crowd. “Evely bite ith a bit, ain’t it? And the wortht mutht be a bitter, ath he ith.”

The Colonel believed tha the whole duty of man consisted in loving the army regulations, and in keeping their commandments. The best part of all virtue was to observe them to the letter; the most abhorrent form of vice, to violate or disregard even their minor precepts.

His feelings were continually lacerated by contact with volunteers, who cared next to nothing for the FORM of war-making, but everything for its spirit, and the martinet heart within him was bruised and sore when he came upon the ground to inspect the regiment.

Alspaugh's blundering in bringing the company into line awakened this ire from a passivity to activity.

"I'll have that dunderhead's shoulder-straps off inside of a fortnight," he muttered between his teeth.

The unhappy Lieutenant's inability to even stand properly during the parade, or repeat an order intensified his rage. When the parade was dismissed the officers, as usual, sheathed their swords, and forming a line with the Adjutant in the center, marched forward to the commanding and inspecting officers, and saluted. Then the wrath of the old Inspector became vocable.

"What in God's name," he roared, fixing his glance upon Alspaugh so unmistakably that even the latter's rainbow-clad girls, who had crowded up closely, could not make a mistake as to the victim of the expletives. "What in God's name, sir," repeated the old fellow with purpling face, "do you mean by bringing your company on to the ground in that absurd way, sir? Did you think, sir, that it was a hod of brick—with which I have no doubt you are most familiar—that you could dump down any place and any how, sir? Such misconduct is simply disgraceful, sir, I'd have you know. Simply disgraceful, sir."

He paused for breath, but Alspaugh had no word of defense to offer.

"And what do you mean, sir," resumed the Inspector, after inflating his lungs for another gust, "what in the name of all the piebald circus clowns that ever jiggered around on sawdust, do you mean by coming on parade dressed like the ringmaster of a traveling monkey-show, sir? Haven't you any more idea of the honor of wearing a United States sword—the noblest weapon on earth, sir—than to make yourself look like the drum-major of a band of nigger minstrels, sir! A United States officer ought to be ashamed to make a damned harlequin of himself, sir. I'd have you to understand that most distinctly, sir!"

The Inspector's stock of breath, alas, was not so ample as in the far-off days when his sturdy shoulders bore the modest single-bar, instead of the proud spread eagle of the present. Even had it been, the explosive energy of his speech would have speedily exhausted it. Compelled to stop to pump in a fresh supply, the Colonel of the regiment took advantage of the pause to whisper in his ear:

"Don't be too rough on him, please. He's a good man but green. Promoted from the ranks for courage in action. First appearance on parade. He'll do better if given a chance."

The Inspector's anger was mollified. Addressing himself to all the officers, he continued in a milder tone:

"Gentlemen, you seem to be making progress in acquiring a knowledge of your duties, though you have a world of things yet to learn. I shall say so in my report to the General. You can go to your quarters."

The line of officers dissolved, and the spectators began to melt away. Alspaugh's assurance rose buoyantly the moment that the pressure was removed. He raised his eyes from the ground, and looked for the young ladies. They had turned their backs and were leaving the ground. He hastened after them, fabricating as he walked an explanation, based on personal jealousy, of the Inspector's treatment of him. He was within a step of overtaking them when he heard one say, with toss of flaunting ribbons, and hoidenish giggle:

"Did you EVER see ANY-body wilt as Alspaugh did when old Bite-Your-Head-Off-In-a-Minute was jawing him? It was so awfully FUNNY that I just thought I SHOULD DIE."

The sentence ended with the picturesque rapid CRESCENDO employed by maidens of her type in describing a convulsive experience.

"Just didn't he," joined in another. "I never saw ANY-thing so funny in all my BORN DAYS. I was AFRAID to look at either one of YOU; I knew if I DID I would BURST RIGHT OUT laughing. I couldn't've HELPED it—I know I COULDN'T, if I'd'a knowed I'd'a DIED the next MINUTE."

"This would seem to be a pretty good time to drop the fellow," added the third girl, reflectively.

Alspaugh turned and went in another direction. At the 9 o'clock roll-call he informed the company that the Inspector was well pleased with its appearance on parade.

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